



LIQUIDITY PUSH

Musk's IPO bet to save empire

While SpaceX is going public in what could be the largest single listing in history, analysts and investors stay sceptical

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The Gen Z trio that took on the CBSE

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CRPF chief reviews security in Manipur

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Telangana Chief Minister calls for federal balance to safeguard citizens

R. Ravikanth Reddy
BENGALURU

India's federal balance and governance outcomes would determine whether citizens, particularly in southern States, are treated as equal stakeholders or reduced to "second-grade citizens", Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy said on Saturday.

In a conversation with The Hindu Group Director N. Ram at the two-day The Hindu Huddle in Bengaluru on "By, for, and of the people: Good governance for Telangana", the Congress leader said southern States would not accept an imbalance in political power distribution. The BJP, he alleged, was trying hard to widen the gap in political power through the delimitation process, while linking it to women's reservation to hide the core issue. "The Congress is ready

even now for the implementation of the women's reservation Bill if it is the primary intention," he said. He credited the Congress with playing a historic role in women's empowerment, and said women had consistently played a crucial part in key political and social transformations in the country. Former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, as the "Iron Lady", liberated Bangladesh from Pakistan, and Congress leader Sonia Gandhi "courageously took a decision on separate Telangana", he said.

During the wide-ranging conversation, the Chief Minister said that Telangana is positioning itself as a global investment destination and not limiting its competitiveness to neighbouring States. "We are not competing with Maharashtra or Andhra Pradesh. We are competing with China,

Japan, South Korea, and Germany," he said, adding that his approach follows a 'China+1' strategy to attract global investments.

Mr. Reddy said he actively studies international best practices and is open to learning from multiple sources, including officials on the ground. He said he plans to visit China and learn best practices that could be implemented in Telangana as it shapes itself into a "China+1" destination.

He also referred to his participation in a short course at Harvard University, saying exposure to global systems helps refine policy thinking.



Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy with N. Ram, Director, The Hindu Group, at The Hindu Huddle on Saturday. K. MURALI KUMAR

thinks they are rulers. I believe I am an elected public servant," he said, identifying youth, farmers, and women as the key pillars of society.

Explaining his administrative approach, the Chief Minister said decision-making in his government is "mixed", combining bureaucratic inputs, field-level insights, media feed-

back, and public opinion. "Ultimately, I take the call after listening to everyone and their suggestions," he said.

Mr. Reddy also said he values information from media reports, public interactions, and ground-level workers, describing media as a "back-office information system" for governance review.

Reflecting on his political journey, the Chief Minister said his entry into public life was driven by grassroots engagement rather than legacy support. He recalled resigning from his earlier political position following Telangana's bifurcation and rebuilding his career independently. "I have fought for the common man. I don't have any brand or inherited support," he said.

His political philosophy, Mr. Reddy said, is governance focused on youth, farmers, and women as core stakeholders. He traced unemployment concerns in Telangana to historical and structural issues and said his government is committed to addressing job creation through both public and private sector expansion.

management and welfare initiatives, he said Telangana has filled over 67,000 government posts in 15 months, describing it as one of the largest recruitment drives in the country.

On agriculture, the Chief Minister cited large-scale loan waivers and procurement reforms, claiming that over 25,000 farmer families benefited from ₹20,616 crore worth of loan waivers. He also pointed to procurement support, input subsidies, and farmer incentive schemes introduced by the government.

The Chief Minister said women's empowerment remains a central pillar of governance in Telangana. He said self-help groups (SHGs) comprising 67 lakh women have been actively engaged in economic activities, including transport services, renewable energy projects, petrol bunks, and

school management services.

The Hindu Huddle is presented by the Sami-Sabinsa Group as the Presenting Partner. The event is co-powered by the Government of Telangana and held in association with Khaja Bandanawaz University.

The event is further supported by Bank of Baroda, Larsen & Toubro, Apollo Hospitals, IIM Sirmaur, ICFAI Group, TAFE, Wizzom, Uttarakhand Government, Associate Partners; Casagrand, Realty Partner; Toyota, Luxury Car Partner; Amity University Bengaluru, University Partner; Harrow International School Bengaluru, Education Partner; Meghalaya Tourism, State Partner; and NDTV 24x7, TV Partner.

DETAILED COVERAGE ON
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INSIDE



Karnataka Minister takes back resignation

BENGALURU
A day after sending his resignation letter to Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar, senior Karnataka Minister Ramalinga Reddy was mollified by the Congress to take it back. Another senior Minister, K.H. Muniyappa, who was unhappy with the Food and Civil Supplies Department allocated to him, has been convinced to take charge. » PAGE 2



Screen to street: CJP founder Abhijeet Dipke and Ladakh activist Sonam Wangchuk with supporters of the movement during the protest at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on Saturday. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

Hundreds gather at CJP protest seeking Pradhan's resignation

Aroon Deep
NEW DELHI

The first in-person protest of the online movement Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), demanding the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, attracted a crowd of over 1,500 people at Jantar Mantar here on Saturday. Ladakh activist Sonam Wangchuk joined the demonstration led by CJP founder Abhijeet Dipke, where protesters raised slogans against the Union government and sought accountability, amid the cancellation of the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test- Undergraduate (NEET-UG) and the issues with the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) Class 12 board examinations. Hundreds gathered in the first hour of the protest and many were seen wearing cockroach masks, which were being distributed at the venue. A large number of youngsters had shown up.

Six detained
While no untoward incidents were reported, some counter-protesters also raised slogans near the protest site and the Delhi Police detained six people to prevent a possible confrontation.

The detentions were made as a precautionary measure to maintain law and order after receiving inputs about the possibility of tensions between supporters and opposers of the movement, police said.

Earlier, Mr. Dipke, who landed in New Delhi following a day-long journey from Boston in the U.S., told presspersons gathered at the airport that "the Education Minister has to resign". "Five students have committed suicide," he added. At the Jantar Mantar, he led chants seeking Mr. Pradhan's resignation.

"We are not here to protest but to appeal that government should be accountable," Mr. Wangchuk, who was jailed for nearly six months under the National Security Act until March this year, said after joining the protest.

Heavy security arrangements had been made at the spot, with police and paramilitary personnel deployed in large numbers. Police photographers too had been spread out across

the site and at least one drone captured visuals of the crowd.

Earlier, Mr. Dipke had announced that he would no longer need to personally seek police permissions for the demonstration, as representatives had already received police approval.

The CJP movement, built on AI visuals and a viral campaign by Mr. Dipke on Instagram and X, has garnered more than two crore followers, just a few days after its launch. Its spokespersons insist that they have no links to established political parties, even as parallels emerged between the CJP and the India Against Corruption movement, with many right-wing influencers alleging political links and nefarious objectives on X.

The protest comes amid an intense heatwave in the capital, as temperatures reached 39 degrees Celsius at noon. Phone signals appeared to be obstructed, with many protesters unable to go online.

(With inputs from Vijaita Singh)

STUDENTS JOIN PROTEST
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Russian oil imports, prices jump; U.S. share goes down

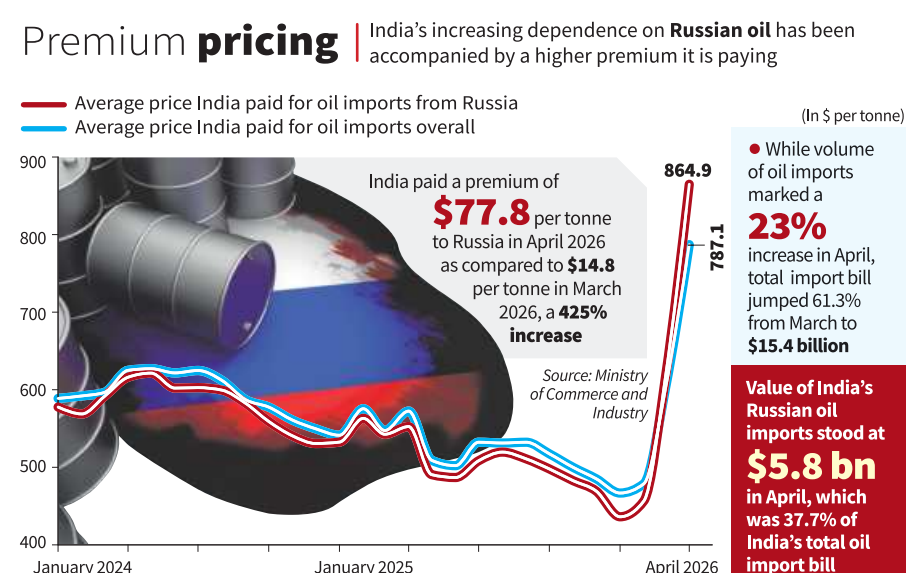
While Russia's share in India's oil imports stood at 34% in terms of volume in April 2026, India's dependence on oil from the U.S. fell to 8-month low, accounting for just 3.8% in terms of volume

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

Russia's share in the value of India's oil imports jumped back up to an 11-month high of nearly 38% in April 2026 as India continued to increase its dependence on it against the backdrop of the ongoing West Asia crisis.

This increasing dependence was accompanied by a 425% jump in the premium being charged by Russia for its oil, in contrast to the discount it had been offering until recently.

Russia's share in India's crude imports in April stood at about 34% in volume. At the same time, India's dependence on oil from the U.S. fell to multi-month lows in both value and volume.



However, while this worked out to a 23% increase over March in volume, the surging price of oil meant that India's total oil import bill jumped 61.3% to \$15.4 billion in April, as compared to its level in the previous month.

The volume of India's oil imports from Russia stood at nearly 67 lakh tonnes in April, up 27% from March and making up 34.3% of the total amount of oil India imported in the month.

The rise in prices had a significant impact on the

amount India paid for this oil. The Hindu had reported last month that the discount Russia used to offer India for its oil had turned into a premium in March.

Higher premium
The data now shows that India paid an even higher premium for Russian oil in April than it did in March. The total value of India's Russian oil imports stood at \$5.8 billion in April, which was 37.7% of India's total oil import bill that month.

In April, India paid Russia \$864.9 per tonne for its oil, while it paid \$787.1 per tonne overall for its oil imports from all countries. This works out to a premium of \$77.8 per tonne as compared to a premium of \$14.8 per tonne paid to Russia in March, a 425% increase.

On the other hand, the U.S. accounted for just 2.9% of India's oil bill in April, an eight-month low. In terms of volume, it accounted for 3.8%, also an eight-month low.

Three Lebanese troops killed in Israeli strike

Reuters Associated Press
BEIRUT

Two Lebanese officers and one soldier were killed on Saturday in an Israeli strike on a military vehicle on the Khardali-Nabatieh road in south Lebanon, the Lebanese Army said.

Later, the Israeli mili-

tary said it targeted the vehicle after identifying what it described as a threat to its forces and receiving indications that the Hezbollah militant group was preparing to fire on Israeli troops from the area.

It said an initial inquiry showed that two Lebanese Army officers and a soldier were inside the vehicle and

that the incident was under review.

Lebanon's President Joseph Aoun called the strike "a flagrant violation of Lebanese sovereignty and international law." He said it came in the context of "ongoing escalation that threatens stability and security in the south (of Lebanon), despite the efforts Leba-

non is exerting in the Washington negotiations to put an end to the ongoing Israeli attacks without deterrent."

The attack comes amid a truce agreed between Israel and Lebanon through U.S.-brokered talks.

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INBRIEF



Jagdalpur-bound IndiGo flight lands in Rajahmundry in A.P.

A Jagdalpur-bound Indigo flight that took off from Rajiv Gandhi Airport in Hyderabad, Telangana, was diverted to Rajahmundry Airport, Andhra Pradesh, owing to adverse weather conditions at Maa Danteswari Airport in Jagdalpur, Chhattisgarh, on Friday. "...The flight was sent back to Rajiv Gandhi International Airport after refuelling by the evening," Rajahmundry Airport In-Charge Director K. Prithi said.

Telangana DCA busts illegal API sales unit in Hyderabad

Telangana Drugs Control Administration (DCA) has busted illegal sale of Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs) during a joint raid with the Prohibition and Excise Department in Hyderabad on Friday. As per the DCA, a firm in Kukatpally had been carrying out illegal sale of APIs. During inspection, officials seized 170 grams of Zidovudine from the firm's premises. Invoices related to trading of the APIs were also seized. Samples of the seized material have been sent for analysis. Further probe is underway.

Kerala Forest Dept. fast-tracks wildlife crime prosecution

In a move that radically alters how environmental crimes are prosecuted, the Kerala Forest Department has launched an e-court integration feature for its 'HAWK' (Hostile Activity Watch Kernel) system. By establishing a direct digital link between the Forest Department and the District Court Management System via an Application Programming Interface, the State has effectively eliminated the need for physical paperwork in wildlife crime prosecution.

Kerala weighs Sreedharan's high-speed railway proposal

The Kerala government is considering a proposal submitted by the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) for a high-speed rail corridor linking Thiruvananthapuram and Kannur.

The project, named Kerala High Speed Railway (KHSR), was prepared by technocrat E. Sreedharan as an alternative to the previous Left Democratic Front government's K-Rail proposal.

A four-member expert panel has been constituted to examine the technical, financial and environmental aspects of the project and submit recommendations within three weeks.

An expert panel has been formed to look into project, submit recommendations within three weeks

Transport Secretary K. Biju will serve as convener. J. Vinayan, C. Veeramani and Sreedhar Radhakrishnan have been appointed as experts in railways, finance and environment respectively. N.S.K. Umesh, Officer on Special Duty to Chief Minister V.D. Saheesan, will assist the committee.

A government order issued on Friday said the panel would assess the project's technical feasibility, financial viability, environmental impact, implemen-

tation challenges and socio-economic benefits.

The proposed 473.2-km double-line corridor will connect Poojappura in Thiruvananthapuram with Mundayad in Kannur through 23 stations. The alignment will be elevated throughout, except for a 6.5-km underground section in Thiruvananthapuram. Travel time between the two cities is estimated at 3 hours and 30 minutes.

The project cost is estimated at ₹60,000 crore. Of this, ₹36,000 crore is proposed to be funded through equity contributions from the Centre and the State in a 51:49 ratio, while the remaining ₹24,000 crore is proposed to be raised through crowdfunding.

Telangana Police's 'Stree Ride' drive helps women break barriers, one ride at a time

Lavpreet Kaur
HYDERABAD

Five years ago, Sarla had never imagined herself weaving through Hyderabad's streets on a two-wheeler, delivering packages and earning enough to support her family. A housewife from Nerredmet, she came across a Facebook advertisement seeking women interested in learning to ride and work in the mobility sector. Hesitant at first, she decided to take a chance.

Today, she earns more than ₹40,000 a month as a delivery rider with a logistics company. She says the move transformed her life.



DGP of Telangana C.V. Anand, DGP (Women Safety Wing) Charu Sinha, and others at the launch of 'Stree Ride' in Hyderabad. NAGARA GOPAL

"I feel very proud of myself. I can financially support my family and my children," she said.

Sarla is among dozens of women whose lives have

been reshaped by training programmes that have enabled them to enter professions long dominated by men.

On Saturday, their jour-

Beating the heat



A handy spring: Amid intense heat and strong winds, an agricultural worker collects water to drink from an irrigation pipeline in a field at Kothapatnam near Ongole on Saturday. KOMMURI SRINIVAS

neys took centre stage as the Telangana Women Safety Wing formally launched 'Stree Ride', an initiative aimed at training and employing women as drivers in the transportation and mobility sector.

The programme was launched at the State Police Headquarters here, where Director-General of Police C.V. Anand flagged off 50 electric bikes, four electric autos and one cab that will be operated by women riders and drivers.

Under the first phase, 55 women received training and employment support through partnerships with mobility service providers and aggregators.

Karnataka primary school teacher fights to keep Bihar migrants' children in school

Sathish G.T.
HASSAN

Every morning, when Pramila S.P., a government primary school teacher in Hassan, Karnataka, leaves for work, eight students from migrant families accompany her to the Government Lower Primary School at Pirumanahalli, about eight km away. With 27 years of experience, she has been helping children from Bihar overcome language barriers and enter formal education system.

The families of these children had travelled to



Pramila S.P. with her students.

Hassan in search of work and earned daily wages by working in fields, fruit stalls and construction sites. Ms. Pramila visited them repeatedly and persuaded them to enrol their children in school. As a re-



The new joiners with senior leaders of the TVK at Panaiyur on the outskirts of Chennai SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Karnataka Minister takes back resignation after Cong. nudge

After talks with CM and party leadership, Reddy to take charge of Water Resources Department; Muniyappa, who got Food and Civil Supplies Department, has also been convinced to take charge

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The Congress in Karnataka seem to have spiked the discontent among its Cabinet Ministers, at least for now. A day after senior Minister Ramalinga Reddy sent his resignation letter to Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar, he was mollified by party leaders to take it back.

Another senior Minister, K.H. Muniyappa, who was unhappy with the Food and Civil Supplies Department portfolio allocated to him, has also been convinced to take charge.

An eight-time legislator, Mr. Reddy, who had been miffed over denial of the Bengaluru Development



Karnataka Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar with Minister Ramalinga Reddy during the swearing-in ceremony of the new government. ANI

portfolio, on Saturday evening told *The Hindu* he withdrew his resignation after meeting with central leaders and the Chief Minister.

He has been allocated the Water Resources Department portfolio. The party's central leadership,

it is learnt, did not want to change portfolios in order to send out a tough message against discontent.

The development came after a series of meetings involving Mr. Shivakumar, Congress general secretary in charge of Karnataka Randeep Singh Surjewala,

and KPCC president B.K. Hariprasada.

'An asset'

"Mr. Reddy's experience is important. He is an asset for the party. He met with me with certain doubts in his mind. He has taken back his resignation. In the future too, he will work as a Minister and the party's loyal soldier," Mr. Surjewala told media. "Mr. Reddy and Mr. Hariprasada have worked in the National Students' Union of India since 1973. Several leaders were not even born then."

Mr. Reddy said the party leadership promised him that his concerns would be addressed at an appropriate time and made it clear that they wanted him to remain in the Cabinet.

Actor Salim Kumar passes away at 56

The Hindu Bureau
KOCHI

National award-winning Malayalam actor Salim Kumar, 56, passed away at a private hospital in Kochi late on Saturday night.

He was rushed to Amrita Hospital in the city after complaining of discomfort on Saturday morning and had been on ventilator support since.

Kumar has a medical history marked by recurring illnesses and had undergone a liver transplant a

few years ago.

He has won both the National and State awards for 'Best Actor' for his moving portrayal in film *Adaminte Makan Abu* (2010). He has won the Kerala State Film Award on four occasions.

During the recent Kerala Assembly election, Kumar openly supported the Congress-led UDF, appearing alongside its leaders on several occasions and criticising the LDF leadership.

Since his debut in a small role in *Ishatamanu Nooru Vattam* (1996), Ku-



Salim Kumar

mar has acted in over 250 films.

Kumar, who has acted in Tamil and Bengali movies, has also tried his luck in writing and directing.

Characters made unforgettable by him such as Manavalan in *Pulival Kalyanam*,

Pyari in *Kalyanaraman*, Kannan Sranu in *Mayavi*, the mentally challenged character in *CID Moosa*, dance master Vikram in *Chathikatha Chanthu*, advocate Mukundan Unni in *Meesha Madhavan*, Koshy in *Ee Parakkum Thalika*, and Chandran in *Kunjikoonan* were among those that found enduring popularity in meme culture. (With PTI inputs)

Governor's appointments spark row at Kerala varsity

The Hindu Bureau
KOTTAYAM

The appointment of an interim Vice-Chancellor at Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, and the nomination of members to its Senate have triggered a political controversy, with allegations that several nominees have close links with the BJP.

Governor Rajendra Arlekar, who is also the Chancellor of universities in the State, last week appointed Mavoothu Duraipandi as interim Vice-Chancellor and nominated 30 members to the Senate.

Of the 30 nominees, 15 are drawn from various sectors, while the rest are heads of university departments, and deans.

Among the general-category members are BJP national executive member J. Prameela Devi and leaders associated with various feeder organisations, including the Bharatheeya Abhibhashaka Parishad, higher education teachers' sangh, school teachers' sangh and the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP). While the Left Democratic Front (LDF) has raised objections, sections within the United Democratic Front (UDF) have also expressed disquiet, though they have refrained from publicly criticising the decision to avoid a confrontation with the Governor.

There are also concerns that the nomination of BJP-affiliated members to the Senate could influence the election of a representative to the panel responsible for selecting the permanent Vice-Chancellor.

Cook held, sent to police custody in Delhi hotel fire case

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Saturday sent to two days' police custody a cook of the six-storey Flourish Stays Bed-and-Breakfast (B&B) facility in south Delhi's Malviya Nagar, where a massive fire claimed 21 lives.

Judicial Magistrate Bhanu Pratap Singh of the Saket Courts Complex granted Delhi Police's request for custodial interrogation of Keshav Negi, 65, who was arrested earlier in the day in connection with the incident.

Police have claimed that Mr. Negi's negligence may have contributed to the blaze that broke out in the Hauz Rani area on Wednesday.

According to the Chief Minister's Office (CMO), various agencies are carrying out extensive enforcement measures, including demolition of illegal properties, sealing of premises, and issuance of show-cause notices on a large scale.

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Saturday said the

Police claimed that his negligence may have contributed to the blaze at the hotel in Malviya Nagar

government is working under a "zero-tolerance policy" against unauthorised constructions, encroachments, violations of fire safety norms, and any activity that poses a threat to the lives and property of citizens in the Capital. She said a permanent mechanism is being developed to effectively curb such dangerous and illegal constructions in the future. Ms. Gupta also said the government is exploring the possibility of developing a third-party insurance framework for buildings.

Ms. Gupta said the Revenue Department has inspected 124 properties and issued show-cause notices in many cases. "In the last few days, the MCD has carried out demolition action against 94 properties and sealed 114 properties..." read the statement issued by the CMO.

Kukis take out 'coffin rally', CRPF chief reviews security

Mourners demand justice for victims of the attack at Loibol Khullen village in Kangpokpi district of Manipur on June 5; while Kukis blame the attack on the NSCN, the latter has denied the accusation

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

Kuki-Zo organisations in Manipur organised a 'coffin rally' on Saturday, ahead of the burial of three community members, including a woman, killed in an early morning attack on Friday.

The mourners demanded justice for the victims and action against those responsible for the attack at Loibol Khullen village in Kangpokpi district. The rally was carried out from Kangpokpi town to Martyrs' Cemetery at Phaijang, about 15 km away.

The Kuki Inpi Manipur, the apex body of the Kukis in Manipur, has blamed the attack on the National Socialist Council of Nagalim, also known as the NSCN (Isak-Muivah), and its "proxy" Zeliangrong United Front (Kamson). The NSCN (I-M) has dismissed the accusation.

The Kuki-Zo Council said that Friday's killings



CRPF Director-General Gyanendra Pratap Singh with Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla. FILE PHOTO

The CRPF chief met the Governor and the Chief Minister and discussed operational preparedness

reaffirmed the legitimacy of the demand for a separate administration for the Kuki-Zo communities, whose conflict with the Nagas followed that with the non-tribal Meiteis.

The latest round of violence in Manipur occurred

during the visit of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) Director-General Gyanendra Pratap Singh to the State. He reviewed the security situation in the violence-hit State.

Mr. Gyanendra Pratap Singh also met Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla and Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh.

According to the CRPF, the Director-General's discussions focused on enhancing operational preparedness, strategic planning,

and the force's comprehensive road map to eliminate insurgency and restore lasting peace in Manipur.

The Chief Minister appreciated the invaluable contribution of the CRPF in maintaining peace and law and order in the north-eastern State.

"The Government of Manipur remains committed to strengthening security, upholding public trust, and fostering harmony among all communities," Mr. Yumnam Khemchand Singh said.

On Saturday, the CRPF chief met the force's CoBRA personnel deployed in Manipur and commended their stellar role in various operational theatres. He emphasised caring for the sentiments of the local population wherever they operated.

"He motivated the personnel to work with zeal and vigour to wipe out insurgency from Manipur," the CRPF said in a statement.

HC raps U.P. police, says officers serve 'political bosses'

Ishita Mishra
NEW DELHI

Questioning the functioning of the Uttar Pradesh police, the Allahabad High Court recently observed that the loyalties of the State's police officers often appear to be aligned with the ruling dispensation rather than the Constitution.

The remarks came from the Bench of Justice Vinod Diwakar, which was hearing a case pertaining to the Gangsters Act against Ghaziabad resident Rajendra Tyagi and his family on Wednesday. While quashing the case, the court found that the allegations arose from land and financial disputes and did not meet the legal requirements for invoking the stringent law.

The court expressed serious concern about the arrest of Lalita Tyagi, a homemaker, who spent nearly 80 days in jail. It termed her arrest "patently illegal, arbitrary and wholly unwarranted".

Reprimanding the police, the court noted that a

Court slams illegal use of Gangsters Act to keep a homemaker in jail for 80 days

deeply entrenched culture has taken root in which the rule of law is treated less as a Constitutional mandate and more as an administrative obstacle.

"The vertical loyalty of officers runs not toward the Constitution but toward the ruling dispensation. Field officers, acutely conscious of the transfer-posting economy, calibrate their conduct to satisfy political superiors. Encounter killings, selective crack-downs, and targeted use of the Gangsters Act against inconvenient individuals have periodically attracted judicial notice," the court said.

It further recorded a *prima facie* finding that former Ghaziabad Police Commissioner Ajay Kumar Mishra appeared to have misused his authority while approving the Gangsters Act proceedings.

RJD workers guard Lalu and Rabri's residence amid row over security change

Amarnath Tewary
PATNA

Workers and leaders of the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) were seen standing guard outside the residence of party leader and former Bihar Chief Minister Rabri Devi, days after the State government withdrew the Z+ security cover provided to both her and party chief Lalu Prasad, and the family decided to return the remaining security personnel deployed for them.

The Bihar government, through a notification issued on June 4, withdrew the Z+ security cover for Mr. Prasad and Ms. Devi and replaced it with security provided by personnel of the Bihar Special Armed



Strong stance: RJD supporters and workers gather outside Rabri Devi and Lalu Prasad's residence in Patna on Saturday. ANI

Police (BSAP). However, sources within the RJD said the family decided to return the revised security cover.

The Y category security provided to their elder son and Janshakti Janata Dal leader Tej Pratap Yadav

was also withdrawn. Y+ security provided to their younger son and Leader of the Opposition in the Bihar Assembly Tejashwi Yadav, his wife Rajshree Yadav, and elder sister Misa Bharti, the MP from Patliputra, has been retained.

Pro-Khalistan slogans, 'shutdown' mark 42nd Operation Bluestar day

Vikas Vasudeva
CHANDIGARH

Pro-Khalistan slogans were raised inside the Golden Temple complex in Amritsar on Saturday during the 42nd anniversary of Operation Bluestar, even as the city wore a largely deserted look, with most commercial establishments and educational institutions remaining closed in response to an 'Amritsar shutdown' call issued by Sikh hardline groups to observe the occasion.

Supporters of the Khalistan movement have been demanding a sovereign state for Sikhs for many years.

Activists of radical Sikh outfit Dal Khalsa, along with hardliners owing allegiance to Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar) chief Sim-



Members of Sikh organisations mark the anniversary of Operation Blue Star at the Golden Temple in Amritsar on Saturday. AFP

ranjit Singh Mann, raised slogans in support of forming Khalistan during a congregation of Sikh devotees.

Several young men were seen dressed in outfits bearing photographs of slain separatist leader Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and distributing his posters, as they hailed him and pledged to press on

with their campaign for a separate Sikh homeland. On June 6, 1984, the Army had stormed the complex of the Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple) in Amritsar, Sikhism's holiest shrine, to flush out extremists led by Bhindranwale, whose death anniversary also falls on this day.

Addressing the commemoration congregation, Kuldip Singh Gargaji, officiating Jathedar of the Akal Takht, the highest Sikh temporal seat, said Sikhs have established a unique identity around the world through service to humanity and adherence to the principle of welfare for all. However, Mr. Gargaji expressed concern that the Sikh identity and religious symbols were increasingly being targeted globally through "various pretexts under a deep-rooted conspiracy". He also criticised what he described as attempts by governments to impose laws and exercise control over Sikh institutions and raised the issue of "Bandi Sikhs (Sikh prisoners)" who had completed their terms in prison, demanding their immediate release.



Raju Kumar Singh

BJP MLA convicted in 2018 Delhi celebratory firing case

Ishita Mishra
NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Saturday convicted Raju Kumar Singh, BJP MLA from Bihar's Sahebganj Assembly segment, in a case of the death of a woman during celebratory firing on New Year's eve in 2018 in Delhi.

Special Judge Vishal Gogne of the Rouse Avenue Courts held Mr. Singh guilty for culpable homicide not amounting to murder and for violating arms licence conditions. Mr. Singh's wife, Renu Singh, and two others were acquitted of charges related to destruction of evidence, citing the absence of material proof.

Rajiv Mohan, counsel for the MLA, told *The Hindu* that the court directed that Singh be taken into custody and scheduled arguments on sentencing for June 9.

The matter pertains to an FIR lodged in connection with an incident at Mr. Singh's farmhouse in Fatehpur Beri, where he allegedly fired shots into the air during a New Year celebration. One of the bullets allegedly struck Archana Gupta, 45, who later died while undergoing treatment.

The police recovered a rifle and live cartridges from the farmhouse and added a murder charge to the FIR. The court, in October 2023, framed charges of culpable homicide against the MLA, observing that there was no evidence of intent to cause death, though Mr. Singh was aware that firing in a crowded gathering could endanger lives.

Bengal police find large cache of arms in Sandeshkhali

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

The Special Task Force of the West Bengal Police on Saturday recovered a huge cache of firearms and cartridges allegedly from a pond belonging to a Trinamool Congress functionary and his brother at Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas district.

Observing that for years under the previous Trinamool regime, such illegal weapons were stockpiled and used ruthlessly to terrorise the public, West Bengal Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari praised the West Bengal Police for the major breakthrough. "On precise intelligence inputs, the Special Task Force (STF) conducted extensive raids across multiple locations near Sarberia Bazaar in Kumrakhali, Basanti, and Sandeshkhali areas. Forces have successfully seized a massive cache of illegal firearms and ammunition hidden away to dis-

rupt peace," Mr. Adhikari said. The pond belonged to Robin Das and Gopal Das.

Sandeshkhali made headlines in the early months of 2024, when local people, particularly women, came out in protest against Trinamool leader Sheikh Shahjahan. He was arrested for being responsible for an attack on officials of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and has been behind bars since. "Those dark days are over. Our government remains unconditionally committed to restoring law and order. We will continue to track down, unearth, and recover every single piece of illegal firearm across the length and breadth of West Bengal," the Chief Minister said.

One of the survivors of Sandeshkhali violence, Rekha Patra, now a BJP MLA from Hingalganj, said there was an atmosphere of fear during the Trinamool regime and now normalcy was being restored.

Relief material recoveries put several Trinamool leaders under scanner

Shrabana Chatterjee
KOLKATA

As the crackdown on Trinamool Congress leaders continues in West Bengal, many of them have found themselves on the wrong side of the law over allegations of hoarding and diverting government relief materials meant for disaster-hit residents. While some of them have been arrested, others faced protests by locals.

Among the latest incidents, a large quantity of blankets, tarpaulins, clothes, rice, and wheat was allegedly recovered from locked Eastern Coalfields Limited quarters linked to Trinamool leader Udeep Singh in the Jamuria coal mine area of Paschim Bardhaman district on Thursday.

On the same day, recoveries of relief materials were reportedly made from the residence of former Trinamool Minister



In police net: A local Trinamool Congress leader, Ramesh Patra, being arrested in Hooghly on Saturday. ANI

Giasuddin Molla in Usti, South 24 Parganas district. Soon after the recoveries, locals started protesting outside the house and shouted "thief, thief".

Former party MLA Narendranath Chakraborty from the Pandabeswar Assembly constituency in Paschim Bardhaman also came under fire after tarpaulin, clothes, and food items were allegedly found in a godown right beside his residence during a search operation by police. The recoveries, also on

Thursday, led to protests by locals.

Similar recoveries of relief materials have also been reported from Katwa, Dum Dum, Bhatpara, Bidhannagar, Khejurr, Diamond Harbour, and several other places across the State. Among those arrested are Baduria Municipality chairman Dipankar Bhattacharya, Patharpratima Trinamool Congress regional president Gautam Aari, and former Purbasthali North MLA Tapan Chatterjee.

SC, minority wings of Cong. plan stir against atrocities

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Scheduled Castes (SC) and minority departments of the Congress on Saturday (June 6, 2026) announced a joint nationwide campaign against alleged atrocities on Dalits, minorities, and other marginalised communities. The campaign will culminate in a major protest at Jantar Mantar on July 20, coinciding with the Monsoon Session of Parliament.

MPs, MLAs, and community representatives from across the country would participate in the July 20 rally, Rajendra Pal Gautam, head of the SC department, and Rajya Sabha member Imran Pratapgarhi, who heads the minority department, said at a press conference following a joint convention of the two departments.

Mr. Gautam alleged that Dalits, Adivasis, minorities, and backward communi-

MPs, MLAs, and community representatives from across the country would participate in the July 20 rally

ties continued to face systemic discrimination.

He pointed to disparities in scholarship eligibility norms, noting that the annual income ceiling for SC, ST, OBC, and minority students was ₹2.5 lakh, compared with ₹8 lakh for beneficiaries in the Economically Weaker Sections category.

He also criticised poor budgetary support for SC and ST finance and development corporations.

Mr. Pratapgarhi accused the Centre of being indifferent to atrocities against marginalised communities.

A joint advisory council meeting will be held in Lucknow later this month, he added.

'There was no way to raise our grievances within Trinamool'

Rebel Trinamool leader Ritabrata Banerjee says the grassroots party created by Mamata Banerjee has been hijacked by Abhishek Banerjee and corporate brokers; he rejects allegations that the BJP engineered the split, and reiterates that his faction will remain anti-BJP; he also hints at a possible rebellion among Trinamool MPs, saying 'courage is contagious, it will travel from Kolkata to Delhi too'

INTERVIEW

Ritabrata Banerjee

Sobhana K. Nair

Expelled Trinamool Congress leader and newly appointed Leader of the Opposition in the West Bengal Assembly, Ritabrata Banerjee, spoke to *The Hindu*, explaining the reasons and timing of his revolt, his relationship with the ruling BJP, and hinting at a split in the parliamentary party in Delhi too.

Why did you and others aligned with you decide to strike out, and why now?

This was the perfect time. Before the elections, I could have been killed. Had the Trinamool Congress won the election, I would have had to remain silent. The selection of the time was not dependent on me. There was no way we could have raised our grievances within the party. The party's structure had collapsed. Non-political people had been at the helm of affairs. The grassroots party created by Mamata Banerjee has been hijacked by Abhishek Banerjee and his corporate brokers from IPAC.

Despite a good performance, I was denied a ticket for the Lok Sabha elections. Instead, in these Assembly polls, I was sent to the Uluberia Assembly constituency, which I was

unfamiliar with. For the first three days, I was not allowed to enter Uluberia because the local municipal chairman, who was also a contender for the ticket, was miffed.

During my campaign there, I came to understand the spread of corruption on the ground.

You joined the Trinamool in 2020 and have been working with it since 2018. How is it that you saw the corruption only now?

I was not part of the Trinamool's organisational structure... I was working in the trade union. It was only when I went for the Uluberia campaign that I understood the depth of the rot.



There are allegations that this split was engineered by the BJP and that the faction you represent is a BJP-sponsored Opposition. Where do you stand in relation to the BJP?

On May 6, after the results,

all MLAs were called for a meeting, and everybody was asked to give a standing ovation to Abhishek Banerjee for his 'exemplary' performance in the Assembly polls.

I also reluctantly stood up. Many others too were hesitant to applaud. Just as fear is contagious, so is

courage.

Bagnan MLA Arunava Sen refused to stand up. This one gesture galvanised others, too.

After Jahangir Khan withdrew from the Falta Assembly re-poll at the last minute, I asked why he was not immediately expelled and why the national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee is not taking responsibility. Instead of responding, I was told to check the party's social media post. On May 19, when I went to sign the party's letter nominating the Leader of Opposition, I saw the names of many MLAs written in block letters. They had never signed, so someone had just listed their names. They were sending a forged document.

Why didn't you flag this forgery within the party?

For the last 15 months that I have been in the Rajya Sabha, I have managed to meet Abhishek Banerjee only thrice in Delhi, and that too in passing. My request for a one-on-one meeting with him was ignored.

It was only when I raised the Jahangir Khan incident that I was called, only to be told to give all my grievances in writing.

So it was clear that even if we were to question the letter, nothing would happen.

And how do you react to the charge that you are a BJP-sponsored Opposition?

During the post-poll violence, two of the 61 MLAs who are with us were attacked by the BJP. Sandip Saha's residence was attacked. If we were helped by the BJP, why are our MLAs being attacked? Our collective has made it clear that in a Presidential or Vice-Presidential election, we will vote and not abstain to bring the numbers down. We are anti-BJP.

Are Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha MPs also standing with you in this rebellion?

Courage, as I said, is contagious.

I am confident that courage has travelled from Kolkata to Delhi, covering a distance of 1,435 km. So let's wait and watch.

Baby writes to Kharage over Cong. charges against CPI(M)

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Days before a meeting of Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) bloc on Monday, Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) general secretary M.A. Baby has written to Congress president Mallikarjun Kharage seeking clarification on the allegations made by Congress leaders that the CPI(M) had an understanding with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) during the Kerala Assembly election campaign.

Mr. Baby argued that accusations repeatedly levelled by senior Congress leaders impacted the foundation of the Opposition alliance formed to jointly challenge the BJP.

Referring to the Congress campaign in Kerala, Mr. Baby said the party had conducted a "systematic campaign" to allege that the Left and the BJP had entered into a political arrangement, and former Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan enjoyed a special understanding with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Such allegations, he said, were incompatible with the spirit of cooperation underpinning the INDIA bloc.

Warning that the issue had implications for Opposition unity, Mr. Baby said the Congress leadership must "clear the air" on what he termed "disruptive moves" before the INDIA bloc meeting.

Students join CJP's debut protest, await next move

A diverse crowd of youth gather for the CJP's first protest in Delhi; several student organisations have extended support to the cause while withholding endorsement of the movement itself

Ashna Butani
NEW DELHI

Students from a range of Delhi colleges, including those from Delhi University, Jawaharlal Nehru University, and Jamia Millia Islamia, showed up for the first protest held by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), which calls itself an "Indian satirical political movement".

Many students said they were there to support the demand of the protesters — the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan amid multiple examination controversies and irregularities — but are yet to decide how involved they want to be in the movement itself.

Making wrongs right

Jantar Mantar in central Delhi was brimming with students and other youth, bearing posters and placards. "Cockroaches do not ruin lives, BJP does," read one slogan. "Dharmendra Pradhan must resign," said another. Another poster listed the Ministers whose children are studying in foreign universities, saying, "Our future is leaked, their future is secure."

A Delhi University (DU) student carrying roses said that the flowers were "for the movement" and that



Voice of dissent: Abhijeet Dipke, founder of the online movement, leads protests in Delhi on Saturday, demanding the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

she was there to protest against paper leaks and irregularities in examinations. Krishna Agarwal, who is studying in DU's Shri Ram College of Commerce, said this was his first protest and he was there to see what students can do to make wrongs right, referring to "paper leaks and issues with the education system".

Many students at the protest were associated with student organisations, but said they were present in their "individual capacity". Among the student outfits that showed up in large numbers was the All India Students' Association (AISA). The organisation's leaders, however, clarified that their support for the cause does

not necessarily translate to endorsement of the CJP, adding that they would wait for the movement to develop before planning their future course of action.

The current JNU student union president, Aditi Mishra, who is also associated with AISA, showed up in solidarity. She was one of the five JNU students rusticated and declared out of bounds from campus for two semesters due to alleged vandalism. "There is a diverse crowd today: so many students are here, including school students, and people who have shown up with Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's photos. We are hoping that the momentum continues and we can bring down the for-

gress of the ruling party," she said.

Some student leaders said they were present as "spectators" and were apprehensive of the "movement's links to and endorsement from the Aam Aadmi Party". Soon after the protest ended, AAP supreme and former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal expressed his solidarity with a post on X. "The cockroach movement is an expression of huge anger and frustration experienced by the youth of this country. Rather than terming them anti-national, the Modi govt. should address their issues. AAP supports their demands. The Prime Minister must sack the education minister immediately," he said.

CJP founder applied for permission at Delhi airport, received it within minutes

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police decided to allow the protest called by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), an online youth group, to pacify the youth's anxiety over the recent NEET-UG paper leak and glitches in examinations organised by the Central government and its bodies, government sources said.

On arrival from the United States on Saturday morning, Abhijeet Dipke, founder of the CJP, was taken to a room at the Delhi airport, where the police asked him to apply for permission to protest at Jantar Mantar and sign an undertaking, sources said.

Within minutes, officers granted the permission letter at the airport after obtaining his signature, even though the CJP's legal team had prepared a separate set of documents and was ready to submit an application at the Parliament Street police station, where Mr. Dipke was to accompany them. As of late Friday, June 5, the CJP had not applied for any such permission.

At 9.02 a.m. on Saturday, Saurav Das, spokesperson of the CJP, posted on X: "Permission for the Cockroach Protest #CJPProtest Secured from Authorities. Everyone, Proceed straight to Jantar Mantar. Do NOT go to Parliament Street. Please come directly to Jantar



Heavy security at Parliament Street Police Station on Saturday. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Mantar." After analysing the chatter on social media and getting a sense of the situation on the ground, it was felt that refusing permission may have led to some protesters storming the venue or the police station and the confrontation would have further fuelled the anger among the youth, sources said.

Wangchuk too allowed
Sonam Wangchuk, climate activist from Ladakh who had pledged support to the CJP, took a flight from Leh on Saturday and reached Jantar Mantar straight from the airport. Mr. Wangchuk, who was detained under the National Security Act (NSA) after the September 24, 2025 violence in Leh city which killed four people, was neither stopped in Leh nor on arrival at the Delhi airport.

When asked why the police chose to grant permission to the CJP, a member said, "Maybe they feared a repeat of the situa-

tion in Bangladesh and Nepal where it was difficult to control the anger of Gen Z. They must have thought it was better to allow the protest than to curtail it somehow."

The Delhi Police had meticulously planned security arrangements for the protest. A mobile command and control room was stationed at the venue. Policemen with body cameras and orange vests that had "Photographer-New Delhi District, Delhi Police" written on them were active at the protest site. An unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) camera operated by the police swept the area at regular intervals, relaying live visuals to the command centre. Several plainclothes police personnel moved among the crowd.

Mr. Das told *The Hindu* that the organisers were grateful to the Delhi Police for handling the situation in a fair manner. "Some right-wing groups tried to create problems at the venue, but they were detained by the police and taken away. Social media was filled with negative comments, and we really thank the Delhi Police for their cooperation," he said.

A total of 1500-2000 people, particularly students, gathered at Jantar Mantar to show support to the movement and demand the resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan.

Amid global uncertainties, PM reviews measures to boost economic growth

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi chaired a meeting of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) on Saturday, during which members discussed measures to sustain and accelerate India's economic growth amid an uncertain global environment.

The council is said to have assessed the potential impact of the ongoing conflict in West Asia on India and global economies. "Chaired a meeting of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister. Deliberated on a wide range of issues relating to India's economic transfor-



PM Narendra Modi chairs a meeting with members of the Economic Advisory Council to the PM, in New Delhi, on Saturday. PTI

mation and long-term development priorities," he said in a post on X. "Also shared perspectives on adding more momentum to the reforms journey and ensuring 'Ease of Living' as well as 'Ease of Doing Busi-

ness," Mr. Modi added.

The discussions focused on ideas and policy measures to strengthen economic momentum at a time of global turbulence, sources said. The meeting was attended by the Prime

Minister's Principal Secretaries, P.K. Mishra, and Shaktikanta Das, along with members of the advisory body.

The EAC-PM, an independent body constituted to advise the Prime Minister on economic and related issues, is chaired by S. Mahendra Dev. Its full-time members include Sanjay Kumar Mishra, Sanjeev Sanyal, and Shamika Ravi. It includes 11 part-time members drawn from academia, finance, and public policy. They include Rakesh Mohan and Sajjid. Z. Chinoy, Neelkanth Mishra, Nilesh Shah, T.T. Ram Mohan, Soumya Kanti Ghosh, K.V. Raju, Chetan Ghatge, Pami Dua, Pulak Ghosh, and Gourav Vallabh.

India and Nepal can shift trajectory of bilateral ties to achieve full potential

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

India and Nepal have an opportunity to "decisively shift" the track of their bilateral ties to achieve its full potential, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said on Saturday, after official talks with his visiting Nepal counterpart Shisir Khanal.

Citing this week's visit by Rabi Lamichhane, the chairperson of Nepal's ruling Rastriya Swatantra Party, Mr. Jaishankar said there are "strong complementarities" between the government of Prime Minister Balendra Shah in Kathmandu and the government of India. Saying that Mr. Shah



External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar with his Nepal counterpart Shisir Khanal in New Delhi on Saturday. ANI

wants to pursue "result-driven diplomacy", Mr. Khanal described India as Nepal's "most important partner".

The conversation between the two Foreign Ministers came on the second

day of Mr. Khanal's visit.

"I want to take the opportunity to convey our best wishes for the success of your government," Mr. Jaishankar said.

"There are strong complementarities between

the objectives outlined by your government and initiatives that India has taken in the neighbourhood."

"We believe that today we have an opportunity to decisively shift the trajectory of India-Nepal relations and to realise the full potential of our ties," Mr. Jaishankar said.

Describing India and Nepal as "stakeholders of a proud ancient civilisation", Mr. Khanal said, "We seek to translate this civilisational bond into modern development oriented partnership. Under the new government, we are ready to engage substantively, purposefully and at the highest possible levels."

INBRIEF



Five killed, two injured as car rams truck in Gujarat's Morbi

Five people were killed and two sustained serious injuries after the car they were travelling in rammed a dumper truck on the Morbi-Halvad highway in Morbi district of Gujarat on Friday night, the police said. The accident took place near Charadwa village around 9.30 p.m. when the truck was crossing the highway, a police officer said. Seven people were travelling in the car. Three were killed on the spot, while two died during treatment in a hospital in Rajkot later in the night. The two injured admitted to the hospital are in serious condition. The police said a heavy excavator machine was used to bring the victims out of the mangled vehicle.

Heat, not disease, caused death of 8 lion cubs in Gir

The deaths of eight Asiatic lion cubs in Gir forest of Gujarat were caused by heat-related stress and weakened immunity rather than any infectious disease outbreak, State Forest Minister Arjun Modhwadia said on Saturday. The clarification comes days after forest authorities launched an intensive monitoring and disease-control exercise following suspicions that the cubs may have died of Babesia, a tick-borne parasitic infection known to affect wild animals. Mr. Modhwadia said investigations had ruled out Babesia infection and other viral diseases as the cause of the deaths.

NC miffed over 'official review' of AIIMS project by PDP chief

The ruling National Conference (NC) on Saturday criticised Peoples Democratic Party president Mehbooba Mufti for "touring and chairing an official meeting" at the under-construction site of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in south Kashmir's Awantipora a day ago. "It's a wrong precedent. Such a review meeting should ordinarily be chaired by the Chief Minister or the Minister holding the portfolio. There is reason to believe that the strings may be controlled from elsewhere. It appears to be an attempt to divert attention from the real political and constitutional issues facing Jammu and Kashmir," said NC legislator Tanvir Sadiq.

India criticises Pakistan for peddling false narrative

India has slammed Pakistan for its "unwarranted reference" to Jammu and Kashmir at the UN, telling the neighbouring country that it was a huge responsibility and not a forum for peddling "biased and false narratives". "The unwarranted reference by Pakistan to a matter strictly internal to India, the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, has compelled me to respond," India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Parvathani Harish said on Friday. Pakistan currently sits in the Security Council as a non-permanent member and its tenure will end this year. Mr. Harish made it clear that Jammu and Kashmir was, is, and will always remain an integral and inalienable part of India. PTI

SUDOKU

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

Domestic LPG price hiked by ₹29 a 14.2-kg cylinder

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Domestic cooking gas price has been raised by ₹29 per LPG cylinder, marking the second increase in three months as state-owned fuel retailers continue to grapple with elevated global energy costs.

The price of a 14.2-kg LPG cylinder in Delhi will rise to ₹942 from ₹913 with effect from June 7, according to industry sources.

The increase follows a ₹60 hike per cylinder on March 7 after the conflict in West Asia disrupted global energy supplies and drove up international fuel prices. Industry sources said that the increase had only partly offset losses incurred on domestic LPG sales.

Oil marketing companies were estimated to be losing about ₹703 on every LPG cylinder sold before the latest revision, the sources said.

The LPG price hike comes amid a broader increase in the price of petrol, diesel and compressed natural gas.

Indian mission in U.K. slams disruption at CJI's lecture

The statement followed videos showing a heated exchange over a question from the audience about 'growing hostility to dissent within India', which was cut short by the event moderator

Press Trust of India
LONDON

The High Commission of India in London on Friday issued a statement condemning the disruption caused at an event addressed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant during his ongoing visit to the U.K.

Chief Justice Kant was addressing a lecture on "Artificial intelligence and international law" at Birkbeck, University of London, on Thursday, which was followed by an audience interaction.

The event explored the growing relationship between artificial intelligence, legal systems and international governance, examining both the opportunities and challenges AI presents for the future of justice and global regulation.

"A lively discussion followed his address. Thereafter, a certain individual tried to disrupt the event," reads the Indian High Commission statement, re-



Chief Justice of India Surya Kant delivers a lecture at the Birkbeck College, University of London, in London. PTI

leased on social media.

"Such indecorous audience behaviour is unacceptable and inconsistent with respectful engagement that should govern public discourse. Differences of opinion are a natural part of a democratic society. However, they must be expressed in a manner that is civil and respectful," it adds.

The statement followed videos circulating online

that reflect a heated exchange over an attempted audience question about "growing hostility to dissent within India", which was cut short by the event moderator as being off the topic of "Artificial intelligence and international law".

Role of law

"Technology itself is neither inherently benevolent nor inherently harmful. Its

Centre to upgrade Bengal rail infrastructure

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Saturday met West Bengal Chief Minister Suvenud Adhikari at the State Secretariat and promised an investment of ₹1 lakh crore to upgrade Railway infrastructure in the State.

The visit of the Railway Minister comes almost a month after the change of regime in West Bengal. He thanked the first BJP Chief Minister for "saving West Bengal".

Expressing hope that Railway officials will get an opportunity to work for the State, Mr. Vaishnaw said that the Trinamool Congress government did not cooperate for implementation of Railway projects and also tried to stall projects by approaching the courts.

Addressing a joint press conference with Mr. Vaishnaw, the Chief Minister said the Centre-State relations had hit a nadir during the previous Trinamool regime and it had seemed that the State was at "war" with the Centre.

Kaziranga National Park records 30 raptor and six stork species in a rapid bird survey

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

The Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve in Assam has 30 species of raptors and six species of storks, a rapid survey focused on these two categories of birds has revealed.

The survey, conducted by a 10-member team between the last week of February and March 2, was released on Friday (June 5) to mark World Environment Day. The Kaziranga Tiger Reserve authority surveyed in collaboration with researchers of Gauhati University.

The enumerators recorded 217 individual raptors – buzzards, eagles, falcons, owls, and vultures – across 30 species and 266



A black-necked stork spotted at Kaziranga National Park in Assam. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

individual storks across six species.

Critical habitats

India is home to 112 species of raptors, both diurnal and nocturnal. Kaziranga and the adjoining landscape harbour about 50 species of these raptors.

Assam's rich, diverse wetlands and the Himalayan foothills provide critical habitats for these birds of prey.

India houses eight of the 20 stork species found in tropical and subtropical regions worldwide. All eight of these are found in As-

sam, although Kaziranga has recorded six.

The raptor-stork study was conducted across Kaziranga's three administrative zones – the East Assam Wildlife Division, the Biswanath Wildlife Division, and the Nagaon Wildlife Division.

The Eastern Assam Wildlife Division recorded 21 species of raptors and five species of storks. While Biswanath recorded 20 species of raptors and six species of storks, Nagaon recorded 14 and five, respectively.

Among the stork species, the Asian openbill (*Anastomus oscitans*) was the most abundant, with 92 individuals spotted. The greater adjutant stork (*Leptoptilos dubius*) was the

rarest, with three individuals recorded. Among the raptors, the Himalayan griffon vulture (*Gyps himalayensis*) was the most common with 69 individual sightings, while the booted eagle and white-tailed eagle were the rarest species with one individual sighting each.

"Kaziranga's landscape also serves as a last stronghold for the enigmatic Pallas's fish eagle (*Haliaeetus leucorhynchus*). A survey conducted by the Wildlife Institute of India in January 2020 reported 10 active nests of Pallas's fish eagle in Kaziranga, making it the protected area with the highest number of [this bird's] breeding sites in the world," an official statement read.

Priest stabbed to death in Kota; leaders seek action

The Hindu Bureau
JAIPUR

A 35-year-old Mahant (chief priest) of the Chandresal Math in Rajasthan's Kota was stabbed to death by unidentified assailants on Friday night, in what the police suspect may be linked to an ongoing dispute over the monastery's trust and succession.

The police said the deceased, Devanand Maharaj, was allegedly stabbed 26 times with sharp weapons after assailants barged into the Math around midnight. Religious leaders and Devanand's family members refused to take the body for cremation until the culprits were arrested.

SC balances child's right to know paternity, father's right to privacy

Rizmi Lia M.
CHENNAI

The Supreme Court, in a ruling last week, upheld the use of DNA test in a long-running paternity dispute, addressing the complex question of whether an individual's right to privacy overrides the need to determine parentage.

Earlier, the top court had consistently held in various judgments that DNA tests should not be ordered routinely, but there has never been a conclusive answer to when they should be permitted.

Paternity cases largely revolved around the concerns of legitimacy and the need to avoid illegitimising children. However, after the Supreme Court's landmark decision of *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India* in 2017 which ruled that the right to privacy is a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Constitution, the court has continuously ruled that compulsory DNA testing interferes with an individual's right to privacy and bodily autonomy.



The top court had earlier consistently held in various judgments that DNA tests should not be ordered routinely. ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES

In the present case, Justice Sanjay Karol and Justice N. Kotiswar Singh upheld the trial court order directing a DNA test to prove paternity. The alleged father and appellant approached the court to overturn the trial order.

Section 112 of the Evidence Act, 1872 (Section 116 of the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam) states that a child is presumed to be legitimate unless the party disputing paternity proves that there was non-access for the relevant period of the marriage and it is upon the alleged father to prove the non-access.

In a series of older cases, the court has pulled

back from using the DNA test to prove paternity. Especially since the above said section was enacted in 1872, when there was no scientific means to determine paternity. However, the DNA testing method became commercially available in India by the 1980s.

In 2014, the Supreme Court gave a wider interpretation in *Nandlal Wasudeo Badwaik v. Lata Nandlal Badwaik* holding that "in our opinion, when there is a conflict between a conclusive proof envisaged under law and a proof based on scientific advancement accepted by the world community to be

correct, the latter must prevail over the former".

N.D. Tiwari case

In the same year, the N.D. Tiwari paternity row was highly publicised in which veteran politician Narayan Dutt Tiwari was compelled to take a DNA test that proved he was the biological father of Rohit Shekhar. The long-drawn-out six-year case established a significant legal precedent regarding privacy, scientific evidence, and the rights of children born out of wedlock. Though Tiwari strongly argued that his right to privacy was violated, the Delhi High Court and the Supreme Court ordered for the test.

In the present case, neither the court gave an unrestricted right to the child to demand DNA testing nor abandon the alleged father's right to privacy, but rather held that in the domain of right to privacy, it wants to balance the interests of the alleged father's privacy with that of the child's desire for closure on a question that has loomed large on his life.

Right of accused to travel abroad can't be seen in isolation: SC

Rizmi Lia M.
CHENNAI

The Supreme Court has held that the fundamental right to travel abroad which comes under Article 21 cannot be viewed in isolation; rather it needs to be balanced with the victim's right to speedy trial.

A Division Bench comprising Justices Dipankar Datta and Satish Chandra Sharma set aside the Telangana High Court's order permitting a businessman, who is an accused in a criminal case, to travel to the U.S. for medical treatment.

The case arose out of a complaint lodged in 2014 about the suspicious death of the complainant's father after which an FIR was filed against the businessman and others of criminal conspiracy and abetment of suicide under the Indian Penal Code.

The trial has not commenced even after ten years. The top court held that the High Court was "indulgent" rather than judicially restrained in granting such permission.

The court noted that the accused had been filing successive petitions, securing interim protection, and withdrawing those before final adjudication, while leaving the country on a suspended look out circular without seeking the court's permission. Therefore, the accused cannot claim that the condition restraining travel amounts to an infringement of fundamental rights, it added.

In 2016, he obtained an order suspending the look out circular and left India in 2017, returning only in April 2025 when he was arrested at the Rajiv Gandhi International Airport in Hyderabad.

Now, the Supreme Court held that the High Court erred in permitting the travel. "A balance must be struck between the individual liberty of the respondent no. 2 on the one hand and the right of the appellant to a speedy trial together with the larger societal interest in ensuring the effective administration of criminal justice, on the other," the Bench said.

THE HINDU HUDDLE 2026



Posing queries: A participant asking a question during a session at The Hindu Huddle in Bengaluru. K. MURALI KUMAR



Selfie session: Manoj Bajpayee, actor, taking a selfie with attendees in Bengaluru on Saturday. K. MURALI KUMAR



Paying close attention: Delegates listening to a session at the sixth edition of The Hindu Huddle on Saturday. K. MURALI KUMAR



Dr. Nirmala Lakshman, Chairperson, The Hindu Group, and former Union Minister Jayanthi Natarajan, and others. K. MURALI KUMAR

Panel discusses need to combat doping in sports



Sports forum: K. Kunal, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Sports; Anjali Bhagwat, former world number 1 shooter; and Ashwini Nachappa, Olympian; with K.C. Vijaya Kumar, Sports Editor, *The Hindu*. K. MURALI KUMAR

Achal Ashwin

BENGALURU
Eradicating the menace of doping and age-fraud must be a priority to set the Indian sports ecosystem right, panellists at a session of The Hindu Huddle emphasised.

Former international track star Ashwini Nachappa explained that a holistic approach must be taken to tackle doping offences. "Just punishing athletes who are caught doping is not enough. The federations need to play a bigger role," Ms. Ashwini said in a session titled "India 2036: The making of a sporting nation" hosted by K.C. Vijaya Kumar, Sports Editor, *The Hindu*.
K. Kunal, Joint Secretary, Sports Development, Union Ministry of Sports, stated that strict measures would be enforced to punish all parties involved in doping. "We want to criminalise doping. This applies to the entire doping system – those who provide the substances to athletes, the middlemen and all others," Mr. Kunal said.
Anjali Bhagwat, a pioneer of rifle shooting, spoke eloquently on competing at a time when her sport was considered niche. "In my era, only people who knew about shooting appreciated my performances. Now with social media, every small shooting competition reaches the entire country..." she said.

With India making a strong bid to host the 2036 Olympics, Ms. Anjali underlined the need to first focus on grassroots development. "We have to start our work from the grass root level before we think of the Olympics. We need to transform our population into sports enthusiasts," Ms. Anjali said.

Politician Vijay is more powerful than actor Vijay, says TVK Minister Arunraj

He attributes party's electoral success to charismatic leadership of Vijay and TVK's ideological grounding; the Minister says the party's internal assessments indicated strong support for Vijay, particularly in urban areas and its social media presence was largely organic and decentralised

Rishita Khanna

BENGALURU
Politician Vijay is more powerful than actor Vijay, and the combination of charisma and ideology is what transformed the Tamila Vetti Kazhagam (TVK) into a political force, Dr. K.G. Arunraj, Minister for Health, Medical Education and Family Welfare in the TVK government, said at the The Hindu Huddle here on Saturday.

At a session titled "New mandate for change - a Gen Z aspiration story", Dr. Arunraj reflected on the TVK's sweeping victory in the recent Tamil Nadu Assembly election, the party's strategy, and its ideological foundation and future course.

Beginning the discussion, Dr. Arunraj spoke about his connection with *The Hindu*, dating back to his UPSC preparation days. "Ask any civil services aspirant and one of the first things they will hear is – read *The Hindu*. I started my civil services preparation years ago when I was posted as a medical officer in a remote village in Krishnagiri. Back then, while preparing for the UPSC, I used to get *The Hindu* from Hosur because it was not available in Krishnagiri," he said.

On the TVK's poll success, he said there were



Behind the win: Dr. K.G. Arunraj, Minister for Health, Medical Education and Family Welfare of Tamil Nadu, with Ramya Kannan, Chief of Bureau, Tamil Nadu, *The Hindu*, in Bengaluru on Saturday. K. MURALI KUMAR

both obvious and less obvious reasons. "This electoral success, this strong foundation was laid when the party grew from a budding outfit into a primary force in Tamil Nadu. It was not a fluke. It was the courage of our political leader," he said.

"The success rested on two pillars – the charismatic leadership of our leader, Vijay, and TVK's ideological grounding," he said. "Tamil Nadu has been ruled by two well-established parties for the last 60 years, and then a fresh-

er takes on both parties and unseats them. Vijay took the bold step of entering politics. TVK is beyond a fan base."

The people of Tamil Nadu, he said, had been waiting for "a truly universal leader" and the TVK's internal assessments had consistently indicated strong support for Vijay, particularly in urban areas.

On DMK's defeat

He argued that the defeat of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam was significant not only because it lost

power but also because it lost the support of its allies. "This is a truly secular alliance, an ideological alliance. DMK has never ever won an election without its allies. So this mandate, even if it is one seat short of a majority, is the best mandate we can imagine," he said.

On the role played by young voters, Dr. Arunraj said Gen Z supporters had been at the forefront of the TVK's campaign, but the party's success could not be attributed solely to a youth movement. "It was a

family revolution. People of Tamil Nadu worked in families with TVK. Not just Gen Z, our leader was emotionally connected to each family," he said, adding that the TVK's social media presence was largely organic and decentralised.

Karur stampede

To questions about the tragic stampede in Karur, where lives were lost during a TVK rally, Dr. Arunraj said the case was with the CBI and a report was yet to come. But the incident had shattered Vijay, he said.

"They are not just voters, they are part of his family. What happened in Karur really shattered, broke him. Our leader wanted to return to Karur and meet affected families but was advised against it because of security concerns," the Minister said.

On the government's distinctive style, including Mr. Vijay wearing a suit in the Assembly, he said, "This is a refreshing change. That's what many people say. Ultimately, our performance matters, not the looks."

Regional parties assert influence in politics guided by national interest

Ravi Reddy

BENGALURU
Leaders of the regional parties have asserted that these parties continue to play a decisive role in shaping India's political landscape and insist that their choices are rooted in national interest rather than opportunism.

On the concluding day of The Hindu Huddle on Saturday, Rajya Sabha members Javed Ali Khan (Samajwadi Party), Santrupt Misra (Biju Janata Dal) and former BRS Parliamentary Party leader K.R. Suresh Reddy, in conversation with Nistula Hebbar, Political Editor, *The Hindu*, in one voice said there had been growing influence of regional parties.

Issue-based positions

Mr. Reddy, a senior politician with three decades of political stints as an MLA and MP, maintained that his party believed in neutrality and issue-based positions. "We are neither with UPA nor NDA. Our stand depends on national interest. The BRS opposed the Kisan Bill but supported demonetisation. We opposed the Waqf Bill. The stance is not political or



Javed Ali Khan, Samajwadi Party MP; Santrupt Misra, BJD MP; Nistula Hebbar, Political Editor, *The Hindu*; and K.R. Suresh Reddy, former BRS parliamentary leader, on Saturday. K. MURALI KUMAR

ideological but fundamentally based on the larger interest of the country," the former Speaker of united Andhra Pradesh said.

He defended Telangana's statehood demand pointing out that what did not happen in 65 years has happened in the past 10 years. "From a drought-stricken region, it is today the country's most prosperous State. Our demand for a separate State was on grounds of water, funds, and jobs," Mr. Reddy said crediting the BRS regime for the overall development.

First-time Rajya Sabha member Santrupt Misra echoed the sentiment of Mr. Reddy and Mr. Javed

Ali, stating that the growing influence of the regional parties was evident in how the BJD had performed and secured 182 Lok Sabha seats between 1999 and 2024.

He went on to caution against double standard in coalition politics, pointing out that if a national party aligns with a regional party to form a government, it is seen as pragmatic. "But if I, as a regional party close to people's issues, choose to align based on national interest, I am accused of being politically convenient," he said.

Mr. Misra cited Odisha's transformation under Naveen Patnaik as proof of issue-based leadership.

"From a bankrupt State in 2000, it became revenue surplus in 2024 because he was not serving BJD's interest but the people's interest," he said.

On simultaneous polls

On the proposal for simultaneous elections, he sought caution, saying: "The first five elections were simultaneous. The question is whether it strengthens or weakens democracy, whether local issues get neglected, whether Assembly terms get reduced. Every national issue that impacts the Constitution and people's lives must be debated in detail."

Mr. Reddy supported simultaneous elections. "Constant elections are not in the larger interest of the nation. Like Odisha, which voted one party to Parliament and another to the State, we are confident of the electorate," he said.

Mr. Javed Ali took a dig at the Congress saying that it is now reduced to a regional party, though they are their allies.

"We are a regional party in terms of Election Commission, but a national party in terms of ideology," he said.

AI will reshape jobs, but the bigger task is skilling, say industry veterans

Ivoti Banthia Siddhi Patil

BENGALURU
The debate around artificial intelligence has largely been framed around a single question: will it take away jobs?

But industry veterans at The Hindu Huddle argued that India risks missing a far more important conversation – how to redesign education, skilling, research, and businesses for an AI-led future.

The panel, moderated by Raghuvir Srinivasan, *businessline* Editor, brought together Lakshmi Narayanan, former Cognizant CEO; Debjani Ghosh, former NASSCOM president and NITI Aayog distinguished fellow; and B. Santhanam, former Saint-Gobain India chairman.

For Ms. Ghosh, the current narrative around AI-driven job losses is often misplaced. "A lot of the displacements till now were due to overhiring during the pandemic. So it was correction that was happening," she said, pushing back against the view that AI is already eliminating large numbers of jobs.

That does not mean the



Tech focus: Debjani Ghosh, former NASSCOM president and NITI Aayog distinguished fellow; Lakshmi Narayanan, former Cognizant CEO; B. Santhanam, former Saint-Gobain India chairman; and Raghuvir Srinivasan, *businessline* Editor. K. MURALI KUMAR

risks are insignificant. "The entry-level will definitely get disrupted. And that is important because that's millions of people in India and millions of youngsters in India," Ms. Ghosh said.

'Redesign work'

The challenge, she argued, is not to resist AI but to redesign work around it. Rather than viewing jobs as fixed roles, employers and policymakers need to break them down into tasks and identify the areas that can be automated and those which continue to require human judgment.

That future, she said, will be defined by what she called the "human sandwich model". "You need

the humans to frame the questions and inputs, AI does the work, and then you need humans again at the end to verify the outcome," she said.

While India has emerged as one of the world's largest digital markets, Ms. Ghosh warned that being a consumer of technology is not the same as creating value from it.

"If you look at the 17.6 trillion prediction of how much value AI will create in the next five years, 80% of that is going to two countries, the U.S. and China. For India, we should at least aspire to get 10% of that," she said.

Mr. Santhanam, however, believes India's biggest opportunity may not lie in

competing head-on with Silicon Valley's frontier models. Instead, he argued that the country can create disproportionate impact through the diffusion of AI across sectors such as agriculture, education and healthcare. "The most important work is in diffusion in these three areas – agriculture, education and health. That's where I think AI can do what humans cannot do," he said.

Mr. Narayanan echoed concerns about India's preparedness, particularly in education and research. Asked whether Indian colleges are producing graduates ready for the AI era, his answer was blunt. "The short answer is no."

India has historically excelled at adopting and scaling technologies, he said, but has underinvested in the invention and research that drive technological leadership. "We are not investing enough in research. The blame goes to the private sector," he said.

He argued that while India is comfortable with diffusion, it needs far stronger capabilities in innovation and research if it hopes to play a meaningful role in shaping the next wave of AI.

THE HINDU HUDDLE 2026

Women MPs introspect on structural inequality, political representation

'Visibility is not equality, symbolism is not power,' says Sagarika Ghose; panellists discuss delimitation Bill and women's reservation Bill, noting that the significance of women's votes has not translated into greater political representation; urge political parties to field more women candidates

Vinaya Deshpande Pandit
BENGALURU

Emphasising the need to create hospitable spaces for the participation of ordinary and extraordinary women in public life, women politicians on Saturday felt that the concept of a glass ceiling was flawed.

"It is a labyrinth. Let us not confuse visibility with equality, symbolism with power," said Sagarika Ghose, Trinamool Congress MP.

Aparajita Sarangi from the BJP, Thamizhachi Thangapandian from the DMK and Ms. Ghose were in conversation with senior journalist T.M. Veeraraghav on "Glass ceiling shattered: women leaders shaping Parliament" on the concluding day of The Hindu Huddle in Bengaluru.

On the delimitation Bill
The leaders dissected the reasons surrounding the historically marginalised participation of women and the impact of deep-rooted patriarchy. They also debated the delimitation Bill and its linkage to the women's reservation Bill. While Ms. Sarangi appealed to everyone to shun the attitude of Opposition towards the step taken by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Ms. Ghose asked if the Indian electorate truly wanted to spend on send-



Bridging the gap: Aparajita Sarangi, BJP MP; Sagarika Ghose, Trinamool Congress MP; and Thamizhachi Thangapandian, DMK MP; in conversation with T.M. Veeraraghav, senior journalist, in Bengaluru on Saturday. K. MURALI KUMAR

ing 800 members to the Lok Sabha. All the panelists opined that though women's votes had assumed more significance than ever before, it had not reflected in an increased political representation for them.

"This is not a men versus women issue. It is our collective responsibility to see that the glass ceiling breaks," Ms. Sarangi said. In a deeply engaging session, the leaders quoted thinkers from Aristotle and Pythagoras to Mahatma Gandhi and Maya Angelou, emphasising the need for a

change in social attitude. Ms. Thamizhachi said the social culture needed to change, adding that India continued to have a "sun-worshipping and son-worshipping culture". They said the parties should give more ticket to women.

The leaders said the culture in the region was full of examples of "female accession to male martyrdom". Ms. Ghose observed that her party was the only one to have bucked the trend in South Asia where several women leaders had been seen inheriting the

male martyrdom. She highlighted that while other parties had little representation of women, the Trinamool had 37% elected representatives.

'Thick layer of men'

Ms. Thamizhachi spoke of the unique and progressive culture of Tamil Nadu, adding that the history of the Self-Respect Movement had given space to women to look at the world for themselves.

"In the less travelled arena too, Tamil Nadu had the first woman priestess," she said. Quoting Laura

Liswood, she said, "There's no such thing as a glass ceiling for women. It's just a thick layer of men."

The MPs expressed regret that after several years of Independence, the number of women representatives in Parliament has not crossed the 100 mark. Of the 543 MPs in the Lok Sabha, only 74 are women. India ranks 147th globally for women's representation in its lower parliamentary house.

"We are below Rwanda, Sweden. This is despite India ratifying a treaty way

back in 1979 about non-discrimination against women," Ms. Sarangi said.

Ms. Ghose said that what women faced in several fields was not the "glass ceiling", but the "glass club".

"The club where men informally meet after 10 p.m. to sit with a glass. A lot of informal discussion takes place there. That is the glass club. And women are inherently excluded because they have to go back home to tend to the household, to look after the children. This is a structural issue," she said.



Closing track: Former diplomat Nirupama Rao performs with Sri Lankan pianist Soundarie David Rodrigo at The Hindu Huddle on Saturday. K. MURALI KUMAR

Former diplomat renders evocative performance to end the event on a musical high

Anagha Maareesha
BENGALURU

The Hindu Huddle concluded after two days of dialogues and sessions on topics ranging from politics and AI, to sports and cinema. The closing session witnessed an evocative musical performance by Nirupama Rao, former Foreign Secretary, titled "Counterpoint: a life in diplomacy, poetry and music".

The former diplomat was accompanied by Sri Lankan pianist Soundarie David Rodrigo. Ms. Rodrigo is a musician, who is also on the panel of Sri Lanka's Got Talent and is also part of a choir called Soul Sounds.

The songs that Ms. Rao performed with Ms. Rodrigo included Bob Dylan's *Farewell Angelina*, *Beautiful Dreamer* by Stephen Foster, *Smile* by Charlie Chaplin, and *Dream a Little Dream* by Fabian Andre and Wilbur Schwandt.

"There are many ways to tell the stories of life. One can tell them through days and milestones, places lived and positions held. As a diplomat, I spent life dealing with stories of nations. But when I look back today at my own journey, I remember songs. This evening is a musical memoir of sorts. The songs are not my favourites. They are songs that have stayed with me. The songs tonight speak of the journeys we undertake both outwards and inwards."

'Enduring constants of my life'

Ms. Rao, who is also the founder of South Asian Symphony Foundation (SASF), added, "As the daughter of an Indian Army officer, I grew up moving from one corner of India to another, learning early that home could be many places. Later, diplomacy took me across the world - to Beijing, Colombo, Lima, Moscow, Washington and beyond. Music has been enduring constants of my life."

The songs in the programme were not linked by any genre or period. The show had Broadway tunes, American jazz classics and folk songs. "What unites them is that each evokes a memory, a place, a person or a moment in time. Together, they form the soundtrack of a life lived across cultures and continents," he said.

She began her performance with *Beautiful Dreamer*, an 1864 song by American songwriter Stephen Foster. The performance took the audience around the globe, with songs by Welsh dramatist Ivor Novello, Charlie Chaplin, and John Turner. One of the numbers she sang was *Smile*, a track composed by Charlie Chaplin for his 1936 film *Modern Times*, a movie whose themes still echo and ring true today. The lyrics, written by John Turner and Geoffrey Parsons, hint towards smiling and having hope for a better tomorrow.

The Broadway number *Something Wonderful* by composer duo Richard Rodgers and lyricist Oscar Hammerstein II was a classic track about love and understanding.

Blend of music and diplomacy

The performance took the gathering on a journey across the globe and Ms. Rao stressed on how music comes to one's aid in times of tension and diplomacy. Music is a language one can trust, she said, and called it the last act of diplomacy.

The last song she performed was Bob Dylan's *Farewell Angelina* famously recorded by singer Joan Baez. The haunting song is about an uncertain world in turmoil, and seemed fitting to The Huddle's theme of 'A World in Transition'. Ms. Rao's soulful vocals with Ms. Rodrigo's piano tunes made for a magical performance. With that, The Hindu Huddle came to a poetic end.

The Hindu Huddle is presented by Sami-Sabinsa Group as the Presenting Partner. The event is co-powered by the Government of Telangana and held in association with Khaja Bandanawaz University

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Artistic take: Abhishek Poddar, art collector; artists Seema Kohli and Shilo Shiv Suleman; and Narayan Lakshman, Opinion Editor, *The Hindu*, and Curator, The Hindu Huddle, in Bengaluru. K. MURALI KUMAR

Memories, medium, or message? Art as a mirror

Preeti Zachariah
BENGALURU

"Artists are not just mirrors but actually makers of the world," said award-winning artist Shilo Shiv Suleman at The Hindu Huddle, in a session titled "Memories, medium, or message? Art as a mirror to a world in transition", moderated by Narayan Lakshman, Opinion Editor, *The Hindu*, and Curator, The Hindu Huddle.

Ms. Suleman, who shared the stage with artist Seema Kohli and art collector Abhishek Poddar at this session, spoke at some length about her work with the Fearless Collective, which was founded in 2012 in response to the protests that raged through Delhi in the aftermath of the Nirbhaya rape and murder that same year. "When I went for my first-ever protest, I felt this wave of rage and power and beauty. Simultaneously, many of the stories we were seeing in the newspapers were rooted in fear. It felt like we needed a counter-force," she recalls, describing the genesis of the collective, which "began in protest and turned into a flood of beauty".

Delving into the vision, impact, and future of the Fearless Collective, which has so far painted multiple murals in 25 countries, she concludes that its "power really comes alive in moments of fear and trauma". Art, in these kinds of situations, she believes, is not only beautiful and transformative but also deeply subversive "because it does not speak the same language that traditional activism does".

Life and practice

The significance of art was explored in various ways, with the panellists offering their perspectives in response to Dr. Lakshman's opening question. "When societies undergo profound change, they do more than pass laws, build institutions and develop technologies. They tell stories about themselves...remember, understand, create meaning," he said, adding that it is at this point that art enters the conversation. Alluding to the session's title, whether art is about the memories, the medium, or the message and clarifying that he is not attempting to set up an ar-

tificial distinction between them, he asked the panellists, "Between these three dimensions - memory, medium or message - if you had to pick one that resonates most closely with your life and practice, what would it be?"

For Ms. Kohli, "Art becomes a memory. I really tap into the conscious, subconscious and unconscious or even layers under. That is the way I go into it; a very simple dialogue I have with myself," she said.

For Mr. Poddar, however, "It is really meaning for me than anything else... For me, artists have also lived on the edge of society, being able to, through their work, say stuff that people like you and me are not easily able to say. That is the importance that I look for in art."

Other aspects of art that were discussed by the panellists included: the role of art institutions, how art must respond to a shifting socio-political landscape, whether it is inherently elitist, its power to shape collective opinion, and how it can create a middle ground in a deeply polarised world.

A light-hearted take on AI and films: Manoj Bajpayee wants an image makeover

Vivek M.V.
BENGALURU

In a lively session at The Hindu Huddle on Saturday, actor Manoj Bajpayee engaged the packed hall with his wit and wisdom. In the middle of his conversation with Rohit Khilnani, journalist and talk show host, the seasoned actor got off the stage to take selfies with members of the crowd.

The light-hearted banter was intended to break his image of a "serious individual". "I don't know when I went from Manoj to Manojji. I have a 15-year-old inside me waiting to express," he said. In the session titled "Bhiku Mhatre to Srikant Tiwari: three decades of reinvention", the actor responded to issues concerning the film industry, but began on a nostalgic note, talking about his iconic character Bhiku Mhatre from Ram Gopal Varma's *Satya* (1998).

"It was a time when I was struggling for roles. I was going hungry and looking for people who could give me a place to sleep. I jumped into the character like a hungry tiger," he recollected.

Speaking on the advent of artificial intelligence, Mr. Bajpayee said, "The fear of AI is coming from the right place because it is attempting to create alternatives to actors. At the same time, I am in favour of technological developments. There are advantages of AI as well. Post-production costs have come down. However, you cannot recreate human experience. The real-time performance is al-



Always popular: Manoj Bajpayee in conversation with Rohit Khilnani, Journalist and host, in Bengaluru. K. MURALI KUMAR

ways authentic."

For someone who rose through the ranks with offbeat films, Mr. Bajpayee said unconventional and independent movies in India deserved better treatment. "You talk about Satyajit Ray in foreign countries, and people value you. Many of our filmmakers, like Shyam Bengal, Shekhar Kapur, Anurag Kashyap, and Kanu Behl, are respected in several countries. People stand up and applaud their work. The same filmmakers are struggling to make movies in their own country, and that is sad."

He added, "Independent and offbeat movies must get better budgets. These films need to get more shows. I see so many tentpole movies, despite unfavourable reviews and less footfall taking several screens and shows, affecting the result of another worthy movie."

Upcoming movie

Mr. Bajpayee will next be seen in *Governor*, a film based on the 1990 Indian economic crisis. Set to release on June 12, the movie will see Mr. Bajpayee playing former Reserve Bank of

India Governor S. Venkataramanan. Mr. Bajpayee was asked about his collaboration with Vipul Shah, who produced the controversial *The Kerala Story* movies. Mr. Shah is also the producer of *Governor*.

"Vipul Shah is an experienced producer. *The Kerala Story* got people to theatres, but it was also controversial. But *Governor* is a story we all agree on. It is not political," Mr. Bajpayee said. "The story tracks the time when India was in a financial crisis. Today's generation needs to know that India didn't always have Pepsi, Coke, and mobile phones. India was standing on the verge of bankruptcy."

Complex roles

Known for revelling in complex roles, Mr. Bajpayee admitted he wanted to move away from serious characters and have "fun on screen".

"I do a lot of research and dive deep into a complex character. But I fear that I will continue to get only such roles. I am a bit tired of this kind of process. I want to dress well, sing songs, and chill on the sets," he signed off.



Daily chore: Pudhupattinam residents walk a couple of kilometres daily to collect water from beachside pits. They say the water from this source is of good quality and has nutritional value.



Water on wheels: A vendor selling water on a mini-truck fills a container for a resident of Pudhupattinam. The villagers are of the view that packaged or canned water causes cold and other health issues.



Carriers of life: For decades, collecting drinking water from hand-dug pits in the beach is an integral part of life for women in the coastal village of R. Pudhupattinam, 60km from Pudukottai. They carry the water for over two kilometres across a damaged bridge.

Trickle of freshwater just off the salty sea

Pits dug on the beach serve as freshwater source for fishing villages near Mimisal in Pudukottai, Tamil Nadu; residents say they are a surviving link to the community's history, tradition, and resilience; they raise quality concerns over littering



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Under the scorching midday sun, women in R. Pudhupattinam, a coastal village about 60 kilometres from Pudukottai in Tamil Nadu, continue a daily ritual that has sustained generations. Barefoot and carrying as many containers as they can, the women walk two or three kilometres along the shoreline to collect drinking water from shallow pits dug on the beach.

The fishing village, known for its close relationship with the sea, depends on freshwater from beachside pits. Residents believe the naturally filtered water is healthier than commercially supplied alternatives. Many are of the view that packaged and canned water, which they say contains chlorine, often causes cold and other health issues.

"Our ancestors drew freshwater from this beachside pit since the British colonial period," said R. Danabakkiam, a resident of the village. The water is traditionally used for cooking meals for fishermen before they venture into sea, with locals believing it enhances the taste and nutritional value of food.

The site is regarded as sacred by the

community. Villagers strictly prohibit sand removal and avoid planting vegetation in the area. Residents say the pits to collect the water are an integral part of life here.

Besides Pudhupattinam residents, people from neighbouring villages also travel to the site to collect water, with activity beginning as early as 4 a.m. and continuing until 10 p.m. Some even visit at midnight to meet their household water needs.

However, concerns about the future of the water source are growing.

Pushpam, a resident of the nearby coastal village of Gopalapattinam near Mimisal, said the quality of water has deteriorated over the past year due to littering and inadequate maintenance, and added that the government should protect the site. Villagers have to carry containers of water across a bridge. They said the bridge becomes unusable and unsafe during rains, and appealed to authorities for regular maintenance.

For these villagers, the freshwater pits are more than just a source of drinking water – they are a surviving link to the community's history, tradition, and resilience.



Harvest hours: Water collection at these beach pits begins as early as 4 a.m. and continues until 10 p.m. Some even visit at midnight to fulfil their water requirements.

Why did riots break out in Southampton?

Why did protests erupt months after a murder? How have Sikhs reacted? What are the debates about the kirpan?

Sriram Lakshman

The story so far:

On June 2, far-right protestors in Southampton in the U.K. clashed with the police. Some of the clashes occurred near the home of Vickrum Digwa, a 23-year-old Sikh man who received a life sentence on June 1 for killing 18-year-old Henry Nowak last December.

Why have protests erupted now?

Protests erupted following the release of police bodycam footage which showed Nowak being handcuffed and arrested as he lay dying. Mr. Digwa, who had stabbed Nowak multiple times with a long knife, which he carried for religious reasons, denied the stabbing and falsely claimed that Nowak had racially abused him.

Controversial far-right figure Tommy Robinson (born Stephen Yaxley-Lennon) and actor Laurence Fox addressed the crowd before the protests began. At least five people have been arrested after 11 officers were injured in the attack.

How has the political establishment reacted?

The treatment of Nowak drew widespread condemnation. Despite repeatedly telling the police that he had been stabbed and could not breathe, he was dragged, made to sit up, and handcuffed, and disbelieved. On the other hand, the perpetrator was dealt with courteously.

Some on the hard right have alleged that the police practice ‘two-tier policing’ – softer treatment for racial minorities and those on the left committing crimes or protesting. “We cannot allow the colour of someone’s skin to

be a consideration in how the police or other public services treat people, and yet this has happened,” Shadow Home Secretary (Conservative) Chirs Philp said in Parliament.

Such accusations are not new. The Keir Starmer-led Labour government had previously rejected these claims as has the Metropolitan Police (Met). U.K. Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood told the House of Commons on June 2 that the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) was investigating the case and she did not want to comment while the probe was under way. “The police in this country have a sacred duty to police without fear or favour. Everyone in this country is equal before the law,” she said. Ms. Mahmood also emphasised the commitment of the government to halve knife crime.

Mark Nowak, the victim’s father, also urged the government to treat knife crime as an emergency. He said he did not want his son’s murder to be used to create further divisions.

Politicians from several parties, including Labour, Conservatives, and the Liberal Democrats, have warned against creating divisions in society as a response to the tragedy. However, nativist party Reform U.K.’s leader, Nigel Farage, called on people to respond with “pure, cold rage”, drawing criticism from MPs across party lines. Conservatives across the Atlantic, including tech billionaire Elon Musk, U.S. Vice President J.D. Vance and the U.S. State Department, have inserted themselves into the debate.

What next for the police?

One of the four officers who had responded to the scene of the crime had already resigned. A probe by the IOPC to look into the officer’s actions on the night of the murder is also under way. The National Police Chiefs’ Council is reviewing the anti-racism guidance of the police, which has one of its goals, “Producing equality of policing outcomes for people from different ethnic groups”. It goes on to say this “does not mean treating everyone ‘the same’ or being ‘colour blind’ (racial equality).”

How have Sikh groups reacted?

Sikh politicians and representatives of Gurudwaras have expressed solidarity with the Nowak family and condemned the murder. Several prominent voices in the community have distanced themselves from Mr. Digwa and reiterated that he did not stand for Sikh values. They have also discussed the role Sikhs have played in Britain, emphasising their integration into British society and contributions, especially during the World Wars.

Some have also emphasised that the “large dagger” used to commit the murder was not the small curved ceremonial and religious dagger, the kirpan, which is generally worn concealed under clothing. However, the judge in the case said that the second large knife was a religious object, noting that members of the Nihang Sikh order traditionally carry a second, often visible, kirpan, though this is not a strict requirement.

“Fully practicing Sikhs who wear a kirpan should continue to recognise the serious responsibility that accompanies it,” a statement released by the Sikh Press Association said.

Kemi Badenoch, who leads the Opposition in Parliament, has called for a review of what weapons can be carried in public.

Why did SC back curbs on online gaming?

What were the two sets of appeals concerning the regulation and taxation of online gaming platforms in front of the Court? What were the main objections raised by gaming companies against the GST levy? What are the likely consequences for India’s online gaming industry?

Aaratrika Bhaumik

The story so far:

The Supreme Court on May 27, 2026, delivered two rulings with major ramifications for the country’s real-money gaming industry. A Bench of Justices J.B. Pardiwala and R. Mahadevan upheld the constitutional validity of the Centre’s retrospective 28% GST levy on online gaming companies and, in a separate judgment, affirmed the validity of State laws prohibiting real-money gaming platforms.

What did the Court have to decide?

The judgments arose from two distinct sets of appeals concerning the regulation and taxation of online gaming platforms. The first batch related to State laws prohibiting online betting and wagering. In 2021, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka enacted legislation criminalising betting on games played in cyberspace and prescribing penalties, including imprisonment. After the Madras and Karnataka High Courts struck down these enactments, the respective State governments approached the Supreme Court, arguing that betting and gambling fall within their legislative competence under Entry 34 of List II of the Seventh Schedule. They further contended that the restrictions were necessary to address addiction and other social harms associated with online betting.

The second batch concerned the applicability of the GST regime to online gaming involving money stakes. The appeals arose from decisions of the Bombay and Karnataka High Courts, which held that online gaming transactions did not constitute actionable claims under the GST law and consequently quashed tax proceedings

The Court held that, for GST purposes, the distinction between games of skill and games of chance becomes irrelevant once money is staked on an uncertain outcome

initiated against gaming companies. The Union government thereafter challenged these rulings before the Supreme Court.

Why was the GST levy upheld?

The dispute over the GST liability of online gaming platforms stemmed from amendments approved by the GST Council in August 2023. The Council clarified that all online games involving bets or wagers, irrespective of whether they were predominantly games of skill or games of chance, would attract GST at 28% on the full value of the amount staked by players.

Following the Council’s decision, the Directorate General of GST Intelligence (DGGI) issued a series of tax demand notices to gaming companies. The notices sought to levy GST not only under the amended regime, which came into force on October 1, 2023, but also on revenues earned during the pre-amendment period, resulting in tax demands running into several lakh crore rupees.

Challenging these demands, gaming companies argued that GST could be levied only on the consideration retained by the platform and not on the entire value of bets or contest entry fees contributed by users. Taxing the full face value of stakes, they contended, was commercially untenable and failed to account for the long-recognised distinction between games of skill and games of chance.

Rejecting these arguments, the Supreme Court held that online gaming platforms involving money stakes were distinct from conventional skill-based competitions. While participants in a skill-based contest merely pay an entry fee to compete, the Court observed that online gaming platforms are structured around wagering and often encourage repeated participation through discounts and bonuses.

The Court further held that, for GST purposes, the distinction between games of skill and games of chance becomes irrelevant once money is staked on an uncertain outcome. Referring to the Central Goods and Services Tax Act, 2017 (CGST Act), which expressly includes actionable claims relating to lottery, betting, and gambling within the tax net, the Court concluded that Parliament was competent to levy GST on online gaming involving money stakes. It also rejected the industry’s contention that the 2023 amendments imposed a fresh levy. Instead, the Court held that the amendments merely “clarified and standardised” the existing legal framework governing the taxation of such activities and were therefore capable of operating retrospectively.

Why did the Court uphold State curbs on real-money gaming?

At the outset, the Court observed that “betting”

and “gambling” are res extra commercium (activities outside legitimate commerce) and therefore fall outside the protection ordinarily available to trade and business activities. It held that while games of skill may be constitutionally protected, the introduction of money stakes imparts the character of wagering to the activity, bringing it within the States’ legislative competence.

The Bench was also not persuaded by the contention that fantasy sports are predominantly skill-based. It noted that even sophisticated predictive models are unable to forecast sporting outcomes with certainty.

The Court further observed that the widespread availability of smartphones and digital payment gateways had effectively turned every mobile phone into a virtual “gambling house”. It held that State governments are competent to impose reasonable restrictions on such activities and could draw legislative support not only from Entry 34 of List II relating to betting and gambling but also from Entry 1 concerning public order.

What are the implications?

The judgments come at a time when the industry is already grappling with the fallout of the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Act, 2025 (2025 Act). The legislation prohibited all forms of online real-money gaming, with the government citing national security concerns, including the alleged use of digital wallets and cryptocurrencies for money laundering and illicit fund transfers. It, however, carved out exceptions for e-sports, educational games, and social gaming.

Sudipta Bhattacharjee, Partner at Khaitan & Co, who has represented several online gaming and casino companies before the Supreme Court, told *The Hindu* that the industry had effectively come to a standstill following the enactment of the 2025 law, which could make recovery of the tax demands difficult. “The GST ruling may not translate into any meaningful recovery for the authorities. Many companies have either shifted their operations outside India or pivoted to sectors such as social gaming and fintech. The GST demands are several times higher than the revenues these companies have ever earned and are simply beyond their ability to pay. We are also likely to see a spate of insolvency proceedings,” he said.

Mr. Bhattacharjee also pointed out that the verdict could have implications for the challenge to the 2025 law on the ground that Parliament lacked the legislative competence to enact it. “The apex court has clearly held that betting and gambling are State subjects under Entry 34 and upheld State laws regulating such activities. We will now have to wait and see how the Union government defends its position that it has the legislative competence to enact the 2025 law under Entry 52 of the Union List, which permits regulation of industries where such intervention is considered expedient in the public interest,” he said.



Supreme Court of India.

Why is there a rebellion in the Trinamool Congress?

What event triggered the rebellion within the Trinamool Congress legislature party? Why were MLAs Ritabrata Banerjee and Sandipan Saha expelled from the party? What challenges do Mamata Banerjee and the party face?

Shiv Sahay Singh

The story so far:

On June 3, 58 of the 80 MLAs of the Trinamool Congress submitted a letter to the Speaker of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly supporting the claim of expelled party legislator, Ritabrata Banerjee, to the post of Leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly. The Speaker, Rathindra Bose, accepted the claim and appointed the 57-year-old Uluberia Purba MLA as the Leader of the Opposition.

What led to the rebellion?

The appointment marked the beginning of a rebellion in the Trinamool Congress legislature party, as the party leadership wanted Rashbehari MLA and former Minister Sovandeb Chattopadhyay, 82, to be appointed the Leader of the Opposition.

A letter nominating Mr. Chattopadhyay, a 10-time MLA, as the Leader of the Opposition was sent to the Speaker on May 20. However, allegations of signatures of MLAs being forged in the letter surfaced. Two MLAs – Ritabrata Banerjee and Sandipan Saha – lodged a formal

complaint that their signatures had been forged. An FIR was lodged at Kolkata’s Hare Street Police Station and since the letter was signed by Trinamool Congress general secretary Abhishek Banerjee, the investigation has reached his doorstep. He has been served notice to appear before the investigators.

Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari, who justified the Criminal Investigation Department probe by the West Bengal police into the signature scandal, said there was no political vendetta behind the investigation and emphasised that the probe was initiated following complaints by Trinamool MLAs.

On June 1, minutes after the Chief Minister spoke about the investigation, the Trinamool expelled the two MLAs – Ritabrata Banerjee and Sandipan Saha – for anti-party activities. Within the next two days, the party, which had administered West Bengal for 15 years, faced a rebellion in its legislature party with more than two-third of its MLAs choosing Ritabrata Banerjee as the Leader of the Opposition without consulting the party leadership.

What is the nature of rebellion?

The Trinamool Congress legislature party led by Ritabrata Banerjee has not made any claims to defect to any other party, nor has it announced so far it is starting a new party. Ritabrata Banerjee had said that the faction led by him was the “real” Trinamool Congress legislature party and will serve as a responsible Opposition in the 18th West Bengal Legislative Assembly.

Though critical of Trinamool general secretary Abhishek Banerjee, the rebel camp continues declaring its loyalty to the party’s founder and chairperson Mamata Banerjee and wants her as the advisor of the legislature party. The rebels, with the support of about 60 MLAs, have also appointed a chief whip and four deputy leaders. About 20 MLAs remain loyalists to Ms. Banerjee and are publicly targeting the rebels for betraying the party chairperson.

What lies ahead?

As far as the crisis in the Trinamool is

concerned, the rebellion in the legislature party is in its initial stages. Neither the Trinamool leadership nor the rebel MLAs have sought the intervention of courts. The Budget session of the West Bengal Assembly session is likely to begin from June 22, when it will be clear as to how the rebellion will shape up.

A section of rebels has also started warming up to Ms. Banerjee saying that there cannot be any Trinamool without a party chairperson. The Bharatiya Janata Party leadership has given hints that they are not keen that the rebel Trinamool MLAs join the saffron party, even though the rebel MLAs are participating in the administrative meetings chaired by Mr. Adhikari.

Since most of the anger in the party, which has resulted in a rebellion of party MLAs, is directed at Abhishek Banerjee, Ms. Banerjee on June 5 tried to assuage the anger by creating new posts of national joint secretary and appointing Derek O’Brien and Dola Sen for them. They are to assist the national general secretary.

How have party MPs reacted?

The Trinamool Congress is the second largest party in the Opposition, with 42 MPs in both the Houses of Parliament. While a few MPs have spoken against the party’s leadership, there is no rebellion among the MPs.

What happens next?

Ms. Banerjee’s loyalists say that the Trinamool secured 40% votes in the West Bengal Assembly elections and the party will soon bounce back under her leadership. The concern remains that even meetings called by the party chairperson in the past few days do not make for a full house, with most MPs and MLAs remaining absent.

The fate of the rebellion will depend on whether Ms. Banerjee is able to hold her flock together or not. After the defeat in the polls, both the Trinamool and Ms. Banerjee are facing a crisis of credibility. Hundreds of local-level Trinamool supporters and leaders, which include sitting and former MLAs, have been arrested on charges of corruption, extortion, and post-poll violence in 2021. More than the rebellion and the arrests, it is public anger against corruption, extortion, and the culture of intimidation unleashed by the Trinamool over the past 15 years that is emerging as the biggest concern for the party’s top leadership, threatening the very existence of the party.



Expelled TMC MLAs Ritabrata Banerjee and Sandipan Saha and TMC MLA Javed Khan in Howrah, West Bengal. PTI

PROFILES

The Gen Z trio that took on the CBSE

Vedant Shrivastava, Nisarga Adhikary and Sarthak Sidhant

The three students who were viciously trolled for raising their voice on public platforms against the CBSE's On-Screen Marking system stand vindicated after the Board admitted to flaws in the system

Maitri Porecha

Vedant Shrivastava (17), Nisarga Adhikary (19) and Sarthak Sidhant (18) were ordinary teenagers until two weeks ago, before they raised their voice on public platforms against the Central Board of Secondary Education's (CBSE) botched up On-Screen Marking system. After the board admitted to flaws in the system, the Gen Z trio stood vindicated.

Class 12 student Vedant was in for a rude shock when he got called 'anti-national,' on X, as he flagged receiving a stranger's answer sheet instead of his own to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE).

One of the first students to raise his voice against the On-Screen Marking system deployed by the CBSE, Vedant, who is now being referred to as 'the primary whistleblower,' says that since he went public on X, what has ensued is utter 'chaos.' The trolling did not stop at being called an 'anti-national,' or 'Pakistani'. "People went on to comment about my physical appearance and my speech," he says. After pointing out the botch-up, senior officials at the CBSE admitted their mistake and traced his original physics answer sheet.

"I took to X to voice my concerns as CBSE was not replying to my distress calls. Because I am a minor, X does not specifically mention country or location but highlights the larger region to which the account belongs. In my case, this was South Asia, and I was brutally trolled and called a 'Pakistani,'" Vedant says.

After the CBSE portal for re-evaluation opened on June 2, Vedant applied to get 13 questions re-evaluated in four subjects – Computer Science, English, Mathematics and Physics.

An East Delhi resident, Vedant observes that the CBSE implemented On-Screen Marking in a hasty manner. "In my school, some teachers are very aged and they are used to checking answer copies by hand. They are not well versed with using computers. If the CBSE wants to implement the OSM system in 2027 they should give



Nisarga Adhikary, an 'ethical hacker', Vedant Shrivastava, and Sarthak Sidhant have exposed flaws in the CBSE's marking system.

teachers proper training," he says.

It has been two weeks since Vedant's post on X, which blew the lid off a massive evaluation fiasco in the CBSE, but the media attention over the teenager has not died down.

"The controversy started affecting me but my family was very supportive," he says adding that he got 'distracted,' by the CBSE upheaval for the last two weeks but is now re-starting his preparation for the National Defence Academy entrance exams. "I aspire to be a fighter pilot with the Indian Air Force."

'Ethical hacker'

Nisarga Adhikary, a West Bengal-based "ethical hacker", exposed "critical vulnerabilities" in the CBSE's OSM portal, including leaking sensitive student information.

The CBSE immediately slipped into denial after Nisarga went public with his posts on X, and nearly after two weeks, it admitted to the flaws. "It was really frustrating for me that the CBSE and the Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT) took three months (since he first raised

complaints in February) to admit the flaws in their portal," Nisarga told *The Hindu*. Between 2023 and 2025, Nisarga found himself embroiled in the Joint Entrance Exams (JEE) race, which he said was 'pretty depressing.' "I don't see a point in putting effort for an institute (Indian Institutes of Technology) when they are not even in top 100 ranking institutes across the world," he told *The Hindu*. Life came full circle for Nisarga when an expert IIT team invited him to fix the vulnerabilities in the CBSE's IT ecosystem. Asked why the students have been forced to take matters into their own hands, Nisarga says: "Gen Z holding people accountable is the way to go as some people in high places are full of ego."

At age 19, when most students are busy with regular schooling, Nisarga had already started interning in tech companies. He primarily identifies as a software engineer and has worked on digitising restaurant menus for a Mumbai-based tech company Skann before dabbling into an internship with Singapore-based crypto giant Cypherock and then interning with

Bengaluru-based tech company Wavelength. Hacking into CBSE portals was his first brush with social activism, he says.

Nisarga says he has multiple job offers from Silicon Valley in California, and he does not want to 'waste his time going to college'. "In case I take up an offer in the U.S., I will aim to apply for an extraordinary talent visa [U.S. O-1 nonimmigrant visa], which allows individuals who have reached the top of their fields to live and work in the U.S.," he says. "However, I will stay back in India if I get a good research opportunity to work in IITs."

Nisarga believes in combining computer programming with activism to champion public rights causes around data privacy. The teen 'ethical hacker' has also publicly stated that he is 'queer,' and is concerned about the LGBTQ rights in India.

"I want to build an inclusive society where people are more accepting of each other. Religion is a coping mechanism whereas we need more scientific thought over religion to build an inclusive society," he says. Ranchi-based Sarthak Sidhant is

being chased by journalists since he alleged through comparison of public documents that the CBSE had diluted requirements to favour technology vendor COEMPT Eduteck in the OSM portal issue. Sarthak became what is likely the youngest person to depose in front of a Parliamentary Panel. After his deposition on June 2, he has not been able to return home, because he says he feels 'unsafe'. He felt compelled to shift to an undisclosed location after journalists reached his accommodation in New Delhi. "In Ranchi, I gather there are journalists waiting for me outside my house. I don't want to go back home, so I am staying put at an undisclosed location," he says.

Seeds of rationality

Sarthak says he is of a curious nature and he likes spending most of his time on his computer "digging into new things". "I do not like watching movies or web shows. What I like, however, is old songs with meaningful lyrics playing in the background while I work on my computer." Sarthak is a fan of progressive Indian poet Sahir Ludhianvi and when asked what his favourite works are, without hesitation, he immediately cites lyrics – *Tu Hindu banega na Musalman banegaa, Insaan ki aulad hai, Insaan banega* (You will neither be a Hindu or Muslim, you are humanity's child you will be a human).

Sarthak says his parents had an intercaste marriage and they have an evolutionary and pragmatic perspective, which sowed seeds of rationality and logic in him since a young age. "After my father passed away due to cardiac arrest two years ago, I started questioning concepts like religion, philosophy and faith."

Sarthak wants to pursue engineering and go on to blend technology with social welfare for bettering lives. He looks up to Dinkar's poetry and cites the poet's famous work: *Lohe ke ped hare hongee*; (Dried out trees will become green). "The sole message of this poetry is that one should keep asking questions and put in constant efforts to seek answers," he says.

THE GIST

▼ Vedant Shrivastava, one of the first students to raise his voice against the On-Screen Marking system deployed by the CBSE, is now being referred to as 'the primary whistleblower'

▼ Nisarga Adhikary, a 19-year-old cybersecurity researcher, exposed "critical vulnerabilities" in the CBSE's OSM portal, including leaking sensitive student information

▼ Ranchi-based Sarthak Sidhant has alleged through comparison of public documents that the CBSE had diluted requirements to favour technology vendor COEMPT Eduteck in the OSM portal issue

New chapter

K. Annamalai

The former BJP Tamil Nadu president has quit the party and launched a new 'movement', promising to bring 'constructive' and 'clean' politics

M. Soundariya Preetha

On June 5, 2026, Kuppusamy Annamalai, the 42-year-old former Indian Police Service officer, announced the launch of a "movement" that he envisages to become a regional political party eventually. The movement saw more than 10 lakh registrations on the first day. On the same day, the BJP announced that it had accepted Mr. Annamalai's resignation from the party.

Reports that Mr. Annamalai would quit the BJP and start a new party was doing the rounds since January. In Tiruppur and Coimbatore districts, Annamalai's posters came up in the last week of May, indicating an announcement from him soon. He was also not present at a post-election meeting the BJP held in Coimbatore.

In a letter to the BJP leadership on June 2, Mr. Annamalai said his views do not align with BJP leaders regarding Tamil Nadu. He had had multiple conversations and disagreements with them for 18 months regarding the State. "I firmly believe that a strong and united India is built upon the strength, dignity and aspirations of its many regions and communities," he wrote in the letter to BJP president Nitin Nabin.

Mr. Annamalai's political journey began in 2020



ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH RAVIKUMAR

when he was identified by B.L. Santhosh, general secretary of the BJP as a potential leader. He quit as the Deputy Commissioner of Police (South), Bengaluru, and joined the BJP in 2020. He was appointed vice president of the party for Tamil Nadu in a few weeks and contested the 2021 Assembly elections from Aravankurichi in Karur district.

He lost to R. Elango of the DMK. In July 2021, he took over as the BJP's Tamil Nadu State president. At the age of 37, he became the youngest leader to head the BJP State unit, from July 16, 2021 to April 11, 2025.

Crowd puller

His 'En Mann, En Makkal' padayatra started in July 2023 was a crowd puller in many parts of the State, and attracted several youngsters to the party. However, his remarks against the AIADMK ideology and some of its leaders that year led to the AIADMK severing its ties

with the BJP and exiting the National Democratic Alliance.

Mr. Annamalai had vociferously pushed for the BJP contesting the elections in Tamil Nadu without an alliance with the AIADMK. For the 2024 Parliamentary elections, Mr. Annamalai brought the Pattali Makkal Katchi, Tamil Maanila Congress, and the Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam to the Tamil Nadu NDA. He contested from Coimbatore and lost to Ganapathi P. Rajkumar of the DMK.

It is said that AIADMK General Secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami wanted Mr. Annamalai to be removed from the post of the State president for the AIADMK to ally with the BJP for the 2026 Assembly elections.

Born in an agrarian family at Thoppampatti in Karur district on June 4, 1984, Mr. Annamalai graduated in Mechanical Engineering from the PSG College of Technology in Coimbatore and went on to

do his MBA at the Indian Institute of Management-Lucknow. He joined the Indian Police Service (IPS) in the 2011 batch under the Karnataka cadre and served in Karnataka till 2020.

He launched 'We the Leaders' as a foundation in 2019-20, even before he joined active politics, and it focuses on organic farming, grassroot leadership, skilling and empowering through sports. With Mr. Annamalai inviting those interested in his movement to register with 'We the Leaders', there were 13,17,808 registrations as of the afternoon of June 6.

In an address to the public on June 5, after quitting the BJP, Mr. Annamalai said he was inspired by the policies of former President of India A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. He said he would bring constructive politics that would be clean and no "permanent chair" for anyone, including him. "We will have to come out of cult politics. This will be common man politics," he said in an address on social media platforms.

He also announced the establishment of APJ Abdul Kalam Centre for Ethics and Politics in Coimbatore to train and prepare people for political leadership. Mr. Annamalai is expected to field candidates in the local body elections in Tamil Nadu and participate in the 2029 general elections.

Besieged history

Beaufort Castle

A 12th-century hilltop castle has emerged as a key strategic flashpoint in Israel's war with Hezbollah in occupied southern Lebanon

Akul Baiju

The Beaufort Castle sits right beside the Litani River in southern Lebanon, with an unobstructed view of northern Israel and the sweeping Beqaa valley. The 900-year-old structure, which literally means "beautiful fort" in Old French, has come under renewed spotlight after the Israeli military invasion on June 1.

Originally called Qalaat al-Shaqif, or the "Castle of the High Rock," Beaufort was built by European crusaders atop older fortifications in 1139. Invaded and besieged multiple times throughout its long history, the bastion has been at the centre of the Israel-Lebanon conflict and a pain point in the fragile ceasefire, announced by U.S. President Donald Trump on April 17.

In 1190, the stately structure was captured by Saladin, the first Sultan of Egypt and Syria, who used it as an important border outpost to strengthen his reign. Due to its military importance, the castle has changed hands frequently, with Crusaders (most famously the Knights Templar), Egyptian Mamluks, Ottomans, and the French all leaving their marks on it.

The Frankish Crusaders created its two-storey keep with an entry through the



REUTERS

ground floor, unlike other forts of its time. Exposed stone staircases cut directly into the rock were built, forcing visitors and attackers to ascend in a single file on the highly exposed path.

The Mamluks added curved towers to defend against the firing of spherical stones. They inscribed Arabic victory messages into the front gates of the castle. The Ottoman takeover saw the repartitioning of the 15,000-square-metre area for logistical and residential usage. They built barracks and added slits in the fort walls for precise firing.

Internal politics led to many of the early constructions being mined and later restored using crude stone.

The French period saw the stripping away of Ottoman influence and attempts at restoring Crusader architecture. Beaufort has a sharp 300m drop on one side and the valley on the other, protecting it from enemy attacks. This

vantage point is still used for military strikes, surveillance, and the deployment of weaponry.

The natural trench between the fortress and the fast-flowing Litani leads to the city of Nabatieh, an ancient centre for the trade of precious spices and commodities like Myrrh and Frankincense in its historical Souk el-Tanen market.

Caught in the war

The sand-battered behemoth is on track to become a UNESCO World Heritage Site and has been included on the country's 'tentative list'. November 2024 saw the global body granting it provisional enhanced protection under the 1954 Hague Convention.

During the 1970s, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) attacked Israel from the fort's ramparts. Underground bunkers and command centres were constructed, with some going as deep as 65m underground.

In 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon, seized the for-

gress from the PLO, and raised the 'blue and white' for the first time. This was a significant moment. Then Israeli Defence Minister Ariel Sharon called the taking of Beirut a war that was "worth it" and rejected the allegations of it being "immoral."

The banner of Israel came down in 2000 when the Israelis blew up their bunkers and abandoned the castle, when they withdrew from Lebanon after 18 years of occupation. What followed was its opening to the public and years of restoration, with a brief pause in 2006 due to another Israeli invasion.

The 2026 invasion by Israel marks one of the most significant escalations in the conflict since the dawn of the millennium.

In March this year, Hezbollah fired rockets at Israel in retaliation for the U.S.-Israeli assassination of Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. In response, Israel launched massive air strikes which were followed by a ground invasion.

The U.S.-backed ceasefire is functionally defunct, with both sides launching attacks against each other. Israel wants to push Hezbollah out of southern Lebanon and keep the territory it has captured. Hezbollah says it would continue to fight as long as Israel continues the occupation of Lebanese land.

Bursts of rain may deal a double whammy to soil moisture, nitrogen

Vasudevan Mukunth

Two new studies, published in *Nature* and *Nature Geoscience*, have found that as climate change concentrates rainfall into fewer, more intense events, the land below may face a double whammy. In their May 13 paper in *Nature*, Dartmouth College, U.S., researchers concluded that more concentrated rain can reduce the amount of water stored in soils and

aquifers across all global climates. This is because heavy bursts of rain can exceed the soil's infiltration capacity, leading to an "infiltration excess" where water pools on the surface.

Because these intense events are typically separated by longer dry intervals, the pooled water evaporates instead of recharging deep soil layers. Their work suggests that the drying effect of precipitation concentration is roughly equal in magni-

tude to the wetting effect of increasing total annual rainfall, effectively neutralising potential gains in the availability of water in many regions.

In their May 25 paper in *Nature Geoscience*, researchers from across China reported a specific rainfall threshold of around 700 mm/year that seemed to determine how soil retains nitrogen. Below this threshold, the soil generally retains nitrogen because a limited amount of water

restricts the movement of nutrients and encourages competition between plants and microbes. But above 700 mm, more moisture encourages leaching, leading to significant nitrogen loss.

These studies together suggest concentrated rainfall could blur the distinction between wetter and drier rainfall regimes. If a region receives 600 mm of rain in concentrated bursts rather than in steady intervals, the downpours could

wash more nitrogen out of the soils than the annual rainfall total alone would suggest.

According to the *Nature* study, 27% of the world's population will face abnormally dry conditions due to concentrated rainfall alone even if total rainfall doesn't decrease. A growing body of research suggests the southwest monsoon is itself becoming more episodic, with more seasonal rainfall falling in intense downpours separated by longer dry intervals.

This, together with the *Nature Geoscience* study's findings, suggests annual total rainfall alone may no longer capture how ecosystems respond to changing rainfall patterns.

Intense rainfall events can wash away nitrogen, a nutrient crucial for plant growth, before it can be used, while the subsequent dry period can quicken water loss by evaporation.

SNAPSHOTS



Industrial salt pans threaten Sambhar Lake's survival

Sambhar Lake is India's largest inland saltwater wetland. When they analysed satellite data from 1984 to 2023, scientists found the lake depends heavily on seasonal rain, with water levels peaking in late summer and shrinking significantly in the dry season. Between 2022 and 2023, the lake's surface also shrank while salt pans nearby expanded. The authors said efforts to conserve the lake must separate industrial salt pans and the wetland environment, including natural saline land.

Scientists rule out worst-case climate scenario, with caution

The doomsday climate scenario is now unrealistic due to slower emissions growth; however, the decline is still not nearly enough to limit global warming to the most optimistic scenario

Neelima Vallangi

Climate scientists have released a new set of global emission scenarios that will serve as the basis for climate research over the coming years. And here, the worst-case scenario that put the world on track to experience warming well above 4°C by the end of the century has finally been retired.

Called RCP8.5, the high-emission scenario was deemed implausible in the latest revision thanks to the rapid adoption of renewable energy and countries implementing climate policies.

Scientists say climate action eliminating the 'doomsday scenario' is encouraging because that means the extreme consequences associated with 4°C to 5°C of warming can now be avoided.

However, they warned, the planet is still on track to experience drastic climate change under current policies.

After months of experiments and collaboration across dozens of research centres worldwide, a team of earth system modelling experts published seven new emissions scenarios in April. In this set, the new highest emission scenario projects an overall warming of around 3.5°C by 2100.

RCP8.5 is out "mainly because of the rapid transition to renewable energy in several countries around the globe, particularly China, which is number one in terms of carbon

Not business as usual

The new highest emission scenario projects an overall warming of around 3.5°C by 2100

- Scientists have retired the extreme RCP8.5 climate scenario because global warming above 4°C now seems implausible

- The revision comes thanks to countries adopting renewable sources of energy and implementing climate policies

- Even so, current global policies place the world on a 'medium pathway' towards roughly 2.8°C of warming by 2100

- Keeping global surface temperature rise below 1.5°C also appears impossible without a significant period of temporary overshoot

- Even a moderate global warming level of 2°C still poses severe risks for extreme weather and global food security

- New research integrates updated data to refine climate models while accounting for remaining uncertainties about planetary sensitivity



Making a difference: 'Emissions have peaked and are declining in the U.S. and Europe, and are plateauing in China'. RABIH SHASHA

emissions today," Govindaswamy Bala, professor at the Center for Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, who was also part of the latest scenario development, said. "Emissions have peaked and are declining in the U.S. and Europe, and are plateauing in China."

At the same time, there remains no plausible path to keep warming below 1.5°C without significant overshoot under the current emissions trajectory. Overshoot means temporarily exceeding the 1.5°C of warming threshold before returning to the limit by 2100.

"While that original high emissions path has become irrelevant, getting to the low emission levels consistent with preventing dangerous climate change has also become much

more difficult to achieve," Detlef van Vuuren, a climate scientist at the PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency who has led emissions scenario development for many years, said.

In 2011, when RCP8.5 emerged as one of the four 'Representative Concentration Pathways' scientists introduced, its drastic prognoses for the world took on a life of their own. For scenario developers, it denoted the world in which governments enacted no climate policy; but many climate modellers used RCP8.5 as the "business as usual" scenario. However, scientists had intended it only as an edge case: to model earth systems under unabated fossil fuel expansion and high population growth.

In 2016, scientists upgraded the RCPs to SSPs, or

'Shared Socioeconomic Pathways', which integrated factors such as economic growth and population expansion alongside greenhouse gas concentrations. RCP8.5 then became SSP5-8.5, with a projected warming of 4.4°C by 2100.

Many scientists said the new revision demonstrates the usual process of doing climate research: by constantly integrating new information and eliminating unrealistic scenarios.

That said, the world has not averted the worst of climate change. A recent study in *Nature* reported that even moderate global warming of 2°C will increase the risk of extreme outcomes such as droughts in key breadbasket regions, extreme rainfall over highly populated areas, and fire weather extremes across forests. The world is close to the medium path-

way in the new CMIP7 scenarios: facing an expected warming of up to 2.8°C by 2100.

"The new scenarios can shed light on what to expect but do not radically change the fact that India is highly exposed to extreme events, in all scenarios, because they take us into dangerous 2°C and beyond-2°C territory," Chandni Singh, climate adaptation researcher at the Indian Institute for Human Settlements and an IPCC Lead Author, said.

RCP8.5 assumed that the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere would triple (to 850-900 ppm) due to increasing coal use and that the world's population would swell beyond 10 billion. Both these possibilities have since become unrealistic.

That said, "if the climate turns out to be much more sensitive [to CO₂ concentration], then we could end up with warming levels associated with RCP8.5," Dr. van Vuuren said. "Secondly, it is still possible to hit those warming levels if we are on the high emission pathway, but around the year 2150."

There is already some evidence that we may have underestimated climate sensitivity, as scientists have been baffled by accelerating global warming in the last three years. They hope to resolve this uncertainty as climate models simulate earth systems in these new scenarios with new data.

Neelima Vallangi is an independent climate journalist

How organisations are reckoning with AI addiction



John Xavier

In December 2025, Microsoft opened the doors for thousands of its engineers to use Anthropic's Claude Code – an AI coding assistant – as part of an internal experiment to benchmark the best tools available. That test worked too well, as some employees decisively chose it over Microsoft's own AI coding assistance – GitHub Copilot CLI.

Then, by May 2026, the software giant began cancelling most of those Claude Code licences, instructing teams behind Windows, Microsoft 365, Outlook, Teams, and Surface to migrate back to Copilot CLI before June 30. That day is apparently the last day of the company's

fiscal year. While it has called this rollback a "tool-chain unification," the financial reality, per multiple reports, suggests that engineers had used Claude Code a little too much.

This is the paradox of enterprise AI adoption in 2026. To understand this situation better, it helps to go down the memory lane on how software companies operated earlier. Before OpenAI's ChatGPT arrived in late November 2022, the dominant tools in a developer's toolkit were a code editor like VS Code, a version control system like Git, documentation wikis, Jira boards, Slack threads, and an occasional Stack Overflow lookup.

Most of these were open-source tools or flat-rate subscriptions that cost essentially nothing. An engineer could work all day without the company spending an extra rupee.



Every action an agentic tool does consumes tokens – the unit of text a language model processes. AI-GENERATED IMAGE

Then came the chatbots like ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Llama, and a cascade of capable successors. GitHub Copilot, which had been available since 2022, gained significant traction as models improved. By 2024, engineering teams were routinely asking AI assistants to write boilerplate, review pull requests, suggest fixes, and generate test cases. As these interactions were short and mostly conversational, the costs were modest.

But the arrival of agentic coding tools disrupted the way engineers worked as they didn't just answer queries but took a series of actions. These AI agents could read files, run tests, check for errors, revise code, read the context again, and loop through all of this autonomously. Claude Code, Cursor, and their peers work this way.

The problem comes down to what is called "token maxxing." Every action an agentic tool does

consumes tokens – the unit of text a language model processes.

A session that starts at five thousand tokens per call can balloon to two hundred thousand tokens per call by the time the agent is fifty turns deep. As one detailed analysis documented, a developer who tracked token consumption across 42 agentic runs found that roughly 70% of tokens consumed were effectively wasted. The agent was re-reading files it had already processed, exploring dead ends, and re-verifying things it already knew. The corporate toll of this wastage is becoming public in uncomfortable ways.

An internal leaderboard that ranked teams by AI usage volume had accelerated adoption, which accelerated bills. Uber's COO, Andrew Macdonald admitted that drawing a line between rising token con-

sumption and actual consumer feature delivery was proving elusive.

Box CEO Aaron Levie has argued that the token consumption problem will eventually spread from engineering into legal, sales, and every other knowledge-work function.

Goldman Sachs, in a report, projected that global token consumption could increase 24-fold by 2030 as agentic AI becomes standard practice.

It is unclear when these perspectives will converge. But, for now, it is clear that companies are becoming thrifty when it comes to token usage.

Agentic AI tools are becoming an infrastructure cost that scales with every autonomous decision an agent makes. And organisations that do not implement usage controls, token budgets, and honest ROI benchmarks are not adopting AI, but are funding it.



AI models fail distraction test that humans pass

Humans use an ability called executive control to focus their attention on tasks and ignore distractions. Researchers used the Stroop task, asking AI models to name the ink colour of words while ignoring the text, like 'BLUE' written in red. While the models did well on short word lists, the models' executive controls nosedived as the lists got longer, unlike humans. The results suggest current AI models will need additional controls to achieve general intelligence.



When eating insects, Europeans start on back foot

Insect shells have a tough material called chitin. Humans have to digest chitin if they eat insects. When researchers analysed two genes that produce chitin-digesting enzymes in the stomach, they found people in the tropics had the variants that improve digestibility. However, Europeans had the gene variants that significantly reduced these enzymes' levels. The team also confirmed these genetic differences existed around 9,000 years ago. In a world with insect foods, Europeans could be disadvantaged.



Question Corner

Marks that stay

What is a birthmark? How does it form?

A birthmark is a coloured mark on the skin that is either present at birth or develops shortly afterwards. While some of them may fade over time, others stay for life. Birthmarks are essentially 'mistakes' in the development of skin cells or blood vessels. They generally fall in one of two categories. Vascular birthmarks occur when blood vessels in a particular area do not form correctly, i.e. because there are too many of them or they may be wider than usual. The extra blood flow that results gives the skin there a red,

pink or even purple appearance. Common examples include the so-called 'stork bites' on the neck or the 'strawberry' marks. Second, pigmented birthmarks are caused when melanocytes, the cells that give your skin its colour, overgrow in an area. As these cells cluster together, they create a patch that is darker than the surrounding skin. Common variations include moles, light-brown 'café-au-lait' spots, and bluish-gray patches. The exact reason why these clusters form is not known.

Readers may send their questions / answers to science@thehindu.co.in

IN BRIEF



TVS Motor launches premium retail channel TVS Paddock

TVS Motor Company (TVSM) on Saturday announced the launch of 'TVS Paddock', an exclusive retail channel dedicated to its premium motorcycle portfolio as it seeks to strengthen customer engagement and tap the country's fast-growing premium mobility segment. TVS Paddock will offer immersive brand experiences, personalised services and enhanced after-sales support for premium motorcycle customers, said a statement from two and three-wheeler manufacturer, which is part of TVS VENU. The firm said new retail network has been designed by London-based Checkland Kindlysides. PTI

NSE set to operationalise Electronic Gold Receipt soon

The National Stock Exchange (NSE) is in the preparatory stage to operationalise Electronic Gold Receipt (EGR) and it will be completed in a week to 10 days, said chief business development officer of NSE Sriram Krishnan. The NSE unveiled EGR on May 4 and it will be available in five denominations each for 995 and 999 purity gold. There is a demand for two more denominations which is likely to be incorporated. Jewellers are saying EGR will give them opportunities to expand business hugely, he said. It is estimated about 25,000 tonne of gold with the people are savings and another 25,000 tonnes is with temples.

ISMA welcomes introduction of E85 infrastructure

Launch of E85 infrastructure by Indian Oil, with E85 priced at about ₹82.12 per litre versus ₹102.12 per litre for E20, completes India's flex-fuel ecosystem alongside Flexi Fuel Vehicles (FFVs) launches by Hero MotoCorp and Maruti Suzuki. If FFVs account for 50% of new vehicle sales, there will be a demand for 312 crore litre of ethanol annually, said Deepak Ballani, Director General of Indian Sugar and Bio Energy Manufacturers Association. Madhav B. Shriram, VP of the Association, added E85 will enhance local use of ethanol and create value across rural economy.

SpaceX IPO: Musk's bet to save empire

The company is targeting a \$75 billion raise at a valuation of \$1.75-2 trillion; investors are already scrutinising the "Frankenco" structure of the firm where profits from the space-based Internet service Starlink are being used to offset xAI's heavy losses, nearly \$6.4 billion in 2025 alone

NEWS ANALYSIS

Vasudevan Mukunth

The SpaceX initial public offering (IPO), set for June 12, on Nasdaq (SPCX) is expected to be the largest single listing in history. The company is targeting a \$75 billion raise at a valuation of \$1.75-2 trillion.

SpaceX is seeking large liquidity influx to fund its Orbital Data Centre (ODC) and terrestrial expansion of artificial intelligence (AI) unit. "The prospectus also shows a mandatory deleveraging whereby SpaceX must use its IPO proceeds to repay a \$20 billion loan within six months."

Early headwinds

Investors are already scrutinising the "Frankenco" structure of the company, where profits from the space-based Internet service Starlink are being used to offset xAI's heavy losses, nearly \$6.4 billion in 2025 alone.

Starlink is facing headwinds of its own. In May, in a bid to protect competitors like Eutelsat and OneWeb, the European Commission proposed new regulations to limit third-country, including U.S., satellite operators to only one-third of Europe's bandwidth. This significantly shrinks Starlink's market in a high-wealth region. Second, as more direct-to-cell services launch, the amount of noise in protected radio bands increases. Regulators are thus becoming more conservative with spectrum grants, thus imposing a ceiling on Starlink's data throughput.

While pre-IPO deals



Sky high risk: A SpaceX Super Heavy booster carrying the Starship spacecraft lifts off on its 12th test flight at Texas, U.S. REUTERS

with Google (worth \$30 billion) and Anthropic for AI provide revenue bridge capacity, investor scepticism has stayed high. Analysts at Morningstar have already warned of a valuation bubble, pegging the company's fair value at just \$780 billion, which is less than half of SpaceX's target. Sceptics are motivated by independent experts calling into question the viability of Musk's ODC plans.

Financial complexity

In March, SpaceX secured a \$20 billion bridge loan led by Goldman Sachs. A bridge loan is a short-term loan, usually for 6-18 months, for immediate liquidity until a larger and more permanent funding event, like an IPO, happens. This loan was used to retire \$17.5 billion of high-interest junk debt sitting on the balance sheets of X and xAI. SpaceX's S-1 filing clearly states that the company is required to use a portion of its IPO proceeds to repay this loan within six months.

Normally, an IPO generates capital for growth; in this case, that would be money to build more rock-

ets. However, here, a significant portion of the \$75 billion raised will be non-productive capital as it won't go into R&D but to pay off a loan.

Likewise, in February 2026, SpaceX officially merged with xAI, folding the social network X (a subsidiary of xAI) and the Grok AI model into the SpaceX corporate structure. Morningstar analysis flagged this as a 'related-party transaction' (RPT).

That is, because Musk controlled all the involved entities, the price of the merger - \$250 billion for xAI - was determined not by the open market but by internal maths. Investors generally dislike RPTs for this reason. Morningstar's scepticism was further bolstered by the fact that xAI was burning cash, and by merging it into SpaceX, its losses were being hidden inside the considerable revenue from Starlink. As a result, investors could have a harder time calculating the real burn rate of SpaceX's core rocket business.

The new valuation of \$1.75-2 trillion also rests on the assumption SpaceX

will own the 'rails' of the AI economy. As part of this, SpaceX has proposed a new semiconductor fabricating facility dubbed Terafab in Grimes County, Texas, at a cost of \$55-119 billion. The goal is to manufacture 1 terawatt of internal computing capacity per year. This will be in the form of custom GPUs for xAI models and SpaceX satellites. In an IPO, however, this asks investors to buy shares based on what money SpaceX is making now from its existing businesses as well as the performance of a chip-making factory it is yet to build. Critics argue SpaceX is trying to solve a supply-chain bottleneck by becoming its own supplier for the world's most complex product - custom GPUs - which could lead to long delays.

The proposed ODC is tied to this. According to the filing with the U.S. Federal Communications Commission, the constellation will have 1 million satellites with computing accelerators. The pitch seems to be that AI models running in orbit will be able to harvest 24/7 solar energy and bypass terrestrial land-use regulations. But it is no coincidence to justify a \$2 trillion valuation. SpaceX needs a total addressable market (TAM) larger than just launch services - and this is the ODC, an attempt to claim the AI cloud computing TAM.

However, thanks to risks like orbital debris, the insurance premiums and regulatory fines on the ODC alone could make all of SpaceX un-investable.

Finally, to bolster the IPO, SpaceX signed a \$30 billion pact with Google through 2029 as part of which Google will pay

about \$920 million/month before IPO to access SpaceX's AI chip clusters as bridge capacity for Google's Gemini AI models. While this is SpaceX's attempt to show AI-in-orbit business can be profitable, the catch is Google is renting SpaceX's terrestrial resources.

Concerns about ODC

Independent experts already raised serious questions on how a server in earth orbit will shed heat fast enough to keep operating - a huge engineering challenge on the ground even with convection (the natural movement of air from warmer to cooler areas) to help. In space, however, there is no air, so there is no convective cooling.

Another option is radiation but here the Stefan-Boltzmann law of statistical mechanics stands in the way. To shed 1 MW of waste heat - corresponding to a small terrestrial data center - at 20° C, a satellite will need about 1,200 sq. m radiator area, larger than wingspan of a Boeing 747. Engineering sceptics have already estimated the mass of radiators required to cool gigawatt-scale computational facility in orbit would make the satellites too heavy to be cost-effective, even with Starship's reduced launch costs.

Second, high-performance AI chips, like NVIDIA H100s or SpaceX's custom silicon are very sensitive to single-event upsets (SEUs) from cosmic rays. In an SEU, a single charged particle striking a sensitive part of a microelectronic device can change its state. So, the chips will have to be 'hardened' to radiation, which will cut performance by or-

ders of magnitude. An alternative plan to launch consumer-grade chips and replace them every 2-3 years would heighten the space debris risk and boost costs beyond profitability.

Gambler's scheme

By using SpaceX IPO proceeds to pay off the bridge loan, Musk is effectively shifting debt from a private, struggling entity to a public and successful one. Second, if the \$1.75 trillion valuation is the "bubble" Morningstar suggests it is, new investors will essentially provide the exit liquidity for the banks. Third, even if SpaceX captures 100% of the global launch market, that is only a roughly \$20 billion/year industry. And if the ODC is physically impossible or economically unviable due to the cooling constraints, the \$2 trillion valuation will effectively be based on a phantom product. Finally, by announcing a capital-intensive project in the form of Terafab, SpaceX is trying to force the market to keep funding it.

Taken together, it has many signs of a Ponzi scheme - but it isn't one. Instead, it is a gamble. Musk is betting he can build Terafab and ODC fast enough for revenue they generate to dwarf the \$20 billion debt dumped into the firm. But this is also why the S&P 500 has refused to waive strict inclusion rules for SpaceX, essentially calling Musk's bluff on the company's financial health.

Ultimately, if the ODC also fails, SpaceX will be left a successful rocket firm with unsustainable debt and a stock price that could drop 70-80% once the AI hype has been stripped off.

Prime Minister flags 'national interest' in Sterlite's 'green copper' project in TN

NEWS ANALYSIS

M. Kalyanaraman

The Sterlite Copper plant in Thoothukudi has been shut for eight years. Around the time of police firing on protesters in 2018 that left 13 dead and about 100 injured, the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) withdrew consent for the unit to operate. The State government later ordered its closure.

Citing repeated environmental violations and holding the firm responsible for sulphur dioxide leak in 2013, the Madras High Court upheld the closure order. The Supreme Court later endorsed the ruling. For many in Tamil Nadu, Sterlite seemed a closed chapter.

Yet, on May 10 this year, PM Narendra Modi invoked the Sterlite issue, lamenting the closure and seeing a conspiracy behind it. "There was a time when India used to export copper. But today, India has to import copper. In our country, strikes and protests led to copper plants being shut down," he said.

Sterlite Copper had a capacity of 4 lakh tonnes of refined copper annually, meeting about 40% of India's local demand and contributing to exports. Its closure made India a net importer of refined copper from being an exporter.

Importing 4 lakh tonne of refined copper instead of ore for domestic smelting entails a foreign ex-



Green idea: A guard stands in front of the Sterlite Industries copper plant in Thoothukudi, TN. REUTERS

change outgo at about \$3.5 billion. The smelter supplied almost 350 downstream firms, many in MSME sector, and its shutdown disrupted supply chains and contributed to price increases.

Copper is increasingly viewed as a strategic metal due to its role in electric vehicles, renewable energy systems and power transmission infrastructure. The closure also hit operations at the Thoothukudi port, which handled copper concentrate imports, with wider repercussions for the local economy.

Prolonged protests

However, the Sterlite plant faced prolonged protests ever since it started operations in the mid-90s. Fishermen initially protested over fears effluents would affect marine life and livelihoods. Later, townspeople and environmental activists took the lead. Concerns ranged from groundwater contamination and hazardous solid waste dis-

posal to air pollution, which were documented in court judgments. The 2013 gas leak remains a particularly sensitive issue.

The final round of protests in 2018 was triggered by the firm's plans for capacity expansion and was led largely by villagers living around the plant. The agitation drew support from across political parties and activist groups and gathered momentum as it approached 100th day. Veteran CPI leader and ex-MP M. Appadurai later remarked he had rarely seen such broad-based participation in any public movement. The protests culminated in the police firing on May 22, 2018.

Despite the closure, Vedanta has continued efforts to restart operations. The company proposed a revamped manufacturing process to produce what it called "green copper". As per Sterlite, the new process would reduce environmental impacts through cleaner technology, renew-

able energy use, improved sulphur dioxide emission controls, greater water recycling and a shift towards desalinated seawater as a source. It also proposed shutting down the phosphoric acid unit that generated gypsum waste.

Application to TNPCB

Vedanta submitted an application to the TNPCB on January 9 of this year seeking Consent To Operate at the proposed green copper plant at the Thoothukudi site but the board rejected application on January 27.

Sterlite approached the Madras High court saying its application had been rejected in an arbitrary manner without providing advance notice or an opportunity for hearing. Chief Justice Manindra Mohan Shrivastava and Justice G. Arul Murugan directed Tamil Nadu Additional Advocate General to get instructions from the State government regarding the constitution of an expert committee to study the

possibility of permitting the 'green copper' facility.

It is against this backdrop that Mr. Modi's remarks assume significance. In Hyderabad, he said, "I would also appeal to the courts that whenever such situations arise, efforts should be made to find solutions keeping national interest foremost."

Not for all time

Commenting on the legal route taken by Sterlite, Sanjay Hegde, senior advocate at the Supreme Court of India, said while closure of the original project acquired judicial finality, the verdicts don't bind things for all times to come. Sterlite is within rights to try with a different process.

New dimension

"The courts should check to see whether there is a new dimension to what is being propounded or is it just a ruse to revive the old project with only cosmetic changes," he said.

Mr. Hegde added that the Prime Minister may well be right that having another smelter is in national interest. But the question is whether national interest can be to the detriment of all environmental concerns.

"What is happening is a broader agenda which says that environmentalism can be totally ignored and is antithetical to growth. When national interest is raised, the courts should take it into account but ask for particulars. How exactly is it in national interest?"

Govt. standardises edible oil pack sizes for price comparison

Meenakshi Verma Ambwani
NEW DELHI

The Department of Consumer Affairs has prescribed standard pack sizes for edible oils under the Legal Metrology framework to help consumers compare prices across brands and make informed purchasing decisions.

In a statement, the Department said it has amended the Standard Operating Procedure (SoP) governing net quantity declarations and standard pack sizes for edible oils and fats. Manufacturers, packers and importers have three months to comply with the new norms.

The move follows consultations with industry associations representing nearly 90% of the edible oil sector. According to the Department, the proliferation of non-standard pack sizes in recent years has made price comparison difficult and created confusion among consumers.

The revised SoP prescribes nine standard pack sizes - 200 ml/g, 500 ml/g, 1 litre/kg, 2 litre/kg, 3 litre/kg, 4 litre/kg, 5 litre/kg, 15 litre/kg and 20 litre/kg - for major edible oils, including palm, soybean, sunflower, mustard, groundnut, sesame, rice bran, cottonseed and corn oil, as well as blended oils.

Volume declaration

The new rules also mandate declaration of both volume and equivalent



The revised SoP prescribes nine standard pack sizes.

weight on packs to improve transparency. The provisions apply to both domestically manufactured and imported edible oils. Packages below 200 ml or 200 grams and minor edible oils have been exempted from the standard pack-size requirement to ensure the continued availability of affordable small packs. Companies may adopt the new pack sizes immediately, even before the transition period ends.

Welcoming the move, Sudhakar Desai, president of the Indian Vegetable Oil Producers' Association, said it would "restore structural sanity to retail shelves and level the playing field".

He noted while flexibility in pack sizes was intended to give industry greater freedom, it had led to a proliferation of non-standard packs and widespread market confusion.

(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)

VOC Port, H2Global sign pact for clean ship fuel

T.E. Raja Simhan
CHENNAI

V. O. Chidambaram Port Authority in Thoothukudi has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Germany's H2Global, represented by the H2Global Foundation and Hintco GmbH, to explore cooperation in the development of green hydrogen and clean shipping fuel trade corridors.

The MoU will focus on assessing the role of port infrastructure in supporting clean fuel production and offtake, while examining implementation pathways for integrating Indian ports into international green fuel supply chains.

U.S.-based GE Vernova inks pact with Powerica

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

U.S.-based energy equipment manufacturer GE Vernova has signed an agreement with renewable energy company Powerica Ltd. to supply 28 wind turbines for a project in Gujarat.

The deal includes turbine supply and installation at Botad Wind Farm in Gujarat, GE Vernova said in a statement on Friday.

WASHINGTON

Iran 'still has 22%' of missiles left, says Trump as skirmishes continue



Iran still has "21, 22%" of its missiles left, U.S. President Donald Trump said on Friday, amid a week marked by repeated violations of a truce between Iran, Israel and the U.S. "They still have capacity. They have some missiles, they have some drones. I would say, percentage wise, maybe 21, 22% of their missiles," Mr. Trump said.

SEOUL

North Korea's Kim showcases new warship ahead of Xi Jinping's visit



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un observed trials of a new warship — the 5,000-ton destroyer *Kang Kon* — repaired after a failed launch last year and vowed to accelerate efforts to build a nuclear-armed Navy, state media said on Saturday, showcasing his expanding military capabilities ahead of a visit by Chinese leader Xi Jinping. AP

GENEVA

Ebola outbreak in Central Africa nears 500 confirmed cases: WHO



Nearly 500 Ebola cases have been confirmed in the deadly outbreak raging in central Africa, according to the World Health Organization. WHO tallied 452 confirmed cases and 82 deaths, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where the outbreak was declared on May 15. In Uganda, it counted 19 confirmed cases, including two deaths. AP

HAVANA

Cuban leader Raul Castro makes first appearance since U.S. charges



Raul Castro, Cuba's low-profile former President, appeared in public for the first time since being indicted by the U.S. for his alleged role in the 1996 downing of two civilian aircraft. Mr. Castro's celebration of his 95th birthday offered Cuba's government a chance to project defiance as the U.S. mounts pressure on the fuel-starved island. AP

Six charged in violent protest over student's death in U.K.

Associated Press
LONDON

British police said on Saturday that six more people have been charged with violent disorder at a protest over the stabbing death of a university student who was handcuffed by officers as he lay dying.

Police were pelted with chairs, cans, rocks and flares on Tuesday by some of the hundreds of people attending a protest in Southampton, where 18-year-old Henry Nowak was killed in December.

In total, police said, 11 people have been charged with disorder.

Nowak's killer, Vickrum Digwa, who is Sikh, falsely claimed to police that he was the victim of a racist assault by Nowak, who was white.

Digwa, 23, was convicted of murder for stabbing Nowak with a Sikh dagger and sentenced this week to life in prison.

PM criticises Vance

On Friday, Prime Minister Keir Starmer's office condemned comments by U.S. Vice-President J.D. Vance, who blamed immigration for Nowak's death.

U.S. and Iran exchange strikes in the Gulf in latest escalation

Bahrain and Kuwait come under fire as Iran's Revolutionary Guards say they targeted 'enemy bases in the area' in response to a U.S. operation targeting the country's Gork and Qeshm islands

Reuters
DUBAI/WASHINGTON

Iran launched a salvo of missiles at Bahrain and Kuwait on Saturday. This barrage occurred hours after the U.S. military said it struck Iranian coastal radar sites on Saturday after shooting down drones launched by Iran toward the Strait of Hormuz, in the latest escalation complicating efforts to end the war.

The U.S. military believed the four Iranian drones were targeting regional maritime traffic, a U.S. official said. U.S. Central Command said on X that the U.S. then struck Iran's surveillance sites in Gork and Qeshm Island, both on the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran's Foreign Ministry said the U.S. action broke an April 8 ceasefire, adding that such repeated violations showed Washington had no intention of reducing tensions. It warned that the United States would bear responsibility for the consequences of its "illegal actions".



People ride past a billboard depicting Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in Tehran on Saturday. REUTERS

Iran's Revolutionary Guards said they had attacked 'enemy U.S. bases' in Kuwait and Bahrain in retaliation for U.S. strikes and fired at four tankers trying to cross the strait without its permission.

The Guards said the group targeted the Ali Al Salem air base, which hosts U.S. forces in Kuwait, and the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet in Bahrain, according to the state-run IRNA news agency. The U.S. military said there were no reports of harm to U.S. personnel.

Kuwait's Army said on Saturday it engaged seven ballistic missiles that

passed over residential areas, resulting in material damage but no casualties. Earlier in the week, Iranian drones heavily damaged a passenger terminal at Kuwait's main airport, killing one person and wounding dozens.

In Bahrain, sirens sounded and residents were urged to seek shelter. Kuwait and Bahrain condemned the strikes.

Iran later said it had hit U.S. bases in both countries with ballistic missiles, but the U.S. military said six missiles were intercepted and a seventh did not reach its target.

The U.S. and Iran have been engaged in largely indirect negotiations for an interim deal to halt the three-month-old war that would leave issues including Iran's nuclear programme to further negotiations. But a deal has remained elusive as the two sides have periodically skirmished.

Tehran wants access to billions of dollars in oil revenue, waivers on sanctions on crude exports, the lifting of a U.S. blockade on its ports and leverage over the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran has effectively blocked the waterway, where about a fifth of global oil traffic transited before the war.

Pakistan Minister visit
Iranian state media reported that Mohsin Naqvi, the Interior Minister of Pakistan, which has been mediating an end to the conflict, arrived in Tehran on Saturday for talks with Iranian officials including Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi.

(With inputs from Associated Press)

Israeli forces kill Palestinian baby in occupied West Bank

Associated Press
HEBRON

Israeli troops killed a seven-month-old Palestinian baby boy after firing at his parents' vehicle in the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian Health Ministry said on Saturday.

Sam Fahd Abu Haikal was killed on Friday evening, and his parents were wounded while driving in the Tel Rumeida area south of Hebron City, according to the Ministry.

The official Palestinian news agency Wafa said the baby was critically wounded after being struck in the face by the same bullet that injured his mother. He later died of his injuries.

His father, Fahd Abu Haikal, a lecturer at Bethlehem University, was shot in the hand. They were travelling from Bethlehem to visit family in Hebron when soldiers opened fire, the agency reported.

The Israeli military said on Friday soldiers shot at a vehicle that was perceived to be accelerating toward them in the Hebron area. An initial inquiry found that the wounded were uninvolved civilians and the situation is under review. At Al-Ahly Hospital in



Fahd Abu Haikal, left, takes a last look at his seven-month-old baby who was killed by Israeli soldiers in Tel Rumeida, West Bank. AP

Hebron, the baby's father said that a bullet struck the car's wind shield before piercing his right hand, then his son and wife who were in the back seat. Another bullet struck the vehicle's hood, according to locals at the scene.

His wife is in critical condition because there's shrapnel close to her heart, he said.

The funeral service was held at noon at a nearby mosque. The tiny body was wrapped in the Palestinian flag as people lined up for prayers before taking him in an ambulance for burial.

The British Consulate in Jerusalem said it was "shocked and saddened" by the Israeli killing of the baby, calling on X for an "immediate and transpa-

rent investigation and accountability."

Seven killed in Gaza

In the Gaza Strip, Israeli strikes killed seven people on Saturday, medical sources and the territory's civil defence said.

In Gaza City, a drone strike killed six people and wounded 15 others in the Jawazat camp for displaced people. The city's Al-Shifa Hospital also reported receiving six bodies.

Further south, a 25-year-old man was killed in the morning in a strike on a tent, the civil defence said.

The strike had hit his tent on the roof of his house, just before he was due to get married later in the day, a family member said. (With inputs from AFP)

3 Lebanese troops killed in Israeli strike after truce

Reuters
BEIRUT

Two Lebanese officers and one soldier were killed on Saturday in an Israeli strike on a military vehicle on the Khardali-Nabatieh road in south Lebanon, the Lebanese Army said.

Later, the Israeli military said it targeted the vehicle after identifying what it described as a threat to its forces and receiving indications that the Hezbollah militant group was preparing to fire on Israeli troops from the area.

It said an initial inquiry showed that two Lebanese Army officers and a soldier were inside the vehicle and that the incident was under review.

Lebanon's President Joseph Aoun called the strike "a flagrant violation to Lebanese sovereignty and international law."

He said it came in the context of "ongoing escalation that threatens stability and security in the south (of Lebanon), despite the efforts Lebanon is exerting in the Washington negotiations to put an end to the ongoing Israeli attacks without deterrent."

The latest declared ceasefire came about through U.S.-brokered talks between Israel and Lebanon's government, which accuses Hezbollah of dragging the country into war and



Caught in the crosshairs: People inspect damage following Israeli strikes in the Saksakiyeh in southern Lebanon on Saturday. AFP

had made efforts to disarm it before the latest hostilities.

The Lebanese militant group has refused the truce.

'Territorial aggression'
Iran-aligned Hezbollah condemned Saturday's strike, calling it a deliberate attack and part of Israel's continued aggression against Lebanon.

The group said the attack was the result of what it called the Lebanese authorities' disregard for the country's sovereignty and a series of concessions, including what it described as acquiescence to Israeli demands in Washington, which it said had emboldened Israel.

The ongoing war began on March 2 when Hezbollah fired rockets at northern Israel, two days after Israel and the U.S. began their attacks on Iran. Israel

has since launched a ground invasion of Lebanon and carried out wide attacks that have displaced more than 1 million people.

A ceasefire that was supposed to end the fighting in Lebanon between Israel and Hezbollah took effect on April 17, but has not been respected.

Hezbollah and Israel have frequently exchanged accusations of violating the truce, with each side justifying its attacks with alleged violations committed by the other side.

Israeli troops have seized around a fifth of Lebanon, pushing further into the country's south.

More than 3,500 people have been killed in Lebanon since the war began. The fighting has killed at least 29 Israeli soldiers and three civilians.

(With inputs from Associated Press)

Taiwan says China escalating pressure with sea operations

Reuters
TAIPEI

Taiwan said on Saturday that a Chinese coast guard ship and a survey ship had carried out the first coordinated operation to "provoke" Taiwan, in waters around strategically located islands in the South China Sea.

The Taiwan-controlled Pratas Islands have emerged as a new pressure point in China's ongoing military and quasi-military operations around Taiwan in an effort to assert Beijing's sovereignty claims.

Taiwan's coast guard said in a statement that along with a Chinese coast guard ship that had approached the Pratas on Fri-

day, a Chinese oceanographic survey vessel approached the islands on Saturday. "This is the first observed instance of Chinese coast guard and survey vessels acting in coordination to provoke Taiwan," it said.

"These acts are highly provocative. The PRC [People's Republic of China] is a sick bully, causing trouble across the region," Taiwan National Security Council Secretary-General Joseph Wu said. The Chinese coast guard vessel broadcast that it was conducting law enforcement operations and that "Taiwan's future lies in national reunification", said Taiwan's coast guard, which dispatched its own vessels in response.

Trump urges new acting intel chief to fire employees

Agence France-Presse
WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Friday he wants his incoming acting spy chief to start firing employees, deepening the controversy over the appointment of a man with no previous intelligence experience.

Bill Pulte, a Trump

loyalist who heads the Federal Housing Finance Agency, was named by the Republican President on Tuesday as acting Director of National Intelligence.

"If he cut, I wouldn't mind that," Mr. Trump said, adding that the number of employees in Mr. Pulte's office had been "way too high for way too long."

Associated Press
SAINT PETERSBURG

Residents of St. Petersburg were told not to leave their homes after a large-scale Ukrainian drone attack targeted Russia's second-largest city on the final day of the country's flagship economic forum in Saint Petersburg, officials said on Saturday.

The attack came a day after Russian President Vladimir Putin refused an offer to meet his Ukrainian counterpart.

St. Petersburg Governor Alexander Beglov said three people sustained minor injuries in the attack. Russia's Defence Ministry said its air defences shot down 376 Ukrainian drones.

"Last night, our drones



Vladimir Putin

covered a distance of about 1,000 kilometres to the St. Petersburg region — to the enemy navy's arsenals and a base in Kronstadt," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy wrote on X, adding that drones also hit an oil depot in Russia's southern Krasnodar region.

Speaking at the Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF) — an

event dubbed "Russia's Davos" — Mr. Putin on Friday rejected a proposal by Mr. Zelenskyy for a face-to-face meeting on the 4-year-old conflict, saying he sees "no point" in it.

Responding to Mr. Putin's dismissal of the proposed meeting, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiba said on Saturday that things would "only get worse for Russia."

"Failures will get more humiliating," he wrote on X, warning that there are "no safe places in Russia that can be exempt" from Ukrainian long-range attacks. In Ukraine, one person was killed and three wounded overnight into Saturday in the Dnipropetrovsk region, as Russian forces struck three districts, authorities said.

MENTAL MATHS

I was not sure if the final day would go my way: Praggnanandhaa



NORWAY CHESS
R. Praggnanandhaa said that winning the Norway Chess tournament was special. "I was not sure it would go my way (on the final day). I still had to do it. I can't really say one specific game, but winning the tournament overall is more special for me," Praggnanandhaa said.

WINNING FEELING

Vaishali emerges victorious in WR Chess rapid event



WR CHESS
World championship challenger R. Vaishali came up trumps in the WR Women's Chess Tour rapid event in Tokyo. The Indian defeated Irine Kharisma Sukandar (Indonesia), Alexandra Kosteniuk (Switzerland) and Alua Nurman (Kazakhstan) in the quarterfinals, semifinals and final respectively, each by a 1.5-0.5 scoreline.

GRACIOUS RESPONSE

Suryakumar wishes team, lauds Sooryavanshi on maiden call-up



FILE PHOTO
Suryakumar Yadav extended his support to the Indian team after he was removed as T20I captain and dropped from the squads for the tours of Ireland and England as well as the Asian Games. "Wishing this highly-skilled group all the best for the challenges ahead," he wrote on Instagram. He also praised Vaibhav Sooryavanshi.

WORTHY SUCCESSORS

Rohit all praise for Suryakumar and Shreyas' captaincy



FILE PHOTO
You have seen Surya lead India to the World Cup (triumph). Shreyas has been announced as the T20 captain. Looking at how he has captained his franchise in the last few years, he is going to have a good time as well — Rohit Sharma praising his successors Suryakumar Yadav and Shreyas Iyer.

Praggnanandhaa caps fairytale run with title win

The 20-year-old Grandmaster becomes the first Indian to clinch the coveted crown; overnight leader So settles for the second spot; Carlsen finishes fourth while Gukesh gets the wooden spoon

NORWAY CHESS

C. Shyam Sundar
OSLO

The usually quiet Deichman Bjorvika, a public library here, was a beehive of activity well past its working hours on Friday. The reason — an Indian player answering to the name R. Praggnanandhaa had done the unthinkable, winning a chess tournament featuring Magnus Carlsen — as rare as the Northern Lights in a southern hemisphere sky.

The 20-year-old from Chennai stormed to the title in sensational style after languishing in the last place after round six of the Open event in Norway Chess 2026. He won four classical games on the trot and his victims included Alireza Firouzja, the great Carlsen, Gukesh and Vincent Keymer.

In the process, he became the first Indian to win the prestigious title.

Praggnanandhaa was as clinical as one could get as



Amazing turnaround: Praggnanandhaa outwitted Firouzja, Carlsen, Gukesh and Keymer on the trot. FLICKR/NORWAYCHESS

he accounted for the best with an impressive display as was evidenced by his decimation of Keymer.

He topped the leaderboard with 18 points, one ahead of American Wesley So, with his convincing win in the final round.

The Indian entered the game against Keymer needing to not only win but also hope that So didn't claim a victory in the classical against Firouzja. Fortune favours

the brave and Praggnanandhaa outclassed his opponent to pick up three points. With So being held to a draw, another golden chapter was added to Indian chess.

While Praggnanandhaa came up with a special performance, his compatriot and World champion D. Gukesh's form was up-and-down. He finished with the wooden spoon after a last-round loss to Carlsen, who wound up

fourth after an eminently forgettable outing.

The women's event saw Kazakhstan's Bibisara Assaubayeva slump to a defeat in her final outing after having clinched the title on Thursday (with a round to spare). China's Zhu Jiner had a strong finish to take the second spot ahead of the 2025 champion Anna Muzychuk.

India's Divya Deshmukh and Koneru Humpy suffered losses to finish fifth and sixth, respectively.

The results: 10th round:
Open: Alireza Firouzja (Fra, 15.5) lost to Wesley So (USA, 17) in Armageddon; Vincent Keymer (Ger, 11) lost to R. Praggnanandhaa (18); Magnus Carlsen (Nor, 13) bt D. Gukesh (8).
Women: Zhu Jiner (Chn, 16) bt Koneru Humpy (9); Ju Wenjun (Chn, 13.5) bt Bibisara Assaubayeva (Kaz, 16.5); Anna Muzychuk (Ukr, 15) bt Divya Deshmukh (10).
Final standings: Open: 1. Praggnanandhaa 18 points, 2. So 17, 3. Firouzja 15.5, 4. Carlsen 13, 5. Keymer 11, 6. Gukesh 8.
Women: 1. Assaubayeva 16.5, 2. Zhu 16, 3. Muzychuk 15, 4. Ju 13.5, 5. Divya 10, 6. Humpy 9. (The writer is in Oslo at the invitation of Norway Chess).

Praggnanandhaa thrilled to prevail in a field featuring the elite players

C. Shyam Sundar
OSLO

R. Praggnanandhaa... the name is no more a tongue-twister. The chess world and fans have gotten used to it as the Indian Grandmaster just keeps winning and winning. Beating Magnus Carlsen in his own backyard in a tournament which he has dominated is no mean feat and he did it in style, winning four classical games in a row to surge to the top.

"Winning this is more special and Magnus was there. Here it's just the top players," he told the Indian media after beating Germany's Vincent Keymer in the 10th and final round to register a historic maiden triumph in Norway Chess 2026 at Deichman Bjorvika on Friday.

It may or may not be the biggest title of his career thus far, but his tourna-



Popular champion: Praggnanandhaa was swarmed by the fans after his triumph. FLICKR/NORWAYCHESS

ment win was a hugely popular one. He was swarmed by fans as the night wore on but managed to please them with autographs and pictures.

Carlsen was effusive in praise of the champion and said, "he won the last four classical games. That's

as clutch as it gets. Prag is an incredible fighter and it is fun to see him get rewarded for that." The World No. 1 lost both his classical games to the Indian GM.

Asked what was the reason for the turnaround after two losses in the middle

of the tournament and being last after round six, Praggnanandhaa said: "I don't think I changed anything in particular. But the conscious effort of playing faster certainly helped me in my games. I had more time than my opponent in most of the games."

After a tepid run in the middle of the event, a phone call with his mother probably was the game-changer. Praggnanandhaa said he had spoken to her (on June 1) before the match against Alireza Firouzja and that she had told him "It's a new month. You'll play well."

Play well... he really did.

Shreyas takes over from Suryakumar as T20I captain

Amol Karhadkar
MUMBAI

Shreyas Iyer will lead India into a fresh T20 World Cup cycle after replacing Suryakumar Yadav as T20I captain, while Vaibhav Sooryavanshi has earned a maiden national call-up following his explosive IPL campaign.

The senior national selection committee on Saturday picked squads for the forthcoming tours of Ireland and England, along with the Asian Games to be held in Japan in September-October. While the squad for two four-day A games in Sri Lanka was also announced, the squad for the three ODIs will be selected later this month. Shreyas joined the meeting virtually.

Suryakumar not only lost the captaincy but also his place in the squad altogether, with chief selector Ajit Agarkar admitting that the decision was influenced by both his prolonged lean patch and the need to build towards the next T20 World Cup in Australia and New Zealand in October-November 2028.

Shreyas thus returns to India's T20I set-up for the first time since December 2023, with his leadership credentials, strengthened by an impressive IPL captaincy record, proving decisive.

The selectors have also moved away from Axar Patel as vice-captain, elevating Tilak Varma as Shreyas'



Baptism by fire: Shreyas will hope to deliver after getting the captain's armband on his comeback. GETTY IMAGES

deputy. The biggest talking point beyond the leadership change remains Sooryavanshi. The teenage opener has been included as the 16th member for the Ireland and England assignments after Agarkar admitted that the youngster's performances "forced" the selectors to reward him with a national call-up.

Besides Suryakumar, Rinku Singh, Kuldeep Yadav, Jasprit Bumrah and Hardik Pandya are the other members of India's triumphant T20 World Cup squad missing from the set-up. While Bumrah has been rested for the European assignments, he is expected to spearhead India's bowling attack during the Asian Games campaign. Hardik will predominantly be utilised in the ODI format leading into next year's ODI World Cup.

The squads:
For Ireland and England T20Is: Shreyas Iyer (Capt.), Tilak Varma

(Vice-capt.), Abhishek Sharma, Sanju Samson (wk), Ishan Kishan (wk), Shivam Dube, Nitish Kumar, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Varun Chakravarthy, Ravi Bishnoi, Mohammed Siraj, Harshit Rana, Arshdeep Singh, Prince Yadav and Vaibhav Sooryavanshi.

The fixtures: vs Ireland: June 26 (Belfast) and June 28 (Belfast).
vs England: July 1 (Chester-le-Street), July 4 (Manchester), July 7 (Nottingham), July 9 (Bristol) and July 11 (Southampton).

For Asian Games: Shreyas (Capt.), Tilak (vc), Samson (wk), Abhishek, Kishan (wk), Dube, Axar, Washington, Nitish, Varun, Bishnoi, Rana, Arshdeep, Sooryavanshi and Bumrah.

The dates: Sept. 24 to Oct. 3 (Aichi, Japan).

India-A roster for Sri Lanka tour: Dhruv Jurel (Capt. & wk), Devdutt Padikkal (Vice-capt.), B. Sai Sudharsan, Ruturaj Gaikwad, Harsh Dube, Saransh Jain, Gurnoor Brar, Auqib Nabi, Yash Thakur, Anshul Kamboj, N. Jagadeesan (wk), Zeeshan Ansari, Aman Mokhadde, Shaik Rasheed and Ayush Pandey.

The fixtures: June 25-28 (Galle), July 2-5 (Galle).

Agarkar & Co. balance past and the future

Amol Karhadkar
MUMBAI

India's transition towards the next T20 World Cup cycle formally began on Saturday with Shreyas Iyer replacing Suryakumar Yadav as captain and teenage sensation Vaibhav Sooryavanshi earning a maiden call-up, decisions chief selector Ajit Agarkar suggested were driven equally by long-term planning and recent performances.

Shreyas' elevation marks a significant turnaround in fortunes for the Mumbai batter, who last featured in a T20I in December 2023 and had narrowly missed selection for the recent World Cup campaign. "We've seen what he has done over the last few years, leading different franchises," Agarkar said on Saturday. "He won [the IPL title] once, had a tougher season this year after a great start. He has seen everything that a captain possibly can. His own performances have been really good."

"He was quite close to getting into that T20 World Cup squad as well, but [with] Surya still there, there was no room for him. He was a stand-out candidate with enough experience now. This will obviously be a different challenge." The change simultaneously brings an abrupt end to Suryakumar's captaincy stint, and possibly international career. "With regards to Surya, obviously it's a tough



Sooryavanshi.
FILE PHOTO: R.V. MOORTHY

one having just won the World Cup," Agarkar admitted. "But as it happens, after most World Cups, we try and reassess what the best way forward is."

"Partly his own form, but also looking at the next two-year cycle. We thought this was the best way forward."

The other headline, unsurprisingly, belonged to 15-year-old Sooryavanshi.

"He just has picked himself really," Agarkar said. "With his performances, he has almost forced us to pick him. It's not just this season. He obviously had a great start [to his IPL career] last season."

For India's selectors, Saturday's announcement was less about one squad and more about officially beginning another cycle.

Jaiswal replaces injured Kohli in India's ODI squad

Amol Karhadkar
MUMBAI

Yashasvi Jaiswal has replaced Virat Kohli in India's ODI squad for the forthcoming home series against Afghanistan beginning June 13, with the selectors hopeful that the 37-year-old's hamstring injury will heal in time for next month's tour of England.

Kohli suffered the setback during the Indian Premier League title decider on May 31 and underwent assessment after experiencing discomfort in his right hamstring. "With Virat at this point, it's just been less than a week since he injured himself in the final. We don't know the timelines yet," chief selector Ajit Agarkar said on Saturday.

"But it looks like he might be fit for the England one-day series. It's not a definitive answer, so don't hold me to it. I haven't had a clear timeline from the physio yet." With Kohli understood to have suffered a hamstring tear, recovery could take up to six weeks, making his availability for the ODI series in England — starting July 14 — uncertain.

While Ruturaj Gaikwad was expected to come in for the Afghanistan assignment after scoring a century during a rare outing in India colours, the selectors opted for Jaiswal, who has also been waiting for an extended run in the ODI



Jaiswal is hoping to get an extended run in 50-over cricket. FILE PHOTO: K.R. DEEPAK

format.

Meanwhile, both Rohit Sharma and Hardik Pandya will undergo fitness assessments at BCCI's Centre of Excellence before joining the squad in Dharamshala ahead of the series opener. Hardik has been undergoing rehabilitation after sustaining an injury during Mumbai Indians' IPL campaign and is at the CoE on the outskirts of Bengaluru.

"Hardik will soon go for the final test, and he will be in the process of clearance," BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia said. "Rohit will visit the CoE in the next two to three days. We are awaiting the final fitness clearance."



Robinson. AP

Rain halts England's victory bid

Agence France-Presse
LONDON

Ollie Robinson continued to prove a thorn in New Zealand's side, taking two wickets in quick succession, as England moved closer to victory in the first Test during what little play was possible at Lord's on Saturday.

Rain and bad light meant fewer than 10 overs were bowled on the third day. But that was enough time for the 32-year-old Robinson to take two wickets for no runs in four balls as New Zealand slumped to 53 for five before adding two more runs prior to the tea break.

At 55 for five, the Black Caps needed 199 more runs to reach a victory target of 254 in what is the first of a three-match series and the 150th Test staged at Lord's.

The scores: England 140 & 226 vs New Zealand 113 & 55/5 in 21.3 overs.

Rahul and Gill's hundreds put India in command

The opener makes the most of an early reprieve while the skipper oozes class as the home team amasses 368 for three on the opening day; Sai Sudharsan and Pant, too, get going on a flat pitch

AFGHANISTAN IN INDIA

Vivek Krishnan
NEW CHANDIGARH

An air of inevitability enveloped the Maharaja Yadavindra Singh Stadium on day one of the one-off Test between India and Afghanistan once Shubman Gill won the toss and elected to bat. On a benign strip exposed to the scorching sun on Saturday, the host was presented with a gift-wrapped opportunity to rack up a heap of runs and make Afghanistan's inexperienced attack toil.

With the exception of Yashasvi Jaiswal, who was dismissed for 24, India's batters took advantage. While K.L. Rahul brought up his 12th Test hundred, Gill ended the day unbeaten on 103 to guide India to 368 for three at stumps. Sai Sudharsan and Rishabh Pant registered brisk half-centuries. Pant, unbeaten on 50, got going by smashing off-spinner Abdul Malik for three sixes in an over.

Gill and Pant unfurled a range of free-flowing strokes after Rahul and Sai Sudharsan stitched together a 139-run alliance for the second wicket.

Never mind that Rahul's innings wouldn't count among his most elegant. Even accounting for his recent idiosyncrasy of tucking the bat behind the front pad whilst leaving the ball, there were a few instances early on when he appeared



Different strokes: Rahul was shaky to begin with while Gill got into his stride immediately. R.V. MOORTHY

SCOREBOARD

INDIA — 1ST INNINGS
Yashasvi Jaiswal c Afsar b Saleem 24 (32b, 5x4), K.L. Rahul c Gurbaz b Ziaur 100 (165b, 11x4), Sai Sudharsan c Afsar b Saleem 81 (104b, 13x4), Shubman Gill (batting) 103 (143b, 11x4, 1x6), Rishabh Pant (batting) 50 (70b, 2x4, 3x6); Extras (lb-5, nb-4, w-1): 10; Total (for three wks. in 85 overs): 368.

uncertain in the channel outside off-stump. But as he spent more time at the crease, he became more authoritative against the spinners, who barely posed a threat even though a few deliveries took turn.

Contrary to Rahul's shaky beginning, Gill was all class from the moment he took guard. Some sumptuous drives and his signature

FALL OF WICKETS
1-41 (Jaiswal, 11.6 overs), 2-180 (Sai Sudharsan, 42.4), 3-247 (Rahul, 60.2).

AFGHANISTAN BOWLING
Ziaur 15-2-61-1, Omarzai 14-3-42-0, Saleem 13-1-67-2, Kharote 20-0-95-0, Malik 6-0-37-0, Shahidi 17-0-61-0.

Toss: India.

pull stood out in his 11th Test ton.

Despite the limitations of Afghanistan's bowlers, they had opportunities to dismiss Rahul and Sai Sudharsan cheaply. In the 11th over, Rahul was on 16 when he attempted a cut off Ziaur Rahman. As the ball nestled into Afsar Zazai's gloves, Afghanistan's players screamed in unison

for a caught-behind appeal. But they didn't have enough conviction to ask for a review, which proved to be a costly error as replays showed a clear edge.

Sai Sudharsan was dropped on 20 by Rahmanullah Gurbaz at slip in left-arm spinner Nangeyalia Kharote's first over. In the southpaw's maiden series in England last year, he had displayed an exasperating tendency to be caught on the on-side, but he was in no such trouble here. Having hit a flurry of boundaries through the leg-side, he raced to his half-century off 67 balls. But the three-figure mark eluded him. On 81, he edged a full delivery from Mohammad Saleem to Zazai behind the stumps.



Sai Sudharsan. R.V. MOORTHY

Coach's backing gives freedom and certainty: Sai Sudharsan

Vivek Krishnan
NEW CHANDIGARH

Ahead of this one-off Test against Afghanistan, India's head coach Gautam Gambhir had dispelled any doubts about who will occupy the No. 3 slot by unequivocally backing Sai Sudharsan and giving him a long rope.

Deriving confidence

At the end of play on day one, the left-hand batter from Chennai, who contributed 81 off 104 deliveries, opened up on the confidence derived from the coach's words.

"It gives so much certainty mentally when the coach, the captain and the team support you and want you to do well for the country. It gives a lot of freedom for you to express yourself and do what you can do at your best rather than thinking about scoring or thinking about whether I will play the next game or not. That never arises because you have got great freedom from the team," Sai Sudharsan said on Saturday.

Andreeva ends Chwalinska's dream run for first Major title

FRENCH OPEN

Agence France-Presse
PARIS

Mirra Andreeva won her first Grand Slam title on Saturday by downing Polish qualifier Maja Chwalinska in straight sets in the French Open final.

The 19-year-old Russian beat Chwalinska 6-3, 6-2 to become the youngest Roland Garros women's singles champion since Monica Seles, then aged 18, won her third straight title in Paris in 1992.

With her first-ever Major crown, Andreeva also became the first player, man or woman, born after 2005 to win a Grand Slam.

The Coupe Suzanne Lenglen will now take centre spot in Andreeva's burgeoning trophy cabinet.

THE RESULTS

Women: Final: 8-Andreeva bt Chwalinska (Pol) 6-3, 6-2.
Men: Doubles: Final: 1-Zeballos (Arg) & Granollers (Esp) bt 2-Heliovaara (Fin) & Patten (GBR) 6-4, 6-2.

net, which already features two WTA 1000 titles. Defeat at the final hurdle brought to an end an astonishing run which started in qualifying for Chwalinska, who won nine matches in the French capital to become the first qualifier to reach the final in the Open era.

However, the World No. 114's career will now be on a different stratosphere as she will climb to 21 in the rankings and be assured of competing regularly in the biggest tournaments.

Argentina's Horacio Zeballos and Spaniard Mar-

cel Granollers won their second straight French Open men's doubles title by beating Harri Heliovaara and Henry Patten in the final.

Third title as a pair

The 41-year-old Zeballos and Granollers, 40, eased to a 6-4, 6-2 victory to secure their third Grand Slam title as a pairing, after also winning last year's US Open.

"Now we can say that it was an amazing two weeks," said Zeballos.

"I can't be more happy. I'm proud in this moment. Yeah, it's unbelievable. It's unbelievable feeling for us and for all of the team."

Finnish player Heliovaara and Britain's Patten missed out on a third Slam title themselves, having won the 2025 Australian Open and Wimbledon in 2024.



Breaking new ground: Andreeva is the first player, man or woman, born after 2005 to win a Grand Slam while the 114th-ranked Chwalinska will climb to 21 after her runner-up finish. AFP

India defeats Bangladesh, wins title for the sixth time

SAFF WOMEN'S C'SHIPS

Press Trust of India
MARGAO

India clinched the SAFF Women's Championship football title for the sixth time and its first in seven years with a 3-1 win over Bangladesh in the summit clash here on Saturday.

Pyari Xaxa (42nd), Sanfida Nongrum (46th) and Lynda Kom Serto (82nd) scored for India, while Ritu Porna Chakma (45+2) pulled one back for Bangladesh. The host had beaten



Richly rewarded: The Indian women's team capped off an unbeaten run with the crown. AIFP

the same opponents 3-0 in the group stage.

India ended the tournament unbeaten, scoring 18 goals while conceding just one. After five title-wins on

the trot, India could not even reach the final in the last two editions when Bangladesh walked away with the trophy. India had last won the title in 2019.

Indian men triumph, women bag bronze

U-18 ASIA CUP HOCKEY

Agencies
KAKAMIGAHARA [JAPAN]

Ashish Tani Purti's hat-trick powered the Indian men's hockey team to the U-18 Asia Cup title win after defeating host Japan 4-1 in the final here on Saturday.

Ashish Tani Purti starred with a hat-trick, while captain Ketan Kushwaha also found the back of the net as India produced a commanding display against the host.

Numada Gaku scored for Japan, according to a press release. The Indian women's team won the



Champions: The Indian men's team celebrates the top-of-the-podium finish. X@THEHOCKEYINDIA

bronze medal after registering a commanding 3-0 victory over Korea in the third-place match. Sandeepa Kumari, captain Sweety Kujur and Nousheen Naz were on target as the wo-

men capped off their campaign with podium finish.

Hockey India announced a cash award of ₹3 lakh for each player in the men's team and ₹1.5 lakh for each member of

the support staff.

Each member of the women's team was awarded ₹1 lakh while the support staff got ₹50,000 each.

Purti was awarded Player of the Match for his

stellar performance in the men's final and was also recognised as the tournament's top scorer with an impressive 17 goals.

India further dominated the individual honours with Ayush Rajak being named the best goalkeeper. Among the women, Nausheen emerged as the top scorer with 12 goals. Sandeepa was adjudged the Player of the Match in women's final.

The results: Men: Final: India 4 (Ashish Tani Purti 2, 28, 34, Ketan Kushwaha 30) bt Japan 1 (Numada Gaku 52).

Women: Third place: India 3 (Sandeepa Kumari 2, Sweety Kujur 16, Nousheen Naz 33) bt Korea 0.

Knicks hold off Spurs in the second game, take a 2-0 lead

Agence France-Presse
SAN ANTONIO

Jalen Brunson drilled the go-ahead free throw as the New York Knicks held off a furious San Antonio rally to beat the Spurs 105-104 on Friday and take a commanding 2-0 lead in the NBA Finals.

San Antonio star Victor Wembanyama missed a potential game-winner with two seconds remaining to leave the Spurs in need of an unprecedented comeback when the best-of-seven series shifts to New York for games three and four. No team has lifted the trophy after dropping the first two games of the Finals at home.

Knicks had to withstand a fourth-quarter surge from the Spurs, who erased a 14-point deficit.

Scaloni gives positive update on Messi's fitness

WORLD CUP

Agence France-Presse
COLLEGE STATION

Lionel Messi has taken a step forward in his injury recovery and could play a few minutes in Argentina's upcoming friendlies before its World Cup opening game, head coach Lionel Scaloni said on Friday.

"Leo is doing well; he has already trained partly with the group, he's no lon-

ger completely separated," Scaloni said. "It's possible he'll play a few minutes in the friendlies. He's much better, and that gives us peace of mind."

The coach said the coming week will show "exactly where we stand."

Iran lashes out at US Meanwhile, Iran lashed out at the United States on Saturday for refusing visas to some of its World Cup squad support staff as the players were to leave Tur-

kiye for Mexico.

The Iranian players, who have been at a training camp in the southern Turkish resort of Antalya since May 18, received their visas late on Friday, Washington's envoy to Turkey Tom Barrack posted on X, hailing the work of the US embassy in Ankara in "processing visas for Iran's national football team".

But Iran's embassy to Turkey hit back with a furious response, saying a "large" number of key staff

had been denied visas.

"Why do you not say that visas were denied to a large portion of the managerial and executive staff, technical advisers, and others who are an integral part of any national football team?" the Iranian embassy in Turkey posted on X.

"You have now escalated the deliberate and discriminatory treatment against Iran's national football team to its highest level," the embassy added.

Mercedes' Antonelli snatches Monaco pole position

FORMULA ONE

Associated Press
MONTE CARLO

Kimi Antonelli took pole position for Formula One's Monaco Grand Prix by just 0.043 of a second, holding off a challenge from Ferrari and Red Bull to maintain Mercedes' dominance here on Saturday.

Antonelli saved his best for last to beat Max Verstappen and ensure Mercedes keeps its run of qualifying on pole for each Grand Prix race this season. Lewis Hamilton was third for Ferrari.

Antonelli's teammate and title rival George Russell was only sixth. Local favourite Charles Leclerc, winner of the race in 2024, was fourth, while Isack Hadjar, in the second Red



Antonelli. REUTERS

Bull, was fifth.

Reigning world champion and last year's Monaco winner Lando Norris will be on the fourth row alongside fellow McLaren driver Oscar Piastri. Qualifying is typically more important in Monaco than any other track on the F1 schedule because it is almost impossible to overtake on street circuit.

Gold for Shaili and women's 4x100m team

ATHLETICS

Press Trust of India
TAIPEI CITY

Long jumper Shaili Singh and the women's 4x100m relay team won a gold each while Tejas Shirse bagged the 110m hurdles silver as all the Indians in the fray returned with a medal on the opening day of the New Taipei City Athletics Open here on Saturday.

Shaili measured 6.24m for the yellow metal while the women's 4x100m relay quartet of S.S. Sneha, Srabani Nanda, Sudeshna Shivankar and Tamanna clocked 44.07 seconds and managed to equal the meet record.

Shirse completed the race in 13.58s. Chinese Taipei's 20-year-old Hsieh Yuan-kai claimed the gold in 13.57s.

Chinese Taipei's 20-year-old Hsieh Yuan-kai claimed the gold in 13.57s.

KERALA

Many schoolgirls are forced to attend classes during periods, enduring pain and discomfort, to meet attendance requirements. THULASI KAKKAT



The caring period

The Kerala government's decision to provide menstrual leave for girl students has triggered a discussion on the menstrual health of women in the State.

Aathira Haridas meets those who hail the decision and the ones denouncing it

Anamika* was in Class IX in a city school in Kochi when she was caught off guard in the school assembly. An excruciating abdominal pain left her speechless for minutes. The girl, who was on her period, sat there, enduring the crushing pain in an effort to avoid disrupting the assembly or drawing attention to herself.

The menstrual cycles have always been an agonising period in the life of this schoolgirl. She used to get muscle cramps, besides the wrenching pain, that often left her paralysed.

"You really have no other option but to stay in bed. The first day is the most painful for me, and I end up missing classes most of the time. The medicines are not enough to ease the pain," rues Anamika.

She recalls the times she has had to miss classes or have felt out of place among her peers when no one could understand the kind of pain she goes through during her menstrual cycle.

Malavika, a schoolmate of Anamika, too has a similar story to recount. "We were in a crowd watching an event hosted by the school. Suddenly, I started experiencing excruciating pain and severe cramps. I started feeling dizzy. Eventually, I fainted and had to be carried away to the restroom," she says.

Malavika and Anamika are among the hundreds of girls for whom the monthly menstrual period turns out to be a painful affair.

Enduring the pain, these girls are forced to attend the classes just to avoid falling short of the attendance requirement, which could affect their academic performance.

The Kerala government's recent decision to offer menstrual leave to school students has brought much relief to these girls. The decision has also brought back public attention to the menstrual health care of school students in the State.

Early intervention

Three years ago, in January 2023, the Cochin University of Science and Technology (Cusat) mainstreamed the issue of menstrual care by offering its students menstruation benefits in the form of additional condonation for overcoming the shortage of attendance. The decision, which was widely hailed, forced other universities to follow suit.

Sitting in the reception area of the school, Steffi and Aparna, who also endure pain and discomfort during their periods, welcomed the proposal.

"Let there be conversations around menstrual health and sex education. The decision to allow



Many students end up regularly missing their classes due to the discomfort and pain they undergo during periods

E. PARVATHY
Principal of Bhavan's Vidya Mandir, Ernakulam

menstrual leave will be a game changer in dismantling the stigma surrounding the biological process," feels Steffi.

"The period leaves can be a mind-opener and help sensitise people who still feel weird talking about periods. It can help normalise the biological process. It is not taboo. The decision to allow the leave would trigger more discussions, and people can talk about this more openly," she asserts.

Aparna notes that "periods are not just a silly matter; some students undergo severe stress and pain. Sometimes it is better to stay home in our comfort zone and rest, and that should be a choice we all get to have. These leaves help us in that."

"Though the decision is certainly a welcome move, it will also bring with it an additional stress on teachers and even the students as we may have to skip the weekend holidays and put in extra efforts to catch up," observes Malavika.

However, Steffi quickly puts forth a solution. "Extra classes can be held for those who opt for the leave. They can also be given the option of attending the classes online from the comfort of their homes," she suggests.

Cusat campaign, an inspiration

Namitha George, a young lawyer who had initiated the campaign for menstrual leave for students during her tenure as the chairperson of the students' union of Cusat, recollects the efforts that she undertook to make the idea a reality.

"The union gave shape to the demands of the students and formulated a proposal, which was accepted by the university. The campaign in Cusat inspired the students of other universities and colleges too. Student organisations also raised the demand. The State government responded with an order extending the benefits to the students of all universities in the State," recalls Namitha.

Gender rights campaigners like T. K. Anandi, while joining the students in welcoming the decision, recalls that the previous Left Democratic Front government had introduced the idea in colleges.

"A proposal to give compensatory leave to women working in the government sector was under consideration of the previous government," says Anandi. "We have seen several students writhing in pain and lying down during classes. It was also proposed that such leaves be given to school students as well," recalls Anandi, a former gender advisor to the State government.

E. Parvathy, Principal of Bhavan's Vidya Mandir, Ernakulam, notes that many students end up

regularly missing their classes due to the discomfort and pain they undergo during periods.

"We approach such students with empathy and consideration. It is a natural, biological process, and all progressive institutions will accept the reality and take suitable measures to support the students," she says.

Parvathy feels that sensitising the children is important. "It is not mandatory that everyone should take the leave. Schools can take measures to help children who miss classes to catch up," she suggests.

'Nothing to hide'

She further notes that many children start menstruating as early as in Class IV these days. "Menstrual leave can help these children. This move can sensitise an entire generation. There is no need to hide anything or attach a stigma to it," she asserts.

Fessy Louis, president of the Kerala Federation of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, observes that some children undergo extreme difficulties during periods and the benefit of the leave should be extended to them. Those experiencing milder discomfort should be offered requisite facilities, he adds. However, he also cautions about the possibility of the leave facility getting misused.

"The decision needs to be properly implemented. The facility needs to be extended to those who have a medical condition," he suggests.

Poornima Narayan, a former member of the Kerala Gender Council, while welcoming the decision, hopes that there will be more discussions on menstrual health and related aspects like premenstrual syndrome, which affects women. "There is nothing to hide or be ashamed of menstruation. Let there be more awareness on the topic," she proposes.

While Aparna and her friends feel quite relaxed over the government decision, it has also left a few women, who are active in public life, fuming.

Noorbina Rasheed, former national general se-



Let there be conversations around menstrual health and sex education. The decision to allow menstrual leave will be a game changer in dismantling the stigma surrounding the biological process

A STUDENT

cretary of Vanitha League, the women's wing of the Indian Union Muslim League, was perturbed by the decision implemented as part of the Project Menstrual Dignity of the State government.

She views it as a case which could cause privacy concerns for girls.

"While the menstrual leaves can be seen as a move to address the health issues of girls, it also carries the risk of affecting their privacy. When such a leave is recorded, there are chances that the information could become public. This could cause unnecessary psychological distress to many children," notes Noorbina in her social media handle.

R. Sreelekha, former Director General of Police, too was vocal in her criticism.

A civic representative now, Sreelekha wonders how the decision would ensure menstrual dignity for girls or even empower them. She notes on her social media page that women could carry on with life without skipping school and college despite the pain and discomfort. She also fears that making the menstruation record public could affect the privacy of students.

She feels that such policies should be implemented only after ensuring mechanisms to protect the privacy of girls.

"There is no shame attached to menstruation. It is a matter of pride for us women. Society need not know about the menstruation schedule of women. All we need to do is improve facilities for girls in educational institutions," suggests Sreelekha.

She also apprehends the possibility of girls being bullied in schools when their menstrual details go public. "It could create unnecessary conversations among the students. If a child does not take a menstrual leave, it could lead to tongues wagging," she fears.

Congress legislator Uma Thomas also shares the fear of the chances of girls being bullied on campuses in the name of menstrual leave.

"Those who experience pain and discomfort may avail themselves of the leave. But it need not be a general rule. Menstruation is a biological process, and should not be sidelined. Schools should be equipped to provide a supportive ecosystem to help the children during the period," she suggests.

Kerala is bracing for yet another social debate on menstrual health, which was once treated as a dark little secret or a taboo. One factor is indisputable though – the decision has offered comfort to many girls like Malavika and Anamika.

(*names of all schoolchildren have been changed)

ANDHRA PRADESH



A drain carrying sewage and solid waste flows into Bay of Bengal at Sagar Nagar. (Below) Polluted water and floating debris gathers at a drainage outlet before entering the sea, in Visakhapatnam. V. RAJU

Vizag's toxic stormwater drains threaten ecosystem

These drains, engineered typically to handle excess rainwater by directing it away from urban areas to prevent flooding, have been compromised, as they also transport untreated or partially treated wastewater, impacting communities and the city's coastline, reports **Paul Nicodemus**

The disturbing sight of plastic waste and other debris floating on the stagnant waters near the outfall of a stormwater drain, where it converges with the Bay of Bengal at Pedda Jalaripeta—one of Visakhapatnam's most historic fishing settlements—has become a regular view.

The image captures Visakhapatnam, also known as the City of Destiny, and its growing challenge with stormwater drains, which are designed to carry rainwater and reduce flooding. However, these drains are increasingly transporting wastewater through many parts of the city throughout the year before discharging into the sea.

The city's landscape is shaped by hills, valleys, reservoirs, wetlands and natural drainage channels that carry rainwater towards the Bay of Bengal. However, over time, many of these natural channels became part of the city's stormwater drainage network.

On World Environment Day (June 5), the condition of Visakhapatnam's *geddas* (local drainage channels) offers a glimpse into the coastal city's natural drainage systems, urban infrastructure, and environmental health, which have become increasingly intertwined.

Official records submitted before the National Green Tribunal (NGT) show that several drains continue to carry what authorities describe as "Dry Weather Flow" (DWF), wastewater generated even in the absence of rainfall. Unlike black water, which is sewage from households, DWF primarily consists of grey water collected from kitchens, bathrooms, roads and other domestic sources.

Urbanisation and sewage infrastructure

The phenomenon highlights the widening gap between urban growth and sewerage infrastructure in one of Andhra Pradesh's fastest-growing urban centres. As the city expanded, however, the sewerage infrastructure did not always keep pace. According to submissions made by the Andhra Pradesh Pollution Control Board (APPCB) and the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) before the NGT in December 2025, the city generates around 224 million litres of sewage every day (MLD). Against this, available treatment capacity stood at 179 MLD across 19 sewage treatment plants (STPs), leaving a deficit of about 45 MLD.

While 18 of the city's 41 major drains had been diverted to treatment facilities, several others continued to discharge into coastal areas, including RK Beach, Jalaripeta, Appughar, Sagar Nagar, and Rushikonda.

The challenge is particularly evident in the rapidly urbanising corridor between Madhurawada and Bheemunipatnam, where residential and commercial development has expanded faster than underground sewerage infrastructure. Several drains in this stretch continue to discharge into the sea because sewerage networks have yet to be established.

And, for residents living along the city's drainage channels and outfalls, the consequences are immediate and visible.

Impact on health and livelihood

At the Pedda Jalaripeta outfall, the drain forms a

The *gedda* overflows whenever it rains, spreading across the beach and into the sea. Along with it come all kinds of waste, including plastic, gunny bags, coconut shells, chicken waste, and even dead animals. All of us living here, including our children, are suffering from skin ailments and other health issues.

O. RAJU,
Fisherman

shallow water body before entering the sea. Plastic waste and floating debris accumulate along its edges, while the beach serves as a workspace for fishing families. The proximity between the polluted outfall and the community's daily activities underscores the extent to which the city's drainage problems are affecting livelihoods and public health.

Over 7,000 people from the fishing community reside in Pedda Jalaripeta, many of whom depend directly on the sea for their livelihoods.

"The *gedda* overflows whenever it rains, spreading across the beach and into the sea. Along with it come all kinds of waste, including plastic, gunny bags, coconut shells, chicken waste, and even dead animals. All of us living here, including our children, are suffering from skin ailments and other health issues," says O. Raju, a fisherman.

For fishing communities, pollution is not merely an environmental issue but also an economic one. "Earlier, we used to pull fish ashore, but now we pull up plastic, gunny bags, and other toxic waste," he adds.

Elsewhere in the city, overflowing drains present a different set of challenges. During periods of intense rainfall, channels clogged with solid waste often overflow onto roads and into residential areas.

"Bottlenecks and shrinking drainage channels continue to aggravate flooding in several localities," says Vivek Rathod, an Environmentalist. He argues that stormwater drains gradually became linked to wastewater disposal systems as the city expanded, creating a situation in which channels intended for rainwater now carry wastewater.

Wastewater and the city

The impact of wastewater entering stormwater drains does not end at the outfall. Monitoring conducted by the APPCB and submitted to the NGT found that wastewater quality at several coastal discharge points failed to meet prescribed standards. The Board reported exceedances in Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD) at multiple locations where wastewater entered coastal waters.

Every drain carrying wastewater to the sea becomes a pathway through which pollutants, ex-

cess nutrients, and solid waste enter marine ecosystems. During the monsoon, the volume of waste transported by drains increases significantly.

Rajendra Singh, water conservationist and founder of Jal Biradari, estimates that around 200 MLD of untreated wastewater eventually reaches the sea through various pathways. This figure, drawn from his independent assessment, is considerably higher than the official treatment deficit of 45 MLD, and likely accounts for STPs operating below rated capacity, bypasses, and informal discharge points not captured in official submissions.

"All this polluted water eventually reaches the ocean, damaging the environment and ecology," he says. Fishing communities are among the worst affected because deteriorating water quality impacts marine life and fish resources on which livelihoods depend, he explains.

The bottom line is that stormwater channels should be treated as useful public spaces rather than mere drains. If they are properly developed with a path alongside the *gedda*, children can walk to school, people can commute on foot, and the area can function like a park.

SOHAN HATANGADI
President of the Greater Visakhapatnam Citizens' Forum

Ecological diversity

The *geddas* have undergone substantial changes over the years. Many natural drainage corridors, which once functioned as earthen seasonal waterways, have been modified, narrowed, or progressively lined with concrete—first under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission and more recently through ongoing GVMC works. Continuous wastewater flows have further altered the ecological character of these channels.

Few Indian cities occupy a setting as ecologically diverse as Visakhapatnam. Rajendra Singh

describes the city as an environmentally, ecologically, and hydrologically sensitive region. "There are mountains, sea, forests, and agricultural fields. The number of such regions in India is low," he says.

Singh, who has been associated with efforts to address water pollution issues in the city for nearly a decade, says the degradation of water bodies and coastal waters warrants urgent attention. "Visakhapatnam's water bodies and the sea are being polluted at a rapid pace," he laments.

Urban planners and environmentalists argue that Visakhapatnam needs to rethink its relationship with these drainage corridors.

Sohan Hatangadi, president of the Greater Visakhapatnam Citizens' Forum (GVCF), believes *geddas* should be viewed as environmental and public assets rather than merely drains.

"The bottom line is that stormwater channels should be treated as useful public spaces rather than mere drains. If they are properly developed with a path alongside the *gedda*, children can walk to school, people can commute on foot, and the area can function like a park. In this way, the space can serve multiple purposes," he says.

He advocates treating *geddas* as 'blue-green veins' within the city and integrating them into urban planning through landscaping, ecological restoration, and pedestrian access. He also cautions against excessive concretisation.

"If you cement the entire *gedda*, the water that is supposed to seep into the ground to increase the water table will also stop. In some places, the *gedda* should be left natural because the water will seep into the ground and encourage flora and fauna," he observes.

Bollisetty Satyanarayana, an environmentalist and co-petitioner in the Andhra Pradesh High Court PIL on sewage discharge, argues that solutions need not always be large and long-term. Referring specifically to the stormwater drain that passes through MVP Colony and Lawson's Bay Colony before discharging into the sea at Pedda Jalaripeta, he contends that immediate bioremediation measures and decentralised sewage treatment facilities located along the drain could reduce pollution substantially, without waiting for major infrastructure projects to be completed.

"With a fraction of the funds, bioremediation can be used to stop the pollution. Why don't you build the STP here? Why do you want to build a pumping station here and pump it elsewhere? You can do it downstream. It is the best thing to do. A portion of the adjacent park, which is not being fully used, can also be utilised to build an STP. Everybody is interested in making a big-size project instead of identifying and implementing small solutions to the problem," he says.

Restoration and treatment

Acknowledging the growing need for better drainage systems, the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) states that a combination of drainage improvements, sewerage expansion, and wastewater interception projects is under way.

According to GVMC Chief Engineer P.V. Satyanarayana Raju, the city's road network spans approximately 2,700 km, and stormwater drains—classified as minor (300 mm to 600 mm), medium (600 mm to 2 metres) and major (above 2 metres)—are designed to run parallel to these roads. Against a theoretical requirement of 4,000 km, the city has around 3,000 km of drains, a gap of 1,000 km identified through a consultant-prepared drainage master plan.

"An Urban Flood Risk Management Project has been proposed by the Central government and is expected to receive administrative sanction shortly. Under this project, we will cover around 15 to 20 low-lying areas that are frequently inundated, including parts of Seethammadhara and KRM Colony. After sanction, we have to prepare the DPR and call for tenders. The works should be completed within two years," he said.

On wastewater entering drains, the Chief Engineer says around 20 such drains carry mixed flows into the sea and the corporation is diverting them to STPs. A pipeline is already being laid along the Beach Road from Sagar Nagar to intercept that drain and pump its flow to a treatment plant. The city currently operates five major STPs and 14 smaller treatment plants serving housing colonies.

"For that level of coverage, the existing STPs are almost adequate. There is only a shortage of about 30 to 40 MLD. To address that, we are building new STPs. We have secured projects worth ₹1,500 crore under the Urban Challenge Fund, including a ₹658 crore underground sewerage project for Madhurawada with a 20 MLD treatment plant and 450 km of network, and a ₹725 crore bulk water supply project for that area where supply is currently only 60 to 70 litres per capita per day against a standard of 150 litres," he said.

Ahead of the monsoon, GVMC undertook large-scale desilting of stormwater drains. According to the Chief Engineer, the corporation identified about 180 km of critical drains for desilting and had completed nearly 165 km so far, with the remaining stretches scheduled for completion shortly. Such works are carried out annually before the onset of the monsoon, he said, adding "GVMC is also installing screens near outfalls to trap floating waste, with sanitation staff deputed to periodically clear the accumulated material."

As Visakhapatnam expands, the challenge for policymakers is not simply to build more drains; it is to restore the distinction between stormwater and sewerage systems, expand treatment capacity, protect natural drainage corridors, and prevent wastewater from reaching the sea.

Stormwater drains were never intended to function as year-round carriers of wastewater. Yet, many now do. The consequences are visible in flood-prone neighbourhoods, fishing communities, beaches, and coastal waters.

"On World Environment Day, let the city's *geddas* offer a reminder that environmental health is shaped not only by forests, hills and coastlines, but also by the condition of the waterways that connect them," notes Rajendra Singh.

