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Spinners bowl India to a thumping win

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INSIDE



Indians rescued from tanker after U.S. missile attack

CHENNAI
Twenty-four Indian seafarers were rescued from tanker Marivex, a ship sanctioned by the U.S. for Iran links, after a U.S. missile strike off the south-eastern coast of Oman on Monday. » PAGE 14

Solar firms sue over order to buy only Indian cells

NEW DELHI
A group of solar manufacturers and developers has moved the Karnataka High Court to defer a Ministry of New and Renewable Energy rule that, from June 1, requires most new solar projects to use only made-in-India cells. » PAGE 12

20 Trinamool MPs rebel, set to back NDA

Several rebels meet Union Minister Bhupender Yadav, taking the revolt to the national capital | Barasat MP Dastidar says she remains chief whip, set to meet the Speaker for separate recognition | Mamata confidant Firhad Hakim meets the LoP Ritabrata Banerjee at the West Bengal Assembly

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

The rebellion in the Trinamool Congress reached the national capital on Monday as several of its MPs held a meeting at the residence of Union Minister and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) West Bengal observer Bhupender Yadav.



Trinamool Congress Lok Sabha members holding a meeting at the residence of Union Minister Bhupendra Yadav. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

There are 29 MPs of the Trinamool Congress in the Lok Sabha, and, according to those present at the meeting, 20 of them have come out in rebellion against party chairperson Mamata Banerjee and general secretary Abhishek Banerjee. The 20 rebel MPs plan to form a separate bloc and support the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government at the Centre.

Barasat MP Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar is emerging as the leader of the bloc. She was recently re-

moved as Trinamool chief whip in the Lok Sabha, and has started warming to the BJP. She told sources close to her that she remains the Trinamool chief whip on paper and will submit a letter with the signatures of 20 MPs to the Speaker, seeking recognition of the MPs as a separate bloc.

Changing dynamics
The development comes almost a week after nearly

60 of the 80 MLAs of the Trinamool came out in rebellion and elected a new Leader of the Opposition, Ritabrata Banerjee. He welcomed the fast-changing developments in Delhi and said that the MLAs and the MPs were guided by a common idea. Photographs emerging from the meeting showed several Trinamool parliamentarians holding a meeting at the Union Minister's resi-

Trinamool divide revives govt.'s delimitation hopes

Nistula Hebbur
NEW DELHI

The rebellion in the Trinamool Congress ranks has revived talk that the Centre is mulling a fresh delimitation Bill as early as the Monsoon Session. The pre-

vious move to redraw electoral boundaries based on 2011 Census was defeated in the Lok Sabha after failing to achieve the required two-thirds majority.

FULL REPORT ON
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dence, where West Bengal Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari was also present.

Trinamool Congress Raja Sabha member Sukhendu Sekhar Roy, who resigned from the party and the Upper House of Parliament, was also present at the meeting.

Among the 20 rebel MPs were Howrah's Prasun Banerjee, Bankura's Anup Chakraborty, Cooch Behar's Jagadish Chandra

nerjee's close aide Firhad Hakim, who recently quit as Mayor of Kolkata, met Ritabrata Banerjee at the West Bengal Assembly on Monday.

Weighing in on the political developments, Congress general secretary (communications) Jairam Ramesh posted on X: "The Union Minister of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change who looked after elections in West Bengal has spent the day poaching. This Minister's special job is to nab poachers and prevent poaching and not be one himself."

Loyalists back Mamata
Meanwhile, Ms. Banerjee's loyalists publicly defended her. Trinamool MP from Bardhaman-Durgapur Kirti Azad shared a letter on social media and claimed that Dr. Dastidar's "removal and appointment of Kalyan Banerjee as the chief whip was already informed

to the Honourable Speaker last month by our Honourable chairperson Mamata Banerjee". "The question is for how long the BJP will keep hoodwinking the people?" he said.

Krishnanagar Lok Sabha MP Mahua Moitra said the MPs who are revolting won in 2024 general elections on Trinamool tickets. "Mandate is NOT for NDA. All the greedy self-serving traitors with yellow-stained pants can please join BJP now - resign your seats & contest on BJP ticket. Let's see what big heroes you are," Ms. Moitra posted on social media.

Senior party MPs Sougata Roy, Kalyan Banerjee, Mahua Moitra, Kirti Azad, and Sudip Banerjee are among the parliamentarians who have backed the Trinamool chairperson.

MORE REPORTS ON
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Blast kills eight at Visakhapatnam steel plant

V. Kamalakar Rao
VISAKHAPATNAM

Eight workers were killed and six injured in an explosion at the Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited (RINL) steel plant in Visakhapatnam on Monday, officials said.

The blast triggered a massive fire and led to the spilling of hundreds of tonnes of molten steel, they said.

The accident occurred around 4.40 p.m. when a ladle carrying hot liquid steel exploded in the melting shop unit. The injured have sustained critical burns, sources said.

District Collector M. Abhisikhth Kishore confirmed that five regular workers and three contract workers were killed. A manager-level officer was also said to be among the victims. The deceased



Flames erupt in the steel plant after the blast and spilling of molten iron in Visakhapatnam on Monday. PTI

were not immediately identified.

A 24x7 control room has been set up at the Collectorate (phone numbers 0891-2590100 and 2590102) to coordinate with officials and relatives of the victims.

The RINL is the corporate entity of the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP). Speaking to *The Hindu*, the District Manager of 108

Ambulance Services M. Suresh stated that 10 ambulances had been deployed to the site immediately following instructions from the District Medical and Health Officer (DMHO) and Collector. "We have shifted several victims with severe burns ranging from 40% to 90% while five ambulances remain stationed at the spot to assist rescue

teams," Mr. Suresh said. Fire tenders and rescue teams were working late into the night under hazardous conditions to douse the flames and rescue the stranded workers.

Ultra-high temperature
Police officials said the molten metal was kept at an ultra-high temperature of nearly 1,600 degrees Celsius before it spilled.

The injured were identified as R. Mallikharjuna Rao, P. Srinivasa Rao, A. Appa Rao, Satyanarayana, G. Suribabu, and Paidiraju. They were rushed services to premier corporate hospitals in the city.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed grief over the mishap, and announced ex gratia of ₹2 lakh from the PM National Relief Fund (PMNRF) to the next of kin of the deceased,

and ₹50,000 to the injured.

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu expressed shock and distress over the loss of lives. In a post on X, Mr. Naidu said he had spoken with the Visakhapatnam District Collector and City Police Commissioner Shankhabrata Bagchi to coordinate a swift, multi-departmental relief operation.

Union Ministry of Heavy Industries (Steel) H.D. Kumaraswamy expressed grief and ordered an ambulance to needy. He is expected to visit the spot on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, Leader of the Opposition and YSRC president Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy condoled the deaths of workers and demanded a comprehensive, transparent inquiry into the "safety lapses".

Deadly tremor



Risky terrain: Rescuers are scouring debris in collapsed buildings in General Santos City, the Philippines, on Monday after a 7.8-magnitude earthquake struck, killing 35 people. AFP (REPORT: PAGE 14)

Israel, Iran trade strikes, warn each other against escalation

Associated Press
DUBAI

Israel and Iran traded fire on Monday in their first attacks since the U.S. struck a ceasefire with Tehran in April.

The Iranian military said hours later that it was halting offensive operations as the renewed hostilities threatened to drag West Asia back into a full-scale war, and warned that further "aggression and hostile acts" by Israel and its supporters, including in southern Lebanon, would be met with "much more severe and crushing measures than before."

Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said on Monday night that the military will continue to operate against

Will respond to further hostile acts, says Iran: Israel talks of using great force against retaliation

Hezbollah in Lebanon, warning that any Iranian strikes in retaliation for Israeli attacks on Hezbollah, the Tehran-backed militant group in Lebanon, would be "met with great force."

Iranian state media reported at least 15 people were wounded.

Fresh advisory
Meanwhile, India on Monday urged its citizens to avoid unnecessary travel to Israel and Iran and asked its nationals these countries to exercise utmost

caution and stay vigilant.

While the Embassy of India in Iran advised Indians to exit the country by available means of transport, Indian nationals in Israel have been asked by the Embassy in Tel Aviv to "remain in proximity to designated shelters" and "to familiarise themselves with the nearest protected spaces in their area of residence or work."

Earlier, U.S. President Donald Trump demanded that Israel and Iran "immediately stop 'shooting'". The flurry of attacks drove oil prices up around 4% and threatened to wreck U.S.-led efforts towards a deal to end the war.

HOUTHIS BAN ISRAELI SHIPS
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INDIA bloc decides to take its SIR complaints to CJI

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

The Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) decided to write to the Chief Justice of India, flagging concerns over the special intensive revision (SIR) and the alleged "vote loot", at a meeting held on Monday.

The bloc also demanded the immediate resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, stating that he had "presided over the betrayal of lakhs of youth who appeared for NEET and CBSE exams". It further called on the Centre to convene an all-party meeting to discuss the "current critical economic situation".

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge opened the meeting by underlining



Leaders of INDIA bloc parties address a press conference after their meeting in New Delhi on Monday. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

the Opposition's united pushback against the now-aborted delimitation Bill, adding that the alliance must build on that coordination. Former West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, whose party was defeated in the Assembly polls recently, detailed her allegations that the mandate had been stolen.

The Congress, which Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah

Janta Party, asking whether it also reflected a growing disillusionment with the Opposition.

According to sources, the DMK will also be brought on board to sign the joint letter.

'U.P. poll is crucial'

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav cautioned that after the setbacks in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, defeating the BJP in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly election early next year would be crucial. He urged the Congress to be "large-hearted" and allow dominated regional parties to take the lead wherever appropriate.

RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav echoed the criticism, saying that despite warnings about possible cross-voting by Congress MLAs

in the recent Rajya Sabha election in Bihar, no action had been taken.

CPI(M) leader John Brittas said Rahul Gandhi, as the face of the INDIA bloc, should have refrained from making unsubstantiated allegations against the Kerala government during the Assembly campaign. CPI general secretary D. Raja supported these remarks.

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Uddhav Thackeray and CPI (ML) general secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya called for a more concrete organisational structure of the alliance. Addressing this, Mr. Kharge said the bloc would meet every two months, with the next meeting scheduled in Hyderabad in August.

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IN BRIEF



Increase public participation in legislative system, says Birla

Asserting that Members of Legislative Assemblies (MLAs) are the most powerful mediums for bringing change in their constituencies through policies, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Monday said for policies and laws to be made in the interest of the country and society, it is essential to increase public participation in the legislative system. He was addressing the inaugural ceremony of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association India Region Zone-II Conference in Chandigarh. The event was also attended by Deputy Chairman of Rajya Sabha Harivansh Narayan Singh.

Ready to take dope test with CM outside H.P.: ex-PCC official

Reacting sharply to Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu's remark calling him a "drug addict", former PCC vice-president Neeraj Bharti on Monday challenged Mr. Sukhu to undergo a dope test with him outside the State. While responding to a media query on a spate of allegations Mr. Bharti made against the working style and administrative functioning of the State government while tendering his resignation recently, Mr. Sukhu said on Sunday, "It's not an issue. If a drug addict makes a statement, what does it matter? His statements should not be taken seriously." PTI

Foreigners who left India after voting in T.N. Assembly election come under scanner

Central, State law enforcement agencies have been working with EC to obtain data on foreign nationals who might have voted; investigators have also sought the Bureau of Immigration's help

S. Vijay Kumar
CHENNAI

After detecting around 40 cases of foreign nationals of Indian origin allegedly voting in the recent Tamil Nadu Assembly elections, investigators have shifted their focus to those who returned abroad shortly after the April 23 polling.

According to official sources, Central and State law-enforcement agencies are working with the Election Commission of India (EC) to obtain data on suspected foreign nationals who might have voted in the election. Investigators have sought the assistance of the Bureau of Immigration, Government of India, in identifying foreign nationals who arrived in the State ahead of the election and departed within two to three days of polling.

The authorities are also verifying social media posts and videos in which individuals claimed to have travelled to Chennai, Bengaluru, and other cities, specifically to exercise



Final call: Any decision on the validity of the votes cast by foreign nationals in the Assembly elections will have to be taken by the EC, said a senior State government official. FILE PHOTO

franchise. "It is possible to verify whether these individuals voted in the Assembly election. If they did, it would amount to cheating and violation of provisions of the Representation of the People Act, 1951. We are also examining how their names were not removed from the electoral rolls during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR). If a voter is falsely shown to be residing in India, action will be taken against those responsible for making the false declaration," a senior State go-

vernment official told *The Hindu* on Monday.

The first case of alleged illegal voting came to light in the second week of May when a couple were questioned by immigration officials at the Madurai airport while preparing to board a flight to Colombo. Questioned about the indelible ink marks on their fingers, they admitted to having voted in the election using their Electors Photo Identity Cards (EPICs). They were subsequently handed over to the Avaniapuram police.

In another case, a United Kingdom national of Indian origin was detained at the Chennai airport after admitting that he had voted in the Velachery constituency. He was handed over to the local police for further investigation.

'False declaration'

"During the SIR, family members appear to have filled the enumeration form and signed it on behalf of the foreign national. This would amount to a false declaration. Proceedings will be initiated through appropriate channels against the individuals who voted and then left the country," the official said.

Apart from prosecution for fraudulent voting, foreign nationals found to have voted in the election could face cancellation of their Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cards, the official said. He added that any decision on the validity of the votes cast by foreign nationals in the Assembly election would have to be taken by the EC.



People participating in a rally demanding NRC update before the conduct of the Census in Manipur, in Imphal on Monday. ANI

Thousands take out rally demanding NRC update in Manipur

Press Trust of India
IMPHAL

Thousands of people took out a rally demanding update of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Manipur before the conduct of the Census in the State.

Tight security

The rally, organised by 14 civil society organisations, started from Tiddim Ground and covered a distance of 5 km before concluding at Thau Ground, both in Imphal. Tight security was ensured to prevent any untoward incident.

The rallyists held placards that read 'Do not neglect Manipur' and 'No NRC update, no Census' and raised slogans de-

manding that illegal immigrants be identified and deported.

The agitators' spokesperson, Shanta Nahakpam, said, "The BJP raised the issue of illegal immigrants during election campaigns in Assam and West Bengal. Manipur, too, has several issues, including illegal immigration and border fencing." "We feel there is no desire on the part of the Centre to conduct NRC (National Register of Citizens) in Manipur. We want NRC update and subsequent delimitation of Assembly seats," she added.

Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh had in March said the State government is making all efforts to ensure a fair Census.

RS election: M.P. Cong. mulls moving legislators out of State as BJP fields candidate for third seat

Mehul Malpani
BHOPAL

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s Mahesh Kewat also entered the fray soon after Congress candidate Mee-nakshi Natarajan filed her nomination on Monday, confirming an intense contest for one of three Rajya Sabha seats going to poll on June 18.

The name of Mr. Kewat, an OBC leader from the Bundelkhand region and chairperson of the State's Fishermen Welfare Board, was announced late on Sunday after rounds of meetings of top State BJP leaders in Bhopal over the weekend and a nod from the party's national leadership.

The BJP's move pushed the Congress into alert mode with Leader of Opposition in the Assembly Umang Singhar hosting party MLAs and senior leaders over dinner at his residence and to discuss



BJP's Mahesh Kewat, accompanied by CM Mohan Yadav, filing his papers for the Rajya Sabha poll on Monday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

the election strategy. A senior party leader, present at the dinner meeting, said options such as moving the MLAs to a Congress-ruled State like Karnataka or Telangana are being considered and a report will sent to the national leadership. "Talks about moving MLAs to either Bengaluru or Hyderabad are going on as about 20 of them have said that they have received communications from the

BJP with offers," the leader said, requesting anonymity.

The three seats that are going to fall vacant from Madhya Pradesh are currently held by Union Minister George Kurien, BJP MP Sumer Singh Solanki and senior Congress leader Digvijaya Singh.

Poised to secure two seats, the BJP has around 48 MLA votes to spare, 10 short of the required mini-

mum votes for one seat – 58. The party earlier announced national general secretary Tarun Chugh and State unit secretary Rajneesh Agrawal as candidates for two seats.

The Congress currently has 62 legal votes, just enough to secure one seat. The announcement of Mr. Kewat's candidature prompted Congress leaders to accuse the BJP of trying to indulge in horse-trading while also asserting that all of its MLAs were backing Ms. Natarajan, a former Lok Sabha member considered close to party leader Rahul Gandhi.

M.P. Congress chief Jitu Patwari alleged that the BJP's stance on the women's reservation in Parliament and legislatures was "hollow". "The BJP had called a special session [of Parliament and the State Assembly] a few days ago but today when a woman has got an opportunity from the Congress, it field-

ed the third candidate despite having less than required numbers," he said after accompanying Ms. Natarajan during her nomination.

'Battle of ideology'

Ms. Natarajan, who is also Congress's Telangana in-charge, dubbed the election a fight between "Gandhian ideology and the BJP's divisive politics". "The BJP has fielded its third candidate and now this is a battle of ideology for us as well as for democratic and constitutional values. This is a fight for dignified politics. We will fight with unity and win," she said.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Mohan Yadav termed Mr. Kewat's candidature an effort to provide representation to OBC communities. Various other senior BJP leaders expressed confidence that the party will win all three seats, while denying charges of horse-trading.

One killed, 6 injured as BEST bus crashes into multiple vehicles

Snehal Mutha
MUMBAI

A motorcyclist was killed and six others were injured after an electric bus of the Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST), Mumbai's civic-run transport undertaking, rammed into several vehicles in Dadar West on Monday. The accident took place at 10.45 a.m. near Veer Kotwal Udyan when the driver lost control of the bus, an official said.

According to authorities at Sion Hospital, a man identified as Niyaz Ahmed, 28, was brought dead to the hospital. The injured have been identified as pedestrian Amit Mhatre, 41; BEST inspectors Mahesh Doiphode, 50, and Satish Waghamare, 48; bus driver Vikas Padare, 42; conductor Rajendra Pelekar, 57; and another two-wheeler rider Rishabh

Gupta, 23, who is undergoing treatment in the intensive care unit.

CCTV visuals showed the bus ramming into several two-wheelers and cars before colliding with a crane. Mr. Padare has been driving electric buses since joining wet-lease operator Evey Trans (Olectra) in March 2021, BEST said. Under the wet-lease model, private contractors own the buses and provide drivers while BEST appoints the conductors, collects ticket revenue, and controls the routes and fares.

"A four-member committee of senior officials has been formed to investigate the incident and submit a report," BEST said.

A case has been registered against the driver under Section 106 (causing death by negligence) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and he has been taken into custody, the police said.

Trinamool moves HC over LoP recognition

Senjuti Sengupta
KOLKATA

The Trinamool Congress on Monday moved the Calcutta High Court challenging the decision by West Bengal Assembly Speaker Rathindra Bose to recognise the expelled MLA Ritabrata Banerjee as the Leader of Opposition (LoP).

The party's LoP nominee, Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay, said he has signed the matter as the formal petitioner on the party's behalf. The Trinamool sought an urgent hearing in view of the scheduled commencement of the 18th West Bengal Assembly on June 18.

"The petition was mentioned before Justice Krishna Rao, which is scheduled to be heard on Thursday," said Sirsanya Bandyopadhyay, who would be representing the party in the matter.

Nearly a year on, families of AI-171 victims still searching for answers

Abhinav Deshpande
AHMEDABAD

For weeks after surviving the Air India flight AI-171 crash, Sitaben Patani kept asking about her teenage son. The answer was one her family could not muster the courage to reveal: 15-year-old Akash Patani had been killed in the air disaster that left his mother battling severe burns and hundreds of families grieving.

On the afternoon of June 12 last year, Akash had delivered lunch to his mother at her pushcart tea stall when the London-bound Boeing 787 Dreamliner crashed moments after taking off from Ahmedabad's Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport. The aircraft went down barely minutes after departure, killing 260 people, including 241 passengers and



Sureshbhai Patani, father of Akash Patani who died in the tragic Air India AI-171 crash on June 12, 2025, with his wife Sitaben Patani at his residence near the crash site in Ahmedabad. VIJAY SONE/PI

crew members and 19 people on the ground. Akash was among the ground victims. Twenty days later, his grandfather Babubhai Patani also died, family members say, unable to cope with the loss.

Sureshbhai Patani, an autorickshaw driver and Ms. Sitaben's husband, said "I learnt about their deaths only after I was discharged from Civil Hospital and ad-

mitted to a private hospital, nearly a month after the crash."

Wiping away her tears, Ms. Sitaben said not a single day had passed without her thinking about Akash. "I could not even see him one last time. My memories are frozen on June 12, when Akash was still alive. They have not moved forward since then, and I don't think they ever will,"

she said. Like the Patanis, the families of those killed aboard the aircraft and on the ground continue to struggle with grief that has become part of their everyday lives. While compensation from the airline and government has helped address immediate financial concerns, relatives say no amount of money can replace the lives lost in one of India's worst aviation tragedies.

Last conversation

Among them is Anil Ambalal Patel of Ahmedabad, who lost his son Harshit Patel (30) and daughter-in-law Pooja Patel (30) in the crash.

A former security guard who lost his wife Umadevi seven years ago, Mr. Patel said his son and daughter-in-law were his only remaining family. "The crash

shattered my life in a single moment," he said.

Recalling his last conversation with his son, Mr. Patel struggled to hold back tears. "I dropped them at the airport and returned home. Harshit video-called me after checking in and said he would call again after landing in London. Less than an hour later, I heard that the flight had crashed. My life crashed with it," he said.

In Amreli district, Gitaben Padasala sits with the weight of a loss that has upended her family. Her daughter Riddhi (25) had returned home after a two-month visit and was heading back to London to rejoin her husband when the crash occurred.

A graduate in food nutrition, Riddhi had been planning to start a business in the U.K. and eventually take her parents and young

brother there. Her future, her mother says, was built around a single ambition – to settle the entire family abroad.

"I lost my parents when I was very young, and now I have lost my daughter," Ms. Gitaben said, breaking down. "I am half dead with her death and half alive for my son, who is now studying law. Riddhi went to London with so many dreams. She wanted to take us there too," she said.

The U.S.-based Beasley Allen Law Firm, the law firm representing more than 150 victims, has alleged that the victims' families faced repeated "roadblocks" in accessing information from Air India and from representatives in the United Kingdom, saying that in several cases they had been stonewalled, leaving relatives frustrated and distressed.

Prohibitory orders imposed in Jaipur for demolition drive

The Hindu Bureau
JAIPUR

Mobile Internet services were suspended along with the imposition of prohibitory orders and deployment of a large number of police personnel here on Monday for a major anti-encroachment drive launched by the Jaipur Development Authority (JDA). The JDA has started work on a long-pending road-widening project on Nandpuri underpass in Jagatpura area.

The Internet shutdown was imposed for 24 hours as a precautionary measure to prevent the spread of rumours and inflammatory contents on social media which could disrupt law and order during the drive. The

1.5-km road stretch in the south-eastern periphery of Jaipur, running parallel to a railway line, is being expanded from its current width of 25-30 feet to 80 feet.

Illegal structures

The anti-encroachment operation will also remove large-scale unauthorised structures which are obstructing public infrastructure projects in other parts of the Rajasthan capital.

The demolition drive includes the removal of five religious structures falling within the Nandpuri road's designated boundary. The owners were earlier given time to remove the constructions voluntarily before the action was initiated.

Congress says denial of RS seat to Deve Gowda a 'humiliation'

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The nomination of M. Nag-araja to the Rajya Sabha by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) instead of fielding former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda drew ridicule from the Congress on Monday, with the party terming the move "humiliation heaped upon the JD (S) by the BJP".

"The constant humiliation heaped upon JD(S) by the BJP and its leadership, and its repeated acceptance by JD(S) State president H.D. Kumaraswamy merely sticking to a Ministerial chair at any cost is highly astonishing and eye-opening," said Congress general secretary Karnataka in-charge Randeep Singh Surjewala in a post on X. He added that the Congress and its leader Sonia Gandhi respected Mr. Gowda's status as a former Prime Minister and extended support to him in the 2020 Rajya Sabha election. "If the JD(S) has self-respect, it should walk out of the alliance with the BJP," he said.

KPCC president B.K. Hariprasad termed it an insult, accusing the BJP of using and misusing the former Prime Minister for its benefits. "The Congress helped him [Mr. Gowda] get unanimously elected to the Rajya Sabha. They [BJP] have used the name of Mr. Gowda for a long time to get Bills passed in Parliament and used him for a political advantage."

Kochi court allows ED access to documents in CMRL pay-off case

The Hindu Bureau
KOCHI

A special court for the trial of Companies Act offences in Kochi on Monday allowed the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to obtain copies of documents collected by the Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO) in connection with the money laundering case linked to the Cochin Minerals and Rutile Limited (CMRL) pay-off case.

Ernakulam Additional District and Sessions Judge V.P.M. Suresh Babu allowed a petition filed by the Enforcement Directorate seeking copies of documents gathered by the SFIO, which had investigated the alleged fictitious expenses submitted by the CMRL before the Income Tax Settlement Commission.

The Enforcement Directorate on May 27 searched the residences of former Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan in Kannur and Thiruvananthapuram as part of the probe into whether his daughter and former IT consultant T. Veena's now-defunct firm Exalogic had received sizeable monthly retainers from the CMRL, a private mining company, during the 2017-2021 period allegedly without rendering any tangible service.

The Central agency had reportedly sought 134 documents collected by the SFIO during its probe into the links between the CMRL and Ms. Veena's firm, which allegedly offered IT consultancy to the



T. Veena

Kochi-based company. The petition, filed on June 6, came up for consideration before the court on Monday. The CMRL opposed the plea stating that the documents should not be handed over to the Enforcement Directorate without hearing it.

However, the court allowed the petition after hearing submissions from the ED, SFIO, and CMRL.

'Fraudulent operations' The SFIO had informed the court that Ms. Veena had colluded with Sasidharan Kartha, Chairman and Managing Director of the CMRL, to "siphon off ₹2.78 crore from the company, misrepresenting the payments as IT consultancy fee for services that were not delivered."

She played a pivotal role in the fraudulent operations totalling ₹2.78 crore from the CMRL under the guise of IT consultancy services, it said.

The SFIO had arraigned her as the 11th accused in the final complaint filed before the Additional Sessions Court-7, Ernakulam.

Deve Gowda nearing end of six-decade-long stint in public office

Ex-PM's tenure in Rajya Sabha comes to an end on June 25; Karnataka BJP has fielded its own leader for RS polls instead of the 93-year-old

Sharath S. Srivatsa
BENGALURU

The former Prime Minister and Janata Dal (Secular) supremo, H.D. Deve Gowda, is set to end his more than six-decades-long political career in public office with his tenure as a Rajya Sabha member coming to an end on June 25.

While all eyes were on the BJP's move, the party late on Sunday night decided to nominate M. Nagara-ja from its ranks instead of the nonagenarian leader, its ally in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

With the retirement of the 93-year-old leader, known for his knowledge in agriculture and irrigation, especially the Cauvery river dispute, Parliament will now not have any former Prime Ministers as a member.

Vokkaliga politics The JD(S) was hoping that Mr. Gowda, who is respected by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, will be nominated to the Rajya Sabha. Besides, with another Vokkaliga leader D.K. Shivakumar becoming Chief Minister, it was speculated that the BJP could offer its seat to Mr. Gowda as a counterweight in the Vokkaliga politics that dominates the Old Mysuru region.

However, the BJP State



Former PM H.D. Deve Gowda has said that he will remain in active politics till his end.

Deve Gowda became 14th Chief Minister of Karnataka in 1994 and 11th Prime Minister in 1996 heading United Front

unit had insisted on fielding a party leader.

"This was not our election because we did not have the numbers. We had not asked for it either. There is no question of dis-appointment. This was not our seat," sources in the JD (S) told *The Hindu*. "We are not attaching too much importance. This is media speculation."

In the election to four Rajya Sabha seats set to be held on June 18, the Congress has the numbers to win three and the BJP one. The JD(S) with 18 legislators does not have the

numbers and was dependent on the BJP's decision.

Active till the end On multiple occasions in the past, Mr. Gowda, whose understanding of the regional caste equations are well known, has said that he would remain in active politics till his end.

The current stint had been made possible by the Congress's decision to support him in the 2020 Rajya Sabha elections that came after his defeat in Karnataka's Tumakuru Lok Sabha constituency during the 2019 election, when the JD (S) faced the election in alliance with the Congress.

Soon after the party's debacle in the 2023 Assembly elections, the JD(S) joined the NDA.

During his illustrious political career that started from being elected to the Taluk Development Board in 1960 and later to the Karnataka Legislative Assembly in 1962, Mr. Gowda became the 14th Chief Minister of Karnataka in 1994 after leading the Janata Dal to victory and the 11th Prime Minister in 1996 heading the United Front government.

He has been a six-term member of the Lok Sabha and a two-term member in the Rajya Sabha. He has been elected to the Legislative Assembly seven times.

J&K Chief Minister seeks INDIA bloc's support for Statehood

Peerzada Ashiq
SRINAGAR

J&K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Monday sought the support of members of the INDIA bloc for his efforts to restore Statehood and constitutional rights.

A National Conference (NC) spokesman said Mr. Abdullah, who attended the bloc's meeting in Delhi, asked all the participants to join his party's efforts and attend its protest march in the national capital on the first day of the upcoming Monsoon Session of Parliament. The spokesman said the CM would be writing to each of the INDIA bloc leaders in this regard.

"If Mr. Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti [of the Pe-



Omar Abdullah

oples Democratic Party] succeed in persuading the INDIA bloc to issue a joint statement supporting the restoration of Jammu and Kashmir's special constitutional status, Statehood and other political rights, it would be a significant step," said Awami Ittehad Party leader and legislator Sheikh Khurshheed.

CPI to take a call on tie-up with DMK soon: Veerapandian

The Hindu Bureau
KRISHNAGIRI

The CPI will take a decision on continuing in the DMK-led alliance at the conclusion of the party's executive and administrative committee meetings to be held this week, its State secretary M. Veerapandian said in Denkanikottai in Tamil Nadu on Monday.

He fielded queries from mediapersons on specu-

lations of his party's continuance in the DMK-led alliance on the heels of CPI(M) State secretary P. Shanmugam's saying the DMK-led Secular Progressive Alliance did not exist. Mr. Veerapandian said that was the CPI(M)'s stand, while the CPI would make an "authoritative" announcement after the executive and administrative committee meetings, scheduled from June 9 to 11.

Monsoon halt



Storm prep: Fishermen moving a fishing boat through the ramp using a pick-up van at the Vizhinjam harbour in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala on Monday. Following a heavy rain alert, fishermen in Kerala have been advised not to venture into the sea. NIRMAL HARINDRAN

Free bus travel for women in Kerala initially limited to ordinary services

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The first phase of the free travel scheme for women on Kerala State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) buses will be implemented in ordinary services. In Kerala, for the first 100 days of the scheme, women will be allowed to travel free only on ordinary buses. After this period, the State government is actively considering extending the free travel benefit to more services, including fast and superfast buses, Transport Minister C.P. John said after a meeting with Chief Minister V.D. Satheesan on Monday.

The travel concession for women, which was among the key 'Indira Gua-



If the scheme is extended to all categories of buses, the liability is estimated to rise to around ₹1,300 crore per month. H. VIBHU

rantees' promised by the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) in its Assembly election manifesto, is set to be implemented in the State from June 15.

The Finance Secretary has been tasked with studying how to compensate

the KSRTC for the revenue loss resulting from the implementation of the scheme.

Liabilities

An expert committee appointed by the transport utility had assessed that allowing free travel on high-

er-category buses, including fast passenger and long-haul services, from the beginning would cause significant practical difficulties and revenue losses. Based on this assessment, it was decided to restrict free travel to ordinary buses during the first 100 days. After studying travel patterns, the proposal to extend the benefit to other categories of buses will be considered in the second phase.

The financial liability arising from the implementation of the scheme in ordinary buses is estimated at around ₹712 crore per month. If the scheme is extended to all categories of buses, the liability is estimated to rise to around ₹1,300 crore per month.

Wild elephant tramples woman to death in Idukki

The Hindu Bureau
IDUKKI

A 36-year-old woman was trampled to death by a wild elephant at Chinnakkal, near Munnar, in Idukki on Monday. Her 11-year-old son was injured in the attack that occurred around 8 a.m.

Forest Department officials said the woman was walking her son and daughter to their school bus stop. The children are students of Classes 7 and 10 at the Chinnakkal Government High School. Due to rain and mist, the woman did not notice a female elephant and her calf and came under attack. The woman's daughter,



Human-wildlife conflict: Locals stage a protest after a woman was trampled to death on Monday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

who was walking a few metres behind, narrowly escaped. An autorickshaw driver rushed the family to a nearby hospital, where the woman was pronounced dead. The boy was shifted to the Kottayam medical college. Local people staged a protest,

demanding relocation of wild elephants and insisted that the government look after the children. The first instalment of financial aid will be handed over to the family soon. The Forest Minister has asked the officials to submit a plan for the children's welfare.

All land records will be digitised, says Naidu, distributes pattadar passbooks

The Hindu Bureau
SIDDHANTHAM

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu has announced that all land records, including Adangal, I-B, D-patta, Inam and ceiling details, will be digitised.

The Adangal contains details of the nature of land, while I-B certifies ownership of land titles, and D-patta is categorised as the government land allotted to landless for agriculture and housing purposes.

Addressing a gathering of farmers during the 'Mee Bhumi-Mee Hakku' programme at Siddhantham village in West Godavari



N. Chandrababu Naidu handing over pattadar passbook to a farmer during the 'Mee Bhumi-Mee Hakku' programme on Monday. PTI

district on Monday, Mr. Naidu said that emerging software had been adopted to ensure protection of land records data from tampering and finalise details of the pattadar passbooks.

Mr. Naidu distributed

new pattadar passbooks to farmers. "Nearly 90 lakh revenue disputes have emerged from the land resurvey exercise undertaken by the previous government, owing to changes in land records and certifying as Section

22(A) land. All the disputes have been resolved through the 'Mee Bhumi-Mee Hakku' programme over the past two years," the Chief Minister said.

Section 22 (A)

"The exclusion of 1.37 lakh acres of land from Section 22 (A) of the Indian Registration Act, 1908 has been completed, resolving the dispute over the land rights and right to transfer the ownership. These lands have been declared as 22 (A) lands during the land survey during the previous government," said Mr. Naidu.

By June, the land resurvey has been completed in 1,836 villages.

Judge recuses from hearing plea in actor rape case

The Hindu Bureau
KOCHI

Justice Jobin Sebastian of a Single Judge Bench of the Kerala High Court on Monday recused himself from hearing a petition filed by the survivor in the 2017 actor rape case. The petition sought a re-investigation into the alleged unauthorised access of the crucial memory card containing videos of the crime by some court officials. The judge reasoned that he had served as the Registrar of the district judiciary when the survivor filed a complaint in this regard on the administrative side.

24 Indian sailors rescued from ship attacked by U.S.

Marivex, sanctioned by the U.S. last December, had earlier carried Iranian oil to India; U.S. Central Command says the tanker violated the ongoing blockade by attempting to sail to an Iranian port

M. Kalyanaraman
Debayan Tewari
CHENNAI

Twenty-four Indian seafarers were rescued from tanker *Marivex*, a ship sanctioned by the U.S. for Iran links, off the south-eastern coast of Oman on Monday, after a U.S. missile strike.

The sailors sent distress messages to a Forward Seamen's Union of India (FSUI) office-bearer that the U.S. Navy had attacked the ship's engine room.

Audio messages from the seafarers to Manoj Yadav, general secretary of FSUI, received at 2 p.m. (India time) say: "This is Motor Tanker *Marivex*. Fire on board. Vessel is sinking. U.S. Navy attacked with missile our engine room. We have a hole at the bottom."

U.S. Central Command (Centcom) said in a statement that "U.S. forces disabled (attacked) an unladen oil tanker in the Gulf of Oman, June 8, after the vessel violated the ongoing blockade against Iran by attempting to sail to an Iranian port. An F/A-18 Super



Smoke rises from *Marivex*, off the coast of Oman, on Monday, after a suspected U.S. missile attack. FSUI

Hornet from USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72) fired a precision munition into the ship's engineering and steering spaces after the crew failed to comply with directions from U.S. forces. *Marivex* is no longer sailing to Iran."

The *Marivex* crew's distress message says that there was a U.S. warship nearby that was not helping, neither was there an immediate response from the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre. Video clips sent to Mr. Yadav show a seafarer from the

ship pointing to a warship nearby. The audio messages say the lifeboats on one side of the ship were also hit in the attack and the other side lifeboats were not accessible due to a fire that had broken out.

Eventually, a rescue operation evacuated the 24 Indian seafarers, who had moved to the front-end of the ship since the back-end of the vessel was on fire, through helicopter.

The seafarers are now on the Masirah Island in Oman, and safe, said Mr. Yadav. "All of them are in a

state of shock and most of them have lost their phones. They are expected to reach India in two days," he said.

'Tanker was empty'

A statement from the Centre said a "fire incident was reported today aboard the vessel *MT MARIVEX* at approximately 13:30 hours off the coast of Oman."

Earlier, at a news briefing, Oshesh Kumar Sharma, director at the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, declined to comment on the cause of the fire. "The vessel has 24 Indian seafarers, all are reported to be safe," he said. He added the tanker was empty and located away from the Strait of Hormuz.

Marivex is a ship sanctioned by the U.S. government last December, as per shipping database Equasis.

Marivex was one of the few ships that exited the Strait of Hormuz on April 9 just when the ceasefire was declared. It had then carried crude oil from Bandar Abbas in Iran to Mangalore. *Marivex* has been operating in the "conflict zone", said Mr. Yadav.

Gallantry awards conferred on security personnel; IAF pilot receives Kirti Chakra

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu on Monday conferred seven Kirti Chakras, including two posthumously, on personnel of the armed forces for displaying raw courage, unparalleled bravery and total disregard for personal safety in the line of duty.

Air Commodore Prasanth Balakrishnan Nair, an Indian Air Force pilot and Gaganyatri, was also among the recipients of the Kirti Chakra, India's second-highest peacetime gallantry award. Ms. Murmu also conferred 15 Vir Chakras, including three posthumously, and 29 Shaurya Chakras, including one posthumously, on the personnel of the defence forces, Central Armed Police Forces and State and Union Territory police forces during Phase 1 of the Defence Investiture Ceremony hosted at Rashtrapati Bhavan, the Defence Ministry said.

Lt. Commander Dilna K. A. of the Navy were among the Shaurya Chakra recipients. The President presented the gallantry award



President Droupadi Murmu confers Kirti Chakra on Group Captain Prasanth Balakrishnan Nair during a ceremony in New Delhi. PTI

to them for their bravery and devotion to duty in 'Navika Sagar Parikrama 2'.

Lt. Commander Roopa along with Lt. Commander Dilna sailed over 25,600 nautical miles through the Indian, Pacific, Atlantic and Southern Oceans.

"While navigating through the perilous Drake Passage in stormy conditions that caused the boat to heel severely, regaining control required exceptional skill and extraordinary courage. During the expedition, they also became the first Indians to reach Point Nemo, the oceanic Pole of Inaccessibility, by sailboat," reads the citation in a post on X by the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Lance Naik Meenatchi

Sundarama of Rashtriya Rifles, Naib Subedar Doleshwar Subba of Para (Special Forces), Major Arshdeep Singh of Assam Rifles and Captain Lalrinawma Sailo of Para (Special Forces) have also been conferred the Kirti Chakra, according to the list of awardees shared by the government.

Sepoy Janjal Pravin Prabhakar of the Mahar Regiment of Rashtriya Rifles and Lt. Shashank Tiwari of the Sikkim Scouts have been conferred the Kirti Chakra posthumously.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi also attended the ceremony. In a post on X, he said, "We are proud of their extraordinary courage, commitment and selfless service to the nation."

Delhi hotel fire: missing accountant surrenders

Shrimansi Kaushik
NEW DELHI

Jay Mishra, an accountant in whose name the bed-and-breakfast (B&B) licence of Flourish Stay was obtained, surrendered before the court of Judicial Magistrate Bhanu Pratap Singh on Monday and was subsequently arrested by the Delhi police in connection with the June 3 Malviya Nagar blaze that killed 22 people. He was remanded in two-day police custody.

The court extended the police custody of Lavkesh Bajaj, the building owner, by two more days. Mr. Bajaj was arrested on the day of the incident and remanded in four-day police custody, which ended on Monday.

The court also dismissed the bail application of Keshav Negi, a cook arrested on June 6, and sent him to 14-day judicial custody.

According to the police, Mr. Mishra was the "frontman" who handled the overall decision-making process. A case was registered against Mr. Mishra in 2024 under Section 223 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita for non-compliance with certain security measures, police said.

India expanded its nuclear arsenal in 2025, says SIPRI

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

India is estimated to have modestly expanded its nuclear arsenal in 2025 and continued developing new nuclear delivery systems, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Yearbook 2026 released on Monday.

The report estimated that India's nuclear stockpile had increased to around 190 warheads by early 2026. The country had around 180 such warheads in 2025.

SIPRI noted that New Delhi's ongoing nuclear modernisation programme is increasingly focused on developing longer-range weapons capable of reaching targets across China, while continuing to address security concerns arising from its long-standing rivalry with Pakistan.

The annual assessment of global armaments, disarmament and international security also highlighted the May 2025 India-Pakistan military confrontation, describing

The report estimates India's military expenditure at \$92.1 billion, an increase of 8.9% from last year

Operation Sindoor as an "unusually severe military crisis" between the two nuclear-armed neighbours.

According to SIPRI, India carried out strikes during the conflict against Pakistani air and missile bases that were likely to have nuclear-related roles. However, the institute observed that both countries took measures to prevent further escalation despite heightened tensions.

The report further noted that India and Pakistan integrated cyberoperations into active military conflict for the first time during the crisis, underscoring the evolving nature of modern warfare and deterrence in South Asia.

Beyond the nuclear domain, India retained its position as the world's fifth-largest military spender in 2025. SIPRI estimated India's military expenditure

at \$92.1 billion, an increase of 8.9% over the previous year. The country ranked behind only the United States, China, Russia and Germany in defence spending.

India also remained the world's second-largest importer of major arms during the 2021-25 period, accounting for 8.2% of global arms imports. SIPRI identified Ukraine, India, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Pakistan as the five largest arms importers, collectively accounting for 35% of global imports during the period.

Modernising arsenals

The report said all nine nuclear-armed states — the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, India, Pakistan, North Korea, and Israel — continued to modernise their arsenals and increasingly relied on nuclear weapons as instruments of national power. Globally, the nine countries possessed an estimated 12,187 nuclear warheads at the start of 2026, of which around 9,745 were held in military stockpiles for potential use.

'India, China should see each other as partners, not rivals'

Press Trust of India
BEIJING

China and India should stick to the "right strategic perception" that they are not rivals but cooperative partners and opportunities for each other's development, not threats, a top Chinese official said on Monday.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian made the remarks at a media briefing here in response to a question on Russian President Vladimir Putin's comments on Sino-India relations and Moscow's efforts to maintain close ties with both countries.

The China-India border situation is at the moment generally stable and the two sides have smooth communication, Mr. Lin said.

Beijing has been reiterating for a while that India and China should not regard each other as rivals but cooperative partners. Mr. Lin's response adds "right strategic perception" to that oft-repeated narrative.

"The two sides need to



Lin Jian, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson

view and handle the bilateral relations from a strategic height and long-term perspective, enhance mutual trust, expand cooperation, properly handle differences, and promote the sound and steady development of China-India relations," he said.

Commenting on India, China and Russia ties, Mr. Lin said all three countries are emerging economies.

"Maintaining sound relations is not only in the respective interests of the three countries but also conducive to regional and global peace, security, stability and prosperity," he said.

Defence Minister reviews HAL projects; Tejas delivery delay comes under scrutiny

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Monday reviewed the progress of major ongoing projects of Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. (HAL) at a high-level meeting held at Delhi's Kartavya Bhavan, with delays in the delivery of Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas MkIA featuring prominently in the discussions.

During the meeting, Mr. Singh directed the Chairman and Managing Director of HAL, K. Ravi, to strictly adhere to delivery schedules for all defence projects and execute programmes critical to the armed forces' modernisation plans on time.

According to senior officials, the Defence Ministry is also examining the possibility of imposing penalties on HAL for delays in the delivery of Tejas MkIA fighter aircraft to the Indian Air Force.

Officials said six GE F404 engines required for the programme had already



Rajnath Singh reviews the progress of major ongoing projects of HAL at a meeting in New Delhi on Monday. ANI

arrived in India, while nearly 18 Tejas MkIA airframes were ready. With engine supplies beginning to stabilise, authorities are hopeful that HAL will be able to deliver the aircraft by the end of the year.

The Tejas MkIA deliveries have faced repeated delays due to supply chain disruptions and delays in engine deliveries from the U.S. To accelerate production and meet future requirements, HAL has set up established three dedicated production lines — two in Bengaluru and one in Nashik.

The Tejas MkIA pro-

gramme remains a key pillar of the IAF's fighter fleet modernisation effort. The Air Force has contracted 83 aircraft under a deal worth over ₹48,000 crore.

The government has also cleared the procurement of an additional 97 aircraft, significantly expanding the programme's scale.

The review meeting comes amid growing emphasis on strengthening indigenous defence manufacturing and ensuring timely induction of domestically developed platforms into the armed forces.

Shah calls for joint action by 3 States to rejuvenate Yamuna

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday chaired a high-level review meeting regarding the rejuvenation of the Yamuna and called on Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana to work through a coordinated action plan instead of adopting "a fragmented approach". Union Ministers, Delhi Lieutenant-Governor Taranjit Singh Sandhu, Chief Minister Rekha Gupta and senior officials from all three States attended the meeting.

According to a release, Mr. Shah called for ensuring a standard ecological flow in the Yamuna across the three States. He said 129 sewage treatment plants (STPs) had been completed across Delhi, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, while 59 more would be built by 2027. He directed continuous monitoring of pollution indicators, including biochemical oxygen demand, chemical oxygen demand and total suspended solids. He also directed that the progress of the projects be reviewed every 20 days.

Nicobar project will enhance maritime security: officials

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

Under the Great Nicobar Island Development Project, India plans to invest around ₹13,000 crore to build a dual-use airport and runway for both civilian and Navy operations, said a senior official with the Ministry of Defence on Monday.

According to sources in the Ministry, the project, expected to be completed within five years, will be jointly funded by the Ministry along with the Ministry of Civil Aviation. The government views the initiative as a strategic investment aimed at strengthening maritime security, boosting regional connec-

tivity and enhancing India's presence in the Indo-Pacific region.

Four components

Elaborating about the project, the official said the project comprises four major components — an International Container Transshipment Port (ICTP), a joint-user greenfield airport and Naval Air Station, a modern township, and a power plant. Together, these projects are expected to transform Great Nicobar into a key maritime and economic hub while enhancing India's defence capabilities in the strategically significant Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

Located just 40 km from the Six Degree Channel,



The project comprises a port, airport, and power plant. AFP

one of the world's busiest sea trade routes connecting the Gulf of Aden and the Malacca Strait, Great Nicobar occupies a critical position along global shipping lanes. Government officials said the project

would reduce India's dependence on foreign transshipment ports and strengthen its ability to monitor and secure vital Sea Lanes of Communication.

The proposed greenfield airport, approved by the Union Cabinet and to be operated by the Indian Navy, is expected to significantly improve maritime domain awareness, logistics support, and rapid deployment capabilities. The airport is also expected to promote tourism, officials said. It is understood that five sites, including INS Baaz at Campbell Bay, were assessed before Galathea Bay was selected for the airport. Technical constraints, limited expansion possibilities, and environ-

mental concerns reportedly made the expansion of INS Baaz unviable.

Extensive studies

Addressing concerns over environmental impact and tribal rights, officials said the project has undergone extensive environmental assessments involving institutions such as the Zoological Survey of India, Wildlife Institute of India and the Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History. Of the island's total area, only 166.1 square kilometres have been earmarked for development, while more than 81% will continue to remain under forests, biosphere reserves, national parks and tribal conservation zones.

A dedicated conservation package worth ₹2,220 crore over 30 years has been planned to protect wildlife, including leatherback turtles, Nicobar megapodes and crocodiles, as well as coral reefs and mangrove ecosystems. The official confirmed that that no physical displacement of tribal communities is proposed and that consultations were conducted with tribal welfare authorities and representative bodies.

Besides strategic gains, the project is expected to generate over one lakh direct and indirect employment opportunities, providing a significant economic boost to the island region.

Trinamool Cong. leader arrested near Nepal border

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

A special task force of the West Bengal Police on Monday arrested Trinamool Congress leader and former candidate for the Falta Assembly seat, Jahangir Khan.

Mr. Khan, wanted in several cases, was arrested from Panitanki Bazaar (near Nepal border) by the special task force in a joint raid with a Darjeeling Police team. He will be produced before the court on Tuesday. According to the police, he had been trying to flee the country.

After allegations of electoral malpractices against the leader during polling at Falta in the second phase on April 29 surfaced, the Election Commission cancelled the poll and ordered re-polling, which was held on May 21. The BJP won the Falta seat by a margin of over one lakh votes. Mr. Khan had withdrawn from the contest at the re-poll and had been on the run since. After the change of regime, several villagers raised allegations of land grab, extortion and electoral violence against the Trinamool leader.

Hundreds of Trinamool leaders, including former MLAs, have been arrested on charges of corruption, extortion and other crimes after the BJP came to power in West Bengal.

BJP flays INDIA bloc, says it lacks 'concrete agenda'

Its constituent parties are grappling with electoral losses and internal conflict while the BJP stays focused on welfare initiatives and measures to make India a developed country, says Sambit Patra

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Bharatiya Janata Party on Monday took a dig at the Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance, claiming the coalition is in disarray as its constituent parties have been grappling with electoral losses and internal conflicts.

In contrast, the BJP remains focused on gaining public trust through welfare initiatives and measures to make India a developed country by 2047, it said.

At a press conference, BJP MP and spokesperson Sambit Patra referred to the INDIA bloc meeting to say, "Earlier, such meetings used to be held in stadiums. Now it takes place in a room at the Constitution Club."

Countering the charge of "vote theft" through the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, Mr. Patra said: "SIR happened in Tamil Nadu and Kerala as well. In Tamil Nadu, you [Congress] formed an alliance with another party to be part of the government. The DMK [Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam] is saying that it was not votes, but the alliance itself, which was stolen there."



Political potshot: INDIA parties have no presence on the ground, says BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

The Congress-led alliance formed the government in Kerala too, he added.

'Hypocrisy'

"When you lose in West Bengal, you start crying about the SIR," said Mr. Patra, accusing the alliance of hypocrisy. "In the true sense, the existence of the INDIA alliance has been stolen. Today, none of these political parties has any real presence on the ground. Their integrity has been stolen, and the public has not voted for them because of that," the BJP leader said.

Mr. Patra said following a major electoral defeat, the Trinamool Congress was being torn apart by in-

fighting. The Samajwadi Party's Akhilesh Yadav would be wondering if "he would meet the same fate as [Trinamool supremo] Mamata Banerjee", he said.

The BJP leader cited previous remarks of Opposition leaders, such as Ms. Banerjee, Aam Aadmi Party chief Arvind Kejriwal, the DMK's Udhayanidhi Stalin, the Communist Party of India (Marxist)'s Pinarayi Vijayan, and Nationalist Congress Party (SP) chief Sharad Pawar, either criticising the Congress or Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi.

"Their meeting will take place in one place, but af-

ter leaving the room they will enter a different electoral battlefield and criticise each other... The DMK has even written a letter saying that their seating arrangement [in the Lok Sabha] should be changed immediately. They cannot even sit alongside Congress members," Mr. Patra said. He also targeted the Left, stating that it now "remains only within the INDIA alliance".

'No need for meet'

Mr. Patra alleged that the INDIA bloc meeting did not have any concrete agenda, questioning its demand for an all-party meeting. "None of these political parties attended the meeting which was called the last time for women's empowerment and the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhinyam [women's reservation Act]. They do not turn up in meetings called during parliamentary sessions," he said.

Seeking to draw a contrast, Mr. Patra said the BJP also organised a meeting on Monday and it was to discuss welfare work done by the government under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the past 12 years and initiatives to make India a developed country by 2047.

Trinamool rebellion revives govt. hopes on Delimitation Bill

Nistula Hebbar
NEW DELHI

The rebellion in the Trinamool Congress ranks, especially in its parliamentary party, has revived talk that the government is likely to bring the Delimitation Bill as early as the Monsoon Session, likely to start mid-July.

The Constitution (One Hundred and Thirty First Amendment) Bill, 2026, or the Delimitation Bill, which sought to redraw electoral boundaries based on the 2011 census, was defeated in Parliament in April as it fell short of the two-thirds majority required for its passage.

The Women's Reservation Amendment Bill had been bundled up with the Delimitation Bill and that too consequently bit the dust.

New norms take over

Much has changed since then in the political scene with the Trinamool Congress's defeat in the West Bengal Assembly election and the fast disintegration of its ranks.

Just like in the case of the Shiv Sena and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) splitting and their rebel groups joining the NDA ranks, and later the Rajya Sabha MPs from the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) doing the same, government circles are sensing an oppor-



The Delimitation Bill was defeated in April after it fell short of a two-thirds majority.

tunity in the split in the Trinamool.

On Monday, Trinamool MP Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar claimed to have the support of 20 party MPs in the Lok Sabha, one more than required to split the party as per the anti-defection law.

Sources in the government have said that senior strategists of the ruling party are again in touch with various parties, including the DMK and the Samajwadi Party (SP), regarding a rethink on voting on the Bill.

Separate acts this time

Sources also said that the government will not be bundling up the Delimitation Bill and the amendments to the Women's Reservation Act this time, and may even make some revisions to the provisions of the Bills if enough parties say they are on board.

Trinamool MP quits party, resigns from Rajya Sabha

Shiv Sahay Singh
Senjuti Sengupta
KOLKATA

Senior Trinamool Congress MP Sukhendu Sekhar Roy on Monday said he has resigned from the Rajya Sabha and from the party.

Mr. Roy has been one of the dissenting voices in the Trinamool and had distanced himself from the party after its debacle in the recently concluded Assembly election in the State. The 77-year-old Trinamool leader raised several issues, including corruption in the party, and said there had been no introspection in the party after the loss.

On Monday, he became the first MP of the Trinamool to resign after the setback the party suffered in the Assembly polls. Mr. Roy's resignation brings to the fore differences amongst the Trinamool MPs. Speculation is rife that more MPs may quit.

The party is also facing a rebellion in its legislature party, with about 60 MLAs electing a new Leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly.

"The legislators also probably did not have the confidence that the party was running in the right direction. There was no forum within the party to discuss the political issues and other social issues," Mr. Roy told media.

Modi to complete 4,399 days as PM, set new record

Nistula Hebbar
NEW DELHI

As numbers go, 4,399 will not appear significant in itself except to mathematicians who may find value in the odds and evens around it, but for political observers, it marks a watershed moment in the history of post-Independence India, when Narendra Mo-

di becomes the longest continuously serving elected Prime Minister of the country.

On June 10, Mr. Modi will be crossing the record set by India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, who was elected to the post in 1952 (Nehru's previous stint, from 1947-52, was as head of an interim government since elec-

tions were yet to be institutionalised and held at the time). Later, Indira Gandhi had a fractured tenure totalling 14 years.

Mr. Modi's tenure as PM for 12 years, or 4,399 days, therefore calls for closer examination.

"Milestones do not define an epoch of transformation," Ajay Singh, former press secretary to

Presidents Ram Nath Kovind and Droupadi Murmu said.

"The milestone of surpassing the record of former Prime Minister Nehru is remarkable yet Prime Minister Modi will be remembered less for statistics and more for reimagining India's politics in the most profound way in the arena of power politics he

stands, without question, as the most consequential and transformative leader in post-Independence India," Mr. Singh said. He argues that while comparisons between Prime Ministers are redundant since they are products of a specific historical context, Mr. Modi's years at the helm of affairs have to be acknowledged as a period

during which many of the givens of Indian politics were shattered.

The National Democratic Alliance government led by Mr. Modi is marking 12 years in power this week.

The milestone of 4,399 days as Prime Minister is somehow subsumed with that, and history will likely have a better view on what his tenure has meant

Bengal govt. dissolves Kolkata civic body

Press Trust of India
KOLKATA

The West Bengal government on Monday dissolved the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) and appointed IAS officer Smita Pandey as its administrator until fresh elections follow-

ing the resignation of Mayor Firhad Hakim.

The Municipal Affairs Department's decision came after the mandatory 72-hour period following Mr. Hakim's resignation expired without the election of a successor by the Trinamool Congress party.

INDIA bloc parties close ranks around Congress, but not without caveats

NEWS ANALYSIS

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

Amid a chorus from the Samajwadi Party, the Rashtriya Janata Dal and the Left parties criticising the Congress and urging it to be more accommodating of its partners, Monday's INDIA bloc meeting marked a moment of grudging acceptance of the Congress as the central force unifying the alliance against the BJP.

Following its defeat in the West Bengal Assembly election, the Trinamool Congress, which has often challenged the Congress's leadership within the Opposition coalition, for the first time spoke of a possible alliance between the two parties for the 2029 Lok Sabha election.

In the last Lok Sabha election, despite multiple attempts by the Congress, the two parties failed to strike an alliance, with the Trinamool unwilling to concede over two seats. At Monday's meeting, former West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee warmly embraced Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi.



Show of unity: INDIA party leaders address a press meet after their meeting in New Delhi on Monday. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

The two were seen speaking at length before the meeting began. During her intervention, Ms. Banerjee spoke of allowing the Congress to "lead" as it is the only party with a national presence.

'No touch of arrogance'

The meeting itself had been convened at Ms. Banerjee's insistence, as she appeared to seek support in the wake of her party's recent setbacks. Senior Trinamool leaders said that in the course of coordinating the meeting, the Congress did not display a "touch of arrogance", a position markedly different from the Trinamool's earlier criticism.

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah described the Congress as the "glue" that

holds the INDIA bloc together. Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav and RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav, while emphasising that dominant regional players should have the first claim on seats in their respective States, also acknowledged the Congress's national reach.

Barring a brief exchange between Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, and CPI(M) leader John Brittas, the meeting was largely free of tense moments. Mr. Gandhi, for his part, struck a conciliatory note, welcoming the criticism.

Assuming a more defined leadership role, he underlined that as the largest party in the bloc, the Congress would work to unite all Opposition parties with "love and affection".

Akhilesh spreading 'fabricated lies' about Ram Temple: BJP

Mayank Kumar
LUCKNOW

A day after Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav alleged that crores of rupees were missing from donations made to the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, the Shri Ram Jannabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust general secretary Champat Rai on Monday dismissed the claims saying an internal audit was on.

The BJP hit back, accusing Mr. Yadav of spreading "fabricated lies" that will have "consequences" in the 2027 State election. "The Shri Ram Jannabhoomi Teerth Kshetra undergoes internal audits from time to time. Representatives of the trust and the State Bank of India are involved in this exercise. The audit process lasts for several days. The same work is being carried out these days. Nothing noteworthy has come to light yet," Mr. Rai said in a statement.

Mr. Yadav termed the clarification "suspicious", and said that funds going missing were a "normal thing" for the trust that they "don't even consider it 'remarkable' anymore". In a long post on X, he demanded that all trust members "be brought together to provide explanations,



Devotees through the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, U.P.

and CCTV evidence should be used to verify the data".

"Once all trustees are together, the truth will immediately emerge... It must also be clarified why it took so many hours to come up with a 40-second explanation, and why even speaking for one minute in the name of clarification is proving costly," he said.

Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak accused Mr. Yadav of making a "failed attempt" to fabricate lies by spreading rumours, and said the SP leader's thinking was "Babar-centric". He added that the SP will "suffer the consequences" and lose the 2027 polls.

On Sunday, Mr. Yadav had posted about a "very sensitive news for the devotees of Lord Ram", alleging "crores of rupees of offerings for 'Ram Temple' have been found missing."

Himanta allocates portfolios to newly inducted Ministers in Assam, retains Home Dept.

Press Trust of India
GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday allocated portfolios to 12 Ministers who were inducted into the Cabinet on June 5, taking the strength of the Council of Ministers to 17.

Assam can have a maximum of 19 Ministers, including the CM, based on the total of 126 seats in the Assembly.

The Cabinet now comprises 13 Ministers from the BJP, two from the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), and one from the Bodoland People's Front.

Mr. Sarma retained Home and Political, PWD, Power, Information and Public Relations, and departments not allotted to any other Minister. He made the announcements in a social media post.

Ranoj Pegu, who retained the Education portfolio, was also given Tribal Affairs (Plains) and Information Technology. Ashok Singhal was allocated Health and Family Welfare, and Medical Education and Research. Bimal Borah was given Cultural Affairs and Industries, Commerce and Public Enterprises, and Act East Policy Affairs. Jayanta Malla Baruah,



Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya and Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma at the swearing-in ceremony of the Ministers in Guwahati last week. ANI

Mr. Sarma's close aide, got the Finance portfolio and Environment and Forest, and Mines and Minerals.

Former Speaker Biswajit Daimary was allocated Handloom, Textiles and Sericulture; Sports and Youth Welfare; Skill, Employment and Entrepreneurship; and Indigenous, Tribal Faith and Culture. AGP's Keshab Mahanta, a Minister in the NDA government since 2016, was allocated Revenue and Disaster Management; Science, Technology and Climate Change; and General Administration.

Pijush Hazarika, a close associate of Mr. Sarma since his Congress days, was given Agriculture, Irrigation, and Parliamentary Affairs. Kaushik Rai, also a Minister in the previous go-

vernment, was given Food, Public Distribution and Consumer Affairs; Housing and Urban Affairs; and Cooperation. Krishnendu Paul was allocated Public Health Engineering, Hill Areas and Barak Valley Development portfolios.

The newcomers

Among the newcomers, Ashwini Ray Sarkar was allocated Social Justice and Empowerment, Soil Conservation, and Welfare of Minorities and Development.

Nilima Devi, elected to the Assembly for the first time, was given Animal Husbandry and Veterinary, and Fishery. Susanta Borghain, another first-time Minister, was allocated Water Resources and Judicial departments.

IN BRIEF



541 Sikh pilgrims receive visas to visit shrines in Pakistan

The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has received visas for 541 Sikh pilgrims who will travel to Pakistan to pay obeisance at historic Sikh shrines on the occasion of the martyrdom anniversary of the fifth Sikh Guru, Arjan Dev. In total, the Pakistan High Commission in New Delhi has issued 737 visas to the Indian pilgrims to participate in an annual festival to be held in Pakistan from June 10-19, according to an official statement. The issuance of visas is in line with the Government of Pakistan's commitment to fully implement the Bilateral Protocol on Visits to Religious Shrines of 1974, the statement said. PTI

President Murmu to confer Padma awards on June 23

President Droupadi Murmu will present the coveted Padma awards to noted personalities, including actors Mammooty and R. Madhavan, as well as Satish Shah, whose kin will receive it posthumously, during the second round of the civil investiture ceremony on June 23, officials said on Monday. The president has approved the conferment of 131 Padma awards this year - five Padma Vibhushans, 13 Padma Bhushans and 113 Padma Shris. At the ceremony on May 25, she had conferred two Padma Vibhushans, six Padma Bhushans and 58 Padma Shris. The remaining awards will be conferred during the second round of the ceremony in Rashtrapati Bhavan on June 23. PTI

Seven Indians killed, nine hurt in Dubai road accident

Press Trust of India
DUBAI

At least seven Indian workers were killed on Monday when a minibus collided with a truck that had stopped in the middle of a road in Dubai, officials said.

"The accident resulted in seven fatalities and nine injuries, including five serious and four moderate injuries. All injured were transported to the hospital for treatment," a senior Dubai Police official stated.

"Deeply saddened by the tragic road accident in Dubai that claimed the lives of several Indian workers," the Indian Consulate in Dubai said in a post on X. The mission said that it is working closely with local authorities to provide all possible assistance and support.

HC upholds POCSO conviction based on victim's testimony

Rizmi Lia M.
CHENNAI

The Allahabad High Court on Wednesday upheld the life imprisonment of an accused convicted under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, reaffirming that the sole testimony of a child victim is sufficient to sustain a conviction if it inspires confidence.

The court dismissed an appeal and affirmed the sentence of rigorous life imprisonment imposed on the accused for abducting and raping a seven-year-old child.

Noting that the victim's statements remained completely unwavering and were fully corroborated by medical and forensic evidence, the court held that she qualified as a "sterling witness", making her soli-

Govt. cuts subsidised LPG cylinders under Ujjwala to 4 from 9

PMUY beneficiaries use about 'four or five cylinders a year', Petroleum Ministry says; around 10.55 crore LPG connections given under scheme

Saptaparno Ghosh
NEW DELHI

Amid prevailing pressure on supplies of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) globally against the backdrop of the West Asia conflict, the Centre has reduced the number of subsidised refills available under the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) from nine to four cylinders a year.

Officials in the Petroleum Ministry, however, did not inform when the direction was formally instituted.

Under the scheme, the government provides a targeted subsidy of ₹300 a cylinder for up to nine refills in a year.

In the second increase since the onset of the conflict in West Asia, prices of domestic LPG cylinders were raised by ₹29 on Sunday, taking the cumulative increase to ₹89 across the two revisions.

At present, a 14.2-kg domestic cylinder costs ₹942 in Delhi. With the additional ₹300 subsidy under the Central scheme,



Steep hike: Prices of domestic LPG cylinders were raised by ₹29 on Sunday. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

beneficiaries pay ₹642 per cylinder.

'Indirect subsidy'

Responding to concerns over the reduction in subsidised refills, Additional Secretary in the Union Petroleum Ministry Praveen Khanooja stated, "Whether I am PMUY or a non-PMUY consumer, I am getting a cylinder, which should have cost ₹1,600 [adhering to international pricing dynamics], at ₹942 - which is also an indirect subsidy," adding, "Over and above that, PMUY consumers get ₹300 more,

therefore, they are getting ₹1,000 [subsidy on every cylinder]." He further said the average consumption among PMUY beneficiaries is "about four to five cylinders in a year".

The government said the effective price of a PMUY cylinder at ₹642 is being offered at a discount of 60% to the current international LPG prices, while a non-PMUY cylinder priced at ₹942 is available at a discount of 45%.

The PMUY scheme has provided around 10.55 crore LPG connections as of May 26 this year.

SC says pre-marital relationship is not a blot on character

Aaratrika Bhaumik
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has held that a consensual pre-marital relationship cannot, by itself, be viewed as a blemish on a person's character, observing that authorities must be "sensitive" to changing social norms.

A Bench of Justices Manoj Misra and Manmohan observed that while character verification remains an integral aspect of recruitment to disciplined forces, pre-marital relationships are common in contemporary society and cannot be used as a pretext to cast aspersions on a person's character.

"...authorities would have to be sensitive to the changing times in the context of premarital relationships. Such pre-marital relationships are common today. Moreover, physical relationship between two consenting unmarried adults cannot and should not by itself be a ground to draw an adverse impression about the character of the persons in that relationship. There is no law which prohibits two consenting unmarried adults from having a relationship of their choice," the Bench said.

The ruling concerned a police constable aspirant barred over a case linked to a failed relationship

The ruling came in a case concerning a police constable candidate whose selection was cancelled by the Telangana State Level Police Recruitment Board on account of his involvement in a criminal case arising from a failed romantic relationship. Allowing his appeal, the top court restored an earlier order of a single judge of the Telangana High Court directing his appointment and set aside a contrary judgment of a Division Bench.

The judgment further underlined that it is a well-settled principle of criminal jurisprudence that unless a charge is proved in a court of law, there is a presumption of innocence.

While recognising that employers are entitled to scrutinise the criminal antecedents of a candidate even after an acquittal, the court held that any adverse decision must rest on objective material indicating both the commission of an offence and the candidate's involvement in it.

SC seeks reply from CBSE on Saudi Arabia student's plea

Aaratrika Bhaumik
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday sought a response from the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) on a plea filed by a Class 12 student from Saudi Arabia seeking directions to the Board to declare the results of his improvement examination.

A Bench of Justices Manmohan and Vijay Bishnoi was hearing a petition filed by Class 12 student Pransu Jigarkumar Patel, who had appeared as a private candidate in Saudi Arabia for the 2026 Class 12 improvement examinations in physics, chemistry, mathematics, English, and computer science.

However, after the CBSE cancelled certain Class 12 examinations in several West Asian countries on March 15 amid the U.S.-Israel-Iran conflict, he was able to appear only for the physics and chemistry papers.

The CBSE subsequently issued a notification to facilitate the declaration of results for students affected by the cancellations.

The Board declared the results on May 13. However, Mr. Patel claims that his results were withheld and that his status was reflected as "RL (Result Later)".

Zojila Tunnel between Kashmir and Kargil to see final breakthrough

Peerzada Ashiq
SONAMARG (GANDERBAL)

India's ambitious, strategic, all-weather Zojila Tunnel in volatile seismic zone IV will witness the final breakthrough on June 9 as Union Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari will oversee the final blasting from the Kargil side. The 13.14-km-long tunnel cuts through the mighty Himalayas at an altitude of 11,578 feet and connects the Kashmir valley with Ladakh's Kargil.

Mr. Gadkari will preside over the process of final blasting of the last block, which will see the tunnel through. The tunnel is likely to allow security officials to ferry goods, machines and stocks to the high-altitude bases of Ladakh during peak winter for the first time ever in coming winters, officials said. Earlier,



The Zojila Tunnel is likely to allow security officials to ferry goods to the high-altitude bases of Ladakh during peak winter. ANI

stocks would be maintained during early autumn months to feed soldiers on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in winters.

The Zojila Tunnel bypasses the weather-dependent Zojila Pass, which is prone to landslides and shooting stones and remains closed due to snow accumulation in winters.

A spokesman of Megha

Engineering and Infrastructures Ltd. (MEIL), which started work on the tunnel in 2020, termed the final breakthrough "a defining moment". "It demonstrates the successful execution of one of India's most complex transport infrastructure works in a hostile Himalayan environment," said senior MEIL officials.

The excavation work has been completed on the world's longest single-tube bi-directional road tunnel at an altitude of over 11,500 feet. "The project will deliver the long-envisioned objective of seamless, all-weather connectivity between Kashmir and Ladakh, bringing long-term benefits in mobility, economic integration, and strategic resilience," said MEIL officials.

Reduced travel time

The tunnel cost more than ₹6,800 crore. A 7.57-metre-high horseshoe-shaped single-tube two-lane tunnel will pass under the arduous Zojila Pass between Ganderbal district in Kashmir and Drass district of Ladakh. Officials say the travel time will come down from three hours to 20 minutes between Ganderbal and Kargil.

BGB team arrives in India for talks with the BSF

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

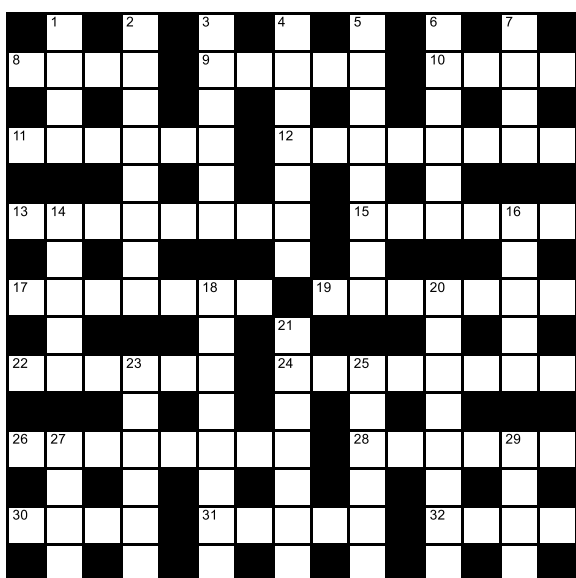
The Director-General of the Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB) arrived in Delhi on Monday to participate in the first round of the bi-annual D-G level talks with the Border Security Force (BSF).

The talks, scheduled to continue till June 11, are taking place against the backdrop of tensions between the two border guarding forces over the BSF sending undocumented Bangladeshis across the border at multiple land entry points. The practice, termed "push-in" by the neighbouring country, bypassing formal deportation procedure, is one of the key agendas of the BGB.

The BSF delegation is led by Praveen Kumar, D-G, BSF.

THE CROSSWORD+ 14815

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



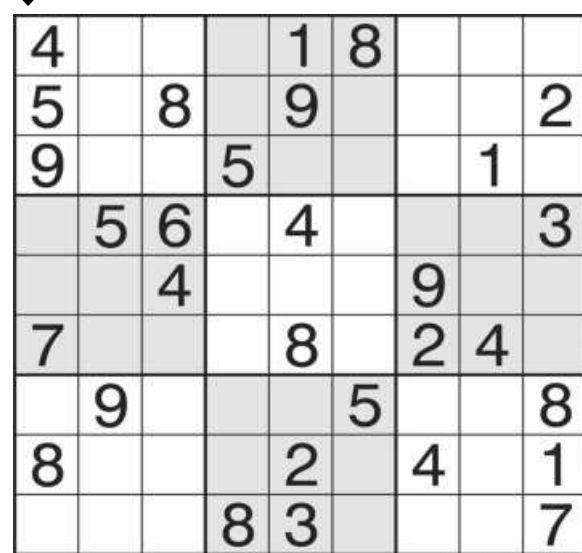
- 13 Hit wound violently in suspense story (8)
15 Get dressed, perhaps, and be Nero, fiddling... (6)
17 Most crazy to get a Chinese body part (7)
19 What a groom might get for painting once again? (3,4)
22 Marshal Omar carries word of peace (6)
24 So diesel may be converted into sources of cooking fat (8)
26 Person carrying one's moniker, but may be unrelated (8)
28 Once saucy ace (6)
30 Neurologist possesses some continental currency (4)
31 Street commonly mentioned by Perry Mason in model law (5)
32 Place to buy half-shorts with Papa (4)

Down

- 1 Moist place to store water on top of pitcher (4)
2 OK, dimes are scattered around hotel in Arab chief's territory (8)
3 Gross profit from liquor after March, in short (6)
4 King leaves baskets for son's dogs (7)
5 Criminal on island produces building material (8)
6 One may reflect... MOM or MUM looks the same in this (6)
7 Logo in the heart of designer (4)
14 Jerk's tenure in America (5)
16 Snake on road panel (5)
18 Orders, with new note on first of September (8)
20 Least expensive animal in box (8)
21 Announcement made by tennis referee at beginning of match between belligerent players (4,3)
23 Tell untruth before owl flies and go underground, perhaps (3,3)
25 General method to get elbow room (6)
27 Be next to rejected musical instrument (4)
29 Moor is back in space (4)

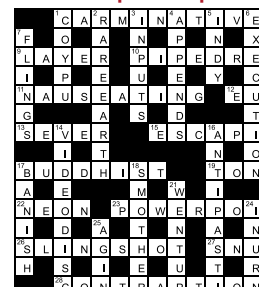
- Across
8 Music composer from Korba, Chhattisgarh (4)
9 Spanish mission that serves as a reminder of Texas Revolution in Mambalam office (5)
10 Egyptian goddess is going around South Island (4)
11 Shoot covers new season (6)
12 Getting tailless dog in south eastern corral (8)

SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★☆☆☆☆

Solution to previous puzzle



Solution to yesterday's Sudoku



FAITH

Rama, Krishna connection

Sita-Raman is a common term, but Gita-Raman is a unique term that explains that the connection between Lord Rama and Lord Krishna is the same divine entity in different incarnations, said Akkarakkani Srinidhi in a discourse. Gita means which is sung by Lord Krishna himself. That is why it is called the Bhagavad Gita. The principles Rama lived by are the same ones Krishna preached in the Gita. The selfless love of the people of Ayodhya is highlighted through the supreme beings they loved. The citizens visited various temples for the well-being of their beloved Rama. The epics describe how Rama ruled Ayodhya, with people living in peace and without suffering, and with justice. That is why his rule came to be praised as "Ramrajya". Since he did not compromise on dharma anywhere, he is called Uttama Rama. People call Rama "Mariyada Purushottam" since he adhered to dharma and sastra. Krishna is "Leela Purushottam" because of his playful way of imparting dharma.

Both the Ramayana and the Mahabharata explain what is permanent and impermanent. Rama demonstrated how one should live in one's life, while the Bhagavad Gita explains and enlightens these principles. In life, we face many challenges every day, and solutions can be found through Rama's way of living and through the Gita. The Gita teaches us to remain strong and composed like Rama during hardships. Lord Krishna summarises the teaching of the Bhagavad Gita in the last *adhyaya* (chapter) through the verse "Sava-dharman paritayajya", whoever approaches Him with complete surrender wholeheartedly will always be protected by Him in every situation.

'Amplifying' random numbers brings a breakthrough in digital security

Creating a truly unguessable password is difficult as even the best computers leave behind subtle, predictable patterns; by tapping into the power of quantum physics, scientists have now found a way to turn mostly random data into flawless security keys that are practically impossible to predict

Vasudevan Mukunth
CHENNAI

Most digital security relies today on random numbers to generate cryptographic keys. Think of a cryptographic key like a long, complex password. If that password is truly random, an attacker has to guess every possible combination. But if the 'random' process used to make that password has a pattern, the attacker can use that pattern to skip billions of guesses.

Digital security has an Achilles's heel: the numbers it uses for encryption are rarely as random as they seem. But in a study published in *Nature*, researchers at ETH Zürich have demonstrated a new solution called randomness amplification, where they used quantum physics to turn predictable bits of data into certifiably perfect randomness.

A note from the university said the researchers had effectively "generated certified perfect randomness for the first time".

Creating true randomness is actually really difficult. Most random number generators (RNGs) produce bits with a small bias. Say you're flipping a coin that lands on 'heads' 51% of the time instead of 50%. That 1% difference is a bias.

Santha-Vazirani limit

In 1986, computer science researchers Miklós Santha and Umesh Vazirani showed that a classical computer cannot upgrade a weakly random source into a perfectly random one. Put another way, if a source of random numbers is predictable even in a small way, classical post-processing alone could never eliminate it. So if you give a classical computer a biased coin, any data it produces based on that coin will remain just as biased and predictable, no matter how much the computer tries to improve on the input. This is why even high-end random number generators suffer from experimental imperfections – like heat or electronic noise – that make their outcomes slightly biased, and thus predictable to an advanced attacker.

"Even modern random number generators, which are based on quantum mechanical effects like the reflection of photons from beam splitters, are not entirely immune to such a systematic error or bias," Andreas Wallraff, one of the study's lead investigators and Laboratory for Solid-State Physics professor, said in the note.

Over the last two decades, theoretical work has suggested that quantum physics may provide a workaround. In fact, in 2012, Roger Colbeck and Renato Renner – who is one of the authors of the new study – showed in theory that quantum physics could do it.

The ETH Zürich team achieved it using a Bell test, a physics experiment designed to prove a phenomenon called quantum entanglement. Entanglement is a state where two quantum particles – like atoms or photons – become linked such that a measurement performed on one particle instantly affects the other, no matter how far apart they are.

In a Bell test, two entangled particles are separated and measured. If the particles answer in a particular highly correlated way, it will show that the answers were not secretly decided in advance. In other words, the test will prove the universe itself did not know the answer until the moment the measurement happened.

Now, in quantum physics, the act of measuring something creates new information that wasn't there before. For example, each of the two particles will be in a superposition of multiple states. When you measure one, it will collapse into one particular state – and so will the other entangled particle. This 'final' state is the new information.

Because this information is born at the exact instant of measurement, it is impossible for anyone to have known the outcome in advance. In the work, the team used this information as an additional source of randomness.

Quantum advantage

In their experiment, the team members entangled two particles, then placed them 30 m apart. This distance made sure the particles could not 'cheat' by communicating their 'final' states to each other at the speed of light.

Next, they used random biased bits to decide how to measure each particle. Then, with the measurement outcomes, they calculated the Bell violation score – a measure of how strongly the particles were entangled, and thus how clueless the universe might have been about the measurement outcomes. The score was 2.271.



Digital security has an Achilles heel: the numbers it uses for encryption are rarely as random as they seem. IMAGE CREATED WITH AI

This was above the classical limit of 2, meaning quantum physics rather than classical physics was in play. (Entanglement is a purely quantum phenomenon.)

"It is a clean instance of quantum advantage: a task quantum physics performs that classical physics provably cannot," Marin Ivezic, founder of research-driven consulting firm Applied Quantum, wrote on his site.

However, the highest score quantum physics allows is 2.82. And the closer an experiment gets to this value, the stronger the evidence that the particles are behaving according to quantum physics alone rather than also being influenced by bias. In a lab, stray heat, microscopic timing errors, and other subtle factors can create noise that biases the particles in small ways. And an attacker who understands the specific noise in a setup might notice that when the system glitches, it tends to produce a '1' more often than a '0', and use that to their advantage.

The researchers now had two resources: the original random biased bits and the new outcomes from the Bell test. They combined both using a mathematical tool called a two-source extractor. Its purpose is to blend two independent strings of data. Independent means knowing anything about String 1 must reveal nothing about String 2, and vice versa.

The extractor is designed so that if an attacker has a slight advantage in predicting String 1 and a slight advantage in predicting String 2, they have zero advantage in predicting the combination. The extractor achieves this by cancelling the strings' individual biases out as long as they are independent.

In their tests, the researchers worked with 5.3 billion random biased bits and 2.6 billion bits of information from the measurements.

They combined them in 1.3 billion trials, which they ran at 50,000 times per second over nine hours. At the end of each trial, the extractor output was 45 million bits – all purely random. The rest got pruned away because they were biased information or noise.

"The resulting sequence of zeros and ones is now really perfectly random, and we can even certify that," Prof. Renner, a professor at the Institute for Theoretical Physics at ETH Zürich, said in the note. The certificate is the Bell test score.

"The technical improvements allowed us, for the first time, to create random numbers that will remain perfectly random for all eternity – no matter what

In quantum physics, the act of measuring something creates new information that wasn't there before; because this information is born at the exact instant of measurement, it is impossible for anyone to have known the outcome in advance, becoming an additional source of randomness

analytical methods are used to assess their randomness," Prof. Renner added.

The team also said their protocol to generate purely random numbers is device-independent – a gold standard in security that means even if you don't trust the person who built the hardware, even if you don't fully understand how the machine works, you can trust the output to be random.

In physics, it is mathematically impossible for a classical theory to score higher than 2 on a Bell test. By scoring 2.271 on the test, then, the researchers' setup proved it was producing random quantum information.

That said, according to the team's security analysis, the protocol has a failure probability of one in a trillion, similar to flipping a coin and getting 'heads' 40 times in a row. This is because of the number of tests, 1.3 billion. If they had conducted several billion more, the researchers may have reduced the failure rate to one in a quadrillion or quintillion. It is mathematically impossible to reach 100%.

In fact, the researchers had chosen one in a trillion as their finish line. And to reach that level of certainty with a score of 2.271, they had to discard a large amount of data in the end. If their score had been higher, they could have reached the same failure rate while keeping much more of the data.

While one in a trillion suffices for practical applications, the experiment's apparatus can't yet replace conventional random-number generators. First, it is complex and resource-intensive. Its randomness output is modest compared to commercial systems: around 1,400 bits per second versus 1 billion bits per second. It is also information-wise inefficient in that for every 119 "almost perfectly random" bits it consumed, it produced 1 "certified random" bit – whereas commercial generators produce a very large number of "almost perfectly random" bits from just one "somewhat random" bit.

But while the new protocol is slower

and less efficient, it can produce randomness of a higher quality. That is, the work establishes that randomness can be amplified in lab conditions, that too in a device-independent way. It also proves the Santha-Vazirani limit can be broken by quantum physics.

Beacon of randomness

"My understanding is that the main advance here is not device-independent random-number generation *per se*. That has already been demonstrated using ... Bell tests," Urbasi Sinha, head of the Quantum Information and Computing lab at the Raman Research Institute, Bengaluru, told *The Hindu*. "The new element is the experimental demonstration of device-independent randomness amplification: starting with a weak, imperfect source of randomness and using quantum correlations to certify output bits that are unbiased under the stated model."

"This is significant because practical quantum random-number generators are never ideal, and in our own work on QRNGs and semi-device-independent certification, we have also emphasised that the real issue is not whether a bit string passes statistical tests but whether its unpredictability can be certified from clearly stated physical assumptions," she added.

"The important caveat is that the guarantee here is conditional on the Santha-Vazirani weak-source model, the claimed bias bound on the input randomness, the... Bell-test implementation, and the validity of the extractor/security analysis."

The researchers proposed one application: a public randomness beacon – a service that broadcasts certified random bits for uses ranging from financial transactions and blockchain protocols to military encryption. The U.S. National Institute of Standards and Technology already runs a service where it releases 512 random bits every 60 seconds on its website. They are used in lotteries, to assign juries, to sample voting machines, and for research.

That said, Mr. Ivezic cautioned in his write-up that while certifiable randomness could help security today, it will not help protect encrypted information against attacks by future quantum computers.

"Better randomness was never the answer to that problem," he wrote; "migrating to post-quantum algorithms is." India recently took its very first steps on this front. (mukunth.v@thehindu.co.in)



Mustard is the most vital crop to meet India's deficit of edible oils. FILE PHOTO

New mustard hybrids need diverse farming plans

Vasudevan Mukunth

In the 2026-27 rabi sowing season, from October to April, Indian farmers are set to begin the wide-scale cultivation of imidazolinone-resistant (IMI-resistant) mustard hybrids. These hybrids are designed to overcome a parasitic weed called Orobanche, a major hurdle in oilseed production.

India has long grappled with an edible oils deficit. In 2024-25, the country imported around 16 million tonnes at about ₹1.6 lakh crore. Mustard is the most vital oilseed crop to meet this demand, especially in the arid environments of North India. However, its yields have been suppressed throughout the year by Orobanche, a destructive root parasite that attaches to the mustard plant and drains it of water and nutrients. (It has more recently been called Phelipanche.)

The new IMI-resistant hybrids are a technological solution to this problem. Unlike genetically modified (GM) crops, these hybrids were developed in a process called mutation breeding – where scientists breed crops to preserve certain natural mutations. The process is based on an enzyme called acetolactate synthase (ALS), which is essential for plant growth. Normal mustard plants are killed by IMI herbicides because the herbicides inhibit ALS.

In the new IMI-resistant hybrids, a single change in the plant's DNA rendered the ALS enzyme resistant to the herbicide, freeing farmers to spray IMI herbicides directly over the field, killing only the weeds. This strategy is particularly effective against Orobanche because, as the herbicide moves through the soil and the plant, it strikes the parasite where manual weeding can't reach.

Farmers have welcomed these hybrids because they don't increase the demand for labour exactly when it might be unavailable, especially in the narrow window when weeding is necessary, and the research community because it protects oilseeds.

However, some experts have urged caution over their long-term use. In a commentary recently published in the journal *Current Science*, Deepak Pental, a leading geneticist at the University of Delhi, acknowledged the immediate benefits but also said the technology must be managed with care to prevent the weeds from evolving their own resistance.

Prof. Pental explained that if farmers rely on only one type of herbicide year after year, the "strong directional selection" will lead to "the emergence of resistant or less susceptible weed populations, the erosion of herbicide efficacy, and ultimately the strategic failure of the production system built around that chemistry".

To that end, he wrote that the introduction of these new crops should not be viewed as a simple trade-off, where chemicals merely replace manual labour, but as a "challenge" that requires a variety of weed-control methods. Specifically, for the technology to remain viable for more than a few years, it must be part of a broader, more diverse farming strategy that includes rotating crops, using different types of herbicides with various modes of action, and continuing to use manual weeding to remove any weeds that survive the chemical spray. "A single herbicide mode of action cannot be the foundation of a sustainable weed management strategy in any agriculture," Prof. Pental wrote.

As India rolls out IMI-resistant mustard this season, the new challenge for the agricultural enterprise will be to ensure these powerful new tools become part of a "durable, and evolutionarily informed" programme rather than a quick fix.

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Unity in diversity

INDIA bloc is more divided than before, allowing the BJP to push ahead

Twenty-three Opposition parties aligned under the banner of the INDIA bloc met in the national capital on Monday, against the backdrop of countrywide concerns related to economic distress, inflation and the chaos in the educational sector. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, Leader of the Opposition (Lok Sabha) Rahul Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav and the Trinamool Congress (TMC)'s Mamata Banerjee were among those who attended. Mr. Kharge announced five key decisions at the close of the meeting. The bloc resolved to write to the Chief Justice of India over concerns of electoral fraud and vote manipulation; demanded the immediate resignation of the Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan; called upon the central government to convene an all-party meeting to address the deepening economic crisis, farm distress and price rise; agreed to hold coordination meetings every two months, with the next one scheduled in Hyderabad in August; and committed to daily parliamentary coordination during sessions. The decisions signal a collective resolve to press the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on governance failures, particularly in the areas of economy and education, and to hold together an institutional framework for Opposition coordination.

The meeting followed evident fissures within the alliance that surfaced during the recent round of Assembly elections, in which constituent parties found themselves on opposing sides in several States. The shadow of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK)'s departure loomed large. The DMK, once the INDIA bloc's most powerful southern anchor, stayed away entirely, having formally announced its boycott on June 4. The decision stemmed from a bitter fallout following the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections, where the Congress cut its long-standing ties with the DMK to join a coalition government led by actor-turned-politician C. Joseph Vijay's Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam. The DMK's future plans *vis-à-vis* the Opposition remain subject to considerable speculation. The Aam Aadmi Party too chose to stay away, having formally declared that it was no longer part of the bloc. The TMC, yet another large constituent, is facing severe internal challenges after its electoral defeat in Bengal. The Left-Congress relationship too has soured, with both sides trading accusations of being ineffective in combatting communalism, or even worse, complicit in it. Taken together, these absences and tensions expose how fragile the coalition can be in a moment of crisis, and how deep the structural conflicts of interest run among its partners. That said, there appears to be a broad, if reluctant, consensus among the participants on two overriding imperatives: that checkmating the BJP remains essential to the political survival of each constituent party and to the health of Indian democracy, and that the Congress, for all its deficiencies and contradictions, remains the unavoidable pivot of any credible national, secular and progressive formation in India.

Strategic afterthought

The government must be transparent with the Nicobar project

For a project so often invoked as a matter of national security strategy, the ballooning Great Nicobar Island development, now estimated to be at ₹91,000 crore, rests on a remarkably thin strategic record. The Centre has long cited the "strategic" character of its centrepiece – a transshipment port at Galathea Bay – to withhold information on its environmental clearances. Yet, the Public Investment Board (PIB), a Finance Ministry body, found in August 2024 that the port "lacked strategic objectives". That label arrived only afterwards, from the Ministry of Defence and seems less like a founding rationale and more of an afterthought, retrofitted to a balance sheet. Both the PIB and the Public-Private Partnership Appraisal Committee (PPPAC) cleared the proposal, yet the PPPAC refused ₹12,230 crore in Viability Gap Funding, telling the Ports Ministry to find the money within its own budget – an unusual rebuke for a venture sold as nationally vital. If the port cannot stand on commercial returns, and if its real purpose is military, the case for a commercial transshipment hub dissolves.

Great Nicobar sits at the southern tip of the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago, wrapped in tropical rainforest and ringed by reefs of rare ecological value. The project – port, international airport, power plant and township – would clear vast tracts of that forest, much of it primary, and disturb the nesting beaches of the leatherback turtle and the habitat of the endemic Nicobar megapode. Scientists who have studied the island warn that the loss would be irreversible, and that no afforestation elsewhere can replace what is felled here. The island's indigenous inhabitants have objections of their own, running alongside the ecological ones but not reducible to them. Tribal councils have said that consent was secured without full disclosure, and asked that ancestral land and the resettlement promised after the 2004 tsunami not be overridden by the project. Their criticism is not a refusal of all development. The quarrel is with scale, secrecy and sequence – a project conceived at a magnitude the island cannot absorb. The remedy is transparency. The Centre should release the High-Powered Committee report in full, account openly for the true cost to the public exchequer, and weigh it against an environmental loss that the exchequer can never reimburse. A project of this scale owes the country at least that much.

The judgment of the Supreme Court of India, delivered on May 27, 2026, on the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, has thrown up many disturbing questions about the powers, the role and the conduct of the Election Commission of India (ECI) in the context of the exercise of its powers in the preparation and revision of electoral rolls.

Although this case is related to the operationalisation of the SIR in Bihar, the issues dealt with by the Court and its findings have far-reaching implications for the right of Indian citizens to be included in electoral rolls. In its 124-page judgment, the Court dealt with all the important points raised by the petitioners against the SIR but refused to concede even a single one of them. On the other hand, the Court accepted all the arguments made by the ECI and further elucidated them.

Revisiting electoral roll revision

When the SIR was begun in Bihar just a few months before the Assembly election in Bihar, in 2025, serious reservations were expressed about the advisability of undertaking such a comprehensive and intensive revision of the electoral rolls in such haste. Apart from the inexplicably compressed timeline for completing the intensive revision of the electoral rolls, serious questions were raised about the statutory backing for such an exercise. There have been a number of articles in this daily highlighting the ECI's deviations from statutory provisions in the implementation of the SIR. So, in light of the Court's judgment upholding the ECI's actions and methods, it is useful to revisit the statutory and constitutional provisions governing electoral roll preparation and revision and assess the judgment accordingly.

Article 325 of the Constitution declares that there shall be one general electoral roll for every territorial constituency in the country and that no person shall be ineligible for inclusion in such a roll solely on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or any of them. Article 326 says that the elections to the Lok Sabha and the Assemblies shall be on the basis of adult suffrage – which means every citizen who is 18 years and above is entitled to be registered as a voter at any such election. The other condition for inclusion in the roll is that he should not be disqualified under the Constitution or any law. Article 327 empowers Parliament to make laws for dealing with all aspects of elections including the preparation of electoral rolls. Article 324 confers the power to prepare the rolls and conduct the elections on the ECI. Preparation of electoral rolls which



P.D.T. Achary

Former Secretary General, Lok Sabha

includes revision is governed by the Representation of the People (RP) Act, 1950 and the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960. Section 21 of the RP Act deals with preparation and revision of the electoral rolls. Sections 21(2) and (3) which contained the framework of revision say in (a)(i)/(ii), electoral roll shall be revised before each general election to the Lok Sabha or the Assembly and before each by-election, (b) the roll shall be revised in any year if directed by the ECI; and Section 21(3) says that the ECI may do a special revision of the roll for any constituency or part of a constituency at any time after recording the reasons for such revision. Rule 25 of the Registration of Electors Rules says that the revision of the rolls under Section 21 (2) of the Act before the general election or by-election can be summary or intensive, which clearly implies that such revision just before the general election can be only summary considering the elaborate scheme of an intensive revision under the rules.

The framework

The question, then, is: under which category of revision does the SIR fall? The Court says that it is traceable to Section 21(3) which deals with a special revision in any constituency or a part of a constituency. But the clause does not permit an intensive revision but only a special revision. SIR is a special and intensive revision of the rolls. Intensive revision according to Rule 25 is done only under Section 21(2) and not 21(3) of the Act as the judgment claims. A careful reading of Sections 21(2) and (3) of the RP Act 1950 and Rule 25 of the Registration of Electors Rules 1960 would reveal that an intensive revision of the roll in a State can be undertaken only when the general election or by-election is not due. It is obvious that an intensive revision is not contemplated by the law when the elections are due because of the comprehensive nature of the revision which requires a much longer time to complete.

Now, as regards the special revision under Section 21(3), it is actually meant to be done in a constituency or a part of a constituency and not the whole State or the country. The claim made in the judgment that "any constituency" means all constituencies does not square with the context. The word "any" may mean 'all' in some contexts whereas it would mean 'single' in some other context. The words "or a part of constituency" following "any constituency" make it clear that the special revision is meant to be done only in a constituency or part of it. When intensive revision is clearly provided in Section 21(2) there is no need to provide the same in Section 21(3). Special revision may become

The top court's verdict raises constitutional concerns and casts a shadow over past electoral rolls

The Oman CEPA, a new gateway for India's exports

India and Oman share one of the oldest trading relationships, with commercial and maritime links dating back thousands of years. From the movement of spices, textiles and frankincense to enduring people-to-people ties, trade has long been a cornerstone of this partnership. The India-Oman Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which came into force on June 1, 2026, reaffirms and strengthens this historic relationship by providing a modern framework to deepen trade, investment and economic cooperation for the future.

India is amongst the top suppliers for Oman and bilateral trade has grown from \$8.94 billion in FY2023-24 to \$11.18 billion in FY2025-26, reflecting the growing complementarities between the two economies.

An expansion of India's trade ties

The CEPA comes at a time when India is actively diversifying its trade partnerships and integrating more deeply with global value chains. Following agreements with the United Arab Emirates, Australia, the European Free Trade Association, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and the European Union, the Oman CEPA further strengthens India's presence in a region that is central to its energy security, trade and strategic interests.

The CEPA offers significant opportunities for Indian exporters. Oman has offered duty-free access on 98.08% of its tariff lines, covering 99.38% of India's exports by value. Before the agreement, only 15.33% of India's exports entered Oman at zero duty under the Most Favoured Nation regime. The CEPA, therefore, provides an immediate competitiveness boost across a broad range of sectors. In textiles and apparel, India already commands a 43% share of Oman's woven apparel imports and 31% of knitted apparel imports. The removal of the existing 5% tariff will strengthen the competitiveness of Indian manufacturers against China, which is the other dominant supplier in this market. In the case of chemicals, India already supplies nearly 39% of Oman's inorganic chemical imports, making it



Anant Goenka

President, The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI)

one of the leading players in the market. Tariff free access will only amplify this further.

Likewise, engineering goods will also benefit. Oman imports over \$3.7 billion worth of mechanical machinery and \$3.3 billion worth of automobiles annually, where India's market share is only 5% and 2%, respectively. Preferential market access under the CEPA can help Indian exports of engineering goods expand significantly and deepen their presence in Oman's infrastructure, construction and industrial sectors.

In pharmaceuticals, where India holds around 10% market share, the agreement's value lies not in tariff reductions but in regulatory facilitation. Products approved by leading international regulators will benefit from fast-tracked approvals, reducing compliance costs and accelerating market entry. As Oman's pharmaceutical market continues to expand, Indian companies will be well-positioned to capture a larger share. Duty-free access for products such as meat, eggs, honey, butter and processed foods will further strengthen India's already strong position. At the same time, sensitive sectors such as dairy, cereals, edible oils and several agricultural commodities have been kept outside tariff concessions, ensuring that domestic producers remain protected.

Streamlining procedures

Significant trade facilitation measures have been introduced. Oman will accept certificates issued by India's Export Inspection Council (EIC), eliminating duplicative testing and inspections, while also recognising India's organic (NPOP) and halal certification systems. There are dedicated sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) and technical barriers to trade (TBT) provisions, which will enhance regulatory transparency and cooperation, and streamlined customs clearance, including fast-track processing for perishables, which will reduce costs and improve export efficiency.

Another forward-looking aspect of the CEPA is its strong focus on services and professional mobility. Bilateral services trade stood at \$863

necessary in some constituencies because of, say, the large-scale influx of people into that area from a neighbouring area. Special revision is done in a manner fixed by the ECI whereas intensive revision under Section 21(2) needs to be done as per the prescribed procedure.

The analysis above would show that the entire SIR exercise is being done under a wrong provision of law. In the States of Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and West Bengal, the SIR was done a few months before the Assembly election. Under Section 21(2)(a) read with Rules 25 only a summary revision was possible before the Assembly election. But the ECI went ahead with the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) in clear deviation from the scheme of the law, resulting in the deletion of millions of voters from the electoral rolls without providing them any effective redress.

The issue of citizenship

The judgment grants great freedom to the ECI in the matter of determining the documents to prove citizenship. The crucial point is whether the ECI can determine what documents are required to prove citizenship. This is a function to be performed by the Home Ministry as it administers the law on citizenship. The ECI's role is to verify citizen-related documents. What actually happened was that the ECI announced a list of documents and asked the voters to produce them. The ECI was simply usurping the role of the Union Home Ministry. It is extremely surprising that during the hearing the Supreme Court did not ask the Union Home Ministry to file an affidavit containing the list of documents required to prove citizenship. The Court has now conceded the ECI's authority to determine the question of citizenship for the purpose of inclusion in or exclusion from the electoral rolls, while leaving the larger question of citizenship to the competent authority, namely the Ministry of Home Affairs. The Ministry of Home Affairs will now have to decide the cases of millions of Indian citizens who will never be able to vote in their lifetime and who will face numerous disabilities arising from the denial of citizenship, albeit on a tentative basis.

The Court has hitherto applauded the work done all these years by the ECI since its establishment. But the SIR judgment speaks about the "cumulative inaccuracies in the voters list" and the "structural deficiencies that pervaded the entire roll" in the past. It is a damning indictment of the preparation and the revision of electoral rolls done by the ECI in the past. The judgment need not have gone to such an extent in order to justify the SIR of 2025.

million in 2024, with India enjoying a surplus of nearly \$447 million. Yet, India's share in Oman's global services imports remains just over 5%, indicating substantial untapped potential.

Oman has undertaken binding commitments covering professionals in sectors such as accounting, engineering, information technology, health care, education and consulting. Oman also raises the quotas for intra-corporate transferees, facilitating greater mobility of Indian professionals and specialists. Provisions relating to AYUSH and traditional medicine further create opportunities for Indian health care and wellness services in the Gulf.

Strategic location advantage

Beyond trade statistics, the CEPA has a larger strategic significance. Oman occupies a unique position at the crossroads of the Gulf, the Indian Ocean and East Africa. Its ports at Sohar, Duqm and Salalah are emerging as major logistics and industrial hubs. For Indian businesses, Oman can serve not only as a destination market but also as a gateway to the wider Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region and East African economies.

The India-Oman CEPA once again demonstrates the evolution of India's trade policy from tariff negotiations to comprehensive economic partnerships encompassing goods, services, investment, mobility and regulatory cooperation. Its benefits will extend from textile clusters in Tamil Nadu and the gems and jewellery industry in Gujarat to engineering hubs in Maharashtra and Punjab, and from pharmaceutical manufacturers in Telangana to seafood exporters in Andhra Pradesh and Kerala.

The real test will now lie in implementation and utilisation. If businesses actively leverage the opportunities created by the agreement, the CEPA can significantly expand India's export footprint, strengthen economic integration with the Gulf, and support the country's broader ambition of becoming a globally competitive manufacturing and services powerhouse. For India, the agreement opens not only the Omani market but also a broader gateway to the Gulf and beyond.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Nepal's claim

The reports, "Not seeking mediation on border dispute: Nepal FM" (June 8), "No role for third parties in bilateral matters between India, Nepal: Centre" (June 3), and "Nepal PM sparks row, says his country has encroached upon Indian territory" (June 1), are interesting points of contrast. But the candid

admission by Nepal Prime Minister Balendra Shah, of Nepal's encroachment on Indian territory, should shock New Delhi. Did India have any inkling of such an encroachment? The Ministry of External Affairs should take cognisance of the issue. In all fairness, the Nepal Prime Minister should volunteer to return the encroached territory to

India as a gesture of goodwill.

C.V. Aravind,
Bengaluru

The difference now

Today's youth engage with public issues differently from previous generations. The recent Gen Z mobilisation over educational policies and systemic failures has shown

how a discussion or idea on social media can rapidly evolve into large-scale protests. This growing participation reflects a generation that values transparency and accountability in governance and seeks a greater voice in shaping its future. Constructive engagement with their concerns would be far more

effective than dismissing their voices.

Navaneeth S. Kumar,
Kollam, Kerala

Border crossings

When I visited the Petrapole-Benapole border in West Bengal in 2002, it was striking to see hundreds of people carrying headloads of rice across the border under the nose of

the BSF. In these circumstances, one wonders whether the 'concerns' over the formation of a High-Level Committee on Demographic Change amount to intellectual overreaction.

K. Chellappan,
Chennai

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

The trust deficit in India-Bangladesh ties

More than hundred days have passed since the Tarique Rahman government took charge in Bangladesh. However, contrary to early expectations from his leadership, India-Bangladesh relations have remained more or less the same as in the difficult months of the interim government.



Kallol Bhattacharjee

Actions, not rhetoric

India reached out twice before Mr. Rahman became the Bangladesh Prime Minister. The first outreach was by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar who visited Dhaka on December 31, 2025 to condole the passing of Mr. Rahman's mother, former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia. The second time was through Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, who carried Prime Minister Narendra Modi's invitation letter, and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla who on February 17 participated in the swearing-in ceremony of Mr. Rahman. But sources in the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) say such gestures in themselves are insufficient. An influential segment within the BNP feel that as a goodwill gesture towards the new government, India should have reversed some of the retributory steps that it had taken during the interim government's rule under Muhammad Yunus. These steps included the restarting of transshipments for goods from Bangladesh, full restoration of visa services including business and medical visas, and stopping the restrictive market access for Bangladeshi goods. None of these measures have been implemented so far, as per Dhaka. They argue that, by not reversing these decisions, India has not delivered any advance incentives to Mr. Rahman who will have to engage with the Jamaat-e-Islami and several anti-India student outfits before normalising ties with India.

Bangladeshi diplomats have pointed out that Dhaka expected less rhetoric on illegal immigration, and more focus on issues such as the renewal of the 1996 Ganga Water Treaty

On its part, the BNP's veteran leaders have tried to smoothen the relationship by creating greater public acceptability of the position

that the presence of the deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in India will not hold ties back, a departure from the hardline stance that the interim government had taken. Here also, Dhaka feels that such attempts have not found appreciation from the Indian side.

As proof they refer to the aggressive use of 'illegal immigration' in official communication from Delhi following the victory of the Bharatiya Janata Party in West Bengal and Assam. Bangladeshi diplomats have pointed out that Dhaka expected less rhetoric on sensitive issues such as illegal immigration, and more focus on issues such as visa restoration and the renewal of the 1996 Ganga Water Treaty.

Dhaka had sent Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman to Delhi on April 7-8 for a brief visit, to test the waters, where he met National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and Mr. Jaishankar. However, the election campaign in Assam and West Bengal around Bangladesh-related issues and a flurry of interviews by exiled PM Sheikh Hasina have displayed that Mr. Rahman's BNP, despite winning a landslide majority in Bangladesh, has not managed to impress India. While a senior diplomat in Dhaka said that Bangladesh was assured that the language around State elections would not reflect New Delhi's foreign policy, the Ministry of External Affairs' strident position on illegal immigration have generated 'a sense of betrayal' in Dhaka's secretariat.

According to reports, Mr. Rahman, sensing that the window for restoration of ties with India is not opening as per expectations, is in the final stages of considering visits to Malaysia and China that are likely to take place in the last week of June.

Bangladesh's dilemma

This turn to China however cannot hide the fact that it is incumbent on Bangladesh, as much as it is on India, to repair bilateral ties.

Bangladesh's ties with India remain broken because of the 2024 uprising and the subsequent interim rule whereas its ties with China, the U.S. and other players have prospered since August 2024. Further, a pragmatic assessment shows that without steady assurance from India on the main river Padma (Ganga), Bangladesh's other plans are not expected to proceed smoothly beyond 2026. River affairs expert Ainun Nishat has stated that a delay in the renewal of the 30-year-old Ganga treaty will put the Ganges-Kobadak irrigation project in a challenging situation affecting vast portions of western and central Bangladesh. The lack of predictable water supply will affect the upcoming sowing seasons, hurting Bangladesh's economy that is already dealing with the crippling effects of the energy crisis because of the U.S.-Israel war on Iran.

The compounded effect of these disruptive forces will increase pressure on the Tarique Rahman government that is already under criticism for its inept handling of the worst measles outbreak in the country that has claimed the lives of at least 600 infants. Critics have targeted the government for its weak handling of the health crisis as well as the growing incidents of sexual violence, which is a symptom of the breakdown of law and order in the country that is yet to make a recovery since the protests of August 2024. Rivals, including Sheikh Hasina's Awami League that are mobilising on the ground despite a ban, will be strengthened if Mr. Rahman fails to renew the Ganga river agreement with Delhi before the deadline of December 31, 2026.

Such material factors on the ground call for pragmatism in both the capitals as the challenges will soon overwhelm Bangladesh, reverting it to instability, which again is not in India's immediate or long-term interests.

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A boost for the Karnataka workforce

The notification on minimum wages is a step in the right direction

STATE OF PLAY

Mohan Mani

In May, the Karnataka government released the notification on minimum wages, equalising wages across 81 sectors of employment, with an average wage increase of 60% over existing levels. As per the notification, the minimum wage for unskilled workers will be ₹23,376 per month in Bengaluru, and ₹19,318 per month in small towns and rural areas. This difference of over ₹4,000 between wages in Bengaluru and the small towns is a reflection of the runaway inflation in metro cities. This move, which acknowledges the high cost of living in urban metros, is commendable.

In media interviews, the Karnataka Labour Minister said the minimum wage revision was carried out as per the directions of the Supreme Court. This highlights an often ignored fact of the jurisprudence around minimum wage in India – that the method for minimum wage determination is elaborately laid out and uniformly applicable across the country. Despite such a formula, the wide variation in prevailing minimum wages across States reflects the power of employers, and the complexity of labour departments in keeping wages below what is statutorily mandated.

Employers claim that higher wages drive up product costs and increase product demand thus fuelling inflation. However, reducing the wages of those at the lowest deciles of the Indian population in order to curtail their consumption cannot be the way to control inflation. Moreover, government statistics indicate that the consumption levels of



comparable skill level in the other 81 sectors covered by the notification. *Beedi* rolling, which is primarily home-based work, highlights the inter-generational perils of poorly paid employment. Children share the same space as their mothers, who are rolling *beedis*, which often results in them getting pulled into helping their mothers, restricting their ability to break out of the poverty trap. A decent minimum wage linked piece rate for *beedi* rolling could increase the options for these children.

Another issue is regarding the Variable Dearness Allowance (VDA). The VDA is meant to safeguard real wages against inflation for the period between two wage fixations, mandated to happen once every five years. The points-based wage neutralisation system in Karnataka unfortunately only protects fully real wages in the lowest unskilled categories. For the higher categories of semi-skilled and skilled workers, such protection is only partial. Further, with every wage revision, the old VDA formula becomes inadequate to protect real wages, and the points need to be revised. There have been union led court cases in the past for VDA revision along with wage revisions. The present notification should also address this lacuna.

Missing aspects

However, there remain important lacunae in the notification. First, it leaves out four important sectors: garment work, *beedi* rolling, *agarbathi* making and plantation work. All four sectors employ a large number of workers, with the majority being women. With the implementation of this notification, the wages of the workers in these four sectors would become around half the wages of the workers at a

comparable skill level in the other 81 sectors covered by the notification. *Beedi* rolling, which is primarily home-based work, highlights the inter-generational perils of poorly paid employment. Children share the same space as their mothers, who are rolling *beedis*, which often results in them getting pulled into helping their mothers, restricting their ability to break out of the poverty trap. A decent minimum wage linked piece rate for *beedi* rolling could increase the options for these children.

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The minimum wage notification is still a positive step, holding out potential for equitable growth in the State. It can also serve as an example for other States. It highlights an alternative paradigm, important at this time of increasing wealth disparity – that profits without super-exploitation should be the route to the "ease of doing business".

Mohan Mani is a Visiting Fellow, National Law School of India University, Bengaluru

DATA POINT



On June 11, the Estadio Azteca in Mexico City will host the kick-off of the FIFA World Cup, the world's most-watched sporting tournament, whose winner will lift the cup 38 days later, after the final in New Jersey on July 19. That 2026 is the longest World Cup ever is only one of the things setting it apart from every edition since 1930. The charts below explore a few other factors of this tournament, with the most matches ever (104) and the largest participation yet – 48 countries. They include Curaçao, the Caribbean constituent country of the Netherlands, whose population of 1.6 lakh is nearly twice the seating capacity of the Azteca

CHART 2: This shows the geographical spread. Hypothetically, a fan, wanting to watch at least one match in all 16 venues, should travel a minimum of 11,347 kms as the crow flies. This was only 70 kms in 2022, between five cities in Qatar

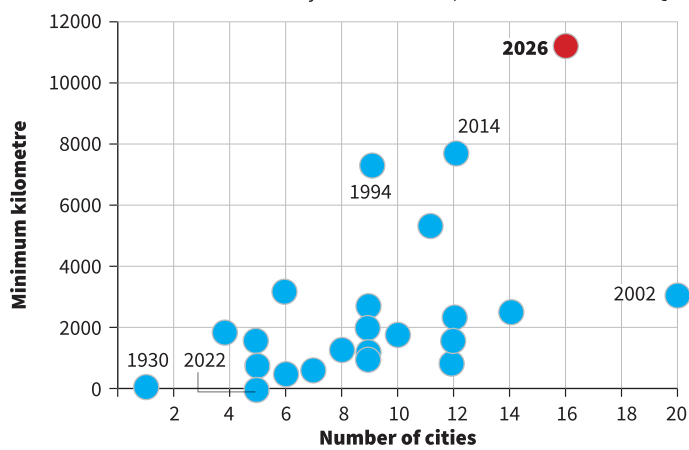


CHART 3: The event stands out for a few notorious reasons, including the sky-high ticket fares. This shows the price ranges as of June 8, 2026 6 p.m. IST

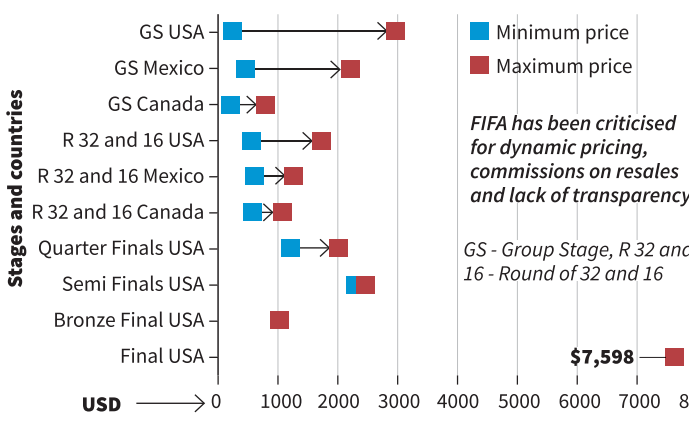
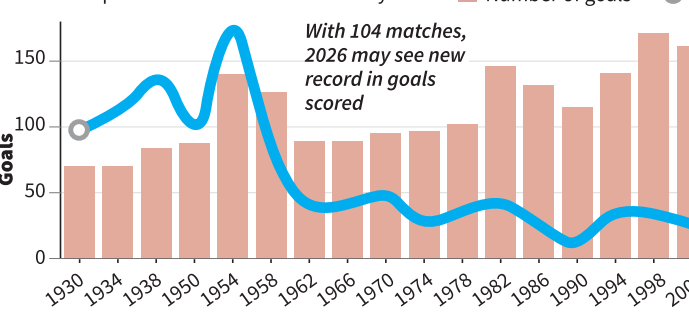


CHART 4: Though the number of goals have increased over the years, the average goals scored per match has plateaued around 2.6 in recent years



A World Cup like no other

MAP 1: The tournament is hosted by three countries, the U.S., Canada and Mexico, which is a first. It is being held across 16 venues, which is the second-highest after the 2002 edition, when matches happened across 20 cities in South Korea and Japan



CHART 5: 2026 could see a competition between 37-year-old Messi, for whom this is likely to be the last World Cup, and 27-year-old Mbappe, to set a new record as the highest goal-scorer in a World Cup



CHART 6: The chart shows the highest, lowest and average rankings in the 12 groups of four members each. Shorter the line, the tighter the competition within the group

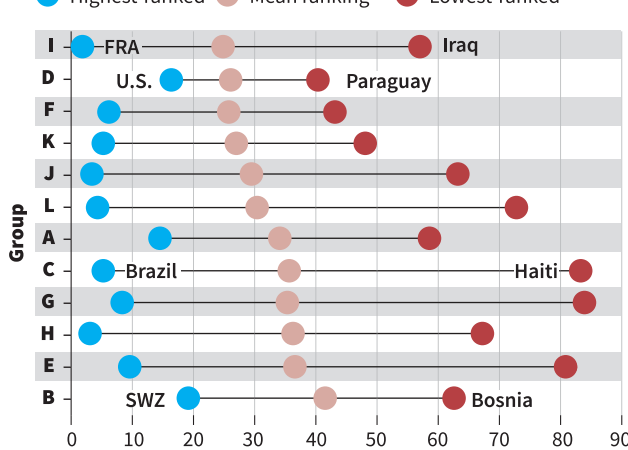
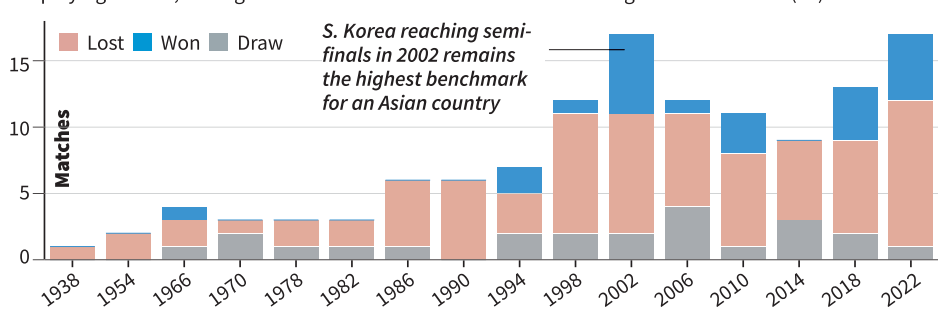


CHART 7: Eight from Asia – Japan, Iran, Jordan, South Korea, Uzbekistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Iraq – are playing in 2026, the highest-ever. Asian countries recorded their highest wins in 2022 (11)



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 9, 1976

ICF likely to produce tramcars

Madras, June 8: The Integral Coach factory is likely to manufacture tramcars for Calcutta Tramways. The factory authorities are now negotiating with the Tramway company, the details of producing 100 numbers of 2-car sets (200 trams). Each set will cost about Rs. seven lakhs.

Disclosing this at a press conference here today, Mr. J. Mathan, General Manager, said that the ICF had extra capacity and hence was trying to branch out to a new line of production. At present, it was manufacturing 535 shells and 518 coaches out of a rate capacity of 700 in each. Even now, the factory was deploying its workers to repairs of wagons and coaches of the Indian Railways, as the zonal railways did not have adequate capacity for carrying out these repairs.

The motors for the trams would be manufactured and supplied by the Bharat Heavy Electricals. Between 1968 and 1975, the ICF had supplied to many nations in Asia and Africa over 309 bogies and 266 coaches costing over Rs. 10 crores. An order for supply of 17 metre gauge coaches for East African Railways at a cost of Rs. 2.15 crore was expected to be completed by July.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 9, 1926

Progress of monsoon

Simla, June 8: A feeble advance of the Arabian sea monsoon has given general rain in Malabar and Bombay Deccan. Bay monsoon is strengthening. The western disturbance has passed away. Rainfall has been nearly general in Lower Burma, Malabar, Bombay Deccan, Local in Assam, North Hyderabad while a few falls occurred in Upper Burma, Bengal, Bihar, East Rajaputana, East Central Provinces, South Hyderabad and South East Madras. Chief amounts are: – Mergui, Rangoon 3-4, Tavoy, Kyaukpyu 1, Maymo 1 and a half, Berhampore, Mymensingh 3-4, Udaipur 1-2, Jagdalpur 3, Cochin 2, Poona, Sholapur, Cuddalore 1-2, Kodaikanal 1 inch.

Temperature is appreciably above normal in central parts of the country and North East of the Peninsula.

Forecast of monsoon rainfall for 1926: – Monsoon rainfall is likely to be normal in the Peninsula and in north-east India but in some defect in north west India.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

India's account surplus in the fourth quarter of FY26

7.1 in \$ billion. The surplus stood at \$13.7 billion, or 1.4% of GDP, in the fourth quarter of 2024-25. However, for the entire fiscal year, the current account deficit stood at \$25.2 billion, or 0.6% of GDP, compared to \$22.9 billion during 2024-25. Services exports increased on a year-on-year basis in major categories, such as computer services and business services. PTI

Trinamool MPs who are to write to Speaker backing NDA

20 Twenty Lok Sabha MPs have decided to write to Speaker Om Birla declaring support for the BJP-led NDA. The development comes days after the Trinamool leadership suffered a setback in the West Bengal Assembly, where 58 of its 80 MLAs defied the party high command's decision to appoint Sovandeb Chattopadhyay as the Leader of the Opposition. PTI

Number of Andhra Pradesh lands resurveyed

6,500 Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu on Monday said that land resurvey has been completed in over 6,500 villages across the State, enabling the government to update the land records. He noted that pattadar passbooks (land documents) have been issued to 26.4 lakh people. PTI

Indians languishing in Bangladeshi prisons after completing terms

148 A prison official said 152 foreigners, including 148 Indians, were languishing in Bangladeshi prisons even though they had completed their jail terms, according to prison statistics published six months ago. The inmates could not be released as their identities remain unverified, while attempts to contact the Indian Embassy yielded no response, the report said. PTI

Current manpower shortage in Tamil Nadu Electricity Board

70,000 Tamil Nadu Electricity Minister R Nirmal Kumar on Monday announced that the State's electricity board will recruit at least 15,000 permanent employees this year to address severe manpower shortages in the power apparatus. PTI
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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

What is lost and gained in NFHS-6

NFHS-6 records gains in child nutrition, maternal care, institutional births and women's Internet use, while also introducing new questions on digital literacy and direct benefit transfers; but the survey's preliminary fact sheet is thinner than the last round, dropping key indicators such as anaemia, mortality, sex ratio at birth

ECONOMIC NOTES

Areena Arora

India's latest National Family Health Survey (NFHS-6) records gains in child nutrition, maternal care, institutional births and women's Internet use. But its preliminary fact sheet is also thinner than the last round, with 101 indicators compared with 131 in NFHS-5.

Which indicators were removed from NFHS-6?

Key indicators such as anaemia, mortality, sex ratio at birth, sanitation, and clean cooking fuel have been removed from the survey.

The Union Health Ministry released the fact sheets of NFHS-6 on May 29, covering 2023-24. The survey recorded data from nearly 6.8 lakh households across every State and Union Territory except Manipur.

Preliminary findings report clear gains on several measures, including mothers getting at least four antenatal check-ups, up about seven percentage points from NFHS-5, an increase in institutional births and women's Internet usage. It also points to declines in several metrics, such as exclusive breastfeeding of infants under six months, down nearly eight percentage points, and the use of modern contraception, down to 52.7% from 56.4%.

The NFHS is commissioned by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, which designates the International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) to conduct the survey. Over the years, the scope of the survey has been additive by design, retaining the previous questionnaire and adding to it.

NFHS-4 in 2015-16 introduced district-level estimates and tablet-based digital interviewing for survey collection. NFHS-5 pushed the indicators further, including new topics, such as preschool education, disability, access to a toilet facility, death registration, bathing practices during menstruation and methods and reasons for abortion. It also extended blood pressure and blood sugar measurements from adults aged between 15 and 49 to all adults aged 15 and above. The survey measured 131 key indicators, up from 114 in NFHS-4.

While the HIV testing component was dropped from NFHS-5, it retained questions on HIV/AIDS knowledge, attitudes, prior testing, sexually transmitted infections, and sexual behaviour. In NFHS-6, biological HIV testing has been brought back as part of the clinical, anthropometric and biochemical testing schedule.

The NFHS-6 fact sheet does not separately spell out whether all HIV/AIDS knowledge and attitude questions were retained.

NFHS-6 also added new questions on direct benefit transfers, self-help group memberships, digital literacy and financial transactions. It also includes testing for Hepatitis-B and Hepatitis-C among women and men, as well as dried blood spot collection from children aged 4-5 for Hepatitis-B testing.

But for the first time, the survey has also subtracted overall, showing a net reduction of 30 indicators in the preliminary results. Among the dropped indicators, the most notable ones, such as anaemia, infant and child mortality, sex ratio at birth, clean cooking fuel use, and sanitation, have all appeared since the last NFHS-4.



The NFHS is commissioned by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, which designates the IIPS to conduct the survey. GETTY IMAGES

Why was anaemia dropped?

The case for removing anaemia is related to how it was measured. The indicator had long shown a worsening picture. Between NFHS-4 in 2015-16 and NFHS-5 in 2019-21, anaemia rose across the board. Among children, anaemia prevalence went up from 58.6% to 67.1%, among women aged 15-49, it rose from 53.1% to 57%, and among pregnant women, anaemia rose from 50.4% to 52.2%.

The rise in anaemia was near-universal across the country, with child anaemia increasing in 28 States and Union Territories, and in some cases by big leaps, from 35.7% to 68.4% in Assam and 19.3% to 46.4% in Mizoram. Such deterioration was reported despite the government launching the Anaemia Mukta Bharat campaign in 2018, aimed at tackling anaemia. The reason for dropping it as an indicator then boiled down to how the data were being collected.

NFHS measured haemoglobin from a finger-prick blood sample read on a portable analyser, which several nutrition researchers contend overstated anaemia compared to the venous blood drawn by other surveys. IIPS dropped the anaemia questionnaire when NFHS-6 fieldwork began in 2023. The official position is that the condition will now be tracked separately, through a dedicated Diet and Biomarkers Survey under the National Institute of Nutrition using a method its proponents consider more accurate.

The Diet and Biomarkers Survey in India was not a hurried replacement and was launched in December 2022, before NFHS-6 fieldwork began, at the ICMR-National Institute of Nutrition in Hyderabad.

The survey recorded data on individual

dietary intake across age groups, paired with blood and urine biomarkers.

It also built upon nutrition deficiencies and tracked obesity alongside anaemia, a first, according to the organisers. For anaemia, data were collected from venous blood instead of the finger-prick method that NFHS used. Data collection is complete, but hasn't been released yet.

What other changes were made?

A line-by-line comparison of the two fact sheets from NFHS-5 and NFHS-6 shows that the net fall of 30 actually combines 43 indicators dropped and 13 added. Several of the deletions were long-running series, and a few are closely related to the government's signature programmes.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government in 2019 had announced that India would be open defecation-free. NFHS-5 recorded 70% of the country's population living in households with access to sanitation facilities. That data point has also been dropped.

The share of households using clean fuel for cooking, 58.6% in NFHS-5, is gone — a direct measure of the success of the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana.

The three mortality indicators — neonatal, infant and under-five — have also been cut, but these will be tracked by the Sample Registration System, whose latest bulletin put infant mortality at 24 per 1,000 live births.

The Registration System, however, does not carry district-level data and socio-economic breakdowns that are available in NFHS.

The sex ratio of the total population and the sex ratio at birth, 929 females per 1,000 males in NFHS-5, are both absent, removing a standard signal of sex-selective practices. Four

cancer-screening indicators, covering cervical, breast and oral cancer, introduced only in NFHS-5 are gone after a single round.

A few changes are redefinitions rather than cuts. Women's individual ownership of a house or land has become a household-level measure. Three-dose hepatitis B line has become a birth-dose measure, and pre-school attendance has shifted age bands, targeting a younger demographic. IIPS has not published a rationale for the wider list.

Together, the removals leave no current survey-based national figure for infant mortality, sanitation coverage, sex ratio at birth, cancer screening rates or comprehensive HIV knowledge, gaps that no other single source fills at the same scale.

How did survey results change between NFHS-5 and NFHS-6?

NFHS-6 reported a drop in the number of women who have experienced spousal violence, down to 22.3% from 29.3%. The number of children aged five or below who are stunted declined too. The drop from NFHS-4 to NFHS-5 was just under three percentage points, but NFHS-6 saw a drop of over six percentage points.

State-level changes are sharper for certain indicators.

Health insurance coverage rose the most in West Bengal, from 33.7% of households in NFHS-5 to 88.2% in NFHS-6. Women's Internet use saw its largest increase in Andhra Pradesh, from 21% to 63.6%. Haryana recorded the steepest fall in exclusive breastfeeding among infants under six months, from 69.5% to 41.2%. The share of women classified as overweight or obese increased in every State.

THE GIST

NFHS-6 shows a net reduction of 30 indicators in its preliminary fact sheet, with 43 indicators dropped and 13 added compared with NFHS-5.

Anaemia was dropped from NFHS-6, with the official position being that it will be tracked separately through the Diet and Biomarkers Survey.

Several long-running indicators, including infant and child mortality, sex ratio at birth, sanitation coverage, clean cooking fuel use and cancer-screening measures, are absent from the latest fact sheet, leaving gaps that no other single source fills at the same scale.

CACHE

Why Census 2027 matters for development, democracy and representation

Census 2027, the world's largest count of people within a national geography, is an overdue exercise with far-reaching implications; an accurate and comprehensive count will ensure that no one is left behind and that policies, entitlements, and resources are guided by reliable data

Akshay Rout

Record turnouts in the recently concluded Assembly elections have brought satisfaction to all those who believe in the ultimate say of numbers and counts in a democracy. The only concern amid this celebration is whether everyone who needs to be counted has actually been included. This sense of urgency should equally drive the ongoing Census, the mother of all counts.

The world's largest-ever count of people within a national geography got underway on April 1, with the commencement of the first of the two phases of Census 2027. The first phase will gather nationwide information on the conditions, amenities, and assets of every household. The second will collect critical demographic and socio-economic information, including details on education, migration, fertility, and, of course, caste.

Seriously overdue

The eighth Census since Independence comes after a gap of 15 years instead of the usual 10, owing first to the COVID-19 disruption and later to the Lok Sabha elections. India has certainly been missing an updated demographic database. Public and private planning alike have had to rely either on the 2011 Census or on informed extrapolations from it.

There are other credible surveys, including five rounds of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), but these largely focus on health and nutrition. The World Bank and various UN agencies have also periodically conducted studies in their areas of interest. The United Nations Population Fund estimates India's population in 2025 at more than 146 crore. The population count in 2011 stood at 121 crore, marking a growth of 17.7% over the 2001 Census. Census 2027 is expected to record an increase of 25-30 crore. That makes the case for an accurate, secure, and comprehensive national census even more urgent.

The purpose of the Census in colonial India was to help the rulers govern more efficiently and sustain the regime. In post-Independence India, the Census has served a different purpose: improving governance and speeding up multidimensional and inclusive development. The 1951 Census, expectedly, revealed dismal levels of literacy, poverty, and life expectancy in a country depleted by colonial rule. India in 2026-27 stands on a completely different footing in terms of mobility, connectivity, infrastructure, education, healthcare and other indicators of living standards, which await measurement.

Contested demography

The season of demographic politics is here. Special intensive revision (SIR) is a rebuilding of India's electoral rolls; the process has also prompted citizens to ensure that they are counted and that their names remain on the rolls.

One act was played in Parliament in mid-April when women's reservation became a casualty of the fear of 'biased' delimitation of constituencies. New electoral boundaries will ordinarily be anchored in Census data, and the 33%



Census enumerators during a door-to-door survey of digital mapping for the Census at Shashi Garden, in New Delhi, on May 29. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

reserved seats for women in the legislature will be tied to it. This way, the Census exercise will have elaborate implications for the country's representative democracy.

Another standout feature of Census 2027 is the inclusion of the caste question for the first time. The matter has been on the political agenda for years now, often dragged into elections. The direction of the debate after the release of the data will be closely watched.

Existing reservations for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes will also have the new Census as a reference. Instead of belligerent battles fought over caste, class, and community interests in the electoral cauldron, getting duly counted along these divisions could be a constructive presentation of the case. Affirmative action for marginalised groups, provided under India's legal and constitutional framework and considered as the fountainhead of social justice, depends on systematic data drawn from the Census.

Roti, kapda, makaan

The Census may appear not to offer any individual profit, but most certainly it does. Access to jobs, food, housing, cooking gas, clean drinking water, safe sanitation, schools, and hospitals are among the expectations citizens have of an elected government.

Accurately identifying needs and deprivations through reliable databases provides the basis for targeted delivery of these welfare measures and public services. Demographic profiles also

inform the Finance Commission's devolution of funds to States and local bodies and even guide private-sector investments in identified areas.

Public policy and service delivery can falter when residents are not properly counted under various buckets. Digital data collection, being done for the first time, could provide deeper and more segregated identification of issues in localities. Viewed from another perspective, departmental dashboards for social and infrastructural provisions could face reality checks post-Census, against their claims.

Guardrails of individual rights

Online self-enumeration, available for 15 days, preceding the survey and already completed by over one crore households, is an additional facilitation, but not mandatory. Self-enumeration blends digital empowerment with the right to privacy and accuracy of personal data. Inclusion is ensured by retaining the manual option and language choices. Census authorities loudly assure that 'an enumerator will definitely visit your home.' The Census Act, 1948, ensures the protection of individual data in the face of a malevolent and interconnected world.

In contemporary elections, population groups look out for targeted benefits, often casting votes in return. The ethical and economic prudence of this bargain is widely questioned. But a good Census delivers the same without moral or fiscal damage. While the government has pitched the Census as an instrument of development, citizens must proactively

grab the chance of getting counted. Census in 2011 had the tagline 'Our Census, Our Future'; in 2027, it is 'Our Census, Our Development'. One could hasten to add, 'my census, my right.'

Everyone's task, everyone's gain

High profile enumeration of the top brass in the national and State capitals carries great symbolism. But the true mandate of the Census is to ensure that no one is left behind and that no facts – or even factoids – from the remotest hamlet or the most crowded urban slum, regardless of people's circumstances, are excluded from this long-overdue exercise.

Over three million census staffers will have to overcome topographical and social barriers as they go door to door to complete this onerous task.

Although participation in the Census is mandatory, public cooperation must be driven by a heightened awareness of self-interest rather than the apathy that often characterises urban life. 'Pragati' and 'Vikas', the mascots of Census 2027, are statements not only of the purpose, but of equal role for men and women.

Millions of voters stood in line at polling booths over the past two months because they recognised the importance of their vote, even though voting remains optional. In an ocean of census operations, every individual count matters, just as every single vote matters in a large election. (Akshay Rout is a former Director General, Election Commission of India and a Public Policy Commentator. Views expressed are personal)



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

S. Upendran

“Which of the following sentences is correct? “He runs faster than me”, or, “He runs faster than I”?” (K. Suresh Kumar, Kanyakumari)

Very often people wonder if they should say, “It's me”, or “It's I”. In the past, the accepted form was “It's I”. “It's me” was considered unacceptable. Nowadays, of course, “It's me” is the preferred answer to the question, “Who is it?”. You would sound pretty pompous if you were to say, “It's I”.

Both the sentences that you have given are acceptable. The most common response to the question “Who runs faster?” would be “He runs faster than me”. Although “He runs faster than I” is correct, it sounds rather old fashioned. You won't find too many native speakers of English saying, “He is elder than I”, or “He is a better player than I”. In sentences like these, there is a tendency nowadays to replace “I” with “me”.

What is the meaning of “Lilliputian”? (Br. Anandraj, SDB, Polur, Tamil Nadu)

Have you read Jonathan Swift's “Gulliver's Travels”? Lilliput is an imaginary country that the hero Gulliver finds himself in after he has been shipwrecked. The inhabitants of this country are only six inches tall. So, when you say that something is lilliputian you mean that it is terribly small. The word can also be used to refer to something that is intended for very small people. The word is considered to be literary. Here are a few examples.

He showed us a lilliputian chest of drawers and he wanted ten thousand for it.

We found many lilliputian figures buried in the sand.

By the way, the first two syllables of the word are pronounced like the word “lily”. The “pu” rhymes with the words “few”, “due”, and “cue”. The “t” sounds like the “sh” in “shirt”, “ship”, and “shin”. The “i” is like the “i” in “sit”, “bit”, and “hit”, while the final “a” is like the “a” in “China” and “amount”. Some people however pronounce the final “tian” like the “tion” in “election”, “station”, and “constitution”. The main stress is on the third syllable “pu”.

What is the meaning of “There is no question of his going”? (Dr. K. R. Mahalingam, Chennai)

This sentence means that the question of someone's going does not arise. In other words, the person is definitely not going – perhaps he himself doesn't want to go, or he has not been given the permission to go! Whatever be the reason, the man is not going. Here are a few more examples.

There is no question of my giving up. (I am not going to give up)

There is no question of my not marrying Usha. (I am definitely marrying Usha)

There is no question of his failing. (He will definitely pass)

How do you pronounce the word “heist”? (G. Rajendran, Hyderabad)

The “ei” is like the “ie” in “die”, “pie”, and “tie”.

The final “st” is like the “st” in “stay”, “strike”, and “stink”. Any idea what the word means? A “heist” is a theft or a robbery. Here are a few examples:

It was their first heist and it was badly planned.

Abhishhek wanted to pull off another heist.

Published in The Hindu on November 21, 2000

THE DAILY QUIZ

June 9 marks the death anniversary of tribal freedom fighter Birsa Munda, whose brief life left a lasting imprint on anti-colonial resistance and Adivasi assertion in India

Prathmesh Kher

QUESTION 1

Which nineteenth-century movement preceded Birsa's uprising and influenced the political climate in Chotanagpur?

QUESTION 2

The Munda uprising led by Birsa Munda at the turn of the twentieth century is popularly known by what term, meaning “Great Tumult”?

QUESTION 3

What slogan associated with Birsa Munda called for the end of British rule?

QUESTION 4

Birsa Munda's religious teachings led to the emergence of a distinct faith community known by what name?

QUESTION 5

Birsa Munda died in Ranchi Jail in 1900. What was the official cause of death recorded by the British authorities?



Visual Question: This famous photograph of Birsa Munda was reproduced in which pioneering ethnographic work by Sarat Chandra Roy?

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. Why was June 8 specifically chosen for World Oceans Day and when was it first observed? **Ans: It was on this date in the 1992 Earth Summit that the concept was introduced by the Oceans Institute of Canada and the International Centre for Ocean Development. 2009.**

2. How many oceans are officially recognised and which is the smallest? **Ans: Five with Arctic being the smallest**

3. Which distinct characteristic of oceans is because of mineral runoff from land and hydrothermal activity on the seafloor? **Ans: Saltness**

4. If the average global temperature rises by 1.5°C, the estimated loss of which remarkable biodiverse natural feature is 70 to 90%? **Ans: Coral reefs**

5. The Aral Sea dramatically shrank because of massive water diversion projects in the 1960s on two major rivers. Name the rivers. **Ans: Amu Darya and Syr Darya**

6. What is a 'seamount'? **Ans: A submarine volcanic mountain rising at least 1,000 metres above the surrounding deep-sea floor**

7. What body of water separates Madagascar from the African continent? **Ans: Mozambique Channel**

8. Which 'colourful' sea's name is a direct translation of its ancient Greek name Erythra Thalassa? **Ans: Red Sea**

Visual: Name this member of the deepest-living fish family that have been recorded in trenches of over 8000m. **Ans: Snailfish**

Early Birds: Jha Akshay Amarendra | Kaveesh Sethi | Pranab Biswas | Deepak Jiloha | Soumyabrata Kar

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

Word of the day

Frugal:

using only as much money or food as is necessary

Synonyms: economical, thrifty, saving

Usage: *He is frugal with his money and saves a little every month.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/frugal

International Phonetic Alphabet: /fru:ɡəl/

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

IN BRIEF



Nifty declines 1.04% amid escalating tension in W. Asia

Benchmark Nifty declined 1.04% to 23,123 points, a day after Israel claimed that missiles were fired from Iran, escalating concerns over fresh tensions in West Asia. The index opened at 23,080 points and rose to the day's high of 23,267.30 points before declining to 23,070 points to hit the day's close. Brent Oil Futures, one of the major indicators of global oil prices, too, increased 1.4% to \$94.38 a barrel from about \$93 a barrel on Friday. Most of the 3,400 Nifty stocks declined on Monday. Except Nifty Healthcare index, the other 20 sectoral indices declined, making the overall decline in the index broad-based. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) have so far sold a significant ₹51,000 crore in just the first week of June. This led to a depreciation in the rupee, which closed at 95.61 against the U.S. dollar on Monday.

TCS wins 'multimillion euro' deal from Canada Life

Tata Consultancy Services Ltd. (TCS) said it has signed a multi-year transformation and managed services agreement with Canada Life, a global life and pensions insurer for unspecified multimillion euros. As per the deal, TCS will support the modernisation of Canada Life's IT infrastructure services across its European businesses. TCS will leverage its AI and digital capabilities to modernise and manage Canada Life's data centres, core infrastructure, end-user computing, and software lifecycle management. The programme aims to deliver high-quality, cost-effective, performance driven IT services while helping Canada Life accelerate its technology strategy and achieve stronger business outcomes, TCS said. The deal will also help Canada Life scale its technology services more effectively and be nimble to changing business needs, it added.

Solar firms move High Court over 'unreasonable' mandate

Industry associations from Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu are up in arms against a Central rule that requires most new solar projects to be built only with domestically made cells

Jacob P. Koshy
NEW DELHI

A group of solar manufacturers and developers has approached the Karnataka High Court to defer a rule that, from June 1, requires most new solar projects to use only domestically made cells. They cite the gap between what Indian solar-cell makers charge and international prices.

Cells listed under the government's mandatory 'ALMM List-II' sell at around ₹13 a watt, against an imported price of about ₹5 a watt, the petitioners said. "₹5 and ₹13 is unreasonable. That is what we are asking [the court to address]," Ramesh Shivanna of the Karnataka Renewable Energy Systems Manufacturers Association (KRESMA), which led the petition, told *The Hindu*.

ALMM is the government ratified Approved List of Models and Manufacturers and a list of domestic producer companies whose solar panels and constituent cells are mandatory for electricity distribution in India.

ALMM-1 is a list of about 130 module manufacturers. ALMM-2 is a smaller group of about 17 companies that makes the solar cells for these modules.

The writ petition, filed on June 6 by solar industry associations from Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, challenges Ministry of New and Renewable Energy



Price disparity: Cells listed under the 'ALMM List-II' sell at about ₹13 a watt, against an imported price of about ₹5 a watt. FILE PHOTO

(MNRE) orders that enforce ALMM List-II – the approved list of domestic solar-cell manufacturers – for projects commissioned on or after June 1, 2026. Reportedly other state associations too have filed similar petitions in other courts.

'Defer enforcement'

The petitioners said they do not oppose the list, but want its enforcement deferred, at least a year, until domestic cells are available in adequate quantity and quality, and at a competitive price. The petitioners also pointed to the Finance Ministry's classification of the West Asia conflict as a force majeure event, under which the MNRE allowed extensions of contractual deadlines to solar-cell makers; the same consideration, they said, should apply to developers.

Mr. Shivanna said the government must step in on price until domestic

supply matures.

"The government should regulate the price," he said. "When something is available so cheap in the global market and here you are being made to pay [much more], it is the government's responsibility to study what is happening globally and in India."

A handful of cell makers, he argued, were capturing the gain: by his estimate, at a 30 GW annual build and a roughly ₹8-a-watt premium, about ₹24,000 crore a year would flow to "four-five manufacturers," several of whom had also received production-linked incentives. According to MNRE database, only six of the seventeen ALMM-2 companies carry "high-efficiency" solar cells – Emmvee, Premier Energies Photovoltaic, Mundra Solar PV, Tata Power Renewable Energy (a small 247 MW line), Waaree and Renewsys, Reliance and Ju-

pitier Solartech. The dispute exposes a structural gap at the heart of India's solar expansion. Installed solar capacity has crossed 144 GW and is growing about 40% a year, and module-assembly capacity has reached roughly 210 GW. But upstream cell manufacturing – the step the new rule targets – stood at only about 27 GW at the end of 2025, according to Mercom India, a clean-energy research group. Ratings agency CareEdge estimates domestic cells meet just 25-30% of demand, leaving India reliant on imports, mainly from China. "Right now the whole capacity (of high efficiency cells) manufactured in India is not enough for our requirement," Mr. Shivanna said. "When we ask for cell supply, [many] don't have stock." All companies that make cells make modules but many modules makers don't make cells whereby about 14 companies make up 98% of India's solar capacity addition.

MNRE has refused a blanket extension, saying in a May 25 order that industry consensus favoured "policy stability" to protect investor confidence in domestic manufacturing, and offering instead case-by-case relief for projects that are substantially built. On Monday, the ministry constituted a four-member expert committee to vet applications for time extension.

May auto retail sales rise 9.5% year on year

Lalendu Mishra
NEW DELHI

Despite an above-normal heatwave, fuel-price pressure and the evolving West Asia situation, the Indian auto retail sales has held its growth trajectory, with May 2026 registering the best ever May across three-wheelers (3Ws), passenger vehicles (PVs), tractors and overall registrations.

According to data released by the Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations (FADA) on Monday, the Indian auto industry retailed 25,31,067 units during the month, a 9.55% year on year (YoY) rise.

While passenger vehicles (PVs) grew 23.25%, the tractor segment was up 11.17%, followed by two-wheelers (2Ws) at 7.54%, commercial vehicles (CVs) at 5.29% and three-wheelers (3Ws) at 3.56%.

The wheeled construction equipment segment saw a YoY decline of 17.51% on a high base.

However, there was a se-



PV retail sales were at a record 4,02,591 units last month.

quential decline of 6.75% month on month (MoM).

"This softness reflects the customary post-April seasonal moderation and a delayed south-west monsoon, keeping May largely a pre-sowing month across much of rain-fed Bharat. That growth held through this confluence of pressures underlines the resilience of the underlying demand," FADA president C.S. Vigneshwar said in a statement.

Two-wheeler retail stood at 18,44,947 units in May 2026, up 7.54% YoY, with urban markets growing 11.75% and rural markets 4.74%.

'Under-recovery ₹30/litre on diesel, ₹6/litre on petrol'

Saptaparno Ghosh
NEW DELHI

State-owned oil-marketing companies are incurring under-recoveries of ₹30 on every litre of diesel sold and ₹6 per litre on petrol, Praveen Khanooja, Additional Secretary at the Union Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG)

told reporters at the bi-weekly inter-ministerial briefing on the situation in West Asia on Monday.

"Even now, when you buy diesel at ₹95.2 [per litre] in Delhi, [the] balance ₹30 is borne by the oil-marketing companies and for petrol it is about ₹6 per litre," the Additional Secretary stated.

'Pushed away' from Tamil Nadu, Mazagon Dock eyes investment in A.P.

Vinaya Deshpande Pandit
MUMBAI

Mazagon Dock Limited (MDL), India's premier shipbuilding company, is looking to invest in Andhra Pradesh after having waited for Tamil Nadu to respond to its proposal to build a greenfield mega ship-building cluster in Thoothukudi.

The MDL had signed a deal with the Tamil Nadu government in September 2025. It had publicly committed an investment of ₹15,000-18,000 crore for the project, after its board had approved the commitment during MDL's Q2 FY26 earnings call in November 2025. The plan was approved for forming a 1,050-acre greenfield shipyard intended to be developed over a period of 10-12 years, aimed at targeting very large crude carriers (VLCCs) up to 3,00,000 DWT.

But now, after the Tamil Nadu government has brought a foreign company onboard for the strategically important cluster project, allegedly without following the due process, MDL is seeking other options. The Tamil Nadu government's move has raised questions on why Indian companies were not given an opportunity for competitive bidding for a strategic project that will see huge monetary subsidisation by the Centre and the State to the tune of thousands of crores. It comes at a time when indigenisation is being given a push under the Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047.

Failing in its bid to secure this project, MDL now wants to invest over ₹29,000 crore for a mega shipbuilding cluster in



Dead end: In 2025, MDL signed an MoU with 'Guidance Tamil Nadu' for a greenfield shipyard on India's eastern coast. PRASHANT NAKWE

Andhra Pradesh. It has expressed interest in becoming the anchor investor there. A team from MDL is soon expected to conduct a feasibility study for developing a planned shipbuilding capacity of 1.2 million tonnes at the cluster.

Lack of transparency

The development has raised questions about the shunting out of Indian shipyards by the Tamil Nadu government, on whether the State government inverted the prescribed procedure, subverted the competitive bidding process, and failed to maintain transparency about one of India's most ambitious cluster anchor shipyard projects.

Thoothukudi (Tuticorin) in Tamil Nadu has been identified by the Government of India as one of the premier locations for a greenfield mega-cluster, due to its natural advantages like extensive coastal land, natural cyclone shielding, low atmospheric salinity, proximity to international shipping lanes, and an existing deep-water port. These clusters are intended to target approxi-

mately 1.2 million Gross Tonnage per annum capacity.

As per the Union Government's Shipbuilding Development Scheme Guidelines, notified by the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW) on December 26, 2025, a sequential process has been laid down for the development of greenfield shipbuilding clusters.

But access to the detailed timeline of the project raises questions on whether this sequence was subverted.

On September 19, 2025, Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL) signed a Memorandum of Understanding with 'Guidance Tamil Nadu' for a greenfield shipyard on India's eastern coast. Both MDL and Cochin Shipyard signed MoUs with Tamil Nadu for greenfield shipyards at Thoothukudi, with a combined stated investment of ₹30,000 crore, during the Government of India's 'Samudra se Samridhhi' event in Bhavnagar.

In November last year, MDL, during its Q2 FY26 earnings call, referred to a

planned Thoothukudi greenfield shipyard with a total investment of ₹15,000-18,000 crore. Since then, it waited for a response from the Tamil Nadu government and an Expression of Interest (EoI) process from the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV).

Instead, a month later, a foreign company announced the signing of an 'Exclusive Business Cooperation Agreement' with the Government of Tamil Nadu for a new shipyard at Thoothukudi, during the TN Rising Investment Conclave in Madurai, in the presence of then CM M.K. Stalin. HD Hyundai described it as a plan for a 'second Ulsan' with an investment reported at approximately \$2.4 billion. This happened on December 7, 2025.

But the Shipbuilding Development Scheme (SbDS) Guidelines were formally notified by the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways only on December 26, a whopping 19 days after the HD Hyundai exclusive agreement was signed. Not just that, even the SPV was formed after over a month of the agreement. In January this year, NSHIP TN (National Shipbuilding & Heavy Industries Park, Tamil Nadu) SPV was formally incorporated as a 50:50 Joint Venture between VOCPA and SIPCOT.

HD Hyundai was allegedly exclusively selected as the Anchor Shipyard before the rules governing the selection process existed, and before the institution (the SPV) required to conduct the selection was formally incorporated. Despite repeated attempts, the Tamil Nadu Government did not respond to a detailed list of questions.

All in a day's work



Hectic day: Workers produce a batch of solar photovoltaic modules for export to Germany at a new energy company in Lianyungang, in China's eastern Jiangsu province on Monday. AFP

Coromandel ties up with Samunnati Agri to support FPOs

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

Agriculture solutions provider Coromandel International and Samunnati Agri Value Chain Solutions will collaborate to enable supply, promotion and distribution of agri-inputs to Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) across the country.

The partnership will also explore customised marketing support initiatives, product demonstrations

The tie-up will also explore customised marketing support initiatives, product demonstrations

financial assistance to eligible FPOs and agri ecosystem participants for procurement of Coromandel products, subject to separate arrangements and regulatory requirements, Coromandel said after Business Head (Fertiliser, SSP and Nano) Madhab Adhikari and Samunnati ED Suresh Rajagopalan signed an MoU.

Viyash Scientific to acquire Italian firm BioForLife for ₹188 cr.

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

Viyash Scientific, through subsidiary Alivira Animal Health, has signed a binding agreement to acquire 100% stake in Italian pet care firm BioForLife Italia S.r.l. (BFL) for around Rs.188 crore.

Based in Milan, BioForLife specialises in development, commercialisation and distribution of pet care products. It has established strong positions in nutritional complements, pharmaceuticals and rapid diagnostic tests. BFL is also building a business in fast growing segments like der-

matology and ophthalmology. The acquisition will provide Viyash a platform for launching new products from Alivira's pipeline in Italy, while simultaneously providing opportunities to expand the BFL range to other markets in the Alivira group located in Europe, the Middle East, Asia and LATAM, Viyash said.

"BioForLife provides us with an established platform in Italy, one of Europe's most attractive pet care markets, while strengthening our presence across the region," MD and Group CEO Haribabu Bodeputi said.

The real stable coin play is in the plumbing that makes it work



Gaining traction: Stable coins currently in circulation are expected to surge as much as 15-fold by 2030. REUTERS

Reuters
LONDON

Stable coins grab the headlines, but the bigger prize for private equity investors may lie in the digital “plumbing” that makes them work.

We are rapidly moving into the age of AI, yet moving money still relies on architecture built for an analogue era: slow, expensive and complex. Stable coins could change that. This type of digital currency is pegged to a reserve asset like the U.S. dollar. Because of this structure, they are gaining traction in cross-border payments, treasury operations, crypto settlement and as a store of value in volatile economies.

Importantly, they are also offering something the traditional financial rails often cannot: near-instant settlement, round-the-clock operability, modest friction costs and a viable alternative where banking infrastructure is thin or trust is weak.

This tokenized form of cash is therefore more than an incremental upgrade. If properly structured and rigorously regulated, stable coins could do to money what email did to snail mail: make the old system increasingly obsolete.

Stable coins currently in circulation are expected to surge as much as 15-fold by 2030, according to Citi and Brookfield research. The debate is no longer whether they will scale, but how quickly – and who will profit when they do.

History suggests the biggest gains in a technological boom are rarely made by investing in the invention itself. They are captured in the infrastructure that enables rapid adoption. For example, in the 19th century, railroads on their own did not drive industrialization and the massive wealth creation that came with it. The gains came from the web of steel, coal, logistics and distribution networks that followed. Electrification was not about the light bulb, but the grid. Stable coins are no different. They are the spark for transforming money movement, not the engine driving conversion.

Token explosion

Wall Street is rapidly moving deeper into digital assets. This is feeding the broader trend of tokenization, the process of turning traditional assets into digital tokens. The New York Stock Exchange, part of Intercontinental Exchange, is partnering with Securitize – a major player in tokenization – on a platform for digital coins linked to stocks and ETFs. Meanwhile, Nasdaq is teaming up with Kraken – a cryptocurrency exchange – to let investors trade tokenized versions of listed stocks and ETFs.

More broadly, in a recent Broadridge survey of 950 financial services firms, 54% said their firm is investing in tokenization, while 53% believe blockchain will dramatically reshape settlement.

For established financial institutions, the choice is stark: integrate and evolve this new technology or cede ground as activity shifts to faster, cheaper, more transparent rails.

In short, this appears to be a structural shift, not a cyclical one.

The technology needed for this instantaneous, trackable movement of money already exists. What remains under built is the plumbing that will enable stable coins to connect seamlessly with the existing financial system. The opportunity lies not in stable coins themselves, but in owning the toll roads they travel on.

This infrastructure includes issuance platforms, payment processors, digital wallets, custody systems, and the other on-and-off-ramps that convert traditional currency into digital and back. It also includes compliance tools such as “know your customer” (KYC), anti-money laundering (AML) and transaction monitoring services.

This is where private equity can come in.

Capital can help financial institutions modernize legacy systems, carve out digital asset units from larger groups, or support governments building national digital-currency platforms.

None of this is risk-free. Stable coins are not insured like bank deposits, and their stability depends on the quality and liquidity of the issuer’s reserves. Compared with banks, the firms that manage stable coins have fewer resources to address fraud and cybersecurity risks.

Moreover, regulatory clarity is needed. Markets do not scale when faced with ambiguity. Investors and institutions will require clear rules on reserves, redemptions, supervision and consumer protection.

Oil market calm masks a host of unknowns as no end in sight to war

Tanker operators, insurers and traders are likely to remain cautious about re-entering the Gulf, fearing vessels could once again become stranded in the event of renewed hostilities, even as more cargoes have been leaving the Gulf of late using stealth channels, pushed by desperate operators,

NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters
LONDON

The biggest oil supply shock in decades has entered its fourth month – with no resolution in sight as neither the U.S. nor Iran appears willing to budge – yet the market remains surprisingly calm. This disconnect reflects an uncomfortable reality: the biggest drivers of today’s energy market are a host of unknowns.

The renewed strikes between Iran and Israel over the weekend have sent oil prices up over 4% to \$98 a barrel on Monday, but Brent crude remains well below levels seen only a few weeks ago and comfortably within the range of the past two decades.

This has happened even though the Strait of Hormuz – the world’s most critical oil choke point – has remained largely shut for more than three months, disrupting flows equivalent to roughly 13% of global supply.

A large part of the market’s sanguine mood reflects expectations that conditions in the Gulf could change overnight. U.S. President Donald Trump’s repeated assertions in recent weeks that a deal with Iran is imminent have helped cool prices.

Yet there is little evidence that Washington and Tehran are moving closer to a durable agreement, with both sides continuing to strike targets across the region.

Even if a formal reopening of Hormuz occurs in the next few weeks – a scenario that is hardly the base case – this would not



Uneasy calm: Vessels are anchored in the Strait of Hormuz as seen from Musandam, Oman. REUTERS

instantly translate into a full recovery of flows. Shipping is governed as much by risk assessments as by geopolitics. Tanker operators, insurers and traders are likely to remain cautious about re-entering the Gulf, fearing vessels could once again become stranded in the event of renewed hostilities.

While there are increasing indications that more cargoes have been leaving the Gulf in recent weeks using stealth channels, these are short-term solutions being employed by desperate operators, not a long-term strategy for the world’s largest energy companies.

What’s more, this opacity speaks to the larger problem. Oil traders are mostly operating in the dark, regarding both supply and demand, raising the risk of a nasty surprise if their assumptions prove faulty.

How long can stocks go?
The first major unknown is exactly how long global inventories can last. Governments and companies have tapped commercial stocks



Even if a formal reopening of Hormuz occurs in the next few weeks – a scenario that is hardly the base case – this would not instantly translate into a full recovery of flows

and strategic reserves at an unprecedented pace since the conflict broke out on February 28.

Global crude and fuel stocks fell at a pace of 5.27 million barrels per day in March, accelerating to 8.62 million bpd in April and likely approaching 9 million bpd in May, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

Draws could rise further to around 11 million bpd in June as seasonal demand increases ahead of the Northern Hemisphere summer.

These are extraordinary numbers – equivalent to running down Saudi Arabia’s pre-war production every single day. The United

States offers a stark illustration. Total U.S. crude inventories, including the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, have fallen by roughly 10% this year to 1.5 billion barrels – the lowest since 2004.

At Cushing, Oklahoma – the delivery point for West Texas Intermediate futures – stocks have dropped to 22.4 million barrels, the lowest since January. If draws continue at the recent average pace, inventories could soon fall below 20 million barrels, a level widely seen as the minimum operational threshold needed to keep the hub functioning smoothly.

The market has proven remarkably adaptable in recent months and could continue to find workarounds, but storage systems are not infinitely flexible. Once those “tank bottoms” are approached, prices would typically be expected to shoot up to reflect scarcity.

The Chinese enigma
Another key unknown is China. The world’s second-largest oil consumer has

sharply reduced its seaborne crude imports in response to higher prices, with imports falling in May to 6.36 million bpd, the lowest level in nearly a decade.

That decline has provided significant relief to other importers by easing competition for scarce cargoes. But it has also introduced a new layer of uncertainty.

First, China could decide to go back into the market at any moment.

China does not publish timely or comprehensive consumption data, leaving the market largely in the dark about how much demand has actually been affected.

Chinese refiners may have drawn on commercial inventories to offset lower imports, or Beijing may have begun to tap its vast-but opaque – strategic reserves. If the latter is true, global supply could be tightening more than traders currently estimate. If not, the drop in imports may signal a sharper-than-expected slowdown in demand.

Either way, this lack of clarity regarding a fundamental driver of the global supply-demand balance at such a precarious moment is troubling – and could leave some suddenly finding themselves on the wrong side of a trade.

Invisible force
The difficulty of gauging China points to a broader problem: demand is inherently harder to measure than supply.

While the industry has developed increasingly sophisticated tools to track crude production, refining activity and tanker movements – often in near real time – consumption re-

mains fragmented across billions of users and is often only reported with significant delays. In some cases, such as China, it is not reported at all.

As a result, estimating the level of demand destruction caused by the current supply shock has become an exercise in inference.

In theory, the mechanism is straightforward: tightening supply depletes inventories, higher prices follow, and demand is gradually destroyed. In practice, that process is messy, uneven and difficult to observe in real time.

The International Energy Agency last month revised its global demand outlook dramatically, forecasting it to contract by 420,000 bpd in 2026, compared with a pre-war expectation of 1.3 million bpd in growth. Consumption is expected to fall by 2.45 million bpd in the second quarter alone.

Some analysts and trading houses are more bearish, estimating that demand could have declined by as much as 5 million bpd in May.

Whichever figure is correct, the longer the Hormuz disruption persists, the greater the drag on economic activity and fuel demand. The oil market today appears remarkably relaxed in the face of a prolonged and unprecedented disruption.

Part of that may be fatigue after months of volatility, but it also may reflect how little anyone currently knows about the true state of the oil market – including the experts – and how much pricing is based on sentiment and expectations.

That is a precarious foundation.

Why Italy’s weak hydroelectric output may drag on Europe’s gas rebuild efforts

Reuters
LITTLETON, COLORADO

Europe’s push to build natural gas inventories is shaped mainly by global LNG flows and storage targets. But another key underappreciated constraint lies farther south – in the Alpine reservoirs that underpin Italy’s hydroelectric system.

When Italy’s hydro output is strong, it acts as a quiet stabilizer for Europe’s gas balance by allowing power firms in that region to curb gas use as hydro generation peaks.

But when Italy’s hydro production is weak, the effects ripple far beyond the country’s borders as stronger gas consumption in Europe’s third-largest gas user tightens supplies throughout the region.

This year, Italy’s hydro production has slumped by over a quarter compared to normal following a warm and dry winter, and has already lifted gas power output to the highest in four years, data from LSEG and Ember shows.

What’s more, due to the light snow pack this past winter combined with a warm spring that accelerated snow melt, Italy’s hydro power peak has likely already passed.

That means that any upcoming jumps in national power needs – such as for



A general view of a dry Ceresole Reale Lake, which provides water to the Piedmont region through a dam, following weeks of drought at the Gran Paradiso National Park, in Ceresole Reale, Italy. FILE PHOTO

greater use of air conditioners during any heatwaves – will be almost entirely reliant on natural gas plants, which form the backbone of the country’s electricity system.

As Europe’s gas storage operators tend to replenish stocks over the summer when regional gas use is usually at its lowest, the prospect of Italy increasing gas burn rates over that same period may complicate restocking efforts by potentially tightening supplies and raising prices.

But with hydro dam generation levels well below normal, Italy and other southern European power systems may have little choice but to burn more gas going forward, even as other parts of Europe look to steer more gas

into storage tanks.

From first to last?

In an ironic twist to Europe’s gas storage saga, Italy is currently a frontrunner in terms of replenishing gas tanks following steep depletions over the past winter.

Italy’s gas storage network is currently around 61% full, according to LSEG, which compares to less than half full near the end of April when the country’s tanks were at their lowest in years.

In contrast, gas storage levels for Europe as a whole are only around 41% full, which is by far the lowest in several years and means regional gas tank operators must accelerate re-stocking efforts if inventories are to be full by win-

ter. Yet Italy’s low hydro levels may mean power firms have little choice but to increase gas consumption and slow gas storage replenishment rates from now on.

Italy’s power output from hydro dams has averaged 2,472 megawatt hours per hour (MWh/h) from January through May, according to data from LSEG.

That is down 28% from the same months in 2025, and is the lowest for that time span since 2022.

To compensate for consistently weak hydro production, Italy’s power firms have increased average gas-fired power generation during January through May by around 5.2% from 2025 to around 11,400 MWh/h.

More significantly, the

gas generation rate in May averaged 7,373 MWh/h, which is 35% above the rate seen during the same month in 2025, when average generation from Italy’s hydro dams was around 38% above this year’s May generation total.

Bigger impact
The flip from hydro to gas means more than just altering the power mix for Italy’s generators. It also materially impacts system generation costs.

Italy’s network of hydroelectric plants across northern parts of the country can cheaply generate large volumes of dispatchable power, which frees up gas to inject into storage while lowering overall power production costs.

But when hydro dam production is impeded, Italy’s power producers must turn to more expensive natural gas to plug any generation gaps, thereby raising system costs.

And the impact extends across Europe.

Periods of robust hydro production allow Italy to act as a net contributor to Europe’s gas rebuilding cycle, as the country holds close to 20% of the region’s total gas storage capacity, according to data from Gas Infrastructure Europe (GIE).

But when hydro production disappoints, the dy-

amic flips. Gas burn rises, storage injections slow, and Italy’s role shifts from buffer to constraint.

What’s more, the challenge is no longer cyclical. Italy’s hydro output is becoming structurally less reliable.

Warmer winters are eroding Alpine snow pack, reducing the volume of water available during the key spring melt season. At the same time, hotter summers increase evaporation rates and strain reservoir levels.

Rainfall patterns are also growing more erratic, making it harder to capture and store water efficiently.

The result is a system that delivers lower and more volatile output across the year.

Hydropower, once a dependable backbone of Italy’s power mix, is now a less predictable contributor. That unpredictability matters most during the spring and summer months – precisely when Europe is trying to rebuild gas stocks.

This means trackers of Europe’s gas stockpiles must also keep tabs on Italy’s reservoir output, which currently suggests that regional gas use may now climb just as storage injections re due to hit their peak growth period for the year.

MOSCOW

Europe's leaders talk of peace, but help Kyiv with weapons: Kremlin



The Kremlin said on Monday that the leaders of Germany, France and Britain spoke of peace, but were helping Kyiv with weapons to continue the war, a position it said was inconsistent. The European leaders backed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's call for direct talks with Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin. REUTERS

PORT LOUIS

Mauritius rejects reported move by Trump to buy Chagos Islands



Mauritius said on Monday that it had not received any proposal from the [Donald] Trump administration on the Chagos Islands, after the *Telegraph* reported that the White House was planning to buy the islands. "Mauritius's position remains unchanged: its sovereignty over the Chagos is non-negotiable," it said. REUTERS

HERAT

Afghan Taliban detain women for alleged violation of clothing rules



Afghan residents in the city of Herat witnessed multiple women detained by the Taliban government's morality police, in a crackdown over clothing which has drawn criticism from the United Nations. The UN mission in Afghanistan said on Sunday that the arrests and detentions raise "serious human rights concerns." AFP

LONDON

U.K. PM set to ban 'harmful' social media for teens under-16: report



Tech giants operating in Britain must stop children from circulating nude images on their phones or be forced to do so by law, Prime Minister Keir Starmer said on Monday. The announcement comes as the *Times* reported that the Prime Minister is also mulling a ban on some social media platforms for those aged under 16. REUTERS

Houthis claim missile attack, declare 'total ban' on Israeli ships in Red Sea

Yemen-based Iran-aligned group launches air attack on Israel, says Israel-affiliated ships would again become a target in the Red Sea; the escalation comes as the Strait of Hormuz remains blockaded by Iran due to the war in West Asia with the U.S.

Agence France-Presse
SANAA

Iran-aligned Houthi rebels in Yemen announced a missile attack on Israel on Monday and declared a ban on Israeli shipping in the Red Sea, raising the spectre of a return to major disruption on the key route.

The Houthis' attack came as Israel and Iran traded fire on Monday, putting the ceasefire under renewed strain and threatening hopes for a peace deal.

The Houthis made a similar threat and targeted cargo ships in the vital sea-way during the Israel-Hamas war, forcing many companies into a lengthy detour around the tip of



War fallout: Two men examine a rocket half-buried in the ground near the West Bank city of Jericho on Monday. AFP

southern Africa. The assaults upended shipping in the Red Sea, through which about \$1 trillion of goods passed each year before the war.

Their threat comes as the Strait of Hormuz, the gateway to the Gulf sea and

its energy exporters, remains blockaded by Iran as a result of the war in West Asia with the U.S. and Israel.

'Legitimate targets'
"We declare a complete and total ban on Israeli

maritime navigation in the Red Sea," said a statement from the Houthis' armed forces. "We consider all enemy movements to be legitimate military targets for our armed forces from the moment this statement is issued."

The statement from Brigadier General Yahya Saree was broadcast on the Houthis' al-Masirah satellite news channel.

The Houthis, who joined the war in support of Iran in March, had not announced a missile attack on Israel since a fragile ceasefire began on April 8.

The Houthis have fired missiles at Israel during the Israel-Hamas war and later, but haven't been fully involved in the Iran war.

They said they "launched a missile barrage targeting sensitive Israeli enemy targets", claiming the strikes "achieved their objectives with precision".

The Israeli military earlier wrote on Telegram that it "has identified the launch of a missile from Yemen toward Israeli territory, aerial defence systems are operating to intercept the threat".

An Israeli military official said two missiles were fired by the Houthis since Sunday evening.

The Houthis and Lebanon-based Hezbollah form part of the "Axis of Resistance" grouping of pro-Iran forces opposed to Israel and the United States.

Major quake off Philippines kills at least 35, many missing

Agence France-Presse
MANILA

A 7.8-magnitude earthquake in the southern Philippines on Monday killed at least 35 people, according to provincial authorities, after toppling buildings and sparking tsunami warnings across the region.

National disaster authorities said at least a dozen people were still missing, while 134 had sustained injuries.

Authorities urged people in affected coastal regions to move to higher ground after the offshore quake hit south of General Santos, a city of about 720,000, where the death toll stood at 12, according to a local command centre.

A series of powerful aftershocks rocked the area from about two hours after the first quake, according



Rubbled remains: A damaged building seen in General Santos, Philippines, following a magnitude 7.8 quake on Monday. AP

to the U.S. Geological Survey, with the largest measuring magnitude 6.5.

Rene Punzalan, disaster chief for hard-hit Sarangani province, said 14 people had died in Glan municipality alone when a landslide buried their homes.

Mr. Punzalan said that more than 2,000 people evacuated due to a morning tsunami warning were now awaiting a green light to return to their homes.

The Pacific Tsunami Warning Center issued a tsunami alert for the Philippines, Indonesia, Palau, Taiwan and Papua New Guinea. But by mid-afternoon, the notices were cancelled.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. ordered an immediate disaster response. "The national government is moving and we will not leave anyone behind," Mr. Marcos said in a statement.

Ukraine has recaptured more than 600 square km in 2026: Army chief

Reuters
KYIV

Ukrainian forces have recaptured more than 600 square kilometre of territory so far this year, Ukraine's top military commander Oleksandr Syrskiy said on Monday, the latest sign of shifting momentum after years of slow but relentless Russian gains.

In May alone, Ukraine recaptured 100 square kilometre more of territory than it lost, Mr. Syrskiy said on Telegram.

The remarks came as Ukrainian forces struck oil facilities in Russia and occupied Ukraine said on Monday.

Mr. Syrskiy did not specify where the gains took place, saying only that in certain areas of the 1,200-km front line, Ukrainian forces continued to main-



Honouring the fallen: People light up flares during the funeral ceremony of a Ukrainian serviceman in Kyiv on Monday. AP

tain the initiative. Mr. Syrskiy said Russian forces were still trying to advance in the country's east and south.

The area around the eastern city of Pokrovsk, Oleksandrivka and Huliai-poleareas in the southeast and south are among the most intense places of fighting, he said.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian officials said its forces carried out strategic attacks as part of their campaign to make Moscow pay an economic cost for the war.

Ukraine's General Staff said Ukrainian forces had struck Russia's Krasnodar Krai region overnight, hitting the Grushovaya oil transshipment base near

Novorossiysk. The complex is one of the largest transshipment hubs in southern Russia for oil and petroleum products.

The Krasny Yar "linear production and dispatching station" in the Volgograd region was also hit, the General Staff said.

Ukraine also carried out strikes overnight in the Semkolodezkaya oil base and an oil depot near Feodosia in the Russian-occupied Crimean Peninsula on Sunday.

Fuel crisis

Asked whether the Kremlin is worried about the fuel crisis in Crimea, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the Energy Ministry and other agencies are working on a set of measures. "There are indeed certain problems at the moment," Mr. Peskov said.

Quiet burden



Members of a Red Cross team carry the coffin of a woman suspected of having died from Ebola virus disease during her safe burial at a cemetery in Bunia, Democratic Republic of Congo, on Sunday. The latest WHO toll from the epidemic is 534 cases in DRC and neighbouring Uganda, and 93 deaths. There is no specific vaccine or treatment for the Bundibugyo Ebola strain behind the latest outbreak. AFP

Lebanon was struck close to 3,500 times since truce: Minister

Reuters
BEIRUT

Israel has carried out nearly 3,500 air strikes on Lebanon and hundreds of controlled explosions since the U.S.-brokered ceasefire came into effect on April 17, Lebanon's Defence Minister, Michel Menassa, said on Monday.

During a Cabinet meeting, Mr. Menassa said that from April 17 to June 7, Israel had carried out 3,491 air strikes, 407 controlled demolitions and six "raz-

ing" operations, or demolitions - which have left some entire villages in the southernmost strip of Lebanon entirely flattened.

Already, more than 1 million people have been displaced by Israel's strikes and evacuation warnings across Lebanon since the war erupted on March 2.

While Israel has largely halted air strikes on Beirut and its suburbs, the truce has failed to stop the fighting in southern Lebanon between Israel and Iran-aligned group Hezbollah.

Xi and Kim express hopes for greater ties between China and North Korea

Associated Press
SEOUL

Chinese President Xi Jinping and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un underscored their commitment to deepen cooperation in a closely watched summit on Monday, as Mr. Xi made a rare visit to Pyongyang in a likely attempt to reassert Beijing's unique influence over its socialist neighbour.

It's Mr. Xi's first visit to North Korea in seven years. Earlier on Monday, he was given a lavish welcome upon arrival at Pyongyang's international air-



Rare visit: Chinese President Xi Jinping and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un at a welcome ceremony in Pyongyang on Monday. AP

port. He and his wife Peng Liyuan were greeted by Mr. Kim and his wife Ri Sol Ju.

Mr. Xi later arrived at Pyongyang's main square,

where a military honour guard and thousands of people staged a welcoming ceremony.

In a summit later in the

day, Mr. Xi expressed China's willingness to expand cooperation in a wide range of areas including trade, agriculture, construction and technology, China's state broadcaster CCTV said in an online report.

Mr. Kim said Mr. Xi's visit "clearly demonstrates how unbreakable" the North Korean-China relationship is, CCTV said. It cited Mr. Kim as saying that consolidating a new era of friendship between the two countries is the "unchanging strategic choice" of North Korea.

Trump's \$100,000 fee for H-1B visa fee is unlawful, court rules

Reuters
BOSTON

A federal judge on Monday struck down a \$100,000 fee that U.S. President Donald Trump imposed on new H-1B visas for highly skilled foreign workers, concluding that it constituted an unlawful tax that Congress never authorised.

U.S. District Judge Leo Sorokin in Boston issued the ruling in a lawsuit filed by 20 Democratic State Attorneys General challeng-

ing a fee Mr. Trump announced in September that raised the cost of obtaining H-1B visas.

The H-1B program offers 65,000 visas annually, with another 20,000 visas for workers with advanced degrees, approved for three to six years. Employers seeking a visa for a foreign worker before Mr. Trump's proclamation paid about \$2,000 to \$5,000 in fees. The increase in fees has discouraged H-1B visa requests, according to court filings.



Almedrones, vintage American cars imported before the 1959 revolution, serve as vital shared taxis in Cuba. AFP

Cuba's iconic antique cars go off the road as fuel crisis deepens

Associated Press
HAVANA

A worsening fuel crisis across Cuba is testing the island's famed "almedrones", the vintage American cars that serve as vital shared taxis and embody the island's ingenuity and endurance.

These days, many of the iconic gas-guzzling antique cars sit idle, casualties of fuel shortages that have gripped Cuba since January and that Cuban officials blame on a U.S. energy blockade.

Outside his home in Las Minas, a town of about 2,000 people on the outskirts of Havana, Diriel Valdez is restoring a 1951 Chevrolet Deluxe.

Mr. Valdez is among thousands of Cubans waiting for fuel through a government reservation app that, for many, has become a symbol of the shortages it was designed to manage.

"I signed up in February ... I'm still somewhere around number 2,800," said the 27-year-old who runs an auto body shop from his home.

The reward for the wait would be 20 litres of gasoline — enough fuel, Mr. Valdez says, to get him to the beach.

The name almedrón comes from the Spanish word for almond, a reference to the rounded shape of the large American sedans imported before Cuba's 1959 revolution.

On a recent night in Havana, as another blackout darkened much of the city, taxi driver Leonardo Daniel González steered a friend's glowing purple 1948 Chevrolet Fleetmaster through the darkness.

"These cars are passed down from generation to generation," said Mr. González, 30. "I had one that belonged to my great-grandfather. It went from him to my grandfather, then to my father, and then to me."

Cuba is experiencing one of its most severe energy crises in years. The population, already battered by decades of economic crises and shortages, is now navigating daily blackouts that can last up to 20 hours in some parts of the island.

Germany's standing in international order under scrutiny after UNSC loss

The country has failed to win a non-permanent seat on the UNSC for the first time; its selective application of international law vis-a-vis Ukraine and Iran, and its cautious and often wavering approach towards Israel might have led smaller nations, especially of the Global South, to lose faith in it

NEWS ANALYSIS

Joan Sony Cherian

On June 3, for the first time, Germany failed to win a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). The largest economy in the European Union (EU) won just 104 votes, well below the required 127 votes, and lost to the other two contenders in the race, Portugal, which won 134 votes, and Austria which got 131 votes.

The UNSC has five permanent members and 10 non-permanent members who rotate every two years. Out of these 10 seats, two are reserved for the regional grouping of 'Western European and other States' which includes Germany. Members for these 10 seats are elected by the UN General Assembly (UNGA), with a contesting nation needing at least two-thirds of the vote to win a place on the UNSC. Germany has been re-elected six times; whenever it has contested. Up until now.

Steadfast with Ukraine

The loss in the UNSC election is being seen as a major foreign policy defeat for the Christian Democratic Union (CDU)-led federal government of Germany and its head, Chancellor Friedrich Merz, who had, after coming to power last year, stated his desire to restore Germany's place on the world map. Opposition parties in the Bundestag, including the Greens



Losung contest: German Foreign Minister Johann Wadepuhl casts his vote during the election of non-permanent members of the UNSC at the UN headquarters in New York City on June 3. AFP

as well as the far-right AfD party, called it an "embarrassing defeat".

Foreign Minister Johann Wadepuhl, who had extensively lobbied for Germany's candidacy in the UNGA, stated that the loss could have been due to the fact that Germany takes a clear stance on issues that not all member states share. "There is our firm support for Ukraine; the fact that Russia does not want such a voice at the Security Council," said Mr. Wadepuhl. He also acknowledged that, "the fact that Germany must always assume a special responsibility for Israel in the Middle East conflict may also have cost votes."

With respect to Ukraine, the EU and Germany specifically have emerged as the war-torn nation's most steadfast supporters even in the face of the U.S.' changed attitude towards the country after Donald

Trump became President for a second term. Under Mr. Merz, Germany has increased its military assistance for Ukraine. Moreover, in light of Russia's aggression and the U.S.' increasingly belligerent rhetoric towards the EU and NATO, Mr. Merz has advocated for increased budget for the domestic military while also calling for stronger European defence capabilities. Mr. Merz also became a part of the 'coalition of the willing', along with France and the U.K., in order to facilitate support for Ukraine.

Russia's "special military operation" in Ukraine has been condemned by almost the entire international order, with the U.S. and the EU invoking sanctions on the country. Portugal and Austria, in line with the EU's position, have also been strong supporters of Ukraine's right to sovereignty. Moreover,

Ambiguity with Israel

Ever since the breakout of the Israel-Hamas conflict in October 2023, Germany has steadfastly upheld Israel's right to defend itself. Since October 2023, the UNGA has adopted at least six major resolutions regarding the conflict and Israel's subsequent genocide in the Gaza Strip. Berlin abstained from three of them, including the most immediate ones in 2023 calling for a ceasefire and

for enhanced UN rights for Palestine. Even as international condemnation for Israel increased due to rising casualties in the Gaza Strip, especially of children, Germany has been walking a tightrope with regards to its relation with Israel.

When Mr. Merz was elected Chancellor in early 2025, he spoke to Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over the phone and said that he would "find ways and means for him (Netanyahu) to visit Germany and also to be able to leave again without being arrested in Germany," in defiance of the arrest warrant issued by the International Criminal Court against Mr. Netanyahu on November 21, 2024, for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in the Gaza Strip.

While Chancellor Merz has since then criticised Israel for its excessive campaign in the Gaza Strip, even moving to restrict arms sales to the country in August 2025, which he lifted in November 2025 after the signing of a 'ceasefire', he visited Israel in December 2025 and held talks with Mr. Netanyahu where he re-affirmed support to Israel. He also refused to join an initiative by western allies to recognise the state of Palestine.

Germany's relationship with Israel is complicated by, as Mr. Wadepuhl mentioned, its 'special responsibility' — the political doctrine of Germany to back Israel's security in the light of Nazi Germany's crimes

against Jews during the Holocaust in World War II.

Conflicting stances

Germany's standing as an upholder of international law has also taken a hit in the context of the ongoing Iran-Israel-U.S. war in West Asia which began on February 28, 2026. Mr. Merz refused to condemn the move as a violation of international law and stated that along with the U.S. and Israel, "we share the goal of ending the terror of these regimes". However, his initial support soon turned into criticism as the war progressed. The effects of the war have been increasingly hitting the German economy, with oil and gas prices rising sharply. The energy sector in Germany is already stressed as the nation has drastically reduced its dependence on Russia, which was its main source for energy, in light of the Ukraine war. By the end of April, Mr. Merz made scathing remarks against the U.S. and said that Iran's leadership was "humiliating" Washington.

Germany's selective application of international law vis-a-vis Ukraine and Iran, and its cautious and often wavering approach towards Israel might have led smaller nations, especially of the Global South, to lose faith in it and regard smaller European states as safer bets. It would be wise for Germany to re-evaluate its standing in the international order if it wishes to regain its position as an upholder of the United Nations and international law.

Little cameo



Initiated by veteran: A man grabs a child as people celebrate the 16th Tomato Fight Festival, known as 'Tomatina', in Sutamarcan, Boyaca department, Colombia, on Sunday. AFP

As Ukraine fights Russia, front line regions see rise in premature births

Associated Press
ZAPORIZHZHIA

When Marharyta Nekhoroshyva first saw her newborn son, she was gripped by fear. Born after just 26 weeks of pregnancy, he weighed only 940 grams (2 pounds) and wore diapers no larger than the palm of an adult hand.

"The doctors told me that if he survived the first three days, everything would be OK," she said, tears filling her eyes. "I don't believe in God, but I was praying." Now nine months old, Mark is energetic and lively, but he has chronic breathing problems and requires frequent hospital stays.

A rising number of babies are being born prema-



Taking care: A nurse changes the diaper of a premature baby inside an incubator at a perinatal centre in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine. AP

turely — before 37 weeks of pregnancy — in Ukraine, particularly in regions near the front lines, where some areas have seen rates nearly double since the conflict started with Russia's invasion in 2022.

Experts say the reasons for premature births are

complex, but the profound psychological and physical stress the war is inflicting on pregnant mothers is contributing.

While fewer women in Ukraine are giving birth overall due to displacement, emigration and other factors during the war, a

growing share of births are premature, according to data from the United Nations and recent scientific studies.

In the southern region of Kherson, the preterm birth rate nearly doubled from 5.4% in 2019 to 9.8% in 2025, according to the U.N. In the Zaporizhzhia region, also in the south, it rose from 5.7% in 2019 to 7.6% in 2025. In Poltava, a region in northeastern Ukraine, the rate rose from 7.7% to 9.8% over the same period.

It may be tied to an increased risk of infection, a known trigger for preterm labor, said Dr. Andrew Weeks, a professor of international maternal health care at the University of Liverpool.

An Italian General rallies his troops on the far-right, threatening to outflank Meloni

Reuters
ROME

Roberto Vannacci's new far-right party, Futuro Nazionale, is fast becoming a political headache for Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.

Just four months after deserting Ms. Meloni's coalition ally, the League party, the former General says he has attracted almost 100,000 paying members, which is polling at around 4% and rising.

That may sound modest, but in a tight election due next year it could be enough to decide whether

Ms. Meloni wins a second term, leaving her with a difficult conundrum — should she embrace him, and risk scaring away her more moderate supporters, or shun him, and hope that his momentum will fade.

Mr. Vannacci's anti-EU, pro-Russia party will be officially inaugurated this weekend, presenting itself as an uncompromising, nationalist party, while accusing Ms. Meloni and her allies of going soft.

"We represent that right which is not faded, not wavering, not fearful," Mr. Vannacci told a group of foreign reporters earlier this

year after he abandoned the League, which is headed by Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini.

"Many positions taken over the past three years by this government ... have revealed a fearful right," he said, arguing that Ms. Meloni had been weak with Brussels, had failed to crackdown on crime, and had reneged on promises to repatriate migrants.

March of paratrooper

Mr. Vannacci, 57, a former paratrooper, shot to prominence three years ago publishing a book that he said promoted traditional Italian values while dispa-

raging LGBTQ people, migrants, and feminists.

Defence Minister Guido Crosetto said the book brought the army into disrepute and Mr. Vannacci, who had served as Italy's defence attache in Russia between 2020 and 2022, was suspended from active service.

Mr. Salvini, drawn by his uncompromising right-wing appeal, welcomed Mr. Vannacci into the League, giving him the springboard he needed to win election to the European Parliament in 2024.

However, in February, he struck out on his own, outflanking both Mr. Salvi-

ni and Ms. Meloni on the right.

"Salvini hoped to take advantage of Vannacci's popularity, but it has backfired horribly on him," said Sofia Ventura, a political science professor at Bologna University.

"Salvini is now going to have to take up more radical positions to prevent being outmanoeuvred. This is a problem for Meloni, who might also feel compelled to follow the same path."

An SWG poll published on Friday put Futuro Nazionale at 4.6%, snapping at the heels of the League on 5.8% — feeding into Ita-

ly's recurring appetite for political newcomers.

The same poll showed a loose alliance of centre-left parties marginally ahead of Ms. Meloni's bloc.

Promise of 'purity'

None of the ruling coalition parties have suggested forging an alliance with Mr. Vannacci.

A tie-up would be particularly uncomfortable for Forza Italia, led by Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani and bankrolled by the Berlusconi family, which has adopted a more socially progressive outlook since the death of its patriarch, Silvio Berlusconi.

"I don't talk to Vannacci," Tajani told Reuters, while not ruling out contact ahead of an election expected within 18 months.

Mr. Vannacci insists his party belongs inside the right-wing camp but has made clear any accord would be on his terms, saying he would not compromise the movement's "purity".

That stance unnerves many in Ms. Meloni's camp.

Since taking office, she has recast Brothers of Italy from a hard-right protest party into a more mainstream conservative go-

vernment force with credibility in Brussels and Washington, backing Ukraine and presenting herself as a reliable Atlanticist.

Mr. Vannacci's rise threatens to pull her coalition in the opposite direction. His party has already begun recruiting from government ranks, attracting eight lawmakers from coalition parties, and combines hardline anti-EU rhetoric with scepticism towards Western support for Ukraine.

"In my opinion, unconditional support in terms of weapons and money for Ukraine is not good for Europe," he said.

STATUS QUO

No extra emphasis on Pant to change his game, says Kotak



R.V. MOORTHY

India's batting coach Sitanshu Kotak said on Monday there is no additional emphasis on Rishabh Pant to alter his game. "I don't think Pant alone has to play according to the situation. Everyone should play freely, but when the team requires something in red-ball cricket, every player should adapt accordingly," said Kotak.

COMFORTABLE WIN

Shreyanka, Radha spin India past Windies in T20 WC warm-up tie



X@BCCIWOMEN

Shreyanka Patil and Radha Yadav shone as India scored a 26-run win over the West Indies in a T20 World Cup warm-up fixture at Cardiff on Monday. **The scores:** India 179/8 in 20 overs (Shafali 29, Smriti 39, Yastika 36, Bharti 56 n.o.) bt West Indies 153/8 in 20 overs (Dottin 49, Campbelle 25, Radha 3/25, Shreyanka 4/36). **Toss:** WI.

IN AND OUT

Brazil midfielder Ederson replaces injured Wesley in the WC squad



FIFA

The Brazilian football federation announced on Sunday that injured full-back Wesley will be replaced in the World Cup squad by midfielder Ederson. Wesley suffered a thigh injury in Saturday's 2-1 friendly win over Egypt. Atalanta's 26-year-old Ederson made the last of his three international appearances in March 2025.

RUN SNAPPED

Marschall ends Duplantis' 40-meet winning streak in pole vault



REUTERS

Swedish pole vaulter Armand Duplantis fell to his first loss after 40 consecutive victories since 2023 at his home Diamond League event in Stockholm on Sunday. Duplantis cleared 5.80m but failed twice at 6 and once at 6.05. Australia's Kurtis Marschall (*in pic*) won with a vault of 5.90. It was Duplantis' first outdoor event of the year.

Manav and Washington bowl India to its biggest victory

The debutant claims a six-for in the first essay; the offie scalps four while Kuldeep strikes thrice as the Afghans get bundled out for 112 after following on, crashing to a defeat well inside three days

AFGHANISTAN IN INDIA

Vivek Krishnan
NEW CHANDIGARH

The one-off Test against Afghanistan was India's first at home since 2010 without either the now-retired R. Ashwin or the rested Ravindra Jadeja. Much like Ashwin and Jadeja at their vintage best in the subcontinent, left-arm spinner Manav Suthar and off-spinner Washington Sundar dovetailed nicely to propel the host to victory by an innings and 300 runs inside three days at the Maharaja Yadavindra Singh Stadium on Monday. It is India's biggest win by an innings in Test history.

Notwithstanding the caveat that the Afghans lack skill and experience in the five-day format, India will take a lot of heart from Manav's match haul of seven wickets on debut. The 23-year-old left-arm spinner returned exemplary figures of 22-10-33-6 in the first essay, becoming the seventh Indian to take a five-for in his debut innings.

In the second dig, Washington came to the fore with four for 36 while left-arm wrist-spinner Kuldeep Yadav chipped in with three scalps.

Replying to India's mammoth 564 for eight declared, Afghanistan, which was 113 for five overnight, was shot out for 152 and 112. The one-sided contest came to a close shortly after the tea interval, with the visitor's implosion entailing the fall of seven wickets for just 25 runs in its second innings (Sharafuddin Ashraf was absent hurt).

Having conceded a first-innings deficit of 412, Hashmatullah Shahidi & Co.



Spin twins: Manav and Washington accounted for 12 wickets as India crushed Afghanistan in the one-off Test. R.V. MOORTHY

were forced to follow on. They had a more robust start second time around as Sediqullah Atal stitched together a 42-run opening stand with Abdul Malik. Sediqullah's keenness to take on the Indian spinners was evident.

But once Mohammed Siraj pinned Malik plumb in front in the 14th over, India had a foot in the door.

As the afternoon wore on, the Afghan batters couldn't strike the right balance between attack and defence. Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Rahmat Shah and Sediqullah succumbed to rash shots just before tea.

In Afghanistan's first in-

nings, Manav ran through the lower-order. Adding to his three victims on Sunday, the youngster induced a faint edge from Sharafuddin Ashraf.

In his next over, the tweaker punched the air in delight as he castled Rahmat around his legs for his five-for. Just three balls later, he trapped Mohammad Saleem leg-before.

A large chunk of Manav's deliveries homed in on the good-length area. Through his spells, he conveyed the impression of a bowler acutely aware of the demands of the classical version. It points to a bright future.

SCOREBOARD

INDIA — 1ST INNINGS
564 for eight decl. in 127 overs
AFGHANISTAN — 1ST INNINGS
Abdul Malik c Siraj b Manav 16 (18b, 3x4), Sediqullah Atal b Prasad 17 (27b, 3x4), Rahmanullah Gurbaz c Sai Sudharsan b Manav 12 (40b, 1x4, 1x6), Rahmat Shah b Manav 60 (135b, 9x4, 1x6), Hashmatullah Shahidi lbw b Prasad 20 (48b, 4x4), Afsar Zazai c & b Manav 3 (26b), Azmatullah Omarzai b Prasad 0 (10b), Sharafuddin Ashraf c Pant b Manav 11 (32b, 2x4), Nangeyaliya Kharote (not out) 4 (12b), Mohammad Saleem lbw b Manav 0 (3b), Ziaur Rahman c Pant b Washington 6 (3b, 1x6); Extras (nb-2, w-1): 3; Total (in 58.4 overs): 152.

FALL OF WICKETS
1-28 (Malik, 5.4 overs), 2-40 (Sediqullah, 8.4), 3-62 (Gurbaz, 19.2), 4-98 (Shahidi, 32.2), 5-113 (Afsar, 39.5), 6-118 (Omarzai, 44.2), 7-142 (Ashraf, 55.1), 8-143 (Rahmat, 57.2), 9-143 (Saleem, 57.5).

INDIA BOWLING
Siraj 9-2-29-0, Prasad 11-2-37-3, Manav 22-10-33-6, Kuldeep 10-1-32-0, Washington 6-4-1-21-1.
AFGHANISTAN — 2ND INNINGS
Atal c Prasad b Washington 42 (80b, 5x4, 1x6), Malik lbw b Siraj 8 (40b), Gurbaz c Prasad b Kuldeep 24 (24b, 3x4, 1x6), Rahmat c Manav b Washington 13 (16b, 1x6), Shahidi c Gill b Washington 5 (10b, 1x4), Afsar lbw b Manav 8 (19b, 1x4), Omarzai c Kuldeep b Washington 4 (5b), Kharote c Manav b Kuldeep 6 (11b, 1x6), Ziaur (not out) 0 (11b), Saleem c Sai Sudharsan b Kuldeep 0 (1b), Ashraf (absent hurt); Extras (nb-2): 2; Total (in 35.5 overs): 112.

FALL OF WICKETS
1-42 (Malik, 13.1), 2-74 (Gurbaz, 19.1), 3-87 (Rahmat, 22.6), 4-93 (Shahidi, 26.3), 5-98 (Sediqullah, 28.6), 6-106 (Afsar, 31.5), 7-106 (Omarzai, 32.1), 8-112 (Kharote, 35.4), 9-112 (Saleem, 35.5).

INDIA BOWLING
Manav 10-2-29-1, Prasad 3-0-6-0, Kuldeep 7-5-30-3, Siraj 4-1-11-1, Washington 11-4-36-4.

PoM: Manav.
India won by an innings and 300 runs.

Next match: First ODI: June 13, Dharamshala, 1.30 p.m.

Iran arrives amidst a tumultuous lead-up; France and Spain bring their star power

FIFA WC COUNTDOWN

N. Sudarshan

Placed in a tough Group I, France, Senegal and Norway will have to bring their A-game to the FIFA World Cup. Belgium (G), Spain and Uruguay (H) have a relatively easier start to the campaign.

Group G (Belgium, Iran, Egypt and New Zealand)
Belgium's golden generation finished third in 2018. In 2026, that gold has lost its sheen.

The likes of Kevin De Bruyne, Thibaut Courtois, Romelu Lukaku and Axel Witsel are still around, but the famed backline comprising Toby Alderweireld, Vincent Kompany, Thomas Vermaelen and Jan Vertonghen no longer exists.

Coach Rudi Garcia will thus be pinning his hopes on his attack, which also has the speedy Manchester City winger Jeremy Doku.

There are, however, doubts over Lukaku's preparedness, with Belgium's all-time top-scorer (90 goals) playing just an hour of football all season for Napoli.

But the strength of the group is such that Belgium is the favourite. Iran, at No. 21, and Egypt, at No. 29, are both not up to scratch.

Iran has featured in each of the last three World Cups, but has exited in the group stage. Currently, the country is in the middle of a military standoff with the United States, something that seriously threatened its participation.

And because of safety concerns, Iran will be based in Mexico, and travel long distances to Los Angeles and Seattle to play. Supreme tenacity will be the need of the hour.

Egypt, at least on paper, seems slightly better because it has Mohamed Salah. The world stage is one place where he is yet to excel, having played just two games in Egypt's group-stage exit in the 2018 showpiece.

The 33-year-old will also be eager to reiterate his footballing worth after a not-so-pleasant exit from Liverpool.

Surprisingly, Egypt, a seven-time Africa Cup of Nations champion, has never won a match at the World Cup. Will the largely turgid football it plays, with the only goal-scoring route through Salah, help break the duck?

There is a chance that this approach may work against New Zealand, the lowest-ranked side at the tournament (No. 85). For that, Nottingham Forest's Chris Wood, scorer of 45 goals for the Kiwis, should be shut down.

Interestingly, the New Zealand football team is called 'All Whites', contrary to the unofficial national colour black. White is about peace. But sport is war minus the shooting.



Linchpins: Mbappe will be keen to regain France's World Cup crown. De Bruyne's Belgium comes with an ageing squad while Yamal will be Spain's bow and arrow. AFP, REUTERS & AP

Best finish: Belgium: Third place (2018); Iran: Group stage (1978, 1998, 2006, 2014, 2018, 2022); Egypt: Group stage (1934, 1990, 2018); New Zealand: Group stage (1982, 2010).

Group H (Spain, Uruguay, Saudi Arabia and Cape Verde)

Ever since Spain won its maiden World Cup in 2010, it hasn't gone past the round of 16. In 2026, it cannot afford a similar fate.

Ranked second in the world, Spain arrives in North America with a first-rate side, despite not having a single player from Real Madrid.

The 2024 European champion's trump card will be Barcelona star Lamine Yamal, already the metronome for both club and country.

And in Nico Williams and Mikel Oyarzabal, the 18-year-old winger will be supplemented well. Yamal and Williams sustained hamstring injuries recently but are expected to be fit.

In midfield, there is an embarrassment of riches, with Pedri, Gavi, Martin Zubimendi, Rodri and Fabian Ruiz all in the roster.

Three world-class goalkeepers in Unai Simon, David Raya and Joan Garcia, and the calming presence of Barcelona defender Eric Garcia make the Luis de la Fuente-coached team well-rounded.

Competing with Spain for the top spot – however improbable it looks – will be Uruguay, the two-time Cup winner.

But the Marcelo Bielsa-marshalled outfit, despite being powered by Real Madrid midfielder Federico Valverde, no longer has that cutting edge quality, especially without strikers Luis Suarez (omitted) and Edinson Cavani (retired).

For success, it needs to summon the spirits that helped beat Brazil and Argentina in 2023, and finish third at the 2024 Copa



America. Saudi Arabia, the third-best side in the group, famously beat Argentina 2-1 at Qatar 2022. But it no longer has the coach who masterminded that heist – Herve Renard.

Georgios Donis from Greece was appointed only two months ago, and he has his task cut out if his wards are to match the round-of-16 effort from 1994 (also in the United States).

Cape Verde, an archipelago off Africa's west coast with a population as low as six lakh, is the fourth member.

It's the third-smallest nation ever at a World Cup, and a majority of the squad is foreign-born as a result of significant outward migration before the country gained independence from Portugal in 1975.

Best finish: Spain: Champion (2010); Uruguay: Champion (1930, 1950); Saudi Arabia: Round of 16 (1994); Cape Verde: Debut.

Group I (France, Senegal, Norway and Iraq)

If Brazil and Argentina are football's eternal favourites, France is its newfound royalty. In the last seven editions, the European nation has won the World Cup twice, finished runner-up twice and made another quarterfinal.

The central figure here is coach Didier Deschamps, who won the World Cup in 1998 as a player and has been France's manager since July 2012. The North American sojourn will be his swansong, and he will be eager to part on a high.

Kylian Mbappe is his main man, with Ballon d'Or winner Ousmane Dembele and Bayern Munich winger Michael Olise forming the support cast. That players such as Desire Doue and Bradley Barcola – both from Paris Saint

Germain – are likely to start from the bench says a lot about Les Blues' strength.

But in the 14 years Deschamps has been in charge, France has been criticised for playing with its handbrake on. If the side can marry its defensive solidity – only four goals conceded in the qualifying – with its fearsome attack, opponents will have a torrid time.

Senegal would want to remind France that it has not always played out that way. The African nation upset the then defending champion in 2002 en route a quarterfinal finish. And in 2026, it remains strong, powered by former Liverpool star Sadio Mane.

Interestingly, Senegal won the Africa Cup of Nations in January only to be stripped of the title after some of its players left the field during the final protesting a penalty awarded to Morocco. The case awaits adjudication at the Court of Arbitration for Sport. An authoritative on-field effort will not hurt.

Norway is the underdog in this group despite having Manchester City's Erling Haaland and Arsenal's Martin Odegaard. The Nordic country is returning to the World stage for the first time since 1998. Can it leave an indelible mark?

For Iraq, qualification itself should count as success. The war-torn nation was the last to punch its ticket, beating Bolivia in an away Inter-Confederation Playoff in March after travelling 12 hours by road and 17 hours by air. Whatever it does in North America will be a bonus.

Best finish: France: Champion (1998, 2018); Senegal: Quarterfinal (2002); Norway: Round of 16 (1998); Iraq: Group stage (1986).

* The 1934 World Cup was a 16-team knockout tournament.

Test cricket is a game of patience: Manav

Vivek Krishnan
NEW CHANDIGARH

The Indian cricket ecosystem has had its eye on Manav Suthar for a few years. In conversations, many would speak glowingly of the 23-year-old's rhythmic action, flight, bounce and the revolutions imparted, all of which allowed the left-arm spinner to extract considerable turn even on flatter surfaces.

There was irrefutable evidence of all his virtues over the past three days as Manav stole the show in his debut Test against Afghanistan at the Maharaja Yadavindra Singh Stadium. Admittedly, the batters at the other end weren't out of the top drawer, but on a deck that was far from be-



In elite company: Manav castled Rahmat to become the seventh Indian to register a five-for in his debut innings. R.V. MOORTHY

ing a dustbowl, Manav turned heads just by the frequency with which he spun the ball past the right-handers.

The fruits of his hard work were figures of six for 33 in 22 overs in the first innings, facilitating his addition to an elite list of Indian

bowlers with five-wicket hauls on debut.

Afterwards, Manav, adjudged the Player-of-the-Match, couldn't hide his delight at the proceedings in New Chandigarh. "It is an unreal feeling. My dream from the beginning was to play Test cricket for

India. At the start, I wanted to see how the pitch was playing. So, I backed the stock delivery. Then, I used subtle variations. Test cricket is a game of patience, so just bowl with patience," he said at the presentation.

Back in Sri Ganganagar, a city in Rajasthan that is located near the border with Pakistan, Manav's father echoed his son's fondness for the classical version. "I always believed that Manav would play Test cricket for India first. White-ball cricket can come later," Jagdish Suthar, a retired school teacher who had attended the first day's play, told *The Hindu*.

Now, it is up to Manav to make this the first of many appearances.

Host England the team to watch out for in Group B

It has never lost a home World Cup across formats; holder New Zealand eyes an encore; Windies will face stiff challenge with Sri Lanka, Scotland and Ireland looking to punch above their weight

T20 WC COUNTDOWN

Lavanya L.

The second bracket of the expanded 12-team ICC women's T20 World Cup might seem lighter on action when compared to the Group of Death featuring heavyweights Australia, India and South Africa. Group B pits inaugural winner England, holder New Zealand, former champion West Indies, Sri Lanka, Scotland and Ireland in a six-way tussle for the two semifinal slots.

Nat Sciver-Brunt's England will be one to watch for reasons far beyond the pitch. As host, the England and Wales Cricket Board has packed an ambitious marketing campaign to boost the women's game and will be heavily helped if the home team does well.

Charlotte Edwards, who lifted the first-ever Women's T20 World Cup trophy at Lord's 17 years ago, is now hoping to replicate her feat as coach. But batting inconsistencies and line-up confusion stand in the way. A 2-1 series victory over India leading up to the showpiece would have been a shot in the arm.

England has never lost a home World Cup across formats and will hope that record stays intact.

New Zealand may have surrendered 1-2 to England in a bilateral series a few



Influential all-rounder: Skipper Sciver-Brunt holds the key to England's success. AFP

weeks ago, but White Ferns should not be underestimated. They benefited from spirited performances and senior players stepping up to the job, coinciding with other teams making fatal errors in a tournament stingy with its

second chances, in the last edition.

Old issues remain in 2026, too. The batting order can be quite fickle and ever so often fall back on the ever-dependent Sophie Devine. But with a new captain, Amelia Kerr – the

Player-of-the-Series in the 2024 edition – the Kiwis will want to go back to back, particularly to give senior pros Devine, Suzie Bates and Lea Tahuhu – who will bow out of the format after this tournament – a fitting farewell.

West Indies won't find it easy to repeat its 2016 heroics, not with Chamari Athapaththu's Sri Lanka, Scotland and Ireland breathing down its neck in the group stage. But if rain delays that have interrupted the warm-ups endure during the tournament, the Windies have the firepower to be on the favourable side of Net Run Rate conversations.

Scotland and Ireland are at a disadvantage of not playing full member nations as often as they might like to really measure their strengths. That said, they will keep a top-eight finish in mind to lock automatic qualification for the next World Cup to be hosted by Pakistan.

This edition will have the most number of European teams (four) in any World Cup and given geographical proximity, teams can expect crowds to raise the roof.

England, though, will hope that with this marquee event to be followed by a historic Test against Harmanpreet Kaur & Co. at Lord's, and The Hundred, women's cricket gains greatly. A shiny addition to its trophy cabinet will be the icing on the cake.

'I am keen to see how Sooryavanshi does in Australia or England'

CRICKET

S. Dipak Ragav
CHENNAI

Australian legend Glenn McGrath was pleased with how MRF Pace Foundation trainees Praful Hinge and Sakib Hussain performed for Sunrisers Hyderabad in the recent IPL season.

"I was very impressed with all of them. Sakib played many games and took some good wickets. For Praful to start with three wickets in his first over, it doesn't get much better than that, does it? And then you had Eshan Malunga, who came here from Sri Lanka and spent time. Watching the three boys



Proud teacher: McGrath swelled with pride when looking back at the IPL performances of Praful, Sakib and Eshan. R. RAGU

consistently play well for Sunrisers, I was very proud of them," said McGrath, who heads the Foundation.

"Praful has had some injuries as well. But it was good to see him come back and play, and that's what

you want. You want them to have game time and a bit of success."

McGrath hailed 15-year-old Vaibhav Sooryavanshi's impressive show for Rajasthan Royals but wanted to see how he fares in overseas conditions. "He was

incredible... to be the leading run-scorer in the IPL with 70-odd (72) sixes. He's got that back lift, a bit like Brian Lara, and is obviously a powerful hitter. He was unbelievable. It would only happen in India or the sub-continent. I couldn't see a 15-year-old playing in Australia.

"They have no fear, do they? They just back themselves. If it's there, they don't care if it's a guy bowling his first over or someone like Pat Cummins, who's one of the best bowlers in the world. In India, you can pick the line up and hit through it. If he goes and plays in England or Australia, I'd be keen to see how he does there," said the 56-year-old.

Sooryavanshi in focus as India-A begins tri-series campaign

Sports Bureau

Dashing opener Vaibhav Sooryavanshi will be the cynosure of all eyes when Tilak Varma-led India-A begins its tri-series campaign against Sri Lanka-A in Dambulla on Tuesday.

Every team will face each other twice – Afghanistan-A is the third side – and the top two will advance to the final, scheduled for June 21.

India-A's fixtures (all matches in Dambulla): June 9: vs. Sri Lanka-A; June 11: vs. Afghanistan-A; June 15: vs. Sri Lanka-A; June 17: vs. Afghanistan-A.



Sooryavanshi. GETTY IMAGES

Federer to play exhibition event ahead of US Open

TENNIS

Press Trust of India
NEW YORK

Roger Federer will play in an exhibition at the US Open this year, returning to the Grand Slam tournament that he is the only player to win five consecutive times.

Days before being enshrined in the International Tennis Hall of Fame on August 29 in Newport, Federer will play in New York on Aug. 25. The event Roger Federer: An Icon Returns to New York will also in-

clude Andy Roddick, John McEnroe and Andre Agassi.

Roddick won the 2003 US Open, the year before Federer started dominating the event.

He won every one from 2004-08 as part of his 20 Grand Slam singles titles. Federer last played US Open in 2019.

"So many unforgettable moments of my career happened in New York, and Arthur Ashe Stadium is a place that means a great deal to me," said Federer.

"I've missed being part of that atmosphere and feeling the incredible energy fans bring every year".

McCullum hopeful about Archer's availability for second Test

Agence France-Presse
LONDON

England could face a tricky decision over Jofra Archer's return, with coach Brendon McCullum "hopeful" that the fast bowler will be available for next week's second Test against New Zealand.

Archer, despite having an England central contract, was not considered for the series opener at Lord's following a lengthy stint in the Indian Premier League.

The 31-year-old rested up instead in his native Barbados as England, which is looking to recover from a humiliating Ashes



Archer. FILE PHOTO

series loss in Australia, started its international season with a comprehensive 115-run win over the Black Caps.

Archer has long been regarded as a first-choice selection when fit and available.

Archer is due back in England later this week and could be added to the squad.

"In the next couple of days we'll probably drill down on that but we're hopeful he will be available for the second Test, then we'll work out conditions-wise where we're at," said McCullum. "He's following a plan (in Barbados). He's bowling.

"We completely trust Jof and he's shown us in the past what he does, which is get himself ready based on the plans we get together and come up with. He's always turned up in the condition we wanted from him."

India begins Asian Games build-up at Antalya WC

ARCHERY

Press Trust of India
ANTALYA (TURKEY)

India will begin its preparation for the upcoming Asian Games with a completely revamped squad taking the field at the Archery World Cup Stage 3, beginning here on Tuesday.

The biggest talking point is the absence of Deepika Kumari from the recurve women's team event, barely a month after she spearheaded India's World Cup gold medal triumph in Shanghai, where the team upset Olympic champion South Korea and host China on way to the title.

While expectations will be high from the women's recurve team, the men's side will be eager to make a statement of their own. Olympian Dhiraj Bomma-devara will lead the challenge alongside experienced campaigners Neeraj Chauhan and Yashdeep Bhoge.

The squad:
Recurve: Men: Dhiraj Bomma-devara (SSCB), Neeraj Chauhan (AIPSCB), Yashdeep Bhoge (RSPB), Atanu Das (PSPB); **Coach:** Sonam Tshering Bhutia.

Women: Kirti Sharma (Haryana), Kumkum Mohod (Maharashtra), Ankita Bhakat (Jharkhand), Deepika Kumari (PSPB); **Coach:** Udhm Singh.

Compound: Men: Sahil Jadhav (RSPB), Kushal Dalal (Haryana), Thirumuru Ganesh Mani Ratnam (Andhra Pradesh), Rishabh Yadav (Haryana); **Coach:** Haresh Kumar.

Women: V. Jyothi Surekha (AAI), T. Chikitha (Telangana), Prithika Pradeep (Maharashtra), Parneet Kaur (Punjab); **Coach:** Jiwanjyot Singh.



Honouring the medallists: Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya with the medal-winning under-18 men's and women's teams INSTAGRAM/HOCKEYINDIA

Sports Minister felicitates India under-18 men's and women's teams

HOCKEY

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya felicitated the Indian men and women's hockey teams here on Monday for their stupendous performance in the recently concluded Under-18 Asia Cup in Japan.

The men, led by Ketan Kushwaha, were crowned champion after defeating host Japan 4-1 in the final in Kakamigahara on Friday. The minister handed a cheque of ₹61.5 lakh to the team.

On the other hand, the

women's team, led by Sweety Kujur, secured the bronze medal after registering a 3-0 win over Korea in the bronze medal match. Mandaviya handed the team a cheque of ₹21 lakh.

"I would like to congratulate both the teams for the hard work they have put in for bringing laurels for the country. The entire nation is proud of you. I would like to tell you that this is just the start.

"There is no alternative for hard work.

"Someone who has scored 13 goals should think of scoring 15 or more goals.

"Someone who has stopped 10 goals should aim for not letting the opponents even score one," said Mandaviya.

The minister also felicitated the best scorers Ashish Tani Puri (men) and Nousheen Naz (women) and goalkeeper Ayush Rajak, who saved 10 goals in the tournament.

Rani and Sardar feted

The minister also felicitated former Indian hockey captains Rani Rampal and Sardar Singh, who were the coaches of the Indian women's and men's teams respectively at the Asia Cup.



NexGen Vijay Kumar Memorial launched

GOLF

Sports Bureau
LUCKNOW

The DP World Professional Golf Tour of India on Monday announced the launch of the inaugural NexGen Vijay Kumar Memorial, a special event dedicated to celebrating the extraordinary legacy of legendary, late Indian golfer Vijay Kumar.

The inaugural edition, the fifth event of the 2026 NexGen season, will be held at Lucknow Golf Club, Vijay's home course, from June 9 to 11.

The tournament, featuring 72 golfers, is envisioned as an annual event.

A total prize purse of ₹25 lakh will be on offer this year. The event will be



Vijay Kumar. FILE PHOTO

contested over three rounds (54 holes), with the cut applied after two rounds (36 holes). The top 36 players and ties will advance to the third and final round.

"The inaugural edition is a heartfelt tribute to a legendary golfer whose contribution to Indian golf will always be remembered with great respect and admiration.

"Vijay Kumar was not just a champion golfer but a true ambassador for Indian golf. He inspired countless golfers through his passion for the game and his remarkable journey that began at Lucknow Golf Club," said Amandeep Johl, CEO, DP World PGTI.

The leading players in this year's field include Bipin Mukhiya, the current leader of the 2026 Order of Merit, along with Rajesh Kumar Gautam, Abhishek Kumar, Vinay Kumar Yadav, and Sunit Chowrasia, all of whom have registered victories on the NexGen Tour this season.

U Mumba to take on Goa Challengers in UTT opener

Sports Bureau
MUMBAI

U Mumba TT will begin its Ultimate Table Tennis (UTT) title defence against two-time champion Dempo Goa Challengers on the opening day of the seventh edition, to be played in Panaji from July 9 to 26.

The western contest will kickstart the competition at the Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Indoor Stadium, with the league stage stretching 17 days.

Final on July 26

The semifinals will be hosted on July 24 and 25, while the summit clash will be held on July 26.

The opening week also features a northern battle between UP Prometheans and former champion Dabang Delhi TTC on July 10 before Kolkata ThunderBlades takes on PBG Pune Jaguars later in the day.

Marquee fixtures

Among the marquee fixtures, the Maharashtra derby between U Mumba and Jaguars is scheduled for July 16 while Challengers and Dabang Delhi will renew their rivalry on July 17 in a rematch of the final in 2024.

"Season 7 brings together everything that has made Butterfly UTT special over the years," league co-promoter Vita Dani said.

"We look forward to another memorable season in Goa."

Knockouts

The seven-team tournament will follow a single round-robin format with the top-four sides progressing to the knockouts.

Over the next two weeks in Dambulla, up in the north of Sri Lanka, the 15-year-old will be squarely in the limelight, and in the crosshairs of the Sri Lanka and Afghanistan bowlers

The Sooryavanshi mania

R. Kaushik

One August afternoon in 2004, August 16 to be precise, a familiar name popped up on the cell phone screen, indicating an incoming call from a recently retired and highly celebrated Indian fast bowler. The said individual was trying his hand at commentary, and was in Nairobi for a triangular one-day series involving host nation Kenya, and the 'A' teams of India and Pakistan.

"Are you watching the match?" the old friend asked, excitedly, breathlessly. Under the mistaken and optimistic impression that he was seeking feedback on his commentary, one mumbled something under the breath when he piped up, "Turn on the TV. Watch this guy, he is something else."

"This guy" was a muscular, long-haired, earthy 23-year-old who had played for Bihar in 1999, and then for Jharkhand from the time the new State was carved out in November 2000. Five years of senior representative cricket had identified him as one for the future, though how much in the immediate future, one wasn't sure.

Then came the tri-series in Nairobi, where the right-hander batted at No. 3, and produced two bruising hundreds against Pakistan 'A', the first of them a day after India's Independence Day. Batting with a freedom that seemed to be a tribute to the nation attaining independence, he tore into a formidable attack that included Iftikhar

Anjum, Riaz Afridi, Mansoor Amjad, Qaiser Abbas and Naved Latif, all of them Pakistan internationals at one stage or the other. In an innings punctuated by 10 fours and two sixes, 'this guy' scored 120 off 122 deliveries, putting on 207 for the second wicket with opener, fellow centurion and current India head coach Gautam Gambhir. It was a muscular exhibition of unfettered ball-striking, an exhibition that made us all forever fans.

As if to show that that wasn't a flash in the pan, he made a slightly more measured unbeaten 119 in the next league clash against Pakistan, and even though he produced just 15 in the final in which India conquered their arch-rivals, the legend of 'this guy' was inescapably, inevitably born.

Mahendra Singh Dhoni's decimation of Pakistan 'A' was a foretaste of what was to come. Grateful for the timely tip from the former India fast bowler, one was able to glimpse shades of the immense power and great maturity and game-awareness that nestled in his formidable frame.

That 'A' tri-series was a bit of a novelty in that it was beamed on live television, a luxury reserved only for internationals at the time (and even now, though T20 leagues too are a regular feature). Nearly

22 years on, another 'A' tri-series has fired the imagination even before a ball has been bowled, thanks to the presence in the Indian side of a mercurial 15-year-old who has already become a household name in the cricketing world.

Foregone conclusion

Vaibhav Sooryavanshi's inclusion in the Tilak Varma-led squad for the tournament that includes the developmental sides of Sri Lanka and Afghanistan was almost a foregone conclusion, given his exploits for Rajasthan Royals in the IPL. Last season, his first, threw up a 35-ball century (the second fastest in the tournament's history), when the left-hander was but 14. This year, he snatched the Orange Cap with an extraordinary 776 runs at an otherworldly strike-rate of 237.30. Thrown in were two 15-ball half-centuries and a 36-ball hundred, as well as routine, nonchalant, irreverent decimation of the best fast bowlers in the world.

How can you keep such a special talent out of the international game, never mind his tender age? How can you deprive audiences at the ground and those watching on television the opportunity to soak in this young lad parading his wares on a global canvas, entertaining and enthralling and exhilarating with his fearless batsmanship that is a gift from above, sure, but which has also been honed through hours and hours of single-minded practice that has staggered far wizened men?

The clamour for his inclusion in the Indian T20 side reached a crescendo by the time Rajasthan crashed out of the tournament after losing to Shubman Gill's Gujarat Titans in Qualifier 2. It's not the worst idea to give the Indian Test and ODI skipper a first-hand reminder of the damage he can unleash, so Sooryavanshi donned his magic garb and lashed 96 off 47, with eight fours and seven sixes. It was another demonstration of his intelligence and street smartness, as much as his incandescent strokeplay. When he was dismissed in the 90s for the third time in four innings, the stadium felt his pain, even the opponents rued the four runs that got away. Such is the hold Sooryavanshi has on our collective consciousness.

Sooryavanshi has already, unfairly, been saddled with comparisons to the peerless Sachin Tendulkar. Imagine that. The same Sachin Tendulkar who finished his career with more than 34,000 international runs and 100 international tons. The same Sachin Tendulkar, who carried the Indian batting on his shoulders for 24 years, from his debut in 1989 to his last appearance in 2013. The same Sachin Tendulkar, who brought a nation to a standstill when he strode out, bat in hand, to espouse the quality and class of Indian batting with an authority that comes only to the most gifted.

One of the catalysts for this comparison is how both had already

The clamour for Sooryavanshi's inclusion in the Indian T20 side reached a crescendo by the time Rajasthan crashed out of the IPL after losing to Gill's Gujarat in Qualifier 2

grabbed the imagination at a very young age. Tendulkar hit the headlines during the record 664-run stand with Vinod Kambli in the Harris Shield, continued to wow the discerning Mumbai cricketing fraternity with his genius (obvious even when he was 14) and celebrated his Ranji Trophy, Duleep Trophy and Irani Cup debuts with centuries in each of those competitions.

He shed tears of disappointment when he was overlooked for India's tour of the West Indies in early 1989 and relished the prospect of taking on Imran Khan, Wasim Akram and Waqar Younis when he was finally selected for India's first full series in Pakistan in more than a decade in November 1989.

He shooed off physio Ali Irani despite bleeding from a blow to the nose from Waqar in the final Test in Sialkot to conjure a series-saving half-century, and destroyed Abdul Qadir in an exhibition match, smashing the living daylights out of the famed leg-spinner. All through his career, Tendulkar carried the burden of expectations lightly; it helped that he was his worst critic and was seized by the need to meet his own expectations, not of the others because each of the 'others' had a different expectation of him.

Undimmed inner light

Ravaged by injuries – sesamoid bone, tennis elbow, dodgy back, protesting groin – but driven by an undimmed inner light, he conquered peaks that appeared insurmountable, all with an equanimity that singled him out as the greatest Indian cricketer of his, potentially of all, time.

How does one compare a 15-year-old who is yet to earn his first international cap with this certified champion, with one of the few on whom Bharat Ratna, the country's greatest civilian honour, has been conferred? Let's just let Sooryavanshi be. Let's let him enjoy himself, and let us enjoy him enjoying himself. Let's not live out our hopes and dreams vicariously through him because he already has enough to deal with and that is certain to only increase with time.

Over the next two weeks in Dambulla, up in the north of Sri Lanka, Sooryavanshi will be squarely in the limelight, and in the crosshairs of the Sri Lankan and Afghan bowlers. No one likes to be smashed around, but very, very few have received stinging punishment from a 15-year-old who is exceptionally respectful of his elders so long as he doesn't have a bat in his hands.

By now, bowlers of all quality know full well the perils of being even slightly off their game when they bowl to him.

Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood, Pat Cummins and Kagiso Rabada and Jasprit Bumrah and Rashid Khan have all suffered at his hands. If the mere mortals are shuddering in anticipatory trepidation, it's not without good reason.

Sooryavanshi will be treated differently because of how young he is. Already, the BCCI has permitted his parents to travel with him, both to Sri Lanka and to the United Kingdom later in the month, when he will be a part of the senior Indian team for the first time. That the India board will cover the parents' travel and living expenses is a laudable initiative designed to send out the message that while there will be every effort to cash in on the goose that lays the golden eggs, it will be done so with empathy and understanding and not be driven purely by crass commercial greed and the lure of the greenbacks.

One isn't even sure if Sooryavanshi is aware of the magnitude of the fuss around him. The general belief is that he is all too aware, given how much more worldly-wise today's 15-year-olds are. He is too smart not to realise that he is a special talent who is being given the special, preferential kid-glove treatment that his age merits. He knows that it's just a matter of time before his bank balance surges, before the agents and the managers swarm him and before he is forced to shed his innocence and embrace wariness. The last two are the unfortunate but inevitable fallouts of courting attention and success this early, but neither Sooryavanshi nor the cricketing populace will have it any other way.

As the sporting world braces for a bouquet of high-octane action – the FIFA World Cup starts on June 11 and the Women's T20 World Cup gets underway the following day – it is impossible that in India, at the very least, and in several part of the cricketing globe, this relatively nondescript 'A' series will attract immense attention only for the presence of a generational talent.

One suspects that the Hazlewoods and the Cummins' might also park themselves in front of devices flashing live visuals, if only to see if the boy wonder subjects the relative 'lesser lights' to the same punishment he meted out to them during the IPL. There was 'this guy' in 2004. Now, there is 'this boy', a chronicled destroyer of reputations, egos and bowling figures. Single-handedly elevating the stature of an 'A' series that would otherwise have wallowed in anonymity but which has now gained a life of its own. Welcome to the world of Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, cricketing royalty in the making.

THE GIST

Sooryavanshi has already, unfairly, been saddled with comparisons to the peerless Tendulkar. One of the catalysts for this comparison is how both had grabbed the imagination at a very young age

As the sporting world braces for the FIFA World Cup and Women's T20 World Cup, the relatively nondescript 'A' assignment in Sri Lanka will attract immense attention because of the wunderkind

By now, bowlers of all quality know full well the perils of being even slightly off their game when they bowl to the 15-year-old



GETTY IMAGES