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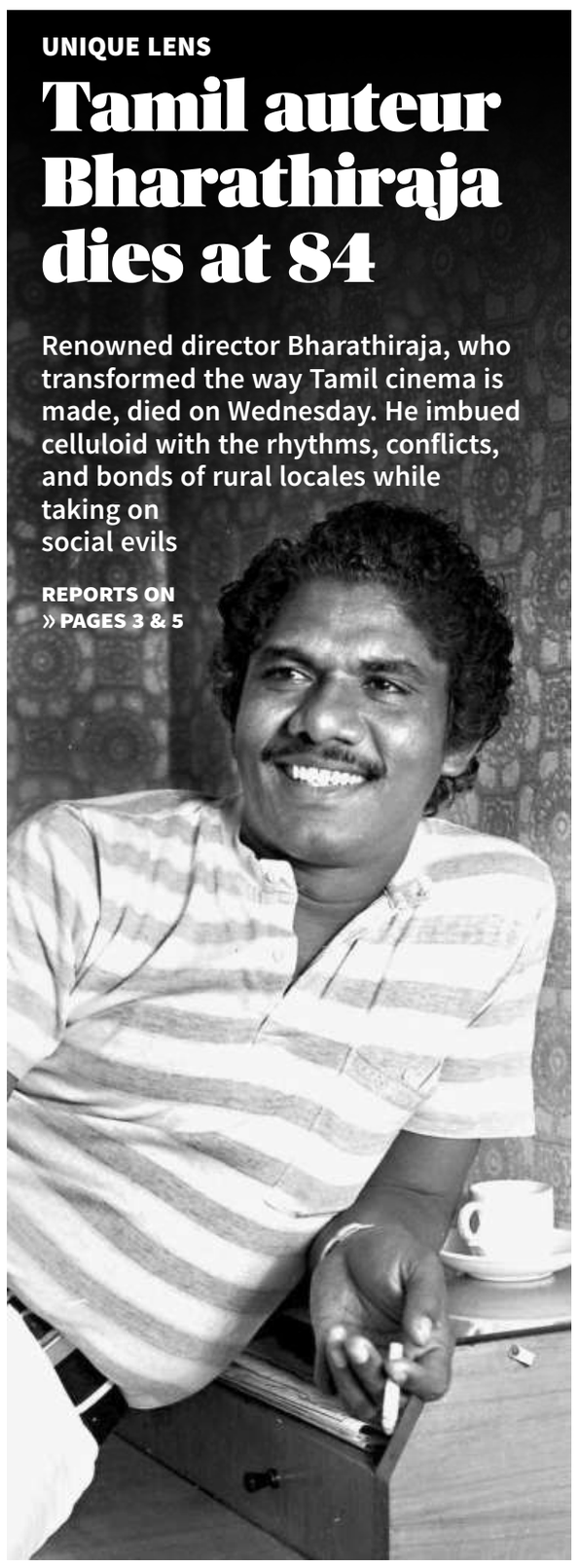
UNIQUE LENS

Tamil auteur Bharathiraja dies at 84

Renowned director Bharathiraja, who transformed the way Tamil cinema is made, died on Wednesday. He imbued celluloid with the rhythms, conflicts, and bonds of rural locales while taking on social evils

REPORTS ON » PAGES 3 & 5



LONGEST-SERVING ELECTED PM

Modi slams Cong. at NDA conclave to mark record

NEWS » PAGE 4

MISSING CIVILIANS

Bodies of 6 Naga men recovered in Manipur

NEWS » PAGE 6

DATA POINT

Major lacunae over industrial accidents

Inconsistencies in data point to poor reporting

OPINION » PAGE 9

'TERROR HIDEOUTS HIT'

Pakistan air strikes kill 26 in Afghanistan

WORLD » PAGE 14

Reprisal attacks will continue: Trump

U.S. launches airstrikes after a helicopter was brought down; Iran attacks U.S. bases

Aggression will be met with an immediate response, says Iranian Speaker Ghalibaf

'The Middle East Bully is dead! They took too long, now they will pay,' says Trump

Stanly Johny

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Wednesday that the U.S. would continue to "attack Iran very hard", after a tit-for-tat exchange in which Washington launched airstrikes following the downing of an American military helicopter over the Strait of Hormuz and Tehran retaliated with attacks on U.S. bases in the region.

"We are going to be attacking them, attacking them very hard," Mr. Trump told presspersons on Wednesday. "We hit them hard yesterday, and we are going to hit them again hard today." Mohammad-Bagher Ghalibaf, Iran's Parliament Speaker, said any attack on Iran would be met with "immediate and decisive response". In a message to commemorate the 12-day war of June 2025, Mr. Ghalibaf said: "The imposed wars, the first, second, and third, have shown the world that the path of victory and triumph passes through steadfastness and martyrdom."

'Pay the price'

Earlier in the day, Mr. Trump warned that Iran "will have to pay the price" for taking "too long" to negotiate a deal. The warning came after the U.S. launched air strikes.

"Iran's military is a complete and total mess. Much of it, like their Navy and Air Force, doesn't even exist any more – they have been completely defeated. Iran is all talk and no action," Mr. Trump wrote in a social media post. "The Bully of the Middle East is DEAD! They've taken too long to negotiate a deal that would have been great for them, now they will have to pay the price," he said.

The U.S. forces struck "Iranian air defense, ground control stations, and surveillance radar sites near the Strait of Hormuz with precision munitions", U.S. Central Command (Centcom) said in a statement.

"The operation was a proportional response to recent attacks on U.S. forces and international commercial ships transiting regional waters."

Iran's Tasnim news agency reported that U.S. strikes destroyed two reservoirs in Bamani Sirik. The attack affected drinking water supply for about 20,000 people, according to a report in Press TV.

Iran, which neither confirmed nor denied that it downed the helicopter, responded with missile and drone attacks at U.S. bases in Bahrain, Kuwait, and Jordan.

"In response to the military aggression and the violation of Iran's national sovereignty and territorial integrity, the country's 'powerful armed forces' struck U.S. bases and assets in the region that were the origin of these aggressions," Iran's Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

According to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the U.S. Navy's fifth fleet headquarters and the Sheikh Isa air base in Bahrain, Al-Azraq base in Jordan, and Ali al-Salem base in Kuwait were the sites targeted by Iranian missiles and drones.

'Drone downed'

The IRGC also claimed that it "intercepted and destroyed" an American MQ-9 Reaper drone over the city of Jam in Bushehr province.

The U.S.-Iran exchange of strikes followed a similar exchange of fire between Iran and Israel earlier this week. Iran launched missiles at Israel, the first direct attack on Israel since the April 8 ceasefire was announced, in retaliation for Israeli strikes on Beirut in Lebanon, and Israel responded with air strikes. Mr. Trump had then asked both sides to stop "shooting" at each other, and said the U.S. and Iran were still close to reaching an agreement.

Mr. Trump said on Tuesday that Iran had shot down "one of our highly sophisticated Apache Helicopters while patrolling over the Strait of Hormuz" and that the U.S. would respond to the attack.

Over the past two months, Mr. Trump had said several times that a deal was within reach. But tensions persist in the Strait of Hormuz, which remains under Iran's control. The U.S. had announced a blockade on Iran's ports on April 13, after direct negotiations in Islamabad failed to make any breakthrough.

Vehicles in flames after an Israeli air strike in Sidon, Lebanon on Wednesday. A ceasefire in effect since April 8 is under strain. AFP

INSIDE

Council advises a targeted split of LS constituencies

NEW DELHI

The Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister has advised "targeted" splitting of Lok Sabha constituencies in the next delimitation. It says "the joint demographic and linguistic profile" can also be added as a criterion. » PAGE 6

Govt. mulls cap on airports given to private firms

NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Civil Aviation has proposed capping the number of airport bundles that can be awarded to a single bidder at "two to three bundles", or roughly five to six airports, in order to prevent "oligopoly". » PAGE 12

The ball gets rolling

Jogo bonito: A 45-foot cut-out of Brazilian footballer Neymar erected by fans at Kulamavu in Idukki, Kerala, ahead of the 2026 FIFA World Cup. The 23rd edition of one of the world's biggest sporting events kicks off on Thursday night. THULASI KAKKAT (REPORT: PAGE 16)

Two Indians dead and one missing after U.S. fighter hits ship off Oman: FSUI

Debayan Tewari
CHENNAI/NEW DELHI

Two Indian seafarers were killed and one was reported missing after U.S. forces attacked an oil tanker, *Settebello*, off the coast of Oman on Wednesday, Manoj Yadav, general secretary of Forward Seamen's Union of India (FSUI), said.

The Centre had earlier said the three were missing. Mr. Yadav has identified the dead as Aditya Sharma, deck cadet, and Shivanand Chaurasiya, engine fitter. Chief engineer Patnala Suresh is missing, he said.

Twenty-one Indian seafarers were rescued from the vessel hit by U.S. "precision munitions".

The U.S. Central Command (Centcom) said the ship "violated the ongoing blockade [of Iranian ports] by attempting to transport oil from Iran". The Centcom "disabled Palau-flagged *M/T Settebello* as it transited the Gulf of Oman. A U.S. aircraft fired precision munitions into the ship's engine room after the crew repeatedly failed to comply with directions from American forces," it posted on X, adding a video of the strike.

'Strong protest'

India summoned the U.S. Embassy's Deputy Chief of Mission, Jason Meeks, and lodged a "strong protest" after the attack.

The Ministry of External Affairs said: "Our Embassy in Oman is closely monitoring the situation and proactively coordinating with the Omani authorities in the ongoing Search and Rescue operation."

A videograb shows the tanker *Settebello* after it was struck by U.S. aircraft off the Oman coast on Wednesday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

India summoned the U.S. Embassy's Deputy Chief of Mission, Jason Meeks, and lodged a 'strong protest' after the hit

The attack comes two days after U.S. forces hit oil tanker *Marivex*, off Oman, from which 24 Indian sailors were rescued.

Earlier, the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations sent out an alert: "UKMTO has received a report of an incident 20NM northeast of Sohar, Oman. Local authorities have reported a tanker has experienced a fire in their engine room and are on the scene assisting with the evacuation of the crew. The vessel is reporting one casualty and two crew members missing. No environment impact reported. Authorities continue investigating."

Maritime intelligence website Lloyd's List said the "tanker was one of many vessels waiting off Duqm (Oman) recently, reportedly held by the U.S. Navy."

Reports quoted British maritime security company Vanguard Tech as saying that the ship had "transmitted a distress call stating that its engine room had been struck by a missile".

The Ministry's statement flagged the "continuing incidents of attacks on shipping in the region" as "deeply worrisome and a direct result of the ongoing conflict in the region."

"The targeting of commercial shipping and civilian infrastructure in the region must end, and free and unimpeded navigation and commerce through the international waterways in the region in keeping with international law must be restored at the earliest," it said.

Ship had been to China

Settebello is a sanctioned vessel, according to the blacklist of TankerTrackers.com. Tracker websites showed that the ship had been to China twice, in March and April. It had discharged cargo at Lianyungang port from April 27 to May 3 and had set sail from Singapore on May 12.

(With inputs from Kallol Bhattacherjee)

Cong. to move SC against rejection of RS nomination

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

After urging the Election Commission (EC) to set aside the rejection of the nomination of the Congress's Rajya Sabha candidate from Madhya Pradesh, Meenakshi Natarajan, the Opposition party is set to move the Supreme Court against the rejection on Thursday, sources told *The Hindu*.

Senior advocates Abhishek Singhvi, Vivek Tankha, and Salman Khurshid will mention the case before the top court, sources said.

Ms. Natarajan's nomination for one of the three seats to the Upper House from the State was rejected by the Returning Officer (RO) on Tuesday after allegations that she had "hidden" details of a case against her in Hyderabad.

On Wednesday afternoon, a delegation of Congress leaders, including general secretary K.C. Venugopal and Mr. Singhvi, along with Ms. Natarajan, met EC officials and sought a reversal of the decision, terming the RO's order "egregious, blatantly unlawful, and detrimental to the democratic process".

"This is a subversion of democracy... We still have full faith in constitutional institutions. That is why we are fighting this battle," Ms. Natarajan told presspersons after the meeting.

Mr. Singhvi, who led the party's legal arguments before the poll body, said the Congress had demonstrated that the RO's decision was legally untenable.

"This delegation made a detailed representation to the EC. We have told them and demonstrated, according to us, beyond doubt and beyond any matter of controversy, that the RO has passed a perverse order," he said.

Referring to provisions of the Representation of the People Act, Mr. Singhvi said the EC's own law had Section 33A, which stated that one has to disclose only those cases which have a punishment of over two years and more importantly, only those cases in which charges have been framed.

"The process of framing charges is a judicial process. A judge frames charges... A private complaint may be baseless, may have no legs to stand on and the second stage is taking up cognisance by the magistrate," Mr. Singhvi said.

The Congress leader said the party had requested an urgent intervention from the commission as Wednesday was the last day for withdrawal of nominations. "This is a completely egregious and blatantly unlawful order, and should be set aside immediately, is our request," he said. Mr. Singhvi said the EC's intervention was necessary to preserve a level-playing field in elections, warning that failure to reverse the decision would create "a highly skewed system in a democratic election".

K.C. Venugopal, Abhishek Singhvi, and other Congress leaders leave after a meeting with the EC in New Delhi on Wednesday. PTI

INBRIEF

'Khan Sir' moves Patna HC to quash FIR lodged against him

Appealing to quash the FIR lodged against him by the Patna police, educator and YouTuber Faisal Khan, who is also popularly known as 'Khan Sir', moved the Patna High Court on Wednesday and urged the court to order the reopening of his coaching institute. The court gave four weeks' time to the State government for submitting a response. Earlier on June 9, a local court in Patna had stayed the arrest of Mr. Khan "till further orders". Mr. Khan approached the High Court with an appeal to quash the FIR lodged against him in connection with an attack and firing incident at his coaching institute.

RSS headquarters, Pune civic body receive bomb threat

The staff at the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) in Shivajinagar in Pune was evacuated on Wednesday following a bomb threat received via email by PMC. As the email mentioned of "Khalistan" and specific time of "bomb blasts", the police administration has been on high alert. Similar threat was received by Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation Mayor Ritu Tawade. According to the police, the other locations in the mail, include Nagpur RSS headquarters and State Assembly complex. The Anti-Terrorist Squad, and other Central government authorities are investigating the case.

Congress leaders eyeing RS seat 'spoilt' chances of party nominee: M.P. CM

Rejecting Mohan Yadav's remarks, Congress leaders accuse Returning Officer of 'bias' in rejecting Meenakshi Natarajan's nomination; 62 MLAs to meet President to seek her intervention in matter

Mehul Malpani
BHOPAL

A day after the nomination of Meenakshi Natarajan, the Congress candidate for one of three Rajya Sabha seats from Madhya Pradesh going to poll on June 18, was rejected during scrutiny, Chief Minister Mohan Yadav said leaders of the Opposition party "eyeing the seat" for themselves were behind the alleged irregularities in her nomination form.

The Congress, however, alleged that Ms. Natarajan's nomination was rejected as part of a "premeditated conspiracy" and all its 62 MLAs would call on President Droupadi Murmu in Delhi on Friday to seek her intervention in the matter.

Ms. Natarajan's nomination was rejected by Assembly Secretary Arvind Sharma, 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 the Congress nominee had "hidden" details of a case filed against her in Telangana. Mr. Kewat is now set to win unopposed, ensuring victory for the BJP in all three seats.

Congress leaders staging a fast over the rejection of party candidate Meenakshi Natarajan's nomination in Bhopal on Wednesday. PTI

"The Congress made the mistake in their candidate's form deliberately due to fear of losing. Many Congress leaders were eyeing the [Rajya Sabha] seat, but when they did not get nominated, they spoilt the game [for Ms. Natarajan]," Mr. Yadav said.

The CM also accused the Congress of "not trusting" its own MLAs following attempts by the party to move them to Bengaluru over fears of cross-voting. "The Congress now needs to introspect," he said.

State BJP president Hemant Khandelwal also took a dig at the Congress, claiming that infighting led to the rejection of Ms. Natarajan's nomination. "*Ghar ka Lanka dhaye* (An insider brings down a kingdom). We were getting all the information from them [Congress insiders] from time to time," he alleged.

Meanwhile, several senior Congress leaders and MLAs accused the Returning Officer of "bias" and staged a day-long hunger strike near the State Election Commission's office in Bhopal. State Congress president Jitu Patwari said the party has approached the Election Commission of India and will also move the Supreme Court to challenge the rejection of Ms. Natarajan's nomination.

Announcing a Statewide protest over the issue, Mr. Patwari said party workers will gherao the CM's house in Bhopal and BJP offices in all districts. "We will expose the real face of the BJP in every village and household," he said.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, J.P. Dhanopia, legal cell incharge of the State Congress, said the FIR lodged in Telangana was not a criminal case and that no charges had been framed against Ms. Natararjan.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay with President Droupadi Murmu at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi on Wednesday.

Vijay meets President, Vice-President in Delhi

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay called on President Droupadi Murmu at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi on Wednesday.

Mr. Vijay, who embarked on a three-day official visit to the national capital to take part in the 11th Governing Council meeting of NITI Aayog on Thursday, departed from Chennai on a special flight on Wednesday morning.

Upon his arrival at the Tamil Nadu House in New Delhi, Chief Secretary M. Sai Kumar, Additional Chief Secretary and Chief Resident Commissioner R. Jaya, and other officials welcomed him. Mr. Vijay also received a guard of honour.

In the evening, the Chief Minister called on the President at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. He also met Vice-President C.P. Radhakrishnan at his office and held discussions with him.

This was the first time Mr. Vijay met the President and the Vice-President after assuming office as the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu.

Later, he met Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi and Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi at their residence in Janpath. He held discussions with them.

CPI headquarters

He also went to the headquarters of the Communist Party of India and met party general secretary D. Raja and other leaders.

Respect, restraint essential in public life, says Pilot days after Gehlot's barb on 2020 tumult

Mohammed Iqbal
JAIPUR

Congress leader Sachin Pilot on Wednesday said restraint, contentment and showing respect to others were essential in public life, while affirming that he had "no personal feud" with anyone. Mr. Pilot's remarks came three days after former Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot targeted him over the 2020 political crisis in Rajasthan.

"I deeply respect every individual working in politics. There may be differences of opinion, but there is no scope for ill will... If you look someone straight in the eye, you can tell whether they are speaking the truth. I have always been able to do that," he said without naming Mr. Gehlot.

Mr. Pilot was addressing a Kisan Sammelan at Sakarghata village in Karauli district after unveiling a statue of his father and former Union Minister, the late Rajesh Pilot.

Congress leader Sachin Pilot unveiling a statue of his late father Rajesh Pilot at Sakarghata in Karauli district on Wednesday. SPECIAL ARRANGMENT

He said discipline and restraint were essential in politics and in life, adding that if someone works hard with a commitment to the party's ideology, the efforts never go to waste. "You all know that I speak very carefully. Once a word is uttered, it cannot be taken back... It is important to stand by the truth," Mr. Pilot said, without commenting on Mr. Gehlot's claim that the Congress MLAs, who boycotted a Legislature Party meeting in September 2022, were not willing to accept him [Mr. Pilot] as the new Chief Minister.

M.P. RS poll

The Congress leader condemned the cancellation of party candidate Meenakshi Natarajan's nomination for the Rajya Sabha poll in Madhya Pradesh, terming it an injustice against the democratic process.

Jharkhand RS poll: BJP-backed candidate's nomination cleared amid Congress protests

Press Trust of India
RANCHI

Amid a high-voltage drama over the Rajya Sabha election in Jharkhand, the returning officer on Wednesday declared BJP-backed Independent candidate Parimal Nathwani's nomination valid, rejecting objections raised by the Congress, which staged a protest on the Assembly premises demanding cancellation of his candidature.

The Congress, a constituent of the ruling JMM-led INDIA bloc, alleged that Mr. Nathwani, an industrialist and sitting Rajya Sabha MP from Andhra Pradesh, had furnished false and incomplete information in the affidavit accompanying his nomination papers and had illegally submitted a fresh affidavit during scrutiny.

Mr. Nathwani filed his nomination on Monday as the third candidate for the June 18 Rajya Sabha polls, where elections are being held for two seats. The BJP-led National Democratic Alliance does not have the numbers in the Assembly to make him a winner in the poll, unless there is cross-voting.

Congress members staging a protest to demand cancellation of the nomination of Parimal Nathwani in Ranchi on Wednesday. ANI

While the nominations of JMM candidate Baidyanath Ram and Congress nominee Pranav Jha were cleared on Tuesday, Mr. Nathwani's papers were initially kept pending after objections were raised by the Congress.

In his order, returning officer Ranjeet Kumar said Mr. Nathwani's nomination was 'valid', and all objections had been examined and rejected.

Revised affidavit

Congress leaders questioned the acceptance of the revised affidavit and alleged preferential treatment by election officials.

State Congress chief Keshav Mahto Kamlesh said the party had flagged multiple discrepancies in Mr. Nathwani's nomination papers and demanded an impartial probe and cancellation of his candidature over the "discrepancies and incomplete" information provided by the Independent candidate.

Former Union Minister and senior advocate Salman Khurshid alleged he was not allowed to participate in the proceedings before the returning officer.

Mr. Khurshid's aide, advocate Surendra Chouhan, representing the Congress, claimed that accepting a fresh affidavit during scrutiny was illegal and violated election rules.

Hitting back, Leader of Opposition Babulal Marandi said the returning officer and other officials had thoroughly scrutinised all documents and allowed Mr. Nathwani to rectify deficiencies within the stipulated time before accepting his nomination.

Women's panel chief resigns in Haryana after remarks row

The Hindu Bureau
GURUGRAM

Haryana State Commission for Women chairperson Renu Bhatia resigned late on Wednesday evening in the wake of protests by nursing officers across the State during the day against her alleged derogatory remarks against the nursing staff at the Civil Hospital in Kurukshetra.

In a letter to the Chief Minister, Ms. Bhatia, without assigning any reasons for her resignation, said she had served with honesty and would continue to fight for the rights and the dignity of the women.

Ms. Bhatia had made the alleged remarks during her official inspection at the Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Civil Hospital in Kurukshetra on June 7, where she was reviewing the case of an alleged rape of a 15-year-old minor girl by a doctor.

Experts raise concerns over spike in C-section deliveries in Delhi

Ashna Butani
NEW DELHI

Delhi has seen a sharp rise in caesarean section (C-section) deliveries, increasing from 23.6% in 2019-21 to 27.4% in 2023-24, according to National Family Health Survey (NFHS) data. Experts and doctors attribute the trend to factors such as preference for painless childbirth and medical conditions like obesity and diabetes, among others. However, they have also expressed concern over the rising rate, noting that C-sections also carry medical risks.

Delhi's trend mirrors the national pattern, where the C-section rate rose from 21.5% to 27.2% during the same period.

The data also show a wide gap between sectors: 50.9% of births in private facilities were by C-section, compared with 19.6% in public facilities, raising concerns about possible overuse in the private sector.

C-section deliveries in Delhi have increased from 23.6% in 2019–21 to 27.4% in 2023–24, according to data. FILE PHOTO

Cause for concern

The World Health Organization (WHO) says that while caesarean sections are safe when medically justified, they carry short and long-term risks, including for future pregnancies, especially in settings with limited obstetric care.

Doctors attribute the rise to a mix of medical and social factors. Dr. Tripti Raheja, Director, Obstetrics and Gynaecology, CK Birla Hospital, said delayed pregnancies are a key driver, with more women conceiving in their 30s and facing complications such as obesity, gestational diabetes, and hypertension that often require surgical delivery.

Dr. Manju Puri, formerly an obstetrician and gynaecologist at Lady Hardinge Medical College and now at SGT College, Gurugram, said patient preference is also contributing. "More patients are requesting C-sections for painless delivery, and doctors may not always strongly discourage this due to concerns about complications and potential liability," she said.

She added that vaginal delivery is generally safer when there is no medical indication for surgery. "It becomes a concern when such demand spreads to areas with weaker health infrastructure," she said, noting recent reports of maternal deaths linked to C-sections in parts of the country, including Kota, Rajasthan.

Doctors also flagged environmental factors. Dr. Payal Chaudhary, Obstetrician and Gynaecologist, said that while there is no direct causal link, poor air quality is associated with adverse pregnancy outcomes such as preterm birth, foetal growth restriction, and hypertensive disorders, which may increase the likelihood of C-sections.

Increasing demand

Praveen K. Pathak, professor at the Delhi School of Economics, called the trend alarming, noting that the WHO recommends C-section rates stay around 10% due to risks to both mother and infant. He added that higher rates in private hospitals could point to profit-driven practices.

Researchers say the key issue is whether every C-section is medically necessary, which is not always the case. "NFHS shows the trend, not the medical reasons behind each delivery. The rise is a signal for deeper investigation through audits, public-private comparisons, and studies on patient and provider choices," said Apoorva Sharma, a researcher in medical and biological anthropology,

Experts say the way forward lies in improving accountability and patient awareness. Ms. Sharma called for better documentation of medical indications, stronger labour support, pain relief access, second opinions before non-emergency C-sections, and greater transparency in private facilities.

They emphasised the focus should be on appropriate use of the procedure, not restricting necessary care.

Post-delivery issues: expert team inspects hospital in Bikaner

Press Trust of India
BIKANER

A team of specialist doctors from Jodhpur Medical College inspected the PBM Hospital in Bikaner on Wednesday as part of an ongoing probe into the recent cases of post-delivery complications among women, including kidney-related issues, officials said.

The team was constituted by State Health Minister Gajendra Singh Khimsar after six women developed serious health complications following caesarean deliveries at the hospital. They were later admitted to the ICU after their condition deteriorated, with some requiring dialysis.

During the visit, the team inspected the gynaecology department, operating theatres and ICU wards, and also interacted with patients and their family members to understand the sequence of events.

Detailed deliberation

Dr. Prabhu Prakash Gupta from the Microbiology Department, who is part of the six-member team, said each specialist made individual observations and added that a conclusion will be drawn only after detailed deliberation.

The development comes after the Minister clarified that the Bikaner case was a separate case from the Kota incident, where five women had died days after childbirth.

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INBRIEF

Wild jumbo attack claims one more life in Wayanad

A 65-year-old man was killed in a wild elephant attack in Wayanad of Kerala on Wednesday. The victim was attacked while forest officers and residents were attempting to drive the elephant away after it entered a populated area. Just a day earlier, a woman was killed in an elephant attack in Idukki. Forest Minister Shibu Baby John has issued directives to form a 500-member special reserve force to address the increasing hardships faced by people due to wild elephant attacks.

From June 15, free bus ride for Kerala women, trans people

The Kerala Cabinet on Wednesday decided to implement the free bus travel scheme for women and transgender people on ordinary services of the Kerala State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) from June 15 onwards. Chief Minister V.D. Satheesan said the scheme titled 'Priyadarshini' was being limited to ordinary services in the first phase. He said the concession would be available to women of all ages and irrespective of their financial background.

Drug smugglers clash with police in A.P.; four nabbed

The Alluri Sitharama Raju district police fired two rounds in the air, after a group of ganja smugglers allegedly attempted to attack personnel with stones, during a vehicle checking operation at Meduru village in Andhra Pradesh on Wednesday. According to sources, the incident occurred when the police were conducting routine vehicle inspections in the area. Four of the suspects who were allegedly transporting ganja from Odisha were caught.

₹2,533-cr. facilities to be built for Central staff in Amaravati

In Cabinet meeting chaired by PM Modi, two major projects in the A.P. capital were approved; they are aimed at creating modern office, residential infrastructure for Central government employees

Sambasiva Rao M.
AMARAVATI

In a significant boost to the development of Andhra Pradesh's capital city Amaravati, the Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday approved two major Central government infrastructure projects, with a revised combined estimated cost of over ₹2,533 crore.

The approved projects include the Central Government General Pool Office Accommodation (CGGPOA) and the General Pool Residential Accommodation (GPRA), which are aimed at creating modern office and residential infrastructure for the Central government employees in the capital.

On the anvil: The proposed Central government residential complex at Amaravati, Andhra Pradesh. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

According to the decision, the CGGPOA project will be developed at an estimated cost of ₹1,299.08 crore, with a total built-up area of 23.25 lakh square feet. The project is intended to provide office accommodation for Central government departments and agencies.

The GPRA project, designed to provide residential facilities for government employees, has been approved at an estimated cost of ₹1,234.91 crore.

Green structures

The housing complex will have a built-up area of 31.30 lakh square feet.

The projects have been planned with a strong focus on sustainability and green infrastructure. The buildings will have a minimum GRIHA 4-Star rating, comply with the Energy Conservation and Sustainable Building Code (ECSBC) 2024 standards and incorporate energy-efficient and environmentally friendly design features.

The Cabinet also focused on inclusive development, and said the proposed campuses would be barrier-free and accessible for Divyangjan (persons with disabilities).

The projects will include modern civic and community facilities to improve the quality of life for residents and employees.

Bharathiraja, ace film director, passes away in Chennai at 84

B. Kolappan
CHENNAI

Bharathiraja

Renowned Tamil film director Bharathiraja, who had been ailing for a while, passed away in Chennai on Wednesday. He was 84.

Celebrated for shifting Tamil cinema from studio-bound film-making to authentic rural landscapes and for his iconic opening line, "*Yen Iniya Tamil Makkale*", delivered in his distinctive voice, he was a transformative force in not only Tamil but also Indian cinema.

A towering personality in the film industry, fondly called *Iyakkunar Imayam* (pinnacle among directors), Bharathiraja won six National Film Awards, four Filmfare Awards (South), six Tamil Nadu State Film Awards, and a Nandi Award. He was instrumental in introducing several new actors in Tamil cinema. In a characteristic move, he rechristened many actors with names beginning with "R", gifting the industry with Radikaa, Revathi, Radha, Ranjitha, and Rekha.

Bharathiraja shared a close association with composer Ilaiyaraaja and his brother Gangai Amaran even before they had made their mark in the film world. Ilaiyaraaja went on to compose music for many of Bharathiraja's films, delivering a string of unforgettable hits before the two eventually parted ways.

His debut film, *16 Vayathinile*, starring Sridevi, Kamal Haasan, and Rajinikanth, broke new ground in Tamil cinema. It portrayed rural life with striking realism, capturing villagers in all their complexity. The music, composed by Ilaiyaraaja, was a runaway success. *Senthoora Poove*, penned by Gangai Amaran, earned singer S. Janaki a national award.

His second film, *Kizhakke Pogum Rail*, dealt with powerful social themes, portraying caste oppression and the secondary treatment of women, without proclaiming itself to be a 'social film'. This subtle yet compelling approach to storytelling became a defining feature of Bharathiraja's cinema. Radikaa was introduced as a heroine in this film.

Sigappu Rojakkal explored what was then an unthinkable theme – a psychopathic serial killer driven by extreme misogyny. Director K. Bhagyaraj, an associate of Bharathiraja, appeared in one scene, while director Manivannan was also among his associates, who later emerged as a prominent filmmaker.

Bharathiraja also acted in some of his films.

RELATED REPORTS
» PAGE 5

No AI use for White Paper, says Kerala CM

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Reacting to the charge that sensitive financial data were exposed in the preparation of the White Paper on Kerala's fiscal health, Chief Minister V.D. Satheesan on Wednesday said former Finance Minister K.N. Balagopal was the first to reveal the cash balance in the Treasury.

He also denied the allegation that artificial intelligence (AI) was used to draft the White Paper. He was reacting to CPI(M) leader and former Finance Minister T.M. Thomas Isaac's charge that sensitive Finance Department information, such as treasury cash balance data, had been divulged to external sources and that "substantial portions" of the White Paper, tabled in the Assembly on June 4, were AI-generated.

Mr. Satheesan said AI tools were not used in this specific instance. Former Union Cabinet Secretary K.M. Chandrasekhar, who headed the panel that drafted the White Paper, himself had denied that AI was used, he said. "Even if AI was used, what is wrong with it? The government intends to use AI tools for data-driven governance," the Chief Minister said.

'Short of ₹20,500 crore'

Mr. Satheesan also reiterated his concern that the State Plan would be short of ₹20,500 crore due to a higher anticipation in the 2026-27 Budget estimates than the provision for Kerala made by 16th Finance Commission. He described the shortfall as "unexpected".

Mr. Balagopal said that his disclosure of the cash balance pertained to the final figures at the end of the financial year. Handing over details of government transactions, confidential statistics and reports handled by the secret sections of the Finance department to an external group (the panel that drafted the White Paper) was a wrong decision, he added.

Death toll in explosion at A.P. steel plant rises to nine

Harish Gilai
VISAKHAPATNAM

The death toll in the explosion at the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP) rose to nine on Wednesday, after a critically injured contract worker died of burns while undergoing treatment at MGM Seven Hills Hospital.

The worker, Paidiraju, 50, was a resident of Gangavaram in Gajuwaka. He is survived by his wife and two sons. Paidiraju was among the six workers seriously injured in the blast at SMS-1 of the VSP on Monday. According to hospital sources, he had suffered more than 90% burns. Despite receiving intensive care, he died on Wednesday. The body was shifted to King George Hospital for a post-mortem.

'Neglecting workers'

Meanwhile, YSRCP president Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Wednesday accused the NDA government of failing to protect the VSP from privatisation and neglecting the welfare of its employees.

Referring to NDA leaders' announcement that each affected family would receive benefits worth ₹1.72 crore, he alleged that most of the amount comprised the employee's own retirement benefits. "Out of the ₹1.72 crore being cited, nearly ₹1.45 crore comes from the worker's retirement benefits. The Centre is providing ₹25 lakh, while ₹2 lakh is coming from the PM's Relief Fund. The State is not contributing a single rupee," the YSRCP leader alleged.

He demanded that the government announce an ex gratia of ₹1 crore to the families of those who died.

Heat relief

Shades of summer: Residents seek respite under the shade of trees along Beach Road in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday as clouds gather after temperatures touched around 41 degrees Celsius, offering relief from the searing summer heat. K.R. DEEPAK

Telangana BJP helped dig up case against M.P. Cong. leader

Ravi Reddy
HYDERABAD

In a dramatic, time-bound operation, Telangana BJP leaders played a pivotal behind-the-scenes role in the rejection of Congress leader and former MP Meenakshi Natarajan's nomination for a Rajya Sabha seat from Madhya Pradesh.

Party sources described the sequence as a race against time that unfolded over four hours, triggered by a query from the national leadership on whether any case was pending against Ms. Natarajan in Hyderabad, where she serves as AICC in-charge.

Caught off guard by the query, a senior Telangana BJP functionary initiated a rapid verification exercise, mobilising the party's legal cell. The urgency stemmed from the narrow window available to challenge nominations before scrutiny deadlines closed.

Twists and turns

After searches for FIRs against the Congress leader yielded no result, the breakthrough came during the second phase, when the team reached out to practising advocates to ascertain whether any private complaints had been filed in court. An advocate tipped off the team about a private petition filed in a Nampally court by a woman, primarily against Congress leader Kumbham Shiv Kumar Reddy, in which Ms. Natarajan and others were respondents.

The BJP legal team's next challenge was to secure proof. According to party insiders, the team managed to obtain copies of the petition and the court notice issued to all respondents. However, the most crucial element remained whether Ms. Natarajan had responded to the notice. By around 3 p.m., the BJP leaders had gathered the complete set of documents, including the counter filed by the Congress leader.

Based on the material submitted, the Returning Officer ultimately rejected Ms. Natarajan's nomination, a decision that reportedly caught Congress leaders off guard and triggered political ripples beyond Madhya Pradesh. For her part, Ms. Natarajan, in her counter to the court, denied all allegations.

A.P. Police bust child trafficking gang, rescue 15 Bihari children

The Hindu Bureau
ONGOLE

The traffickers were involved in putting the children to work as daily labourers at factories in T.N.

Fifteen children from Bihar were reportedly rescued by the Prakasam District Child Welfare Committee (CWC) at the Ongole railway station, Andhra Pradesh, while travelling on the Jogbani-Erode Amrit Bharat Express (16602) on Tuesday evening. The police arrested a child trafficking gang of 12 members who were allegedly involved in exploiting the children to work as daily labourers at various factories in Tamil Nadu.

The rescue operation was carried out through the joint efforts of Government Railway Police (GRP) and Railway Protection Force (RPF), along with voluntary organisations – HELP (Helping Entire Lower and rural People), SARDS (Social Activities For Rural Development Society), Association for Voluntary Action (AVA), and Society for Integrated Rural Development (SFIRD).

On the orders of District Collector P. Raja Babu, the children were presented before District Joint Collector Kalpana Kumari, who further directed the police to take strict legal action against those who were involved in the trafficking.

She also instructed them to ascertain the specific districts in Bihar from which the children hailed and to inform their parents to ensure their safe return to native places.

Following the orders of the Joint Collector, accommodation was arranged for the children at the District Social Welfare Hostel to be a temporary shelter under the CWC. HELP Foundation project director B.V. Sagar, along with CWC and District Child Protection Officer (DCPO) P. Dinesh Kumar visited the children on Wednesday.

'Courts cannot be mute spectators when well-being of voiceless animals is at stake'

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Observing that courts cannot remain "mute spectators" when the well-being of voiceless animals is at stake, the Supreme Court has directed the Kerala government to take custody of Uttoly Raman, a well-known elephant in the State, and shift it to a rescue and rehabilitation centre pending a final decision on its ownership.

The SC Bench said it was compelled to pass the direction after finding that the tusker had been subjected to commercial exploitation, and used in rituals despite an earlier order prohibiting it.

Contempt of court: Jumbo Uttoly Raman was used in ceremonial processions despite a prohibitory order. REPRESENTATIONAL IMAGE

"In the given circumstances, where the issue pertaining to the custody of the elephant in question is yet to be decided; and with a view to prioritise the health and overall well-being of the elephant, this court deems it appropriate to direct the State of Kerala to take over the custody of the elephant, and house it in a rescue/rehabilitation centre," the Bench said in an interim order.

The order came on a contempt plea by Jayakrishnan Menon. He alleged that Krishnankutty, who had been granted temporary custody of the elephant amid a dispute involving the Mata Amritanandamayi Mutt, had violated an assurance given to the court that Raman would not be used for "commercial or temple activities".

"It is truly unfortunate that the elephant in question.., has been subjected to commercial exploitation despite an order restraining such exploitation, that too on the strength of an undertaking made before this court," the Bench said.

It also imposed a fine of ₹2,000 on Mr. Krishnankutty, finding him guilty of breaching the undertaking furnished to the court.

President lauds Modi on becoming longest-serving PM

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday congratulated Prime Minister Narendra Modi on becoming India's longest continuously serving elected Prime Minister, completing 4,399 days in office.

In a letter marking the occasion, the President described the achievement as an expression of the faith that voters had repeatedly placed in Mr. Modi's leadership through successive elections.

"Few responsibilities in public life demand as much dedication, resilience and perseverance as the office of the Prime Minister of India," Ms. Murmu wrote.

She added that the milestone was not merely about the length of time spent in office but also about the confidence reposed in him by the people.

The President said the country had witnessed major changes across sectors during the past 12 years and welcomed the large participation of women in these initiatives aimed at financial inclusion. She also highlighted the use of technology in governance, saying that it has improved transparency, accountability and the delivery of public services. Welfare schemes were now reaching beneficiaries with greater speed and efficiency, helping strengthen trust between citizens and the government, she observed.

The President described the achievement as an expression of faith that voters have placed in Mr. Modi's leadership.

In her letter the President said development under Mr. Modi's tenure had increasingly focused on public participation, dignity and equal opportunity and highlighted that measures relating to poverty alleviation, healthcare, farmers' welfare and support for the middle class has improved the lives of millions across the country.

PM credits 'public maturity' for NDA's 12-year stable rule

Modi says 'instability and turmoil' before 2014 made the country 'suffer immensely', adding that govt. will make all efforts to fulfil the aspirations of youth, women, the middle class, and farmers

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said the maturity of the people in choosing a stable government has allowed long-term reforms and rapid development over the past 12 years under the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) regime led by him.

He thanked the people for giving him the opportunity to serve them. "Before 2014, there was instability and turmoil for many decades, because of which the country had to suffer immensely," said Mr. Modi at the NDA conclave.

Mr. Modi said the people were now witnessing and experiencing the benefits of a stable government and were admiring its decisive approach.

He said the advantages of a stable government are being noticed during the current global crisis and previously during the COVID-19 pandemic, from which the country emerged stronger.

Stating that the government will make all efforts to fulfil the aspirations of all sections of society, particularly youth, women, the middle class, and farmers, Mr. Modi said that today every citizen was "dreaming" of a developed India.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi being felicitated by BJP chief Nitin Nabin during the NDA Conclave in New Delhi on Wednesday. PTI

"I never thought that one day such a milestone would also arrive, that as an elected Prime Minister I would have the opportunity to serve continuously for the longest period. I consider this my supreme good fortune to serve Mother India... it is possible only because of the special grace of God. And for me, the people are a manifestation of God," said Mr. Modi. The Prime Minister said he viewed service to his countrymen as a spiritual practice, adding that it had always been a collective 'yagna'.

The Prime Minister said the country was today moving forward rapidly aboard the "reform express", in cooperation with the people who extended wholehearted support. "We must continue moving forward with this public trust and participation, which is the true driving force behind building a developed India," he said.

Calling for healthy competition among the States over becoming a trillion-dollar economy the fastest, generating employment, and encouraging innovation, Mr. Modi said the country should now set its sights on a self-reliant future, including in terms of energy security.

"Keeping the goal of 2047 in mind, we must increase our pace even further. India must now think in terms of parameters and competition from a global perspective. The world sees India as a reliable partner. We must keep ourselves at the forefront of futuristic technologies," he said.

Trump lauds PM Modi's milestone

WASHINGTON
U.S. President Donald Trump on Wednesday greeted Prime Minister Narendra Modi on becoming India's longest-serving elected Prime Minister. "Congratulations to my friend, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on becoming India's longest-serving Prime Minister – And a Great One he is," Mr. Trump said in a post on Truth Social. PTI

NDA leaders pass resolution hailing Modi government

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Leaders of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) gathered in the national capital on Wednesday to laud Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who, after serving 4,399 days in office, became the country's longest serving continuously elected Prime Minister.

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu moved the "resolution of gratitude" in honour of Mr. Modi.

Former Bihar Chief Minister and Janata Dal (United) president Nitish Kumar was conspicuous by his absence, though his son and Bihar Minister Nishant Kumar attended the meeting.

Moving the resolution, Mr. Naidu described Mr. Modi as the "right leader, at the right time, in the right place".

Achievement list

The nearly 3,000-word resolution listed the achievements of the Modi government over the past 12 years, and said Mr. Modi's leadership "epitomises delivery, accountability and integrity", achieved through the "integration of people-centric development, participative democracy and performance-oriented governance".

Describing Mr. Modi as the first Prime Minister born after Independence and the first non-Congress Prime Minister to secure a third consecutive mandate, the resolution said he had forged a "unique bond" with the people of India.

The resolution also underlined the NDA's political expansion over the past decade. It said the alliance currently governs States accounting for more than three-fourths of India's population and territory. Positioning itself as pro-Dalit and pro-tribal, the resolution noted that the NDA is in power in seven of the 10 States with the highest Scheduled Caste populations, and eight of the 10 States with the highest Scheduled Tribe populations.

"The NDA is in power in almost all the States of the northeast, many of which have high tribal as well as Christian populations," the resolution said.

The resolution also praised the government's handling of terrorism, citing measures including surgical strikes, air strikes, and Operation Sindoor.

Modi is presiding over the murder of democracy: Cong.

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Mounting a scathing attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Congress on Wednesday said Mr. Modi had a "Nehru fixation" and accused him of "presiding over the murder of democracy in India".

In a post on social media platform X, Congress general secretary (communication) Jairam Ramesh charged the Modi government of "dubiously inventing a milestone", referring to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s celebration of Mr. Modi upon his becoming the longest-serving elected Prime Minister.

Comparing Nehru's tenure with that of Mr. Modi, Mr. Ramesh said Nehru had presided over a stellar Cabinet in 1947, which laid the foundation for a modern India. "The 1947-52 record of achievements of India with Nehru as PM, and in which stalwarts like Sardar Patel, Dr. Ambedkar, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, C. Rajagopalachari, and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad played such a pivotal role, is now sought to be erased by Mr. Modi, who has a pathological fixation on Nehru," Mr. Ramesh said in his post.

Jairam Ramesh

"He may have passed a self-proclaimed and dubiously invented milestone today, but he is a millstone around India's neck, presiding as he is over the Murder of Democracy in India," he added.

Listing out the achievements of the first Nehru Cabinet, Mr. Ramesh said 560 princely states were integrated peacefully into the Indian Union, the Constitution of India was debated and adopted, zamindari was abolished, reservations for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes were put in place, multipurpose irrigation-cum-power projects were launched, infrastructure for science and technology capability (including in nuclear energy) was established, and India emerged "as a force in global affairs".

"Electoral rolls bearing 170 million registered voters were prepared to ensure universal adult franchise and free India's first General Elections were held between October 1951 and February 1952. The very same establishments of democracy – an independent Election Commission and a sacrosanct voter list – are now threatened," Mr. Ramesh said.

Union Cabinet passes resolution praising PM for reaching milestone

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday congratulated Narendra Modi on becoming the longest-serving elected Prime Minister of the country.

At a press briefing, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the occasion stood as a symbol of India's democratic consciousness, public trust, and the power of public participation, reflecting the unprecedented support bestowed by the people upon a leader guided by the "nation first" resolve.

The Cabinet adopted resolutions expressing gratitude for the work done under his leadership for the welfare and empowerment of the poor and the marginalised, and appreciated his policies that have enabled over 25 crore poor people to defeat poverty, and his efforts for inclusive growth and social justice. It praises his leadership in strengthening national security and extended its full support for his resolve in building a "Viksit Bharat (Developed India)".

The adopted resolution concluded by extending best wishes for Mr. Modi's excellent health and long life. "It firmly expresses absolute confidence that under the leadership of Shri Narendra Modi, India will continue to achieve new heights as a self-reliant, secure, prosperous, and glorious nation, strongly paving the way to becoming a developed nation by 2047," said a government release.

The resolution underscored that the "political stability, dynamic governance, and far-sighted policies of the last 12 years have transformed India into the world's fastest-growing large economy".

Bengal CM keeps Home; Swapan gets Finance

The Hindu Bureau
KOLKATA

Governor R.N. Ravi on Wednesday allocated portfolios to the Ministers in West Bengal. Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari will keep the portfolios of Home and Hill Affairs, Information and Cultural Affairs and Power along with other Departments.

BJP MLA from Rashbehari, Swapan Dasgupta, will hold the charge of the Finance Department, and veteran politician Tapas Roy has been given the Department of Industries and Power. Sharadwat Mukherjee will hold the Health and Family Welfare portfolio.

Journalist-turned-politician Jagannath Chattopadhyay has been given the responsibility of the Higher Education and Technical Education Department, while Dipak Barman was put in charge of the School Education Department. Arjun Singh has been assigned the charge of the Labour and Transport Ministry. Sankar Ghosh will be in-charge of the Ministry of Parliament Affairs and Tourism, and Manoj Kumar Oraon will be in charge of the Ministry of Forest and Environment. Birbhum MLA Dudh Kumar Mondal has been allocated the charge of the Agriculture Ministry.

Suvendu Adhikari

Several of the Ministers took charge of their respective Ministries on Wednesday and spoke to media persons about their priorities. "My priority will be to bring back the Tatas in a big way in the State. The situation created by the previous Trinamool Congress-led government was pathetic. We want to send a strong message that Bengal is ready for industry once again," Industry Minister Mr. Tapas Roy said.

Finance Minister Mr. Swapan Dasgupta said he would hold talks with different stakeholders and try to understand the situation on ground. Tourism Minister Mr. Sankar Ghosh said West Bengal had a lot of tourism potential and his objective would be to bring the State on the global tourism map.

Five Cabinet Ministers were sworn in with Mr. Adhikari on May 9. There has been no change in the Ministries allocated to them.

The Council of Ministers has 41 Ministers, including Chief Minister Mr. Adhikari. There are about 54 departments in the West Bengal government.

Rahul meets Abhishek Banerjee in Delhi

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi met Trinamool Congress national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee here on Wednesday, a day after Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee held talks with former Congress president Sonia Gandhi.

There was no official word on what transpired in the meeting at 10 Janpath, Ms. Gandhi's official residence, on Tuesday. The meetings come against the backdrop of efforts to forge unity and better coordination within the INDIA bloc.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge has also called for a meeting of his party colleagues on Thursday.

Trinamool moves HC over legality of CID search at party office

The Hindu Bureau
KOLKATA

The Trinamool Congress moved the Calcutta High Court on Wednesday, challenging the legality of the search operation conducted by the CID at the party office located on the premises of the residence of former Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, in connection with an alleged forgery of signatures of party MLAs.

The matter was mentioned before Justice Saugata Bhattacharyya by Senior Advocate Kishore Datta.Officials said the petition was filed by senior MP Kalyan Banerjee on behalf of the party.

The matter is scheduled to be heard on Thursday.

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the West Bengal police searched the residence of former Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in Kolkata on Tuesday in connection with the alleged forgery of the signatures of two Trinamool Congress MLAs.

Both Ms. Banerjee and her nephew and party general secretary Abhishek Banerjee were not present in the house and therefore former Trinamool MP Subhasish Chakraborty said he could not allow the CID officials inside.

However, CID officials countered, saying that they had come to search the Trinamool party office on the premises, and not the residence of Ms. Banerjee, and accusing Mr. Chakraborty of "obstructing the investigation".

Trinamool MP quits Rajya Sabha, meets Assam CM

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

In another jolt to the Trinamool Congress, Rajya Sabha member Sushmita Dev resigned from the Upper House and the party on Wednesday, even as speculation continued about a significant number of their Lok Sabha members, led by Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar, claiming ownership of the party in the Lower House.

Second resignation

Ms. Dev had joined the Trinamool Congress after quitting the Congress in 2021. She is the second Trinamool MP to resign this week. With her resignation, the party is down to 11 seats in the Upper House. Earlier, Sukhendu Sekhar Ray had tendered his resignation from the party as well as the Rajya Sabha.

Sushmita Dev

Ms. Dev reasoned that her politics is in Assam, and while remaining in the Trinamool, she was unable to fulfil the expectations of the people of her State, since the party had no clear plans for Assam.

Within hours of her resignation, she met Assam Chief Minister and senior BJP leader Himanta Biswa Sarma. Though she did not clarify whether the meeting was the first step towards joining the BJP, Ms. Dev claimed that she met Mr. Sarma because he was the "best person to guide" her in these "uncertain times".

She said that during her tenure in the Trinamool, she had put in her best efforts. Soon after joining, she was sent to work in Tripura, followed by Goa, and then Assam. In Assam, she underlined that the Trinamool, for the first time, has a legislator in the State Assembly.

She refrained from casting any aspersions on the Trinamool, but added that there was nothing new for her to do in the Rajya Sabha. "I am unable to deliver the expectations people have from me while continuing in the Trinamool," she said, while also adding that to deliver, one has to work with the government.

No pressure on kin of victims to accept compensation: airline

Jagriti Chandra
NEW DELHI

Two days before the first anniversary of the Air India Ahmedabad crash on June 12, 2025, Air India has responded to a letter from the daughter of former Gujarat Chief Minister Vijay Rupani, who lost his life in the crash, accusing the airline of arm-twisting families to waive legal rights while accepting interim compensation.

In its letter to Radhika Rupani, a copy of which was reviewed by *The Hindu*, Air India has denied applying pressure on any family or individual to accept full and final compensation within a fixed time frame. "Our offer of final compensation did not set out any timetable for acceptance. Families are entirely free to wait until the investigation report has been released, as some have chosen to do," the airline said in its letter. The final investigation report into the crash is awaited, with the government expected to release an interim report on the first anniversary of the crash.

Earlier, Radhika Rupani wrote to Tata Sons chief N. Chandrasekaran, accusing the airline of asking families to "waive present and future claims" while receiving interim compensation.

The airline said interim payments of ₹25 lakh had been made to 96% of the families of the deceased, with the remaining cases pending largely due to incomplete documentation.

Director's cue: Bharathiraja with actors Aruna and Vijayashanthi while filming *Kallukkul Eeram*. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Enduring classic: Bharathiraja and actor Sridevi with the team of the film *16 Vayathinile*. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Caught on camera: A still of directors K. Balachander and Bharathiraja from the film *Rettaisuzhi*. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Big Three: Actors Rajinikanth and Kamal Haasan with director Bharathiraja at an event in Chennai in 2017. M. VEDHAN

Tales behind his timeless classic *Muthal Mariyathai*

Director Bharathiraja with legendary actor Sivaji Ganesan. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

B. Kolappan
CHENNAI

One of director Bharathiraja's masterpieces, *Muthal Mariyathai*, which portrayed the love between an ageing hero and a young woman, had its genesis in the love story of Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky and Anna Snitkina, who was 25 years younger than him.

Thespian Sivaji Ganesan and Radha played the lead roles in the film adaptation of the story. The song *Vettiveru Vaasam Vedalapullai Nesam*, composed by Ilaiyaraaja, encapsulated the story in a nutshell.

R. Selvaraj, Tamil film story writer and a close associate of Bharathiraja, recalls: "Initially, everyone was quick to write off the film as a flop. Producer and writer Panchu Arunachalam said the horse would lose the race. Music director Ilaiyaraaja also had reservations about the film's success. But the movie proved everyone wrong and became a major hit," he said.

It was Selvaraj's idea to include the scene in which Radha receives a strand of Sivaji Ganesan's silver hair as a memento.

When many people had given up on *Muthal Mariyathai*, Bharathiraja organised a special screening exclusively for women. "He handed each of them a sheet of paper and asked them to write their opinion. More than 40 women described it as a fantastic film. It was then that Bharathiraja decided to go ahead with the release," recalled Mr. Selvaraj.

Engaging stories, strong heroines define director Bharathiraja's repertoire

Bharathiraja decided he was done with conventional tropes of the hero, baddie, and a hanger-on heroine; he ensured that his gentle view of love and fierce view of society on celluloid would endure

Ramya Kannan
CHENNAI

As Bharathiraja breezed into Tamil cinema with *16 Vayathinile* with a sylvan landscape, he not only transformed what was being shown on screen but also brought in a new grammar for characterisation in Tamil cinema.

With fresh eyes, groomed on a rural story line in the lush surroundings of Theni in south Tamil Nadu, Bharathiraja decided he was done with the conventional tropes of the hero, the baddie, and a hanger-on heroine. Interestingly, this director who introduced a number of heroes and heroines, found that his heroines became iconic stars, while the heroes, with a few exceptions, got by. In this, lies the subtext of how Bharathiraja imagined and sculpted his *dramatis personnae* – strong women, mellow heroes, and a liberal spattering of motley characters adding depth to the storytelling.

Midas touch

This asymmetric attention that Bharathiraja pays to male and female characters emerges over his repertoire of films. Repeatedly, the heroines stand out in relief, while the heroes redefine "heroism". It is well known that Bharathiraja had a Midas touch in introducing heroines. Besides Radha, Radikaa, Revathy, Rekha, and Ranjitha, his 'R series' of heroines, Vijayashanti, an action heroine, also got a foothold in cinema thanks to him.

Take Mayil, for instance, in *16 Vayathinile*. Sridevi dazzles as a school girl whose vulnerabilities and strengths remain the pivot of the film. The men, whether it is Kamal Hassan's Chappani or Rajinikanth's Parattaiyan, never mind what position on the good-evil spectrum they may lie, are all destined to circumnavigate Mayil. For those seeking heroes in the movies, Bharathiraja offers Chappani, a man drawing courage and support from the heroine, a 'mellow hero'.

While Bharathiraja gave Chappani a noticeable limp, he also dared to give thespian Sivaji Ganesan age in the classic *Muthal Mariyathai*. In his masterpiece about love between an aged man and a young woman, Sivaji is the "mellow hero", his silver hair used as a metaphor and as a sign of the vulnerability that defines his screen character. In the "other" woman, Kuyilu, played by Radha, why, even in the fire-spitting wife, the shrewish Ponnatha essayed brilliantly by Vadivvukkarasi, Bharathiraja places that perfect foil to showcase Sivaji's mellow Malaichamy.

Bharathiraja's rich legacy includes warm characters, fallible heroes, and cultural context

Show stealer

Even in *Mann Vasanai*, where, on his debut, Pandian plays a cocky, carefree youth, it's clear he is rustic and naïve. It is Revathy, again on a debut that steals the show as Muthupechi who navigates the innocence of first love, the pain of separation, and the struggles of a young widow. A Revathy starrer again, the 1983 movie *Pudhumai Penn* pulled all the stops out taking a feminist line, boldly and unapologetically.

In *Kadolara Kavithaigal*, it is Sathyaraj as Chinnappa Das, a bully who undergoes the transformation in the story, but everyone who has watched the film knows that it is Jennifer teacher (Rekha) who is the fulcrum, the transformative agent. Again, setting off two completely polar characters against each other, Bharathiraja delivers another version of his romantic storytelling.

But Bharathiraja also pivoted, later in his career, to fixate on social issues. In the process, he created strong characters again, but as vessels for his ideas on social reform. There can be no better example for this than *Vedam Puthithu*, arguably the director's boldest, politically charged masterpiece. An unapologetic critique of the rigid caste system, Brahminical hegemony, and religious hypocrisy, it uses the character of Sathyaraj as Balu Thevar, and a child to deliver punches that rent the existing fabric of society.

Even *Alaigal Oivathillai*, an ostensible love story, explores the bitter complications of inter-religious love and marriage, in a touching take refreshingly told with debut artists Radha and Karthik, thrown together in young love.

In *Karuthamma*, the hero and heroine take a backseat and the overarching theme of female foeticide drives the film. In *Kizahkku Seemaiyile*, with a striking essay by Radikaa, the villain, but also the primary driver of the film, is a family feud that tears apart siblings.

Bharathiraja's rich legacy leaves us not only with glorious locales, but also with warm characters, fallible heroes, strong heroines, extraordinarily bold storylines, fierce criticism, and deep cultural contexts. As he leaves the world, he has ensured that his gentle view of love and fierce view of society on celluloid will endure.

ILLUSTRATION: SAAI

En iniya Thamizh makkale: unforgettable celluloid legacy of a son of the soil

K.C. Vijaya Kumar
CHENNAI

"*En iniya* Thamizh makkale (My dear Tamil people)," the prefatory line, marinated in love and warmth, has now become part of the mists of time. Legendary director Bharathiraja would utter these words as a preamble just before his celluloid offerings commenced.

It was his classic signature, one that hinted at another film rooted in Tamil Nadu's landscape and pulsating with its rural heart.

When Bharathiraja passed away on Wednesday, Tamil cinema lost one of its greatest auteurs. Ailing at 84, and being heartbroken after losing his son Manoj last year, the director, who launched a multitude of actors and directors, was in his twilight.

The Rajinikanth-Kamal Haasan duopoly may have its roots in the K. Balachander school, but it was Bharathiraja who offered them the road not taken through his stellar *16 Vayathinile*, also starring a wonderful Sridevi. The 1977 hit, steeped equally in the innocence and misogyny typical of a village, was the stuff of legend, and it yanked Tamil cinema from the stuffy confines of studios, and made outdoor shooting the preferred norm.

Versatile genius

Paddy fields, sugarcane farms and palm trees may have been his preferred background, but the versatile genius could also make a serial killer film, *Sigappu Rojakkal*, with Kamal doing a villainous turn.

Bharathiraja delved into social issues with gusto, he held a mirror, never flinched and his range was broad.

There was women's emancipation in *Pudhumai Penn*, the tender romance between an older man and a younger woman in *Muthal Mariyathai* with thespian Sivaji Ganesan and Radha dishing out a bravura performance, and a scathing expose on female foeticide in *Karuththamma*.

Heartbreaking loss: Bharathiraja encouraged young talent and launched a slew of actors. THE HINDU ARCHIVES

Bharathiraja delved into social issues with gusto, he held a mirror, never flinched and his range was broad

The perils of caste were focused upon in *Vedam Puthithu*, and equally, Bharathiraja could helm a commercial revenge saga through *Oru Kaidhiyin Diary*, also remade in Hindi as *Aakhree Raasta*.

Ear for music

He launched a slew of heroines ranging from Radikaa to Revathi, and had a fetish of renaming his heroines with names starting with the letter 'R'. Actor Karthik too debuted under Bharathiraja in *Alaigal Ooivathilai*. Fine music was intrinsic in this ace director's movie adventures, and to this day, there is chatter both about *Nizhalgal's* script and songs. Be it Ilaiyaraaja or A.R. Rahman, Bharathiraja could tap into their soul and glean their finest creative outputs.

He also inspired his assistant directors to carve their own path, and K. Bhagyaraj, R. Parthiban, and Pandiarajan all evolved from the Bharathiraja school of thought. Bhagyaraj, out of reverence, always referred to Bharathiraja as "*enga* director", and it was a bond that lasted decades.

As age and ailments caught up, Bharathiraja found a second wind in acting. Be it the wily politician in Mani Ratnam's *Aayitha Ezhuthu* or the old stunt master in Mohan Lal's Malayalam blockbuster *Thudarum*, the former director invested gravitas and believability into these characters.

Young talent

Supremely aware of his craft and very secure in his domain, Bharathiraja encouraged young talent. Always effusive in his praise, he would say in his unique English: "What a fellow, what a film, look at that climax, the framing, I told myself '*dei* Bharathiraja *nee out*'." When he appreciated Mari Selvaraj's *Pariyerum Perumal*, it metaphorically signalled the passing of the baton from one rural cinematic master to another peering wide at the Tamil hinterland.

Like the title of one of his hits, *Mann Vasanai*, Bharathiraja's films evoked the smell of the soil.

As Tamil filmdom lapse into grief, his films will stand the test of time, reminding us of a man, hailing from the leeward side of the Western Ghats, moving to Madras, while his affectionate gaze remained locked on the villages he left behind.

Bharathiraja and Ilaiyaraaja: a relationship that ebbed and flowed

B. Kolappan
CHENNAI

It was a friendship that weathered hardship, poverty, and adversity before each of the buddies scaled great heights in the film world.

The friendship between Bharathiraja and maestro Ilaiyaraaja and his brothers Gangai Amaran and the late Bhaskar spans more than half a century, though it had its share of ups and downs. Bharathiraja and Ilaiyaraaja parted ways after working together for years, but eventually rekindled their friendship.

Ilaiyaraaja and Gangai Amaran paid their last respects to their long-time friend on Wednesday.

"I pray from the bottom of my heart that his soul rests in peace. The relationship I shared with him was the same as the one I shared with all of you. It is my destiny to love this land, its people and its artistes. I pray to the Almighty," Mr. Ilaiyaraaja said.

Stories of struggle

The moment inevitably brought back memories of their struggle to gain a foothold in the film industry. However, even before the movie *16 Vayathinile*, Ilaiyaraaja had announced his arrival in a big way with *Annakili*.

The songs of *16 Vayathinile*, soaked in rustic charm and folk melodies, captured the imagination of the people. *Senthoora Poove*, penned by Gangai Amaran, won the national award for singer S. Janaki.

Recalling those difficult days in a conversation with *The Hindu* in 2018, Ilaiyaraaja said that in 1968, he, his brothers and a few friends boarded a bus to Chennai in search of a career in the film industry. The journey was anything but easy. Bharathiraja, who had worked with them in staging dramas, had already arrived in Chennai hoping to become an actor. Instead, he could find work only at a petrol bunk.

The group was forced to move into a small portion of a house at the end of Gangai Amman Koil Street, opposite Ram Theatre in Kodambakkam, after being evicted from a mansion where only three people were permitted to stay. Kamala, a singer in their troupe, arranged accommodation for them in an outhouse and allowed them to store their musical instruments at her house.

"Farming activities were still taking place in the area. Whenever I wanted to meet Dhanraj Master, I would take the 12B bus. The conductor, whose nickname was Fiddle, never charged me for a ticket. If a ticket inspector boarded the bus, he would immediately issue one to me," Mr. Ilaiyaraaja recalled.

A 'Navaratri' tradition

That year, heavy rain during *Navaratri* made life difficult. "There was waist-deep water everywhere and we had nothing to eat. Bharathiraja, my brother Bhaskar and I collected puffed rice and *pottu kadalai* distributed at shops from Ram Theatre to the Vadapalani Murugan Temple in paper cones made from *The Hindu* newspaper. For three days, we survived on that and water," he said.

When he later narrated the incident to his wife, she suggested that food be served at their house for 10 days during *Navaratri* every year and it still continues.

Though Bharathiraja and Mr. Ilaiyaraaja together made memorable films and songs, difference of opinion between them led to Bharathiraja roping in music director Devendran for the film *Vedam Puthithu*.

They again worked together for *En Uyir Thozhan*, *Puthunellu Puthunaathu*, and *Nadodi Thendral*. Once again differences cropped up between them and A.R. Rahman became the sought-after music director for Bharathiraja from *Kizhakku Seemaiyile*.

A reunion that wasn't

However, the duo agreed to work together in 2020 for the film *Aatha*. Writer and film director Bharathi Krishnakumar, who has penned the story for the movie, told *The Hindu* then: "After 28 years, they are going to work together and it is again for a rural theme."

The production was supposed to start after the COVID-19 pandemic, but it never took off.

Friendship through the ages: Film director Bharathiraja and maestro Ilaiyaraaja. STILLS RAVI

INBRIEF

Bristol, York, and UNSW get nod for campuses in India

The Education Ministry issued three Letters of Approval (LoAs) to three Foreign Higher Education Institutions – University of Bristol, the University of York and the University of New South Wales (UNSW) on Tuesday. The LoAs were handed over by Secretary, Department of Higher Education and Chairman, University Grants Commission, Dr. Vineet Joshi, in the presence of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan. Mr. Pradhan said that the setting up of campuses in India marked another important step in advancing the internationalisation of education vision of NEP 2020. He said that these institutions will further strengthen quality education, global learning partnerships and research collaboration in India.

NDMA rolls out push for 'Resilient India 2047'

The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has begun an effort to require Union Ministries to develop comprehensive disaster management plans and hazard-specific response frameworks as part of a broader push to build a "Resilient India 2047" aligned with the government's *Viksit Bharat* vision. At an inter-ministerial meeting on Tuesday, the NDMA discussed the preparation of hazard-specific plans under Section 35 of the Disaster Management Act and Ministry Disaster Management Plans under Section 37. The exercise aims at strengthening institutional preparedness and ensure disaster risk reduction is integrated into government policies.

Panel recommends targeted splitting of seats for next delimitation exercise

The model proposed by EAC-PM allows a 50% rise for all large States; dataset was based on elections to LS from 2009 to 2024; it results in increasing the size of Lok Sabha to 824 seats and is broadly in line with what the Centre had suggested when it brought the delimitation-related Bills in April

Varghese K. George
Abhinay Lakshman
NEW DELHI

The Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) has recommended multi-factor criteria for a "targeted" splitting of seats during India's next delimitation of Lok Sabha constituencies. The recommendations have been made in a new working paper that goes beyond population distribution and maintains the current proportion of Lok Sabha seats for all large States.

A model worked out by the EAC-PM on such criteria entails Kerala's Lok Sabha seats, for instance, rising from 20 to 30, Tamil Nadu's increasing from 39 to 59, and Uttar Pradesh's from 80 to 120 – broadly in line with what the Union government had suggested in April, when it brought the delimitation-related Bills but failed to pass them in Parliament.

The use of these criteria in the EAC-PM's model further suggested a doubling of the number of LS seats in smaller States and Union Territories such as Mizoram, Puducherry, Sikkim, Ladakh, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Nagaland, Chandigarh, and Lakshadweep. Out of the existing 543 seats, the EAC-PM's model suggests splitting a total of 170 seats, of which 59 constituencies have been recommended for a two-way split and 111 for a three-way split.

House of over 800 seats

The model results in increasing the size of the Lok Sabha to 824 seats. As per the Council, this will see the southern States' (Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu) aggregate share of seats in Lok Sabha come to 23.6% compared with the 23.7% currently.

Meanwhile, the share of the six most populous northern States (Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Bihar, and Maharashtra) will come to 45.2% as per the model, compared with the current 45.6%.

The existing proportion of seats-per-State was frozen based on the population figures of the 1971 Census. The freeze was brought in through a Constitutional Amendment in 1976.

While the EAC-PM notes that the next delimitation exercise is consequential because it would be the first time since then to allow altering per-State seat count, it does not comment on the underlying principle for essentially retaining the existing proportion of States' seats beyond saying that their model has been designed to "respect" the 50% per-State expansion.

Unique formula: The new working paper found a persistent gap in women's turnout in urban areas, even after constituency splits. PTI

The working paper, authored by EAC-PM member Shamika Ravi and Mudit Kapoor of the Indian Statistical Institute, says that its main objective was to address the following questions: "Which constituencies should be split, into how many parts, and on what criterion?"

In doing so, the EAC-PM said that it assembled a dataset on elections to LS seats from 2009 to 2024 to estimate a "statistical relationship" between voter turnout, constituency size, and five compositional features of the constituency (these include urban share, SC share, ST share, linguistic polarisation, and linguistic diversity).

The paper added that this estimated statistical relationship was then used to come up with a "turnout-maximising delimitation plan that splits the largest and most turnout-responsive constituencies into two or three parts".

Splitting constituencies

In the policy brief attached to the working paper, the EAC-PM goes on to recommend a "targeted criterion" for splitting constituencies instead of a "uniform one", adding that the "Delimitation Commission, when it is constituted after the 2027 Census", should "treat the joint demographic and linguistic profile of a candidate constituency, and not its size alone, as the criterion for splitting".

The Council went on to recommend that the Election Commission of India and the Ministry of Statistics should time the next delimitation exercise with a "fresh booth rationalising cycle" and the government should ensure that the "2027 Census tabulations and gender-disaggregated electoral statistics" are released on schedule.

It added that the working paper's model calculations showed that even after the splitting of constituencies, there remained a residual gap in the women's turnout percentages in urban areas, and thus recommended the EC to plan delimitation with measures like women-only polling booths and women-targeted voter roll update drives.

In their working paper-policy brief, Ms. Ravi and Mr. Kapoor further break down their study into six key findings. These deal with the relationship of different factors with constituency-wise voter turnouts. In one of its findings, the paper claimed that the model suggested by them is likely to lead to an overall increase of up to 2.3% in the voter turnout across the country in the next general election. The authors have, however, buttressed this with a caveat, saying that the gain in voter turnout would depend on which statistical specification is chosen, adding that the model was meant to answer what would happen when an electorate is reduced in size while retaining its composition.

The brief also says that between 2009 and 2024, the gap between voter turnouts in the smallest constituency and the largest constituency had halved. "Small constituencies descriptively out-vote large ones in 2024 because they sit on turnout-friendly compositional features (high ST share, low urban share, moderate linguistic polarisation), and not because they are small per se," it concluded.

The EAC-PM added that the demographic and linguistic measures used for the study were based on the 2011 Census and so would need to be updated with 2027 Census figures for a more reliable recalculation.

Bodies of six Naga men found; UNC seeks removal of Manipur Deputy CM

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

The bodies of the six Naga men who were allegedly abducted by Kuki armed groups on May 13 and had remained missing since then, were recovered by the police in Manipur's Kangpokpi district on Wednesday, the police said.

Manipur Director-General of Police (DGP) Mukesh Singh told *The Hindu* that after hectic efforts of nearly 24 hours by around 15 teams of the Manipur Police, Assam Rifles and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), the mortal remains of the six missing men could be located. "Legal formalities are being done," Mr. Singh said.

The United Naga Council (UNC), the apex body of the Nagas in Manipur declared a 24-hour shutdown in Naga areas and demanded the removal of Deputy Chief Minister Nemcha Kipgen.

Naga groups had held several demonstrations over the past weeks seeking the release of the six men who were held hostage. PTI

The UNC said that Ms. Kipgen is the wife of Semtinthang Kipgen, president of Kuki National Front-P (KNF-P), a Kuki insurgent group in suspension of operations agreement with the government and suspected to be complicit in the murder of the Naga civilians. The Naga body has also accused the residents of Leilon Vaiphei village of abducting the individuals.

The six men, including two pastors, and their family members were abducted on May 13 following the killing of three church leaders from the Thadou tribe in an ambush the same day in Kangpokpi. Twelve people including women and children were released later. At least 44 civilians were reportedly taken hostage by Kuki and Naga groups in Kangpokpi and Senapati districts. While several of those abducted were released earlier, 14 members of the Kuki community who remained in captivity were released on Tuesday and the bodies of the six missing Naga men was recovered by the security forces on Wednesday.

The UNC claimed that the bodies were mutilated and has refused to receive the bodies till the demands are met.

74 new land ports proposed along International Border

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

India proposes to build 74 additional land ports along the International Border in the coming years, which include three land ports along the China border and six along the Pakistan border, according to Land Ports Authority of India (LPAI) Chairperson Jayant Singh.

The new land ports are expected to strengthen trade and seamless movement of people with the neighbouring countries.

The land ports along the China border are proposed at Namgia in Himachal Pradesh, Gunji in Uttarakhand, and Nathu La in Sikkim. India does not have any other land port operational along the China border.

According to the External Affairs Ministry, three points are designated for conducting border trade between India and China – Lipulekh Pass in Uttarakhand (since 1992), Shipki La Pass in Himachal Pradesh (since 1995), and Nathu La Pass in Sikkim (since July 2006) but post-COVID pandemic in 2020, all trade is suspended. Trade points and land borders are different as the latter integrates immigration, customs and movement of large goods vehicles too.

Amit Shah during the inauguration of the Land Port Management System. ANI

The land ports planned along the Pakistan border are at Teetwal, Adusa, and Chakan Da Bagh in Jammu and Kashmir, Attari railway station and Hussainiwala in Punjab, and Munabao railway station in Rajasthan. At present, there is just one operational land port at Attari in Punjab and trade from the two Facilitation Centres located at Salamabad, Uri, Baramulla district and Chakkan-da-Bagh, Poonch district along Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir remained suspended since the Pulwama attack.

Under Phase II, 13 land ports are proposed along the Nepal border, 12 along the Bangladesh border, four along Bhutan and two along the Myanmar border, the presentation said.

SC invokes Article 142 to quash POCSO conviction

Aaratrika Bhaumik
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court used its powers under Article 142 to overturn a POCSO conviction, noting the victim later married the man as an adult.

The court observed that the couple should now be allowed to live "peacefully in society as spouses".

Article 142 enables the court to ensure "complete justice" when existing laws fall short. They had fallen in love while she was still a minor.

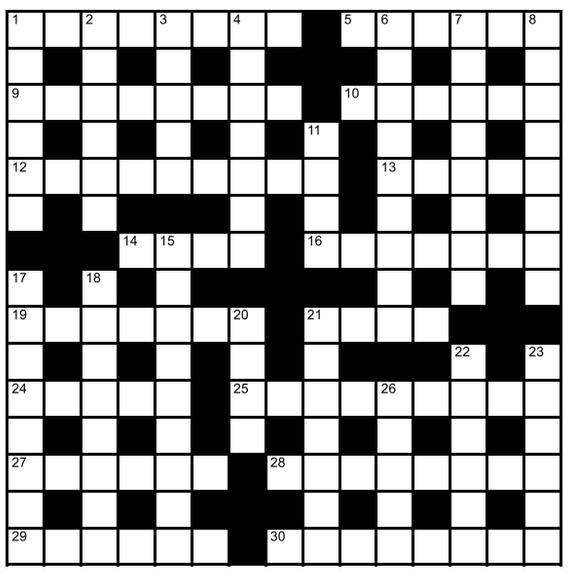
As per the case records, she lodged a criminal complaint after he refused to marry her. He was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment and fined for having a physical relationship with a minor.

TH CROSSWORD + 14817

(Set by KrisKross)

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

SCAN TO PLAY



Across

1 Chemist's quick to wrap wound (8)
5 Reportedly delivers heavy woollen fabric (6)
9 & 13 They are used to revive sailors with BO? (8,5)
10 It can hold breakfast food for one - greasy pot originally lined with copper (6)
12 Opponents try drills. Many give up (4,5)
13 See 9
14 Top trends in poems (4)
16 Temple town's function for a zealot (7)
19 Obscure quotations seen in memes regularly (7)
21 Panel changing sides in a month (4)
24 Country's popular face left out (5)
25 Pin ads around a flyer (9)
27 AI software not opening novel - it's an irritating problem (6)
28 Primarily many people excited in arena, resulting in this? (8)
29 One suffering hurt before try-out (6)
30 Woman is pinched by spoilt kid, most rude (8)

Down

1 Step dancing with extremely lovable crush (6)
2 Doctored images revealing bias (6)
3 Enrich soil greatly, taking in fertilisers essentially (5)
4 Dismiss very stupid person in campaign (7)
6 Administrator is back, charged with direction to rule (9)
7 Intensify police case, missing deadline (8)
8 Showing ten pigeons flying all around (8)
11 Break small plaything (4)
15 Evil God filled with power, chiefly crazy (9)
17 Idle vagrant, a bit intoxicated, overwhelmed by strange fever (8)
18 Glue dries for the most part, turning more muddy (8)
20 Some require a strategic direction (4)
21 After a month, bread counter becomes cleaner (7)
22 Ball's area (6)
23 Tune with hint of romance… girl starts crying (6)
26 American uncle excited about cats (5)

SUDOKU

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

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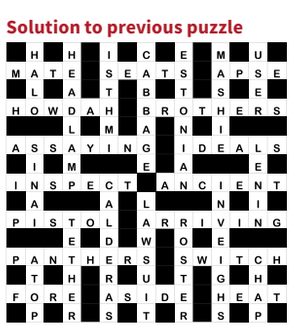
DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★☆☆

Solution to previous puzzle



Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

FAITH

Kanda Puranam benefits

Kanda Puranam tells the story of Murugan. Elders urge us to read it or to listen to discourses about it, for this will confer auspiciousness on us, said Sumathi Sri in a discourse. In fact, Kanda Puranam begins on an auspicious note, with the wedding of Parvati and Siva. It ends with the wedding of Valli and Murugan. And in between comes the Deivanai-Murugan wedding. A person who reads Kanda Puranam will live like Indra, the chief of the celestials. He will have joy in life. Eventually he will reach the feet of Lord Siva. We must not read Kanda Puranam without involvement and dedication. If we read it with hearts full of love for Lord Murugan, we will reap the rewards of such a study. Murugan is inseparable from His spear (*vel*). In fact, there are weapons which become the names of people, and the *vel* is one such. In Tamil Nadu, we come across names such as Vadivelan, Vetrivel, Velayudham and so on. If we seek Murugan's help, He will come at once to our aid.

The author of Kanda Puranam was Kachiappa Sivachariar. He was the son of Kalathi Sivachariar. Kachiappa Sivachariar was born in Kanchi. He gave the contents of the Sanskrit work Skanda Purana in Tamil and he called the Tamil work Kanda Puranam. Of the 18 Puranas, Skanda Purana has the distinction of being the longest. Lord Murugan appeared in Kachiappa Sivachariar's dream and asked him to write Kanda Puranam. Every day, Kachiappa Sivachariar would take his verses to the Kumara Kottam temple in Kanchi, and place the manuscripts at Murugan's feet. Murugan would make whatever corrections or changes were needed. Thus Kanda Puranam has the honour of having had Lord Murugan as its editor!

No 'obesity gene': your genetic makeup is not a fixed destiny

Scientists cannot reliably predict whether an individual carrying certain gene variants will eventually end up obese; put another way, there is no 'obesity gene', and for similar reasons, there is no 'fat gene', 'lazy gene' or 'hunger gene', genetics is also only one part of the story behind diseases

Sayantan Datta

In a 1983 paper, Harvard University geneticists James Gusella and Nancy Wexler reported that Huntington's disease, a fatal inherited disease where brain cells progressively decay, was caused by a gene mutation on chromosome 4. This was the first time a single gene had been implicated in a disease.

Since then, scientists have discovered about 5,000 genes whose mutations can increase our susceptibility to afflictions ranging from obesity to schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder.

Concomitant with the rise in genetic discoveries is the rise of commercial genetic testing. The U.S.-based company 23andMe, for example, offers a saliva-based test priced at around ₹20,000 that promises "insights into [people's] ancestry, traits and health that can help make it easier for [them] to take action on [their] health."

Similarly, Hyderabad-based MapMyGenome offers a "Genomepatri" service for ₹5,999. A play on *janampatri*, a Vedic birth chart purporting to forecast a person's destiny, Genomepatri offers to help consumers uncover their "authentic self" and enhance their health, according to their website.

But according to six geneticists this reporter spoke to, an individual's genetic composition is not their destiny.

"Mutations in our genes predispose us to specific traits and diseases, but it doesn't mean that if you have a mutation, you're going to get this disease," Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Hyderabad, molecular geneticist Manish Jaiswal said.

What then does it mean to find a gene for a trait or disease – and what happens when we carry them?

Genetic tests should always be followed by genetic counselling. Genetic counsellors are specialists who help people assess their risk of developing genetic disorders and help manage them. GETTY IMAGES

Genes, mutations, disease

Genes are segments of DNA that provide the body a blueprint for building proteins, which eventually help define traits like eye colour or blood type.

When cells in our body divide, specialised proteins make copies of the DNA. This process, while largely accurate, can introduce errors in the duplicated DNA. These changes are called mutations and the corresponding gene is said to have an allele – a variant.

Only a small fraction of an organism's genome – which is the entire length of its DNA – has genes that its body uses to build proteins. For human beings, this coding region comprises about 2% of the genome. The rest of the DNA is non-coding, i.e. not involved in producing proteins, but regulates gene expression.

If a mutation in the coding region impairs the protein product, it may lead to a disease. For example, in Huntington's disease, a small section of the *HTT* gene is repeated more times than in an average individual. This produces a longer version of the protein, whose toxic fragments accumulate in brain cells and eventually kill them. As brain cells continue to die, people begin showing symptoms of the disease.

Sometimes, mutations in non-coding regions of the DNA can also change an individual's risk of a disease. For example, four independent studies in 2007 found that mutations in a particular non-coding region of the DNA were associated with a higher risk of coronary artery disease and type 2 diabetes. Later, in 2011, researchers found that the region contained certain enhancers, short DNA sequences that boost the expression of certain genes.

Identifying genes

To identify genes associated with a trait or disease, scientists until recently took two kinds of approaches: candidate-gene studies and linkage studies.

In candidate-gene studies, scientists use existing information about the disease to identify potential gene candidates that, when mutated, may lead to the disease. For example, because schizophrenia is treated with drugs that regulate the amount of dopamine in the human brain, scientists assumed until 2007 that mutations in genes related to dopamine regulation were linked to schizophrenia.

While such studies were successful in some cases, like Alzheimer's disease, in others they could not reliably identify genes associated with the disease. In the case of schizophrenia, for example, 21 of 25 candidate genes scientists historically studied were found to have little "empirical support ... as genetic risk factors for schizophrenia," a 2015 review in *Molecular Psychiatry* reported.

Linkage studies on the other hand begin by identifying a population or a family where the incidence of a trait or disease is particularly high. Then, scientists study how known markers in their DNA are inherited. If members of the population carrying the trait or disease also inherit the same markers, scientists can claim that the gene variant responsible for the disease and the marker are close on the chromosome, i.e. they are linked. By using statistical techniques, scientists can then pinpoint the gene.

This method works well when diseases are caused by mutations in one or a few genes, National Institute for Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS) genetics researcher Jayant Mahadevan said. Such diseases, like Huntington's, are called monogenic when their risk is determined by mutations in one gene and oligogenic when it's determined by mutations in a few genes.

However, most monogenic diseases are rare: they occur in less than 1% of the population, Dr. Mahadevan added. Most common diseases, including diabetes, obesity, coronary artery disease, and schizophrenia, are polygenic: they are determined by mutations in several genes.

For example, mutations in more than a 100 genes have been implicated in typical obesity. For type 2 diabetes, the most common form of the disease, recent studies place the number at approximately 250 genes. For schizophrenia, scientists suggest that the number could run into several hundreds.

In order to identify gene variants responsible for such diseases, researchers now typically undertake genome-wide association studies (GWAS). By comparing entire DNA sequences of a large number of individuals who carry a disease with that of individuals who don't, scientists can identify hundreds of variations associated with the disease through the entire length of an individual's DNA. This gives researchers a more holistic picture of the gene variations underlying the disease.

No 'obesity gene'

But possessing one or more gene variants implicated in a disease does not mean that one is doomed.

For one, not all gene mutations implicated in a disease have the same effect size. This is a measure of how strongly a gene variant can affect a trait. For example, most gene variants implicated in schizophrenia are thought to have small effect sizes: for an individual's schizophrenia risk to increase substantively, they need to have mutations in several of these genes.

Studies have shown similar results in the case of gene variants associated with obesity. In a 2010 study, scientists studied the effect sizes of 12 implicated. These have "small effects on obesity measures," they reported. Even mutations in the *FTO* gene, known to have the largest effect on an individual's obesity risk and is commonly dubbed the "obesity gene", predisposes a person to only a modest increase in weight compared with individuals who do not carry these mutations, the study added.

> Mutations in our genes predispose us to specific traits and diseases, but it doesn't mean that if you have a mutation, you're going to get this disease
>
> **MANISH JAISWAL**
> Molecular geneticist at Tata Institute of Fundamental Research

Even though a combination of mutations in these genes could compound the risk, "their predictive value for obesity risk is limited," the researchers concluded.

This means scientists cannot reliably predict whether an individual carrying these gene variants will eventually end up obese. Put another way, there is no "obesity gene". And for similar reasons, there is no "fat gene", "lazy gene" or "hunger gene".

Genetics is also only one part of the story behind a certain disease. The other part is epigenetics: a that refers to how physical, behavioural, and social factors affect the gene expression and, eventually, an individual's risk of a disease.

"Think of the genome as a piano, where each key represents a gene," said epigenetics researcher Ullas Kolthur-Seetharam, director of the Centre for DNA Fingerprinting and Diagnostics, Hyderabad, and a professor at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai. "If a key is faulty, it can produce discordant notes – reflecting a potential disease risk. However, the system has flexibility: by adjusting how other keys are played, you can often compensate and still produce harmonious music."

"In the case of certain inherited diseases caused by critical mutations, some keys may be so impaired that no amount of adjustment can fully restore the intended melody," he added.

"In those situations, the limitation lies in the instrument itself. But for many complex conditions/diseases, how the piano is played (or how the genes are expressed) become as important as the keys themselves."

Indeed, behavioural and lifestyle interventions can actually reduce the risk of diseases. There is mounting evidence that in individuals with *FTO* variants that increase their risk of obesity, high-intensity exercise can reduce the gene's expression, potentially attenuating their risk of developing obesity. One 2015 study that investigated about 16,000 children and adolescents also found that "lower dietary protein intake attenuates the association between the *FTO* genotype and adiposity [the way fat is distributed] in children and adolescents."

Merits of genetic testing

In this context, what does it mean when scientists report identifying a new gene variant for a disease or a trait?

"All you've discovered is its pattern of occurrence in the population or the pattern of its transmission in a family," NIMHANS senior professor Sanjeev Jain, who works on the genetics of several neurological and psychiatric disorders, explained.

But figuring out whether the variant corresponds to the actual disease – and by how much – requires scientists to undertake more research involving diverse model systems, he added.

This doesn't mean genetic pursuit is itself useless, both Dr. Jain and Dr. Mahadevan cautioned. Genetic studies do help researchers identify the physiological mechanisms underlying a disease, which can help clinicians design more effective therapeutics. Scientists also often end up finding gene variants that are actually beneficial.

Starting in the 2000s, researchers discovered that some mutations in the *PCSK9* gene can drastically reduce the risk of coronary artery disease. Since then, clinicians have developed ways to silence the gene, thus reducing patients' cholesterol levels and mitigating the risk of stroke and heart attacks.

Some scientists also see merit in genetic testing – but only in certain contexts. Dimple Notani, a gene regulation researcher at the National Centre for Biological Sciences, Bengaluru, said women who conceive late could consider getting themselves screened for mutations linked to rare genetic disorders, which are often monogenic. But for traits that are not monogenic, "I wouldn't worry much," she added.

Genetic tests should always be followed by genetic counselling, Dr. Jaiswal, the TIFR Hyderabad geneticist, said. Genetic counsellors are specialists who help people assess their risk of developing genetic disorders, and help manage them.

In other words, genetics provides us with a helpful but incomplete picture. Between a mutation and its manifestation is a far messier story.

The reporter thanks Dr. Suhas Ganesh (NIMHANS) for his inputs.

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A colourful fence sports an axolotl mascot of the FIFA World Cup in Mexico City. REUTERS

World Cup's mascot axolotl nowhere in Mexico City

Reuters

One of the first things visitors arriving in Mexico City for the FIFA football World Cup are likely to see is the wide grin of an axolotl – with the salamander unique to this part of the world splashed in bright purple on murals and subway cars or depicted in sculptures dribbling a soccer ball.

Named after the Nahuatl word for "water monster", the axolotl (pronounced ah-sho-LO-tul) has become the unofficial mascot as the city gears up to host five World Cup matches.

But despite the undoubted cuteness of the almost otherworldly axolotl, the use of its image has drawn backlash from many Mexico City residents, who say the peppy portrayal of the critically endangered animal is being used to distract from both the infrastructure problems of the capital and its lack of conservation efforts.

Scientists trying to count axolotls in the wild say they have not seen a single one in two years. The Mexico City government did not respond to requests for comment.

Along with the constant flow of poorly treated wastewater, fresh dangers to the axolotl include chinampas being turned into soccer pitches and overcrowding due to ecological tourism

Ernesto Velazquez, 19, who runs an axolotl-themed stand selling cuddly toys in Chapultepec park, said he hopes the newly painted images around the city can drive more interest in conservation.

"Some foreigners have asked if you can eat them – well no, they're at risk of extinction," he said. "I hope the World Cup will help people learn more so we take better care of them."

A disappearing habitat

For centuries, *Ambystoma mexicanum*, an amphibian that remains living in water through its life cycle, thrived between chinampas – farms built on human-made floating islands that once sustained the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan, where modern-day Mexico City lies.

The lake the city was built on was largely drained during colonial rule and its remnants are being used up and contaminated by the growing urban sprawl. But the city's southern Xochimilco district, known for its maze of muddy canals, remains one of the axolotl's last hiding places.

UNAM, Mexico's top university, identified around 36 axolotls per sq. km in Xochimilco in 2014 – a steep drop from the 6,000 per sq. km in 1998. The latest census began in 2024, and, two years later, researchers have yet to find a single axolotl.

Soccer and mass tourism

Luis Zambrano, who heads UNAM's ecological restoration laboratory, said that besides a constant flow of poorly treated wastewater, fresh dangers to the axolotl include chinampas being turned into soccer pitches and the overcrowding of what began as ecological tourism.

Axolotls consume oxygen through their skin, making them highly vulnerable to water pollution.

"Mass tourism has become a terrible problem now with the World Cup," said Zambrano. "The government thinks more is better, but that's not true in these areas of high ecological value."

Even as their habitat disappears, axolotls are widely bred in captivity. Scientists believe their unique skin mucus and ability to regrow limbs and even parts of their brain offer promising leads in cancer research.

For Zambrano, the axolotls' viral popularity has yet to translate into concrete action that could save their home.

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Foreseeable accidents

Industrial mishaps are due to accumulated organisational weaknesses

Despite there having been a streak of industrial accidents in India of late, the notion that they are isolated and incidental persists. Within days of each other, four workers were killed in a 'mishap' in a septic tank in Surat while nine workers were killed by an explosion at a steel plant in Visakhapatnam. They appear to be different circumstances: one involved workers entering a confined space and succumbing to toxic gases; the other involved 150 tonnes of molten steel and a violent blast. Yet, industry has known of these risks and had developed preventive measures decades ago. In the Surat incident, four workers entered the tank and were overcome by toxic fumes. The circumstances resemble a well-known pattern in fatalities in confined spaces, where the first victims are often followed by would-be rescuers who enter without protection. There have been deaths in similar circumstances in Surat's industrial sector in recent years. The working area must be mechanically ventilated and have rescue personnel on standby while the workers must have breathing apparatuses, harnesses and retrieval lines, and clear lines of communication. Unprotected entry must be strictly prohibited. Septic tank deaths and deaths due to manual scavenging are in fact rarely accidents in the sense of unforeseeable events, but failures of basic safety management, and the recurrence of such incidents speaks to the persistence of that failure. Likewise, while steelmaking is intrinsically more dangerous because it combines extreme temperatures, pressurised gases, heavy equipment, and enormous stores of heat energy, industry still knows the hazards it poses, and further that even relatively small process failures can result in multiple casualties.

Both incidents, and the patterns they extend, are reminders of persistent safety failures in many parts of Indian industry. In Visakhapatnam, trade unions and former employees have alleged that the plant had reduced staffing, heavier workloads, ageing equipment, deferred maintenance, and an increasing dependence on contractual labour. Some also linked these trends to the difficulties the plant faced following the Centre's divestment plans and the resulting constraints on investments. However true any of these factors are, they confirm that a major industrial accident is almost always due to the accumulation of organisational weaknesses. In fact, contract labour is central to understanding both incidents. Occupational safety research has consistently found that contracted workers face higher risks because they may receive less training and operate within systems with fragmented accountability. The incidents have also occurred during the gradual and uneven implementation of India's new occupational safety framework – and highlight the invisible fact that the country's industries remain anchored by old problems of manpower shortage, caste- and class-based exposure to hazardous labour, and a 'cost over safety' mindset in financially stressed units.

Sport during a war

The United States is giving the FIFA World Cup a bad name

No showpiece event of a sport has lived up to its billing quite like the FIFA World Cup. The 2026 edition, which kicks off on Thursday, offers proof. With 48 teams and 104 matches, it is the biggest ever. With roughly one in four FIFA member nations qualifying, and six of the seven continents represented, it is the most inclusive yet. From Oceania to North America, it wraps the whole universe. It is also the first time that three countries will be hosting the quadrennial extravaganza – the United States, Canada and Mexico. Top players in Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo and Neymar have touched down, and so have coaches such as Carlo Ancelotti and Thomas Tuchel. While Messi will aim for a repeat of Argentina's trophy-winning exploits from 2022, Ronaldo will gun for Portugal's first. Neymar, yet to win the coveted Cup, has a very heavy cross to bear, for he comes from the land of Pele and five-time champion Brazil. Kylian Mbappe's France, titlist in 2018 and runner-up in 2022, remains strong. Spain, with the irresistible teenager Lamine Yamal in its ranks, is a favourite, and so are Germany and England to a lesser degree. But four-time winner Italy is absent, for a scarcely believable third straight occasion.

The World Cup also serves a purpose beyond the turf – of shrinking differences, uniting populations and promoting cross-cultural exchanges. In this, the latest instalment has stumbled badly. On Monday, it emerged that the U.S. had denied entry to Somalian referee Omar Artan, the best men's referee from Africa in 2025 and one of the 52 handpicked by governing body FIFA. There are credible reports of journalists being refused visas and squad members being questioned by immigration authorities. In an unfortunate turn, the military stand-off between the U.S. and Iran has forced the West Asian nation to camp in Mexico and travel to Seattle (more than 2,000 km away) and Los Angeles for its group-stage games. It is both a logistical nightmare and an affront to the core sporting tenet of a level-playing field for all teams. Fans are also rankled by the high ticket costs, limited public transport facilities and steep visa fees. That a travel-intensive competition is being held amidst a disruption in global fuel supplies and spike in energy prices is not lost on anyone. These concerns will likely dissipate once Mexico and South Africa set the ball rolling at the majestic Estadio Azteca. However, it is essential to reflect and learn in order to chart a more inclusive future.

The forgotten copilot of Air India flight 171

Captain A. (Mohan) Ranganathan

Former airline instructor pilot, aviation safety adviser and also a former member of the Civil Aviation Safety Advisory Council (CASAC), India

A year since the tragic crash of Air India flight AI 171 that cost 260 lives on June 12, 2025, the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA), Government of India, and its Air Accident Investigation Bureau, have strayed from their promised "transparent and factual" path. The only piece of information that is available to us is the Preliminary Report that was published in July 2025. The cryptic report has hidden pointers that are worth highlighting, in the absence of any final report.

The flood of false narratives spread by some sections of mainstream media and social media compel this writer to highlight issues. The usual tendency of the MoCA and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) to conceal the truth and place the blame on the pilot has, in this case, taken a different turn. Instead, there is a defence of the captain and playing possum in the face of claims by some pilots' associations and "aviation illiterates" – as a former National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigator has described them in a YouTube video – that the crash resulted from failures on the part of the airline and the aircraft manufacturer.

Media narratives versus facts

The first clear indication appears on pages 12-13 of the preliminary report which says: "The forward EAFR [Enhanced Airborne Flight Recorder] was located on 16 June 2025 from the wreckage debris beside the Building F." The forward EAFR records both the digital flight data and voice data from cockpit area mike. It is therefore evident that the AAIB has listened to the cockpit voice recorder (CVR) recording and alerted the MoCA, which in turn informed the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). On the same day, June 16, citing intelligence inputs and a perceived threat, the MHA reportedly ordered X-category commando protection for the head of the AAIB. He continues to enjoy this protection at taxpayers' expense, even as the travelling public and the families of the crash victims remain in the dark.

Certain narratives in the media and social media have been on the report of the fuel control switches (FCS) having transitioned from run to cutoff and then cut-off to run after several seconds delay.

The use of the word "transitioning" in the report is being bandied about as evidence of American influence on the report. What is being forgotten is the fact that the FCS is a spring loaded switch that has to be lifted off the run slot, moved over the gate and dropped into the cut-off slot.

> One year on, the AI 171 investigation demands answers, accountability, and closure

The same action is required for moving the switch from cutoff to run. These switches cannot be moved by a software error or a power failure. The only CVR statement in the report mentions this: "one of the pilots is heard asking the other why did he cutoff. The other pilot responded that he did not do so." The rest of the CVR recordings were apparently shared with the MoCA and the MHA for the threat perception.

The Government of India knew the facts on June 16, 2025 and is still dragging its feet to provide closure to the affected families who are experiencing mental agony.

A red herring

The latest angle that is occupying centre stage is the Ram Air Turbine (RAT). Calculations about when the RAT deployed in flight and how this was due to a major wiring fault are being used by interested parties to digress from the key issue of who moved the FCS to cut off the engines. Page 14 of the report says that the "RAT hydraulic pump began supplying hydraulic pressure at about 08:08:47 UTC", which is a clear indication the RAT was deployed five seconds earlier, around 08:08:42 UTC.

The report mentions that once the aircraft achieved the maximum recorded airspeed of 180 knots at about 08:08:42 UTC, immediately thereafter, the Engine 1 and Engine 2 FCS moved from run to cutoff position one after another with a time gap of one second.

When both engines were cut off, two things would have happened immediately. The entire instrument panel in front of the copilot would have gone blank and the power supply to the rear EAFR shut. The rear EAFR becomes a lame duck and whatever data the investigators retrieve will only be what is recorded prior to that time. The actual backup of critical data would have been lost had the forward EAFR data not been recovered.

The Boeing 787 Manual lists four conditions that result in the automatic deployment of RAT to provide backup. It also mentions that the RAT can be deployed manually by pressing the RAM Air Turbine switch on the hydraulic panel. This will be recorded both on the EAFR as well as the sound recorded on the CVR. The clear reason why RAT deployed before the engines were cut off will be evident on both the EAFR and CVR recordings.

Under normal circumstances, when a major emergency takes place on take-off, the Captain must take over the controls and the copilot reverts to pilot monitoring duty even if he was the Pilot flying. The CVR will clearly indicate if that action took place. The EAFR apparently records the flight controls of the copilot side moving during the entire event. In the case of flight AI-171, the delay in moving the FCS for the no. 1 and no. 2 engines, at 08:08:52 and 08:08:56, respectively, can be explained by the circumstances confronting the poor co-pilot: a blank screen, no guidance, both engines without power, and the task of controlling the aircraft with his right hand while attempting to restart the engines with his left hand.

For his low experience on the aircraft type and performing a manoeuvre which is never given for copilots during training, First Officer Clive Kunder did a remarkable job in steering the crippled aircraft away from crowded areas where more lives would have been lost on ground.

Closure requires the truth

There were two pilots on board. The FCS were deliberately moved to cut off the engines. Only one of them could have done it and not a software error or a power system error. If the AAIB could have deciphered the CVR data to alert the MoCA and the MHA as early as June 16, 2025, fishing for excuses to deviate from the facts will only damage the credibility of the Indian aviation system.

The United States NTSB and the Air Accidents Investigation Branch of the United Kingdom have far more experience in deciphering the EAFR/Digital Flight Data Recorder and CVR data than the Indian AAIB or the DGCA. One hopes that the authorities in India do not drag their feet and face the humiliation of the NTSB releasing its own findings, as it did in the SilkAir (1997) and China Eastern (2022) fatal crashes, which ultimately established "Deliberate Human Intervention".

The families of First Officer Kunder and all those who perished in the crash on June 12, 2025, deserve closure to their mental agony.

Protecting federalism must be the INDIA bloc's 'glue'

D. Ravikumar

Second time Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) from Viluppuram, Tamil Nadu, and General Secretary of the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK)

At the meeting on June 8, 2026, of political parties under the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) bloc, in New Delhi, Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah noted that the Congress party is the only party with a presence across all Indian States, whereas other parties are typically confined to one or two States. He argued, therefore, that the Congress is the only party that is capable of acting as the "glue" that holds the alliance together.

Congress leads, but informally

All constituents of the alliance acknowledge the pivotal role that the Congress plays in driving the INDIA bloc forward. Even the Left parties, despite their various criticisms of the Congress, broadly agree with this view. The criticism levelled against the Congress during alliance meetings is that it has failed to effectively facilitate the electoral success of its partners and, at times, has campaigned in ways that cast doubt on the fundamental principles and political positions of its allies.

The INDIA bloc was formed prior to the 2024 general election as a loose coalition of parties opposed to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Although the Congress played a significant role in its formation, some alliance partners did not agree to the party assuming formal leadership of the coalition. No leader was elected for the alliance either. While action plans were occasionally drawn up and resolutions passed, the alliance never evolved into a formal organisational structure.

> The alliance's future depends on defending federalism and democracy

The basis of unity

Contrary to Mr. Abdullah's assertion, it is not the Congress that serves as the bloc's "glue"; rather, a shared apprehension about the BJP is the objective factor that brought the coalition into being The BJP's unlawful and authoritarian political conduct has instilled fear among all non-BJP parties. It is this very fear that acts as the unifying force for the Opposition.

Consequently, a compelling necessity has arisen for all parties – which realise that they have no meaningful political future unless the BJP is defeated in the upcoming general election – to work in unison.

However, defeating the BJP alone cannot be the sole objective of an alliance. The INDIA bloc comprises both national and regional parties. It is true that the BJP's domineering style of politics threatens the very existence of Opposition parties.

More importantly, however, it poses a threat to the Constitution, parliamentary democracy, secularism and the federal principles enshrined in the Constitution by increasingly concentrating power in the hands of the Union government. Consequently, opposition to the BJP has brought these parties together, and there is nothing inherently wrong with that.

State rights matter

Yet, an alliance formed merely out of fear cannot endure in the long run. The principle of federalism, and the Constitution that upholds it, must serve as the real "glue" that gives this alliance coherence and an organised structure. It is essential that not only national parties within the alliance – such as the Congress – but also regional parties from North India, where awareness of State rights is often inadequate, embrace the conviction that State rights must be safeguarded. Only by internalising this principle can the bloc move forward effectively.

Though the Congress understands the importance of upholding the Constitution, it remains reluctant to fully recognise and champion the rights of States. It will truly grasp the significance of regional parties only when it recognises that federalism is one of the basic features of the Constitution, and that secularism alone is not sufficient to distinguish it from the BJP. If the Congress continues to sideline federalism, it risks being viewed by regional parties merely as a substitute for the BJP rather than as an alternative political force.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Defections defy democracy

The report on Union Minister Bhupender Yadav's meeting with rebel Trinamool Congress MPs raises troubling ethical questions.

While political dialogue is legitimate in a democracy, outreach to legislators who have openly defied their party inevitably creates perceptions of encouraging defections and political horse-trading. The anti-defection law was enacted precisely to preserve electoral mandates and prevent governments and parties from being destabilised through inducements. What is more disturbing is the normalisation of such practices across party lines. Voters elect representatives based on party platforms, not personal political bargains.

If democratic mandates can be altered through post-election manoeuvring, public faith in institutions will steadily erode.

Gopalaswamy J.,
Chennai

Bharathiraja

Veteran film director Bharathiraja set a new trend in Tamil cinema by bringing rural themes and settings to the forefront. This shift attracted audiences of all kinds, as the village flavour was both fresh and refreshing. His directorial debut, *16 Vayathinile*, was not only a huge success but also transformed Tamil cinema to a considerable extent, compelling producers and directors to think differently. In that sense, he was a true trendsetter. One should also not overlook the fact that Ilaiyaraaja received his breakthrough with the same film. None of these artists looked back thereafter.

V. Lakshmanan,
Tirupur, Tamil Nadu

Alongside K. Balachander and Balu Mahendra, Bharathiraja helped shape modern Tamil film-making. Through classics such as *16 Vayathinile*, *Muthal Mariyathai*, and *Alaigal Oivathillai*, he brought the spirit of rural Tamil Nadu to the screen with authenticity and emotion. He also introduced and nurtured many talented actors who became superstars. I fondly remember asking for his business card during a meeting; his reply was unforgettable: "Bharathiraja does not need a business card."

A.P. Thiruvadi,
Chennai

At a time when Tamil cinema was dialogue-oriented and an extension of drama enacting, Bharathiraja, in the 1970s, changed this by telling the story through the camera. It was he who transformed the art of direction with camera frames.

Bharathiraja-Ilaiyaraaja-SPB songs were the order of the day in the 1980s.

A.V. Narayanan,
Chennai

The director was an exponent of village drama, bringing authentic rural narratives and realistic characters to the mainstream. His timeless classics have reshaped the visual language of regional cinema.

C.K.S. Maniam,
Chennai

Bharathiraja's films, enriched by Ilaiyaraaja's music, were an integral part of my growing-up years. I still remember the excitement of watching his movies with neighbours after we bought our first television set and later a VCR. By taking cinema out of the studio and into the villages and open landscapes of Tamil Nadu, he gave audiences like me a profound sense of connection to the world around us. Like *Mann Vasanai*, his stories, deeply rooted in emotions and the Tamil soil, will live on in our hearts forever.

Ananthi Santhaiyan,
Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh

Some film-makers make movies, but a very few change the dynamics and magnitude of cinema forever. Needless to say, Bharathiraja belonged to the latter.

R. Sivakumar,
Chennai

NCERT books not available

The new academic session has already begun, yet many students are still unable to obtain the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) textbooks that they require. Most local bookstores report that the books are out of stock, and students are being asked to wait several weeks for fresh supplies. As a result, many students are falling behind in their studies and facing difficulties in completing their homework and assignments. Some students have been forced to rely on borrowed books or photocopies.

Preetham C.,
Bengaluru

Pilgrim welfare

I was in Tiruvannamalai on June 4. As a 70-year-old, I had to stand in a queue for hours to have darshan of Lord Arunachala. Though separate queues are reportedly available for senior citizens, no signboard indicating this was prominently displayed, nor did any temple employee guide me. After the long wait, I was brusquely told to move on by a young man who was the age of my grandson. Although wall-mounted fans had been installed along the queue, none of them was functioning. Even to reach the counter issuing ₹50 tickets for special darshan, one had to stand in line for nearly two-and-a-half hours, with no provision for seating, unlike at Tirupati. With a growing number of devotees from neighbouring States contributing to the temple's increasing revenue, there is a need for improvements in facilities. Another issue is the exorbitant fares charged by auto-rickshaw drivers.

V. Jayaraman,
Chennai

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

Negotiating federalism in higher education

Eldho Mathews

is with the Kerala State Higher Education Council. Views expressed are personal

Higher education in India has emerged as an important site through which the changing dynamics of Indian federalism are being expressed. Issues relating to regulatory authority, curriculum, language policy, public funding, and digital governance have transformed the sector into a critical site where competing visions of the Union and State governments intersect. These developments not only shape the direction of higher education but also illuminate broader questions concerning the distribution of power within the Indian Union. As a result, governance of higher education can no longer be viewed merely as a sectoral policy concern; rather, it has become an integral component of India's evolving federal architecture.

Some recent examples include the contestations surrounding the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 across different States. Recent regulatory reforms facilitating the establishment of foreign university campuses in India have also generated varied responses from State governments, reflecting differing perspectives. This fragmented political landscape has important implications for higher education governance in the country. However, they have received only relatively limited attention.

Growing influence of Centre

Several developments have illustrated these tensions. In Tamil Nadu, the State government repeatedly opposed various aspects of the NEP 2020, particularly the three-language formula as well as the University Grants Commission's (UGC) circular on the third language this year. Centre-State tensions in higher education were also evident in the disputes over the appointment of Vice-Chancellors and the powers of Governors in States such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, and West Bengal.

Although education remains constitutionally within the Concurrent List, which gives both the Union and the States legislative authority, the prevailing governance dynamic increasingly favours the Union. Through the Ministry of Education, the UGC, and various regulatory and accreditation bodies, the Union government possesses substantial leverage over universities and colleges across the country.

The introduction of the NEP, 2020 is an important restructuring attempt to redesign the architecture of higher education in India. The policy has proposed sweeping reforms, including four-year undergraduate programmes, an Academic Bank of Credits, institutional restructuring, multidisciplinary universities, and internationalisation initiatives. These reforms also represent an expansion of the influence of the Centre into domains that have historically been the preserve of State governments.

Moreover, access to central funding now is increasingly dependent on compliance with nationally designed reform agendas. Programmes such as the Institutions of Eminence initiative and competitive research mechanisms under the Anusandhan National Research Foundation have contributed to the influence of the Union government over States' authority.

The role of national regulatory agencies has also become another important site of conflict. The structures proposed by the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025, which are intended to replace existing higher education regulatory bodies including the UGC, have generated apprehensions regarding the gradual erosion of the authority of State governments. Another important dimension to centralisation is digital governance. Mechanisms such as the Academic Bank of Credits have expanded the capacity of the Union government to standardise and monitor higher education governance across States.

In States with strong regional political identities, these reforms are viewed not just as administrative issues but as constitutional questions concerning the balance of power within the Indian Union.

Strategic adaptation

Interestingly, the implementation of the NEP, 2020 has also revealed that Centre-State relations in higher education are not purely adversarial. Rather than adopting positions of complete acceptance or outright rejection, many States, including Opposition-ruled States, have selectively adapted aspects of reforms in accordance with local political contexts. This reflects the emergence of a more negotiated form of federalism characterised by strategic adaptation.

For instance, with respect to internationalisation, several States are seeking to position themselves as regional education hubs by facilitating partnerships with overseas institutions. These developments underscore the growing recognition of higher education as a strategic instrument for global visibility and knowledge-driven development. The debate surrounding the establishment of international branch campuses further illustrates this change. While the regulatory framework and policy direction are largely determined by the Union government, the actual implementation of such initiatives depends substantially on State governments through local administrative clearances, infrastructure support, and investment facilitation.

As India's regional political landscape continues to evolve, the trajectory of higher education governance will depend not only on constitutional provisions or national-level policy frameworks, but also on the capacity of the Centre and the States to negotiate competing political and developmental priorities within the federal structure.

Although education remains constitutionally within the Concurrent List, the prevailing governance dynamic increasingly favours the Union

Why TVK is eager to woo AIADMK cadre

Tamil Nadu's ruling party is strengthening itself by welcoming rival members

STATE OF PLAY

T. Ramakrishnan

The recent defection of a large number of former Ministers and legislators belonging to the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) to the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) has prompted many to wonder whether the ruling party is seeking to build its organisational network through these latest recruits.

Even though it is well known that the Vijay Makkal Iyakkam (VMI), a voluntary organisation made up of newly elected Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay's fans, has provided the much-needed manpower for the TVK, there is a perception in certain quarters that the ruling party has not yet acquired enough strength on the ground. Under such circumstances, it is quite natural that the TVK follows an "open-door policy" for anyone with political experience, especially from the AIADMK, which has finished third in the April-May Assembly election. There have been accretions to the ruling party from the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) too but the TVK's keenness to woo as many cadres as it can from the AIADMK is clearly evident. At an event to mark the admission of the defectors last week, one of the prominent faces of the new regime and Minister for Public Works and Sports Development Aadhav Arjuna said that "the AIADMK and the TVK are one and the same. The TVK is not a different party but [like] a parent body." This observation has prompted leaders and observers to describe the TVK as "a new AIADMK."

The main reason why the ruling party is targeting the

Dravidian major is the latter's comparative weakness in relation to its traditional adversary, the DMK. The depth of its defeat can be appreciated better if one is to take a close look at how it suffered electoral reverses in the 2026 Assembly poll. Apart from winning only 47 Assembly seats (against 66 seats in 2021), the party forfeited deposit in 19 seats, the highest so far. But the DMK, which contested four seats more than the AIADMK's 172, did not forfeit deposit in any constituency. In terms of vote share in contested seats, the DMK fared better with 32.17% as against the other's 28.7%.

A new alternative

There is one school of thought within the AIADMK, as articulated by general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami late last week, that the party's performance was not as poor as it was in 1996 when it secured only four seats and that of the DMK's in 1991 when it won just two seats. But there is one qualitative difference between 2026 and 1991 and 1996 – there was no credible third alternative force available then, unlike the TVK now. Besides, the number of seats where both the Dravidian majors forfeited deposits was much lower – 3 for the DMK in 1991 and 2 for the AIADMK in 1996. Moreover, as regards the AIADMK, the signals were out even in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls when the party forfeited, for the first time in a parliamentary election, deposits in seven constituencies. It is against this backdrop that the TVK, which has catapulted to power in the recent polls, is consolidating its position.

There are a few more compelling factors for the ruling party to take under its fold members of the AIADMK. In the Assembly polls, the TVK drew a blank in eight districts including Villupuram (with seven Assembly constituencies) and Nagapattinam-Mayiladuthurai-Tiruvarur (put together, 10 seats). It knows that it has to have a strong base in all these areas, even though no leading figure from these places was there in the latest round of defectors.

In addition, local body polls are going to be held in eight months, as declared by Mr. Arjuna a couple of days ago. Rural local bodies in 28 districts, which comprise 9,581 village panchayats, 314 panchayat union councils, and 28 district panchayats, do not have elected representatives. The term of such bodies in nine other districts will be over in four months. In February next year, the term of all major urban local bodies will also end. Going by all indications, the authorities would like to have elections to the rural and urban local bodies together. This is why the Minister has challenged the DMK asking whether it would be able to bag mayorship even in one municipal corporation.

It may be the hope of the TVK that if the party were to come out with flying colours in the local body polls, it can make moves, both politically and administratively, much more confidently than it has done so far.

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Major lacunae in reporting industrial accidents

The inconsistencies in the data compiled by the Labour Bureau and the DGFASLI point to severe lapses in reporting of industrial accidents

DATA POINT

Sambavi Parthasarathy
Pon Vasanth B.A.

The death toll from the explosion at the Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited-Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (RINL-VSP) on June 8, rose to nine on Wednesday. Following the incident, a familiar chain of bureaucratic responses has been triggered such as ex-gratia for the bereaved families and the constitution of an expert committee for a high-level probe. These were the same measures taken after the last major accident at the plant in 2014, and indeed after most workplace accidents across the country. But India appears to be lagging in strengthening institutional mechanisms needed to prevent such accidents **(Chart 2)**.

The problem begins with the very collection of safety data, as the gaps in the annual Standard Reference Notes (SRNs) of the Directorate General Factory Advice Service and Labour Institutes (DGFASLI) reveal. DGFASLI helps implement the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (OSH) Code, 2020. The OSH, for which the rules were notified only last month, renamed the DGFASLI as the Directorate General of Occupational Safety and Health.

Each SRN records industrial accidents in two sections: one from data compiled by the Labour Bureau and the other from DGFASLI's own correspondence with Chief Inspectors of Factories. The two never match, pointing to lapses in reporting **(Chart 3)**.

The reports also show DGFASLI struggling with heavy vacancies **(Chart 4)**. The country does not have enough factory inspectors, even in industrialised States such as Tamil Nadu **(Chart 5)**. This gets consequently reflected in the small fraction of factories inspected each year **(Chart 6)**. Moreover, many States simply do not report the required details **(Chart 7)**.

Institutional **apathy**

Data for the charts were sourced from Standard Reference Notes (SRNs) and Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India (ADSI) reports. With inputs from Nitika Francis and Sandhya K, who is interning with *The Hindu*

Flames erupt in a steel plant after molten iron spills while being moved in a bucket by a crane in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, on Monday, June 8. PTI

Chart 1: Deaths (■) and injuries (■) reported in fire accidents in factories, as per ADSI reports

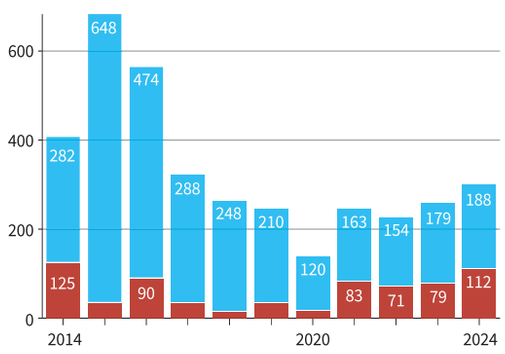


Chart 2: The number of registered factories in each year (■) and the number of employees in millions (—)

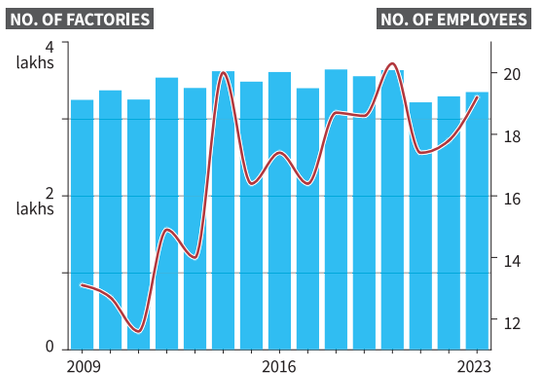
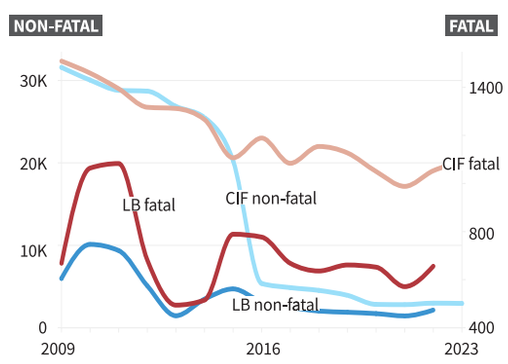


Chart 3: Fatal and non-fatal injuries as per the Labour Bureau (LB) and (CIFs), which vary widely over the years, with a few showing unexplained swings in the SRNS



Besides wide variations within the SRNs between the LB and CIFs' data, the fire accidents captured by them were only a third of the numbers reported in ADSI reports

Chart 4: The year-wise vacancies (■) and filled positions (■) in DGFASLI. Nearly 50% of the 349 sanctioned posts remained vacant as of 2023

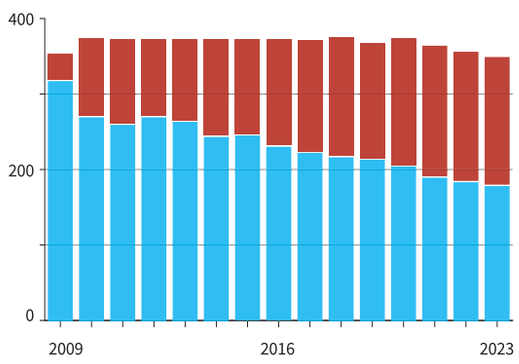


Chart 5: Inspectors per factory among the States with the highest number of factories as of 2023

	Number of factories	Inspectors of Factories	Factories per inspector
Tamil Nadu	50,669	106	478
Gujarat	49,246	81	608
Maharashtra	39,533	44	898
Haryana	25,607	35	732
A.P.	24,642	42	587
Kerala	22,601	53	426
Telangana	22,118	27	819
Karnataka	18,389	48	383
Delhi	13,616	7	1,945
Rajasthan	11,014	27	408

Chart 6: The share of factories inspected by DGFASLI each year (in %). The inspections have dropped significantly in the recent years, perhaps due to the staff crunch

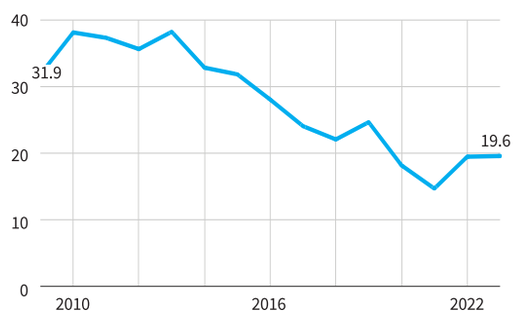
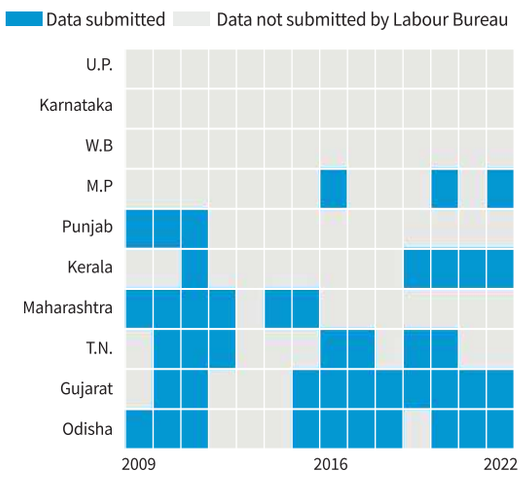


Chart 7: Many States did not furnish data on fatal and non-fatal incidents, either to the Labour Bureau, or DGFASLI, as per the SRNs. U.P. , Karnataka and W.B. did not provide data even once



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUN 11, 1976

Decline in pen exports

With domestic sales of over Rs. 60 crores India's pen industry entered the world market in the late Fifties. In 1973-74 these exports touched Rs. 80 lakhs. Next year they were down to almost half and in 1975-76 they dipped further.

Examining the how and why of this low performance we came on a story of bad business practices and of adverse conditions in the international market.

The export figure of Rs. 80 lakhs was possible with an active sales campaign to spot new markets. Till then the market for Indian pens was confined to the West Asian and African countries, where the filler tube fountain pen and the ink containing ones made by us were acceptable. These exports were of the order of Rs. 30 lakhs to Rs. 40 lakhs. Then, through the massive sales campaign launched by an export trading house, Poland came in with orders worth Rs. 37 lakhs. These were mostly for ball point pens, a commodity in which Indian expertise is not yet perfect.

The magic of export earnings attracted all and sundry manufacturers of ball pens to chip into the huge order. As their consignments reached the cold climate of Poland, the pen's nozzles got blocked with the frozen ink. The following year the Poles ordered for a mere Rs. 3.2 lakhs from India. Exporters may blame the manufacturers, but the Poles have gone elsewhere for their pens. With the Polish order reduced to a mere Rs 3.2 lakhs, pen exports in 1974-75 dropped to Rs. 42.9 lakhs. In the year ended March 1976 these exports dropped further to Rs. 42.3 lakhs when the target was for Rs. 75 lakhs.

According to one exporter the explanation for this dip ties in the troubled situation in West Asia. Lebanon has been buying a fair amount of India pens since the early Sixties. Since then there has been a gradual decline in Lebanese imports as the civil war in that country gathered momentum.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 11, 1926

Wimbledon jubilee

London, June 10: The King and Queen will attend the opening day at Wimbledon on 21st June. All living past champions in Ladies Singles, Men's Singles, and Men's Doubles have been notified by All-England Club to be in attendance when the King will present them with Jubilee Commemoration Medals.

Text&Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Japanese people who signed online petition against Trump

20,000 Thousands of people have signed an online petition in Japan protesting against U.S. President Donald Trump using manga and anime characters. The petition was re-opened as an urgent effort to convey fans' concerns to rights holders after a new video depicting Mr. Trump as ninja Naruto Uzumaki. AFP

Challans issued in anti-encroachment and parking drive

55,532 These challans were issued against motorists and violators obstructing roads during a week-long anti-encroachment and unauthorised parking drive conducted by Delhi Traffic Police between June 1 and June 7. The drive covered 144 locations across Delhi in coordination with the MCD. PTI

Cong.-approved bill funding immigration crackdown in U.S.

70 in $ billion. President Donald Trump's hardline immigration crackdown for the rest of his term was passed by the U.S. Congress. The measure provides around $38 billion for Immigration and Customs Enforcement, $26 billion for Border Patrol and $5 billion for unforeseen costs, ensuring steady funding for Mr. Trump's deportation agenda through fiscal 2029. AFP

Jump in China's passenger car exports year-on-year in May

73 in per cent. More than eight lakh passenger cars were exported by China in May, a 73% jump year-on-year, as higher gasoline and diesel prices due to the war in Iran raised global interest in electric vehicles. Exports of pure EVs and plug-in hybrids more than doubled to about 435,000 units, accounting for more than half of total exports. AP

Contract signed for GNSS jammers procurement for Navy

449 in ₹ crore. This contract was signed by the Defence Ministry with Accord Software and Systems Private Limited, Bengaluru, for the procurement of 20 enhanced capability Global Navigation Satellite System jammers for the Indian Navy. It was inked in the presence of Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh. PTI

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The reality behind falling net FDI

India's net FDI has declined sharply despite strong gross inflows, underlining the impact of disinvestment/capital repatriation; investor classes, modes of entry, and exit strategies can have important implications for technology transfer, industrial development, and external sustainability

ECONOMIC NOTES

K.S. Chalapati Rao
Biswajit Dhar
K.V.K. Ranganathan

India's net foreign direct investment (FDI) has declined drastically in recent years. Critics see the weak net flows as a sign of weakness, while the Chief Economic Adviser points to the large inflows and rising manufacturing FDI as evidence of strength. He links weak net flows to profit repatriation and outward investment by Indian companies.

However, this debate overlooks a major issue. By focusing on overall numbers, both sides ignore the changing composition of international capital and the Balance of Payments (BoP) mechanisms that govern inflows and outflows.

For BoP purposes, net FDI is calculated as the difference between inflows and outflows after adjusting for the repatriation of capital. From the peak of $44.0 billion in 2020-21, net FDI fell to less than $1 billion in 2024-25. It recovered to $7.6 billion in 2025-26. The corresponding gross inflow was $94.6 billion.

It is necessary to note that India's liberal FDI policy, introduced in 1991, initially emphasised technology acquisition, export promotion, and foreign exchange conservation. Over time, policy increasingly prioritised attracting larger inflows, while concerns regarding future external payment obligations and investment quality receded.

GETTY IMAGES

Three types of FDI

FDI is often viewed as a uniform, long-term commitment that brings technology and management skills to the host country. FDI can fall into three different investor classes, each with distinct capabilities, strategies, and exit timelines.

The first category is real FDI (RFDI), consisting of traditional multinational enterprises with the technology, brands, and capabilities to establish production and services. These generally represent long-term commitments.

The second category comprises financial investors, including private equity funds, venture capital firms, sovereign wealth funds, and asset managers. Their main goal is capital growth and planned exits.

The third category includes diaspora investments and special purpose vehicles (SPVs). These involve capital raised abroad and funneled through offshore financial centres, sometimes including the round-tripping of Indian funds.

Data on remittance-level FDI from the past four years, from 2022-23 to 2025-26 up to December, show that RFDI made up 41.9% of "effective inflows." Financial investors followed closely with a 40.5% share, while the remaining 17.6% came from the diaspora and SPVs linked to India.

The business model of financial investors suggests future exits that result in large-scale capital repatriations. A notable example occurred in 2025 when Singapore's Temasek exited Schneider Electric India Ltd., earning $6.4 billion on an investment of $637 million made in 2020. Total recorded divestment in CY 2025 was $52 billion, with 45 major foreign private equity and venture capital exits accounting for $29 billion in outflows.

Based on an analysis of effective inflows, FDI in India's manufacturing sector has declined across three consecutive four-year periods. Most notably, RFDI into manufacturing accounted for only 10.6% of total effective inflows during the most recent four-year period.

Not fresh capital

A major blind spot in gross FDI figures is the mixing of new capital injections with corporate accounting changes, such as intra-group ownership reorganisations, mergers, share swaps, and the conversion of earlier non-equity instruments such as external commercial borrowings (ECBs) and convertible debentures.

While capital structures change, no new capital flows into the country. Approximately $40 billion of the $560 billion in equity inflows to India from 2014-15 to 2025-26 (up to December) fall into this category. Large transactions, such as Bosch and Meesho Technologies, can skew annual inflow and sectoral trends.

Disinvestment drives decline

Before looking at why net FDI is low or even negative in certain months, it is worth mentioning that the official narrative that profit repatriation depresses net FDI is misleading.

Under BoP conventions, profits sent as dividends are recorded as investment income in the current account. They increase the current account deficit (CAD) but do not change the reported net FDI flows. Instead, the primary reason for weak net FDI is disinvestment and capital repatriation, which appear in the financial account.

Likewise, the increase in Outward Foreign Direct Investment (OFDI) warrants closer examination rather than being attributed solely to corporate maturity. From 2023-24 to 2025-26, 45% of India's total outbound investment of $65 billion went into the "financial, insurance, and business services" (FIB) sector. Singapore and the UAE accounted for 27% and 11% of the total, respectively. These funds mostly go to holding companies and SPVs rather than directly to operational entities. For instance, TML Commercial Vehicles, a subsidiary of Tata Motors, invested $405 million in a Singaporean FIB entity to acquire the IVECO Group in Italy.

Capital movements through the GIFT City further complicate this issue. OFDI to the City increased from $246 million in 2023-24 to $1.18 billion in 2025-26. Total OFDI and inward FDI through it until 2025-26 reached $2.35 billion and $1.40 billion, respectively, highlighting the growing two-way flows.

These cross-flow of investments by Indian entities, also from other locations, indicates that OFDI can represent both genuine corporate expansion and the return of capital that fled. Therefore, increasing OFDI may not necessarily indicate maturity, as Indian companies might seek resources and technology, while a few might recycle capital through different jurisdictions.

Understanding the outflow channels

From 2022-23 to 2025-26, total FDI inflows and related current and capital account outflows reached significant levels. While gross inward equity FDI totalled $317.80 billion ($230.60 billion excluding reinvested earnings), the outflows present a more complex scenario.

Disinvestment and capital repatriation (capital account) totalled $178.9 billion, primarily driven by financial investors through secondary and strategic sales, IPO exits, and share buybacks. This also includes "offers for sale" by foreign promoters such as Hyundai and LG. The other type involves sell-offs by RFDI investors, such as Wistron which sold off to the Tatas.

Dividend remittances (current account) amounted to $118.9 billion in profits paid out by MNE subsidiaries and affiliates, excluding reinvested earnings.

Attributable IPR payments (current account) totalled $46.6 billion. These payments, made by MNE subsidiaries and affiliates for intellectual property (assuming they account for 75% of total IPR payments), can substitute dividends.

Additionally, $250.0 billion was transferred by all entities for technical/service/consultancy payments. However, it is difficult to divide this amount between RFDI and domestic companies.

Even when excluding OFDI and technical service payments, outflows due to disinvestment, dividends, and IPR payments (royalties) totalled $344.4 billion. Therefore, for every dollar of fresh inflow (excluding reinvested earnings), approximately $1.50 flowed out. This situation has worsened over the past 12 years. The corresponding outflow per dollar entered was 56 cents from 2014-15 to 2017-18, rising to 70 cents from 2018-19 to 2021-22, before reaching the current high.

Need for informed debate

The above narrative shows how an incomplete view of FDI prevails in the public discourse. Different types of investors, entry methods, and exit strategies impact technology transfer, industrial growth, and external sustainability. The reporting of global FDI flows adds an additional layer of problems. Understanding these nuances is crucial for evaluating FDI beyond headline numbers.

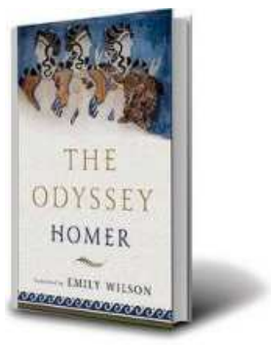
(K.S. Chalapati Rao is Senior Research Fellow at the Academy of Business Studies, Biswajit Dhar is former Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University, and K.V.K. Ranganathan is an independent researcher)

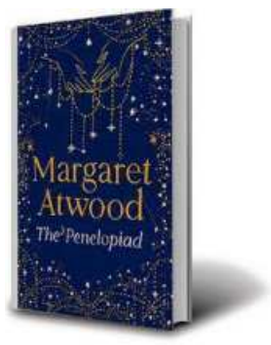
THE GIST

- Real FDI accounted for 41.9% of effective inflows between 2022-23 and 2025-26, while financial investors contributed 40.5%, reflecting the growing role of private equity, venture capital, and sovereign wealth funds.
- Real FDI into manufacturing has declined across three consecutive four-year periods, with manufacturing receiving only 10.6% of total effective inflows in the latest period.
- Gross FDI figures include transactions such as intra-group ownership reorganisations, mergers, share swaps, and conversion of external commercial borrowings, even when no fresh capital enters the country.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

From left, Jimmy Gonzales as Cepheus, Matt Damon as Odysseus, and Himesh Patel as Eurylochus in a scene from *The Odyssey*. AP





The Odyssey across ages: how an ancient epic continues to speak to us

Ahead of the release of Christopher Nolan's new adaptation of the Greek epic this July, Odysseus's long journey home from the Trojan war continues to captivate readers through its many translations and adaptations

Uma Mahadevan Dasgupta

Christopher Nolan's upcoming fantasy action film, *The Odyssey*, reported to be three hours long and filmed entirely on IMAX cameras, has led to new and heightened interest around the ancient Greek epic. The film's glittering cast reportedly features Matt Damon as Odysseus, Zendaya as Athena, Anne Hathaway as Penelope, Tom Holland as Telemachus, and Charlize Theron as Calypso. Lupita Nyong'O plays Helen as well as her sister Clytemnestra.

My sons have already booked tickets for the family for the film's July release. For them, Nolan's craft, with characteristic elements of nonlinear time and unreliable narrators, is endlessly exciting in itself, but I hope that this introduction to *The Odyssey* will also open the door for them to much more in Homer's epic: a powerful tale of displacement, strategy, survival, and finally, a long, difficult, bittersweet homecoming.

One of the oldest surviving works of literature, *The Odyssey* dates back across three millennia to the 8th or 7th century B.C. Nevertheless, this story of the adventurer Odysseus's long journey home from the Trojan war remains relevant and fascinating to contemporary audiences.

The first English translation of *The Odyssey*, by the Elizabethan playwright George Chapman, appeared in the 16th century. In the early 19th century, the young Romantic poet, John Keats, composed a sonnet of discovery about the epiphany of reading Chapman's Homer. He compared the experience to human exploration and the discovery of a new world: "Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes / He star'd at the Pacific – and all his men / Look'd at each other with a wild surmise – / Silent, upon a peak in Darien."

A gendered lineage

Nolan is reported to have drawn from Emily Wilson's 2017 translation of the epic. Even after dozens of new translations have continued to be published over the centuries, bringing new perspectives, it is somehow not surprising that classicist Emily Wilson's work, published in the 21st century, is the first translation from ancient Greek into English by a woman. Translation has a gendered lineage: the classics have long been regarded as a closed club and the preserve of male scholars.

Wilson's translation begins with a clear invocation to the Muse that I am sure will resonate at least slightly differently in the 21st century: "Tell me about a complicated man." We recognise the moral ambiguity of "complicated." This is not just the story of a bold hero escaping from magical temptations; it is the story of an intelligent but imperfect man navigating the challenges of life. It reads, "Muse, tell me how he wandered and was lost / when he had wrecked the holy town of Troy, / and where he went, and who he met, the pain / he suffered in the storms at sea, and how / he worked to save his life and bring his men / back home."

Wilson's translation has been described by Wyatt Mason in *The New York Times Magazine* as "radically contemporary"; Charlotte Higgins described it in *The Guardian* as "a cultural landmark."

Retellings by women

Women writers have adapted and retold the Homeric epic in different ways. Madeline Miller has written an entire fantasy novel about the so-called witch *Circe* (2018). When Prometheus was punished by the gods for the sin of stealing fire for humanity, Circe was the only one who showed him empathy by bringing him nectar. Miller's novel shows us Circe as deeply human in her feelings and actions.

Margaret Atwood's novella, *The Penelopiad* (2005), is also a counter-narrative of women in the Homeric epic. Penelope, wife of Odysseus, is left behind to raise their son Telemachus when Odysseus goes to war. Odysseus has been gone for many years. To keep the crowd of restless and aggressive suitors at bay, Penelope comes up with a delaying tactic. By day, she weaves a burial shroud for her father-in-law; by night, she takes it apart to weave it again the next day. As she does so, she reflects on her own difficult growing years.

Atwood also asks us to consider the fate of Penelope's 12 unnamed maids. Odysseus, believing they are also traitors, orders Telemachus to execute them. In the epic, the maids only get a brief, passing reference: that their feet twitched, but not for long. To this vivid and horrific detail, Atwood gives a haunting poetic voice and an afterlife. Even Penelope remains silent about the dead women, but they speak and sing in Atwood's *Penelopiad*: "we are the maids / the ones you killed / the ones you failed // we danced in air / our bare feet twitched..."

As far as film adaptations go, perhaps nothing can surpass the Coen Brothers' brilliant 2000 film, *O Brother Where Art Thou?*, set in the Depression-era American south.

Throwing a sepia light on race, religion, and corruption in 1930s Mississippi, the film asks us to think deeply about how we remember the past and what it tells us about our present.

The questions that remain

The Odyssey continues to speak to our times. An intelligent, skilful, albeit flawed man, facing complex challenges, struggles to find his way home – and finds that the home he left behind has changed into something that does not recognise him. We may go for the IMAX spectacle, but the harder questions will stay with us. In a vast universe, what is home? In an age of conflict and forced migration, who gets to travel and who stays behind? Can there be justice without reparations?

As Wilson's translation urges the Muse: "Tell the old story for our modern times. Find the beginning."

(The writer is in the IAS)

THE DAILY QUIZ

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

A tribute to Indian cinema legend Bharathiraja who passed away on June 10

V.V. Ramanan

QUESTION 1
Name his debut film made in 1977 that had Kamal Hasan, Rajinikanth and Sridevi and is considered an all-time classic in Indian cinema.

QUESTION 2
What was the moniker given to him as a tribute to his directorial prowess and with what words (on screen) did he welcome the viewers of his films?

QUESTION 3
The first of his six National awards was for the Telugu film '*Seethakoka Chiluka*'. Of which Tamil work that introduced Karthik and Radha was it a remake?

QUESTION 4
Bharathiraja also dabbled in acting and in '*Rettaisuzhi*' he shared screen space with another legendary filmmaker. Name him.

QUESTION 5
Known for introducing many a talent, which film of his saw the debut of the award-winning lyricist Vairamuthu?

QUESTION 6
'*Aakhree Raasta*', the hit Amitabh Bachchan-starrer, was the Hindi remake of which Bharathiraja film?

QUESTION 7
Who were the music directors for his National Award-winning films '*Vedham Pudhithu*' and '*Karuthamma*'?

Visual Question:
Name this Bharathiraja film, the only one he made with the thespian Sivaji Ganesan, said to have been inspired by writer Fyodor Dostoevsky's love life.

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. Alexander Zverev defeated which Italian player in five sets for his first major title in his fourth final? **Ans: Flavio Cobolli**
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. **Ans: Boris Becker**
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? **Ans: Connected devices**
4. Who among the champions from last year successfully defended their titles? **Ans: Horacio Zeballos and Marcel Granollers (Men's Doubles)**
5. Which male tennis player, who was also 2015 champion, competed in his 21st and final appearance at Roland-Garros in 2026? **Ans: Stan Wawrinka**
Visual: Identify this player. What is the feat she achieved in this edition? **Ans: Maja Chwalińska, she became the first qualifier to reach the women's singles final at Roland Garros in the Open Era**
Early Birds: Pulkit Sathe | Sudhir Thapa | Prem Raj P.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

S. Upendran

What is the meaning and origin of the expression "by hook or by crook"? (C. Janardan Reddy, Hyderabad)
When you say that you are going to do something 'by hook or by crook', it means you are going to do it come what may. In other words, you are determined to do it, whether it is legal or not. The expression is considered to be rather old fashioned.

Whenever you give him a task, he gets it done by hook or by crook.

The origin: In medieval Britain, tenants were allowed to collect firewood from trees located on their landlord's property. To protect the trees and to ensure that they were not chopped down indiscriminately, there was a law which was strictly enforced. People were allowed to cut down only those branches which they could reach. The tenants were not allowed to climb up the trees and chop off any of the branches at the top. To reach the branches that were high up, people started using "hooks" and "crooks". (Necessity is the mother of invention, they say!).

We all know what a "hook" is, but what is a crook? It is a long stick; the kind with a curved handle which shepherds used to carry in the old days. People used the hooks and crooks to pull down the higher branches and chop them down. They got the branches by hook or by crook! Things have changed a lot since those days, haven't they? Nowadays people chop down trees by hook or by crook.

What is the meaning of "faux pas"? How is the word pronounced? (Vidyavathi, Kurnool)
First, let's deal with the pronunciation. The "faux" sounds like the word 'foe', and the "a" in the second word is pronounced like the "a" in "bath", "path", and "calf". The final "s" is silent. The main stress is usually on "pas". A "faux pas" is an embarrassing mistake that one makes in a social context.

It was Mohan's first party as Ambassador; he was afraid of committing a faux pas.

Our Chairman is famous for his faux pas.

Can the word "milk" be used as a verb? (W. Ghela, Chennai)
Yes, it can. When you milk someone for something, you get as much money as you can from that person. Similarly, when you 'milk' a situation or place, you take advantage of the situation or place in a very determined sort of way. You try and make as much profit as you can, without really worrying about the methods you have resorted to.

"I am my father's second son." What is the question that one needs to ask to get this as the reply? (Jaya Meera, Velachery, Chennai)
This is a question that can be asked quite easily in most Indian languages. Native speakers of English, however, do not have an idiomatic way of asking this question. It is possible to ask this question indirectly - "How many elder brothers do you have?" Some have suggested that you ask, "What number son are you?" While one could possibly get away with such a question in speech, it would be considered unacceptable in formal contexts. Perhaps native speakers of English are not interested in knowing whether you are your father's third or fourth child.

Published in The Hindu on December 5, 2000

Word of the day

Foible:
a behavioural attribute that is distinctive and peculiar to an individual

Synonyms: weakness, quirk, shortcoming

Usage: *Her foible is buying books faster than she can read them.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/foible

International Phonetic Alphabet: /fɔɪbəl/

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

INBRIEF

Ministry rescinds Quality Control Order on cotton bales

The Textiles Ministry on Tuesday said it had rescinded a 2023 Quality Control Order (QCO) on cotton bales with immediate effect. The government recently suspended the 11% import duty on cotton till October 30, 2026. "We think imports will increase as already 40 lakh bales have been imported. We expect 15 lakh-20 lakh more bales to come in this cotton season," said Nishant Asher, secretary of the Indian Cotton Federation.

Govt. okays 22 more applicants under PLI scheme for textiles

The Union government has approved 22 new applicants that are expected to bring in total investment of ₹2,339.14 crore in the latest round of approvals under the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme for textiles. According to an official press release these companies will generate a projected turnover of ₹15,561.34 crore in notified products, and create 36,217 employment opportunities across the textile value chain.

SEBI mulls limiting AMCs' top employees salary disclosure

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has proposed to disclose salaries of asset management company (AMC) senior executives only as a group as against the current individual level disclosure, according to a consultation paper released on June 10. Further, SEBI proposed that the remuneration of fund managers can be given on "request basis." The proposal comes after feedback that granular disclosure was not required for mutual funds.

Govt. mulls capping airport 'bundles' for privatisation

Limiting the number of bundles that can be awarded to a single bidder at 2 to 3, or roughly 5 to 6 airports, for the third round of privatisation involving 11 airports is aimed at preventing 'oligopoly'

Jagriti Chandra
NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Civil Aviation has proposed capping the number of airport bundles that can be awarded to a single bidder at "two to three bundles", or roughly five to six airports, for the third round of airport privatisation involving 11 airports, in order to prevent an "oligopoly".

The move comes even as the Adani Group, which had no presence in airport operations till a decade ago, has grown to become the country's largest private airport operator.

The recommendation was made last week in response to queries raised by government departments represented on the Public Private Partnership Appraisal Committee (PPPAC), which is reviewing the Ministry of Civil Aviation's proposal to privatise 11 airports that was submitted in December 2025, according to a person familiar with the matter.

Holding sway: Adani Group acquired GVK's majority stake in Navi Mumbai and Mumbai airports, expanding its portfolio to eight. PTI

"It is important to ensure other bidders have a fair opportunity to participate. Otherwise, it could discourage future investment in the sector," the person added.

The 11 airports proposed for privatisation have been grouped into five bundles, each comprising a mix of metro and non-metro airports to improve the commercial viability of smaller airports. The bundles are: Amritsar and Kangra; Varanasi, Kushinagar and Gaya; Bhubaneswar and Hubli; Raipur and Aurangabad; and Trichy and Tirupati.

The committee also sought clarifications on a range of issues including the minimum capital expenditure requirements for each airport bundle to ensure that smaller airports receive adequate investment and do not suffer from neglect.

If the constituent departments of the PPPAC are satisfied with the Ministry's responses, it may grant an in-principle approval. In February 2019, during the second round of airport privatisation, the Adani Group emerged as the successful bidder for all six airports on offer. At the time, the conglomerate had no prior experience in operating airports.

In July 2019, *The Hindu* reported that the PPPAC had brushed aside key recommendations made by the Department of Economic Affairs and the NITI Aayog to improve the criteria for selection of bidders, which included capping the number of airports that can be awarded to a single player to two, as well as prior airport operational and management experience.

Later, the Adani Group also acquired GVK's majority stake in Mumbai and Navi Mumbai airports, expanding its airport portfolio to eight facilities. Together, these airports handle around 78 million passengers annually, accounting for nearly 25% of India's air traffic.

Equity MF inflows slip to one-year low of ₹22,900 cr. in May

Ashokamithran T.
MUMBAI

Investments through systematic investment plans (SIPs) also dipped to ₹30,954 crore

Net inflows into equity mutual funds dipped 40% to ₹22,907 crore in May 2026 from the previous month, according to monthly data of the Association of Mutual Funds of India (AMFI).

The inflows had already moderated ever since the beginning of the calendar year – in January and February – even before the West Asia conflict. Investors had shown resilience despite lukewarm returns on their funds throughout 2025 with July 2025 inflows going as high as ₹42,702 crore. This momentum normalised in the subsequent months.

"The moderation in flows can largely be attributed to a combination of factors. Equity markets witnessed some recovery from the corrections seen earlier in the year, reducing the urgency among investors to deploy incremental capital during periods of weakness," said Himanshu Srivastava, Principal, Manager Research, Morningstar Investment Research India.

"Elevated valuations in certain pockets of the market, particularly within the broader market segments, may have also prompted some investors to adopt a more measured approach," he said.

"In addition, the global backdrop remained uncertain, with concerns around the trajectory of global growth, evolving geopolitical developments, and the future path of interest rates continuing to influence investor sentiment. Against this backdrop, some degree of profit booking and temporary caution from lump-sum investors appears to have weighed on overall flows," he added.

The shift from equity to gold ETFs, too, faded with a net outflow of ₹725 crore. To be sure, multiple gold ETFs have halted large scale lumpsum subscriptions in light of an expected increase of increasing foreign exchange rate.

"The reversal appears to have been driven by a combination of profit booking following the earlier rally in gold prices and a shift in investor risk appetite, with some rotation away from safe-haven assets," said Nehal Meshram, Senior Analyst at Morningstar.

SIPs too dip

Investments through systematic investment plans (SIPs) also dipped to ₹30,954 crore in May 2026, from ₹31,115 crore in the previous month.

The number of contributing SIP accounts stayed at a little more than 9 crore accounts for the second consecutive month. However, 3 lakh new SIPs were registered taking the number to 54 lakh accounts in May 2026.

RIL to develop data centres for Meta in Gujarat

Lalatendu Mishra
MUMBAI

Reliance Industries has entered into an agreement with Meta Platforms Inc. for a data centre project in Jamnagar, Gujarat.

RIL will develop a data centre with 168 MW capacity to be delivered within two years, with an option to scale, the company said in a statement.

"This is the first built-to-suit data centre capacity in India for Meta and represents a significant milestone in India's emergence as a global hub for AI infrastructure" the company said.

"Meta will lease capacity from the facility, marking a significant milestone in Meta's global infrastructure expansion and deepening the long-standing strategic partnership with Reliance – one that spans connectivity, commerce, and AI innovation in one of the world's most dynamic digital market," the company said.

The data centre will serve Meta's global infrastructure, supporting its core business and AI compute needs, it added.

Life insurers' new business rose 5% in May to ₹32,031 cr.

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

Life insurers' New business premium (NBP) rose more than 5% year-on-year in May to ₹32,030.84 crore even as number of policies/schemes sold were a tad lower. Market leader LIC reported a 3.5% NBP rise to ₹19,042.16 crore.

LIC mobilised ₹4,584.1 crore (₹4,030.2 crore) in individual premium and ₹14,458.1 crore (₹14,374.9 crore) in group premium. It issued 10.35 lakh policies/schemes (10.68 lakh)

LIC secured ₹4,584.1-cr. NBP.

The 26 private life insurers together logged over 7% NBP rise to ₹12,988.68 crore, per Life Insurance Council data. It came on 5% increase in number of policies/schemes issued to 6,35,567.

Emkay Research commented the protection segment is expected to have maintained momentum in May, while the savings business, including linked and non-linked products, likely saw some softness on geopolitical tensions.

'Data centre power use to rise 26% in '26'

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Global data centre electricity consumption is expected to rise by 26% in 2026, forecast Gartner Inc, a research advisory firm.

It was estimated the worldwide data centre electricity consumption would reach 565 TWh in 2026, a rise from 447 TWh in 2025. Gartner further projected global data centre power demands increasing by 27% year-over-year, reaching 132 GW in 2026 and almost doubling to 290 GW by 2030.

AI-optimised servers are expected to be the primary driver of increased power consumption.

Linglan Wang, director analyst, Gartner, said power availability has become a key constraint in expanding AI capacity, making energy security a critical factor in the global race to scale AI operations.

Industry hired 1.18 lakh flexi workers in last 12 months: ISF

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The Indian Staffing Federation (ISF), the apex body for the flexi-staffing industry in India, said despite cautious market sentiment in 2025 and 2026 on account of geopolitical uncertainties, the industry added 1.18 lakh new formal flexi workers over the last 12 months recording an 8% year-on-year growth in employment.

As per ISF's annual report for FY25-26, the total formal flexi staff employed by members reached 1.91 million as of March 2026. The federation attributed the growth to rising formalisation of employment and sustained demand across sectors despite global challenges.

IT recovery

The report also highlighted a recovery of the IT staffing segment, which logged a 10.1% y-o-y rise in new employment. ISF VP Farhan Azmi said GCCs accounted for 73% of new hiring mandates, driving growth in the sector.

ISF ED Suchita Dutta said its members continued expanding formal employment despite subdued economic environment, adding chunk of workers belonged to the 18-25 year age group, highlighting their strong presence in the workforce.

Zee to raise $241 million for stategic initiatives

Reuters

Indian television broadcaster Zee Entertainment said on Wednesday it would raise $241.43 million to fund its strategic and business initiatives.

The company, which did not disclose a medium for the raise, said the board will deliberate further on options for raising funds.

The fundraise comes days after the broadcaster struck a deal with FIFA to broadcast the 2026 World Cup in India, ending uncertainty over the tournament's availability in one of the last major markets where rights remained unsold.

The deal covers 39 FIFA events over eight years through 2034 and includes the next World Cup in 2030. The company had expanded its presence in sports broadcasting by launching a dedicated portfolio of sports channels.

Indian reservoirs can host 102 GW floating solar

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

India's reservoirs can host about 102 gigawatt (GW) of floating solar capacity, as per the first comprehensive national assessment of the technology's potential by the National Institute of Solar Energy, an autonomous institute of the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy. The report titled "Solar PV Potential of India (Floating Solar)" frames panels on water as a way around one of the most intractable obstacles in the solar sector – land.

The assessment, however, has no calculation of what it would cost to realise this potential. Its only cost reference is a 2021 benchmark from U.S. National Renewable Energy Laboratory, which the report cites to note floating units cost about 25% more upfront than ground-mounted ones owing to floats, anchoring and waterproofing.

"We are in discussions with the Finance Ministry to promote floating solar and agri-photovoltaics," Santosh Kumar Sarangi, Secretary, MNRE said.

Water power: An aerial view of the floating solar panels on the Mudasarlova reservoir in Visakhapatnam. FILE PHOTO

Agri-photovoltaics refer to farm beds that are sheltered by structures on which solar panels are mounted.

Acquiring land

Ground-mounted solar systems, which dominate India's about 100 GW of installed solar capacity, need 3-4 times more area/MW than the panels themselves occupy. Land acquisition, which is costly, slow and prone to conflict with agriculture and habitation, continues to be a chokepoint as India pursues 500 GW non-fossil capacity by 2030. Floating solar is 'land neutral', the report underlines.

NISE arrived at its estimate by passing India's inland water bodies via six geospatial filters: lakes and reservoirs larger than 10 hectare, water present for at least 11 months/year, depths of 3-30 metre, solar irradiance above 4.5 kWh/m²/day and proximity within 10 km of roads and substations. Demonstrated at Odisha's Hirakud reservoir, the filters whittled 499 sq. km. of water down to 99.5 sq. km. of usable surface. Applied nationwide, they yielded 1,946 sq. km. of feasible area with a self-imposed cap of 20% of any reservoir's surface, translating to 102.18 GW. Maharashtra (16.28 GW), Madhya Pradesh (14.89 GW), Karnataka (13.69 GW), Odisha (12.81 GW) and Telangana (10.72 GW) account for the bulk.

Flagship solar park

India's flagship is the Omkareshwar floating solar park on River Narmada in Madhya Pradesh's Khandwa district – at 278 MW, the country's largest with plans to scale to 600 MW. Yet NISE's field observations there recorded loosening float joints, misaligned platforms and uneven buoyancy alongside reports from developers of electric cables breaking. Globally, floating solar reached about 9.6 GW by 2024, almost 90% of it in Asia. China leads with installations such as a 120 MW plant on fish farm in Poyang Lake; Singapore's 1 MW Tengeh reservoir test bed supplied much of the field's performance data and Netherlands accounts for about 3/4th of Europe's capacity built largely on quarry lakes.

Hetero Labs, Hungary's Gedeon Richter to tie up for Semaglutide

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

Semaglutide is the active ingredient in Novo Nordisk's blockbuster drugs Wegovy and Ozempic

Budapest-headquartered Gedeon Richter and Hyderabad-based Hetero Labs announced on Wednesday signing of a global collaboration agreement for the joint development, registration and commercialisation of Semaglutide injection.

Under the agreement, they will combine complementary strengths under a coordinated global framework with clearly defined territorial responsibilities and a balanced cost- and profit-sharing model, the companies said on the collaboration for the generic of Danish major Novo Nordisk's Ozempic.

Semaglutide is the active ingredient in Novo Nordisk's blockbuster diabetes and weight loss drugs Wegovy and Ozempic.

Hetero has already made significant development investments, including technology setup and registration batch manufacturing. Regulatory filings are underway, with the EU and US submissions planned for 2027.

The collaboration leverages Hetero's proven market reach within the U.S. and Emerging Markets, as well as Richter's well-established commercial infrastructure across Europe and Central Asia, while maintaining optionality for future European manufacturing by Richter, the companies said.

The collaboration will enable us to deliver high quality, affordable therapies, Global Head of General Medicines at Richter Bence Kovacs said.

France's Airbus turns towards Saab as FCAS unravels

No take-off: A scale model of the Franco-German-Spanish Future Combat Air System (FCAS / SCAF). REUTERS

Reuters
PARIS/BERLIN

Airbus is increasingly looking to Sweden's Saab as a preferred future partner as the collapse of a Franco-German fighter programme reshapes European defence alliances, three people familiar withthe matter said.

Teaming up on warfare with the maker of Gripen combat jets is not the only option for Airbus, which represents Germany and Spain in the fighter market. There have also been high-level contacts on a separate project involving Britain, Italy and Japan.

But Airbus and Saab have been in broad exploratory talks for at least six months, buoyed by improving defence relations between Germany and Sweden, the people said.

Open-door policy

Saab said any cooperation would be a political decision."That said, we have an open-door policy and are open to collaboration with many defence industry players," a spokesperson said.

Airbus had no immediate comment.

Until now, talks have been largely conceptual to avoid pre-empting the breakdown of the FCAS fighter project, sources said.

But this week's divorce between Airbus and Dassault Aviation- expected to be made official at the Berlin Airshow -could allow Airbus to pursue a Nordic partnership more openly.

Speaking to *Reuters* in Berlin, Airbus Defence & Space CEO Michael Schoellhorn confirmed Saab was among potential partners but said it was too early to rule out other options.

NEWS ANALYSIS

"There are potential partners, e.g. Saab. It will also be up to the (German) air force ... to restate what they actually need."

On Tuesday, Leonardo opened the door to Airbus and its defence paymaster Germany joining the separate GCAP project between Britain, Italy and Japan.

Berlin would be a "particularly valid partner," CEO Lorenzo Mariani told *Reuters*.

Analysts say the collapse of FCAS after nine years deals a blow to European defence cooperation. Decisions over what comes next will shape European air power for decades.

"It demonstrates how difficult it is to align military,political and industrial priorities," said Douglas Barrie,senior fellow for military aerospace at IISS.

Potential hurdles

Sweden remained independent during the last round of fighter development, building the Gripen while France produced the Rafale and Britain, Germany, Spain and Italy co-developed the Eurofighter.

For the next generation it has yet to show its hand, having initially partnered with Britain and now conducting research on a Gripen successor, with political decisions due in 2030.

India bond-tax step to up foreign debt inflow, bid for global index inclusion

India tax breaks, policy steps spark $1 billion in foreign bond inflows, lower yields; measures to improve India's debt appeal could lower borrowing costs over time; global asset managers say reforms boost India's case for inclusion in global bond indices; measures taken in response to oil shock

NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters
MUMBAI

India's decision to exempt foreigners from taxes on government bonds and broaden access to the debt market is expected to make the country more attractive to overseas investors, catalyse fresh inflows and strengthen its case for inclusion in global indexes.

On Friday, policymakers unveiled a wide-ranging set of measures to draw in overseas capital while shoring up the currency and external balances, which have been strained by higher oil prices.

They scrapped withholding and capital gains taxes on foreign investments in government bonds, broadened the pool of securities that are available without investment limits and introduced incentives to encourage banks to raise foreign currency deposits from non-resident Indians and for companies to tap overseas borrowings.

The slew of measures, rolled out in response to the oil shock that has hit Indian assets, is beginning to lure foreign investors back into an overlooked market against a backdrop of rising global rate volatility.

"We believe that these changes are a game-changer for debt flows," said Jennifer Taylor, the head of emerging market debt and systematic fixed income at State Street Investment Management, which manages about $5.6 trillion in assets.

Money swings: Outlook for foreign inflows will be closely tied to rupee's trajectory. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

The pace of foreign inflows has quickened since the measures were introduced, with more than $1 billion worth of government debt bought in just three sessions. Before the announcement in the year-to-date period, $1.6 billion had been purchased.

Yields on government bonds have fallen 10 to 30 basis points across the curve, with shorter maturities seeing the biggest declines.

The removal of taxes makes Indian government bonds more attractive on a relative basis, Taylor said, adding that the measures should boost foreign participation across the yield curve and lower borrowing costs over time.

> The rupee is down 5.86% so far this year, trailing only Indonesian rupiah as Asia's worst performing currency though it experienced modest relief since the bond tax moves

More consequential

Some investors said the reforms could prove more consequential over the longer term by paving the way for India's inclusion in broader global debt benchmarks, which would bring more durable and predictable inflows.

Niel Clement, portfolio manager for emerging market fixed income at BNP Paribas Asset Management, which manages more than €1.6 trillion ($1.85 trillion) of assets, said the steps would broaden opportunities for overseas investors, redirect flows to the onshore market and provide a constructive boost to India's bid for inclusion in the Bloomberg Global Aggregate Index.

Bloomberg Index Services is expected to seek investor feedback later this month on whether Indian government bonds should be added to its flagship global bond index.

M&G Investments, which manages about £376 billion ($503.4 billion) of assets, said the tax exemptions have boosted the near-term appeal of Indian government securities.

Bigger inflow driver

It added that inclusion in the Bloomberg index would be a bigger driver of inflows, similar to India's entry into JPMorgan's emerging market debt index. In the weeks before tax cuts were rolled out, India's finance minister met with officials at the central bank to push for entry into the Bloomberg index, a government official said.

"We view the measures announced aimed at addressing pressures on the capital account as having effectively restored policy control," said Low Guan Yi, head of Asia fixed income at M&G Investments.

"With steps taken to support macroeconomic stability, we see investment opportunities as India continues to differentiate itself from other emerging bond markets with more limited policy flexibility." UBS Asset Management, which is neutral to underweight on Indian fixed income, said the Reserve Bank of India's moves signaled a constructive approach toward broadening market access and they will encourage more foreign inflows over time.

"India is an important part of EM local index so we are always reviewing it as an investment option," said Shamaila Khan, head of fixed income emerging markets and Asia-Pacific at UBS Asset Management.

Currency, energy risks

Investors cautioned that while the measures improved the appeal of Indian debt, the outlook for foreign inflows will remain closely tied to the rupee's trajectory.

"The bigger issue for offshore investors is still the currency," said Rong Ren Goh, head of macro and thematics forAsian fixed income at Eastspring Investments, which manages about $250 billion, adding that investors are likely to wait for clearer signs of rupee stability before raising allocations.

The recent pace of rupee depreciation has dented the carry appeal of Indian debt, while higher energy prices have added to the pressure, he said.

The rupee is down 5.86% so far this year, trailing only Indonesian rupiah as Asia's worst-performing currency though it experienced modest relief since the bond tax moves; it was last at 95.16 per dollar.

Economists at Citi sharply revised India's balance of payments forecast for the current fiscal year, a shift they says should underpin the rupee. They now expect a $5 billion surplus versus an earlier projected deficit of $60 billion.

Why SpaceX IPO may spell bad news for crypto

NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters

SpaceX's much-anticipated $75 billion initial public offering, set to be the largest ever, will likely keep cryptocurrency prices in the doldrums as retail investors attracted to new and risky artificial intelligence stocks scramble to get a slice of the action.

Celebrity billionaire Elon Musk's rocket and satellite communications company - which merged with his AI startup xAI earlier this year - is expected to fetch a valuation of around $1.75 trillion, sparking a Wall Street and media frenzy. The company has set aside up to 30%, or $22.5 billion, of shares for retail investors, *Reuters* and other outlets have reported, in a rare move for a blockbuster IPO that historically have been dominated by institutional investors. That has helped drive rotation out of risk assets like cryptocurrencies, as retail and other investors free up cash to buy shares in SpaceX - as well as hotly anticipated IPOs from OpenAI and Anthropic that are expected to follow this year, said analysts and crypto executives.

Hit to crypto: A 3D-printed miniature model of Elon Musk and a SpaceX logo are seen in this illustration. REUTERS

Bitcoin down

Bitcoin, the world's largest cryptocurrency, was last trading near the $60,000 level, down about 52% from its all-time high of $1,26,223 in October. "Crypto is a funding currency for a lot of this," said Spencer Hallarn, global head of over-the-counter trading, GSR, a crypto trading firm and liquidity provider. "We've got to find $75 billion for this IPO, and it's got to come from somewhere."

Firm unprofitable

With SpaceX, Musk revived space travel, turning cosmic exploration into thriving businesses, but it is eyeing an even bigger opportunity in building AI for enterprises. SpaceX's IPO prospectus shows that the company overall is unprofitable, and its lofty valuation assumes years of rapid growth driven by its plan to become an AI powerhouse, in addition to other futuristic ambitions such as Mars missions and launching AI data centres in space. That makes it the type of risky and speculative AI bet that appeals to the same cohort of retail investors that drive sentiment in crypto markets, crypto executives said."A SpaceX IPO would likely pull some capital out of crypto, atleast initially. Both compete for the same pool of risk capital," said Thomas Puech, CEO of crypto trading firm INDIGO,adding that relative to crypto, AI is "the 'sexier' trade at the moment."

Worst times for crypto

SpaceX's planned Friday Nasdaq debut could not come at a worse time for cryptocurrencies. Bitcoin tumbled 15% last week, the most since November 2022, when crypto exchange FTX imploded.

Adding to the pressure, Michael Saylor's Strategy, the largest corporate holder of bitcoin that has been relentlessly bullish on the token for years, disclosed last week that it had sold some of its holdings for the first time since 2022.

"It really is out of favour with investors," said David Morrison, senior market analyst, Trade Nation, adding bitcoin has lost its luster and novelty for many investors. "Excitement over the SpaceX IPO isn't helping either." Cryptocurrencies soared after U.S. President Trump's crypto-friendly administration took power but prices fell in October when he threatened to slap new tariffs on China and struggled to regain footing since.

China Inc. deploys 'quiet' layoffs as Beijing promotes AI

NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters
BEIJING

Liu, a Hangzhou-based contractor at a large Chinese internet firm, says her employer began quietly firing contractors in March after it ordered staff to use AI tools including AI agent OpenClaw, which saw lightning-fast adoption in China this year.

While she does not know the full scope of the layoffs, her employer has also started reducing graduate hiring as Chinese companies race to implement AI systems.

"The tasks most people do can be completely replaced by OpenClaw. After a person writes all their workflows (into OpenClaw)... they can basically be fired," said the 26-year-old,who asked not to use her full name or her company due to the sensitivity of the subject.

Preserve social stability

While companies around the world are grappling with AI adoption, Chinese firms face an unique challenge: Beijing wants companies to adopt AI fast enough to transform productivity, but not so fast or visibly that workers are pushed out in numbers that threaten social stability.

Liu's company is among a number of Chinese enterprises quietly implementing small-scale layoffs as they seek AI-linked productivity gains without attracting government scrutiny, nine workers from industries spanning tech, entertainment and advertising told *Reuters*. Their strategy contrasts with massive AI-linked job cuts announced by major global companies including Meta, which have triggered a wave of anti-AI populism in the West.

Age of the AI: Some firms are using AI to measure if workers are adopting it fast enough. REUTERS

China's State Council and human resources ministry did not immediately respond to faxed requests for comment.

Under Chinese labour laws, companies must seek government approval for job cuts exceeding 10% of their workforce, and Chinese courts have in at least three cases ruled against companies that dismissed workers to replace them with AI.

"Private companies will need to make room for some level of inefficiency in order to avoid mass layoffs that would prompt' social instability' and could have political ramifications," a senior manager at a big Chinese fintech company told *Reuters*.

The person said restructuring is already happening at every big tech firm in China, with marketing and front-end jobs largely replaced by AI. An engineer at Alibaba's cloud division also said AI-driven headcount reductions have begun in parts of the company and are likely to unfold through gradual cuts and attrition rather than a single mass round of lay-offs.

Alibaba did not respond to a *Reuters* request for comment.

He Shujing, a senior analyst at consultancy Plenum, said big Chinese tech firms remain in an "all-in phase" on AI.

"The productivity gains from AI will likely reduce hiring needs, but large companies are expected to be cautious about making direct workforce cuts."

Some firms are not only using AI to replace tasks and roles but also measuring whether workers are adopting it fast enough. Employee use of tokens, a unit of AI compute consumption, is being measured in some workplaces to estimate efficiency -although that doesn't translate to direct productivity gains or indicate the quality of work produced using AI.

Token usage

A big data engineer at a Chinese tech giant said his manager began ranking employees by token usage in March, adding that the metric will be linked to their performance reviews and promotion prospects.

"It is relatively forced. One should not use AI for the sake of it," he told *Reuters* on condition of anonymity. "I still can't shake the feeling that I'm getting closer to being replaced."

"Entertainment is among the industries most heavily disrupted, as low-budget micro drama studios shift to AI-generated actors and sets."

JERUSALEM

Netanyahu will run in the next Israel election, says Likud party

AFP

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will seek re-election in Israel's upcoming national vote, his Likud party announced on Wednesday, after U.S. President Donald Trump publicly questioned whether the 76-year-old would run. Mr. Netanyahu has served as Prime Minister for nearly two decades across multiple terms. AFP

KYIV

Ukraine launches long-range strikes on military, energy sites in Russia

REUTERS

A series of long-range Ukrainian attacks hit targets deep inside Russia on Wednesday, part of Kyiv's efforts to raise the costs of the war for the Kremlin by striking energy and military facilities. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Ukrainian FP-5 Flamingo long-range missiles had hit the facility in Cheboksary. AP

ANKARA

Israeli attacks on Syria, Lebanon threaten Turkiye, says Erdogan

REUTERS

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said on Wednesday that Israel's attacks on Syria and Lebanon had reached a point where they also threaten Turkiye, adding Israel's "aggression" posed a threat to the whole world and must be stopped. Mr. Erdogan also said Israel was leading a "sneaky effort" to destabilise African countries. REUTERS

JERUSALEM

Damage caused to airbase during Iran attacks, says Israeli official

AFP

An Israeli military official said that a key Israeli airbase had sustained damage during this week's missile attacks by Iran, though it remains unclear whether it took a direct hit. "We confirm that there was an impact at the base but at a non-critical area," the official said, referring to the Ramat David base in northern Israel. AFP

Air strikes on 'terror hideouts' in Afghanistan killed 26, says Pakistan

Islamabad says its forces carried out 'precise and calibrated strikes' in the border regions targeting safe havens of planners and masterminds of the TTP; Kabul says Pakistan bombed civilian homes in the provinces of Kunar, Khost, and Paktika

Press Trust of India
ISLAMABAD

Pakistan on Wednesday said it carried out "precise and calibrated" overnight air strikes targeting alleged militant hideouts in Afghanistan and killed 26 people.

In the aftermath of recent militant incidents in Pakistan, "precise and calibrated strikes were carried out along Pakistan-Afghanistan border areas on hideouts and safe havens of masterminds and planners belonging to Fitna-al-Khwarij, killing 26 Khawarijs," Pakistan's Information Minister Attaullah Tarar said on Wednesday. Fitna-al-Khawarij is a term that Pakistan uses for the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

A Taliban security member near the debris of a house after an air strike in Khost Province, Afghanistan, on Wednesday. REUTERS

The affirmation came hours after the Taliban regime in Afghanistan said Pakistan air strikes killed several people in an overnight attack.

"Last night, the Pakistani military once again violated Afghanistan's airspace and bombed civilian homes in the provinces of Kunar, Khost, and Paktika. As a result of these attacks, 11 children, one woman, and one elderly man were killed, while 14 other women and children were injured," Afghan Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid said.

Among the recent terror incidents that Mr. Tarar listed was a militants' attack on Federal Constabulary post in Musa Dara on Tuesday, vehicle-borne suicide attacks on a military post in North Waziristan on June 2, and an attack on a police station in Bannu on May 9.

"Based on credible intelligence, selective targeting of camps and hideouts was carried out with precision and accuracy. Four targets were completely destroyed including a training centre, a hideout, an ammunition cache and a Marakiz (hub) belonging to the Fitna-al-Khwarij Commander Aleem Khan Khushali and Commander Akhtar Muhammad Jani Khel," Mr. Tarar said in a statement on X. He also said Pakistan has always strived for maintaining peace and stability in the region, but at the same time "the safety and security of our citizens remains our top priority".

Pak. Army copter crashes in PoK, killing all on board

Press Trust of India
ISLAMABAD

An Mi-17 helicopter of the Pakistan Army Aviation crashed near Muzaffarabad in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir on Wednesday, killing all personnel on board, the Army said.

"There were no survivors," the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the media wing of the Pakistan military, said, without giving the number of those killed.

Smoke billows after Pakistan Army's Mi-17 helicopter crashed in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir on Wednesday. AP

'Technical fault'

In a brief statement, it said that the accident occurred "during take-off due to a technical fault".

Rescue and recovery teams immediately reached the crash site.

A board of inquiry has been ordered to ascertain the exact technical cause of the accident.

President Asif Ali Zardari, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Speaker of the National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq expressed grief and sorrow over the accident.

In separate statements, they extended their heartfelt sympathies to the families of those killed in the accident.

Chief of Defence Forces and Chief of the Army Staff Field Marshal Asim Munir and all ranks of the army "express deep grief over the tragic loss of precious lives and extend heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families", the ISPR said.

UN nuclear watchdog Board demands Iran cooperation

Associated Press
VIENNA

The UN atomic watchdog's board on Wednesday demanded that Iran fully cooperate with the agency, provide complete information about its stockpile of near weapons-grade nuclear material and grant its inspectors access to Iranian nuclear sites.

A resolution passed by the International Atomic Energy Agency's board also said that giving information and access are "essential and urgent" in order to enable verification that there's no "diversion of nuclear material".

Twenty-one countries on the IAEA's 35-member board of governors voted for the resolution at IAEA headquarters in Vienna, according to diplomats who spoke on condition of anonymity to describe the outcome of the closed-doors vote.

The resolution was put forward by France, the United Kingdom, Germany and the United States

Russia, China and Niger opposed it, while 10 countries abstained and one didn't vote as it was in arrears.

The resolution was put forward by France, the United Kingdom, Germany and the United States.

A senior Western diplomat, who wasn't authorised to speak about the sensitive matter so requested anonymity, said that the resolution "aims to keep diplomatic pressure on Iran to come into compliance with its legal safeguards obligations".

According to the IAEA, Iran maintains a stockpile of 440.9 kg of uranium enriched up to 60% purity – a short, technical step away from weapons-grade levels of 90%.

That stockpile could allow Iran to build as many as 10 nuclear bombs, should it decide to weaponise its program, IAEA Director-General Rafael Mariano Grossi warned in a recent interview. He said that it doesn't mean that Iran has such a weapon.

Iran says that it's not pursuing nuclear weapons, and its program is entirely peaceful.

Talking to presspersons outside the IAEA boardroom, Iran's ambassador to the IAEA, Reza Najafi, denounced Wednesday's resolution and said that the document describes the situation in Iran "as being quite normal and as if nothing had happened".

Stanching a protest

On the streets: The police fire tear gas at anti-government protesters blocking a highway in Vinto, Bolivia. Dressed in ponchos and helmets, demonstrators tried to reach the palace of government in La Paz's main square, but they were dispersed by the police. AP

U.S. secretly helped oil pass through strait: Trump

Agence France-Presse
WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Wednesday that the U.S. military secretly helped 100 million barrels of oil pass through the Strait of Hormuz, which Iran largely closed in response to U.S. and Israeli attacks.

"Last month, I directed our Great U.S. Military to execute a secret mission to support Oil Tankers and other Commercial Ships through the Strait of Hormuz," Mr. Trump said in a post on his Truth Social platform, claiming the U.S. "controls" the waterway.

"Today, I am pleased to announce that this effort has resulted in more than 100 MILLION Barrels of Oil making its way through the Strait," he said.

U.S. blocks China, Pak. bid to blacklist BLA, Majeed Brigade

Press Trust of India
UNITED NATIONS

The U.S. has blocked a joint bid by Pakistan and China at the UN Security Council to designate the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and the Majeed Brigade as a terrorist entity.

Islamabad and Beijing had in September last year submitted their joint bid to the Security Council to blacklist the BLA and the Majeed Brigade under the Council's 1267 Al Qaeda Sanctions Committee.

It is learnt that the U.S., France and U.K. – all permanent veto-wielding members of the Security Council – blocked the bid this month.

Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmed had said that terrorist entities, including ISIL-K, Al-Qaeda, Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan, East Turkistan Islamic Movement, BLA and the Majeed Brigade operate from Afghan sanctuaries, enabling cross-border infiltration and attacks.

Ex-intelligence chief Sallay 'directed' 2019 Easter bombings, says Sri Lanka Minister

Agence France-Presse
COLOMBO

Sri Lanka's Public Security Minister told Parliament on Wednesday the nation's ex-intelligence chief directed the 2019 Easter Sunday attack, in the first official statement linking him directly to the bombings that killed 279 people.

Minister Ananda Wijepala said Major General Suresh Sallay, who was arrested in February on accusations of "aiding and abetting" the attack, had identified a Catholic church to be bombed.

Sri Lanka's Opposition activists demanding the release of Suresh Sallay take part in a sit-in protest in Colombo on Wednesday. AFP

Sri Lanka's worst single terror attack against civilians involved bombings against three upmarket hotels in the capital, two Roman Catholic churches and an evangelical Protestant church outside Colombo.

"Investigations have revealed that Retired Major General Tuan Suresh Sallay conspired with and strategically directed Islamic extremists until they carried out the attacks," Mr. Wijepala said.

"Just three weeks prior to the attack, Gen. Sallay met Muslim men to obtain details of the location and the congregation," the Minister added.

Gen. Sallay, through his lawyer, has denied any involvement.

Mr. Wijepala said Gen. Sallay was admitted to hospital on Sunday after launching a hunger strike while being detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

Opposition activists have been demonstrating in the capital demanding his release from custody.

China warns EU on new sanctions over ongoing Ukraine war

Agence France-Presse
BEIJING

China warned the European Union on Wednesday against sanctioning its companies, after Brussels proposed a fresh wave of measures over Beijing's support for Russia in its war with Ukraine.

The EU's latest round of sanctions since Moscow's 2022 invasion of Ukraine seek, among other aims, to complicate commercial activities by companies in third countries that allegedly support the Russian military. The 27-member bloc has previously implemented measures targeting Chinese firms for their alleged support for Russia's military industrial complex.

Asked about the proposed sanctions, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said that Beijing "has always firmly opposed illegal unilateral sanctions that lack basis in international law".

He warned that China will "take necessary measures to resolutely safeguard its legitimate rights".

Drawing attention: Gabonese artist Naïla Opiangah, 31, at her seaside studio in Accra, Ghana. AFP

A Gabonese artist is on quest to redefine black representation

Agence France-Presse
ACCRA

Gabonese artist Naila Opiangah, whose paintings of black female nudes have been showcased at the Met Gala, believes artists have a key role to play in forging Africa's future.

"When we talk about the development of Africa, we also need to think about how we preserve who we are," she told AFP from Accra, Ghana, where she lives when she is not in New York.

Her own exploration of identity comes through her depictions of naked black women – a blend of the figurative and the abstract – painted in sober shades of brown, green, and muted blue.

Addressing female nudity is a "rather rebellious act given my origins, the way I was brought up, the people I depict and the community to which I belong", the 31-year-old from Gabon said.

"I found myself thinking: 'Why am I ashamed? It doesn't make sense. Why have I grown up in a system where I have to hide my nudity? Why not simply look at the body for what it is?'"

The question became an obsession.

"The relationship we have with the naked body today is a legacy of colonisation," she said.

She was referring to the straitjacket of modesty imposed by 19th-century European colonial powers on the traditional African societies of the time, and the Europeans' stereotypical view that African women were hypersexualised.

"We didn't have such a sexualised relationship with the human body before we were forced to cover ourselves up."

Ms. Opiangah is aware she is a role model for other African women. "I have what I have because I've seized opportunities. For an African woman, self-confidence is a rare commodity," she said.

Setbacks ignite talks of Trump sliding into lame-duck phase as he turns 80

Historically a President's influence wanes in his second term as he is barred from running again by the U.S. Constitution; Trump faces defiance from some fellow Republicans as midterms approach; his health is also being watched as he was seen with swollen ankles and bruises on hands recently

Reuters
WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump is trying to project political strength as he turns 80, but setbacks at home and abroad are exposing the limits of his power and pushing him towards the kind of lame-duck status he has told aides he is determined to avoid.

Nearly 17 months into his second term, the courts are pushing back; his effort to wind down the Iran war has stalled; and his approval ratings have weakened. Some fellow Republicans in Congress are also defying him - though his hold on core supporters remains firm.

Still, Mr. Trump has shown he retains significant clout: he has helped oust Republican incumbents in primary races and has pressed ahead with aggressive trade policies. He has also pursued high-profile construction projects in Washington in one of the most ambitious building drives by a U.S. President in years.

This dynamic is unfolding just months ahead of November's midterm elections as Mr. Trump's Republican Party scrambles to maintain control of Congress. The loss of one or both chambers to opposition Democrats could hasten his slide into a lame-duck phase, historically when a President - if barred from running again - sees influence waning and domestic priorities stymied.

Changing priorities: In this file photo, U..S. President Donald Trump gestures at the site of ongoing construction of the planned White House ballroom in Washington, D.C., in May. REUTERS

The White House is trying to prevent that narrative from taking hold prematurely and has been forceful about letting Republican lawmakers know Mr. Trump can still make or break them, according to a presidential adviser, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive internal matters.

But with some Republicans already showing greater willingness to stand up to Mr. Trump, the adviser acknowledged it was inevitable that his authority would begin to diminish.

"He'll naturally start to lose leverage, especially after the midterms," the adviser said.

Mr. Trump has privately told staffers that one of the reasons he has mused about a third term, which is forbidden by the Constitution, is to ward off any public perception that he might become a lame duck and slip into "irrelevance," according to a former senior aide who spoke on condition of anonymity.

White House spokeswoman Olivia Wales said, "President Trump is the unequivocal leader of the Republican Party who is committed to maintaining Republicans' majority in Congress."

Health under scrutiny

The questions about Mr. Trump's political standing come as scrutiny of his personal stamina is intensifying.

A Reuters/Ipsos poll in February found 61% of Americans thought Mr. Trump had become more erratic with age, and another survey in April showed a majority concerned about his temperament and mental sharpness.

Mr. Trump, who is the oldest President sworn into office, will celebrate his 80th birthday on Sunday by hosting a UFC cage fight on the White House lawn.

After a flurry of near-weekly travel early in the year, Mr. Trump has largely stayed at the White House or his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida since he launched the Iran war on February 28. He has made only a handful of domestic trips since then.

His public daily schedule consists largely of "executive time" and policy meetings held behind closed doors. He is often more visible on his Truth Social platform, where he posts throughout the day and late into the night.

Mr. Trump declared himself in excellent condition following a routine checkup last month after he was seen at public events with swollen ankles, which his doctors have described as only a "slight" issue, and with bruising on his hands.

A senior White House official, who also spoke on condition of anonymity, said Mr. Trump was keen to avoid comparisons to Joe Biden, his Democratic predecessor who faced questions about his fitness for the job before leaving office at 82.

Even so, Mr. Trump has occasionally been caught on camera appearing to doze off at events, including at an NBA Finals game at Madison Square Garden on Monday. As clips of him with his eyes shut have gone viral, Mr. Trump aides have fired back on social media, claiming he was blinking or listening intently.

White House spokesman Davis Ingle described Mr. Trump as "the sharpest and most accessible President in American history."

Analysts agree that even if Mr. Trump's political influence wanes, he can still rely on executive orders to shape policy and act more freely on the world stage, where Presidents have greater leeway to take action unilaterally.

A weakening hand

Still, there have been signs of Mr. Trump's weakening hand. While he is not likely to see a full-scale Republican revolt, some defeated incumbents, who remain in office until January, have already begun opposing parts of his agenda and have also signalled pushback against his cabinet nominations.

In the past two weeks, small Republican factions in the Senate and House of Representatives have joined with Democrats to rebuke him over the Iran war, reject $1 billion in funding tied to his ballroom and force a retreat on his $1.8 billion fund to pay political allies claiming they were victims of "weaponized" prosecution.

As Mr. Trump has struggled to achieve policy objectives, he has become more preoccupied with his construction projects. He is increasingly touting not only the ornate ballroom under construction but also refurbishment of the Reflecting Pool on the National Mall and a proposed triumphal arch.

One way he is likely to continue exercising power is in the selection of Republicans' 2028 presidential nominee, seen as a contest between Vice-President J.D. Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

Date with Pope

Trip to Spain: Pope Leo XIV waves from a balcony after the recitation of the Rosary at the Abbey of Our Lady of Montserrat, near Barcelona. He is visiting Spain during June 6-12, where he will meet with migrants and organisations dedicated to helping them. VATICAN MEDIA/AFP

Amnesty accuses Israel of 'ethnic cleansing' of West Bank Bedouins

Agence France-Presse
RAMALLAH

Amnesty International has accused Israel of conducting an "ethnic cleansing" campaign against Bedouin and herding communities in the occupied West Bank, saying the measures were designed to accelerate the annexation of the Palestinian territory.

A new report by the rights group found that these rural Palestinian communities are bearing the brunt of Israeli settler violence and forced displacement.

"Israeli authorities are accelerating annexation through a state-driven campaign of ethnic cleansing targeting Palestinian Bedouin and herding communities" of the West Bank, said the report released on Wednesday.

In occupied territory: Palestinian children at a school in the Bedouin hamlet of Khan al-Ahmar, West Bank, on Wednesday. AP

Amnesty said its research showed that 27 Bedouin and herding communities were forcibly displaced between 2023 and 2025 or were at risk of displacement in the West Bank's Area C, which encompasses 60% of the territory and is under Israeli control.

Amnesty accused Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government of catering to the settler movement's religious nationalist agenda. "It has accelerated settlement expansion and land grabs, increased financial and logistical support to settlements, and it has armed settlers, thereby enabling a brutal state-sanctioned campaign of settler violence," it said.

In an apparent effort to counter arguments by Israeli officials that settler violence is caused by bad actors in that community, Amnesty pointed to "explicit calls by Israeli officials for settlement expansion" and "measures aimed at minimising Palestinian presence in Area C".

The "ethnic cleansing campaign is state-led, and state-sponsored, not driven by rogue settlers or so-called extremist ministers", the report concluded.

North Korea, China claim wins from Xi's Pyongyang visit, but limits remain

Reuters
SEOUL/BEIJING

North Korea and China both walked away claiming major wins from Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit this week to the isolated state, which helped elevate North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's global stature and pulled Pyongyang more tightly into China's orbit. The two countries each lavished the other with praise and spoke of deeper cooperation during the two-day trip, which saw Mr. Kim greet Mr. Xi with a 21-gun salute as well as a performance of Chinese and North Korean songs and avoided discussion of thornier issues such as denuclearisation and the United States.

Mr. Kim "has often talked about how North Korea is now a pivotal player in reshaping the global order, and its partnership with Russia has been a major catalyst in validating that assertion," said Jenny Town, director of the Korea program at the Washington-based Stimson Center.

"Having Xi now take his first trip out of country this year to visit Pyongyang on an agenda that didn't include North Korea's nuclear programme, was a big win for Kim."

The lack of discussion around denuclearisation, which had in the past strained China's relationship with North Korea, is a significant change. On the eve of Mr. Xi's visit, Kim Yo Jong, the North Korean leader's sister, slammed the U.S. as spreading false information, after Washington in May said that Mr. Xi and U.S. President Donald Trump had confirmed a shared goal to denuclearise North Korea during talks in Beijing.

"Beijing has very clearly moved on from that issue and now tacitly accepts North Korea as a nuclear state, which likely puts China on an equal footing with Russia in Pyongyang's eyes," said Jeremy Chan, a China & Northeast Asia analyst at Eurasia Group.

Limits of cooperation

"I think China achieved its primary goal of this trip, which was drawing North Korea closer and counterbalancing Russia's growing influence in North Korea." Asked about whether Mr. Kim and Mr. Xi discussed denuclearisation on Tuesday, China's Foreign Ministry told a briefing that its position and policy on the peninsula remained consistent and stable. It did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Wednesday if the lack of mention meant an implicit acceptance of North Korea as a nuclear state.

A picture released by North Korea's official news agency shows Kim seeing off Xi at the Pyongyang International Airport on Tuesday. AFP

Still, analysts noted there were distinct differences in the two sides' accounts of the leaders' talks, with North Korea more focused on the pageantry of the event and positioning itself as an equal to Beijing, while China spoke of hoped-for outcomes around trade, tourism, and law enforcement. Ms. Town said it indicated there were limits to how far North Korea was willing to go to improve the relationship with China, after moving closer to Russia in recent years by sending military support for the Ukraine war and receiving economic help in return. "It is clear that Kim and Xi do not have the kind of rapport Kim has with Putin; there seems to be little personal affinity between them. But both understand the strategic value of the relationship to push through," she said.

But Mr. Kim giving explicit support for Beijing's One China principle, which for Beijing means that both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to one country, and China's mention of military cooperation stood out, they added.

Daughter in focus

"North Korea's support for Russia has shown that Pyongyang can provide material assistance to a major power in wartime. There is no evidence yet of a comparable commitment to China, but DPRK (North Korea) messaging on Taiwan now matters more than before," said Chad O'Carroll, founder of North Korea-focused website NK News. Observers of the visit also said they were closely watching for the presence of Mr. Kim's daughter as it would have bolstered arguments made by South Korea's spy agency and others that she was being groomed to succeed her father.

The daughter, who is believed to be around 13 and named JuAe, accompanied Mr. Kim on his visit to Beijing last year and is pictured with him regularly. However, she has not been seen in images of the trip released by Chinese and North Korean state media. Benjamin Ho, China programme associate professor at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore, said her absence was in keeping with China's style.

"Given Beijing's penchant for protocol, it would be awkward if a young girl appears among all the senior officials present,"he said.

HAVE FUN

Neymar wants to enjoy every moment of the World Cup

AFP

Brazil forward Neymar said that he felt like a "kid" ahead of what will be his fourth and "final" World Cup, which could yet risk being derailed by a nagging calf injury. "I am like an 18-year-old going to his first World Cup. I am going to enjoy every second and every moment. I hope it will be special as well," said Neymar.

FULLY RECOVERED

Messi makes an appearance and scores a goal in Argentina's friendly

GETTY IMAGES

Lionel Messi is ready for his sixth World Cup. After recovering from an injury, the captain of the reigning champion played 20 minutes and scored a penalty in Argentina's 3-0 victory over Iceland in Alabama on Tuesday in its final tune-up match before the World Cup. Messi is the all-time top scorer for Argentina (117 goals).

DETERMINED

I'll be at the next WC in 2030: barred Somali referee Artan

AFP

Somali referee Omar Artan, who was denied entry into the USA for the World Cup, returned to a hero's welcome in Mogadishu and vowed to take part in the tournament in 2030. "I will be at the next World Cup and will continue to make Somalia proud. Despite what has happened to me, I am not discouraged," Artan said.

MIND GAMES

England not among the top favourites, reckons Tuchel

REUTERS

We are not the top favourites. We cannot be because we have not won it for so many years. There are proven winners in the tournament with more success in recent years. It is my opinion and conviction that once you reach the quarterfinals, you can go all the way — England manager Thomas Tuchel.

Will expansion of dream lead to explosion of quality?

North America will welcome 48 teams for football's biggest tournament; while Argentina, Spain and France are among the favourites, many emerging nations believe that they can cause an upset

FIFA WORLD CUP

Ayon Sengupta

The World Cup has a habit of redefining football's hierarchy. New stars emerge, established powers fall and careers are forever defined by a handful of moments.

As the tournament heads to North America for the first time since 1994, the game is at a crossroads. Argentina is attempting to become the first team since Brazil in 1962 to retain the World Cup. Kylian Mbappe is looking to cement his place at the top of the game, while Spain's young stars seek to fulfil their promise. And there remain questions over what a 48-team competition will look like in practice.

Some of those will be answered over the next 39 days as football's biggest tournament unfolds in the United States, Canada and Mexico. Across 104 matches in 16 host cities, teams will navigate vast distances, multiple time zones and varying conditions, testing not only their quality but also endurance.

Argentina enters the showpiece with much of the squad that conquered the world in Qatar and with Lionel Messi still leading the way.

Now 38 and playing for Inter Miami, Messi knows North American conditions better than most rivals and will hope familiarity can fuel one final run at the world stage.

Argentina begins as one of the favourites, but there will be no shortage of challengers. Spain arrives as the reigning European champion, powered by the creativity of Pedri and Lamine Yamal. Under Luis de la Fuente, it has evolved beyond the possession-heavy style that defined its golden generation, combining technical excellence with greater intensity and directness.

France, world champion in 2018 and finalist in 2022, has spent much of the last decade setting the benchmark in international football.

Let the action begin: The Mexico City Stadium in readiness for the tournament opener between the co-host and South Africa. GETTY IMAGES

Weight of expectations

Mbappe, Ousmane Dembele and Aurelien Tchouameni headline a side capable of dominating games with or without possession and adapting to the varied demands of tournament football.

England, led by Jude Bellingham and Harry Kane, will again carry the weight of expectations, while Brazil seeks its first World Cup title since 2002. Germany appears rejuvenated after years of inconsistency, with Portugal hoping Cristiano Ronaldo can inspire one final memorable run.

The tournament's biggest change is structural. Expansion to 48 teams has altered the landscape of international football.

Asia now has eight direct qualification places and Africa nine, opening the door for nations that previously stood little chance of reaching the World Cup.

Uzbekistan, Cape Verde, Curacao and Jordan will make their debuts, while several emerging football countries believe that they can do more than simply participate. Whether the expanded format strengthens the competition or merely stretches it remains to be seen.

Off the field, at a time when the world feels increasingly fenced off, the game has already encountered some of the complications that come with staging a global event.

Iran will be based in Mexico and commute to its matches in the United States amid continuing tensions between Tehran and Washington and the wider regional conflict involving Israel.

There has also been controversy surrounding Somali referee Omar Abdulkadir Artan, who was denied entry into the USA despite reportedly holding a valid visa and diplomatic passport. Artan, the 2025 African Referee of the Year, was set to become the first Somali official to take part at a World Cup.

But for all the attention on politics, travel and expansion, the tournament will ultimately be judged by the football it produces. In a world that often feels increasingly fractured, the World Cup remains one of the few occasions capable of making the globe move to a common rhythm.

And for over a month, football, hopefully, will once again prove to be bigger than the machinery that powers it today.

2026 FIFA World Cup in numbers

- A record **48 nations will take part** in the 23rd edition of the FIFA World Cup to be held over 39 days
- **104 matches** will played across 16 cities in three countries (USA, Canada, Mexico)
- **Curacao, Cape Verde, Uzbekistan** and **Jordan** are making their debut with the first-named being the smallest nation to participate in a World Cup
- The club most represented will be **Manchester City** with 19 players set to feature in the tournament
- **Argentina** will strive to be the third country to defend its title after Italy (1934 & 38) and Brazil (1958 & 62)
- **Lionel Messi**, who has 13 goals, needs four more to become the all-time highest scorer in World Cup history

- **Messi** (Argentina), **Cristiano Ronaldo** (Portugal) and **Guillermo Ochoa** (Mexico) set for a historic sixth World Cup
- Scotland's **Craig Gordon**, at 43 years and 162 days, is the oldest player registered to take part while Mexico's **Gilberto Mora** (17 years and 240 days) is the youngest
- Ghana's **Carlos Queiroz** is coaching at his fifth consecutive World Cup, having guided Portugal in 2010 and Iran in the last three editions
- France's **Didier Deschamps** and Uzbekistan's **Fabio Cannavaro** are two coaches who have tasted success as captains in 1998 and 2006 respectively
- The 2026 champion will be richer by **$50 million**, while the runner-up will receive **$33 million**

COMPILED BY **V.V. RAMANAN**

The schedule

Date	Teams	Time	Venue
June 12	Mexico vs. South Africa	00.30 a.m.	Mexico City
June 12	South Korea vs. Czechia	7.30 a.m.	Guadalajara
June 13	Canada vs. Bosnia & Herzegovina	00.30 a.m.	Toronto
June 13	USA vs. Paraguay	6.30 a.m.	Los Angeles
June 14	Qatar vs. Switzerland	00.30 a.m.	San Francisco
June 14	Brazil vs. Morocco	3.30 a.m.	New Jersey
June 14	Haiti vs. Scotland	6.30 a.m.	Boston
June 14	Australia vs. Turkiye	9.30 a.m.	Vancouver
June 14	Germany vs. Curacao	10.30 p.m.	Houston
June 15	Netherlands vs. Japan	1.30 a.m.	Dallas
June 15	Ivory Coast vs. Ecuador	4.30 a.m.	Philadelphia
June 15	Sweden vs. Tunisia	7.30 a.m.	Monterrey
June 15	Spain vs. Cape Verde	9.30 p.m.	Atlanta
June 16	Belgium vs. Egypt	00.30 a.m.	Seattle
June 16	Saudi Arabia vs. Uruguay	3.30 a.m.	Miami
June 16	Iran vs. New Zealand	6.30 a.m.	Los Angeles
June 17	France vs. Senegal	00.30 a.m.	New Jersey
June 17	Iraq vs. Norway	3.30 a.m.	Boston
June 17	Argentina vs. Algeria	6.30 a.m.	Kansas City
June 17	Austria vs. Jordan	9.30 a.m.	San Francisco
June 17	Portugal vs. DR Congo	10.30 p.m.	Houston
June 18	England vs. Croatia	1.30 a.m.	Dallas
June 18	Ghana vs. Panama	4.30 a.m.	Toronto
June 18	Uzbekistan vs. Colombia	7.30 a.m.	Mexico City
June 18	Czechia vs. South Africa	9.30 p.m.	Atlanta
June 19	Switzerland vs. Bosnia & Herzegovina	00.30 a.m.	Los Angeles
June 19	Canada vs. Qatar	3.30 a.m.	Vancouver
June 19	Mexico vs. South Korea	6.30 a.m.	Guadalajara
June 20	USA vs. Australia	00.30 a.m.	Seattle
June 20	Scotland vs. Morocco	3.30 a.m.	Boston
June 20	Brazil vs. Haiti	6 a.m.	Philadelphia
June 20	Turkiye vs. Paraguay	8.30 a.m.	San Francisco
June 20	Netherlands vs. Sweden	10.30 p.m.	Houston
June 21	Germany vs. Ivory Coast	1.30 a.m.	Toronto
June 21	Ecuador vs. Curacao	5.30 a.m.	Kansas City
June 21	Tunisia vs. Japan	9.30 a.m.	Monterrey
June 21	Spain vs. Saudi Arabia	9.30 p.m.	Atlanta
June 22	Belgium vs. Iran	00.30 a.m.	Los Angeles
June 22	Uruguay vs. Cape Verde	3.30 a.m.	Miami
June 22	New Zealand vs. Egypt	6.30 a.m.	Vancouver
June 22	Argentina vs. Austria	10.30 p.m.	Dallas
June 23	France vs. Iraq	2.30 a.m.	Philadelphia
June 23	Norway vs. Senegal	5.30 a.m.	New Jersey
June 23	Jordan vs. Algeria	8.30 a.m.	San Francisco
June 23	Portugal vs. Uzbekistan	10.30 p.m.	Houston
June 24	England vs. Ghana	1.30 a.m.	Boston
June 24	Panama vs. Croatia	4.30 a.m.	Toronto
June 24	Colombia vs. DR Congo	7.30 a.m.	Guadalajara
June 25	Switzerland vs. Canada	00.30 a.m.	Vancouver
June 25	Bosnia & Herzegovina vs. Qatar	00.30 a.m.	Seattle
June 25	Scotland vs. Brazil	3.30 a.m.	Miami
June 25	Morocco vs. Haiti	3.30 a.m.	Atlanta

Date	Teams	Time	Venue
June 25	Czechia vs. Mexico	6.30 a.m.	Mexico City
June 25	South Africa vs. South Korea	6.30 a.m.	Monterrey
June 26	Curacao vs. Ivory Coast	1.30 a.m.	Philadelphia
June 26	Ecuador vs. Germany	1.30 a.m.	New Jersey
June 26	Japan vs. Sweden	4.30 a.m.	Dallas
June 26	Tunisia vs. Netherlands	4.30 a.m.	Kansas City
June 26	Turkiye vs. USA	7.30 a.m.	Los Angeles
June 26	Paraguay vs. Australia	7.30 a.m.	San Francisco
June 27	Norway vs. France	00.30 a.m.	Boston
June 27	Senegal vs. Iraq	00.30 a.m.	Toronto
June 27	Cape Verde vs. Saudi Arabia	5.30 a.m.	Houston
June 27	Uruguay vs. Spain	5.30 a.m.	Guadalajara
June 27	Egypt vs. Iran	8.30 a.m.	Seattle
June 27	New Zealand vs. Belgium	8.30 a.m.	Vancouver
June 28	Panama vs. England	2.30 a.m.	New Jersey
June 28	Croatia vs. Ghana	2.30 a.m.	Philadelphia
June 28	Colombia vs. Portugal	5 a.m.	Miami
June 28	DR Congo vs. Uzbekistan	5 a.m.	Atlanta
June 28	Algeria vs. Austria	7.30 a.m.	Kansas City
June 28	Jordan vs. Argentina	7.30 a.m.	Dallas
June 29	Round of 32	00.30 a.m.	Los Angeles
June 29	Round of 32	10.30 p.m.	Houston
June 30	Round of 32	2 a.m.	Boston
June 30	Round of 32	6.30 a.m.	Monterrey
June 30	Round of 32	10.30 p.m.	Dallas
July 1	Round of 32	2.30 a.m.	New Jersey
July 1	Round of 32	6.30 a.m.	Mexico City
July 1	Round of 32	9.30 p.m.	Atlanta
July 2	Round of 32	1.30 a.m.	Seattle
July 2	Round of 32	5.30 a.m.	San Francisco
July 3	Round of 32	00.30 a.m.	Los Angeles
July 3	Round of 32	4.30 a.m.	Toronto
July 3	Round of 32	8.30 a.m.	Vancouver
July 3	Round of 32	11.30 p.m.	Dallas
July 4	Round of 32	3.30 a.m.	Miami
July 4	Round of 32	7 a.m.	Kansas City
July 4	Round of 16	10.30 p.m.	Houston
July 5	Round of 16	2.30 a.m.	Philadelphia
July 6	Round of 16	1.30 a.m.	New Jersey
July 6	Round of 16	5.30 a.m.	Mexico City
July 7	Round of 16	00.30 a.m.	Dallas
July 7	Round of 16	5.30 a.m.	Seattle
July 7	Round of 16	9.30 p.m.	Atlanta
July 8	Round of 16	1.30 a.m.	Vancouver
July 10	Quarterfinal	1.30 a.m.	Boston
July 11	Quarterfinal	00.30 a.m.	Los Angeles
July 12	Quarterfinal	2.30 a.m.	Miami
July 12	Quarterfinal	6.30 a.m.	Kansas City
July 15	Semifinal	00.30 a.m.	Dallas
July 16	Semifinal	00.30 a.m.	Atlanta
July 19	Third-place playoff	2.30 a.m.	Miami
July 20	Final	00.30 a.m.	New Jersey

* ALL DATES AND TIMES PERTAIN TO INDIA

The 2022 defeat should inspire France to reach another final

It's the team that matters the most; I will be the happiest man if we earn the third star

INTERVIEW

Kylian Mbappe

French superstar Kylian Mbappe said that defeat in the 2022 World Cup final should act as motivation going into the upcoming edition. Excerpts:

France is 'the' favourite to go the distance. What are your thoughts?

If that happens, everyone will be happy! But in the World Cup, such tags bring nothing. Winning the WC is an extremely difficult job and we must play well. We have an exceptional pool of talented players with great appetite. But we must show it on the field.

Mbappe. AFP

You can emulate Cafu's feat of playing in three World Cup finals...

It's the team that matters the most. I shall be happy if we reach the final. But as I have said, we must play well to do so. I love to dream, and it will be great to play another World Cup final. However, now, I am not thinking about it.

We have the right squad under a great coach (Didier Deschamps) who had taken us to the final in 2018 and 2022.

This will be the last edition with Deschamps as coach...

Just look at his CV, it speaks volumes about the man. He was the captain when we won our first World Cup (in 1998). Twenty years later, he was again at the podium as the winning manager. We reached another final in four years, a legend in its truest sense!

How disappointing was that night in Qatar?

We had broken hearts; disappointment will be there forever. But we must move on. That defeat should inspire us to play better and reach another final.

You can match or better the goal-scoring records of Pele, Just Fontaine and Miroslav Klose...

You can score more goals than them, but it is impossible to reach their level. I shall be happy if I score one, two or five goals, but I shall be happier if we win the trophy. I will be the happiest man if my team earns the third star.

(Professional Management Group).

INBRIEF

T20 WC: India loses final warm-up game to England

Richa Ghosh, *in pic*, produced a breathtaking late assault but Dani Gibson's sparkling all-round show proved enough as England posted a narrow five-run win in their final Women's T20 World Cup warm-up match in Cardiff on Wednesday. After Harmanpreet Kaur opted to bowl, Amy Jones, skipper Nat Sciver-Brunt and Gibson took England to 171 for six. India's chase never quite gathered momentum and it was bowled out for 166 in 19.5 overs.

The scores: England 171/6 in 20 overs (Amy Jones 64, Nat Sciver-Brunt 57, Dani Gibson 30 n.o.; Shreyanka Patil 2/29) bt India 166 in 19.5 overs (Richa Ghosh 68; Linsey Smith 3/42, Charlie Dean 2/16, Tilly Corteen-Coleman 2/22, Dani Gibson 2/17).

Spinner Manav Suthar signs up to play for Warwickshire

Left-arm spinner Manav Suthar, who starred on his India Test debut against Afghanistan, has signed up with English club Warwickshire for the next two rounds of the County Championship. He will be available for the game against Yorkshire in Scarborough from June 12 and the fixture against Somerset in Taunton the following week.

Benfica says Mourinho has agreed to move to Real

Benfica said on Tuesday that its coach Jose Mourinho had agreed to return to Real Madrid, which earlier announced that it had parted ways with coach Alvaro Arbeloa. Madrid president Florentino Perez had vowed to bring Mourinho back as part of his campaign promises that led to his re-election on Sunday. Benfica said that Madrid had formally agreed to pay Benfica $17.3 million for Mourinho, with the Portuguese coach agreeing to the move.

Atletico rejected offer of €150m for Alvarez: Real

Real Madrid said on Tuesday that Atletico Madrid had rejected the club's offer of €150m for Argentine forward Julian Alvarez. "After reviewing and evaluating the offer, Club Atletico de Madrid has expressed its gratitude for the proposal... and has rejected it," Real Madrid said.

Sahibzada Farhan to lead Pakistan at Asian Games

Pakistan on Wednesday named a largely inexperienced 15-member squad for the men's T20 cricket competition at the Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan, with opener Sahibzada Farhan appointed captain.

The squad: Sahibzada Farhan (Capt.), Abdul Samad (Vice-capt.), Abrar Ahmed, Ahmed Daniyal, Akif Javed, Ali Raza, Arafat Minhas, Haider Ali, Hasan Nawaz, Maaz Sadaqat, Mohammad Salman Mirza, Saad Masood, Saim Ayub, Sufyan Moqim and Usman Khan (wk).

Hyderabad to host Archery Premier League in October

The second edition of the Archery Premier League (APL) will be held in Hyderabad from October 8 to 18. Several top international archers are expected to take part in the 11-day event to be hosted at the People's Plaza on Necklace Road. Six franchise teams – Mighty Marathas, Rajputana Royals, Prithviraaj Yodhas, Kakatiya Knights, Chero Archers and Chola Chiefs – will participate in the APL, which made its debut in Delhi last year.

Can the Women in Blue go to uncharted territory?

India cannot afford to look far into the tournament at the moment; it is in the Group of Death along with Australia and South Africa and only two teams can advance to the last four

ICC T20 WORLD CUP

P.K. Ajith Kumar

Some images linger. Like Kapil Dev holding the World Cup aloft at the Lord's balcony in 1983. Like Harmanpreet Kaur teasing her teammates before letting them touch the trophy after the Women's World Cup final at Mumbai's D.Y. Patil Stadium last November.

'Kapil's Devils' paved the way for an eventual Indian takeover of the global cricket economy, apart from making the country a superpower on the ground. Harmanpreet's brave women have given India's aspiring young female cricketers a moment to cherish, a right to dream.

How Harmanpreet would love to emulate Kapil: win a World Cup at cricket's most iconic venue. She is unlikely to be satisfied with anything less than that this English summer. India is one of the favourites at the ICC T20 Women's World Cup starting at Birmingham on Friday.

India cannot afford to look far into the tournament at the moment, though. For, they are in the Group of Death, along with Australia and South Africa. Remember, only two teams can advance to the semifinals.

The Women in Blue may have lost their last two T20I series, in South Africa and England, but not so long ago, they had triumphed in Australia and crushed Sri Lanka 5-0. No one will doubt their class, especially in batting.

Gunning for glory: Harmanpreet & Co. can't slip up if they want to go the distance. X@BCCI

India, in fact, will need those batters, especially at the top of the order, to get going, play big shots, and come up with significant scores. The team isn't blessed with the sharpest or the most experienced of bowling attacks in the competition.

Neither it could claim to have a large number of all-rounders, notwithstanding the redoubtable Deepti Sharma. How India misses the chirpy, smiling, wise-cracking Amanjot Kaur, who played an important role in India's World Cup win. The superstar-studded Indian batting is more than capable of making enough runs so that the team doesn't depend too much on the lower order. Smriti Mandhana and Shafali Verma are among the most feared pair of openers in the game.

Smriti may not be going into the World Cup in perfect form, but her experience and success in England should come in handy. She has sparkled at The Hundred and last year scored a 62-ball 112 against England, her first T20I century.

Like Smriti, Jemimah Rodrigues also is familiar with English conditions and she should want to replicate her heroics at the ODI World Cup for India. Harmanpreet can win you matches from difficult situations, while the return from injury of the elegant Yaskita Bhatia is good news – she impressed in the three-match series against England – but the team needs Richa Ghosh to deliver in the death overs.

When it comes to bowling, Renuka Singh should relish the English conditions. Kranti Goud can cause trouble with her pace, while Nandni Sharma looks extremely promising, with her wicket-taking abilities. Shree Charani, who has taken little time to make an impact on the global stage, Shreyanka Patil and Radha Yadav are among the spin options. And, of course, there is the golden arm of Shafali.

Tendulkar's advice before final helped me, says Jemimah

Press Trust of India
MUMBAI

India batter Jemimah Rodrigues revealed that the legendary Sachin Tendulkar's inputs helped her regain focus after being left overwhelmed by the knock of a lifetime in the women's ODI World Cup semifinal against Australia last year.

Jemimah stood tall with an unbeaten 127 as India toppled the world-dominating Australia in Navi Mumbai en route its maiden title win. "Sachin sir called my coach Prashant Shetty. He asked him to tell me that he understood the past couple of days had been a lot for me, the big knock against Australia, the joy of beating it," Jemimah told JioHotstar.

"But he reminded me that the job was not over yet. We still had a final to win. He said, 'Try to put that aside and start from zero'. That message really helped me reset my mind. I understood that what I did in the past will not win me the next game. You must treat every match as a new start. That advice from a legend gave me so much clarity before the final," she added.

In the final against South Africa, it was an all-round show from Shafali Verma (87 and 2/36) which made the big difference. The opening batter said that her father's pep-talk came in handy. "We had two off days before the final. My dad sent me a voice note. He said, 'Just work hard. Give your best on the field and it has to be in writing that Shafali Verma helped India win the World Cup'," the 22-year-old said.

"That voice note gave me some extra fire. I knew I had to perform not just for myself but for him and the team. It pushed me to give everything I had on the field," she added.

The reigning ODI World champion is gearing up for its T20 World Cup opener against arch-rival Pakistan in Birmingham on Sunday.

Stellar show: Jemimah stood tall with an unbeaten 127 in the semifinal. FILE PHOTO: K.R. DEEPAK

Hardik ruled out of Afghanistan ODIs

Press Trust of India
MULLANPUR

Cleared to play just hours ago, India all-rounder Hardik Pandya was on Wednesday ruled out of the three-match ODI series against Afghanistan after picking up a quadriceps strain.

Hardik was at the BCCI's Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru to get clearance for his back spasm injury which he sustained in the IPL.

It is learnt that the new injury could be a result of him bowling the full quota of 10 overs at the CoE during the assessment.

"With three weeks for recovery, there is absolutely no chance of him playing the ODI series as his rehabilitation will not be complete," said a BCCI source.

Nightclub incident: Stokes gets the axe from England squad

Agence France-Presse
LONDON

England captain Ben Stokes and teammate Gus Atkinson have been dropped from the squad for next week's second Test against New Zealand at the Oval, the England and Wales Cricket Board announced on Wednesday.

The pair is currently facing an ECB probe for breaking a team curfew following England's win in the first Test at Lord's.

Joe Root will step in as interim captain in Stokes's absence.

"The England & Wales Cricket Board can confirm that, given the ongoing investigation, Ben Stokes and Gus Atkinson have not been made available for selection for the Rothesay second Test against New Zealand, which starts at the Kia Oval on Wednesday 17 June," said an ECB statement.

Feeling the heat: Atkinson and Stokes were shown the door for the second Test against New Zealand. FILE PHOTO: AFP

"Yorkshire batter Joe Root will lead the team as interim captain. Sussex fast bowler Jofra Archer and Essex batter Jordan Cox have been added to the squad."

The ECB announced on Monday it was looking into Stokes' involvement in a nightclub incident also involving Saracens rugby player Totoa Auvaa on Monday morning following England's 115-run win in the first Test at Lord's.

A physical confrontation with Auvaa is understood to have led to a member of ECB security staff being struck.

Team management decided against promoting vice-captain Harry Brook, instead opting for former skipper Root to lead the side at the Oval.

Men's compound archers lose bronze match to Mexico

WORLD CUP STAGE-3

Sports Bureau

The Indian compound men's team, comprising Sahil Jadhav, Kushal Dalal, Ganesh Mani Ratnam Thirumuru, narrowly lost its bronze medal contest 232-233 to Mexico at the Archery World Cup Stage-3 in Antalya on Wednesday.

Mexico's team consisted of Sebastian Garcia Flores, Lot Maximo Mendez Oritz and Rodrigo Gonzalez De Alba.

Best of the lot

In recurve qualification, B. Dhiraj, who shot a season best 681, and Kumkum Mohod, who logged her career best 671, were the best Indians.

The results: Recurve: Qualification: Individual: Men: B. Dhiraj (6th, 681), Neeraj Chauhan (10th, 677), Atanu Das (67th, 651), Yashdeep Bhoge (84th, 637).

Women: Kumkum Mohod (3rd, 671), Deepika Kumari (7th, 665), Ankita Bhakat (21st, 653), Kirti (43rd, 642).

Team: India: Men (7th, 2009), Women (3rd, 1989), Mixed (3rd, 1352).

Compound: Elimination: Team: Men: India (Sahil Jadhav, Kushal Dalal, Ganesh Mani Ratnam Thirumuru) bt Singapore 227-227 (shoot-off: 30-28) (first round), bt Italy 231-231 (shoot-off: 29*-29, shot closer to centre) (quarterfinal), lost to China 232-235 (semifinal), lost to Mexico 232-233 (bronze medal match).

Women: India (V. Jyothi Surekha, Chikitha Taniparthi, Prithika Pradeep) got a bye (first round), lost to USA 225-228 (second round).

Sindhu cruises, Tanvi stuns fifth seed Chiu

Quick work: Seventeen-year-old Tanvi took just 45 minutes to get past Chiu in two games. FILE PHOTO: SANDEEP SAXENA

BADMINTON

Press Trust of India
SYDNEY

P.V. Sindhu led a strong show by Indian women with an easy victory over Peru's Ines Luci Castillo Salazar while teenager Tanvi Sharma pulled off an upset win over fifth seed and World No. 11 Chiu Pin-Chian of Taiwan at the Australian Open Super 500 badminton tournament here on Wednesday.

Third seed Sindhu, Tanvi, Malvika Bansod, Isharani Baruah and Tanya Hemanth all progressed to the round of 16. It was, however, a disappointing day for the men as Kiran George, Tharun Mannepalli and qualifier Saneeth Dayanand bowed out in the opening round.

Sindhu barely broke a sweat in her opener, outclassing Salazar 21-13, 21-11 in just 32 minutes.

Sindhu will next face compatriot Isharani, who fought hard to overcome China's Han Qian Xi 22-20, 10-21, 21-14 in a one-hour three-minute battle.

The biggest result of the day came from 17-year-old Tanvi, who defeated Chiu 21-12, 22-20 in 45 minutes.

World No. 36 Tanvi will now take on Malvika after the latter recovered from a game down to beat Thailand's Tonrug Saeheng 15-21, 21-7, 21-13.

Tanya also joined the winning brigade, defeating Ishika Jaiswal of the USA 21-17, 21-18 in 39 minutes.

In men's singles, George suffered a hard-fought 19-21, 21-14, 15-21 defeat to Malaysia's Justin Hoh in a match that lasted one hour and two minutes. Qualifier Dayanand found the going tough against China's Hu Zhe'an, losing 8-21, 10-21 in just 35 minutes.

Tharun came closest to causing an upset, pushing second seed and World No. 10 Lin Chun-Yi of Taiwan to the limit before going down 21-18, 13-21, 23-25.

In mixed doubles, Dhruv Rawat and Maneesha K. advanced to the second round with a comfortable 21-13, 21-14 victory over Australia's Lim Jayden and Victoria Tjonadi in 27 minutes.

The results (first round): Women: P.V. Sindhu bt Ines Luci Castillo Salazar 21-13, 21-11; Tanvi Sharma bt Chiu Pin-Chian 21-12, 22-20; Malvika Bansod bt Tonrug Saeheng 15-21, 21-7, 21-13; Isharani Baruah bt Han Qian Xi 22-20, 10-21, 21-14; Tanya Hemanth bt Ishika Jaiswal 21-17, 21-18; **Men:** Justin Hoh bt Kiran George 19-21, 21-14, 15-21; Hu Zhe'an bt Saneeth Dayanand 21-8, 21-10; Lin Chun-Yi bt Tharun Mannepalli 18-21, 21-13, 25-23.

Mixed doubles: Dhruv Rawat & Maneesha K. bt Lim Jayden & Victoria Tjonadi 21-13, 21-14; Guo Xin Wa & Chen Fang Hui bt Mohit Jaglan & Lakshita Jaglan 21-6, 21-5.

Separation season

The Monaco GP revealed a title contender struggling to halt a slide. It revealed a seven-time World champion growing ever more comfortable in red, and a home-town hero searching desperately for answers

Anirudh Velamuri

Mercedes emerged as the clear front runner when this F1 season began, having nailed the new regulations and building a car capable of setting it on the path of dominance this campaign, and maybe more.

Ferrari showed early promise but was soon clear that it had the second-best car on the grid, though it remained capable of causing headaches to the Silver Arrows. Mercedes team principal Toto Wolff acknowledged that after the season-opening Australian Grand Prix, saying, "The prevailing feeling is that we now have a fight on our hands with Ferrari."

The two teams have been the strongest ones so far, but the gap between the two isn't as miniscule as the neutral would've wanted. At last weekend's Monaco GP, however, both went through similar emotions with their drivers, at contrasting levels.

Anatomy of dominance

Unlike many - perhaps most - other circuits on the F1 calendar, the Monaco GP is rarely decided by wheel-to-wheel combat. Around those unforgiving, narrow streets, track position is king. Precision outweighs aggression, and the smallest mistake can carry the biggest consequences.

The formula for success is almost deceptively simple: produce the lap of your life in qualifying, start near the front, keep the car out of trouble, and make sure no one jumps you during the pit-stop cycle. It is why Formula 1's oldest joke remains one of its truest: "Monaco is won on Saturday."

Yet, Monaco has always been more than a procession. To purists, it is the ultimate examination of a driver's craft. A qualifying lap around the Principality is often described as the purest expression of speed, commitment, and precision that motorsport can offer.

That much remained true this year. But there was another layer to the story.

Was the Mercedes W17 exceptional? Absolutely. Did pole position pave the way for victory? Without question. But Kimi Antonelli's commanding triumph in Monaco - his fifth consecutive win of the season - was anything but a textbook Monaco success.

He did not merely protect track position. He annihilated the contest.

When the lights went out, Antonelli launched into clear air and never looked back. The task became significantly easier when Max Verstappen's Red Bull, which had qualified within four-hundredths of a second of the Mercedes, retired on the opening lap. Antonelli seized the opportunity with ruthless efficiency.

By lap four, he had already carved out a healthy margin to the chasing pack. His only real companion during the long afternoon at the front was race engineer Pete Bonnington, whose occasional radio messages punctuated an otherwise lonely drive. There were reminders about tyre temperatures still running a touch high, cautions to manage brake temperatures while negotiating traffic, and little else.

The race quickly shifted from attack to control. By lap nine, Antonelli's advantage was already substantial enough to allow a greater focus on management. The gap stretched relentlessly, reaching 15 seconds by the time Lewis Hamilton made his pit stop. When Charles Leclerc took fresh tyres, Antonelli responded, rejoining comfortably in the lead and maintaining complete control of proceedings.

He was serenely cruising toward victory when Monaco finally delivered a hint of drama.

A late safety car erased what had grown into a lead of nearly half a minute. Then came a red flag, introducing an element of uncertainty that had been absent all afternoon. A standing restart loomed. Ferrari, whose cars had shown impressive launch performance, suddenly had a narrow window of opportunity through Hamilton.

For a brief moment, there was at least the possibility of a fight. It lasted only a few corners. When racing resumed for what effectively became an eight-lap sprint to the chequered flag, Antonelli immediately reasserted his authority. He surged clear once more, rebuilt a comfortable advantage, and extinguished any lingering hopes of a Ferrari challenge.

The final laps felt less like a battle for victory and more like a coronation.

And as he swept through the streets of the Principality for the final time, Antonelli did more than win the Monaco GP. He etched his name into the history of one of motorsport's most iconic stages.

The safety car came. The red flag came. The possibility of a late fight briefly flickered into life. But Monaco's script had already been written. Antonelli did not spend Sunday defending a lead; he spent it demonstrating why nobody else deserved it.

On a circuit where victory is supposed to reward perfection over pace, patience over daring, Antonelli delivered something a little rarer: domination. By the time he reached the chequered flag, the result was no longer the story. The manner of it was.

Disintegration on the other side

If the Principality became the stage for a defining statement for Antonelli, it marked the latest chapter in an increasingly troubling slide on the other side of his garage for George Russell.

While Antonelli disappeared into the distance, Russell spent much of his afternoon trapped in fifth place behind a struggling Isack Hadjar. Despite the Red Bull driver's issues, he still managed to put 20 seconds between himself and the Mercedes, leaving Russell vulnerable to the ultimate indignity around Monaco: being lapped by his teammate. Sure enough, after 53 laps, Antonelli swept past him.

Things only unravelled from there.

Mercedes failed to react quickly enough to the safety car triggered by Lance Stroll, opting not to pit Antonelli immediately. The resulting sequence left Russell stacked behind the championship leader when he eventually stopped, costing him the position he had only just wrestled away from Hadjar.

And then came the final blow.

Russell was then hit with a drive-through penalty that had to be served after the late restart when the field was tightly packed together. Any hope of salvaging something from the weekend evaporated there and then. He eventually crossed the line in 14th place, and now finds himself trailing Antonelli by 68 points. Suzuka qualifying was a gut punch. Retiring from the lead in Montreal was arguably worse. Yet somehow, Monaco may prove the most damaging weekend of all.

Not simply because of the result, but because of what Russell is now saying about it. "There's something in my driving style that's not helping the car at the moment but is playing into his hands perfectly well. The difference in how we're driving has such an impact upon the tyres," he admitted after qualifying.

Heading into this season, Russell was the driver bookmakers expected to dominate the title fight. Now, he is not only no longer leading it, he is not even Antonelli's closest challenger. That distinction belongs to Hamilton, who leapfrogged his fellow Brit into second place after Monaco.

A few months ago, Russell looked like Mercedes' title favourite. Today, he looks like a driver searching for answers while the championship rapidly slips out of reach.

A tale of two, for Ferrari too

Divided emotions were not confined to Mercedes.

Ferrari arrived in Monaco looking capable of mounting a genuine challenge, and for a brief moment it seemed as though the Scuderia might have the pace to do exactly that. Hamilton and Charles Leclerc, fresh off signing a contract extension, were untouchable in Friday's opening session and, while the field closed in during the afternoon, Ferrari still ended the day on top.

From there, however, the trajectory was almost entirely downward.

Hamilton outqualified Leclerc after the Monegasque brushed the barriers at Tabac on his final Q3 attempt. What followed was not merely a divergence in results, but in mood, confidence and outlook. As Ferrari's weekend slipped away, an increasingly technical debate over brake performance began to dominate the conversation.

By then, the contrast in the drivers' own words was clear.

"The happiest day of my Ferrari days so far. I finally have the engineering team that I've been working towards. I think our car is great. I can understand it and am a lot more comfortable with it. While we're not exactly where we want to be, getting this result has capitalised on our great reliability. I feel very light right now, mentally in a good place," Hamilton said after the Canadian GP.

Leclerc, meanwhile, could hardly have sounded more different.

"It's been one of, if not the, worst weekend of my career. I have work to do to get to Lewis's level on a day like this. I will look into the data. I've gone through difficult races [before] where you analyse after and you learn a lot," he then admitted. The gap between the two has not simply been one of results. It has increasingly become a story of differing solutions to similar, if not the same, problem.

Hamilton switched to customised brake packages supplied by Carbon Industrie at Suzuka, favouring a stronger initial bite and more precise modulation that complements his trademark late-braking style.

Leclerc, meanwhile, has continued with Brembo hardware. Given his preference for an aggressive front end, a higher tolerance for oversteer, and a tendency to brake earlier than Hamilton, the setup has become an increasingly frustrating limitation.

By Monaco, that frustration had boiled over. "I don't know how much I can go into the details, but I don't think... it's just not acceptable. The issues I have faced with my brakes have been...it's not that it's difficult, it's that in this particular moment, it's just impossible," the Monegasque said after his home race.

His description of the problem was even more revealing.

"I cannot do anything. The only thing I can do is not brake for the last corner, but in an F1 corner not braking in the last corner ends up in the wall anyway. I put the least amount of brakes I could possibly do, and it's not even braking, it's leaning my foot on the brake."

When asked to elaborate on the root cause, Leclerc stopped just short of publicly pointing the finger at Ferrari's long-time brake supplier. "I think it's very clear for everyone, I don't think there's any doubt."

That was enough to prompt a swift response from Brembo.

"At present, the company does not know the causes of the issues experienced by Charles Leclerc and therefore considers it premature to draw definitive technical conclusions before the available data has been analysed," the company said.

"In cases such as this, it is necessary to examine the telemetry data together with the team's engineers in order to accurately determine the origin of the incident."

Whether Brembo ultimately bears responsibility may be irrelevant, for Leclerc has already identified the direction he wants Ferrari to take.

"The only thing I can say is that we have the solution in-house, and I'll go to Lewis's configuration from the next race onwards, which hopefully will be a step," he revealed, before adding, "But it's been a nightmare."

Leclerc's miserable home weekend cannot be pinned solely on one component, and he has acknowledged as much. Yet the brake saga has become impossible to ignore, not least because a potential remedy already appears to exist within Ferrari's own garage.

If Hamilton's configuration transforms his fortunes, Ferrari may look back on Monaco as the weekend that stopped the bleeding.

Subplots thicken

Monaco is often described as F1's ultimate test. Not because it produces the best racing, but because it exposes every strength, every weakness and every crack beneath the surface.

This year, it exposed plenty.

It revealed a young driver turning dominance into routine. It revealed a title contender struggling to halt a slide. It revealed a seven-time world champion growing ever more comfortable in red, and a hometown hero searching desperately for answers.

The championship order may not have changed dramatically, as Mercedes remains the benchmark and Ferrari remains its closest pursuer. But perceptions did. And in F1, perception has a habit of becoming reality.

THE GIST

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- The championship order may not have changed dramatically as Mercedes remains the benchmark and Ferrari remains the closest pursuer