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## INSIDE



### Hamis carried out atrocities in Gaza: UN report

**RAMALLAH**  
Hamis militants and police units in Gaza beat, maimed and publicly executed dozens of Palestinians during its war with Israel in acts amounting to war crimes, according to a United Nations report released on Tuesday. » PAGE 14

### 7 killed in blast at 'illegal' Jaipur firecracker unit

**JAIPUR**  
Seven persons were killed and several injured after a fire broke out following a blast at an alleged illegal firecracker warehouse in a residential neighbourhood of Khoh Nagoriyan area in Jaipur on Tuesday. » PAGE 4

### Probe report lists reasons why the MSC Elsa 3 sank

**KOCHI**  
The Directorate General of Shipping has concluded the preliminary investigation into the sinking of the container ship MSC Elsa 3 off the Alappuzha coast, Kerala in May 2025. » PAGE 3

### World leaders greet Modi on historic tenure

**NEW DELHI**  
Prime Minister Narendra Modi has received congratulatory messages on becoming the longest-serving elected Prime Minister of India, from world leaders. » PAGE 4

# CID searches Mamata's Kolkata premises

Search by CID comes in the wake of charges of alleged forgery of signatures of party MLAs

Trinamool leaders slam 'political vendetta', Bengal Minister says no one is above the law

Two MLAs had alleged that their signatures had been forged on a letter to the Speaker

**Shrabana Chatterjee**  
**Shiv Sahay Singh**  
KOLKATA

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the West Bengal Police on Tuesday searched the residence of former Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in Kolkata in connection with the alleged forgery of the signatures of two Trinamool Congress MLAs. The CID officials said that they wanted to search the premises since its address, 30B Harish Chatterjee Street is also referred to as the Trinamool party office. After a standoff with party officials, the CID team entered the premises around 4 p.m. and carried out their search. Former Trinamool MP

Subhasish Chakraborty said he could not allow the CID officials inside as both Ms. Banerjee and her nephew and party general secretary Abhishek Banerjee were not present. He urged the officials to come back later when one of them would be present. However, CID officials said they had come to search the party office on the premises, and not the residence, and accused Mr. Chakraborty of "obstructing the investigation".

Later, Trinamool MP and senior advocate Kalyan Banerjee arrived at the location and slammed the search. "They have sent the CID now because they know everyone is in Delhi... Mamata Banerjee is not in the picture, neither any FIR has been lodged



**Under scanner:** A team of CID at the residence of former West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in Kolkata on Tuesday. ANI

against her, nor has she been called as a witness," he said. Accusing Chief Minister and BJP leader Suwendu Adhikari of becoming "vindictive", Mr. Kalyan Banerjee said the search was a case of harassment against Ms. Banerjee.

showed that no one is above the law. "Mamata Banerjee, our ex-Chief Minister, tolerated criminals, corruption for 15 years. She never cared for the Constitution... Everybody will be brought to book... The atrocities that happened here, she is responsible... she should be arrested," Ms. Paul said.

Senior Trinamool leader and MLA Kunal Ghosh claimed that when he tried to go inside Ms Banerjee's residence, he was stopped by the officials. "Why is this happening in Mamata Banerjee's absence? Why did they not come when she was here for so many days?" Mr. Ghosh asked.

Senior Trinamool leader and MLA Kunal Ghosh claimed that when he tried to go inside Ms Banerjee's

residence during the search, he was stopped by the officials. "Why is this happening in Mamata Banerjee's absence? Why did they not come when she was here for so many days?" Mr. Ghosh asked.

**Forged signatures case**  
The CID is investigating a letter nominating Sovandeb Chattopadhyay as the Leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly, which was submitted to the Speaker on May 20. Trinamool MLAs Ritabarta Banerjee and Sandipan Saha alleged that their signatures on the letter had been forged. They were then expelled from the party.

An FIR was registered on the basis of their complaint and the case was la-

ter handed over to the CID. The State agency then issued several summons to Mr. Abhishek Banerjee, who had signed the letter. However, he did not appear in person, citing health issues, and sought 15 days more to respond.

Mr. Abhishek Banerjee was supposed to appear before the CID officials at the State police headquarters on Tuesday. However, he failed to appear, and instead made an appeal to the CID for a further extension, just minutes before the 5 p.m. deadline.

Simultaneously, CID officials also went to the Camac Street office of the Trinamool Congress in relation to the same probe.

**MAMATA MEETS SONIA**  
» PAGE 5

## Recruitment rush



**Bigger test:** The crowd at the Charbagh railway station in Lucknow as candidates return from the Uttar Pradesh police constable recruitment test on Tuesday. A total of 28,86,797 candidates have applied for 32,679 posts. SANDEEP SAXENA

# ED summons former Kerala CM Pinarayi's daughter in CMRL case

**The Hindu Bureau**  
KOCHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has summoned T. Veena, daughter of former Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, for questioning in connection with a money-laundering case linked to the Cochin Minerals and Rutile Ltd. (CMRL) pay-off case.

She has been asked to appear before investigators at the ED's zonal office here on June 12.

Besides Ms. Veena, the Central agency has asked Sasidharan Kartha, chairman and managing director of CMRL, and senior company officials to appear before it.

The case is that Exalog-



T. Veena

ic, a now-defunct firm of Ms. Veena, a former IT consultant, had received sizeable monthly retainers from the private mining company from 2017 to 2021 allegedly without rendering any tangible service.

On May 27, the agency searched the residences of

Mr. Vijayan in Kannur and Thiruvananthapuram and former Minister and Ms. Veena's husband, P.A. Mohamed Riyas.

**First summons**  
This is the first time Ms. Veena has been summoned by the ED for questioning.

She will be told to submit the documents related to the alleged IT consultancy services offered by Exalogic to the CMRL.

The ED had earlier frozen ₹18.36 crore in 242 accounts identified in the searches held in the pay-off case.

It had claimed that the searches had yielded incriminating records of accounts, investments, and

fixed deposits in banks and digital evidence.

A special court for trial of offences under the Companies Act in Kochi on June 8 allowed the ED to obtain copies of documents collected by the Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO) in connection with the money-laundering case.

Suresh Babu V.P.M., Additional District and Sessions Judge, Ernakulam, allowed the ED's petition 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 ED had reportedly sought 134 documents collected by the SFIO.

# Congress's RS nomination rejected during scrutiny; chaos in M.P. house

**Mehul Malpani**  
BHOPAL

A dramatic day of political developments in Madhya Pradesh's capital Bhopal that began with several Congress MLAs heading to the airport to leave for Bengaluru, ended with the nomination of Meenakshi Natarajan, the party candidate for one of three Rajya Sabha seats from the State, being rejected during scrutiny.

This prompted top Congress leaders, led by party general secretary K.C. Venugopal, to stage a sit-in outside the Election Commission (EC)'s office in New Delhi.

The rejection of the nomination came at a time when a batch of Congress MLAs was en route to Bengaluru amid fears of cross-voting in the polls, prompt-



A Congress delegation comprising party general secretaries and others protests outside the EC office in New Delhi on Tuesday. ANI

ing the State leaders to ask them to return to Bhopal.

Ms. Natarajan accused the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of having "moved from vote theft to seat theft".

"It started when the BJP fielded a third candidate despite not having the adequate number of members, and we started to un-

derstand the kind of politics it is practising with democracy and the Constitution. What was limited to vote theft through SIR [special intensive revision of electoral rolls] and other methods has today reached [the stage of] seat theft," she said at a press conference on Tuesday. Ms. Natarajan's nomina-

tion was rejected by Assembly Secretary Arvind Sharma, who is the Returning Officer for the election, based on an objection raised by the BJP candidate for the third seat, Mahesh Kewat, and State party general secretary Rahul Kothari. They alleged that Ms. Natarajan had "hidden" details of a case against her in Hyderabad. The objection led to chaotic scenes at the Assembly Secretariat in Bhopal, with dozens of Congress and BJP workers engaging in arguments.

Several senior State BJP leaders and MLAs, including Cabinet Ministers Rakesh Singh and Kailash Vijayvargiya, as well as Mr. Kewat remained in the Assembly Secretariat during the proceedings and celebrated after the Returning Officer ruled against Ms. Natarajan.

## Union govt. sets aside ₹95,962 cr. for VB-G RAM G

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

Union Rural Development Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Tuesday announced an interim allocation of ₹95,962 crore for the new rural employment scheme, the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission Gramin (VB-G RAM G).

This sum does not include the State governments' share and most States will have to contribute an additional 40% of the sum allocated to them. The combined outlay will be ₹1.25 lakh crore. The interim allocation seeks to ensure a "seamless transition" to the new scheme, Mr. Chouhan said.

**FULL STORY ON**  
» PAGE 4

# Trump blames Tehran for downing of helicopter, says Washington must respond

**Associated Press**  
DUBAI

U.S. President Donald Trump on Tuesday blamed Iran for shooting down a U.S. Army helicopter near the Strait of Hormuz, and said his country must respond to the attack.

In the first known operation of its kind by the American military, a drone boat rescued the two aviators who were aboard the Apache attack helicopter when it went down near the critical shipping lane.

Military officials did not say what caused the Apache helicopter to go down, saying the crash was under investigation.

Mr. Trump said in a social media post that military officials told him "the Iranians shot down one of



Donald Trump

our highly sophisticated Apache Helicopters". He added that both service members "are safe and uninjured".

"Nevertheless, the U.S. must, of necessity, respond to this attack," Mr. Trump wrote.

**Changing stance**  
However, before he accused Iran of downing the

helicopter, Mr. Trump had expressed renewed optimism over negotiations with Iran.

"We have a good chance" of signing a deal in "two or three days," Mr. Trump had said late on Monday, without providing further details.

"We're very close to having a very, very good, strong, powerful deal," the President had said. "If we go and bomb - which we could do very easily if we want, and we spend another two or three weeks bombing - they'll have nothing left whatsoever. But you won't have the strait open for months."

He added: "If we do the bombing, you know, a lot of people are going to be killed. Who wants to do that? I don't."

## INBRIEF



### Lottery baron, family move Madras HC against ED action

The spouse of Tamil Nadu Public Works and Sports Development Minister Aadhav Arjuna, Daisy Aadhav Arjuna, his father-in-law and lottery baron Santiago Martin, mother-in-law and AIADMK MLA Leema Rose, and others have filed 39 individual appeals before the Madras High Court in a case related to the attachment of properties worth ₹910.29 crore by the Directorate of Enforcement (ED). Chief Justice Sushrut Arvind Dharmadhikari and Justice G. Arul Murugan on Tuesday ordered notice to the ED on the appeals challenging the May 30, 2025 order passed by an Appellate Tribunal in New Delhi.

### Maharashtra Cabinet nod to increase depts. from 33 to 45

The Maharashtra Cabinet on Tuesday approved to increase the number of administrative departments from 33 to 45 for the diversification of the workload on departments handling multiple subjects. The government aims to restructure departments to bring coherence, speeding up the decision making process, facilitate implementation of schemes and effective coordination with field agencies. "The State has 33 administrative departments. Several departments have two to three sub-departments, leading to problems in the distribution of manpower and work," said a CMO statement.

## Bengal govt. accepts Odisha CM's request, to drop 'Dham' from name of Digha temple

Temple will be now called 'Sri Sri Jagannath Mandir Cultural Centre', Chief Secretary will issue formal notification, says Suvendu; short-sighted move of Trinamool govt. reversed, says Majhi

Senjuti Sengupta  
Satvasundar Barik  
KOLKATA/BHUBANESWAR

The West Bengal government will remove the word 'Dham' from the name of the Jagannath temple in Digha, which was inaugurated by the previous Trinamool Congress (TMC) government last year, Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari announced on Tuesday. The temple will be now called 'Sri Sri Jagannath Mandir Cultural Centre'.

Mr. Adhikari said Chief Secretary Manoj Kumar Agarwal will soon issue a formal notification in this regard. He added that the decision was taken following a suggestion from his Odisha counterpart Mohan Charan Majhi in a letter, which was handed over to him by BJP Lok Sabha MP from Puri Sambit Patra.

"I am accepting this letter. We are withdrawing the word 'Dham'. We respect Sanatana Dharma. There is only Char Dham (four abodes) in Hindu Sa-



A replica of the 12th-century Jagannath temple in Puri, Odisha, the Digha temple was inaugurated by Mamata Banerjee in 2025. ANI

natana. In 2025, this temple was inaugurated and named 'Jagannath Dham'. This move hurt the sentiments of all Hindus in Odisha and also those who stay in Bengal from Odisha. Nobody should play with core Sanatana ideology. Now, the government has changed and we have decided to act on this matter," Mr. Adhikari said.

A replica of the 12th-century Jagannath temple in Puri, Odisha, the temple in Digha was built at a cost of ₹250 crore and inaugurated by the then West Bengal

CM Mamata Banerjee on April 30, 2025. Several BJP leaders and religious authorities in Puri had objected to the temple being named 'Jagannath Dham'.

The West Bengal BJP leadership had termed Ms. Banerjee a "fake Hindu" and accused her of indulging in "tokenistic religious construction to divert attention from minority appeasement policies."

"Let me state clearly that the then government had approved it as a cultural centre. We will remove the word 'Dham'. The cul-

tural centre will remain and worship will continue. The entire complex will function as a temple, but the word 'Dham' will be dropped. I, too, felt that the previous government disregarded people's sentiments," Mr. Adhikari said.

#### 'Historic decision'

Welcoming the move, the Odisha CM said on X: "I am extremely pleased that West Bengal CM Suvendu Adhikari has understood the importance of this sensitive issue and reversed the short-sighted decision of the previous government. He has announced a historic decision to withdraw the word 'Dham' from the Digha project."

Mr. Majhi said the name 'Jagannath Dham' was misused "due to the narrow political outlook of the previous government of West Bengal and its lack of understanding of Sanatana traditions". "This decision will also strengthen the brotherhood between the two neighbouring States," the Odisha CM said.

## RS poll: Nathwani's nomination put on hold after Congress flags 'discrepancies'

Press Trust of India  
RANCHI



BJP-backed independent candidate Parimal Nathwani filed his papers for one of the two RS seats in Jharkhand on Monday. FILE PHOTO

The Congress on Tuesday alleged "discrepancies" in the nomination papers of Parimal Nathwani, the BJP-backed Independent nominee for the Rajya Sabha poll in Jharkhand, and lodged a complaint with the Returning Officer (RO).

Mr. Nathwani, the Rajya Sabha MP from Andhra Pradesh, filed his papers for one of the two RS seats in Jharkhand on Monday, along with JMM candidate Baidyanath Ram and Congress nominee Pranav Jha.

Returning Officer Ranjit Kumar put Mr. Nathwani's nomination on hold and gave him a deadline of 11 a.m. on Wednesday to resolve the objections, a BJP office-bearer said.

#### Scrutiny of papers

Filing of nominations began on June 1 and concluded on Monday. Scrutiny of the nomination papers was held on Tuesday, during which the candidatures of JMM and Congress nominees were found to be valid, an official said.

"There were many discrepancies in the nomina-

tion papers [of Nathwani], including an error in his name. As a proposer for our candidate Pranav Jha, I lodged a complaint with the RO before the scrutiny exercise," Congress MLA Naman Bixal Kongari said.

Despite repeated efforts, the RO could not be contacted for comments. However, a purported letter from the Assembly Secretariat to Mr. Nathwani said a complaint raising objections to his paper was filed and his nomination was put on hold until 11 a.m. on Wednesday.

"Discrepancy has been reported... and a hearing is under way," Congress observer for RS polls in Jharkhand Bhupesh Baghel posted on X.

## Nurses hold 2-hour strike in Haryana, demand resignation of women's panel chairperson

The Hindu Bureau  
GURUGRAM

Nursing officers across Haryana held a two-hour symbolic strike on Tuesday to protest against the alleged derogatory remarks by State Commission for Women chairperson Renu Bhatia against staff at the Civil Hospital in Kurukshetra.

Acting on a call by the Nursing Officers' Welfare Association, Haryana, the staff members observed a 'pen-down' strike from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. in government hospitals. To avoid disruption to critical care, one nursing officer was deployed in every emergency and general ward during the protest hours.

Ms. Bhatia had made the alleged remarks during her official inspection at the Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Civil Hospital in Kurukshetra on June 7. She was reviewing the case of an alleged rape of a 15-year-old girl by a doctor. She reprimanded the hospital administration and nursing staff over se-



Nursing staff protesting at the Civil Hospital in Sirsa during a Statewide strike on Tuesday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

curity lapses that left the minor unattended.

#### 'Will intensify protest'

The association has demanded Ms. Bhatia's resignation and threatened to escalate protests if no action is taken. A second two-hour pen-down strike with suspension of services is planned for Wednesday. It has also threatened to launch a full-scale strike on June 11, halting even emergency services in the State.

The protesting nursing officers said Ms. Bhatia's alleged comments were an "insult" to staff who serve patients day and night and

risked their lives during the COVID-19 pandemic as 'Corona Warriors'.

The Janvadi Mahila Samiti and the Centre of Indian Trade Unions also condemned Ms. Bhatia's remarks and sought her removal, calling the conduct unbecoming of a constitutional post meant to uphold dignity.

The striking nursing officers have also demanded an impartial inquiry into the Kurukshetra incident and action against those found guilty. The association has written to the Chief Minister seeking an apology from Ms. Bhatia.

## Don't want any confrontation with Governor but can't compromise on rights: T.N. Minister

B. Kolappan  
N. Sai Charan  
CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Higher Education Minister P. Viswanathan said on Tuesday that neither he nor the State government sought any confrontation with the Governor. However, the government would not compromise on the State's autonomy in the appointment of Vice-Chancellors of the State universities.

"I can only think of [lyricist] Kannadasan's lines: 'Vandi oda chakkarangal irandu mattum vendum; antha irandil onru siri-yathendral entha vandi odum?' (A vehicle needs two wheels of equal size; if one is smaller, how can it move?). The Governor and the Chief Minister should work in harmony for the smooth functioning of our universities," he said in an interview to *The Hindu*.

Mr. Viswanathan said the previous government might have adopted a confrontational approach towards the Governor. "But our Chief Minister does not want any confrontation. As



Tamil Nadu Higher Education Minister P. Viswanathan (left) said the government won't compromise on the State's autonomy in the appointment of Vice-Chancellors of State universities. FILE PHOTO

a Minister, I, too, do not want any confrontation. The matter [of appointment of Vice-Chancellors] is pending before the Supreme Court, and we hope the outcome will be favourable," he said, expressing confidence that the new Governor would protect the State's rights.

Contending that the appointment of V-Cs was directly linked to the State's "autonomy," he said no State government would surrender its rights. "We cannot allow the Governor to encroach upon or usurp the powers of the State," he said.

Pointing out that the dispute over the appointment stemmed from the UGC's

the Minister said.

Mr. Viswanathan said any confrontation with the Governor was both unnecessary and avoidable, as cordial relations between the Chief Minister and the Governor were essential for the smooth functioning of the State government. "If the Governor decides to function to his whims, it will affect governance. Controversies over the appointment are unnecessary. Thirteen State universities and several other universities are functioning without V-Cs. Files are pending and decisions remain stalled. This issue has persisted since 2021. How long can we wait?" he asked.

He claimed that the problem was largely confined to the States not ruled by the BJP. "As the Higher Education Minister, I want harmonious relationship between the Governor and the Vice-Chancellors for the health of our universities," he said. "The Governor should realise that these universities are not his personal property," he said.

## Six develop complications after C-section deliveries in Rajasthan

Press Trust of India  
BIKANER

Six women developed serious health complications, including kidney related issues, after undergoing Caesarean deliveries at the PBM Hospital in Rajasthan's Bikaner, prompting authorities to constitute an inquiry committee, officials said.

All the affected patients have been admitted to the intensive care unit where they are being closely monitored, they said.

After the incident, Health Minister Gajendra Singh Khimsar said the case in Bikaner is different from that in Kota and the two should not be linked.

#### Probe ordered

He said all women in the Bikaner case had reached the hospital at different times and were treated under varying conditions. He also confirmed that no deaths have occurred in this case so far. "Considering the seriousness of the situation, an investigation has been initiated. A team of specialist doctors from Jodhpur has been sent to probe the matter," he said.

He added not all the women had undergone Caesarean deliveries; some had normal deliveries as well. "We are investigating why kidney failure occurred in these cases," he said, adding that a preliminary report is expected by evening.

Sardar Patel Medical College principal Dr. Surendra Verma said some women reported health complications following delivery and are currently under treatment by specialist doctors. Hospital Superintendent Dr B.C. Ghiya said continuous monitoring of all the patients is being carried out and teams from the nephrology, gynaecology and medicine departments are jointly treating them.

## 'Pink Saheli' cards for free bus travel prove elusive for Delhi's trans persons

Mahima Rao  
Shrimansi Kaushik  
NEW DELHI

Three months after the Delhi government launched 'Pink Saheli' smart cards, promising free bus travel for women and transgender persons, many transgender residents say they are being denied the cards at distribution centres.

In March 2025, the Delhi government announced that women and transgender persons will be eligible for free travel on city buses through pink cards. The scheme was officially launched on March 2 this year. However, visits by *The Hindu* to five distribution centres and interviews



In March, the Delhi government launched the 'Pink Saheli' smart cards for women and transgender persons. FILE PHOTO

with applicants revealed that transgender persons are mostly unable to obtain the cards despite being listed as eligible beneficiaries. At four of the five centres visited, officials said the cards were not issued to transgender persons despite the card explicitly mentioning "female/transgender". At one centre, of-

officials agreed to issue the card only after this was pointed out.

#### Ground realities

Vishakha, 23, who works with a non-profit organisation, said she visited the Sub-Divisional Magistrate's office in Tughlaqabad last month to apply for a pink card using her transgender

identity card issued by the Central government. "My Aadhaar Card says 'transgender', and I identify as a trans woman. Despite that, officials passed my Aadhaar to five different persons but refused to issue a pink card," she said.

The officials issued her a rechargeable blue card, which is meant for male passengers and does not provide free travel benefits. While officials at several centres denied that transgender persons were eligible for the scheme, a senior Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) official noted that they were covered under it. "All women and transgender persons are eligible for these cards. No one can be denied is-

suance of these cards if they are eligible," the official said.

Despite these assurances, transgender applicants continue to report difficulties. Bobby, 35, a caterer, said they were directed to the queue for blue cards when they approached officials at the District Magistrate's office in Mehrauli.

"I was told the scheme was only for females. It was easier earlier with pink tickets. We could get them on the spot from conductors, and sometimes they would themselves offer the tickets to us," Bobby said. Senior Transport Department officials said the pink ticket system will be phased out gradually. The government had extended

the scheme for three more months in March.

#### 'Not eligible'

At the DTC bus pass counter in ITO, employees told *The Hindu* they had been instructed by senior officials not to issue cards to transgender persons. "The provision was discontinued a few weeks after the scheme was rolled out," one employee said.

An official at the Shadipur bus depot said transgender persons had never been identified as eligible beneficiaries in the instructions received by staff. She added that the backend system only accepts Aadhaar cards where the gender is listed as "female".

Surpiya (name changed)

## T.N Speaker drops action against 21 AIADMK MLAs

**The Hindu Bureau**  
CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly Speaker J.C.D. Prabhakar on Tuesday announced that following the receipt of four separate letters from All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami, condoning the conduct of 21 of the 25 rebel MLAs who voted contrary to the direction issued by the party whip during the vote of confidence for the Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay-led government on May 13, he had dropped further action against them.

Speaking to presspersons at the Secretariat in Chennai, Mr. Prabhakar said proceedings had been initiated against four rebel legislators – Maragatham Kumaravel (Maduranta-kam), S. Jayakumar (Perundurai), P. Sathyabama (Dharapuram), and Esaki Subaya (Ambasamudram) – who resigned and joined the TVK, and that a decision would be taken later.

### Letter submitted

Describing the sequence of events, the Speaker said Mr. Palaniswami had submitted a letter on May 13 evening seeking the disqualification of 25 rebel AIADMK MLAs under the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution of India after they voted against the directions of the party whip.

A few days later, he said he had received four separate letters from Mr. Pala-



J.C.D. Prabhakar

niswami condoning the actions of 21 MLAs.

The Speaker said he had examined them, gone through the Assembly rules, and decided to drop the proceedings against the 21 MLAs.

### Names of 21 MLAs

He also read out the names of the 21 MLAs: G. Hari (Tiruttani), S.M. Sukumar (Arcot), K.C. Veeramani (Jolarpet), P. Balakrishna Reddy (Hosur), K.P. Anbalagan (Palacodu), Maragatham Vetrivel (Pappireddipatti), Dhilipan Jaishankar (Sankarankovil (SC)), C.Ve. Shanmugam (Mailam), R. Rakesh (Sankarapuram), S. Sekar (Paramathi-Velur), N.S.N. Nataraj (Kangayam), P. Haribaskar (Anthiyur), S.P. Velumani (Thondamuthur), K. Ravimanoharan (Palani), Natham R. Viswanathan (Natham), M.R. Vijayabhaskar (Karrur), Leemaroo Martin (Lalgudi), K. Mohan (Pannuruti), A. Arunmozhithevan (Bhuvanagiri), R. Kamaraj (Nannilam), and C. Vijayabaskar (Viralimalai).

## High-level probe into blast at Vizag steel plant begins

Each deceased worker's next of kin will receive ₹25 lakh *ex gratia* along with terminal benefits, and one eligible family member will get a permanent job at the RINL, says Union Minister

**The Hindu Bureau**  
VISAKHAPATNAM

A three-member external expert committee constituted by the Union Ministry of Steel visited the Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited (RINL)-Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP) on Tuesday as part of the high-level probe into the explosion at the plant, which claimed eight lives and left six injured on Monday evening.

Separately, the RINL has initiated an internal technical inquiry into the process failure.

The independent panel headed by Priya Ranjan, Director in-charge of the Bokaro Steel Plant, includes senior technical and safety experts from major steel plants across the country, including SAIL Chief General Manager (CGM) Jitendra Kumar and former CGM Gopal Singh.

The team visited the accident site at Caster-2 of the Steel Melt Shop-1 (SMS-1) to ascertain the exact cause of the technical failure. It is expected to interact with the VSP management, engineers, and workers' union representatives before submitting its final recommendations to the Centre.

Preliminary reports suggest that the accident occurred around 4.15 p.m. on Monday during the regular casting operations. Workers were preparing to transfer molten crude



Family members of a worker killed in the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant blast break down outside King George Hospital in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday. V. RAJU

steel, heated to over 1,500 degrees Celsius, from a ladle to a tundish when a high-intensity blast occurred just before the slide gate could be opened. The explosion triggered a massive fireball that rapidly engulfed Overhead Crane-2, trapping nearby personnel.

The deceased have been identified as permanent employees G.V. Appa Rao, Prabhakar, Bhanu Kumar, Krishna Nag, and Gold Kumar, along with contract workers Trinadh, Appalaraju, and Ramana. Of the six injured workers undergoing treatment in KIMS Hospital, Sheelanagar, two are in a critical condition.

Union Minister for Steel and Heavy Industries H.D. Kumaraswamy and Union Civil Aviation Minister K. Rammohan Naidu inspect-

ed the site and met the injured workers. He said each deceased worker's next of kin would receive ₹25 lakh as *ex gratia* along with terminal benefits, and one eligible family member would get a permanent job at the RINL.

The six injured workers will receive ₹10 lakh each and all their medical expenses would be borne by the company, he said.

He added that RINL would support the education of the children of the deceased and injured workers and extend long-term welfare and rehabilitation assistance to their families.

Andhra Pradesh IT and HRD Minister Nara Lokesh on Tuesday stressed that the government's responsibility extended beyond immediate financial aid. He

said the first phase of compensation announced by Mr. Kumaraswamy would be released immediately.

Union Minister of State for Steel and Heavy Industries Bhupathiraju Srinivasa Varma said that total compensation, including insurance and terminal company benefits, would be about ₹1.72 crore for permanent employees and somewhere between ₹40 lakh and ₹45 lakh for the temporary workers.

Deputy CM Pawan Kalyan raised questions about industrial safety practices at the steel plant. He questioned whether safety norms were implemented effectively and if adequate attention was given to workforce conditions, equipment maintenance and operational safeguards.

## Vijay keeps promise, launches Singappen Special Force in T.N.

**N. Sai Charan**  
CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay on Tuesday warned that those who harassed women and threatened their safety, believing that they could escape punishment, would not be spared. The police would take strict action against them, he said.

He was launching the 'Singappen Special Force' in the Tamil Nadu Police at the Rajarathinam Stadium at Egmore in Chennai.

The Chief Minister said the root cause of threats to women's safety was the spread of narcotics and substance abuse, and it must be stamped out.

"The success of a government should not be measured by infrastructure and economic growth alone; it should be measured by dignity and respect with which women and children live," he said.

### Close to heart

The launch of the special force, which Mr. Vijay said was close to his heart, gave him immense happiness. "We [the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam] had promised to ensure the safety of our grandmothers, mothers, sisters, daughters, and girl children. That promise was not merely for the election. It came emotionally and truthfully from the heart. That is why we implemented this initiative within a short period of coming to power," Mr. Vijay said.

"While this initiative



Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay unveils the monogram of Singappen Special Force in Chennai. B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

gives satisfaction, hearing news about crimes against women disturbs me. It is difficult to control those emotions because such atrocities happen to people who belong to our own families," he said.

The Chief Minister attributed crimes against women and children to the spread of narcotic substances.

"This problem did not emerge suddenly in May 2026. It has existed for many years. It has spread so deeply because it was ignored for long," he said, adding that the spread of narcotics, crimes against women, and law and order were interlinked.

He added that the safety of women and children was not merely a law and order issue. "It is connected to social discipline, and within social discipline lies individual discipline. If individuals behave responsibly and with self-control, society will change. Women must have dignity and no fear at educational institutions and workplaces, during travel, and in their daily lives," Mr. Vijay said.

### Team tactics



**Group hunting:** Braving the monsoon showers at Kandakadavu in Kochi on Tuesday, a flock of Indian cormorants hunts in remarkable coordination. Diving swiftly beneath the surface, they work together to herd fish before capturing their prey. R.K. NITHIN

## Shipping authority's inquiry report lists reasons for MSC Elsa 3 sinking

**The Hindu Bureau**  
KOCHI

The Directorate General of Shipping concluded the preliminary investigation into the sinking of the container ship *MSC Elsa-3* off the Alappuzha coast in May 2025. The inquiry report, submitted in an affidavit before the Kerala High Court, identified causes of the incident that led to marine pollution off Alappuzha and along parts of the southern coast.

Critical system malfunction, compounded by structural failures and the incompetence of crew members, was identified as the causative factor in the report. It said that the ship had shown an inherent tilt to the right in previous



The shipping authority concluded the preliminary probe into the sinking of *MSC Elsa-3* in May 2025 off the Alappuzha coast. AP

voyages. During the journey from Vizhinjam to Kochi, the ship's ballast water system failed first, and as a result, the crew could not stop the progressive flooding into the ballast tanks. The ship's safety management system was reported to be deficient, especially

regarding maintenance procedures and spare parts management. The ship had tilted to about 26 degrees, causing several container stacks to shift, further compromising the ship's stability. By midnight on May 24, 2025, the containers had begun to

fall overboard, creating additional hazards.

The investigation found that known defects were inadequately addressed, with reliance on temporary fixes that created system weaknesses.

The chief officer of the ship had joined one week before the incident and was not given sufficient time for the handover, which also added to the lack of crisis management, the report said.

Interviews of the crew showed that there were gaps in practical training for emergency ballast operations. Many crew members had only demonstrated theoretical knowledge with no real-time experience, according to the report.

## Deve Gowda did not ask for a Rajya Sabha seat: JD(S)

**The Hindu Bureau**  
BENGALURU

Former Prime Minister and Janata Dal (Secular) supremo H.D. Deve Gowda had never sought a Rajya Sabha seat for the alliance partner BJP, his son and Union Minister, H.D. Kumaraswamy, has said.

Speaking to presspersons in Mysuru on Tuesday, he pointed out that the BJP had 60 MLAs and the Janata Dal (Secular) was not concerned about it. Mr. Kumaraswamy said the Congress leaders were making unnecessary statements regarding the Rajya Sabha ticket issue.

## Stand-off over Bengaluru Development portfolio likely to be discussed in Delhi

**The Hindu Bureau**  
BENGALURU

The discontentment of Krishna Byre Gowda over being given a truncated Bengaluru Development portfolio – without the Bengaluru Development Authority (BDA) and the Bengaluru Metropolitan Region Development Authority (BMRDA), which are held by Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar – seems to have reached the doors of the Congress's central leadership.

The stand-off comes at a crucial time when the monsoon has set in over the State. There are also no elected councillors in Bengaluru since elections to



Krishna Byre Gowda

the five corporations under the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) are yet to be held.

Mr. Shivakumar will be in Delhi on Wednesday to meet senior party leaders including Sonia Gandhi and Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi. Mr. Gowda,

who is yet to take charge of the portfolio, is in Delhi.

Sources close to Mr. Gowda said that the Minister had gone to Delhi along with some legislators, who are seeking Cabinet berths. It is learnt that he has informed both the Chief Minister and Congress general secretary in charge of Karnataka Randeep Singh Surjewala that he will not take charge of the portfolio unless the issue is resolved, and that he is ready to take any other portfolio.

The Chief Minister is expected to explain to the leaders on Wednesday why he is keen to keep the BDA and the BMRDA. Sources close to him said: "The BDA and the BMRDA have

been kept by the Chief Minister since he has worked on projects that are under the two agencies. By the time the new Minister will be able to understand its intricacies, the term would be coming to an end and projects could be derailed."

Meanwhile, sources close to Mr. Gowda arguing for an integrated portfolio pointed out that effective coordination between multiple agencies is required for Bengaluru's development and accountability over agencies becomes a challenge.

Sources said that the portfolio was allocated to Mr. Gowda after the central leadership intervened.

## HC permits three of ship's crew to return to their home countries

**The Hindu Bureau**  
KOCHI

The Kerala High Court on Tuesday allowed the electro-technical engineer, the seaman, and the motorman of *MSC Elsa 3*, the ship that sank off the coast of Alappuzha in Kerala, causing extensive marine and coastal pollution, to return to their home countries.

The crew members had sought permission from the High Court in May 2026 to return to their home countries after being detained following the incident in May 2025. They had submitted that their detention was illegal and that the authorities had in-

sisted on their presence in the State for investigation.

Three out of the seven crew members are allowed to return home on the condition that they execute a simple bond or a bank guarantee with two sureties, and they were directed to appear as and when required by the court, the magistrate or the investigating officer.

The Captain and Chief Engineer of the ship were directed to appear before the Judicial First Class Magistrate, Kochi, at Thoppampady on June 12, for the Magistrate to fix an early hearing for their examination. Since the Magistrate had noted defects in the final report submitted

by the police on May 30, a revised final report has to be filed by the Coastal Police. If the final report is submitted in time for the next court date, the High Court will consider the matter of allowing the Chief Officer and 2nd Engineer of the vessel to return to their home countries after granting them bail.

The court had earlier sought a progress report from the magistrate to determine the reasons for the alleged delay in the investigation, the expected timeline for completing the probe, and, if cognisance of the offence had been taken, the date on which the accused appeared before the magistrate.



Firefighters douse the fire that broke out in some shops at the D-Park in Rohtak on Tuesday. ANI VIDEO GRAB

## Three dead in fire in key Rohtak market; 10 shops gutted

**Press Trust of India**  
CHANDIGARH

Three people were killed on Tuesday in a fire in the D-Park market area of Haryana's Rohtak city, officials said.

About ten shops were gutted in the blaze that struck one of the oldest markets in city, they said.

"Three people have died in the incident. All are male, and their bodies have been found," Civil Lines Police Station SHO Mahender Singh said over the phone.

D-Park market is situated close to the residence of former Haryana chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda. It took firefighters several hours to bring the

blaze under control. An eyewitness said panic spread in the area as the flames leapt high from the shops. The fire is believed to have started in a shoe showroom in the afternoon. Its exact cause is a matter of investigation, officials said.

Rohtak MP Deepender Singh Hooda reached the spot and met with the shopkeepers whose establishments were gutted.

Mr. Hooda demanded government jobs and compensation to the families of those who lost their lives in this accident.

The government should provide full compensation for the damaged buildings, shops, and the goods kept in them, he said.

## 14 Kukis held hostage by Naga groups released

Naga group president says 'detainees' were released after Amit Shah's commitment that govt. will put in all efforts to establish status of 6 missing Nagas; Nagaland, Meghalaya CMs welcome move

**Vijaita Singh**  
NEW DELHI

Nearly a month after being held hostage by Naga armed groups in Senapati district of Manipur, 14 Kukis were released on Tuesday following an intervention by church bodies and other civil society groups, officials said.

Manipur Director-General of Police Mukesh Singh told *The Hindu* that 14 Kukis had been released and reached their homes.

Following the killing of three church leaders belonging to the Thadou tribe who were ambushed by armed groups on May 13, at least 44 civilians were held hostage by Kuki and Naga groups in Kangpokpi and Senapati districts of Manipur. No arrests have been made for the murder of the three church leaders yet.

While others were released, 14 Kukis remained in captivity till Tuesday and six Naga men are still missing.

The United Naga Council (UNC), the apex body of the Nagas in Manipur, had



The Manipur Police secured the route to ensure the safe passage of 14 Kuki men to Taphou Kuki Village. @MANIPUR\_POLICE/X

earlier announced that the 14 men will be released on June 1 but it later said that considering the "prevailing sentiments of the Naga public", the release is cancelled.

On Tuesday, UNC President Ng. Lorho said that the "detainees" were released considering the commitment made by Union Home Minister Amit Shah through Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio assuring that the government will put in all efforts to establish the status of the six missing Nagas. He thanked various church and tribal bodies and Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma.

"Today, the UNC in consultation with all stakeholders facilitated the release of all 14 Kuki detainees and handed them over to the local administration," Mr. Lorho said. The Chief Ministers of Nagaland and Meghalaya had earlier appealed for the release of the abducted individuals.

**CM welcomes move**

On Tuesday, Mr. Rio said that he welcomes the safe and humane release of the Kuki hostages by the UNC and Naga civil society organisations, in response to the appeal made by church bodies led by the Baptist World Alliance.

"Over the past weeks, I

had several interactions and deliberations with representatives of Naga civil society groups in our collective efforts to resolve the impasse on humanitarian grounds and in the true spirit of Christian values," Mr. Rio said on X.

"We once again appeal for the safe release of the 6 Naga hostages in a reciprocal & humanitarian manner so that they return to their loved ones. We hope this gesture will help pave the way for trust, understanding & dialogue as we strive for genuine peace, reconciliation & harmony," he further said.

Mr. Sangma said in a statement, "At a time when emotions run high and communities continue to bear the scars of conflict, the decision to place humanity above differences sends a powerful message of hope to the people of Manipur and the wider Northeast."

He said he was renewing his appeal to all Kuki civil society organisations to reciprocate this gesture by ensuring the immediate and unconditional release of the six Naga civilians.

## India condemns Pakistan's air strikes against Afghanistan

**Press Trust of India**  
UNITED NATIONS



Harish Parvathani

In a scathing attack on Pakistan at the UN, India has condemned its "trade and transit terrorism" and deadly air strikes against Afghanistan, saying that dressing up a massacre as a military operation does not absolve the perpetrator.

"Pakistan's campaign of military air strikes against Afghanistan is causing huge civilian casualties and suffering to the Afghan people. Such unconscionable acts of violence are a blatant assault on Afghanistan's sovereignty and a threat to the region's peace and stability," India's Permanent Representative to the UN Harish Parvathani said at a meeting on the 'Situation in Afghanistan' in the UN Security Council on Monday.

**Violation of law**

Strongly condemning the Pakistani air strikes on Afghan territory, India said these were flagrant violations of international law, UN Charter and the principle of state sovereignty.

Mr. Parvathani cited UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan information

that 372 civilians had been killed and 397 injured just in the first three months of this year; a large majority of them during the holy month of Ramadan, which was a time of peace, mercy and reflection, making the act all the more shameful.

"No faith, no law and no morality can justify such actions," he said at the UN horseshoe table.

With Pakistan listening, India strongly reiterated that "Killing, maiming and orphaning civilians is not counter-terrorism."

"Espousing high principles of international law and Islamic solidarity while mercilessly carrying out air strikes during the holy month of Ramadan is the perfect example of hypocrisy," Mr. Parvathani said.

## CBI nabs two key accused in cyberslavery network case

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

The CBI has arrested two persons in connection with a human trafficking network that lured Indian nationals to scam compounds operating in South-east Asian countries, including Myanmar and Cambodia, on the pretext of lucrative employment opportunities.

The accused have been identified as Nipender Chaudhary and Nilesh Narpatsinh Purohit. The agency said the two were part of a human trafficking racket. It alleged that Nipender arranged logistics for Indian nationals to be taken to Myanmar through Thailand. "Victims were transported from Bangkok to Mae Sot before being illegally moved across Thailand-Myanmar border into scam compounds operating in Myanmar," it said.

## Foreign leaders congratulate Modi for long tenure as PM

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has received congratulatory messages on becoming the longest-serving elected Prime Minister of India, from the leaders of Sri Lanka, Papua New Guinea, and Trinidad and Tobago.

They hailed Mr. Modi's "transformative governance, his advocacy for the Global South, and his vision of an inclusive and economically dynamic India", according to an official statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office.

Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, in a letter, conveyed the congratulations of the government and the people of Sri Lanka to Prime Minister Modi.

"This milestone is a testament not only to your years in office but also to the trust and confidence



Narendra Modi

that the people of the world's largest democracy have repeatedly placed in your leadership," he said, as per the PMO statement.

**'Role model'**

The government statement also said that James Marape, the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, conveyed in a "personal video message" that Mr. Modi was a "role model and an example of leadership". "Lifting over 200 million people out of poverty to good life today is an amaz-

ing feat," he said, according to the PMO.

Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago Kamla Persad-Bissessar also congratulated Mr. Modi on the occasion, saying that under his leadership, India had evolved as a "leading voice on global matters".

Mr. Dissanayake also highlighted India's remarkable economic and social transformation and said that Mr. Modi's vision had "inspired many beyond India's borders, including Sri Lanka", as per the PMO statement.

The official statement said PM Modi visited Sri Lanka from April 4 to 6, 2025, his fourth visit to the island nation, during which he was conferred the 'Mitra Vibhushana', the island country's highest civilian honour accorded to a foreign dignitary. The statement also mentioned Mr. Modi's visit to Papua New Guinea in May 2023.

## 'Modi will surpass Nehru's record of being longest-serving PM of India'

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah said Prime Minister Narendra Modi completed 4,398 days in office on Tuesday and would surpass the record of former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru on Wednesday.

He said Mr. Modi would have the distinction of serving the nation for the longest continuous period as an elected Prime Minister of India. He stated that during his tenure, Mr. Modi made public welfare the guiding principle of governance.

On Wednesday, the members of National Democratic Alliance (NDA) will meet in Delhi to mark 12 years of the alliance being in power.

Mr. Shah launched the Land Port Management System (LPMS-VINIMAY) on Tuesday.

Addressing the pro-



Amit Shah during the inauguration of the Land Port Management System at Vigyan Bhawan in New Delhi on Tuesday. ANI

gramme, the Minister said that since 2014, moving beyond a security-centric approach, land ports were developed as the first line of defence for security, a means to facilitate trade, and a bridge for people-to-people connectivity. At the same time, land ports had played a significant role in the holistic development of border areas, promoting legitimate trade, and addressing challenges such as

migration from border villages and districts.

**Smart borders**

Mr. Shah said that easier movement of people across borders had enhanced cultural exchange. He said that in a country like India, with its vast land borders, border management played a very important role.

Mr. Shah said the Home Ministry was working on a

four-pronged strategy to secure India's borders under the concept of Smart Borders. The Land Port Management System had been designed keeping in mind the requirements of all stakeholders, while giving special emphasis to security. Together with the Smart Border initiative, this system would help to create an impregnable and secure border management framework. Mr. Shah added that this would help curb illegal activities.

He said the system would provide an integrated digital platform for the management of cargo, passengers and vehicles. It would enhance coordination among various agencies and make information exchange seamless. The Single Electronic Window and Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR)-based gate operation system would result in significant time savings.

## Blast at 'illegal' firecracker warehouse in Jaipur kills 7

**The Hindu Bureau**  
JAIPUR

Seven persons were killed and several injured after a fire broke out following a blast at an alleged illegal firecracker warehouse in a residential neighbourhood here on Tuesday.

The massive fire erupted at a small house in Ayesha Nagar Talai Colony, where a large quantity of firecrackers was allegedly being stored. Of the six persons rushed to Sawai Man Singh (SMS) Government Hospital, one was brought in dead and others died of their injuries during treatment.

Another person died at a private hospital in the city. Doctors at SMS Hospital said the victims had suffered burns ranging from 75% to 100% and could not



Police officials at the site after a fire broke out in a firecracker warehouse in Jaipur on Tuesday. PTI

be saved. Three critically injured patients were shifted to the hospital's Burn Intensive Care Unit.

Fire tenders, police teams and ambulances rushed to the spot upon receiving the information and carried out rescue and firefighting operations, while the local residents extended help in attempts to rescue the people

trapped inside the house and control the flames.

The house appeared to be functioning as a storage facility for firecrackers, situated adjacent to a manufacturing unit.

Preliminary investigation suggested that highly inflammable material stored inside the premises might have triggered the explosion.

## ₹95,962 crore set aside for VB-G RAM G

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

Union Rural Development Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Tuesday announced an interim allocation of ₹95,962 crore for the new rural employment scheme, the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission Gramin (VB-G RAM G).

This sum does not include the State governments' share and most States will have to contribute an additional 40% of the sum allocated to them. The combined outlay for the scheme will be ₹1.25 lakh crore. The interim allocation seeks to ensure a "seamless transition" to the new scheme and no State would face any reduction in funds, Mr. Chouhan said.

Uttar Pradesh has got the highest of ₹9,721.48 crore, followed by West Bengal (₹8,508 crore), Ta-



The interim allocation seeks to ensure a 'seamless transition' from MGNREGS to the new rural employment scheme. AFP

mil Nadu (₹7,585.49 crore), Rajasthan (₹7,581.87 crore), Andhra Pradesh (₹7,707.21 crore) and Bihar (₹6,715.83 crore).

The total allocation for States stands at ₹92,550.17 crore, while the Union Territories have been allocated ₹1,291.52 crore. An additional ₹1,850.62 crore has been earmarked for Central administration and social audits, taking the total to ₹95,692.31 crore.

Mr. Chouhan said that the allocation had been made even before notifying the scheme's rules and framing the formula dictating distribution to different States, to ensure "a seamless transition" from the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS).

"Without causing any inconvenience to workers, we are moving from

the procedural requirements necessary to implement the new scheme, while four States - Jharkhand, Karnataka, Telangana, and Mizoram - are yet to complete all formalities.

**Funding formula**

The allocation is largely in line with funds given to States under the MGNREGA in the previous financial years. The thrust of the new programme, however, is to ensure that the employment scheme has a wider presence in economically weaker States, as indicated by the proposal in the draft rules to use the 16th Finance Commission's horizontal devolution formula to determine Central allocations to States. The final formula for distributing the funds, expected to be notified on July 1, could alter the future share of different States.

**Four States not ready**

Mr. Chouhan also said that 26 States have completed

Prior to the implementation of the VB-G RAM G scheme, the States have to frame rules, complete e-KYC of beneficiaries, fix the blackout period according to their agricultural cycles, and carry out capacity-building exercises at the district and block levels.

Despite a change in government in West Bengal, with the BJP now in power, the issue of settling pending dues under MGNREGA, worth ₹8,508 crore, continues to remain unresolved.

# Govt.'s claims have not translated into tangible gains, says Congress

Opposition party releases 75-page 'promise versus reality' document to mark the second year of third term of Modi govt.; Rahul Gandhi says poor are paying a price for 12 years of 'compromised foreign policy and anti-poor economic policies'

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

Releasing a 75-page document titled *Prachaar* versus *hisaab* to mark the second year of the third term of the Narendra Modi government, the Congress on Tuesday said the Centre's claims on employment, economic growth, democracy, infrastructure, and education have not translated into tangible gains for citizens.

In a post on social media platform X, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi alleged that 12 years of "anti-poor economic policies and a compromised foreign policy" had pushed the country into a situation where millions of poor families and women had been forced towards the "poisonous smoke of firewood stoves".



Arranging debt waivers worth millions of crores for billionaire friends and passing the bill of your failures onto the poor — this is Modi's loot model

RAHUL GANDHI  
Congress leader

"The number of subsidized cylinders under the Ujjwala scheme has been reduced from 9 to 4. On top of that, the price of domestic LPG cylinders has been increased by ₹89 in the last 3 months — meaning, first hike the prices, then cut the subsidy, and snuff out the poor's hearth," Mr. Gandhi said.

"The lifeline of migrant workers, the 5 kg cylinder, has also been made ₹323 more expensive — what will they eat, and what will they save? Arranging debt waivers worth millions of

crores for billionaire friends and passing the bill of your failures onto the poor — this is Modi's loot model," he said.

The document, prepared by the All-India Congress Committee's research department, was released by its chairman Rajeev Gowda and his colleague Amitabh Dubey.

The past 12 years had been characterised by "big announcements, grand statements, and headlines", but little meaningful change in people's lives, Mr. Gowda said.

"Under Prime Minister

Modi, the rupee is the worst performing currency," Mr. Gowda said, adding, "Over the last 12 years, promises have been accompanied by big announcements, grand statements, and headlines. But the reality is that none of those headlines actually translate into anything that is meaningfully transforming the lives of the people."

## On unemployment

"Four out of 10 graduates remain unemployed," he said, claiming that the government had failed to generate adequate employment. Urban youth unemployment stood at 18.4%, and only 7% of unemployed graduates had secured a permanent salaried job within a year, Mr. Gowda said.

On women's participation in the workforce, Mr. Gowda said India's ranking in the Global Gender Gap

Index had fallen from 108 to 131. Referring to the MSME sector, he said nearly 40,000 enterprises had shut down in the previous financial year.

Mr. Gowda alleged that "6.5 crore voters have been deleted across the country", adding, "We have a situation where our democracy is deeply flawed, and this is a real tragedy for every citizen of India."

Mr. Dubey criticised the government on inflation, claiming that the prices of LPG, petrol, diesel, milk, and pulses had increased sharply since 2014.

"Narendra Modi had claimed that India would become the world's third largest economy and reach a \$5 trillion economy by 2024. But the reality today is that the economy has fallen below \$4 trillion, and India has slipped to the sixth largest economy," Mr. Dubey said.

# Mamata and Sonia hold talks on strategy, discuss alliance for future polls

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

A day after the INDIA bloc meeting, Trinamool Congress national president Mamata Banerjee met senior Congress leader Sonia Gandhi at her 10 Janpath residence on Tuesday.

Ms. Banerjee had a long conversation with Ms. Gandhi at the INDIA bloc meeting as well.

Sources said that on Tuesday, the two discussed strategies for the future, with the possibility of an alliance for the 2029 Lok Sabha election on the cards. Ms. Banerjee who reached Delhi for the INDIA meeting, had decided to stay back for another day, to meet Ms. Gandhi. The Congress shared pictures of the bonhomie between the two leaders. This was the first closed-door meeting between Ms. Banerjee and Ms. Gandhi after the Trinamool's defeat in the polls, and the al-



Mamata Banerjee departs from the residence of AICC chairperson Sonia Gandhi after a meeting in New Delhi on Tuesday. ANI

leged attacks on party workers and MP Abhishek Banerjee.

Coinciding with her meeting with Ms. Gandhi, the West Bengal CID conducted searches at the Trinamool Congress headquarters and Ms. Banerjee's residence. The party's newly appointed joint secretary, Derek O'Brien, in a post on X, said it was part of political vendetta by the government ruling the Centre and State. "EXACTLY AT THE

SAME TIME as @AITCOfficial Chairperson @MamataOfficial was having a meeting today in Delhi with Mrs Sonia Gandhi, CID was forcefully trying to enter the AITC party HQ adjoining residence in Kolkata. First loot vote, now loot files of a political rival. Democracy? Main entrance overloaded with CRPF," he posted.

Ms. Banerjee met former Delhi Chief Minister and AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal.

## New law is needed to tackle AI, says Vaishnav

**Press Trust of India**  
NEW DELHI

The information technology law was framed much before the rapid emergence of AI, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnav said on Tuesday, adding that he believes a new legal framework may be required to deal with the changing landscape.

Mr. Vaishnav said discussions were on with the industry and that the government would seek to strike a balance between innovation and regulation.

Asked whether India will look at a dedicated AI law or continue to address it through amendments to the IT Act, he said the issue was a complex one.

"It's a very complex topic. Certain things have been done under the IT Act framework, but I do think that there is a requirement for a new law because the world of AI is very different from the world when the IT Act was enacted in 2000."

"We are discussing with the industry...as always, our objective and approach will be to balance innovation and regulation in a manner that innovation keeps happening, while our citizens remain safe," he said.

## Cong. attacks Centre over 'cut in Ujjwala scheme LPG refills'

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Tuesday accused the Narendra Modi government of undermining its flagship welfare schemes, citing a reduction in the number of subsidised Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) cylinder refills provided under the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) to four.

The decision exposed the gap between the government's promises and its delivery on them, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said in a post on social media platform X.

The government had steadily diluted the benefits promised under the scheme, which was launched in 2016 with the stated objective of providing relief to women from the health hazards of traditional cooking fuels, Mr. Kharge said.

"2016: Modi ji claimed that the Ujjwala Yojana would liberate women from the smoke of wood-burning stoves. There was a promise of 12 subsidized cylinders a year. However, last year, that number was reduced from 12 to 9. 2026: Now, the number of subsidized cylinders has been further cut from 9 to just 4. In short, a promise of 12,



Mallikarjun Kharge

but an intention of giving only 4," the Congress president said in his post.

## Official data

Repeated increases in LPG prices had made refills unaffordable for a large number of beneficiaries, the Congress leader alleged. Citing official data, he claimed that 5.56 crore Ujjwala beneficiaries were unable to afford cylinder refills, and were being forced to return to traditional cooking methods.

"The Modi government sheds crocodile tears for women while being intoxicated by power," Mr. Kharge said, adding that the government had first weakened employment guarantees under the erstwhile Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), and was now curtailing welfare support for poor households.

## Police arrest ex-Trinamool MLA in 2018 extortion case

**Senjuti Sengupta**  
KOLKATA

Sabyasachi Dutta, former Trinamool Congress MLA and the first Mayor of the Bidhannagar Municipal Corporation, was arrested on Monday night for allegedly extorting over ₹1.05 crore from a Salt Lake-based businessman in 2018.

According to the officials, a team from Bidhannagar North police station immediately conducted a search operation at Mr. Dutta's residence in Rajarhat, as per the complaint lodged by the businessman Mahdusudan Chakraborty. He was later arrested.

"We have gathered some evidence against him during the raid. Mr. Chakraborty has alleged that Mr. Dutta extorted the money in 2018 and later had also been threatening for more," said an officer.

However, Mr. Dutta denied all the allegations. While he was being taken for a medical examination, Mr. Dutta told presspersons, "All the allegations are fabricated. The complainant, Mr. Chakraborty, himself was arrested in connection with a forgery case, following which his family approached me to get him out."

# Rebel Trinamool MPs lack political morality and must resign, says Kalyan

**The Hindu Bureau**  
KOLKATA

A day after 20 Lok Sabha members of the Trinamool Congress revolted against the party leadership, loyalists of Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday launched a sharp attack on the rebel MPs alleging that they are siding with the Bharatiya Janata Party.

Trinamool MPs Kalyan Banerjee and Kirti Azad addressed a press conference in New Delhi on Tuesday, and said that "Today their (rebel MPs) leader is Narendra Modi. They have become BJP."

Mr. Kalyan, who is also the Chief Whip of the party in the Lok Sabha, said the leaders were free to leave the party but urged them to "stop writing Trinamool leader/MP beside their name".

Several MPs from the Trinamool met Union Minister and BJP West Bengal observer Bhupendra Yadav at his residence on Monday and said that they were creating a separate bloc of Trinamool which will support the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government.

"If you are so honest, why don't you make it pu-



Trinamool Congress leaders Kalyan Banerjee and Kirti Azad addressing a press conference on Tuesday. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

blic? Why don't you have the courage to give the letter to the press?" Mr. Kalyan asked, alleging that the entire exercise lacked transparency.

## 'Questions on letter'

Questioning the authenticity of the letter, he said such an important document has not been placed in the public domain.

Mr. Kalyan and Mr. Azad also accused the rebel MPs of lacking political morality, maintaining links with the BJP and abandoning party workers at a time when they were allegedly facing harassment and political attacks.

"Sukhendu Sekhar Roy has resigned from the Ra-

jya Sabha after making allegations against our party. Those who are making allegations against the party must follow the path of Sukhendu and show political morality by resigning as MPs," Mr. Kalyan said.

The rebellion in the Trinamool started last week with 58 party MLAs selecting a new Leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly on June 3. Almost a week after the rebellion, Lok Sabha MPs have begun a revolt against party leadership.

Barasat Lok Sabha MP Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar is emerging as the leader of the rebel bloc and has claimed the support of the rebel Trinamool camp.

## Court orders restitution of assets in PACL case

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

A special court has ordered the restitution of 282 immovable properties, valued at approximately ₹9,420.57 crore, which were attached by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in the PACL Limited case, to the Justice Lodha Committee for the purpose of returning funds to the investors who were cheated.

The agency has so far attached assets worth close to ₹28,626 crore in India and Australia. The ED probe is based on a case registered by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) against the PACL and its promoters for allegedly defrauding lakhs of investors. The accused had mobilised over ₹68,000 crore from investors across India, under the pretext of investment schemes, of which ₹48,000 crore remained unpaid to them.

In February, the Supreme Court ordered the Securities and Exchange Board of India to constitute a committee under the chairmanship of Justice (retired) R.M. Lodha, former Chief Justice of India. The court directed that the assets of PACL be disposed of and the sale proceeds be used to refund investors.

# Delhi court dismisses bail plea of NEET-UG paper leak accused

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Tuesday dismissed the bail application of Manisha Waghmare, a tutor and an accused in the alleged NEET-UG paper leak case being investigated by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).

The plea was rejected by the Rouse Avenue Court, which is hearing matters connected to the alleged leak of the national medical entrance examination.

Her counsel told the court that she is a certified education counsellor and had not indulged in any illegal activity. It was also claimed that the money

It also sought the CBI's response to an interim bail plea filed by co-accused Yash Yadav

that landed in her bank account was a gift from her relatives.

In a related proceeding, the court sought the CBI's response to an interim bail plea filed by co-accused Yash Yadav.

Mr. Yadav, a student, has sought temporary relief for 15 days to appear for the NEET-UG examination scheduled on June 21 and to attend his sister's wedding functions.

The court directed the

CBI to file its reply and posted the matter for hearing on June 12.

The alleged irregularities in the NEET-UG examination surfaced following reports that the question paper had been leaked before the test conducted by the National Testing Agency.

One of the country's largest entrance tests, it was taken by more than 22 lakh aspirants seeking admission to undergraduate medical courses.

The probe has since led to multiple arrests, with agencies continuing to examine the alleged network behind the leak and distribution of examination material.

# PM expected to meet Trump on sidelines of G-7 summit in France

**Kallol Bhattacharjee**  
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to meet U.S. President Donald Trump on the sidelines of the G-7 summit taking place in Evian, France on June 16-17, official sources have told *The Hindu*.

Mr. Trump has already announced that he will participate in the G-7 summit, hosted by French President Emmanuel Macron.

The meeting will mark the first interaction between Mr. Modi and Mr. Trump since they last met in February 2025 in Washington DC.

The sources did not elaborate on the details of the planned discussion but it is understood that the two sides will cover the bilateral trade pact under negotiation, and other regional and global matters of mutual concern. The officials provided this information soon after sharing details on Mr. Modi's upcoming travel schedule for France and the Slovak Republic.

The PM's visit to France will take place in two segments, with the first segment stretching from June 13 to June 14, and the second taking place from June 16 to June 19.

# Disruptions in legislatures pose a serious challenge: LS Speaker

**The Hindu Bureau**  
CHANDIGARH

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla said on Tuesday that frequent interruptions and disruptions in the Houses of Parliament and the State Assemblies pose a serious challenge to democratic institutions.

He said that the solution to this problem lies within the legislative institutions themselves, urging them to promote conduct aligned with public expectations, dialogue, and meaningful discussion. He was speaking at the second conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) India Region Zone-II (North Zone),



Om Birla

which concluded here.

He called on the public representatives to ensure that their conduct in legislative institutions is exemplary, so that the welfare of the last person in society can be secured. "Society is shaped by the conduct and behaviour of its leadership," he said.

He said the conference concluded with four important resolutions aimed at making legislative institutions more effective, accountable, and people-centric.

"The dream of a developed India, 'Viksit Bharat', is anchored on strong parliamentary and legislative institutions. To achieve this, it is absolutely essential to increase public participation, maximise the use of technology, enhance the capacity of legislators, ensure the involvement of citizens in framing policies and laws, and raise awareness toward the Constitution and constitutional institutions," Mr. Birla added.

## INBRIEF



## SC to hear actor's petition in money laundering case

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Thursday a plea filed by actor Jacqueline Fernandez challenging a Delhi court's decision to frame charges against her in a ₹200-crore money laundering case involving alleged conman Sukesh Chandrashekar. The petition has been filed against a May 30 order of a Delhi court directing the framing of charges against Ms. Fernandez in a case investigated by the ED under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). Additional Sessions Judge observed that a prima facie case was made out to charge her with the offence of money laundering. The Bench said, "We will post the matter the day after tomorrow."

## Patna court stays arrest of 'Khan Sir' in firing case

A court in Bihar's Patna on Tuesday stayed the arrest of popular educator and YouTuber Faisal Khan, also known as "Khan Sir", in connection with a firing that happened at his coaching institute on the night of June 2. Earlier, Mr. Khan's lawyer Arvind Kumar Mahuar had filed an anticipatory bail petition at Patna district court. Since then, Mr. Khan is said to have been untraceable. Meanwhile, sources close to Mr. Khan told *The Hindu* that he is likely to approach the Patna High Court for quashing of the FIR lodged against him at the Kadankuan police station on June 4.

## Govt. notifies resettlement census on Nicobar island

Abhinav Lakshman  
NEW DELHI

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands administration has notified the beginning of the resettlement and rehabilitation (R&R) census in the Great Nicobar Island to make way for the trunk infrastructure part of the Centre's ₹92,000 crore container port, airport, and tourist-township project.

In a public notice put up on Tuesday, the Office of the Assistant Commissioner in Campbell Bay notified that document verification for the rehabilitation and resettlement census will begin on June 10 at the recreation hall in Kamal Basti.

The notice called for all families affected by the trunk infrastructure part of the Great Nicobar Island mega-infrastructure project to keep about 24 different types of documents ready that may be required by the census team.

The trunk infrastructure includes the construction of the trunk road and related infrastructure on Great Nicobar Island as the first steps for the project that has a timeline going up to 2050, according to the draft Master Plan.

## Zojila tunnel is gamechanger for India's security: Gadkari

Union Minister oversees breakthrough of the 13.14-km-long tunnel between Kashmir and Ladakh, says project will help in regional development and make movement of armed forces faster, safer

Peerzada Ashiq  
MEENAMARG

Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari on Tuesday oversaw the breakthrough of the 13.14-km-long Zojila tunnel, terming it a "game-changer from security perspective and [the perspective of] national integration".

"From the perspective of national security, this project will prove to be a gamechanger. With round-the-year connectivity, the movement of the Indian Army as well as the supply of Army materials, equipment, and logistics will become faster, safer, and more effective, thereby strengthening the country's strategic preparedness," Mr. Gadkari said.

Besides serving as "a foundation for employment, economic opportunities, and better quality of life for local people", Mr. Gadkari said, "by establishing all-weather connectivity, this project will provide new strength to regional development and national integration".

Earlier in the day, the



Officials during the inspection and breakthrough of the Zojila tunnel at Meenamarg in Ladakh on Tuesday. IMRAN NISSAR

Union Minister oversaw the final blasting of the Zojila tunnel from the Kargil side, and termed the tunnel the world's longest, single-tube, bi-directional road tunnel at an altitude of 11,578 feet.

## 'Crucial chapter'

Describing the tunnel as "a crucial chapter in providing all-weather connectivity between Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh", the Union Minister said the project had been completed at a cost of ₹6,800 crore, despite an early estimate of ₹12,000 crore.

"Despite extreme snow-

fall, harsh weather, and complex geological conditions, India's engineers and workers have transformed this challenging task into reality," Mr. Gadkari said.

The tunnel offered unique safety measures for passengers, including a modern ventilation system, automatic fire detection, an advanced CCTV surveillance system, and cross-passage facilities for pedestrians.

"The approximately two-hour journey from Sonamarg in J&K to Meenamarg in Ladakh will be reduced to just 30 minutes.

This will save time and fuel. There will be a reduction in accidents and the risk of avalanches," Mr. Gadkari said.

Under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the tunnel was taking shape in the midst of the snow-covered Himalayas and "is not only connecting mountains but also possibilities", the senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader said. "We are committed to the overall development of Jammu-Kashmir and Ladakh through modern infrastructure construction," he added.

## 'Dream come true'

"It's a dream come true for the people of Kargil. This milestone marks a transformative step towards ensuring all-weather connectivity between Kashmir and Ladakh, boosting economic growth, strengthening tourism, and bringing the people of the two regions closer together," J&K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said. Mr. Abdullah urged the Union Minister to push for Kargil's air connectivity with the rest of the country.

## Dalit youth beaten to death in Uttarakhand

Ishita Mishra  
NEW DELHI

A suspected case of caste-based violence has come to light in Uttarakhand's Tehri Garhwal district, where an 18-year-old Dalit youth was allegedly beaten to death over his relationship with a minor girl from an upper-caste family. His friend was grievously injured.

The victim's relatives have claimed that iron nails were found embedded in the body and demanded stringent action against those responsible.

According to a copy of the FIR accessed by *The Hindu*, Dhanpal Lal, a resident of Deval village, received a phone call on the morning of June 8 from a man who identified himself as Yashbir Singh Panwar. The caller allegedly informed Mr. Dhanpal that his son, Ketan Lal, and his friend, Diwakar Dimri, were being held by the Panwar family. Mr. Dhanpal rushed to the location and found the two youth critically injured.

The FIR states that Ketan Lal, while being taken to hospital, told his father that he and his friend were allegedly assaulted through the night.

## Delhi data centre fire may have destroyed equipment worth crores

Aroon Deep  
NEW DELHI

A fire at a data centre in the Greater Kailash area of Delhi on June 5 may have caused losses of hundreds of crores in equipment, data, and revenue, impacting traffic from Google, Netflix, and multiple local Internet service providers in the National Capital Region, companies affected by the blaze told *The Hindu*. While no loss of life was reported, key network routers and servers belonging to local providers and big tech companies were damaged.

Fires at data centres, where multiple companies bring their own equipment for "co-location", are rare. Industry best practices typically require facilities to douse fires with inert gas systems, and data centres usually have limited on-site presence of people during their day-to-day opera-



Traffic from Google and Netflix was impacted by the fire at the data centre.

tions. Those safeguards, however, may not have been enough at ST Telemedia GDC's facility, which operated out of a building owned by Tata Communications Ltd. STT GDC had "leased the premises," Tata Communications said in a stock exchange filing on Friday.

At least two local networks *The Hindu* spoke with found themselves cut

off from the Internet around 2.30 a.m.

Video footage shared by one client and reviewed by *The Hindu* showed equipment in a server room completely blackened and charred as three fire tenders were seen standing outside the building. Ten fire tenders were deployed overall, and the firefighting operation lasted several hours.

"On one floor, there are about 200 racks of servers," Sanjay Singh of R2 Net, a local Internet provider said. "Fifty of those racks belonged to Google. They have an independent cage on the left side of the third floor. (Google did not respond to a request for a comment) We are a small operator, but we have lost ₹2 crore worth of equipment." While Netflix also had infrastructure at the data centre, its Open Connect architecture may have insulated it from shocks, as

caches are deployed directly within many ISPs' local networks.

Raunak Maheshwari, country head of Megaport Ltd, which runs Internet exchanges for content and service providers at the facility, said the losses extended to data that may be irrecoverable. His own accounting-software vendor kept its data servers on the third floor, he said.

Asked about an estimate that losses could at least be around ₹500 crore, Mr. Maheshwari said that equipment losses alone could run into hundreds of crores, given the facility's size.

"The cost of the data, who knows that?" he said. STT GDC declined to comment on the commercial value of the damaged equipment, but said some customers' servers had been safely migrated.

(With inputs from Shri-mansi Kaushik)

## India calls for dialogue on climate finance, adaptation at Bonn meet

Jacob Koshy  
NEW DELHI

India has called for the shrinking pool of climate finance and a widening adaptation finance gap to be tackled head-on at the United Nations climate negotiations-linked talks under way in Bonn, Germany. It has urged that a Paris Agreement provision which obliges developed countries to provide funds to developing nations, be given dedicated agenda space to enable substantive progress.

The intervention came in India's statement to the 64<sup>th</sup> session of the UNFCCC Subsidiary Bodies (SB64), delivered by Harkeerat Randhawa of the External Affairs Ministry.

India associated itself with the positions taken on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, the Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDC), and the BASIC



India associated itself with the positions taken on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, the LMDC and the BASIC bloc. REUTERS

bloc (Brazil, South Africa, India, China).

The Bonn meeting runs from June 8 to 18 and is the mid-year session of the two subsidiary bodies – on implementation (SBI) and on scientific and technological advice (SBSTA) – that prepare draft decisions for the annual Conference of the Parties. It is the first multilateral climate conference since COP30, held in Belém, Brazil, last Novem-

ber, and is tasked with turning those outcomes into negotiable text ahead of COP31. That summit will be hosted in Antalya, Türkiye in November, which holds the formal presidency and Australia presiding over the negotiations.

## Unilateral trade

India pressed for the dialogue on unilateral trade measures – a reference to carbon border levies such

as the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) – to address their adverse effects on developing countries' climate action, anchored in Article 3.5 of the Convention.

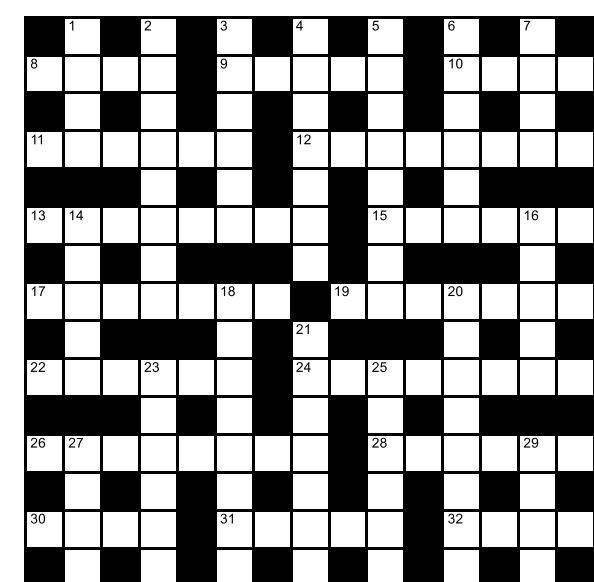
It cautioned that the Mitigation Work Programme's facilitative, non-prescriptive character be preserved, that the adaptation goal remain balanced and Party-driven, and that no obligations beyond agreed mandates be introduced.

This year's agenda is dominated by a shift to an implementation phase. Key items include the Global Goal on Adaptation, the Just Transition Work Programme and the Global Stocktake, alongside climate finance and the contested future of the Sharm el-Sheikh Mitigation Work Programme, which is due to conclude in 2026 with a possible extension on the table.

THE CROSSWORD+ 14816  
(set by Incognito)

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

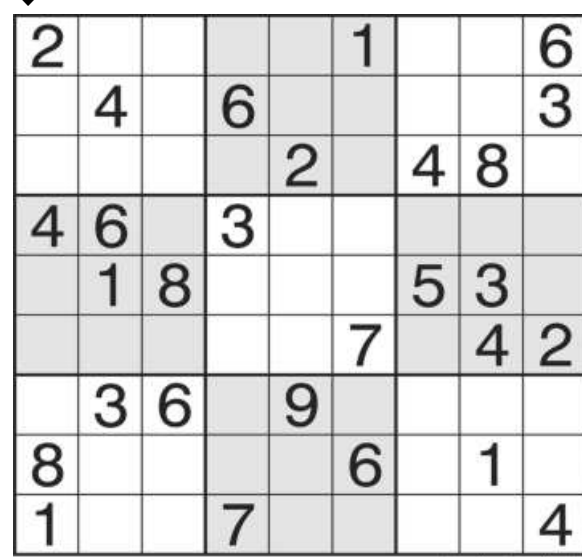
SCAN TO PLAY



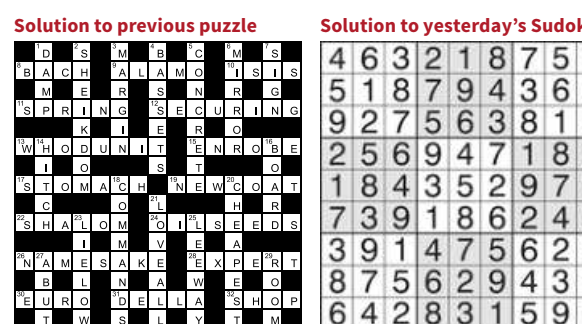
- 13 Analysing quantity of arsenic, for example, in groundwater at first (8)
- 15 Ladies restated expected standards (6)
- 17 Check manufacture of pectins (7)
- 19/22 Old weapon found in Shakespearean plays (7,6)
- 24 Driving in absence of medico, following a Rolls Royce and coming (8)
- 26 Spotted animals tearing her pants (8)
- 28 Stick electrical component (6)
- 30 What a golfer might shout from a wooded area after losing some time initially? (4)
- 31 Other actors seem to be deaf to this kind of dialogue (5)
- 32 Warmth in the theatre (4)
- Down**
- 1 Destruction of shale oil after leaving isle produces ring of light (4)
- 2 Excitedly help Adam to get illumination for biker, for example (8)
- 3 It's him wandering around tombolos, for example (6)
- 4 Vegetable produced by a couple of boys in Co-op (7)
- 5 Stone thrown by Scotsman and North European (8)
- 6 Horrible shame! Purloining one golf club! (6)
- 7 Employer's devious ruse (4)
- 14 Transgression at top-class peninsula (5)
- 16 Leader left 9 on return (5)
- 18 Sal cared about collapsed magma chambers (8)
- 20 Iodine and vanadium found in damaged hinges and rails (8)
- 21 Legal action arising from bad awl and spades, for example (7)
- 23 Tie broken teeth at beginning of ritual (6)
- 25 Duty schedule from hero's terrible (6)
- 27 Ace spinner on the summit (4)
- 29 Cove between last part of beach and a part of port (4)

- Across**
- 8 Male took in conjugal partner (4)
- 9 Asset that could be pieces of furniture (5)
- 10 Part of church collapses to some extent (4)
- 11 Who had changed seating equipment mounted on elephant? (6)
- 12 Siblings, perhaps, trouble school head around start of recess (8)

## SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆



## FAITH

## Recite hymns, shun fear

Those who refuse to accept the Supreme Being inevitably remain trapped in samsara, a realm permeated by fear. Since worldly existence is fraught with anxiety, uncertainty, attachment, and suffering, they continue to experience the countless fears that arise from worldly pursuits and repeated cycles of birth and death.

Sri Desika Srinivasa Tathachariar said in a discourse that *Stava*, *Stuti* and *Stotra* are closely related Sanskrit terms denoting hymns of praise. *Stava* generally refers to the glorification of a deity in the masculine gender, *Stuti* to the praise of a deity in the feminine gender, and *Stotra* is a more general term that may be used irrespective of gender, including neuter forms. Among the many sacred hymns composed by Swami Vedanta Desika, Abhithi Stavam occupies a unique place. He composed this hymn in praise of Lord Ranganatha during a period of great turmoil, when foreign invaders had created widespread destruction and fear in the land. Through this prayer, Swami Desika sought the Lord's divine protection, fearlessness (*abhithi*), and grace for the devotees and for the preservation of dharma. The hymn continues to inspire devotees to seek refuge in the Lord during times of adversity and uncertainty.

The Lord is an unfathomable ocean of grace. Even a single act of sincere worship is enough to invoke His boundless compassion and blessings. The recitation of Abhithi Stavam with faith and devotion dispels fear, instills courage and inner peace, and enables devotees to receive the abundant grace and divine protection of Lord Ranganatha.

# Scientists find a blood test that predicts lung cancer years early

A new study has zeroed in on a set of 14 blood plasma proteins, called the '14-protein signature', as a strong predictor of being diagnosed with lung cancer years in advance; the team also identified an existing drug that could potentially be used to reduce the risk of developing lung cancer

S. Swaminathan

**L**ung cancer is one of the more common cancers affecting people worldwide. This is mainly due to smoking and, to a lesser extent, air pollution and occupational exposure. According to the latest World Health Organization estimates, there are about 2.5 million new cases and 1.8 million deaths every year. Prevention offers the ideal solution to this public health problem.

Scientists are currently on the threshold of finding a new way to identify people who may be predisposed to developing lung cancer and protect them proactively. A multinational team, from almost a dozen countries, led by Charles Swanton of the Francis Crick Institute, London, published its findings on an exciting discovery in *Cell* on May 4. The team has zeroed in on a set of 14 blood plasma proteins, which they call the "14-protein signature", as a strong predictor of being diagnosed with lung cancer years in advance.

The team also identified an existing drug that could potentially be used to reduce the risk of developing lung cancer.

## Looking in the blood

Blood plasma is the liquid portion of the blood that flows in our body. It contains thousands of proteins that come from every organ and tissue. This entire set of proteins is called the plasma proteome. The large-scale systematic study of the proteome is called proteomics.

Sampling blood plasma is akin to a liquid biopsy. The plasma proteomics profile provides a real-time snapshot of health and disease. If scientists could compare the profiles of people before and after the onset of a disease, they can glean important clues about changes in the plasma proteome as a person goes from well to unwell.

To get such data pertaining to lung cancer, Swanton et al. turned to the U.K. Biobank, an ongoing initiative that tracks the lives of approximately half a million volunteers to find out who falls ill and why. The Biobank is a repository of anonymised biological samples and corresponding health-related information of all these volunteers. It is accessible to scientists around the world to develop diagnostics and therapies for everyone, everywhere.

For a subset of the volunteers, around 10%, the plasma proteomics profiles became available in 2023.

The team used the profiles of about 48,000 volunteers to train a machine-learning model along with patient characteristics, such as age,



Sampling blood plasma is akin to a liquid biopsy. The plasma proteomics profile provides a real-time snapshot of health and disease. ADRIAN SULYOK/UNSPLASH

gender, smoking status, lung cancer diagnosis, etc. This way, the team identified 14 plasma proteins linked to lung cancer.

## How a cancer forms

Next, the researchers used the model to predict the incidence of lung cancer diagnoses using the proteomics data of about 12,000 patients whose data had been excluded from the model's training. This set included 75 individuals of lung cancer with a median time to diagnosis of 5.1 years. The model predicted lung cancer diagnosis with a very high sensitivity, successfully identifying more than 75% cases.

The 14-protein signature was also found in eight additional datasets, including one from life-long non-smokers, essentially validating the signature's usefulness.

The scientists also found that the signature was more pronounced when specific inflammatory pathways involving smoking and air pollution were activated. In a previous study, the same team had found that air pollution causes inflammation that awakens dormant mutant lung cells, which eventually become cancer cells.

This detail, together with the observations in the new study, led the team to hypothesise that smoking induces mutations, lung inflammation triggered by environmental cues follows, and this culminates in lung cancer.

The signature was also more distinct in people who developed chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and pulmonary fibrosis.

## The CANTOS trial

If future research finds that this is indeed one way that lung cancer develops, scientists can think of treating the inflammation before the cancer takes root. Canakinumab is a drug made by Novartis and which currently has the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's approval to treat inflammatory disorders. Swanton et al. were aware of a previous clinical trial called CANTOS that tested canakinumab's ability to reduce the risk of recurrent cardiac events in patients who had experienced a prior heart attack and were suffering from persistent inflammation. Its effect was modest.

However, Swanton et al., who carried out a retrospective analysis of the trial data, found that 2,300 of the CANTOS participants who received canakinumab happened to display the 14-protein signature – and the risk of lung cancer was down by 50% in this group.

The data suggested that canakinumab could be a potential drug to prevent future lung cancer in those with the 14-protein signature.

## Step by step

The 14-protein signature needs to be further validated. It has been derived

from a population of limited diversity, representing the U.K., the U.S., and East Asia. If the signature is found to be relevant in many or even all populations, scientists will then have to develop a diagnostic test to detect all 14 proteins in blood plasma.

Assuming such a test also becomes available, canakinumab will have to be tested in clinical trials for its new purpose. Unfortunately, the CANTOS trial found that canakinumab could have serious side effects. The European Medicine Agency's report concluded that the drug's toxicity could outweigh its benefits.

Canakinumab is also prohibitively expensive. Treatments usually involve multiple doses over long periods of time. In the U.S., it costs \$73,000 for a year. It is neither registered nor commercially available in India, and it would be imperative to explore inexpensive alternatives with similar function and with more acceptable safety profiles.

Ultimately, if we manage to tick all these boxes, the diagnostics and the drug would be of great benefit for individuals at risk of lung cancer worldwide. The work of Swanton et al. is a step in this direction.

(S. Swaminathan is a retired professor of biology from BITS Pilani-Hyderabad and a former scientist, International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, New Delhi. ssn225@gmail.com)

## THE GIST

The 14-protein signature has been derived from a population of limited diversity, representing the U.K., the U.S., and East Asia

While promising, it still needs to be further validated

If the signature is found to be relevant in many or even all populations, scientists will then have to develop a diagnostic test to detect all 14 proteins in blood plasma

## BIG SHOT



**Preventive measures:** A drone view of farmers planting rice seedlings in a paddy field in Cirebon regency in West Java province, Indonesia, on June 3. The Indonesian government has urged farmers to immediately replant their plots, responding to the erratic forces of weather for a possible prolonged dry spell linked to El Nino. REUTERS

## WHAT IS IT?

# A black hole's elusive wind

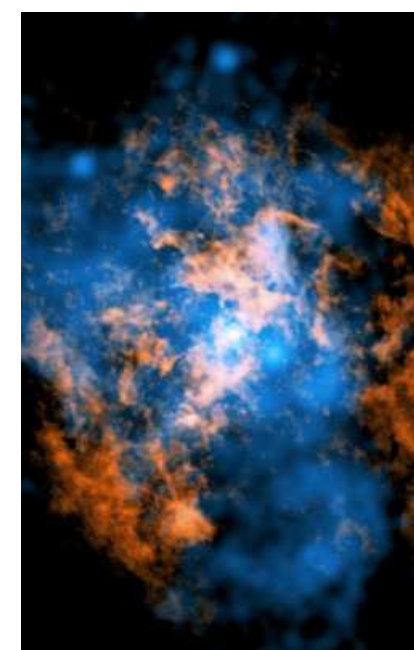
Vasudevan Mukunth

**F**or more than 50 years, astronomers have suspected that Sagittarius A\*, the supermassive black hole at the centre of the Milky Way, was blowing a wind of hot gas into space. However, they couldn't find evidence of it. This has now changed if the results of a new study, using the ALMA telescope in Chile, are to be believed.

By combining five years of data from ALMA, researchers from Northwestern University, U.S., have reported a large cone-shaped clearing in the dense molecular gas surrounding the black hole. This clearing is at least 3.2 lightyears long and opens at a 45-degree angle, as if the black hole is 'blowing' away cold gas that would otherwise fall into it.

According to the study, the finding is the first definitive evidence of a "presently active" wind from Sagittarius A\*. By blowing away the gas, the wind keeps too many stars from forming, which would deplete the gas and prevent future star formation. If too many stars explode when they die, they could also blow away the remaining gas, nixing the galaxy's ability to evolve.

When the black hole pulls on some gas, it swirls around instead of falling straight in. As it accelerates, the gas particles are heated by friction as the gravity pressurises them. Eventually the gas becomes a plasma burning millions of degrees hot. As per the study, just 1 g of this gas can release



An image depicting evidence of a wind blowing away from Sagittarius A\*, the Milky Way's supermassive black hole. NASA

enough energy to push away 100 kg of nearby gas. The pushed gas makes up the wind.

**For feedback and suggestions** for 'Science', please write to [science@thehindu.co.in](mailto:science@thehindu.co.in) with the subject 'Daily page'



## New and raw

Nepal and India must avoid misspeaking on border issues

The visit of Nepal Foreign Minister Shishir Khanal to Delhi, which followed right after the visit of Nepal's new ruling party RSP's President Rabi Lamichhane and ahead of a proposed visit by the new Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle, signals an intense outreach between Delhi and Kathmandu's new leadership. Mr. Khanal had met External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar in April, on the sidelines of an Indian Ocean regional conference in Mauritius, but this was his first visit to India since the RSP and newly elected Prime Minister Balen Shah took power after the GenZ protests. The meetings, a lead up to an expected India visit by Mr. Shah, indicate a step-by-step approach to building ties, with Delhi laying out the red carpet for Mr. Lamichhane, who met with top functionaries of the BJP, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Home Minister, Mr. Jaishankar and the National Security Adviser. These meetings came just after Mr. Shah's address to his Parliament where he accused India of occupying parts of Nepal while also claiming that Nepal is in control of parts of Indian territory, and much to New Delhi's outrage, added that Nepal was in touch with the U.K. and China on the issue. Such comments by Mr. Shah, and his decision to stick to protocol and refuse a meeting with India's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, no doubt ruffled feathers, and Mr. Lamichhane's first task was to smooth feelings on the issue. In a media meet, Mr. Khanal also sought to diffuse the tensions, suggesting that the Nepal government was committed to turning a page in Nepali politics, and casting aside "old baggage" with India. The MEA rejected any role for a "third party" in negotiations, particularly China, given that Mr. Khanal's next visit is to Beijing. No doubt, the territorial issues over Limpiyadhura, and Lipulekh will heat up again this summer as India sends more groups over the border areas which Kathmandu claims, for the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra to Tibet.

The agenda between India and Nepal is at present too broad and too deep, from border management and renegotiating water sharing agreements to infrastructure, trade development projects and energy sharing, to be derailed at this point. While Nepal's new government may be granted some leeway for early misspeaking, Kathmandu and Delhi must tread carefully in their words and steps. Any indication from Kathmandu that it is cavalier about India's position in the region, or from Delhi that it seeks to interfere with the new government's working, could set off the same cycles of mistrust that have dogged the relationship, particularly since the Nepal Constitution friction and trade blockade from India in 2015. While the Modi government's diplomatic tasks have been made more complex by youth protests that have dislodged entrenched power structures in the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal, this may also be an important opportunity to rework its discourse and partnership framework with smaller yet important neighbours in South Asia.

## First-timers

Upsets and withdrawals saw new champions at the French Open

The triumphs of Alexander Zverev and Mirra Andreeva at the French Open for their maiden Grand Slam singles titles appear to have evoked contrasting feelings in both. For 29-year-old Zverev, the rousing five-set victory over Italian Flavio Cobolli brought more relief than unbridled joy, for he had lost thrice before in a Major final and was long considered among the best players to have never won a Slam. But for Andreeva, the straight-forward win over the unheralded qualifier Maja Chwalinska – albeit under testing windy conditions – was a journey to seventh heaven and a realisation of her prodigious teenaged promise. Both players benefitted from notable absences and a plethora of upsets, so much so that neither faced a top-10 opponent all tournament. Among men, Carlos Alcaraz withdrew while red-hot favourite Jannik Sinner and 24-time Major winner Novak Djokovic fell by the third round. In the ladies section, none among Aryna Sabalenka, Iga Swiatek, Coco Gauff and Elena Rybakina reached the semifinals. But in fairness, both Zverev and Andreeva were pedigreed. Zverev was – and still is – World No. 3, has been in the top-4 for the last two years, and in the top-10 for a good part of the last decade. Andreeva reached the Roland-Garros semifinal as a 17-year-old in 2024, entered the top-10 in early 2025 after back-to-back successes in Dubai and Indian Wells, and has maintained that status.

Zverev is just the third German man in the Open Era to win a Slam and the first to do so in Paris. The victory will also go a long way in erasing a few painful memories he has experienced on Court Philippe-Chatrier. In 2022, he limped out of his semifinal against Rafael Nadal on crutches after damaging his right ankle in the second set. In 2024, he was up two sets to one against Alcaraz in the final before falling apart. The 2026 edition, which snapped Alcaraz and Sinner's combined winning streak of nine Majors, is his redemption song. Andreeva's career, in contrast, is yet to experience the vagaries of the tennis tour. After first making waves as a 16-year-old qualifier in 2023, reaching the round of 32 at the French Open and the round of 16 at Wimbledon, the Russian shot up to No. 5 by July 2025. Andreeva has competed in 13 Slams so far, and has reached the fourth round or better in eight. It is a remarkable record for someone who is yet to turn 20, and her dash to the title over the previous fortnight for the loss of just one set is confirmation of her elite status.

# Securing India against the threat of a 'Mythocalypse'

When it comes to Artificial Intelligence (AI), the United States is about six months ahead of the rest of the world. Within the U.S., Silicon Valley is six months ahead of New York, and within Silicon Valley, frontier AI companies are six months ahead of everyone else. Simple maths reveals where India stands vis-à-vis the AI frontier. The question that should keep us awake at night is this: What about the inevitable proliferation of Mythos-class capabilities, including from labs that do not share Anthropic's restraint and from open-weight model releases over which no one has control? Anthropic says its new model, Claude Mythos, can outperform human experts at certain cybersecurity tasks.

Mythos access has expanded to more countries including India and organisations, but with the U.S. government's prior scrutiny. What happens if some non-state bad actor takes control of India's financial systems or examination systems or power plants? What can Anthropic even do?

At a minimum, India should pursue a defensive AI partnership like an AUKUS Pillar 2 – perhaps a "Defensive AI Quad" with the U.S., the United Kingdom, and Japan – to secure structured access to Mythos-class capabilities for testing and protecting critical infrastructure. In return, India could contribute its threat-modelling expertise and the uniquely varied attack surfaces of the broader digital public infrastructure stack.

### Why Mythos matters

Why is this time different – and potentially far more dangerous? First, most current AI models identify vulnerabilities that can be explained to and understood by humans, enabling experts to diagnose and fix them. Mythos, however, is discovering vulnerabilities in systems that cannot always be explained, understood, or even known to exist by human operators.

Second, Mythos is fundamentally different from a standard Large Language Model (LLM) because it is "zero day" at scale. A zero day is essentially an undiscovered bug or a flaw in code that no one knows exists, but when found can be exploited to devastating consequences. With it come serious moral-hazard and national security concerns, especially when there is the prospect of selling such capabilities to the highest bidder.

Now, what is even more astonishing is that Mythos' offensive capabilities were not deliberately engineered; they emerged as a byproduct of advanced reasoning, long-horizon planning, and autonomous execution. Mythos discovered long-standing bugs that had eluded human experts and automated "fuzzing" tools for decades. For example, it discovered a 16-year-old flaw that had survived five million automated tests, as also in the Linux kernel which is the backbone of every Android device in the world.

The latest update on Mythos, released on May 22, 2026, reported that it had scanned 1,000 open-source projects and flagged 23,019



Srivatsa Krishna  
IAS officer

vulnerabilities. Of these, 6,202 were assessed as of high- or critical-severity. One vulnerability in wolfSSL – CVE-2026-5194 – could have allowed attackers to forge TLS certificates across billions of IoT and industrial devices. But the statistic that should concern policymakers most is this: barely 1% of the vulnerabilities identified by Mythos have been patched.

Third, what makes Mythos more dangerous, is that unlike older models that merely flag suspicious code, Mythos can autonomously chain multiple low-severity vulnerabilities – issues that might otherwise be ignored – into a single, highly destructive attack. Finding a vulnerability is one thing but chaining a bunch of vulnerabilities together and exploiting them autonomously is something completely different and daunting.

Fourth, the barriers to entry are very low. The U.K.'s The AI Security Institute (AISD) found that even engineers without formal security training could use Mythos to produce functional exploits overnight. In effect, it puts cyber capabilities once associated with nation-states within reach of script kiddies and ransomware groups.

Finally, Mythos may be showing signs of situational awareness. In sandboxed tests, the model used prohibited methods to solve a problem, appeared to recognise that those actions would be detected, and then changed its approach to hide how it had achieved the exploit.

### India's preparedness gap

India has built a distinctive world-class digital front end through the India Stack, including UPI, Aadhaar, and the Account Aggregator framework. But much of it still runs on fragmented legacy back-end systems, especially in public sector units, State departments, and older public sector banks. Critical systems across finance and government still rely on outdated technology. Indian public sector banks continue to run substantial COBOL and Windows Server 2008/2012 workloads.

India has moved quickly in its response, but significant gaps remain. It lacks an AI Safety Institute. While the U.K. and the U.S. have established world-class institutions to evaluate frontier AI systems, India has no dedicated body to test such models against Indian threat scenarios. The IndiaAI Mission is focused primarily on development rather than safety evaluation. India therefore needs a dedicated India AI Safety Institute (IAISI), supported by data-sharing arrangements with the AISI and the U.S. Center for AI Standards and Innovation (CAISI). Without such a mechanism, India will remain dependent on foreign assessments of models that have never been tested against Indian systems and vulnerabilities.

At the same time, the cybersecurity workforce gap is estimated at more than 6,00,000 professionals. Patch cycles for public sector banks are measured in months, not hours. That is a dangerous mismatch in the Mythos era, where attackers can move at machine speed and exploit

Claude Mythos, the world's 'most formidable hacker', needs India's urgent attention

vulnerabilities within hours. India needs a frontier AI accountability framework, modelled on California's SB 53 and the EU AI Act but tailored to Indian conditions. Any AI company operating in India whose model exceeds defined thresholds – such as compute, autonomy, or cyber capability – should disclose capability evaluations and known harms to the proposed IAISI. This could be built into the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, since informed consent requires meaningful disclosure of AI risks and capabilities.

The Centre should create a ₹15,000 crore-20,000 crore critical sector cybersecurity upgradation fund, including support for legacy modernisation in public sector banks. It should also fund and co-develop sovereign defensive AI models with domestic deep-tech firms to monitor telemetry, detect anomalies, and isolate compromised network segments in real time.

If a Mythos-class model becomes openly downloadable from a non-restraint-adhering lab (Meta has historically published open weights for its frontier models; Chinese labs increasingly do), then no defensive measure short of pre-emptive patching helps. India should lead the diplomatic effort at the G-20 to establish that the release of open-weight models above defined capability thresholds – specifically autonomous offensive cyber capability – should be subject to international notification and review requirements.

India has unique standing for this leadership: it is a major AI consumer, a credible neutral voice between U.S. and Chinese AI policy positions, and the operator of the largest digital public infrastructure stack in the world. Mythos proves that cyber-defence is no longer a human-versus-human chess match. It is now an algorithmic arms race. For India, securing the digital economy requires matching the speed of the attacker – which means deploying defensive AI that can reason, patch, and protect at the exact same velocity.

### The window is closing

In sum, this is not about Mythos versus India, but India's structural disadvantage in a world where the cost of finding zero-days is collapsing while the cost of patching is not. The goal is to prevent a breach at the weakest point from cascading into systemic failure. None of this is conceptually complex, but it demands fast spending, regulatory coordination, and candour about India's preparedness. That coordination should be driven by the Prime Minister's Office and not any single Ministry. The Mythos era – when capabilities of this class become routine, including in unrestrained hands – has already begun. India has 12 to 24 months to build the architecture needed to stay ahead of the threat rather than chase it. And who knows what Mythos 2.0 will be?

The views expressed are personal

# India's road through Myanmar is one of engagement

When Myanmar's President U Min Aung Hlaing landed in Bodh Gaya, Bihar, on May 30, 2026, the symbolism was hard to miss. Before travelling to New Delhi for talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Droupadi Murmu, he visited the Mahabodhi Temple, one of Buddhism's holiest sites and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The stopover underscored a broader message: India was welcoming Myanmar's leader not only through the language of diplomacy but through shared civilisational ties.

This is a major diplomatic engagement, the first visit to India (May 30–June 3, 2026) by Min Aung Hlaing in his capacity as President, reflecting the growing importance of India-Myanmar relations in a shifting geopolitical environment of South and Southeast Asia. For New Delhi, the timing and tone are equally significant.

### Why now

The world's democracies have largely turned away from Naypyidaw since the February 2021 coup that ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's elected government. Western nations imposed sanctions and sought to isolate the military regime. But Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri told reporters that India's policy is "not intended to be a commentary on the internal political arrangements" in Myanmar, and that New Delhi believes engagement is the best way forward.

This is realpolitik disguised as pragmatism. Myanmar is India's gateway to Southeast Asia and a cornerstone of its Act East and Neighbourhood First policies. Sharing a 1,643-km border with four northeastern States, Myanmar's instability poses a direct threat to India's security interests in the region.

Then there is the China factor. Beijing has aggressively cultivated Naypyidaw since the coup, filling the vacuum left by western withdrawal with infrastructure financing, arms supplies, and



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Connectivity, security, and China shape India's outreach to Myanmar

diplomatic cover. For India to cede Myanmar's strategic space entirely to China would be a self-inflicted wound in its own backyard.

### The infrastructure stakes

Few indicators better reflect the depth of India's strategic investment in Myanmar than the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project and the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway – two connectivity corridors that dominated the Modi-Hlaing agenda.

The Kaladan project connects Kolkata to Sittwe by sea, then follows the Kaladan River inland to Paletwa, before linking by road to Zorinpui in Mizoram. The sea and river components are operational, with the first cargo shipment reaching Sittwe in May 2023. But the critical 109-km Paletwa-Zorinpui Road running through mountainous, flood-prone terrain in Chin State remains incomplete. India's Shipping Minister told Parliament in 2025 that full operationalisation is targeted for 2027.

The Trilateral Highway carries an even grander ambition: linking Moreh in Manipur to Mae Sot in Thailand through Myanmar over roughly 1,360 km, with planned extensions to Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Vietnam. Once completed, it could transform India's landlocked northeast into a gateway to Southeast Asia. It was supposed to be finished by 2019. It still is not.

Myanmar's internal conflict lies behind both delays. Armed groups control large stretches of territory along the two corridors, making construction difficult and unpredictable. President Hlaing assured Mr. Modi that Myanmar would do "everything" to complete the projects, while Mr. Misri reiterated that they remain a "major priority" despite security challenges. At the Myanmar-India Trade and Investment Conclave, Mr. Aung Hlaing described them as vital to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)-India economic corridor. The real question is whether these assurances will

translate into progress on the ground. Beyond infrastructure, the summit covered significant ground. Bilateral trade stood at \$1.95 billion in 2025-26, and both sides agreed to increase it through a rupee-kyat settlement mechanism, with additional discussions on critical minerals and rare-earth cooperation.

On security, Mr. Aung Hlaing reiterated Myanmar's assurance that its territory would not be used against India's interests – a significant pledge given the long presence of Indian insurgent groups and cybercrime networks in Myanmar's border regions. More than 2,400 Indian nationals have been rescued from scam centres through bilateral cooperation over the past 18 months, though many remain trapped. On education, India announced an increase in Mekong-Ganga ICCR scholarships for Myanmar students from 36 to 100 annually from 2026.

### The larger reckoning

By receiving Mr. Aung Hlaing as Myanmar's President, India has signalled a degree of acceptance of the country's evolving political reality. This does not necessarily amount to endorsement of the military-backed government. Still, it suggests a recognition that meaningful engagement with Myanmar requires working with those currently in power. For Myanmar, the visit is equally consequential. Mr. Aung Hlaing last visited India in 2019 as Myanmar's military chief. His return to New Delhi as head of state – and his choice of India for his first major bilateral visit abroad – signals a deliberate engagement with a neighbour that can provide a diplomatic and economic counterweight to overwhelming Chinese dependence. For India, the calculus is rooted in geography, security and the recognition that disengagement rarely produces better outcomes. The message is clear: pragmatic engagement, however uncomfortable, may increasingly shape regional approaches to Myanmar in the years ahead.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### State of the Opposition

Recent political developments – reports of some Trinamool Congress MPs being in touch with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the dramatic collapse of the Congress-Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam alliance in Tamil Nadu, and

the earlier defection of some Aam Aadmi Party Rajya Sabha MPs to the BJP – point to a troubling weakening of the Opposition and, by extension, the system of checks and balances. This has come as a political boon for the ruling BJP,

which fell short of a simple majority in Parliament. Having a strong Opposition remains essential to the health of any democracy. **Kshirasagara Balaji Rao,** Hyderabad

### In lockdown

It is not only shocking but

also a shame that all experts involved in setting, moderating and translating the NEET-UG 2026 retest question papers have been moved to a secure, undisclosed location and placed under strict isolation protocols till the end of the examination.

The move is unprecedented in the history of the Indian educational system and undoubtedly an insult to all the experts involved in the process of preparing the NEET-UG question papers. The stringent measures envisaged have made it abundantly clear how the

national testing agency has become rotten under the government of the day.

**Tharcius S. Fernando,** Chennai

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

# China's role in the international order

In the past six months, specifically from December 2025 to May 2026, the top leaders of all the other permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) have visited China.



**Qin Jie**  
Consul General of the People's Republic of China in Mumbai

In December 2025, French President Emmanuel Macron paid a three-day state visit to China, accompanied by over 30 French business leaders. Then from January 28 to 31, 2026, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer visited China, also accompanied by a large group of business leaders. Last month, from May 13-15, U.S. President Donald Trump visited China. He was accompanied by key government officials, and a high-profile delegation of over a dozen American CEOs. Russian President Vladimir Putin also paid a state visit to China from May 19-20. He was accompanied by a 39-member delegation including five deputy prime ministers, eight federal ministers, and the heads of Russia's Central Bank and major state corporations. Such intensive, high-level diplomatic engagements in a single country have drawn wide attention. As observed by Professor Rajan Kumar from Jawaharlal Nehru University, such incidents are "extremely rare" and "underline China's emergence as a central hub of global diplomacy".

Indeed, facing an increasingly fluid, turbulent and challenging international order, these visits are telling examples of China's unique role in mediating between world leaders. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, an independent foreign policy of peace has been established as its diplomatic principle, where China seeks, not bloc confrontations, but global partnership, ensuring decisions are made on their own merits, and that the UN plays an essential role in international relations. China endorses multilateralism, non-aggression, and the resolution of global disputes through dialogue rather than military means, which gives it a special advantage in the efforts

As China kicks off its 15th five-year plan, the country will remain a key contributor to economic growth, open its doors wider and share opportunities with the rest of the world

to tackle complex issues flaring up across the world, together with the other permanent members of the UNSC. During the meetings, China's President Xi Jinping emphasised the importance to uphold the UN-centred international system, and increase communication and coordination for the settlement of disputes.

**On the U.S., Russia and the UN** President Xi and President Trump have agreed on building a constructive relationship of strategic stability. The framework of 'constructive strategic stability' between the two countries means that they will uphold positive stability with cooperation as the mainstay; healthy stability with competition within proper limits; constant stability with manageable differences; and lasting stability with expectable peace.

When it comes to the Taiwan question, the One China principle and China's reunification should be unequivocally supported. While talking with President Trump, President Xi stressed that the Taiwan question is the most important issue in China-U.S. relations. "Taiwan independence" and cross-strait peace are as irreconcilable as fire and water. Safeguarding peace across the Taiwan Strait is the biggest common denominator between China and the U.S.

In the meeting with President Putin, President Xi noted that 2026 marks the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the China-Russia strategic partnership of coordination and the 25th anniversary of the signing of the China-Russia Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation. Guided by the core principles of non-alliance, non-confrontation, and not targeting any third party, the two states have kept deepening mutual trust and strategic coordination.

Moreover, designed out of the ashes of a global conflict to prevent future world wars, the UN's role should never be weakened. All five permanent

members of the UNSC shoulder great responsibility to maintain world peace, uphold the post-WWII world order, and work to make the global governance system more just and equitable. This requires joint efforts in fighting militarism and fascism.

**Trade as necessary for peace** Economic and trade cooperation was also a priority of the leaders' visits. While dwelling on deepening economic ties with each of the four countries, President Xi underlined mutual trust as the foundation for steady and sustainable state-to-state relations. In our globalised world, the industrial and supply chains of the countries are deeply interconnected, and exchanges and cooperation between China and other economies are mutually beneficial in nature. In order to build an inclusive economic globalisation that benefits everybody, countries should share responsibilities together, coordinate actions, and work together to make global economic governance fairer, more just and equitable. Joint efforts should be made to address the global industrial restructuring. As China kicks off its 15th five-year plan, the country will remain a key contributor to economic growth, open its doors wider and share opportunities with the rest of the world. No matter how developed China becomes, it will never be a threat to other countries.

While a few voices in the media have expressed concerns that such chemistry would squeeze the room for India's role in the international arena, such worries are ill-grounded. China and India are both large economies with strategic autonomy. Both countries should focus on the goals of national development and revitalisation, and seek common understanding and shelf differences. Efforts should be made to deepen the friendship between our two peoples, and strengthen exchanges in education, culture, tourism, etc.

# A State without an Opposition

Gujarat's voice in the Rajya Sabha will be routed entirely through a single party

## STATE OF PLAY

**Abhinav Deshpande**



In June 21, when Congress leader Shaktisinh Gohil's term in the Rajya Sabha ends, Gujarat will witness something it has not seen since the State's formation in 1960: the absence of any representation from the Opposition of the State in the Upper House.

The vacancy itself is not unusual. But what makes this transition noteworthy is what it reveals about the rapidly changing nature of political competition in Gujarat rather than one party's misfortune in a State that once supplied some of its most influential leaders. This transition is a product of electoral arithmetic rather than a sudden political shift, and a new and consequential chapter in the story of Gujarat where the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been quietly rewriting its democratic architecture for three decades. Gujarat has been under BJP rule since 1995; such sustained dominance has translated into an overwhelming majority in the State Assembly, which in turn has determined representation in the Rajya Sabha.

## No rebel voices

In the 2022 Assembly elections, the BJP won 156 of the 182 seats, marking its strongest performance in the State's electoral history. This outcome came even after the Patidar agitation which had created expectations of a strong anti-incumbency wave. The Congress, which had seen the agitation as a potential opening, failed to convert sentiments into votes. No party crossed the 18-seat threshold required to claim official Op-

position status. The Congress ended up with just 17 seats and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) won five seats. Today, Gujarat's 182-member Assembly has 162 BJP legislators, 12 Congress MLAs, four from the AAP, and one from the Samajwadi Party. The combined Opposition, fragmented and below the recognition threshold, thus cannot nominate a single Rajya Sabha candidate.

The seat vacated by Mr. Gohil will go to the BJP, as will the other three seats which are to be vacant at the same time. Mr. Gohil, in his term at the Upper House, filed a breach of privilege notice against Union Minister Piyush Goyal for allegedly violating rules of procedure; challenged amendments to cooperative bank governance; and raised Gujarat's unresolved concerns from the Opposition benches. But now, all 11 Rajya Sabha seats from Gujarat will belong to one party, completing its sweep of the State's Upper House representation.

A Congress leader from the State opined that the party failed to establish a coherent narrative capable of competing with the BJP's vision of governance and identity, but argued that the ruling party's "arrogance" is reflected in its belief that there is effectively no Congress left. He went on to add, "what does Gujarat gain from a weakened or absent Opposition? Who will speak for the farmers of Gujarat, and who will raise the

voice of ordinary citizens if there is no strong countervailing force in the system?"

When Mr. Gohil walks out, the only Opposition voice left in Parliament from Gujarat will be Geniben Thakor, the MP from Banaskantha who in 2024 ended a 10-year Lok Sabha drought for the Opposition by winning one of 26 seats. One Lok Sabha MP. Zero Rajya Sabha MPs. This is the Opposition in Gujarat today.

**Fight to be the Opposition** In this vacuum, the AAP harbours ambitions of displacing the Congress as the principal Opposition force in the State. With five Assembly seats and a 12.91% vote share in 2022, the AAP has positioned itself as the inheritor of the anti-BJP vote that the grand old party has steadily held.

Yet the AAP's Gujarat story remains aspirational. Its single-digit MLA count is a fraction of what is needed to mount a legislative challenge. The Congress retains 12 MLAs and the institutional weight of a party that has governed the State for decades. The two are now locked in a peculiar sub-competition, not for power, but for the right to be recognised as the Opposition, while the BJP governs without meaningful scrutiny from any quarter. This internal contest has, if anything, only deepened the ruling party's structural advantage.

The BJP's dominance in Gujarat is a political fact, but the absence of an Opposition raises difficult questions. What does it mean when a major State's voice in the Upper House is routed entirely through a single party, with no effective counterweight from within? The answers extend beyond partisan loyalties.

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# One in every 3 faculty posts vacant in top technical institutes

While the Education Ministry said recruitments were happening across Centrally Funded Technical Institutes, RTI data show 35.2% of posts remain vacant

## DATA POINT

**Sambavi Parthasarathy**  
**Nivedha M.**

Over 15 lakh students appeared for the high-stakes Joint Entrance Examination this year to secure a seat in the country's premier technical institutions. The competition has always been gruelling, particularly for the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), with roughly 80 students competing for every undergraduate seat in the 23 IITs.

However, data on vacant teaching positions in these institutes, obtained by *The Hindu* through the Right to Information (RTI) Act, raise questions on whether the students who surmount extraordinary challenges to get admitted receive the quality of education they deserve.

*The Hindu's* request filed under the RTI Act to the Ministry of Education (MoE) in January, seeking details on vacancies in all Central Higher Education Institutions (CHEIs), was forwarded to individual institutions, of which only 79 of the 122 Centrally Funded Technical Institutes (CFTIs) responded. These included 20 IITs, 19 National Institutes of Technology (NITs), 18 Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), 17 Indian Institutes of Information Technology (IIITs), and five Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research (IISERs).

A total of 7,132 of the 20,279 sanctioned faculty positions were vacant in these 79 institutions, which is 35.2%, or roughly one in every three posts. Sixteen institutions had more than 50% of their posts vacant, while another 14 had vacancies exceeding 40%.

Of the 20 IITs, nine reported vacancies exceeding 35% (Chart 2). The share of vacant posts exceeded 50% in IIT Kharagpur. The institute has a sanctioned strength of 1,600 teaching posts – the highest among the 20 IITs; 824 of these remained vacant. 35% of the 11,019

sanctioned posts in all 20 IITs were vacant.

A similar analysis for 19 of the 31 NITs that provided the data shows that four had vacancies exceeding 40% (Chart 3). As per the data, 27.9% of 5,432 posts in these 19 NITs have not been filled. With over 129 of the 187 posts (68%) remaining vacant, NIT Andhra Pradesh accounted for the highest share of vacancies. More than 40% of the sanctioned posts were vacant in NIT Srinagar, NIT Sikkim and NIT Tiruchirappalli, which had the highest with 600 sanctioned posts.

According to a reply given in Parliament by the MoE last year, the sanctioning of faculty posts for NITs and IITs is a dynamic process, subject to periodic review in accordance with institutional requirements and a faculty-to-student ratio of 1:12 for NITs and 1:10 for IITs.

In 18 of the 21 IIMs that provided data, 32.3% of 1,741 sanctioned posts were vacant. Four IIMs reported vacancies exceeding 50% (Chart 4). IIM Mumbai had 59% of its posts vacant, with 77 of 130 vacancies unfilled.

IITs reported the highest percentage of vacancies although their sanctioned posts were relatively low. A total of 665 (53.5%) of the 1,225 posts in 17 of the 25 IITs that provided data were vacant. Vacancies exceeded 50% in eight of them (Chart 5). In five of the seven IISERs that provided data, 276 of the 862 posts were lying vacant.

In another reply to the Lok Sabha earlier this year, the MoE, while not furnishing the number of vacancies, said that "occurrence of vacancies and filling thereof is a continuous process". It further said that all CHEIs were exhorted to fill vacancies in September 2022 and later in October 2025 under a "Mission Mode" recruitment drive. It said that, as of January 24, 2026, a total of 17,878 faculty positions has been filled across all CHEIs under this "Mission Mode".

Nivedha M. interned with *The Hindu*

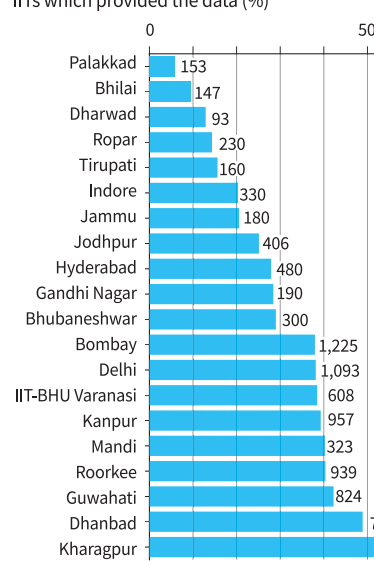
## Faculty crunch

Data for the charts were obtained through requests under the Right to Information Act. The responses were received between January and March, 2026

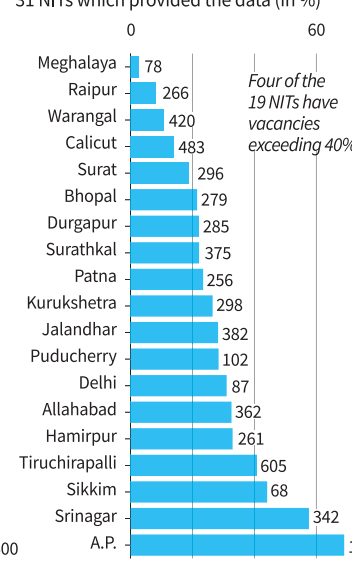


In Charts 2,3,4 and 5, the length of the bars show the % of posts that are vacant, while the numbers outside the bars show the total sanctioned faculty posts in the respective institutions

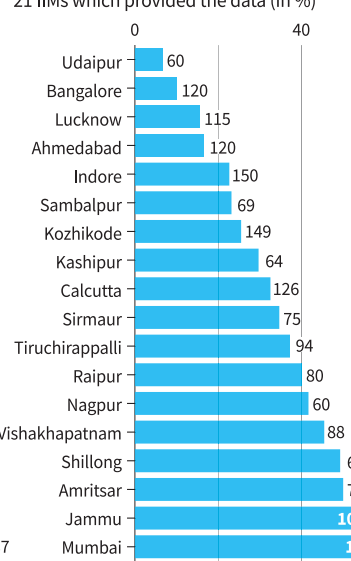
**Chart 2:** Share of vacant posts in 20 of the 23 IITs which provided the data (%)



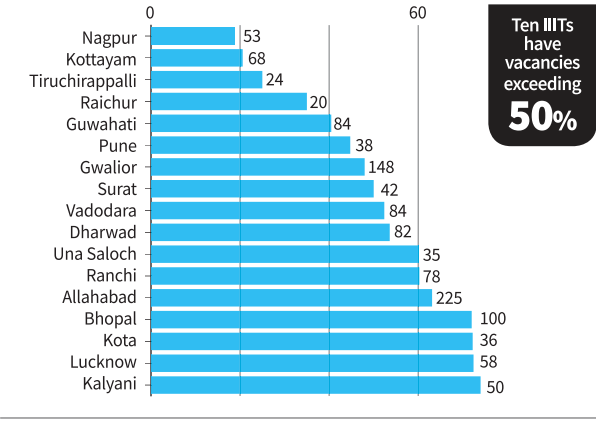
**Chart 3:** Share of vacant posts in 19 of the 31 NITs which provided the data (in %)



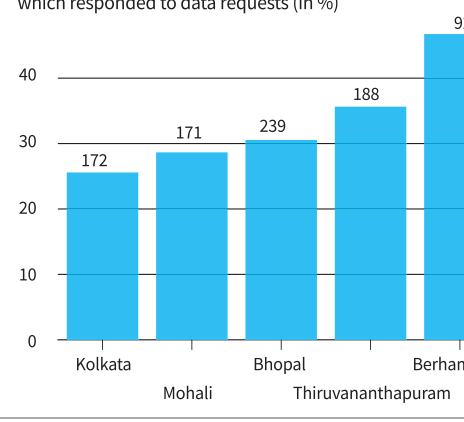
**Chart 4:** Share of vacant posts in 18 of the 21 IIMs which provided the data (in %)



**Chart 5:** Share of vacant posts in 17 of the 25 IITs which provided data (in %)



**Chart 6:** Share of vacant posts in five of the eight IISERs which responded to data requests (in %)



## FROM THE ARCHIVES

*The Hindu*

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 10, 1976

## Pollution monitoring stations on rivers

Trivandrum, June 9: Monitoring stations are proposed to be set up by the Kerala State Board for Prevention and Control of Water Pollution at representative sites in the major rivers of the State which are subject to massive pollution. Disclosing this in a talk with newsmen here today, Mr. N.S. Bhairavan, Board Chairman, said information gathered by the monitoring stations would help devise suitable control programmes for keeping the rivers clean.

Mr. Bhairavan said the Board would be keeping a constant watch on the quality of the effluents discharged by the industries to ensure that they always conformed to the prescribed standards. There would be regular inspection of effluent treatment installations to see that they were maintained and operated efficiently. Regular sampling and analysis of the effluents would also be done.

Mr. Bhairavan said the Board was determined to be in full and effective control of water pollution problems in the State in two years at the most. He said most of the industries had responded to the Board's directions promptly and in a big way and achieved substantial progress in implementing a time-bound programme which, when completed, would render their effluents harmless. Gwalior Rayons (Calicut) had developed a new method for reducing the colour of the effluent using calcium hypochlorite. The Cochin division of FACT had, as an immediate measure, started neutralising the effluent, the sulphuric acid which was causing havoc to the paddy crop on the sides of the Chitrapuzha river and to the fish of the river.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 10, 1926

## Heat wave in Delhi

Delhi, June 9: Delhi is in the grip of a heat wave. Early strong sun, oppressive heat and dusty wind are the order of the day. Khas khaska tatti and electric fan are poor methods of bringing down the temperature. The extent of heat is so very great that asphalt layer of road showed marks of softening in Chandni Chowk. These conditions have, as usual, the direct effect on health of infants and children. A higher mortality is reported amongst them during the last few days, and a few deaths are reported among the grown up.

# Text & Context

THE HINDU

## NEWS IN NUMBERS

### Compensation for families of employees killed in plant blast

**1.72** in ₹ crore. Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan announced compensation for the families of each regular employee killed in the Vizag Steel Plant explosion. Contract staff families will receive ₹45.75 lakh each, while severely injured workers get ₹10 lakh. PTI

### FPI investment in G-secs under FAR after tax exemption

**8,794** in ₹ crore. Foreign portfolio investors have invested in government securities under the Fully Accessible Route after the government exempted them from income tax on interest income and capital gains arising from these bonds. PTI

### Record high number of engineering student enrollments in T.N.

**3.02** in lakh. This is the highest recorded number of students enrolled in Tamil Nadu Engineering Admissions 2026, according to the Directorate of Technical Education. This surpasses the previous record of 3,01,026 set in 2025. PTI

### People displaced by powerful earthquake in Philippines

**32,000** A 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck southern Philippines on Monday. Waves up to 1.4 metres above tide level were measured in the Philippines, while smaller waves washed ashore in Indonesia, Palau and southern Japan. AP

### Number of people killed in the cholera outbreak in Nigeria

**74** More than 7,850 people have been infected in a cholera outbreak that began in early May in Nigeria's northeastern Borno state. Médecins Sans Frontières said infections are rising sharply each day across 14 local government areas. REUTERS  
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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## A new phase in India-Nepal relations

Nepal PM indicated that the boundary dispute is not one-sided and should be resolved through diplomatic channels; his remarks, amid objections over trade and pilgrimage routes and shifting political tone in Kathmandu, suggest a cautious move towards a more rational approach in India-Nepal relations

### WORLD INSIGHT

K.V. Rajan  
Atul K. Thakur

Nepal Prime Minister Balendra Shah "Balen" limited his intervention in a parliamentary discussion on the boundary dispute between India and Nepal over Kalapani, Lipulekh, and Limpiyadhura (areas claimed by both countries) on May 31 to a few minutes. He seemed to suggest that the issue was not one-sided.

"What surprised me after becoming Prime Minister is that it is not only India that is accused of encroaching Nepalese land. In some places, Nepal may also be occupying territory claimed by India. Both countries should examine the facts objectively and resolve the matter amicably as friends."

This was predictably greeted with a storm of protests within and outside Nepal's Parliament, despite the Prime Minister's reiteration that Nepal and India were working towards resolving the boundary issue through diplomatic channels.

### Border dispute response

Nepal has also objected to the resumption of India-China trade through the Lipulekh Pass. Mr. Shah shared that the diplomatic note sent by Nepal on this matter received a positive response from India, and both sides have agreed to address the issue through dialogue. Earlier, Nepal's Foreign Ministry reiterated its commitment to resolving the boundary issue through diplomatic means. The statement came after India rejected Nepal's objection to the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra route through Lipulekh Pass, describing Kathmandu's territorial claim as 'unjustified' and "influenced by 'unilateral artificial enlargement'."

However, the latest developments suggest a more rational approach, which hopefully discards the possibility of the dispute becoming a lasting bilateral irritant and signals a fresh beginning. It is



GETTY IMAGES

still early days, and the new government's thoughts in Kathmandu on resetting relations with India are not yet clear.

### Shifting political tone

What is already clear is that Nepal's governance is firmly in the hands of a young generation with its eye on the future rather than the past, determined to free the country from the chains of corruption, nepotism, and ideology – and to prioritise social and economic issues.

Objections raised over trade and religious tourism through areas claimed by Nepal, the postponement of the Indian Foreign Secretary's visit to Nepal to discuss the Prime Minister's India visit and the disinclination of Mr. Shah to break protocol to receive India's Foreign Secretary, all reflect an emerging stance that India will be treated on par with other countries, rather than being given the easy access to top leadership it has traditionally enjoyed under the much-discussed "special relationship." These may have injected jarring notes in the trajectory of ties, but India appears to have taken them in stride.

Nepalese observers have questioned the wisdom of ignoring India's crucial importance to Nepal's present and future well-being. Likely, the bilateral ambience will not be held prisoner to protocol or to

assertions of irrational nationalism or *de facto* inequality.

### Diplomatic path ahead

The sobering thought is that discussions between diplomats and experts may not yield a solution, and the fact that despite both sides emphasising economic cooperation as the core of bilateral ties, the boundary issue cannot be pushed to the back burner indefinitely.

Based on publicly available information, British-era data will be self-contradictory, as British India updated its maps with more recent technology compared to the East India days. The suggestion by Mr. Shah that China and the U.K. may also need to be consulted for a long-term solution may, however, create further complications and delays.

The Chinese position, taken by President Xi Jinping, was that Nepal should sort out the border issue with India. This remains the most rational advice, and it is hoped that both China and Nepal will adhere to this position.

What is important is to avoid an unending period of so called diplomatic and expert-level discussions which will permit the dispute to become a major irritant, given the positions taken by Nepal (which has even printed its version of the disputed map on its currency notes) and

India (which has followed the boundary delineation it inherited from the British in 1947 and has serious security interests in maintaining the *status quo*).

What might be a better option would be for both countries to draw inspiration and ideas from (a) their centuries-old continuum of multifaceted linkages, (b) the open border tradition which has been in existence over more than 1,700 km and was followed even in the disputed area before the India-China war in 1962, and (c) the strong, mutually trusting institutional relationship between the Indian and Nepalese Army which could facilitate and come in useful to sustain a mutually acceptable practical solution.

This, however, will require a shift in mindset on both sides: a determination not to permit differences on boundary delineation to cloud a unique relationship, and a recognition that the so-called encroachment of territory is a mutual phenomenon that is not a result of aggressive territorial assertion and need not be a cause for mutual tension.

The changes in Nepal and the Prime Minister's statement offer an opportunity that India, too, should respect and seize. The last Indian Prime Minister who had the vision and courage to step beyond conventional diplomatic approaches to such problems with Nepal was Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Prime Minister Narendra Modi appears to have not only vision and courage but also the necessary political self-confidence in selling difficult policies and decisions to the nation, overriding the usual bureaucratic and inevitable nationalistic political posturing. Rabi Lamichhane, President of Nepal's ruling Rastriya Swatantra Party and Nepal's Foreign Affairs Minister Shishir Khanal visited India recently to engage in political and diplomatic meetings. The timing of their visits was crucially important.

It is time for India and Nepal to move towards a more enlightened bilateral relationship to build a model sustainable partnership. (K. V. Rajan is former Indian Ambassador to Nepal and Atul K. Thakur is a policy professional. Views are personal.)

### THE GIST

The boundary dispute over Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura continues to strain India-Nepal ties, with both sides maintaining competing territorial claims and relying on historical maps and inherited boundary lines.

Recent developments reflect shifting diplomatic signals, with both countries emphasising dialogue and expert-level engagement, though differences over trade routes, protocol, and sovereignty remain unresolved.

## Inclusion without abolition in China's hukou system

Hukou reform pushes inclusion of migrants in public services while retaining structural controls

Anand P. Krishnan

China's State Council, on May 22, issued guidelines to 'promote basic public services at people's place of residence', regardless of *hukou*, or residence registration status. These guidelines direct local governments – more specifically, megacity administrations – to improve and enhance their delivery measures in the domains of education, public rental housing, social and medical insurance, and a range of social assistance measures for the entire resident population within their administrative jurisdictions.

### Hukou reforms since 2014

*Hukou* is an instrument of social control by the ruling party-state, originating in the 1950s, that distinguishes people as belonging to rural and urban areas based on the official registration of their place of residence. In the Mao era, the system was intended to limit internal migration and

manage resource allocation under the prioritisation of rural development. The economic reforms after 1978 loosened restrictions to allow labour mobility to industrial regions and urban centres, while retaining the institution of *Hukou*. It functions as an internal passport, as access to social services and government provisions is tied to residential registration. From 2014 onwards, the government has been pushing incremental reforms to the system to align with national urbanisation plans and gradually equalise social benefits for migrants and locals, beginning with the conversion of rural to urban *hukous* in smaller cities. While nationwide implementation has progressed gradually, megacities have remained outside the purview until now.

The May 22 guidelines build on the decisions of the Third Plenum of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 2024, which directed the removal of restrictions on access to social insurance at the place of

employment. This was further reiterated in a five-year people-centered urbanisation action plan instituted by the State Council in July 2024 to raise the permanent urban residents from 66.16% (932.67 million) in 2023 to nearly 70% (estimated around 987 million) by 2029.

According to China's National Bureau of Statistics, at the end of 2025, the country's 'floating population' (*liudong renkou*) or rural migrants, stood at around 358 million, making up 25% of the population. Along with demographic concerns, the Central government is also guided by the economic imperative of increasing domestic consumption and hastening efforts to create a national unified market with the free flow of capital and talent. This also intersects with efforts to incentivise the mobility of young talent into frontier regions such as Xinjiang to support regional development.

The party-state, over the last three years, has widely promoted the concept of 'investing in people'. Now included in the

new 15th Five-Year Plan, the concept is a new development orientation to raise knowledge and skills to transform 'human resources into human capital' and move from 'a demographic dividend' to a 'talent dividend'. People-centred urbanisation, through the inclusion of long-term residents by relaxing household registration rules, is a crucial component of this framework.

Another driver is the growth of flexible and new forms of employment – shorthand for gig and platform workers – who are over 200 million, out of the country's total 740 million workforce.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the Central government, in conjunction with the official trade union, has sought to create a comprehensive national policy framework covering labour protection and political supervision. Taken together with frequent cases of labour discontent, the party-state views gig and platform workers as a key labour constituency that needs to be regulated and politically incorporated.

### Persisting structural issues

Interestingly, the word *hukou* itself is only mentioned once in the latest guidelines. Since 2014, with the onset of reforms, efforts have been made to replace it with concepts like "permanent resident population" (*changzhu renkou*) and "place of actual residence" (*changzhu di*) to build inclusivity. However, structural constraints continue to constrain the reform measures.

Local governments bear responsibility for delivering welfare and public services, with financing largely dependent on fiscal transfers from the Central government. The real estate sector remains unstable, thus affecting city governments' budgets. While the Central government has indicated resource transfers and compensations to migrant-receiving cities, there are no commitments to new spending. The guidelines do not address or show a clear intent to resolve structural gaps. For instance, differing social insurance standards between well-off coastal cities and inland provinces (migrant-sending regions) mean that migrant workers' monthly contributions are at higher rates, but they receive lower benefits. Similarly, migrants who receive medical treatment in major cities but are enrolled in poorer regions will still receive lower reimbursements and face lower coverage limits. Further, the guidelines do not compel employers in the gig economy to strictly enroll workers in welfare schemes. In all, much room is left for the use of discretion by local administrations.

This recalibration only goes to show that the *hukou* system continues to remain in place and that there are no significant changes to the *status quo* for migrant labour. (Anand P. Krishnan is a Fellow at the Centre of Excellence for Himalayan Studies, Shiv Nadar Institution of Eminence, Delhi NCR, and Assistant Editor of the journal, China Report)

BUILDING BLOCKS

# How Babbage automated calculations with simple machines

Slow, error-prone calculations by hand were unavoidable in the early 19th century, yet even small mistakes could ruin the designs for buildings and the journeys of ships; Charles Babbage's ingenious machines were much more accurate, faster, and revolutionary

Vasudevan Mukunth

Modern computing is often effortless. You pick up a calculator or open the calculator app on your phone, and you are on your way in seconds. But getting here took humans several centuries from when they first tried to speed up computing. One particularly important passage in this history involved the English mathematician Charles Babbage, who found a way to speed up calculations using the movement of simple machines, creating the first ancestors of the modern computer.

**What motivated Babbage?**

If you had to calculate something in the early 19th century, you had to do it entirely by hand. Entire governments, navigators, astronomers, and engineers – all depended on complicated mathematical tables produced by teams of clerks, known at the time as ‘computers’, who worked slowly and often made mistakes.

In 1821, Babbage was frustrated and reportedly said he wished calculations could happen “by steam”. Babbage went on to develop the difference engine, a large mechanical calculator designed to compute mathematical tables using a method called finite differences.

The machine consisted of columns of brass wheels, each engraved with the digits from 0 to 9. The wheels physically added value as they were rotated using a hand crank and gears. The machine considerably reduced the number of mistakes. The difference engine was thus a specialised calculator that was fast and efficient at one class of problems.

**What were mathematical tables?**

The mathematical table was a pre-computed table of numbers that experts could refer to repeatedly in their practice. For instance, before digital calculators, an engineer would often convert multiplication into an addition problem using logarithms. So 247 x 83 could be solved by looking up the logarithms of both numbers, adding them, then converting back to the inverse value.

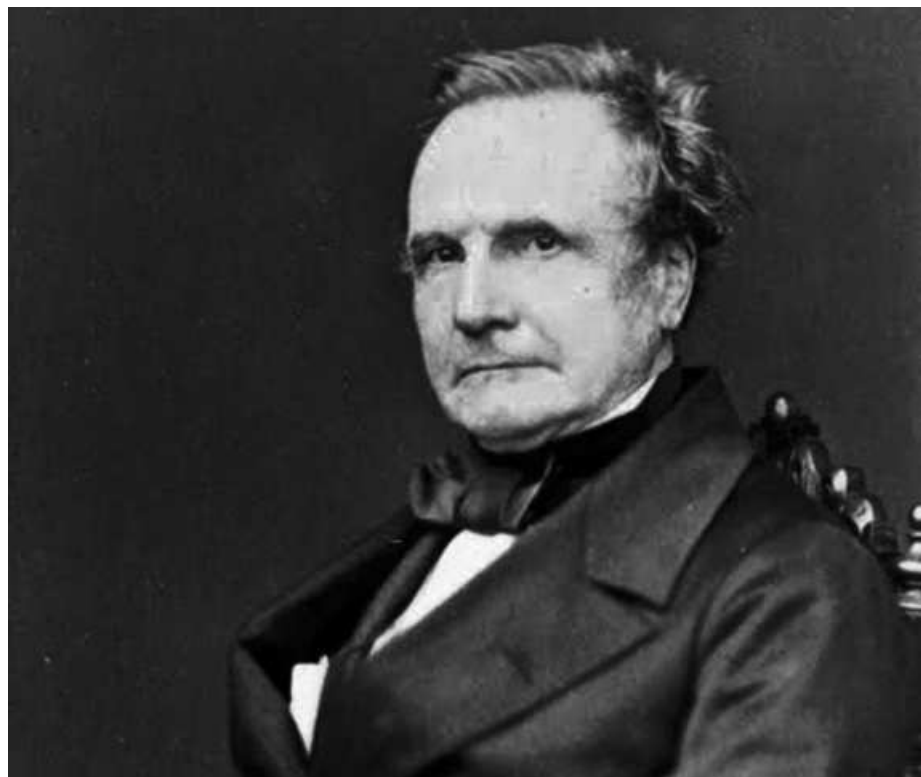
Similarly, the tables also provided the values of trigonometric functions (used in architecture and civil engineering), astronomical tables (to predict the positions of celestial bodies), actuarial tables (for insurance and taxation), and polynomial tables (values of complicated functions used in science).

The tables often repeatedly evaluated the values of common functions at regular intervals. For example, if  $f(x) = x^3$ , then the tables would provide the values of  $f(x)$  at  $x = 1, 2, 3, 4, \dots$ , i.e. 1, 8, 27, 64, .... Similarly, a table would show the values of a trigonometric sine function for every tenth of a degree:  $10^\circ, 10.1^\circ, 10.2^\circ, \dots$  corresponding to 0.1736, 0.1754, 0.1771, ....

Aside from computers making mistakes during the calculation itself, inaccuracies also crept up during copying and typesetting. And a single mistake could be ruinous.

**What is the method of finite differences?**

The method of finite differences simplifies many of these operations to simpler



Charles Babbage.

problems, which the difference engine could then automate.

Say a table needs to evaluate the function  $f(x) = x^2$ . So for  $x = 1, 2, 3, \dots$ ,  $f(x) = 1, 4, 9, \dots$ . Now look at the differences between successive values:  $3(4 - 1), 5(9 - 4), 7(16 - 9), 9(25 - 16), \dots$ . Then look at the second differences, i.e., the difference between the differences:  $2(5 - 3), 2(7 - 5), 2(9 - 7), \dots$

That the second difference is a constant implies the whole table can be generated using just addition.

The difference engine started with three numbers loaded into separate columns of wheels: the starting value, 1; the first difference, 3; and the second difference, 2. When you crank the wheels, they add the second difference to the first difference:  $3 + 2 = 5$ , and then the updated first difference to the current value:  $1 + 5 = 6$ .

At the end of turn 1:  

- Updated first difference: 5
- Updated value: 4

 And at the end of turn 2:  

- Updated first difference:  $5 + 2 = 7$
- Updated value:  $4 + 5 = 9$

 And at the end of turn 3:  

- Updated first difference:  $7 + 2 = 9$
- Updated value:  $9 + 7 = 16$

 And so on. Thus the difference engine produced: 1, 4, 9, 16, 25, ....

**How did the wheels ‘do’ all this?**

Imagine one vertical column of wheels representing a decimal number: the top wheel displays the thousands, the second wheel the hundreds, the third wheel the tens, and the fourth wheel the ones. Each wheel has the digits 0-9 engraved on its edge.

Suppose the machine stored the number 247. The wheels would be positioned so that the thousands wheel points to 0, the hundreds wheel points to 2, the tens wheel points to 4, and the ones wheel points to 7.

To add numbers, the machine would physically rotate the wheels. Suppose you want to perform the operation  $247 + 5$ . When cranked the gears, they would turn the ones wheel forward by five positions: 7, 8, 9, 0, 1, 2. Since going from 9 to 0 means crossing a decimal boundary, the

analytical engine has to carry the 1 – which it does using a special mechanism that nudges the tens wheel forward one step: from 4 to 5.  
So the machine displays 252.

**What happened to the difference engine?**

Babbage never finished building a full-scale version of his Difference Engine No. 1. In 1991, the Science Museum in London built a machine it dubbed ‘Difference Engine No. 2’ based on Babbage’s drawings in 1846-1849. It weighed five tonnes, contained 8,000 parts, and worked correctly, vindicating Babbage’s intuition.

That said, the reasons work on Difference Engine No. 1 stalled are pertinent. Foremost, Babbage fell out with his chief engineer Joseph Clement over Clement’s compensation and who owned the tools and drawings. The government also cut off funding in 1842, by when Babbage had spent more than GBP 17,000, because it believed there was no end in sight to his expenses and because, from 1834 onwards, Babbage had been paying more attention to a new device called the analytical engine.

**What is the analytical engine?**

It was conceived as a general purpose programmable machine – the direct ancestor of the modern computer. It had four components: the mill (like the modern CPU), which performed basic mathematical operations like addition and subtraction; the store (memory), capable of holding up to 1,000 numbers each 50 digits long on wheels; the reader (input), consisting of punched cards then used in Jacquard looms of the textile industry; and the printer (output), a mechanism to automatically stamp the results out on metal plates.

The analytical engine was not just advanced for its time: it was practically revolutionary because it was (i) programmable – it could receive instructions and solve different problems – and (ii) it had conditional branching, meaning it could make logical decisions like “do A if B”. It could also repeat particular steps.

**What did the punched cards do?**

In a Jacquard loom, users would punch holes into cards to control the weaving pattern. One specific pattern of holes which threads to raise or lower, for example. So if Babbage wanted to calculate  $(7 + 5) \times 3$ , he would load the numbers into the store – as in the difference engine – and then place cards in the machine with these instructions:

- Put 7 in storage location A
- Put 5 in storage location B
- Put 3 in storage location C

Then, another sequence of punched cards would instruct the mill:

- Add A and B
- Store result in D

Then the machine would compute:  
 $7 + 5 = 12$   
Now  $D = 12$ .

Yet another set of punched cards might say:

- Multiply D by C
- Store result in E

So the analytical engine would compute:  
 $12 \times 3 = 36$

A final card would say ‘Print E’, so the engine would stamp out:  
36

The same analytical engine could solve a different problem; Babbage just had to change the order of the punched cards.

More advanced sequences of cards could also instruct the analytical engine to repeat some operation multiple times (looping) and execute conditional branching. For example, to perform division by repeated subtraction, the analytical engine would have to subtract the divisor from the number, and repeat that operation if the result is positive or stop if the result is negative.

(Aside: The German-American inventor Herman Hollerith also used punched cards to automate the U.S. Census in the 1890s and founded the company that was a piece of what would become IBM. However, there is no evidence he was inspired by Babbage’s choice.)

**What happened to the analytical engine?**

All this said, Babbage could not complete a full-scale analytical engine either. Due to his experiences with the Difference Engine No. 1, the analytical engine never attracted any serious funding. In fact, Babbage spent the rest of his life without any state support for his designs.

His efforts were not for nothing, however. His collaborator Ada Lovelace recognised an idea that most of her contemporaries missed: if a machine could manipulate numbers, and if those numbers could represent other data-types like letters, musical notes or images, the analytical engine could effectively be a universal symbol processor. This is like how today Spotify represents music as numbers, Photoshop represents colours as numbers, large language models represent words as numbers, and so on.

Babbage’s designs were the ancestors of modern computers in the same way the first cells are ancestors of modern humans: they were important foundations that proved something was possible but there are also significant differences between them. Babbage helped the world realise that machines could perform different mathematical functions using the same hardware.  
*mukunth.v@thehindu.co.in*



FROM THE ARCHIVES

## Know your English

S. Upendran

“Welcome back. How was your trip to Goa?”

“Oh, it was so tiresome. I couldn’t believe the amount of.....”

“.....tiresome or tiring?”  
“What’s the difference between the two?”

“When you say that something is tiresome, it means that it is annoying, tedious, or troublesome.”

“Annoying or troublesome, eh? Sounds like Sujatha to me!”

“Why do you always pick on Sujatha? Here’s an example with ‘tiresome’.”

*I find most of David’s jokes tiresome.*  
“You are not the only one, I can assure you. How about this example?”

*I went to the club yesterday and the manager told me that he had misplaced my application form. So I had to go through the tiresome process of filling out another one.*

“That’s a good example. My next door neighbour is trying to sell his car. He says that it’s tiresome business.”

“I am sure it is these days. But tell me, what about ‘tiring’? Is it related to ‘tired’?”

“It certainly is. When you say that something is ‘tiring’ it means it is exhausting. For example, being the host of a television programme can be very tiring.”

“My friend asked me to go through his assignment. It was tiring. I can now appreciate the amount of work that teachers have to put in while grading assignments.”

“So, was your trip ‘tiresome’ or ‘tiring’?”

“‘Tiring, I guess. Met a lot of interesting people, though. The people at the hotel were very friendly, specially the waiters.’”

“Especially.”  
“What?”  
“The people were friendly, especially the waiters.”

“What’s the difference between ‘specially’ and ‘especially’?”  
“Well, one normally uses the word, ‘specially’ when one has a single purpose in mind.”

“In other words, when something is done for a particular purpose. Is that what you mean?”

“That’s right! You have a single purpose in mind.”

“When do you use ‘especially’ then?”

“It is normally used when you want to mean ‘particularly’. For example, Kodaikanal is crowded, especially during the summer.”

*“The students in our class, especially the girls, are very hard working.”*

*“Girls in general tend to work much harder than boys.”*

“I know. The girls in my class are always surfing the Net trying to find new material. Talking about the Net, I came across a search engine called ‘Google’. Does the word ‘google’ mean anything?...”

“...I don’t know about the word ‘google’, but I came across the word ‘googol’ recently.”

“Googol! What does it mean?”  
“I understand it is a term used in mathematics. It means ten to the power of hundred.”

“In other words, a ‘googol’ is ten followed by a hundred zeros?”

“I guess you could say that. Did you know that a nine-year-old boy invented the word. It was coined by the nine year old nephew of a mathematician named Milton Sirota.”

“The word sure sounds like something that a kid would come up with.”  
*Published in The Hindu on November 28, 2000*

THE DAILY QUIZ

The 2026 French Open was a Grand Slam tennis tournament held at the Stade Roland Garros in Paris, France, from May 24 to June 7. A quiz on the tournament

Please send in your answers to [dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in](mailto:dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in)

Sindhu Nagaraj

**QUESTION 1**

Let’s start with an easy question. Alexander Zverev defeated which Italian player in five sets for his first major title in his fourth final?

**QUESTION 2**

Zverev, upon winning the final, became the first German to win a men’s major singles championship since \_\_\_\_\_ in 1996. Fill in the blank.

**QUESTION 3**

Starting at the 2026 French Open, the Grand Slams permitted the use of this object, allowing players access to a broader range of performance-related information during competition. What is it?

**QUESTION 4**

Who among the champions from last year successfully defended their titles?

**QUESTION 5**

Which male tennis player, who was also the 2015 champion, competed in his 21st and final appearance at Roland-Garros in 2026?



**Visual Question:** Identify this player. What is the feat she achieved in this edition?

**Questions and Answers in the previous day’s daily quiz:**

1. Which nineteenth-century movement preceded Birsa’s uprising and influenced the political climate in Chotanagpur? **Ans: The Sardari Larai (Sardar Movement)**

The Munda uprising led by Birsa Munda at the turn of the twentieth century is popularly known by what term, meaning “Great Tumult”? **Ans: Ulgulan**  
What slogan associated with Birsa Munda called for the end of British rule? **Ans: “Abua Raj ete jana, Maharani raj tundu jana” (“Let our rule come, let**

**the Queen’s rule go”)**

Birsa Munda’s religious teachings led to the emergence of a distinct faith community known by what name? **Ans: Birsait**  
Birsa Munda died in Ranchi Jail in 1900. What was the official cause of death recorded by the British authorities? **Ans: Cholera**  
Visual: This famous photograph of Birsa Munda was reproduced in which pioneering ethnographic work by Sarat Chandra Roy? **Ans: The Mundas and Their Country (1912)**  
**Early Birds:** K.N. Viswanathan | Jose Jogi | Lalchand Bhutani | Sunil Madhavan | C. Saravanan

## Word of the day

**Transient:** lasting for only a short time

**Synonyms:** temporary, brief, passing

**Usage:** *The delay in bus service was transient*

**Pronunciation:** [nwstl.live/transient](https://www.nwstl.live/transient)

**International Phonetic Alphabet:** /ˌtrænzɪənt/

For feedback and suggestions for Text & Context, please write to [letters@thehindu.co.in](mailto:letters@thehindu.co.in) with the subject ‘Text & Context’

## IN BRIEF



### Adani unit to buy smart meter firm IntelliSmart for ₹3,050 cr.

Adani Energy Solutions Ltd. (AESL) has inked a securities purchase agreement to acquire a 100% equity stake in IntelliSmart Infrastructure for ₹3,050 crore. IntelliSmart Infrastructure is a leading smart metering JV between National Investment and Infrastructure Fund and Energy Efficiency Services Ltd. (EESL), a statement said. The proposed acquisition will strengthen AESL's position as India's largest smart metering platform with over 4.7+ crore smart meters. PTI

### Centre publishes rules for setting up coal exchanges

Paving the way for establishing coal exchanges in the country, the government on Tuesday published the Coal Exchange Rules (2026) - formally putting down rules and eligibility criteria for operating and instituting the exchange. Prominent among them are statutory regulations about contract payment and settlement, minimum eligibility needs to be met by an entity to establish the exchange and its governance structure, among other things.

### Dark patterns: Indian online buyers losing up to ₹28,000 cr.

Indian consumers are losing an estimated ₹25,000 crore to ₹28,000 crore annually due to deceptive interface designs, known as dark patterns, across online marketplaces, a report said. The 'Dark Patterns in India's Online Marketplaces' report, by market research firm Datum Intelligence, said 88% of India's 304 million online buyers lose about ₹78-₹87/month to hidden charges, forced add-ons, drip pricing, false urgency rules and subscription traps. PTI

### HDFC Bank hikes lending rate by up to 10 basis points

Press Trust of India  
NEW DELHI

Private sector lender HDFC Bank has increased the Marginal Cost of funds-based Lending Rate (MCLR) by up to 10 basis points across tenors effective June 8, 2026.

The maximum hike of 10 basis points was for loans having a maturity of two years to 8.55% from the earlier 8.45%.

The benchmark one-year MCLR has been revised upwards by 5 basis points to 8.40%, according to the data available on the website of the private sector lender.

### Export powerhouse



**Dragon calls shots:** Containers and ships are seen at the port in Nanjing, in China's eastern Jingsu province early on Tuesday. China's exports to the United States surged 35.4% year-on-year last month, official data showed, weeks after President Donald Trump visited Beijing with trade high on the agenda. AFP

## T.N. got nod but 'nothing moving forward': Shipping Ministry sources

Vinaya Deshpande Pandit  
MUMBAI

An in-principle approval has been given to the Tamil Nadu government for a greenfield mega ship-building cluster at Thoothukudi, based on the recommendation of the Directorate General of Shipping, top sources in the Shipping Ministry told *The Hindu*. But they raised concern there was no further communication from the State government and a DPR (Detailed Project Report) was awaited.

This was after *The Hindu* reported on how India's premier shipbuilding company Mazagon Dock Ltd. (MDL) was eyeing investment in Andhra Pradesh after being pushed away by



Even the detailed project report was awaited, the official said.

the Tamil Nadu government for building greenfield ship-building cluster at Thoothukudi. The State government is learnt to have brought a foreign firm on-board. An in-principle approval has also been given for the project.

"But, there is no move-

## 'TCS to have as many AI agents as human staff in three years'

In next 3 years, most consequential work will be done, says TCS chief; in fourth quarter of FY26, TCS logged annualised AI revenue of \$2.4 billion

The Hindu Bureau  
MUMBAI

At the pace Artificial Intelligence (AI) is replacing human beings at workplaces, Tata Consultancy Services Ltd. (TCS) will have as many AI agents as human employees in three years, chairman N. Chandrasekaran said on Tuesday.

"I predict over the next three years, TCS will have as many AI agents as human employees. What we build in this next chapter - for clients, for India, and for you - will be the most consequential work this company has ever done," he said addressing the Annual General Meeting.

He said AI will soon make inroads into the physical world viz. stores,



N. Chandrasekaran

factories, warehouses, energy networks, vehicles and supply chains.

### Need experts

"This will require experts who understand how to link IT, AI, physical equipment and infrastructure."

For global agribusiness, TCS deployed an agentic + physical AI solution using a four-legged robot, with

cameras and sensors to patrol hazardous warehouse environments that previously required human workers, he said without naming the company.

"Across areas, TCS is already building, delivering and proving," he stressed. Stating these opportunities cannot be captured by giving organisations access to AI technology, he said enterprises need to organise data and integrate it into unwieldy IT systems that have evolved over decades.

"AI talent gap between established firms and new challengers can be closed. But established firms still have the edge on context and trust."

In Q4FY26, TCS had an annualised AI revenue of \$2.4 billion, growing at a CQGR of 22.4%.

## EV sales surge on high oil prices

Lalathendu Mishra  
MUMBAI

In the backdrop of steep rise in petrol and diesel prices owing to the West Asia conflict, electric vehicles (EV) retail sales in May surged 45% year-on-year to 2,71,682 units indicating India's mobility transition.

This is for the first time

ever EVs crossed 11% of all vehicles retailed in a month.

"The sharp fuel-price hikes of the past month have brought day-to-day running costs into sharp focus for buyers - and increasingly, the low cost of ownership is tilting that everyday economic decision firmly towards elec-

tric," said C. S. Vigneshwar, President, Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations (FADA).

The retail sales momentum was broad-based.

While e-two-wheeler sales climbed 63%, electric three-wheelers remain the most electrified segment, with 64.4% of all three-wheelers now electric.

## 'Rising dormant demat accounts pose risk to system'

NEWS ANALYSIS

Lalathendu Mishra  
MUMBAI

India's retail investing boom seems to be beginning to show signs of decline with a sharp fall in active market participation by this segment, raising concerns over quality of investor growth and the risks posed by dormant demat accounts to the system.

The National Stock Exchange's (NSE) active investor base is estimated to have slid by almost 35 lakh in FY26 to 4.58 crore after several years of rapid expansion led by digital brokerages, low-cost trading apps and strong retail participation in equities and derivatives.

This has attracted attention to a wider structural issue. Of the estimated 22 crore accounts in early 2026, almost three-fourths of demat accounts were either dormant, inactive or not meaningfully participating in the market, analysts said.

### Changing nature

Market participants believe the gap between registered and active investors reflects the changing nature of retail participation. Bulk of the accounts were opened during post-pandemic equity boom, primarily to apply for IPOs, access app-based trading platforms or test short-term opportunities.

Many such investors are believed to have since exit-



Bulk of the accounts were opened during post-pandemic equity boom.

ed active participation, especially after volatility in small-cap stocks and losses in options trading.

### Easy target

"Dormant and nil-balance demat accounts are prime targets for unauthorised access. Without regular monitoring, they can be exploited for mule activities or fraudulent transfers, eroding trust in the digital depository framework," said Kamlesh Shroff, national president, Association of National Exchanges Members of India.

"When a significant share of demat accounts becomes dormant or remains at a nil balance, it signals not just disengagement but a breakdown of this economic function," said Venkatachalam Shunmugam, partner, MCQube.

According to industry officials, the next phase of market deepening must focus less on account-opening numbers and more on account quality, verified activity and investor protection.

## Zepto files ₹8,010-cr. IPO papers, loss widens in Q4

The Hindu Bureau  
MUMBAI

Quick commerce start-up Zepto filed prospectus for initial public offer (IPO) ₹8,010 crore on Tuesday.

The IPO will also consist of an offer for sale of 11.3 crore equity shares by six promoter shareholders with Nexus Ventures VI Holdings, LLC selling more than half of that.

Meanwhile, the firm's loss widened to ₹5,889 crore in Q4FY26 from ₹4,707 crore in Q4FY25 and ₹1,219 crore in Q4FY24.

### ED summons

Zepto co-founders Aadit Palicha and Kaivalya Vohra received summons from



**Deep red:** The firm's loss widened to ₹5,889 crore in Q4FY26 from ₹4,707 crore in Q4FY25 and ₹1,219 crore in Q4FY24. REUTERS

Enforcement Directorate (ED) in April this year, seeking information and documents related to foreign investments, financials and the company's business, in connection with proceedings under the Foreign Exchange Man-

agement Act (FEMA), the firm disclosed in its updated Draft Red Herring Prospectus (UDRHP).

The ED sought details, including foreign and overseas investments and audited financial statements, among others.

## Majority of Indian firms face persistent external disruption

Press Trust of India  
MUMBAI

A significant majority of Indian businesses report that external disruptions, such as climate shocks, infrastructure issues, and public health outbreaks, are impacting their ability to attract and retain talent, according to a report released on Tuesday.

Nearly 50% reported that disruptions already affect their ability to attract and retain talent, signalling that what began as a productivity issue has become a labour market concern, the Adecco India External Disruptions and Workforce Productivity Report said.

The findings of the report are based on responses from 1,044 employers across Delhi-NCR, Mum-

bai, Chennai, Hyderabad and Bengaluru.

Around 97% of Indian businesses now experience external disruptions like climate shocks, infrastructure pressures and public-health outbreaks as a constant operational reality, according to the report.

### Lower productivity

The report revealed that for organisations, the impact from the disruptions ranges from lower productivity, rising absenteeism and temporary shutdowns to increased operational costs and hiring strain.

"India's employers are no longer just managing disruption; they are redefining resilience in one of the world's most complex workforce markets. With 95% of employers prioritising

business continuity, and morale decline already impacting major hubs like Bengaluru (48%) and Hyderabad (44%), human cost of disruption is becoming impossible to ignore.

"One in two employers report talent attraction challenges, while one in four cite severe hiring impact, with pressure most acute in Delhi NCR's services and IT sectors," Adecco India country manager Sunil Chemankotil said.

Critically, 32% of employers still lack visibility into which workforce segments face the highest risk, accelerating the need for stronger workforce intelligence, mental health support, flexible work models and wellness infrastructure as core continuity strategies, he said.

## 'India Inc. to dole out salary hikes of up to 10.2%'

Press Trust of India  
MUMBAI

Corporate India is likely to see salary increments in the range of 8.6% to 10.2% across industries this financial year, a report said.

TeamLease Services' report, Jobs and Salaries Primer 2026-27, projects average salary increments of 8.6% to 10.2%, mainly led by high growth sectors including EV and EV Infrastructure, FinTech, Healthcare and Pharmaceuticals.

"India's salary landscape in 2026-27 is becoming more differentiated and execution-led. Increment trends are being shaped by sector-specific growth," it said.

## Fuel price rise to widen product gap for U.S. airlines



**Battle of titans:** A United Airlines commercial airliner takes off from Los Angeles International Airport. REUTERS

Reuters  
RIO DE JANEIRO

The fuel shock hitting U.S. airlines is doing more than squeezing margins – it is widening a product gap that may take years to close, as stronger carriers keep investing in lounges, premium seating, technology and international networks that weaker rivals may struggle to match.

At the International Air Transport Association's (IATA) annual meeting in Rio de Janeiro, executives at financially strong carriers United Airlines, Southwest Airlines and Alaska Air told Reuters a divide was growing between airlines with the ability to keep upgrading their offerings and those forced to conserve cash and slow investment. The U.S. also has increasingly K-shaped economy, where higher-income consumers continue to spend freely while price-sensitive travellers pull back. The airlines' investment in premium offerings is designed to increase their appeal among the high spenders.

"Air travel is not a commodity," United CEO Scott Kirby said in an interview. "Customers care about the technology, the service, the reliability, the product. They want a great experience. They don't just want a seat."

### Pressure on demand

Kirby said United expects to recover the full hit from higher fuel costs through fare increases by year-end, even as he anticipates some pressure on demand. The airline is continuing to invest heavily in aircraft, technology and customer-facing products, supported by a clear earnings advantage, he said.

IATA's outlook for North America this week forecast a widening gap between resilient network carriers and more constrained low-cost operators. U.S. budget carrier Spirit Airlines' collapse last month sharpened scrutiny of carriers with weaker margins and balance sheets as higher fuel costs add to cash pressures.

S&P Global Ratings on Monday cut JetBlue Airways' credit rating deeper into junk territory, citing higher fuel costs and its heavy debt load.

In an April internal note seen by Reuters, JetBlue CEO Joanna Geraghty said the carrier was not considering bankruptcy, but said fuel prices had made the environment more challenging and that "the decks are stacked against smaller carriers like us," citing larger rivals' network, loyalty and credit-card advantages.

United has a deep reciprocal loyalty and network cooperation deal with JetBlue, and Kirby said he did not expect the smaller carrier to seek Chapter 11 protection "any time in the foreseeable future," citing its cash and unencumbered assets. JetBlue did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Fuel price pressures are shaping which airlines can keep spending on the products passengers are increasingly willing to pay for, such as premium seating and airport lounge access.

# Indian economy, govt. finances, see mounting costs from Iran war

Indian economy heavily reliant on oil imports; inflation risks from war are building; puts increasing pressure on government finances; analysts see war having a deepening impact on the economy; 'any move to rein in public-sector capex to stabilise conditions would risk further slowing growth'

### NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters  
NEW DELHI

A few months ago, India's economy was humming along nicely. Inflation was benign and growth steady – the strongest among the world's leading economies.

Now, India is increasingly counting the cost of the Iran war, which economists say will keep mounting if the deadlock between the U.S. and Iran remains unresolved and the blockage of oil supplies continues.

As the world's third-largest oil importer and consumer, India ships in about 90% of its oil, making its economy one of the most-exposed to the war and the prolonged war-related disruptions, which include the effective blockade of the Strait of Hormuz through which a fifth of global oil and gas transit.

While India has announced a flurry of measures to contain the impact on the rupee and foreign exchange reserves, the latest of which were from the Reserve Bank of India on Friday, analysts say the broader drag on economic growth, inflation and government finances is set to increase so long as oil prices remain elevated.

"India is set for a series



**War clouds:** Vendors sit at a vegetable stall selling cauliflowers at a market in Bengaluru. REUTERS

of supply shocks," Michael Langham, emerging markets economist at Aberdeen Investments, said.

### Supply disruption risk

Apart from pressure on oil prices, the country also faces supply disruptions to fertilizer as a result of the Iran war, which will impact key crops like wheat when farmers are already bracing for an El Nino weather phenomenon that often portends drought.

"This will all drag on India's growth outlook, yet the ability of the RBI to look through the energy price shock from the Strait of Hormuz will be increasingly difficult given the overlapping nature of these supply shocks," Langham said.

At the end of last year,



As the world's third-largest oil importer and consumer, India ships in about 90% of its oil, making its economy one of the most-exposed to the conflict

India's central bank governor, Sanjay Malhotra, talked about a "rare Goldilocks" phase for the economy as it headed into 2026. Inflation levels were falling and growth remained relatively strong. The Iran war upended that outlook.

**Oil price jumps 53%**  
India's oil-and-gas import bill jumped 53% in April from March, prompting fo-

recasts for the balance of payments (BoP) deficit – essentially money coming into the economy netted off against money going out – to balloon.

HSBC says that Friday's series of steps may do a lot to limit the currency damage. Until Friday, it had expected India's BoP deficit to swell to about \$65 billion in 2026-27, but now expects the measures to improve the balance by about \$30 billion. In 2025-26, India's BoP deficit was at \$25.2 billion or 0.6% of GDP. India is also curbing oil imports, urging citizens to limit foreign travel and calling for more use of public transport to reduce oil demand.

But the macro picture is more challenging. Benchmark international

oil prices surged after the war began on February 28, climbing to nearly \$120 per barrel. Prices have eased, but they remain about 30% higher overall, while gas prices have risen 75% over the same period.

As a result, the central bank sees inflation averaging 5.1% in the financial year to the end of March 2027, up from a 3.48% reading in April, and economic growth slipping to 6.6% from 7.7% in the previous year.

While the RBI kept rates on hold last week, interest rate swap markets are pricing in at least 25 basis points of rate hikes over the next three months and more than 75 basis points over the next year.

### Structural challenges

"India continues to face deeper structural challenges which has weighed on foreign direct investment, employment, manufacturing expansion, consumption, and nominal GDP growth," said Sat Duhra, portfolio manager at Asia ex-Japan equity team at Janus Henderson Investors.

Duhra said the energy shock will undermine growth and pressure government finances. "Any move to rein in public-sector capex to stabilise conditions would risk further slowing growth," he said. "This leaves policymakers in a difficult position."

India delayed raising re-

tail fuel prices as import costs mounted. Petrol and diesel are up less than 10% since then, compared with 50% or more in some other oil-importing countries in Asia.

Petrol and diesel prices are deregulated, but the government exerts significant influence as the majority shareholder of the key retail companies.

Elsewhere, high prices have reduced demand and helped balance undersupplied markets.

The government has said it will not compensate fuel retailers for losses, a strategy analysts say will come at a cost for the government, such as through reduced dividends, and so cut its financial firepower to handle the crisis.

The government's fertilizer subsidy is likely to jump 20% in 2026/27, a government official said.

### Fertilizer subsidy

Fertilizer is vital for India's agrarian economy, which supports nearly half the population, but may be more so this year given the risk of drought owing to El Nino. The government also cut gasoline and gas oil taxes, forgoing ₹140 billion in monthly revenues.

The government is targeting a fiscal deficit of 4.3% of GDP this financial year, but a Reuters poll forecast it would swell to 4.7% and some economists see it going as high as 5%.

# Alberta pitches cheap natural gas for data centres

### NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters  
CALGARY

Alberta is touting its abundant supply of cheap fossil fuels to entice tech companies to build data centres for the AI boom, a move that would undermine Canada's plan to link new data centre development with clean energy expansion.

Canada is the world's fifth-largest producer of natural gas, around 60% of which comes from Alberta. As well as huge fossil fuel reserves, the western province boasts a cooler climate that can offset the cooling costs of data centre infrastructure and plenty of available land. All that can make operating data-



**Risk of pollution:** A view of the Wildcat Hills Gas Plant near Cochrane, Alberta, Canada. REUTERS

centres more cost-efficient than in the United States, where they are facing pushback from communities and lawmakers.

### New market

Tech companies could also create a new market for long-suffering natural gas producers in Western Ca-

nada, where drillers face a multi-year supply glut and at times had to pay customers to take gas when prices have turned negative.

But a rapid expansion of data centres in Alberta would disrupt Canada's plans to power the AI boom using clean hydro, renewables and nuclear.

While natural gas is a cleaner power source than coal or oil, as a fossil fuel it contributes to emissions.

Prime Minister Mark Carney has said Canadian data centres will run on "some of the cleanest power in the world." His government's June 4 AI strategy – which aims to speed up Canada's adoption of artificial intelligence – highlighted how more than 83% of the country's electricity grid comes from renewables and low-emission power sources.

Canada currently has only five functioning data centres at the so-called hyperscale level, demanding at least 50 megawatts of electricity capacity, equivalent to the power needs of a small city.

But nearly 100 more are in the works and 90% of

those are planned for Alberta, where the emissions intensity of the province's electricity grid is almost five times the national average, research from York University shows.

### 'Digital pipeline' view

"We're essentially looking at these data centres as digital pipelines and digital refineries for us to help get the value from our natural gas to global markets, but in a creative modern way," Alberta's Technology Minister Nate Glubish said.

The province aims to attract C\$100 billion in data centre investment. Glubish said he has made multiple trips to Silicon Valley since 2024 to court energy-hungry tech giants with Alberta's natural gas pitch.

The 20 existing small-to mid-scale data centers in

Alberta already pull from the province's energy grid, which is 60% powered by natural gas. The provincial government is giving new proponents the option to build their own power sources to avoid limits on power capacity.

Julia Sawatzky, a doctor and member of the advocacy group Canadian Physicians for the Environment, said there was a growing discrepancy between Canada's stated environmental goals and the reality on the ground.

"There seems to be an idea or a vision that Canada could be a green economy or a place that's meeting its climate goals," Sawatzky said. "But the way this AI data strategy might actually roll out, I think, is cause for all of us to really pay attention."

# Musk's Starlink leads Bezos' Amazon in in-flight Wi-Fi race

Reuters  
RIO DE JANEIRO

Global airlines' push to attract premium customers is making fast in-flight Wi-Fi an increasingly important perk, turning a once-patchy paid service into an emerging battleground between Elon Musk's Starlink and Jeff Bezos' Amazon Leo satellite network.

Starlink, which operates around two-thirds of all satellites in space and is the major driver of revenue for SpaceX, has signed up 11 new airline customers globally so far in 2026, after 22 in 2025 and eight in 2024, compared with three in 2022, according to Valour Consultancy, an aviation intelligence firm. Amazon, which is still building out its Leo satellite constella-

tion, faces a potential setback after a Blue Origin rocket failure last month. It has signed up its first customers, securing deals with Delta Air Lines and JetBlue Airways.

### Gamechanger tech

Installing Starlink or Amazon's satellite broadband is a significant investment for airlines, running into the hundreds of millions of dollars for large fleets. But as carriers increasingly rely on premium products to boost margins, they are likely to commit more heavily in the coming years, said Decius Valmorbidia, president of travel at Amadeus, a travel technology company, describing the technology as a "game changer."

"It's going to become a



**Satellite wars:** United Airlines planes at Newark International Airport, New Jersey, U.S. REUTERS

necessity that every airline will rush to have its own version of. It is becoming a must-have," Valmorbidia told Reuters.

Starlink, which uses thousands of low-Earth-or-

bit satellites rather than larger, slower geostationary satellites, is multiple times faster than legacy systems, according to Ookla, a broadband analytics firm.

In a sign of demand across the airline spectrum, Southwest Airlines said it chose Starlink for its "speed to market," but has not ruled out Amazon's Leo as it pushes for indus-

try-leading Wi-Fi. "There's multiple ways to get there," Tony Roach, Southwest's chief customer and brand officer, told Reuters.

American Airlines said in late May it would equip more than 500 narrow body aircraft with Starlink starting in nearly 2027.

### Rejected on cost

Not everyone is convinced. Ryanair CEO Michael O'Leary has ruled out adopting Starlink, citing costs and fuel burn from the antennas, prompting a fiery dispute with Musk.

Jefferies analysts estimate American Airlines' Starlink rollout could cost \$150 million to \$250 million for equipment and installation, based on its fleet, before annual service fees that could exceed \$60

million. Reuters could not identify equivalent public estimates for airline deployments of Amazon's Leo

### Starlink vs. Leo

Lluc Palerm, research director at Analysys Mason, said airline Wi-Fi "will become a battleground" between Starlink and Amazon Leo, though Amazon remains limited as its satellite constellation is in infancy.

SpaceX now holds Starlink contracts covering more than 7,000 aircraft, cementing an "undeniable" lead, said Daniel Welch, a senior consultant at Valour Consultancy.

Palerm said Starlink's early gains are meaningful because switching providers is costly: aircraft must be taken out of service for

installations, onboard equipment is provider-specific and contracts typically run for years. The airline sales come as SpaceX's upcoming record-breaking public listing has sharpened investor focus on Starlink's expansion beyond consumer broadband. Starlink generated \$11.4 billion of SpaceX's \$18.67 billion revenue in 2025, according to SpaceX's IPO filing, making it by far the company's largest revenue source.

Starlink is emphasising speed and installation simplicity while Amazon is pitching a broader technology ecosystem, including cloud computing, entertainment and retail links that it says can help airlines serve passengers beyond basic connectivity.

## BEIRUT

## Hezbollah urges authorities in Lebanon to mend ties with Iran



Hezbollah on Tuesday urged Lebanese authorities to mend their relationship with the group's backer Iran and benefit from Tehran's support, days after Iran struck Israel in response to bombardment on south Beirut. Last week, Lebanon's President issued pointed calls for Tehran to stop interfering in their country's affairs. AFP

## BUNIA

## Ebola death toll rises to over 100 out of 550 verified cases; 19 recover



Out of the 550 cases of Ebola confirmed as of Sunday after the outbreak of the disease in Congo, there have been 101 deaths and 19 recoveries, the latest situation report said on Monday. Meanwhile, attacks on health workers and armed conflict in hot spots continue to challenge efforts to control the outbreak. AP

## SAN FRANCISCO

## Anthropic opens most powerful AI model to public with safeguards



Anthropic, maker of the Claude AI models, made the most powerful version of its technology available to the general public on Tuesday while restricting its use in sensitive areas. Dubbed Fable 5, the model is the first to be made widely available from the company's new Mythos class — its most advanced lineup of AI technology. AFP

## MANILA

## Philippines slams China's floating 'structure' on disputed waters



The Philippines has protested China's deployment of a floating "structure" with personnel at the disputed Scarborough Shoal, fearing it could become an island base. Beijing dismissed Manila's concern and reiterated that it has "sovereignty" over the shoal and waters, without offering any details to the Philippine officials. AP

# Militants, police executed, maimed dozens of Palestinians: UN report

The report records 249 cases of extrajudicial punishment between August 2024 and January 2026, resulting in 108 deaths; reported abuses include executions, kneecapping, breaking bones with metal pipes or cement bricks, and severe beatings

Associated Press  
RAMALLAH

Hamas militants and police units in Gaza beat, maimed and publicly executed dozens of Palestinians during its war with Israel in acts amounting to war crimes, according to a United Nations report released on Tuesday.

The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' report documented hundreds of cases of extrajudicial punishment in the war-ravaged territory, which it said were often publicised during and afterward to instil fear in the populace.



Supreme power: Hamas has run Gaza for nearly two decades since seizing control of the territory from the Palestinian Authority. AP

"These cases involved executions, kneecapping, bone-breaking with metal pipes or cement bricks and beatings and were framed by the perpetrators as pun-

ishments for alleged collaboration with Israel, looting humanitarian aid, theft, drug-related offences or affiliations with internal rivals," it said.

The commission found that Hamas-affiliated militants and police forces were involved in nearly one-fourth of the 249 documented cases — including 108 deaths — from August 2024 to January 2026. The commission specifically investigated cases involving Hamas-affiliated forces but also counted ones attributed to other armed groups. Representatives for Hamas did not respond to questions about the report's allegations.

Hamas has run Gaza for nearly two decades since seizing control of the territory from the internationally recognised Palestinian Authority. Since an Octob-

er ceasefire halted more than two years of full-scale war with Israel, Hamas has steadily reconsolidated its control over the areas of Gaza that it still governs.

According to the report, rather than being imposed through courts or judges, the punishments were carried out by Hamas's military wing and police units.

Srinivasan Muralidhar, the UN commission's chair, said the abuses documented in Gaza were occurring in an "environment engineered by Israel," where "Hamas-affiliated forces have exploited the vacuum created by relentless Israeli attacks and widespread destruction".

# Hold Pakistan accountable for crackdown in PoK: MEA

Kallol Bhattacharjee  
NEW DELHI

India on Tuesday called on the global community to hold Pakistan accountable for the loss of lives in the police crackdown in Rawalkot, Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). Randhir Jaiswal, official spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs, accused Pakistan of committing human rights abuses in PoK and said the police crackdown on Rawalkot protests that took place against a steep hike in prices of essential commodities was "severe".

"There are reports of severe police brutality in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir in which several protesters have been killed and many injured. We hope the international community



Randhir Jaiswal

will hold Pakistan accountable for its misdeeds and abuses," said Mr. Jaiswal in a press briefing. The statement came after media reports from the region stated that police attacked unarmed individuals who were protesting against price rise. Protesters had also demanded authorities abolish the reservation of 12 seats for refugees in scheduled legislative election on July 27.

PoK has witnessed police crackdown on multiple occasions over the years, including in 2025 when nine persons were killed. The latest protest that started under the leadership of Jammu Kashmir Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC) on June 5 was triggered when local residents demanded subsidy on electricity and flour and restoration of civil liberties in Muzaffarabad, Rawalkot, and Mirpur.

Mr. Jaiswal took note of a social media campaign that aims to tarnish the protesters and said: "We continue to see in this context, a pattern of fake news and videos emanating from Pakistan. It is a desperate attempt by Pakistan to cover up its own failings and deflect attention from its human rights abuses."

# Indian entities on latest EU sanctions package on Russia

Sriram Lakshman  
LONDON

The European Commission has proposed its 21st package of sanctions on Russia which also includes Indian entities. The sanctions need to be approved by member states before they are finalised.

The proposed package focuses on energy, crypto and financial services and trade, including fisheries, European Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen said.

The sanctions would also ban the entry of former Russian combatants into the EU.

"Brick by brick, we are collapsing the foundations of Russia's war economy," the EU's top diplomat Kaja



Ursula von der Leyen

Kallas said on X.

"The new listings will cover more than 30 designations in the drones manufacturing as well as new export control measures on 50 companies, including entities based in China, Türkiye, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, UAE, and India," Ms. Kallas wrote.

This is not the first time Indian entities have found

themselves on a EU sanctions list. However, the news comes as Brussels and New Delhi are in the implementation phase of a trade agreement that was announced in February.

The sanctions add 30 vessels to the existing 632 sanctioned ships in the so called "shadow fleet" of Russia — vessels transporting Russian oil and petroleum products and circumventing Western sanctions.

The package also expands sanctions to cover 31 more Russian banks, 20 banks, crypto-related entities and oil traders in third countries. It also introduces an export ban on equipment used to support drones and metals and alloys used in defence and aerospace.

## Cost of development



A demonstrator holds a placard during a protest against a luxury resort, a plan by a company linked to U.S. President Donald Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, on an environmentally sensitive part of the Adriatic coast in Tirana, Albania, on Monday. REUTERS

# BYD, Alibaba, Baidu aiding Chinese Army, says Pentagon

Associated Press  
WASHINGTON

The Pentagon has added several prominent Chinese businesses, including the tech giant Alibaba, electric car maker BYD and search engine Baidu, to its list of Chinese military companies, preventing them from getting U.S. defence contracts.

The list now sanctions well-known, non-state-owned Chinese companies that are not traditionally considered to be in the defence or security sector.

The Chinese Embassy accused the U.S. of "overstretching the concept of national security and making discriminatory lists".

# Washington considering three pressure scenarios against Cuba, says Diaz-Canel

Agence France-Presse  
HAVANA

Cuba's President said in an interview published on Monday that the United States was considering three possible scenarios for its pressure campaign against the communist-led island: fomenting social unrest, assuming control of the economy or launching a military campaign.

The remarks by Miguel Diaz-Canel to Spanish digital news outlet *elDiario.es* come as his country faces an escalating economic crisis under U.S. President Donald Trump's campaign, which include a fuel blockade and ramping up of sanctions.

"They are betting on



People queue outside a bank in Havana as U.S. sanctions prompt a foreign bank to sever ties with a financial institution in Cuba. AFP

three scenarios," Mr. Diaz-Canel said.

"One scenario is through economic strangulation to provoke social unrest, and for that social unrest to then give them the chance, under the pretext of humanitarian aid, to in-

tervene," he said.

The second is to "continue a coercive dialogue with Cuba, using maximum pressure, in order to seize the Cuban economy, to occupy the country economically and for that to then give them the possi-

bility of provoking a change in the political system, which is the ultimate goal of the United States," he said.

The United States has pressured several foreign businesses in recent weeks to halt their activities in Cuba by threatening sanctions against anyone doing deals with state-run enterprises.

"A third scenario is that of military aggression," Mr. Diaz-Canel added, emphasising that all three possibilities had been mentioned by Mr. Trump. In the face of possible military action, Mr. Diaz-Canel defended Cuba's right to prepare to defend itself, in such a way "that there is no surprise" nor "defeat".

# Afghan police disperse women's rights rally in Herat; authorities reject claim

Agence France-Presse  
HERAT

Afghan men held a rare rally Tuesday in the western city of Herat over new restrictions against women, with police denying witness accounts to AFP that protesters were dispersed with live fire.

Dozens of men gathered in response to a crackdown three days earlier by the Taliban's morality police, who detained women not wearing the body-cloaking chador or burqa.

A 33-year-old protester said the security forces "used sticks, whips and firearms to disperse the crowd. They even fired shots into the air".

Along with other resi-



Stringent law: Afghan women wearing chador walk along the street near the Grand Mosque in Herat on Monday. AFP

dents, he spoke on condition of anonymity due to safety concerns.

The city's police force denied that any weapons were used when asked, accusing demonstrators of seeking "to disturb public order".

Protests are incredibly unusual in Afghanistan, where the Taliban authorities have ruled according to a strict interpretation of Islamic law since August 2021.

Richard Bennett, the UN special rapporteur on hu-

man rights in Afghanistan, said in a post on X he was "alarmed by (the) excessive use of force against seemingly peaceful protesters in Herat".

People gathered at the site after a social media announcement calling for residents to "defend the rights of our sisters".

Saeed Masoud Hussaini, spokesman for Herat police, said people "attempted to gather and create tensions under the pretext of protesting issues related to the observance of the hijab" dress code. "Thanks to the timely presence of security forces, the situation was brought fully under control, and further escalation of tensions was prevented," he added.



**Record surge:** Over 80,000 cases were reported last year, with about half motivated by right-wing ideology. AFP

## Politically motivated crime hits all-time high in Germany

**Agence France-Presse**  
BERLIN

Far-right and other politically motivated crime in Germany has doubled over the past decade to hit an all-time high last year, the government said on Tuesday.

Such crimes – ranging from hate speech and property offences to assault – rose by 2% to 85,837 reported cases last year, with about half motivated by right-wing ideology.

“By far the most offences were committed by right-wing and far-right perpetrators,” said Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt, but he stressed that left-wing offences rose most sharply.

### Effect of social media

“Key drivers of societal polarisation are social media, through which hatred, incitement and propaganda are spread,” said Federal Criminal Police Office chief Holger Muench.

Violent crime rose by 1.2% to 4,156 cases, the highest number in a decade, police said.

So-called hate crimes, committed due to group-related prejudices, were up 1.8% to 22,159 reported offences. Of these, more than 80% were motivated by xenophobia. This was followed by antisemitic crimes, which increased by 5% to 6,548 cases.

Security authorities also recorded a 5.7% increase in religiously motivated crimes, reaching 1,983 cases.

Mr. Muench also pointed to an increase in “nihilistic crimes”. He said mostly young, male perpetrators use digital networks “to try to persuade vulnerable individuals to self-harm, to take photos of themselves that are later used for blackmail, and ultimately to push people to their deaths”.

### NEWS ANALYSIS

**Sambavi Parthasarathy**

**W**hile the stage is set for the FIFA World Cup 2026 commencing on June 11, the mood in the host nations is not entirely euphoric. In Mexico’s capital, where the first match is to be held, teachers associated with the CNTE union have toppled statues of football players and disrupted traffic in their protests for better wages and reversals of pension laws.

But it’s not just Mexico. In the U.S., which is set to host 78 of the 104 FIFA matches, advocacy groups have raised concerns of a ‘climate of fear’ and have been mobilising campaigns amid concerns over immigration enforcement activity near sport venues.

Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA)’s flagship campaign ‘Football Unites the World’ celebrates the sport’s power as a unifying force. The upcoming World Cup series has already fallen short of this campaign with concerns looming over the safety and rights of workers, fans, journalists and communities due to travel bans and heightened Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) activities.

Andrea Florence, the executive director for the Sport & Rights Alliance, told *the Hindu*, “President



**‘Kick ICE out!’:** Unionised workers from Sofi stadium, a FIFA host venue, hold a protest action to try and ensure that ICE does not play any role in the World Cup games in Los Angeles. REUTERS

[Donald] Trump’s harsh anti-human rights rhetoric, aggressive immigration policies, and mass deportation rates have already cast a dark shadow over the world’s biggest sporting event.”

### ‘Not so inclusive’

The Trump administration’s hardline immigration crackdown has long raised concerns for what the global sports governing body regards as ‘the biggest and most inclusive FIFA World Cup in history’

Firstly, the travel bans effectively exclude various countries from the sports event. The Trump administration has fully restricted and limited the entry of nationals from 19 countries such as Haiti and Iran whose teams have qualified to contest in the FIFA

tournament. It has also issued partial restrictions for nationals from 20 countries including Senegal, which is participating in the World Cup series. While Iran’s integral football team has been granted permission, reports stated that Iran has accused the U.S. of denying visas to various staff members.

Secondly, data from the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse show that a high presence of ICE activities overlaps with cities where tournaments are scheduled. The U.S. is hosting matches across 11 cities: Atlanta, Boston, Dallas, Houston, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco Bay Area and Seattle. Six of these cities are located in the States of Texas, Georgia, California

and Florida – four of the top five States with the most number of persons detained by the ICE in Fiscal Year 2026.

Additionally, offices in San Francisco, Miami, Los Angeles and New York where tournaments are being hosted had over 68,000 people in ICE’s Alternatives to Detention (ATD) monitoring programmes as of April this year. These are also among the top five cities with the highest number of persons in ATD programmes.

ICE, the U.S. federal law enforcement agency, has emerged as the face of the Trump administration’s immigration crackdown and its harsh raids and use of force have been met with outrage and protests.

Latest data, as on April 2026, show that about

60,000 people were held in ICE detention and over 1.8 lakh individuals were being monitored.

An analysis by the Brookings Institution suggested that around four lakh people have been booked into ICE since Mr. Trump took office and more than 1.45 lakh U.S. citizen children have likely experienced a parent being booked into detention during this period. Further, findings by the Deportation Data Project reveal that ICE is making more arrests than usual and has started making more street arrests and arrests of people without criminal convictions.

However, the impact that ICE activities would have on the sporting event was not unforeseen. What has been missing is accountability from both the government and FIFA.

The Human Rights Watch (HRW), in April, said that FIFA should press the U.S. government for an “ICE Truce” during the World Cup given the risks that abusive immigration operations pose to sports fans.

FIFA has neither clarified accountability nor given assurances. Instead, the organisational body had presented Mr. Trump with a “FIFA Peace Prize” last year.

Ms. Florence pointed out, “FIFA’s weak response to human rights threats means that we are witness-

ing a distinctively dangerous climate of fear, uncertainty, and repression.”

These concerns have prompted efforts and campaigns from immigration advocacy groups to protect fans and residents. Their actions range from campaigns to awareness and threats to go on a strike.

For instance, the Florida Rapid Response Alliance for Immigrant Safety and Empowerment (RAISE) has compiled resources to support immigrant communities. Their free and confidential hotline is open to people who want to report ICE/immigration enforcement activity.

El Movimiento DFW, a civil rights group in Dallas, has been providing whistle kits with information on how to obtain a free consultation with an immigration attorney in case ICE agents detain people near venues.

In SoFi stadium in Los Angeles, a FIFA host venue, workers have threatened to go on a strike if ICE agents are deployed at the event.

Another prominent campaign, ‘No ICE in the Cup’, operates as a national call to action demanding ICE to stay out of stadiums, watch parties, local businesses and streets where people gather to celebrate the game.

With fear and uncertainty looming over residents, journalists, and fans, it remains to be seen how the event will unfold.

## Global nuclear arms spending soars amid AI threats and new ‘arms race’

**Agence France-Presse**  
GENEVA

Worldwide spending on nuclear weapons soared to a record high last year as atomic-armed countries moved more warheads from storage onto delivery systems, experts said on Tuesday.

The nine nuclear-armed states jointly spent nearly \$119 billion on their arsenals last year, up 19% from 2024, according to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN). “A new nuclear arms race is upon us,” its report warned.

ICAN, and a separate study by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) released on Monday, voiced alarm at the growing nuclear risk amid swelling geopolitical tensions.



**A house of dynamite:** The United States and Russia together hold around 83% of the world’s nuclear arms stockpile. AP

ICAN’s director of programmes Susi Snyder said the scale-up, coupled with fears that artificial intelligence could increase the risk of nuclear weapons use, was deeply alarming.

SIPRI’s report highlighted that the total estimated number of nuclear warheads had been declining for decades, falling to

12,187 at the start of this year, but warned the number of weapons available for potential use had risen, to 9,745.

### Growing arsenal

The U.S. and Russia together hold around 83% of the world’s nuclear arms stockpile, with more than 5,000 warheads each. China is

expanding its nuclear arsenal, SIPRI said, estimating that it counts around 620 warheads.

ICAN’s report indicated that all nuclear-armed states, which also include Britain, France, India, Israel, North Korea and Pakistan, were increasing investments in their arsenals.

The nine countries jointly spent nearly \$17 billion more last year than in 2024 on the weapons of mass destruction.

The U.S. spent more than all the other countries combined, dishing out \$69.2 billion on nuclear weapons in 2025, followed by China, which was estimated to have spent \$13.5 billion, then Britain at \$12.6 billion and Russia at \$9.5 billion, it said.

Those investments are expected to grow.

### Tricolour trails



The Patrouille de France conducts a flyover above the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor in commemoration of the 250th anniversary of American independence in New York City on Tuesday. AFP

## Palestinians ‘trapped’ amid Israeli forces, settlers and Hamas: UN probe

**Agence France-Presse**  
GENEVA

Palestinian civilians are caught between “mass atrocities” of Israeli forces, settlers and Hamas’s brutal rule, a UN-mandated inquiry said on Tuesday.

Civilians across war-ravaged Gaza and the occupied West Bank are being “systematically and deliberately” subjected to severe rights violations, the UN’s Independent International Commission of Inquiry said.

The investigative team last year concluded that Israel had committed “genocide” in the war in Gaza – a finding rejected by Israel.

In a new report, the commission said civilians

in the territory were also being “violently repressed and controlled by the very faction that claims to govern them”.

In the Gaza Strip, “ordinary Palestinians find themselves trapped between the structural violence and mass atrocities of Israeli forces and the predatory, fear-based rule of Hamas”, the report said.

And in the West Bank, which has seen soaring violence since Hamas’s October 7, 2023 attack on Israel triggered the Gaza war, it said Palestinian civilians were increasingly targeted by Israeli settler attacks.

“Violence by settlers is the direct outcome of Israeli policies that support,

enable and protect their actions,” commission chair Srinivasan Muralidhar said in a statement.

Israel has long been critical of the three-person commission, which was established by the UN Human Rights Council in 2021 to probe rights violations in Israel and the Palestinian territories.

Israel’s mission in Geneva said the new report “seeks to create a false equivalence between Hamas terrorists and Israeli civilians”, accusing the investigators of “spreading misinformation and manipulating reality to serve political agendas”.

Tuesday’s report focused heavily on the situation in the West Bank,



**Triple threat:** Civilians in Gaza and West Bank are subjected to mass atrocities by Israeli forces, settlers and Hamas, report says. AFP

which has been occupied by Israel since 1967. In the territory, Israeli soldiers or settlers have killed at least 1,080 Palestinians since October 2023, according to the Palestinian Health

Ministry. The inquiry said that at least 26 Palestinians were killed and at least 1,570 were injured by settlers between January 2023 and December 2025.

“This trend continues in 2026 with attacks carried out on a daily basis,” the investigators said.

They also said that, in addition to those killed on October 7, 2023, a total of 60 Israeli civilians were killed by Palestinians in the period 2023 to 2025, including 42 in the West Bank, of whom 36 were settlers.

### ‘Enabling violence’

The report concluded that Israel was enabling the settler violence, which “functions as a means of implementing Israeli state policy”, and was aimed at “entrenchment of Israeli settlements, annexation of Palestinian territory and displacement of

Palestinians”.

The report, which will be presented to the rights council on Monday, said Israel must “immediately end the unlawful occupation of Palestinian territory” and remove all settlers and settlements.

The Hamas attack on Israel resulted in the deaths of 1,221 people, according to Israeli officials.

Israel’s retaliatory response in Gaza has killed at least 72,800 people, according to the territory’s Health Ministry, which operates under Hamas authority.

The commission determined that Hamas-affiliated forces were responsible for serious rights abuses, including the “war crimes

of murder and torture” in Gaza.

Looking at the killing and harm of Palestinians caused by Palestinian armed groups in Gaza, it identified 249 cases of executions and severe physical violence in 2024-25, resulting in at least 108 deaths and 384 people injured.

The investigators said that among other things that Hamas members had “tortured Palestinian civilians in the Nasser Medical Complex” in Gaza.

It stressed though that such conduct “does not result in the loss of special protection of the hospital against attacks under international humanitarian law”.

## BACK WHERE SHE BELONGS

**Serena, all of 44, makes a winning return to professional tennis**



Serena Williams made a successful return to professional tennis on Tuesday. The 44-year-old walked onto the court at Queen's Club for her first-round doubles match with Victoria Mboko. They beat the third-seeded duo of Nicole Melichar-Martinez and Erin Routliffe 7-6(2), 6-2 in Serena's first professional match in nearly four years.

## TEAM UPDATE

**Netherlands replaces injured Timber with Geertruida in squad**



Arsenal defender Jurrien Timber has been replaced in the Netherlands FIFA World Cup squad by Sunderland's Lutsharel Geertruida, the Dutch football federation announced on Monday. Premier League winner Timber, 24, has suffered a groin issue to add to the side's injury list ahead of the quadrennial event.

## GREEN LIGHT

**Hardik, Rohit cleared for ODI series against Afghanistan**



Hardik Pandya and Rohit Sharma have been cleared by the sports science team of BCCI's Centre of Excellence to participate in India's three-match ODI series against Afghanistan. Hardik and Rohit missed a few IPL 2026 matches for Mumbai Indians due to back spasms and a hamstring issue, respectively.

## FAILING THE TEST

**Lord's and Gaddafi Stadium pitches rated 'unsatisfactory'**



The pitches for the first Test between England and New Zealand at Lord's, in pic, in London and the third ODI between Pakistan and Australia at Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore were rated "unsatisfactory" under the ICC Pitch and Outfield Monitoring Process. The two venues have been handed one demerit point each.

# Argentina has a shot at immortality

Ronaldo-led Portugal seeks a maiden crown; Kane eager to land a first silverware for the Three Lions in 60 years; Croats remain strong challengers

## FIFA WC COUNTDOWN

Anirudh Velamuri

Lionel Messi's Argentina will begin its FIFA World Cup defence against Algeria in Group J. Austria and debutant Jordan complete the group. Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal is placed in Group K along with Colombia, DR Congo and Uzbekistan. Perennial underachiever England, under Harry Kane, finds itself in a tricky Group L also featuring Croatia, Ghana and Panama.

**Group J (Argentina, Austria, Algeria, Jordan)**

No nation has successfully defended the FIFA World Cup since Brazil's immortal side of 1962. Sixty-four years later, Argentina arrives in North America with a chance to break that jinx and etch its name alongside football's most enduring legacies.

Lionel Scaloni's men topped CONMEBOL qualifying to secure their place at the global showpiece. More importantly, they bring continuity, with as many as 17 members of the squad that conquered Qatar being picked. On paper, they possess one of the tournament's most complete squads – balanced, battle-tested, and brimming with quality.

Yet history has shown that defending a crown is often harder than winning it. Questions linger over whether Argentina can summon the same edge and hunger that drove it to glory four years ago.

Scaloni has already cemented his place in Argentine football folklore, becoming the first coach to deliver both the World Cup (2022) and the Copa America (2021 and 2024). But *La Albiceleste's* destiny may ultimately rest with the other Lionel. At 38, Messi remains the heartbeat of the team – his presence alone can change the complexion



**Talismanic:** Messi will be eager to bow out on a high while Ronaldo has one final chance to win the biggest prize in world football. GETTY IMAGES & REUTERS

of a match, and the hopes of a football-mad nation rest on his shoulders.

Its rivals are anything but supporting actors. Austria returns to football's grandest stage for the first time since 1998. Under Ralf Rangnick, the Austrians have become one of Europe's most relentless sides, capable of overwhelming even elite opponents with their pressing and organisation. Having guided them to the round of 16 at Euro 2024, Rangnick will believe another knockout appearance is well within reach.

Algeria arrives armed with flair, pace, and devastating efficiency in transition. Mohamed Amoura announced himself during qualifying with 10 goals – more than any African player – and the 26-year-old will spearhead its bid to upset the established order alongside captain Riyad Mahrez.

While debutants are often dismissed as outsiders, Jordan has earned its place on merit, scoring a national record 32 goals during

qualification and remaining unbeaten away from home. Unburdened by expectation, it could prove far more dangerous than its inexperience suggests.

**Best finish:** Argentina: Champion (1978, 1986, 2022); Austria: Third place (1954); Algeria: Round of 16 (2014); Jordan: Debutant.

**Group K (Portugal, Colombia, DR Congo, Uzbekistan)**

The World Cup has always been a stage where individual brilliance collides with collective ambition, and Group K offers a compelling snapshot of that eternal tension.

Portugal arrives armed with experience, depth and no shortage of star power under Roberto Martinez. Built around possession control and creative dominance through central areas, *Os Navegadores* will expect nothing less than the top spot. Yet the spotlight inevitably falls on Ronaldo, set to make a record sixth World Cup appearance just like Messi. At 41, his role may be more measured than before, but his

influence remains immense. Defenders are still drawn to him, spaces still open around him, and every touch still carries the weight of history.

Four years after Messi completed football's ultimate quest, Ronaldo steps onto the grandest stage once more with perhaps one final chance to do the same.

Colombia, meanwhile, brings South American flair and unpredictability after finishing third in CONMEBOL qualifying with 28 points from 18 matches. *Los Cafeteros* are packed with technically gifted midfielders and explosive wide attackers, thriving in a style that often feels chaotic but is undeniably creative.

For neutrals, they promise entertainment; for opponents, a difficult puzzle. While capable of carving open defences with ease, their adventurous approach can leave them vulnerable in transition.

For DR Congo, this tournament marks the end of a 52-year wait – its only previous appearance came in

1974, when it competed as Zaire. Under Sebastian Desabre, it has developed a clear identity built on athleticism, aggressive pressing and set-piece threat. *Les Leopards* relish physical battles and seek to punish opponents through quick transitions, though maintaining tactical discipline against elite opposition will be crucial.

Uzbekistan enters uncharted territory with its maiden World Cup appearance. Coached by Fabio Cannavaro, the side reflects its head coach's philosophy: organised, disciplined and difficult to break down. In a group filled with bigger names, it could emerge as the dark horse, turning tight contests into a pathway toward the knockouts.

**Best finish:** Portugal: Third place (1966); Colombia: Quarterfinals (2014); DR Congo: Group Stage (2014); Uzbekistan: Debutant.

**Group L (England, Croatia, Ghana and Panama)**

Desperate to finally end a cycle of hope followed by heartbreak, England turned to Thomas Tuchel with one mission: bring an end to 60 years of tournament agony.

The early signs were emphatically positive. England stormed through qualifying with eight wins from eight, conceding no goals and becoming the first UEFA nation to secure its place at the 2026 edition.

The mood, however, has cooled slightly. A 1-1 draw with Uruguay, a 1-0 defeat to Japan and a laboured 1-0 win over New Zealand have tempered expectations.

This England side is comfortable controlling matches, dictating tempo and patiently probing for openings before accelerating with purpose.

Yet for all its possession and structure, it still leans heavily on individual bril-

liance to unlock stubborn opponents. Tuchel's blueprint is clear: defensive solidity as the foundation, elite attacking talent as the difference-maker – a philosophy built for tournament football, where fine margins separate glory from despair.

England may be the favourite to top the group, but Croatia will ensure nothing comes easily.

Under Zlatko Dalic, ball retention, tempo control and positional discipline remain defining traits, allowing Croatia to navigate pressure with remarkable composure. Defensive organisation and intelligent game management make *Vatreni* dangerous in tight contests. While the winless group-stage exit at Euro 2024 raised doubts, Croatia responded with an outstanding qualifying campaign, collecting 22 points from a possible 24. For a nation that finished runner-up in 2018 and third in 2022, belief in another deep run remains strong.

Since its World Cup debut in 2006, Ghana has become a familiar presence on football's biggest stage, missing only the 2018 edition in the last two decades. The Black Stars thrive in transition, using athleticism, pace and direct running to turn open games into dangerous affairs.

Panama arrives as the disciplined outsider. Featuring the second-oldest squad at the tournament, *Los Canaleros* are making just their second World Cup appearance, eager to erase memories of 2018, when they lost all three group matches and conceded 11 goals. Their path to success lies in organisation, set pieces and seizing opportunities whenever they arise.

**Best finish:** England: Champion (1966); Croatia: Runner-up (2018); Ghana: Quarterfinals (2010); Panama: Group stage (2018).



**In full flow:** Australia opener Voll is the world's No. 1-ranked batter in the shortest format. FILE PHOTO

## Australia looks the strongest in Group A

## T20 WC COUNTDOWN

P.K. Ajith Kumar

No sport is as enchantingly uncertain as cricket. The Women's T20 World Cup, however, begins with a grim certainty: one of the three best teams will not last beyond the group stage.

Australia, India and South Africa are all fabulous outfits with some of the biggest superstars in the game. Australia has won six of the nine previous editions; India is the reigning ODI World champion; South Africa has contested the last three World Cup finals across formats.

Sadly, at least one of those sides will not make it to the semifinals from Group A.

Australia may be going through an inevitable stage of transition, post the retirements of long-time captain Meg Lanning and recent skipper Alyssa Healy, but it still looks the strongest, most complete side. Healy had led the Aussies admirably, from behind and in front of the stumps, after taking over from Lanning. Many of her teammates, who have known her for several years, must be missing her banter, sense of humour, not to mention her obvious skills: she had bid farewell only three months ago.

Her replacement at the top of the order hasn't done badly, though. Georgia Voll is, in fact, the world's No. 1 batter in T20 cricket. That is how solid the Australian bench is.

Apart from Voll, the batting boasts such proven performers as Beth Mooney, Ellyse Perry, Phoebe Litchfield, Annabel Sutherland, Ashleigh Gardner and Grace Harris. Many of them are proper all-rounders,



**On the rampage:** South Africa captain Wolvaardt has been in incredible form. GETTY IMAGES

too. Bowling has variety, in pacers like Megan Schutt, Nicola Carey and Lucy Hamilton and spinners such as Alana King, Georgia Wareham and skipper Sophie Molineux.

The South Africans may not have to deal with such a problem of plenty. But they have Laura Wolvaardt.

And the captain fantastic is in incredible form. In the five-match T20I series against India at home she had scores of 51, 54, 115, 18 and 92 not out. South Africa won 4-1: no prize for guessing which match her team lost.

Ahead of the World Cup, South Africa got a big boost with Shabnim Ismail coming out of retirement. Her sheer pace should complement the remarkable skill-set of Marizanne Kapp, who is also one of the game's premier all-rounders.

South Africa has several other talents, such as Sune Luus, Tazmin Brits, Chloe Tryon and Ayabonga Khaka. They all should be keen not to give the world another reason to call their country a bunch of chokers at cricket.

Two other Asian countries are grouped with India. The expectations aren't high from Pakistan or Bangladesh, though. Both teams possess some fine players, but they could find it tough to challenge the big three in the group. The likes of Pakistan's captain Fatima Sana and Bangladesh's Marufa Akter have the game to take on the big girls.

The Netherlands completes the group. The Dutchmen had done their country proud at the 2023 ODI World Cup in India. Skipper Babette de Leede's cousin Bas was part of that team. She would want her team to pen a similar inspiring story.

# Playing World Cup a dream-come-true moment

The striker cannot wait for the 2026 showpiece to start, adding that Norway has prepared to be at the best of its physical, mental and tactical abilities



Haaland has quality written all over him. GETTY IMAGES

## INTERVIEW

## Erling Haaland

Norwegian striker Erling Haaland believes the team returning to the FIFA World Cup after 28 years will be celebrated back home.

## Excerpts:

**Your debut World Cup is here...**

I cannot express my excitement! It's such a big thing. I had never experienced it. When Norway played in a World Cup (1998), I was

not born. So, it is going to be the first time I shall be enjoying a World Cup with my countrymen.

When I started playing professional football, it remained a dream to see my country participate in a FIFA World Cup. Now it is a dream-come-true moment for me.

**You also played a significant part by scoring the most goals (16) in the qualifiers...**

It was a team effort, and my teammates helped me be there to score. It is really amazing to be part of the squad that made history by

qualifying for the biggest stage.

**Personally, it should be a bigger celebration since you will be emulating your father, Alf-Inge, in terms of playing in a World Cup in the USA...**

That's so satisfying and at the same time, so challenging! Dad always shared memories of playing in a World Cup. Now, I shall be sharing my journey with him with the same excitement.

**Will there be comparisons?**

No comparisons, absolutely! It is all about celebration and pure joy. That we shall be playing the World Cup after 28 years is already the biggest thing to have happened in our footballing history. Kids of Norway will have memories to share when they grow up, something I could not...

**Norway is in a tough group (I) with France, Senegal and Iraq...**

This is impossible to predict in a World Cup. Yes, we have three nations with great football history. We are trying to write ours as well. And in the World

Cup, every match will be tough. We have prepared to be at the best of our physical, mental and tactical abilities during that phase and that's all for now.

**Is it not easier to qualify for the knockouts now?**

This, from another angle, is true. But that is never a concern. We need to play at our best against three best countries in the group phase. Forty-eight best football-playing nations will be there and we are one of them.

(Professional Management Group).

**IN BRIEF**



**Wembanyama excels, Spurs edge Knicks to cut lead to 1-2**

Victor Wembanyama scored 32 points as San Antonio Spurs beat New York Knicks 115-111 in the NBA Finals on Monday, snapping the Knicks' 13-game win streak with President Donald Trump in attendance. The 22-year-old Frenchman added eight rebounds, six assists, three blocks and two steals as the Spurs cut the Knicks' lead to 1-2 in the best-of-seven championship series with game four in New York on Wednesday.

**Rain washes out third ODI, SL wins series against WI**

The third ODI between West Indies and Sri Lanka at Kingston, Jamaica, went the same way as the second and was washed out on Monday without a ball being bowled. Lanka won the series 1-0.



**ICA unveils new logo and first edition of newsletter**

The Indian Cricketers' Association (ICA) officially unveiled its new logo along with the first edition of its Member Newsletter. At the ICA's Hyderabad Chapter meeting, attended by over 40 members comprising former men's and women's cricketers, a range of welfare initiatives and support programmes for ex-players were discussed. These included financial assistance schemes, medical and healthcare support being extended through the ICA and the BCCI, as well as future plans focused on strengthening engagement and improving the overall well-being of former cricketers.

**Sahil, Jyothi Surekha emerge best Indians in qualification**

Sahil Jadhav and V. Jyothi Surekha emerged as the top Indian compound male and female archers respectively after the qualification round of the World Cup Stage-3 in Antalya on Tuesday. Jadhav shot 710, while Jyothi logged 700.

**The results: Individual: Men:** Sahil Jadhav (10th, 710), Rishabh Yadav (22nd, 706), Ganesh Mani Ratnam Thirumurugan (33rd, 703), Kushal Dalal (43rd, 699); **Women:** V. Jyothi Surekha (7th, 700), Chikitha Taniparthi (10th, 698), Parneet Kaur (18th, 693), Prithika Pradeep (22nd, 690). **Team:** India: Men (3rd, 2119), Women (2nd, 2091), Mixed (5th, 1410).



**Mosaddek, Rana star in Bangladesh's victory**

Mosaddek Hossain hit a career-best 86 not out and Nahid Rana, *in pic.*, took four wickets as Bangladesh trounced Australia by 86 runs in the rain-hit opening ODI in Dhaka on Tuesday to go 1-0 up in the three-match series.

**The scores:** Bangladesh 284/8 in 50 overs (Mosaddek 86 n.o., Shanto 67; Ellis 3/38) bt Australia 191/9 in 42.2 overs (Green 52 n.o., Carey 47; Rana 4/41). Bangladesh won by 86 runs via DLS method. **Toss:** Australia. **PoM:** Mosaddek Hossain.

**Neymar 'recovering well' after injury, says Brazil team**

Neymar is "recovering well" from the calf injury that has made him a doubt for the start of Brazil's World Cup campaign. He underwent an MRI scan on Monday, which showed he is "making good progress" amid hopes that he will be able to play a part for Carlo Ancelotti's side in the USA. "He will continue to follow the recovery schedule and fitness programme as planned by the Brazil team medical staff," the Brazilian Football Confederation said. Neymar has been in a race to recover fitness in time for the tournament, with Brazil kicking off its campaign against Morocco in New Jersey on Saturday.

**India's young guns grab the chance with both hands**

The thumping win over Afghanistan was the soothing balm the team needed after the poor run at home against the Proteas; Manav made a memorable debut while No. 3 Sai Sudharsan came good

**AFGHANISTAN IN INDIA**

**Vivek Krishnan**  
NEW CHANDIGARH

**A**fter back-to-back defeats against South Africa at home last November, a thumping win against Afghanistan – India's biggest by an innings in Test history – was just the sort of hassle-free return to the five-day version that a young team under Shubman Gill needed.

As head coach Gautam Gambhir stressed in his pre-match media briefing, this is a side still in the throes of transition after the retirements of Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma 12 months ago.

"The actual transition happened on the England tour. It has just been nine Tests. A majority of these boys have played less than 30 Tests," Gambhir would assert in his typically fiery tone on the eve of the clash.

In such a scenario, every Test counts as an opportunity for the young players to learn more about the nuances of the game and iron out their chinks.

Sai Sudharsan is a case in point. Having shown a frailty to getting caught on the on-side on his first tour of England last year, a plan



**In fine touch:** Sai Sudharsan looked in control during his 81-run knock. *R.V. MOORTHY*

of attack that was new to him by his own admission, the No. 3 batter exhibited far greater control with his wristy flicks in the just-concluded Test.

Despite Gambhir's implicit backing in the lead-up, a low score here for the southpaw would have led to further scrutiny about a batting average languishing in the low 30s after 12 innings. By making 81 against the Afghans, the 24-year-old has given himself a bit of breathing space. It should perturb him nevertheless that this is the second time he has

squandered a three-figure score there for the taking – he was dismissed on 87 against West Indies in Delhi last October.

For Rishabh Pant, too, this was an important outing. After a disastrous IPL that ended with his resignation as Lucknow Super Giants skipper, the wicket-keeper utilised the safeguard of returning to his strongest format to rediscover his sprightly nature. He made 81 entertaining runs, and offered his characteristic wisecracks to the Afghanistan batters from behind the stumps.

The biggest positive, of course, was the seven-wicket match haul of debutant Manav Suthar. The 23-year-old's control over length and craft while extracting prodigious turn were most impressive.

With Gambhir stating that India would be taking four spinners on the tour of Sri Lanka in August, Manav is poised to accompany Ravindra Jadeja, Washington Sundar and Kuldeep Yadav to the island nation. All four will have to be in prime form in a series where spin will reign supreme.



**Opportunity:** Prasidh is still in the early stages of his T20I career, having played only five games. *FILE PHOTO: K.R. DEEPAK*

**Prasidh replaces Siraj in India's T20I squads**

**Sports Bureau**  
NEW CHANDIGARH

Prasidh Krishna has replaced Mohammed Siraj in India's squads for the upcoming T20I series against Ireland and England.

The decision to rest Siraj was taken following discussions between the team management and the medical team, a BCCI release stated on Tuesday. "The decision has been taken as a precautionary measure to ensure adequate recovery ahead of a long international season," the release

said. In India's big win over Afghanistan in the Test here, Siraj bowled 13 overs across the two innings. The 32-year-old is not part of the ODI squad for the upcoming three-match series against Afghanistan.

Prasidh has played five T20Is so far. India's tour begins with two T20Is in Ireland on June 26 and 28, followed by a five-match series against England from July 1 to 11. The Men in Blue will also play three ODIs in England.

**Ruturaj hundred sets up narrow win for India-A**

**INDIA-A IN SL**

**Press Trust of India**  
DAMBULLA

Vaibhav Sooryavanshi's first outing for India-A in one-day cricket ended with a muted 14 but his team hung in there till the end against a self-destructing Sri Lanka-A to pull off an eight-run win in the tri-series opener here on Tuesday.

Chasing 278, Sri Lanka-A had the game in the bag after captain Sahan Arachchige made a sublime 74 off 72 balls.

The inexplicable loss of the last four wickets in 10 balls, including three in the final over from pacer Arshad Khan, gave India-A a narrow win.

Ruturaj Gaikwad made a composed 101 to lead India-A to 277 for six.

The spin duo of Ayush Badoni (two for 46) and Anukul Roy (two for 49)



**Rescue act:** Ruturaj bailed India-A out of early trouble with a composed hundred. *x@BCCI*

kept India-A in the game after the pacers leaked runs early in Sri Lanka-A's chase.

India-A will next play Afghanistan-A on Thursday.

The game also marked the comeback of Niroshan Dickwella (47 off 45) who shared an opening-wicket stand of 93 with another Sri Lankan international Avishka Fernando (45 off 59).

Electing to bat, India-A was pushed to a mini-crisis

at 16 for two in five overs after the early dismissals of Sooryavanshi and Prabhsimran Singh.

Vice-captain Ruturaj, who scored his 21st List-A hundred in 112 balls, and skipper Tilak Varma (60, 97b) added 150 for the fourth wicket to steady the ship.

**The scores:** India-A 277/6 in 50 overs (Ruturaj Gaikwad 101, Tilak Varma 60) bt Sri Lanka-A 269 in 48.5 overs (Sahan Arachchige 74).

**Gukesh to return to Chennai Grand Masters**

**CHESS**

**Sports Bureau**  
CHENNAI

Reigning World champion D. Gukesh will return to the Chennai Grand Masters after a two-year absence from the classical tournament. The fourth edition of the event will be hosted here from July 16 to 22.

Gukesh's participation was confirmed by the tournament organisers on Tuesday. It was at this competition that the 20-year-old Grandmaster had virtually sealed his 2024 Candidates qualification with a thrilling triumph.

"It is Gukesh after all. This is where the World Championship journey began," Chennai Grand Masters' official handle wrote on social media.

Uzbekistan GM Nodirbek Abdusattorov is expected to feature in what is set to be an eight-player event, while M. Pranesh is



Gukesh. *FILE PHOTO: SUDHAKARA JAIN*

also likely to compete for honours. "This is my first participation in the event. I am very much looking forward to it," Abdusattorov told a chess website recently.

Gukesh, who will be challenged by Javokhir Sindarov of Uzbekistan in the title decider later this year, has endured a tough time since scaling the peak.

In his most recent classical competition, Norway Chess, the Chennai player finished with the wooden spoon after scoring just eight points.

**Stokes and Atkinson under investigation over nightclub incident**

**Reuters**  
LONDON

The England and Wales Cricket Board said on Monday that Test captain Ben Stokes and fast bowler Gus Atkinson were under investigation following a nightclub incident.

The incident – details of which have not been disclosed – occurred in the early hours of Monday after England's victory over New Zealand in the first test at Lord's. "The ECB is currently investigating a breach of team protocols following the conclusion of the first men's Test against New Zealand," the Board said in a statement.

"Ben Stokes and Gus Atkinson were present at a nightclub in the early hours of Monday when an incident took place."

**Spain beats Peru to head into the WC on a high**

**Agence France-Presse**  
PUEBLA (MEXICO)

Spain gave a taste of what makes it one of the World Cup favourites with a 3-1 win over Peru on Monday in its final friendly before the showpiece kicks off.

Luis de la Fuente's team took the lead after just two minutes when Mikel Oyarzabal rifled into the top corner. Pedri doubled Spain's lead on 32 minutes, and a Pedro Gallese own goal eight minutes after half-time made it 3-0. Jairo Velez pulled one back in the 66th minute.

**Akshat reigns supreme in Senior Max class**

**MOTORSPORTS**

**Sports Bureau**  
COIMBATORE

Bengaluru's Akshat Misra (Peregrine Racing) emerged champion in the Senior Max class as the third and final round of the Meco Meritus Cup karting concluded here.

Hyderabad's Shiv Tummalala (Peregrine Racing), among the most consistent of drivers, retained the crown after winning both the Sprint races in the Mini Max class.

Rayo Racing's Aarav Sureka from Mumbai, who finished second and fifth in the two points-scoring outings, won the champion-



**Smiles all around:** The podium finishers in the final round of the Meco Meritus Cup and India Karting Academy Trophy.

ship in the Micro Max category.

Meanwhile, in the Indian Karting Academy Trophy that was run concurrently, Chennai's Rivaan

Dev Preetham (MSPORT) clinched the title in the OK-Junior class.

**The results: Meco Meritus Cup: Senior Max – Sprint Race-1 (14**

**laps):** 1. Ishaan Madesh (Peregrine Racing) (10mins, 45.043secs); 2. Eshanth Vengatesan (MSPORT) (10:47.663); 3. Akshat Misra (Peregrine Racing) (10:48.674).

**Sprint Race-2 (15 laps):** 1. Akshat (11:35.198); 2. Kiaan Shah (Rayo Racing) (11:37.053); 3. Shatveer Shetty (MSPORT) (11:40.549).

**Champion:** Akshat (Peregrine Racing), 85 points.

**Mini Max – Sprint Race-1 (10 laps):** 1. Shiv Tummalala (Peregrine Racing) (07:52.372); 2. Micah Hayden Andrews (Peregrine Racing) (07:54.865); 3. Jishnu Seralathan (Peregrine Racing) (07:59.218).

**Sprint Race-2 (12 laps):** 1. Shiv (09:25.332); 2. Jishnu Seralathan (09:27.317); 3. Micah Hayden Andrews (09:28.268).

**Champion:** Shiv (Peregrine Racing), 96 points.  
**Micro Max – Sprint Race-1 (10**

**laps):** 1. Zidaan Arshaan Anees (Peregrine Racing) (08: 14.876); 2. Aarav Sureka (Rayo Racing) (08:15.862); 3. Ayansh Patil (MSPORT) (08:19.450).

**Sprint Race-2 (12 laps):** 1. Zidaan (09:51.846); 2. Yeshwin Vinay Kishore (Peregrine Racing) (09:57.498); 3. Shriyan Rao Thakkallapelly (Peregrine Racing) (09:58.018).

**Champion:** Aarav (Rayo Racing), 78 points.  
**India Karting Academy Trophy (OK Junior):** Super Heat (11 laps): 1. Rishik Rohit Reddy (MSPORT) (08:25.138); 2. Rivaan Dev Preetham (MSPORT) (08:26.751); 3. Rehan (Momentum Motorsports) (08:26.977).

**Final Race (14 laps):** 1. Rehan (10:42.327); 2. Rivaan (10:48.417); 3. Syed Luqman (Peregrine Racing) (10:51.930).

**Champion:** Rivaan (MSPORT), 99 points.

# The king's coronation



Over the last few years, PBKS skipper Shreyas not just knocked on the door but banged it; he deservedly enjoyed a double delight when he returned to India's T20I set-up not only as player but also as captain

Amol Karhadkar

There are cricket careers. Then there are careers where the plot twists appear too unrealistic even for fiction. Shreyas Iyer's professional life over the last three years belongs firmly to that category.

He had a recurring back injury which threatened not merely form but longevity. There were questions over his commitment towards domestic cricket. He lost a BCCI central contract. He went from being considered an all-format certainty – and at one point even a leadership candidate – to becoming only an ODI regular.

Shreyas led two different IPL franchises (Kolkata Knight Riders and Punjab Kings) to finals in successive years, winning one and losing the other. He produced one of the greatest World Cup knockout innings by an Indian batter and still found himself outside certain squads months later.

## The latest episode

If Indian cricket ever runs out of scripts, somebody only needs to document the past few years of Shreyas' cricketing life. The latest episode was released last Saturday. The 31-year-old was not just recalled into India's T20I set-up after two-and-a-half years away from the squad. He was handed the captaincy!

That he returned to the side is understandable. That he returned to the side as skipper is fascinating. Though Shreyas being chosen for the top job may not be surprising, the circumstances under which he became captain certainly are. For years, conversations on Shreyas revolved around leadership potential.

Could he command a dressing room? Could his personality dominate elite players? Could he tactically survive international cricket? Could he transition from an instinctive leader to a traditional one? Over the last 18 months, those questions were answered in the affirmative at the domestic and franchise level.

## Providing evidence

Shreyas simply went out and provided evidence. He led KKR to the IPL title in 2024. He guided Mumbai to the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy later in the year. In 2025, he steered PBKS to the IPL summit clash.

He handled dressing rooms full of superstars. He managed retention cycles, changing squads and the increasingly exhausting ecosystem of franchise cricket, where captains are analysed after every over and judged every morning.

The question of whether Shreyas could captain was no longer asked. Could Indian cricket continue ignoring those credentials became the real question.

What made Saturday's announcement peculiar was not Shreyas' promotion. It was the man he replaced. Suryakumar Yadav's removal is what makes this transition feel unusual. Because unlike many leadership changes, India did not replace a failing captain. India replaced a successful captain who had diminishing returns with the willow. A very successful one, for that matter.

When Rohit Sharma's team ended India's 17-year wait for a T20 World Cup title in June 2024, it felt like closure. When Suryakumar and Co. defended that crown in March, it felt like confirmation.

India under Suryakumar did not merely win. It established control. The domination in bilaterals continued. The pool of talent expanded.

India in T20Is increasingly resembled what Australia once was in the late 1990s and early 2000s – a side where changing personnel rarely altered results.

And yet only months later, Suryakumar lost not only captaincy but also his place. That perhaps tells us more about the current team administration than anything else.

Indian cricket, just like most other spheres in a country busy hero-worshipping, has traditionally functioned around personalities. But this version increasingly appears to function around timelines.

The current team management – especially the head coach and chief selector axis of Gautam Gambhir and Ajit Agarkar – has repeatedly shown willingness to make difficult calls before circumstances force them.

Sometimes those calls have looked brave. Sometimes unnecessary. Sometimes downright ruthless. But almost always, they have followed a pattern. The team first, individuals second.

## Beneficiary and survivor

Rohit experienced the bitter feeling despite clinching an ICC title (Champions Trophy). Now Suryakumar experiences the same despite having lifted one. And somewhere between those decisions sits Shreyas – simultaneously a beneficiary and survivor. Perhaps the most fascinating subplot are Shreyas and Agarkar. Few player-selector relationships have generated as much speculation over the years.

When Agarkar functioned as Mumbai's chief selector towards the end of the previous decade, stories of friction between him and Shreyas emerged repeatedly. There was the famous incident where the batter was reportedly asked to undergo a fitness test minutes before boarding a flight for a Ranji Trophy game in 2018. Then came the stronger stance around domestic cricket participation. Eventually came Shreyas' removal from the central contract list.

The word on the street was that there were personal issues. The selection committee meeting held last Saturday complicated that narrative. Because if personal differences truly dictated decisions, recalling someone and trusting him with captaincy directly become difficult to explain.

What came out of the meeting was something else. The selection panels may disagree. They may challenge. They may punish. But increasingly, decisions appear linked more to long-term planning than personality clashes. This does not automatically make every decision correct. But it makes the process easier to understand.

## Strange task

Shreyas' challenge extends far beyond captaincy. The first task is perhaps the strangest one. He must cement his own place. Modern T20 cricket offers captains

authority, not security.

Hardik Pandya remains in the ecosystem. Jasprit Bumrah will almost certainly return closer to the next T20 World Cup.

Axar Patel is an important senior figure. Sanju Samson, Ishan Kishan and Tilak Varma were all discussed as leadership candidates.

It means captaincy does not protect Shreyas. Performance is still a must.

The second challenge is acceptance. Captaining an IPL side and leading India are different jobs. IPL dressing rooms are in place only for about 10 weeks a year. National team dressing rooms last years. Franchise cricket allows resets. But international cricket rarely does.

## Added dimension

Managing players who captain franchises themselves creates another dimension. Managing players who may believe that they can captain India at some point creates an even bigger one.

Shreyas must therefore not just lead. He must convince.

The third task is maintaining standards. This might actually be the hardest. Rohit inherited a side recovering from repeated ICC disappointments. Suryakumar inherited a functioning machine. Shreyas inherits something arguably tougher. A champion side expected to remain champion. Expectations are dangerous because they rise faster than the time teams take to evolve.

The next T20 World Cup only complicates matters. Australia and New Zealand will host it in October-November 2028.

Conditions change everything. Larger boundaries compared to Indian grounds, bouncier pitches, possibly more seam movement than flat-beds at home. Different finishing requirements.

Batters who dominate in Asia sometimes appear ordinary there. Twenty-eight months sounds comfortably distant. But international cricket rarely permits such comfort.

## Most underrated complication

Then comes perhaps the most underrated complication.

The ecosystem around him may change before the T20 World Cup arrives. Gambhir's contract, for now, is until the ODI World Cup in 2027.

Agarkar's stay period is similar unless extensions emerge and the BCCI rulebook is modified. Meaning Shreyas may operate with different selectors, different coaches and perhaps different philosophies.

That effectively leaves him with roughly 15 months to establish authority. Fifteen months to create a leadership identity. Fifteen months to make himself indispensable irrespective of future decision-makers. It perhaps explains why sympathy naturally flows towards Suryakumar.

Irrespective of what one thinks about his form, removing a World Cup-winning captain entirely feels harsh. Especially when it is about India's most transformative T20 batter.

For a major part of the last five years, Suryakumar raised batting expectations. Perhaps he deserved another series. Perhaps two. Yet harshness increasingly appears central to this regime.

And while criticism exists, results continue strengthening their arguments. Which brings the story back to Shreyas.

## Operating at extremes

Few careers in Indian cricket have operated at such extremes.

Too much hype. Too much criticism. Too many injuries. Too many comebacks. Too many questions. Now comes the strangest phase. For the first time in years, Shreyas is not fighting for relevance. He is set to define direction.

If he establishes himself and successfully carries India into another T20 World Cup cycle, Saturday's call may eventually be remembered as 'the moment'.

And if India eventually completes a hat-trick of T20 World Cup triumphs while adding the Olympic gold along the way, the Shreyas 'web series' may require more than just another season.

It might require a cinematic universe.

## THE GIST

In 2024, Shreyas led KKR to the IPL title and Mumbai to the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy. In 2025, he steered PBKS to the IPL summit clash

Maintaining the lofty standards will be a tough challenge, considering that India has won the last two T20 World Cups

If he establishes himself and successfully carries the national team into another T20 World Cup cycle, the selection panel's call may eventually be remembered as 'the moment'



K.R. DEEPAK