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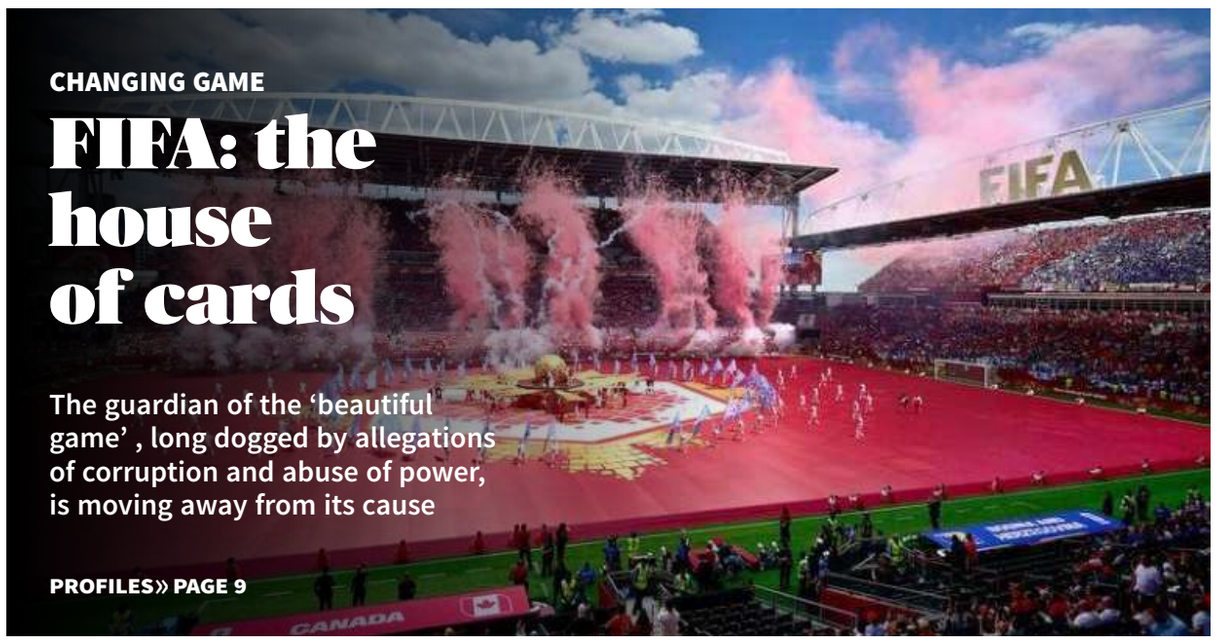

CHANGING GAME

## FIFA: the house of cards

The guardian of the 'beautiful game', long dogged by allegations of corruption and abuse of power, is moving away from its cause

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Assam stops regular Aadhaar enrolment for adults

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India takes on Pakistan in its World Cup opener

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## INSIDE

### PM Modi arrives in France for bilateral talks

LONDON
Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrived in Nice on Saturday evening, the first stop on his six-day tour of France and Slovakia. Mr. Modi will travel to Slovakia on Sunday evening and return to France for the G7 Summit. » PAGE 12

### Lt.-General Dhiraj Seth appointed next Army Chief

NEW DELHI
The Union government has appointed Lieutenant-General Dhiraj Seth, serving as the Vice-Chief of the Army Staff, as the next Chief of the Army Staff with effect from the afternoon of June 30. » PAGE 3

### Bengal Police raid Trinamool leader's residence

KOLKATA
The West Bengal Police broke into the residence of Trinamool Congress leader Abhishek Banerjee in the Kalighat area of the city in the early hours of Saturday and searched the premises. » PAGE 4

### Bangladeshi leader urges govt. to clarify remarks

NEW DELHI
High Commissioner-designate to Bangladesh Dinesh Trivedi's remarks suggesting that India and Bangladesh should "become one" in their efforts were "certainly condemnable", Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami chief said. » PAGE 3

# Will sign deal to open Hormuz today: Trump

- U.S. President appears to confirm that talks on nuclear issue will begin at a later stage
- Trump says no funds will be provided to Tehran, contradicting Araghchi's claims
- Tensions continue over the strait, with the U.S. claiming that Iran fired drones on Friday

**Stanly Johny**

U.S. President Donald Trump on Saturday said a deal with Iran is scheduled to be signed on Sunday, reopening the Strait of Hormuz to all shipping, and that the U.S. would "go and get" Iran's highly enriched uranium at a later stage, even as Tehran said the talks were in their final stage but remained non-committal about any timeline for the agreement.

"The deal is scheduled to get signed tomorrow, and immediately after it is signed, the Hormuz Strait is open to all. Our relationship with Iran is a much different and better one than previous administrations have had," Mr. Trump wrote in a social media post.

Mr. Trump also said no funds would be provided to Tehran, contradicting the claims made by Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi that the country's frozen assets would be released upon signing the deal. But Mr. Trump appeared to confirm the Iranian claim that the nuclear issue would be addressed at a later stage – not in the preliminary agreement.

"We will go in and get the Nuclear Dust [highly enriched uranium]... and downblend and destroy it, whether in Iran, or the U.S. We look forward to working with Iran," Mr. Trump said.

Trump's comments came hours after Pakistan indicated that the U.S. and Iran were in the final stage of negotiations. AFP

### On 2015 deal

He said the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement, signed by the Barack Obama administration, was an "easy road to a nuclear weapon... My agreement with Iran is the exact opposite, a wall to no nuclear weapon. In fact, they no longer want a nuclear weapon, nor will they have one, either through purchase, development, or any other form of procurement".

Earlier in the day, Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had said that a deal would be signed in 24 hours.

"We are closer to a peace deal than ever before. With finalisation likely expected in the next 24 hours, Pakistan is preparing for the electronic signing of the peace deal immediately after, followed by technical level talks next week," Mr. Sharif said.

Esmaeil Baqaei, spokesperson of Iran's Ministry Foreign Affairs, said the 'Islamabad Memorandum' is focussed on ending the war, which the U.S. and Israel launched on February 28, and lifting the U.S. blockade on Iran. While refusing to give a date for the signing of the deal, he urged caution, citing "hesitation" on the American side.

"We have to wait for the exact time of signing the memorandum; Although it will not happen tomorrow, the possibility of this happening in the coming days is not ruled out," Mr. Baqaei said in a briefing in Tehran on Saturday, according to Tasnim news agency.

While final-stage negotiations are progressing, tensions flared over the Strait of Hormuz again on Friday night, with the U.S. military claiming that Iran fired drones at commercial vessels crossing the waterway.

"Iran launched multiple one-way attack drones in an attempt to strike commercial ships transiting the Strait of Hormuz. U.S. forces have downed all of them in recent hours as traffic flow through the strait continues unimpeded," the U.S. Central Command said in a statement.

On Thursday, after two nights of tit-for-tat strikes with the U.S., Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps had announced that the strait had been closed to all traffic.

### Iranian perspective

Iran's Foreign Minister Araghchi, while speaking at the state television on Friday, laid out the Iranian perspective of the agreement.

He said the U.S. and Israel were equipped with advanced weapons, including nuclear capabilities, but were "prevented by Iran from achieving their objectives". "Naturally, after such a victory, it is necessary to consolidate it through an agreement or understanding," he added, laying the ground for the agreement.

He said last stage talks are taking place based on a 14-point memorandum of understanding. If the deal is signed, Iran's frozen assets would be released and the U.S. blockade of Iranian ports would be lifted. U.S. Vice-President J.D. Vance, however, had said on Friday that no cash would be released to Iran upon the signing of the preliminary agreement.

According to Mr. Araghchi, issues such as Iran's nuclear programme and sanctions on the country would be discussed in the second phase of talks, which is expected to last around 60 days.

He also added that Lebanon, which is currently being bombed by Israel, is part of the deal.

'UAE TO UNLOCK IRAN FUNDS' » PAGE 12

## *Stroll in the rain*

People cover themselves as they walk amid rainfall and fog in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, on Saturday. Light to moderate rain lashed several parts of Himachal Pradesh on Saturday, with the meteorological department forecasting a wet spell across the State till June 19. PTI

# Attacks on ships 'unjustified', says Jaishankar; won't allow illicit Iran oil trade, says Rubio

**The Hindu Bureau**
CHENNAI

On Friday, after India summoned U.S. Embassy representative Jason Meeks and lodged its "strong protest" against the missile attacks on ships carrying Indian crew, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio told External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar that violations of the American blockade and "illicit transport of Iranian oil" would not be tolerated.

Recalling his discussion with Mr. Rubio, Mr. Jaishankar posted on X: "I reiterated India's strong protest at the attacks by the U.S. Navy in the Gulf that killed three Indian mariners. Such lethal actions against commercial shipping are not justified."

The two discussed the Strait of Hormuz situation following the U.S. missile strikes on three vessels – *Marivex* near Duqm, and *Settebello* and *Jalveer* near Shinas – that killed three Indian seafarers off the Oman coast.

The U.S. State Department said Mr. Rubio further told Mr. Jaishankar that "all commercial vessels should immediately comply with orders from U.S. forces as they seek to uphold peace and security in the Strait".

The divergence between the two nations on this issue comes ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's scheduled meeting with U.S. President Donald Trump in France on the sidelines of the G7 summit next week, according to a White House statement.

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar during a meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, in New Delhi in May. PTI

### 'Are Indians fair game?'

Shashi Tharoor, head of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs, in a post on X said the U.S. statement "contains absolutely no expression of regret or condolence for the loss of innocent Indian lives. How can a "friend" and strategic partner be so deeply insensitive? Is it not possible to disable a ship's propulsion or steering without firing missiles targeted to kill civilian crew members? Practically every merchant ship navigating these crucial waters has Indian crew on board. Are they all considered fair game for U.S. missiles now?"

The U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) has maintained that the crew of all three vessels had "repeatedly failed to comply with directions from U.S. forces". It described *Marivex* as attempting to sail to an Iranian port.

*Marivex* was attacked at anchorage off Duqm some 420 nautical miles from the Strait.

*Settebello*'s management company, IOS Marine FZE, had flatly contradicted the Centcom account, stating that no warnings were issued and no communication was established with the U.S. Navy. Demanding evidence of the claimed communication from the U.S. Navy, it said the vessel had been stationary off Shinas port for nearly 10 days.

Meanwhile, Manoj Yadav, general secretary of the Forward Seamen's Union of India who had received the statement from IOS Marine and posted it on X, has urged the Centre to deploy naval and intelligence support for Indian-associated vessels in the region.

# An-32 cargo plane crash kills 5 IAF men in Assam

**The Hindu Bureau**
GUWAHATI

Five Indian Air Force (IAF) personnel were killed after an An-32 cargo aircraft met with an accident while landing at the Jorhat airbase in eastern Assam on Saturday.

The deceased were Squadron Leader Prashant Singh, Flight Lieutenant Shubham Kumar, Sergeant Jitendra Sharma, Agniveervayu Khemaram Kumawat, and Agniveervayu Danish Alam, the IAF said in a statement.

Six personnel were on the plane and the co-pilot is undergoing treatment at a military hospital in Jorhat for injuries, the news agency PTI reported.

**Landing accident:** Remains of the transport aircraft of the IAF that crashed while landing in Jorhat district, Assam, on Saturday. PTI

The IAF did not provide details of the accident, but said it occurred at 10 a.m. while the aircraft, belonging to 43 Squadron, was landing at its airbase in the Rowriah area of Jorhat.

"A court of inquiry is being constituted to ascertain the cause of the accident," the IAF statement read.

The PTI reported that the aircraft was set to fly to Chabua from Jorhat, but requested a landing shortly after taking off.

The aircraft lost control upon touchdown and skidded off the runway, hurtling across a parallel taxiway and snapping into two segments before being engulfed in flames, the PTI added, citing sources.

A Defence spokesperson said the entire Air Force Station was sealed after the accident, and no entry was allowed.

### Minister mourns loss

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh mourned the loss of the five airmen. "Their courage and service to the nation will always be remembered with pride and gratitude," Mr. Singh said.

"On behalf of the people of Assam, I offer my thoughts and prayers with the bereaved families. The Government of Assam is in touch with the concerned authorities and is ready to offer any support and assistance," Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma posted onm X.

Expressing his condolences to the bereaved families, Assam Congress chief Gaurav Gogoi called for a proper inquiry into the deaths of the five personnel.

"I urge the government and the Defence Ministry to conduct a proper inquiry into the mishap and identify the primary cause so that measures are taken to prevent such accidents in the future," he said in a social media post.

*(With PTI inputs)*

# Karnataka to pay grant to sandalwood craftsmen

**Rashmi Patil**
BENGALURU

After a gap of six years, Karnataka State Handicrafts Development Corporation Ltd. (KSHDCL) has revived its scheme of providing sandalwood to craftsmen at 50% subsidy to support artisans and encourage youngsters to take up the dwindling art of sandalwood carving.

The corporation has announced this under the Support to Handicrafts Scheme. However, given the limited availability of raw material, only a section of artisans is likely to receive support in the first round.

H.R. Rajappa, Managing Director of KSHDCL, said the programme had been stalled owing to a shortage of raw material. The KSHDCL collaborates with the Forest Department to procure raw materials.

"At present, the market price for 1 kg of sandalwood is ₹16,000, which will be provided to the artisans at ₹8,000 per kg," Mr. Rajappa said. The KSHDCL has procured one tonne of sandalwood from Dharwad, Shivamogga and Mysuru, besides neighbouring Kerala, he added.

The corporation has 700 registered artisans across the State.

"At present we will be able to provide sandalwood to only 300 artisans," he said.

The corporation plans to extend the programme to the remaining artisans, subject to the availability of funds.

Industries Minister S. Keerthana with representatives from Hyosung TNS, in South Korea. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

# Hyosung TNS plans to set up plant in T.N., says Minister

**Sangeetha Kandavel**
CHENNAI

Hyosung TNS, a South Korean firm, is considering setting up a greenfield manufacturing facility in Tamil Nadu for the production of ATMs for both domestic and global markets, said S. Keerthana, Minister for Industries, Investment Promotion and Commerce, in a post on X.

She asserted that the Tamil Nadu government would extend its full support to the initiative and looked forward to welcoming Hyosung TNS to Tamil Nadu. "During my visit to South Korea, I had a productive meeting with the leadership of Hyosung TNS. We discussed opportunities in Tamil Nadu and explored potential collaborations in advanced manufacturing and technology sectors," she said.

"The government of Tamil Nadu is committed to strengthening the State's industrial ecosystem and attracting global manufacturing investments," Ms. Keerthana said in the post. The visit to South Korea was the Minister's maiden overseas trip since assuming charge as Industries Minister last month.

During the trip, she also visited HD Hyundai Heavy Industries, which had signed a deal with the State government in December 2025 during the previous DMK regime to build a new shipyard in Thoothukudi, entailing investments to the tune of ₹40,000 crore. "The proposed Thoothukudi Greenfield Shipyard is one of the earliest outcomes of the India-Republic of Korea maritime cooperation framework and reflects the growing strategic partnership between our two countries in the maritime sector. The project is envisaged as a mega greenfield shipyard with the capability to support large commercial vessel segments and strengthen India's long-term shipbuilding capacity," Ms. Keerthana said on X.

Tamil Nadu is home to over 150 Korean companies; more than 4,000 Korean families reside in the State, forming the biggest expat community here.

# Three close contacts of Nipah patient in Kerala test negative

No need to declare containment zones, says Minister; infected patient remains on ventilator support; 4 persons under observation in hospital

**The Hindu Bureau**
KOZHIKODE

Kerala Health Minister K. Muraleedharan has said that the three close contacts of the 43-year-old Nipah-infected patient from Ramanattukara in Kozhikode, have tested negative for the virus, indicating that a community spread of the lethal zoonotic disease is unlikely at the current juncture.

The three contacts, all close family members, were placed in the highest risk category. They have been under observation at the Government Medical College Hospital (MCH) here since Friday.

The patient is on ventilator support at the MCH, official sources said.

At present, 100 people are on the contact list of the patient. Eighty-two are in the lowest risk category, 14 in the high-risk category, and four in the highest risk category.

A press release quoting Mr. Muraleedharan said on Saturday that four more persons on the contact list were under observation at the MCH.

**On alert:** Health authorities in Kerala are keeping a close watch on the high-risk contacts of the Nipah patient. THULASI KAKKAT

### ICMR team arrives

A team from the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has arrived in the district to take stock of the situation. The team visited the MCH and participated in a review at the Collectorate attended by Revenue Minister A.P. Anil Kumar, who is the district in-charge.

Official sources said the patient was administered the first dose of monoclonal antibody on Friday. The medical board would evaluate the situation after 48 hours and give him the second dose, they added.

### No restrictions

Mr. Kumar told pressperson earlier that from the current scenario, it could be presumed that there had not been any large-scale spread of the infection. There was no need to declare a containment zone and put restrictions in place, he said. People from Kozhikode, Malappuram, and Kannur were on the contact list, he said.

He claimed that there had been no lapses in the containment steps as alleged by leaders of the Communist Party of India (Marxist).

Health workers have reached out to all the residents of the area from where the infected person hails. The health system was fully prepared to handle the situation, he said.

### 'Govt. lethargic'

This comes against the backdrop of the allegations by Leader of the Opposition Pinarayi Vijayan, Beypore MLA P.A. Mohamed Riyas, and CPI(M) Kozhikode district secretary M. Mehboob accusing the political executive of being lethargic to the current situation.

On Saturday, Mr. Riyas staged a protest outside the Nipah control room at the Kozhikode Collectorate claiming that steps were not being taken to address local residents' concerns.

# Rahul's ways helping BJP, not supporting INDIA bloc: Pinarayi

**The Hindu Bureau**
KOZHIKODE

Former Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan has accused Rahul Gandhi, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, of taking political positions that will help the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), instead of strengthening the Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance (INDIA).

His comments in Kozhikode on Saturday came in the wake of a remark made by Mr. Gandhi during an INDIA bloc meeting on June 9.

The Congress released the audio and the transcript of Mr. Gandhi's speech on June 12. "We have our fights, but if you are asking me to go and hug the ex-Chief Minister of Kerala, I cannot and I will not, because I have an ongoing political fight with him," he said.

### 'BJP aide'

Responding to this, Mr. Vijayan said the INDIA bloc was facing its current crisis because of Mr. Gandhi's approach. He said leaders such as Tejashwi Yadav (Rashtriya Janata Dal) and Akhilesh Yadav (Samajwadi Party) had aired their views against this political position of the Congress.

"We have seen what is happening with the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). All this is because of Mr. Gandhi's approach. He is not trying to strengthen the INDIA bloc, but is becoming an aide of the BJP," Mr. Vijayan alleged.

Pinarayi Vijayan

The senior Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)] leader also said that he was not used to hugging people when he met them.

"If I meet Mr. Gandhi, I either shake hands with him or we greet each other by folding hands. But we have seen a photo of him hugging [Prime Minister Narendra] Modi. I don't have any problem with that. But, he portrayed it in a different way at the INDIA bloc meeting," Mr. Vijayan said.

Meanwhile, the former Chief Minister criticised the Health Department for "its casual approach to dealing with the recent Nipah case in Kozhikode." Mr. Vijayan said the government was not giving the issue the attention it deserved and there were lapses in the containment steps.

He said Health Minister K. Muraleedharan had not bothered to come to Kozhikode. Pointing out that though none of the Health Ministers in recent times were medical degree holders, he said, they were well-prepared to meet any emergency.

## *Cold comfort*

Rain pours misery on a horse in Bengaluru on Saturday. Animal-drawn carts exist with modern transport modes in the city. SUDHAKARA JAIN

# 89 tourists rescued after boat develops snag on Godavari in A.P.

**The Hindu Bureau**
DEVIPATNAM

At least 89 tourists were rescued after a private boat developed a technical snag in the Godavari river in Polavaram district of Andhra Pradesh on Friday.

The boat had travelled nearly one kilometre from the boarding point when the problem was detected. The tourists were on their way to the Papikonda hill range.

Rampachodavaram Deputy Superintendent of Police Ashraf Ali told *The Hindu* that the boat driver noticed a sudden drop in speed due to a technical issue, reportedly linked to connecting bolts.

The private operator later deployed another boat, *Jalasri*, to ferry the tourists, who continued their scheduled trip to Papikonda.

A fresh safety audit of all the boats will be undertaken.

"Both the boats, including the one that developed the technical snag, have since returned to the boarding point," Mr. Ashraf Ali said.

In a release issued on Saturday, Rampachodavaram Revenue Divisional Officer K. Swathi said an inquiry committee comprising officials from the Revenue, Irrigation, Tourism and Police departments had been constituted to ascertain the cause of the breakdown and examine whether any operational guidelines had been violated. Operations of all tourist boats plying between the Gandiposamma Temple point and the Papikonda hill range have been suspended until further orders.

### Compliance measures

"A fresh safety audit of all private boats will be undertaken from Sunday. The audit will examine safety measures and compliance with operational guidelines before permitting the boats to resume services," Ms. Swathi said.

# Accused in Sabarimala gold theft case passes away

**The Hindu Bureau**
KOCHI

Murari Babu, 54, a former administrative officer of the Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) who was arrested in connection with the Sabarimala temple gold theft case, died in Kochi on Saturday. A native of Perunna, Changanassery, in Kottayam district, he was arrested from his residence after the special investigation team (SIT) that probed the gold theft case found that he had "falsely recorded the gold plates on the idol as copper plates." The SIT had arraigned him as the second accused in the alleged theft of gold from the Dwarapalaka sculptures.

# Man, daughter electrocuted in Telangana

**The Hindu Bureau**
HYDERABAD

A 44-year-old man and his 16-year-old daughter were electrocuted in Secunderabad on Saturday after they stepped out of their home to move their car away from a tree that had fallen during heavy rain. The man, his wife and daughter had come out to move their car after a tree fell in front of their house.

While doing so, the wife moved a live wire on the road and suffered a shock. As the man rushed to help, another live wire struck the daughter, electrocuting both of them on the spot.

# Teeming peacock population poses new challenges to farmers, foresters

**K. Umashanker**
KUPPAM

In the rural areas of Kuppam region in Andhra Pradesh's Chittoor district, flanked by Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, peacocks are as much a part of the landscape as the granite outcrops and scrub forests that define the tri-State terrain.

Till a decade ago, the Indian peafowl was confined to the forest fringes, but now the bird is a frequent visitor to villages, agricultural fields, and even institutional campuses across the region.

**At home:** A peacock perched on a tree on the outskirts of Kuppam in Chittoor district, Andhra Pradesh. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The forest authorities of Chittoor confirm that the bird's population is growing steadily. "The peacock is a Schedule-I species under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, enjoying the same level of legal protection as the tiger. But unlike the tiger, whose conservation remains a challenge in many parts of the country, peacock numbers have been increasing consistently, not only in Kuppam but across India," says District Forest Officer G. Subburaj.

The forests of the Kuppam region continue to provide an ideal habitat for peafowl. Open forests, cultivated fields, seasonal water sources, and rocky elevations offer abundant food and safe roosting sites.

Across several hamlets and semi-urban villages as well, farmers express concern over increasing crop damage caused by peacocks. Paddy fields are the worst hit, while vegetable crops and cereal plantations also bear the brunt.

# Andhra CM's two-day tour of Singapore begins tomorrow

**The Hindu Bureau**
VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu is going on a visit to Singapore on June 15 and 16 to attract investments and review collaborations for the development of Amaravati and other key infrastructure projects.

High on his agenda are discussions with Singapore Prime Minister Lawrence Wong, Foreign Minister Dr. Vivian Balakrishnan, Home Affairs Minister K. Shanmugam, Minister for Manpower Tan See Leng, and Minister for Trade and Industry Gan Kim Yong.

N. Chandrababu Naidu

Mr. Naidu's itinerary includes meetings with Shilpak Ambule, Indian High Commissioner in Singapore, and Anacláudia Rossbach, Executive Director of UN-Habitat, among others.

Mr. Naidu will also inaugurate CBN@361 programme being organised by the Kakatiya Cultural Association, participate in APAC Semiconductor Roundtable and attend the Surbana Jurong – Amaravati Planning Meeting.

Mr. Naidu will address the leadership plenary at the World Cities Summit, visit the World Cities Summit Exhibition and attend the CII Partnership Summit-2026 Business Roadshow, which forms a key component of Andhra Pradesh's investment outreach efforts.

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# Maritime insurance battle looms for slain Vizag mariner's family

Wife of the deceased seeks government support to guide her through the complexities associated with P&I Insurance; legal expert says the family must route their insurance claim via the local seamen's welfare authorities and the DGS office in India

**V. Kamalakara Rao**
VISAKHAPATNAM

Even as the mortal remains of Patnala Suresh (44), the chief engineer who was killed in a strike on the Palau-flagged oil tanker *MT Settebello* off the Oman coast on June 10, are yet to be repatriated to Visakhapatnam, his family is facing a complex financial battle for compensation.

Suresh's wife, Bhargavi, along with two sons aged 13 and 10, is dealing not only with intense grief but also the uncertainty regarding the ship's insurance policies, including the Protection & Indemnity (P&I) Insurance.

"I am totally in the dark about how these international shipping protections work. I did not even know P&I coverage existed. I am definitely going to raise this issue with the ship's management. I am seeking the local government's support to guide me through this," Ms. Bhargavi told *The Hindu*.

Bhargavi, wife of Patnala Suresh who was among the three dead on ship *Settebello* hit by a U.S. missile, showing his photograph in Visakhapatnam as his two sons look on. PTI

Merchant ships take two kinds of insurance: one to protect against damage to hull and machinery and the other, called P&I insurance, to cover for loss of life, damage to environment and so on.

P&I insurance is provided by mutual clubs of shipowners to cover third-party liabilities, which explicitly includes the injury or death of seafarers on board. The compensation runs to several thousands of dollars and depends on the contract signed by the member of the crew with the ship owner or manager.

Maritime legal records indicate that despite the geopolitical controversies surrounding the vessel's journey–which led to the targeted strike by external forces– commercial vessels such as *MT Settebello* are legally mandated to carry P&I insurance.

Typically, in case of sanctions by the U.S., P&I clubs withdraw their insurance. But Settebello's P&I insurance remains fundamentally active to fulfil basic crew liabilities under standard maritime employment contracts.

### Legal path forward

For a grieving family, navigating international maritime law can be intimidating. Legal experts outline the necessary legal path forward.

Speaking to *The Hindu* from Dubai, a maritime legal consultant, who regularly handles complex shipping liabilities and insurance disputes, said, "The family must immediately secure Suresh's original crew agreement or employment contract. This document details the exact compensation benchmarks, war-zone clauses, and specific death-benefit provisions. A specialised death certificate must be issued by the flag state (Palau) and formally authenticated by the Indian Embassy in Oman. This document is mandatory to initiate the formal P&I club claim settlement process."

### Financial backbone

The family must formally route their insurance claim via the local seamen's welfare authorities and the Directorate General of Shipping (DGS) office in India. "This step prevents the family from being isolated or stonewalled by overseas entities," he said."P&I insurance is the ultimate financial backbone for a seafarer's family during war-like or hostile zone casualties. Under standard maritime labour conventions, even if a vessel enters a high-risk zone under disputed circumstances, the owner's liability toward crew compensation remains absolute," he added.

# Attacks on vessels with Indian seafarers likely to feature in IORA meet

**Saptaparno Ghosh**
NEW DELHI

At the 28th meeting of the Committee of Senior Officials of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), commencing on Monday, all eyes will be on India, which may put forth concerns over the U.S.'s recent attacks on four vessels with Indian seafarers on board.

India is the current Chair of the regional maritime cooperative association, which also has Iran, the UAE, Yemen, and Oman as its members – countries which have also been directly affected by the conflict in West Asia.

The U.S. too features as a 'dialogue partner' at the association, in the role of an observer, wherein it participates and discusses issues but does not have voting rights.

Although the IORA's charter explicitly bars members from raising issues that do not concern regional cooperation, in the broader scheme of things, India could look to utilise the forum for airing its concerns in the maritime space.

India is the current Chair of the Indian Ocean Rim Association.

The Committee of Senior Officials is the IORA's second-highest decision-making body.

The platform could be an avenue for a dialogue on the prevailing broader maritime concerns, and potentially, cooperation in the realm.

Besides issues specific to India, other member countries too would find themselves in the spotlight, particularly Iran, as it seeks to impose a 'service fee' on the passage of ships through the Strait of Hormuz.

"According to international laws, it is not possible to impose toll on the Strait of Hormuz, but service fees will be collected, and this will be established in the negotiations," Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has said.

In the past five days, the U.S. has attacked three foreign-flagged vessels that had Indian seafarers on board, for violating the naval blockade. The blockade imposed by the U.S. bars the use of Iranian ports, and the transportation of Iranian oil.

Speaking to *The Hindu* at 10th Indian Ocean Conference in Mauritius on April 11, 2026, Mauritius' Foreign Minister Dhananjay Ramful had said the idea of the Indian Ccean as a "zone of peace" had been negated as the "war has come" to the ocean.

While denouncing the U.S. torpedo attack on Iranian ship *IRIS Dena* in the Indian Ocean, killing more than 80 sailors in March 2026, he also expressed his concerns over retaliatory attacks by Iran on the U.S.'s Diego Garcia military base.

# Umar, Sharjeel move fresh bail pleas in Delhi riots case

**The Hindu Bureau**
NEW DELHI

Sharjeel Imam and Umar Khalid have moved a Delhi court seeking bail in the alleged "larger conspiracy" case linked to the 2020 Delhi riots.

The applications were placed before Additional Sessions Judge Sumedh Sethi at the Karkardooma Court, who scheduled the hearing on both bail pleas for July 4.

### Lack of progress

The two accused approached the trial court following developments in the apex court, where a Bench recently raised questions regarding the interpretation relied upon while refusing them bail earlier.

Umar Khalid

In his plea, Mr. Imam has contended that more than six months have elapsed since the top court rejected his bail plea, but the trial has seen little progress, with arguments on the framing of charges yet to be concluded.

Mr. Imam also submitted that he has been incarcerated for nearly six years in connection with the case.

# No new Aadhaar cards for adults in Assam without special verification

**The Hindu Bureau**
GUWAHATI

The Assam Cabinet has decided to stop Aadhaar cards being issued in the State through the regular enrolment process to people aged 18 and above.

The decision is aimed at preventing illegal immigrants from obtaining the unique identification number, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Saturday.

He said the Cabinet approved a ban on fresh Aadhaar enrolment in Assam for adults except for people with disabilities and those from Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, and tea garden communities.

The exemption for applicants in these categories will remain valid until March 2027. "The restrictions will not apply to individuals below 18 years of age," the Chief Minister said.

Himanta Biswa Sarma

According to the blueprint, any "genuine" person aged 18 or above seeking an Aadhaar card will now have to undergo a special verification process through the office of the District Commissioner concerned. In such cases, the District Commissioner will be required to submit a proposal to the government, which will take the final call on processing Aadhaar cards.

**Exceptions offered for SC, ST, tea garden communities and those who have disabilities, says CM**

The Chief Minister said Aadhaar cards were still being issued although Assam has reached Aadhaar enrolment saturation, with some districts recording issuance of up to 115%.

"As Assam has already achieved 100% Aadhaar saturation, there are apprehensions over who is taking Aadhaar cards. We want no illegal immigrant to acquire an Aadhaar," Mr. Sarma said.

The Chief Minister added that the intention was to stop the "leakage" in the issuance of Aadhaar.

The Assam Cabinet also approved the implementation framework of the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act (VB-G RAM G), 2025, for the State. It will be implemented from July 1.

"The budget allocation for the Act is ₹2,000 crore, and 125 man-days will be provided for direct wage employment under the Act. Moreover, under the Act, besides providing employment, importance will be given to creating assets as a result of the man-days," a government statement said.

# Lieutenant-General Dhiraj Seth named next Army Chief

**Saurabh Trivedi**
NEW DELHI

The government has appointed Lieutenant-General Dhiraj Seth, serving as the Vice-Chief of the Army Staff, as the next Chief of the Army Staff with effect from the afternoon of June 30.

The present Chief of the Army Staff, General Upendra Dwivedi, retires from service the same day.

Lt. Gen. Seth assumed charge as the Vice-Chief of the Army Staff on April 1, 2026. An alumnus of the National Defence Academy, Khadakwasla, Lt. Gen. Seth was commissioned into the Armoured Corps in 1986. Over a distinguished career spanning nearly four decades, he has served in a variety of operational environments, including extensive counter-insurgency assignments.

Lieutenant-General Dhiraj Seth

The officer has commanded an armoured regiment in the desert sector, an armoured brigade, and a counter-insurgency force in Jammu and Kashmir. As a Lieutenant-General, he commanded the prestigious Sudarshan Chakra Corps and later served as the General Officer Commanding, Delhi Area.

# Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami chief seeks clarification on Trivedi's remarks

**Kallol Bhattacherjee**
NEW DELHI

India's High Commissioner-designate to Bangladesh Dinesh Trivedi's remarks suggesting that India and Bangladesh should "become one" in their efforts were "certainly condemnable", Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI) chief Shafiqur Rahman said on Saturday.

In a statement posted on social media, Mr. Rahman stated that India and Bangladesh are both independent countries and that the Tarique Rahman government should seek clarification from Mr. Trivedi.

"Yesterday [Friday], after the arrival of the new Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh, Mr. Dinesh Trivedi, one of his remarks came to our attention. We believe our government should seek clarification from him regarding what he meant by the phrase 'India and Bangladesh becoming one'," said Mr. Rahman while asserting Bangladesh's independent identity.

Mr. Trivedi, who reached Bangladesh through the Benapole-Petrapole land crossing, around 112 km from Kolkata, told presspersons that he did not feel like a foreigner after entering the territory of Bangladesh. "We have a population of 140 crore and Bangladesh has 20 crore people. Whatever we do, we have to do it together. We cannot be powerful in isolation," said Mr. Trivedi.

> Yesterday [Friday], after the arrival of the new Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh, Mr. Dinesh Trivedi, one of his remarks came to our attention. We believe our government should seek clarification from him regarding what he meant by the phrase 'India and Bangladesh becoming one'
>
> **SHAFIQUR RAHMAN**
> Bangladesh's Leader of the Opposition

Responding to Mr. Trivedi's remarks, Mr. Rahman said, "The issue needs to be made clear. Just as India is an independent country, Bangladesh is also an independent country. If his statement is not clarified, it will certainly create confusion among the public."

Mr. Trivedi is the first political appointee to the post of the Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh since the country attained independence in 1971.

Apart from the first High Commissioner, Subimal Dutt, who was summoned to serve after retiring in 1962, all subsequent Indian High Commissioners to Dhaka were career diplomats.

The Ministry of External Affairs is yet to make a statement regarding JeI's remarks ."If he meant something of this nature in the literal sense, then it is certainly condemnable," said Mr. Rahman, who leads the 77-member strong Opposition bloc in the Jatiya Sangsad, the unicameral legislative body of Bangladesh.

In the February 2026 election, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), led by Tarique Rahman, won 212 of 300 seats, while the 11-party alliance led by Jamaat-e-Islami won 77 seats. The JeI, with 68 seats, emerged as the principal Opposition party.

Since the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government, Mr. Rahman-led JeI has positioned itself as an important political player in Dhaka, and he is often seen engaged with foreign diplomats. He met U.S. Ambassador Brent T. Christensen at the National Parliament building on June 9 and discussed "regional and international issues". He has met diplomats of several other countries and blocs, like the European Union, over the past several months as he tries to project a more "pragmatic side" of the Jamaat-e-Islami.

# Amit Shah directs Ministry support to panel studying demographic changes

**Vijaita Singh**
NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah chaired a meeting on Saturday where he directed officials of the Union Home Ministry to ensure proper facilitation of the High-Level Committee on Demographic Changes, Ministry officials said.

The committee was formally constituted on May 26 and held its first meeting on June 2, around a year after Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced it.

Headed by retired Supreme Court Judge Prakash Prabhakar Naolekar, the panel is expected to visit border districts, metropolitan areas, and industrial towns to study demographic changes, especially caused by illegal immigration.

A senior official said that the committee has already been convened and its agenda has been formulated. The Ministry will provide logistical and other necessary support for its proper functioning, the official added.

Amit Shah

### Support meeting

Saturday's meeting was attended by Union Home Secretary Govind Mohan, Intelligence Bureau (IB) chief Tapan Kumar Deka, Additional Secretary Nilesh Kumar Vyas, Registrar General and Census Commissioner Mritunjay Kumar Narayan, and other Ministry officials; Mr. Narayan was the only attendee who is a member of the panel.

As reported by *The Hindu*, the committee met for the first time on June 2 where it was decided to also study the exclusion of names from the voters list following the special intensive revision (SIR) exercise that has been conducted in 13 States and Union Territories so far. The panel has asked for documents from several government departments.

### Operational system

According to the terms of reference of the committee, its mandate is to study the demographic changes arising from illegal immigration and other abnormal reasons, and also recommend an appropriate institutional mechanism for "population stabilisation."

The notification added that the panel will also recommend "a well-organised and permanent operational system for the legal, fair and time bound identification, detention, and deportation of illegal immigrants already residing in the country."

# Centre to supply rice worth ₹10 cr. to Mizoram

**Press Trust of India**
AIZAWL

The Centre will provide rice worth ₹10 crore to support about 40,000 refugees from Myanmar and Bangladesh, and displaced people from Manipur currently taking shelter in Mizoram, an official statement said on Saturday.

The assurance came after Chief Minister Lalduhoma highlighted the humanitarian challenges faced by the State in accommodating refugees and sought the Centre's support during a meeting with Union Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi on Friday, the statement said.

He said the State has been making every possible effort to provide humanitarian assistance to the refugees and stressed the need for urgent support from the Centre, the statement said.

Mr. Shah informed the Chief Minister that the Centre would provide ₹10 crore worth of rice to aid relief efforts.

# Upendra Kushwaha re-elected RLM chief

**The Hindu Bureau**
NEW DELHI

Rashtriya Lok Morcha (RLM) chief Upendra Kushwaha on Saturday said his son Deepak Prakash would remain in the Bihar Cabinet for as long as there is an NDA government in the State.

On June 9, Mr. Prakash was denied NDA ticket for the Bihar Legislative Council (MLC) election slated for June 18. He is currently serving as State Panchayati Raj Minister but is not a member of either the Assembly or the Legislative Council.

Because constitutional rules require him to become an MLA or MLC within six months of taking oath (which he did on May 7), a Damocles sword hangs over his ministerial position now.

On Saturday, the RLM re-elected Mr. Kushwaha as its national president. The move is seen as an assertion of independence by Mr. Kushwaha, who has been nudged by the BJP to merge the RLM into the national party. Addressing party workers at a convention in the national capital, Mr. Kushwaha said there should be no confusion in anyone's mind and that Mr. Prakash would remain a Minister for as long as the State was led by NDA.

"It was not me but the NDA which made him the Minister, and they will decide the way forward," he said. Before the nominations for the MLC polls, Mr. Kushwaha had ruled out the possibility of a merger with the BJP, stating his party's ideology did not align with that of the BJP.

# Bengal Police search Abhishek's residence

Personnel entered Trinamool leader's house in the early hours looking for his PA, Sumit Roy, in a financial embezzlement case; party chairperson Mamata Banerjee visits home in the morning

**Shiv Sahay Singh**
KOLKATA

**Back-to-back knocks:** The Kalighat residence of Abhishek Banerjee during a police operation linked to an alleged financial fraud case involving his personal assistant, Sumit Roy, in Kolkata on Saturday. PTI

The West Bengal Police broke into the residence of Trinamool Congress general secretary Abhishek Banerjee on Patuapara Road in the Kalighat area of the city in the early hours of Saturday morning and searched the premises.

### Embezzlement case

Personnel from the Salboni police station in Paschim Medinipur district of the State entered the Trinamool leader's residence, and said that they were looking for Sumit Roy, the personal assistant of Abhishek Banerjee.

A complaint against Mr. Roy was filed at the Salboni police station and the police were on the lookout for him in a financial embezzlement case.

A district police officer said that the "tower location" of the personal assistant's mobile phone was last seen at Mr. Banerjee's house.

### Mamata reaches house

Accusing the police of harassment, the Trinamool general secretary said that he had filmed the police action at his house in the early hours of Saturday and kept a record of it.

Trinamool Congress chairperson Mamata Banerjee reached her nephew's house in the morning after hearing about the police operation. The former Chief Minister did not want to comment on the police action.

Mr. Banerjee has been summoned in several cases, including the West Bengal Assembly signature scandal for the second occasion on Sunday and by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in a recruitment scam on Monday.

On June 16, he has been asked to appear before the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) in connection with another case involving a provocative speech that he allegedly made during the Assembly election campaign. In that speech, the Trinamool leader had said that DJ music would be played instead of Rabindra sangeet after election results are declared on May 4, a comment construed as a call to violence by some.

However, it is the West Bengal Assembly signature scandal being investigated by the CID that is turning out to be a challenge for Mr. Banerjee.

On June 11, Mr. Banerjee was questioned by the CID for over five hours in the signature scandal and is likely to appear again on Sunday.

Speaking to media persons on Friday, Mr. Banerjee said that he had learnt that the CID team had arrived at his residence.

### 'Never evaded probe'

"I requested my office staff to receive the notice, but the officers did not hand it over. I was not able to leave the meeting midway. The next time CID visits, I would request the officers to contact me beforehand so that I can personally receive the notice. I have never tried to evade the investigation and have always extended full cooperation," the Diamond Harbour MP said.

Mr. Banerjee said that if he had spoken about playing DJ music after the elections, then the Union Home Minister had said that Trinamool Congress supporters would be hung upside down.

"Every action has an equal and opposite reaction. The EC (Election Commission) knew that if they started a case against Abhishek Banerjee, they would have to do the same against Amit Shah. But [Chief Election Commissioner] Gyanesh Kumar did not have the guts to do that," he claimed.

Several FIRs have been registered against Abhishek Banerjee and Mamata Banerjee after the Trinamool Congress lost the Assembly polls in the State.

# Mamata's aide Sudip Bandyopadhyay may join rebel Trinamool leaders

**Shiv Sahay Singh**
KOLKATA

**Shifting loyalties:** Mamata Banerjee and Sudip Bandyopadhyay campaign in Kolkata during the recent Assembly election. PTI

A six-time Trinamool Congress MP and the leader of the party in the Lok Sabha, Sudip Bandyopadhyay, on Saturday met Union Minister and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Bhupendra Yadav sparking speculation that he is joining the rebel camp of Trinamool MPs.

Mr. Bandyopadhyay, who has been representing the Kolkata Uttar (North) Lok Sabha seat for decades, was accompanied by Birbhum Lok Sabha member Satabdi Roy, who has announced her allegiance to the rebel camp.

Mr. Bandyopadhyay, 77, who is older than party chairperson Mamata Banerjee, 71, has been one of the most trusted aides of the latter. With his possible defection to the rebel camp, the number of MPs supporting the camp will increase to 20.

In the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, 29 MPs of the Trinamool were elected to the Lok Sabha. Basirhat Trinamool MP Haji Sheikh Nurul Islam passed away in September 2024, bringing the number of Trinamool MPs to 28. With Mr. Bandyopadhyay joining the rebel ranks, the number of Mamata Banerjee loyalists has dropped to eight.

Among those backing Ms. Banerjee in the Lok Sabha, the prominent names include Kalyan Banerjee, Saugata Roy, Mahua Moitra, Kirti Azad, Shatrughan Sinha, and Abhishek Banerjee.

Mr. Bandyopadhyay's visit to Delhi and a meeting with Union Minister Bhupendra Yadav comes days before the rebel Trinamool MPs are going to meet the Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and stake claim as an independent group backing the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance government at the Centre.

**With his possible defection, the number of MPs supporting the rebel camp will increase to 20**

Mr. Bandyopadhyay's wife Nayna Bandyopadhyay, who is the MLA for the Chowrangee seat, is likely to join the rebels.

### Strong reactions

Some 60 of the 80 MLAs of the Trinamool have come out against the party high command and supported expelled MLA Ritabrata Banerjee as Leader of the Opposition.

Speculation over Mr. Bandyopadhyay changing political loyalties evoked strong reactions from political circles. Senior BJP leader and West Bengal Industry Minister Tapas Roy, who quit the Trinamool in 2024 due to differences with Mr. Bandyopadhyay, said the Kolkata Uttar MP "will be a liability wherever he goes".

"They were never loyalists, not even political elements. They rose in career by clinging to someone's support, sometimes holding onto Priya Ranjan Dasmunsi, and at other times, Mamata Banerjee. They have done absolutely nothing, neither for the public nor for any party. Now Mamata Banerjee is realising who truly stands by her," Mr. Roy said.

Trinamool MLA Kunal Ghosh, who remains loyal to the Trinamool chairperson, spoke in similar vein and launched a scathing attack on the senior leader.

Mr. Ghosh said that Mr. Bandyopadhyay's shift toward a rebel faction comes with his wife Nayna Bandyopadhyay also following the same path and joining those supporting the BJP. The Beleghata MLA said that the Trinamool chairperson gave positions of prominence to such people and they are turning against her.

**On agenda:** The campaign will foreground demands that Rahul Gandhi has raised earlier, including decentralisation of NEET, abolition of exam fees, action on paper leak rackets and accountability. PTI

# Congress launches nationwide campaign against paper leaks, exam woes, youth joblessness

**The Hindu Bureau**
NEW DELHI

In a move to reach out to the country's youth, the Congress on Saturday announced student conventions against paper leaks, decentralisation of NEET, abolition of examination fees, and fixing accountability for recurring examination irregularities.

The campaign, to be led by Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi, will begin with a student convention in Kota on June 17, followed by programmes in Prayagraj (Allahabad) on July 10, Patna on July 11, and Delhi on July 14.

Announcing the first phase of the nationwide outreach, Congress general secretary (organisation) K.C. Venugopal said the initiative was aimed at highlighting issues such as paper leaks, examination irregularities, unemployment, and the "Centre's failure to safeguard the interests of students and job aspirants".

In a statement, Mr. Venugopal said the campaign would bring together students, aspirants, youth organisations, and educators affected by examination scandals. He alleged that the futures of millions of young Indians were being jeopardised by paper leaks, rising examination costs, and the government's failure to ensure a fair and transparent recruitment and education system.

### Exam rows in focus

According to the statement, the campaign will foreground demands that Mr. Gandhi has raised earlier, including decentralisation of the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET), abolition of examination fees, stringent action against those involved in paper leak rackets, and accountability at the highest levels of government.

The party reiterated its demand for the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over examination-related controversies.

"The Congress party will therefore seek a comprehensive discussion in Parliament on the crisis confronting India's youth and advocate legislative measures to protect their interests, rights and future," Mr. Venugopal said.

The Congress leader said it would mobilise students through the National Students' Union of India (NSUI), the Youth Congress and party units across the country. The outreach would include campus visits, interactions at coaching centres, universities and schools, social media campaigns, live screenings and direct engagement with students.

The party said the movement sought to unite students beyond political affiliations and provide a platform for those affected by examination irregularities to share their experiences and demand accountability.

The Congress leader said Mr. Gandhi had consistently raised concerns over paper leaks, recruitment delays and unemployment, and had made the issues of merit, fairness and equal opportunity central to his engagement with students and youth.

# ED questions Trinamool MLA Madan Mitra

**Shrabana Chatterjee**
KOLKATA

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) searched at least six properties linked to Trinamool Congress MLA Madan Mitra on Saturday over a gold-for-jobs scam.

It has been alleged that Mr. Mitra gave jobs to undeserving candidates in various municipalities in exchange for gold and cash. He reportedly collected the bribes through middlemen and gave postings in the civic bodies of Kamarhati and adjacent Titagarh.

ED officials said searches were conducted through the day at Mr. Mitra's house in Bhabanipur, a flat in Joka, a five-storey apartment in Dakhineshwar, two clubs, and other places. They also questioned Mr. Mitra at his Bhabanipur residence.

The searches were conducted on the basis of leads from a businessman, Ayan Sil, who was arrested in 2023 in the same scam.

On May 11, ED officials arrested former Minister Sujit Bose over similar allegations of illegal recruitment at the South Dum Dum Municipality. He is the only top Trinamool leader who has gone behind bars after the regime change.

Other leaders such as party general secretary Abhishek Banerjee and former Minister Aroop Biswas have been given temporary relief by the Calcutta High Court against coercive action by the police or Central agencies. While Mr. Banerjee is under the ED scanner for a school recruitment scam, Mr. Biswas is facing a police probe over the 2025 Lionel Messi event fiasco.

### Third summons

On Saturday, Mr. Biswas got a third notice from the police asking him to appear for questioning within 48 hours. He had previously evaded two other notices and did not appear before the police.

The police had filed the case against Mr. Biswas on a complaint filed by the organiser of the "G.O.A.T. India Tour", Satadru Datta. He had accused Mr. Biswas of extortion, cheating, and misuse of political power at the December 2025 Lionel Messi event at the Salt Lake stadium. The event ended in massive chaos and vandalism, and led to major embarrassment for the ruling government on the international stage.

Photographs of Mr. Biswas holding the football legend by his waist went viral on social media as citizens, fans, and Opposition leaders came down heavily on the politician for his actions.

# After Cong., regional parties face existential questions

NEWS ANALYSIS

**Sandeep Phukan**
NEW DELHI

**In solidarity:** Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge at a press meet after an INDIA bloc meeting this month in New Delhi. ANI

The political slogan of Congress-*mukt* Bharat (Congress-free India) was first used by the BJP on January 14, 2014, barely four months before Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power at the Centre. "Congress *Mukt Bharat BJP ka naara nahi hai, jan jan ka sankalp hai* [Congress free India isn't just a BJP slogan but people's slogan]," Mr. Modi, then the BJP's prime ministerial face, told an enthusiastic crowd at a public rally in Goa.

The slogan, since then, became the leitmotif of the BJP's attack on the Congress as it sought to position itself as the pan-India alternative.

### The hardest hit

But now, when the BJP has more or less replaced the Congress system – a term used by political scientist Rajni Kothari to describe one-party dominance – it's the regional players who have been hit the hardest.

The unravelling of the Trinamool Congress post the humiliating defeat in the recent West Bengal Assembly polls reflects the existential questions that many regional parties now face. And this is despite the argument that regional players have outperformed the Congress in one-on-one contests against BJP.

Take the Lok Sabha polls, as an example. The BJP's success rate against the Congress on seats which witnessed a bi-polar contest was 70%. But in West Bengal, its success rate against the Trinamool was 33%, and in Uttar Pradesh, it had a strike rate of 45% against the Akhilesh Yadav-led Samajwadi Party, even though the SP has consistently lost two U.P. Assembly elections to the BJP since 2017.

Such comparisons are misleading. Regional parties may still defeat the BJP in direct contests, but they are increasingly vulnerable to splits, defections and absorption into BJP-led political coalitions.

In Maharashtra, both the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena and the Sharad Pawar-led Nationalist Congress Party not only saw a vertical split, but the leaders also lost their party symbols to the breakaway factions. In Bihar, where the 2025 polls were contested on Janata Dal (United) leader Nitish Kumar's governance record, the BJP has been able to install its own Chief Minister for the first time ever.

And in Assam, the ties between the BJP and the Asom Gana Parishad has completely reversed, with the AGP, once the flagbearer of Assamese identity, reduced to being a junior partner.

While the now-repealed controversial farm laws forced the Shiromani Akali Dal to break its alliance with the BJP in Punjab, in Odisha, the Biju Janata Dal, which had maintained friendly ties with the Modi government, has been replaced by the BJP as the ruling party in the State.

Professor Kumar Sanjay, who teaches history at Delhi University's Shraddhanand College, says the BJP's current trajectory reflects the unitary approach to politics, once associated with the Congress, which seeks to weaken regional parties and satraps.

"This helps them in ensuring that decision-making remains at the Centre," Mr. Sanjay said, adding, "They are extremely alert and know of the roadblocks that regional parties can create to a centrist party."

He argued that when regional parties seek to challenge unitary politics, they coalesce around a centrist force. "Around the late 1960s and the 1970s, this was provided by the RSS. Now, the Congress is trying to occupy this space, with Rahul Gandhi fusing social justice with his party's own welfare state model," Mr. Sanjay said.

## INBRIEF

### SIT formed to probe 'missing donations' at Ram Temple

The Uttar Pradesh government on Saturday formed a three-member special investigation team (SIT) to probe accusations surrounding the alleged disappearance of donations made at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya. The SIT, comprising Lucknow Divisional Commissioner Vijay Vishwas Pant, Inspector General of Police S. Kiran, and Special Secretary (Finance) Neel Ratan, has been constituted following a request from the temple trust and it has been directed to submit a final report within 15 days and preliminary report within seven days. Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav had earlier alleged a large sum of money donated by devotees had gone missing.

### Union Ministry takes over Jaipur Polo Ground in Delhi

The Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry on Saturday took physical possession of the 15.2-acre Jaipur Polo Ground in the Race Course area of the national capital after a Delhi court on Friday declined to grant temporary protection to the Indian Polo Association (IPA) against a government order requiring it to vacate the premises. On May 20, an eviction order was issued by the Land and Development Office, seeking possession of the land parcel, citing its need for a "larger public purpose". The IPA termed the eviction "wrongful, arbitrary and contrary to law," and said it would pursue all available legal remedies to safeguard its rights.

### Press Club welcomes court order in *NewsClick* case

The Press Club of India (PCI) on Saturday welcomed the Delhi High Court order quashing the FIR and the subsequent Enforcement Directorate case against the news portal *NewsClick* and its founding editor, Prabir Purkayastha. The PCI said the Delhi High Court, on May 29, observed that the cases were "a gross abuse of the process of law and is hereby, quashed". Stating that the court order rightly put an end to one of the most perverse examples of vindictiveness against press freedom, the PCI said the actions of Delhi Police and the ED resulted in journalists working at *NewsClick* losing their jobs and valuable equipment.

### India and Nepal hold talks on cross-border rail connectivity

India and Nepal have held discussions on cross-border railway links, including passenger train services on the Janakpur-Ayodhya section, and bilateral cooperation in the sector, an official statement said. The discussions between the two countries were part of the 10th Project Steering Committee and the eighth Joint Working Group meetings held here on June 11 and 12, the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu said on Friday. The standard operating procedures for the commencement of passenger train services on the Janakpur-Ayodhya section was one of the focus points during the engagement between the two sides. PTI

## SUDOKU

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★☆☆☆☆

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# Rajnath praises rise in 'women's strength' in IAF

Indian Air Force sees the commissioning of its first batch of women officers; Defence Minister says Operation Sindoor showed the force's capability to destroy enemy infrastructure with precision

**Siddharth Kumar Singh**
HYDERABAD

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Saturday said the growing participation of women was making the Indian Air Force (IAF) more balanced and robust as the service marked a historic milestone with the commissioning of the first batch of women officers from the National Defence Academy (NDA), Pune, during the Combined Graduation Parade (CGP) of the 217th Course at the Air Force Academy (AFA), Dundigal, near Hyderabad.

"With the increase of women's strength, our Air Force is becoming more balanced and stronger. This reflects the strength of our inclusive force," Mr. Singh said after reviewing the parade. The women cadets, who had passed out from the NDA on May 30, 2025, underwent branch-specific training at the Air Force Academy before being commissioned. The occasion marked the first time in the history of the IAF that women cadets from the NDA graduated from the academy as officers. A total of five women officers were awarded wings, with two joining the fighter stream and the remaining three joining the maintenance and ground duty branches.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh awards Wings to a woman cadet at the Air Force Academy in Hyderabad on Saturday. ANI

A total of 231 flight cadets graduated after completing their pre-commissioning training across various branches of the IAF. The graduating batch comprised 194 men and 37 women. Wings were also awarded to nine officers of the Indian Navy, three officers of the Indian Coast Guard and two trainees from the Socialist Republic of Vietnam on the successful completion of flying training, while three officers received brevets after completing their navigation training.

The Defence Minister presented the President's Plaque to cadets who secured first position in the overall order of merit in the Flying Branch, Navigation stream and Ground Duty branches.

Flying Officer Ashish Kumar Yadav was awarded the President's Plaque and the Nawanagar Sword of Honour for standing first in the overall order of merit in the Pilot Course. Flying Officer Ekta Gupta received the President's Plaque for securing first position in the Navigation stream, while Flying Officer Divyanshi Singh was awarded the President's Plaque for topping the Ground Duty branches.

Mr. Singh congratulated the cadets and said they were becoming part of a proud legacy built over decades by the Indian Air Force.

Referring to Operation Sindoor, Mr. Singh said the Indian Air Force had demonstrated its capability to destroy enemy infrastructure with accuracy and precision. He said the force's achievements had been made possible by indigenous platforms, a strong organisational structure and the contribution of dedicated personnel, and expressed confidence that the Air Force would continue to play a similar role in the future.

Calling upon the officers to understand evolving threats and recalibrate their responses, Mr. Singh said they must remain open to change. "You have to adapt, adopt, and, if necessary, amend. You have to innovate and get an edge in every aspect," he said.

### Air Chief Marshal joins flypast

**HYDERABAD**
The Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Amar Preet Singh, provided an unexpected highlight to the Combined Graduation Parade at the Air Force Academy on Saturday by taking part in a three-aircraft Kiran formation flypast above the parade ground. As the distinctive roar of jet engines drew the attention of those gathered to the skies, one of the aircraft in the formation was, to the surprise of many on the ground, being flown by the Air Chief.

# Anomaly in PSLV detected and resolved: Jitendra

**Hemanth C.S.**
BENGALURU

Jitendra Singh

Union Minister of State for Science and Technology Jitendra Singh on Saturday said that the anomaly in the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) had been resolved.

Dr. Singh said on the sidelines of the Research, Industry, Start-up and Entrepreneurship (RISE) Conclave 2026 in Bengaluru, that a national-level expert committee constituted to review the reason for the anomaly had submitted its report and the problem had been detected.

"The report has come out and the anomaly has been detected. However we cannot share that [reason for the anomaly] on a public platform. But experts are working on it, which has been resolved and very soon we will be back on track," Dr. Singh said replying to a query by *The Hindu*.

The PSLV, which is referred to as the workhorse of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), had suffered two back-to-back setbacks.

On January 12, 2026, the PSLV-C62 mission carrying the EOS-N1 earth observation satellite failed to finish its intended trajectory after an anomaly was detected during the end of the third stage of the launch vehicle.

On May 18, 2025, while the ISRO attempted to launch the EOS-09 satellite aboard the PSLV-C61 mission, it couldn't complete it.

It was also due to an anomaly in the third stage of the rocket.

Following this a national-level expert committee was constituted which included K. Vijay Raghavan, former Principal Scientific Adviser, and former ISRO Chairman S. Somanath.

"There is no such thing as failure in a space mission. It is sometimes delayed, sometimes a setback which actually is a learning experience. Even if you... call every unsuccessful or half successful attempt as a failure, statistically our number of so-called failures is much lesser than the USA. Chandrayaan-3 and Mars Orbiter Mission were successful in their very first attempt so that way we have a better statistical record," Dr. Singh said.

ISRO Chairman V. Narayanan said that ISRO's next launch, which would be the first one since the PSLV failure in January, would take place next month.

## *On the draw*

# President reviews passing-out parade at Military Academy

**Saurabh Trivedi**
NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu on Saturday reviewed the passing-out parade of the 158th Regular Course and the 141st Technical Graduate Course at the Indian Military Academy (IMA), Dehradun, and described the induction of women cadets into the academy as a watershed moment in its history.

The President congratulated the officer cadets on successfully completing one of the country's most rigorous military training programmes.

President Droupadi Murmu felicitates a cadet at the passing-out Parade at the Indian Military Academy in Dehradun on Saturday. ANI

Expressing delight at the presence of nine women cadets in the graduating batch, President Murmu said their participation marked a significant milestone for India's journey towards women-led development.

# DRDO showcases critical defence technologies in three flight tests

**Saurabh Trivedi**
NEW DELHI

The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has successfully demonstrated a range of critical defence technologies through three consecutive flight tests conducted on Wednesday and Thursday, significantly enhancing India's capabilities against diverse aerial and maritime threats.

**Defence milestone**

According to the Ministry of Defence, the tests showcased a multi-layered Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system and the maiden flight test of the Naval Anti-Ship Missile-Medium Range (NASM-MR), marking a major milestone in India's indigenous defence technology development.

It further mentioned that the multi-layered BMD capability was successfully demonstrated with interceptor missiles engaging and destroying their designated targets.

The tests showcased a multi-layered ballistic missile defence system and the anti-ship missile. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

**The Defence Minister congratulated the DRDO and associated teams on the successful tests**

The systems, developed using advanced technologies, are designed to counter emerging missile threats across a broad spectrum.

**Anti-ship missile**

The successful trials have placed India among a select group of countries possessing BMD capabilities capable of engaging threats up to Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles, significantly strengthening the country's strategic defence shield.

In another key achievement, DRDO successfully carried out the maiden flight test of the Naval Anti-Ship Missile-Medium Range (NASM-MR), demonstrating enhanced anti-ship strike capability at medium ranges.

The flight tests were witnessed by senior officials of DRDO and the Armed Forces.

**Rajnath lauds DRDO**

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh congratulated DRDO and associated teams for the successful demonstration of the crucial technologies, stating that the achievements would further strengthen India's defence preparedness.

Secretary, Department of Defence R&D and Chairman DRDO, Rajesh Kumar Singh, closely monitored the trials and lauded the combined efforts of DRDO scientists, industry partners and the Armed Forces in achieving the milestone.

# Kashmir witnesses bid for return of displaced Pandits

**Peerzada Ashiq**
SRINAGAR

With local recruitment down to almost zero and militant attacks waning this year, Kashmir on Saturday witnessed a rare push to reconciliation and return of displaced Kashmir Pandits to the Valley, after a batch of Pandits toured heritage sites for six days.

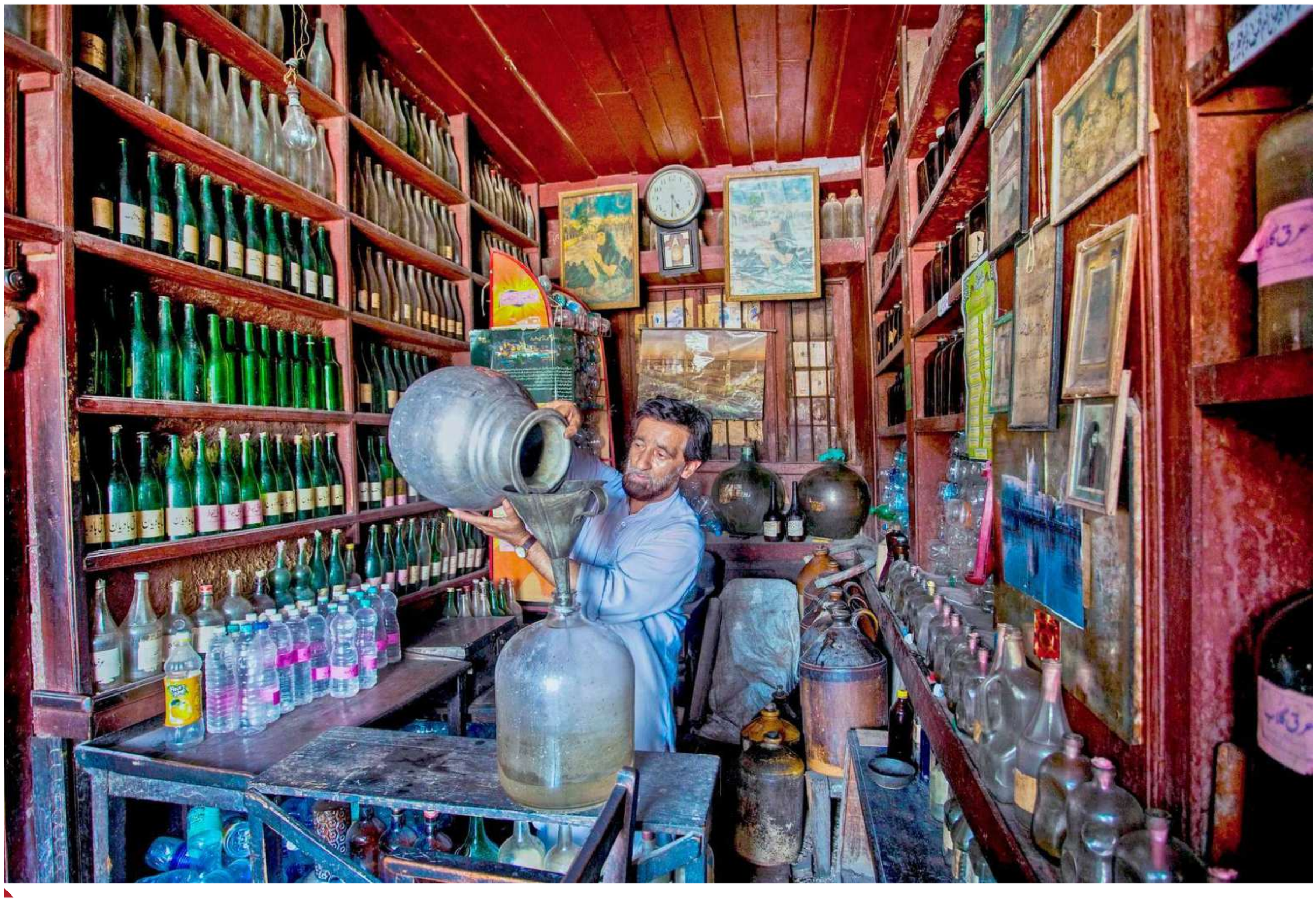
Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant-Governor Manoj Sinha said this homecoming was the "truest victory".

Dr. Surinder Koul, who heads the Global Kashmiri Pandit Diaspora, has pushed for an initiative titled 'Pragash' to set the stage for "a historic dialogue, reflection, heritage preservation, cultural renaissance and community empowerment." Around eight Pandit organisations have lent support to this initiative, and around 100 Pandits toured heritage sites across the Valley for a firsthand experience of the "changed situation".

"Terrorism is no longer a fear factor in Kashmir. We drove from Kupwara's Tikker to Srinagar in the middle of the night. Dalgate in Srinagar was buzzing with tourists and vendors. We want to be part of the change," Mr. Koul said.

He also praised non-displaced Pandits who stayed back in Kashmir, and asked Muslims "to ensure their protection". "Pandits here are under the protection of Muslims till we all return to Kashmir," he added.

Referring to his meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2019 in the United States, Mr. Koul said the initiative, Pragaash, was an effort to reconnect with our ancestry.



**Bottled pride:** Azizullah Kozgar pours rose water syrup in a glass jar at his shop in the downtown area of Srinagar.

**Harvest season:** Farmers pluck highly fragrant Damask roses at a field in Sirhama, Anantnag district in south Kashmir.

**Floral alchemy:** Workers process the collected rose petals in a distillation plant. The resulting herbal hydrosol is used widely in culinary dishes, cosmetics, and religious rituals.

**Steaming essence:** A worker heats rose water in distillation units to extract rose oil in Ganderbal district, central Kashmir.

# Scented by tradition

Rose farming is a labour of love, and there is no better canvas for these delicate pink blooms than Kashmir where the journey from blossom to by-product is a celebrated tradition, deeply rooted in the heart of the region's local communities

**Imran Nissar**
imran.nissar@thehindu.co.in

The temperate climate and fertile soil of Kashmir provides an ideal environment for floriculture, particularly for the cultivation of the highly aromatic Damask rose.

Rose farming is a seasonal labour of love and requires the harvest of petals in spring and early summer when the blossoms yield their highest concentration of complex fragrance and essential oils.

Once harvested, these pristine petals are immediately channelled into two traditional products of rose water – *Ark-e-Gulab* and *Gulkand*.

Rose water is prepared using traditional steam distillation. Petals are simmered in large copper stills, and the condensed vapour creates a pure, therapeutic hydrosol used widely in culinary dishes, cosmetics, and religious rituals.

*Gulkand* is a rich, sweet preserve made by layering fresh rose petals with sugar in airtight glass jars.

The mixture is slow-cured under the natural warmth of the sun for several weeks. This gentle sun-cooking process allows the natural juices to ferment softly with the sugar, transforming the petals into a thick, cooling jam celebrated in Ayurvedic traditions for its digestive benefits.

Local entrepreneurs like Shireen Manhas are instrumental in bridging the gap between these age-old agricultural traditions and modern, premium markets. By establishing structured agro-ventures, Ms. Manhas and fellow innovators empower local farmers, particularly women, through sustainable employment.

Their enterprises focus on maintaining absolute purity – avoiding synthetic additives – while utilising contemporary packaging and supply chains.

This modern entrepreneurial approach not only preserves Kashmir's delicate horticultural heritage but also elevates its organic rose water and *Gulkand* to a competitive luxury status globally.

**Purest drops:** A worker collects the distillate in Sirhama, Anantnag district.

# News in Frames

**Scented delight:** Rose water perfume bottles displayed at a farm in Ganderbal district, central Kashmir.

**Dedicated hands:** A worker layering fresh rose petals in the first step to making *Gulkand*.

**Bringing flavours to life:** Rose petals being pressed in a traditional stone blender. The petals are layered with sugar in airtight glass jars, and the mixture is slow-cured under the warmth of the sun for several weeks.

**In the pink:** Women engaged in the preparation of *Gulkand* in Srinagar.

**Sweet culmination:** The home-made concoction of *Gulkand*, a sugary preserve made of rose petals.

# Why did the SC quantify labour of homemakers?

What was the dispute that led to this ruling? What did the Court say about homemakers? What does the ruling signify?

**Aaratrika Bhaumik**

**The story so far:**

The Supreme Court on June 11 held that the unpaid domestic labour performed by homemakers must be assigned an independent economic value while determining compensation in motor accident death cases. It fixed a minimum notional income of ₹30,000 per month for this purpose. Observing that homemakers are "nation builders", a Bench of Justices Sanjay Karol and N. Kotiswar Singh created a distinct head of compensation called "loss of domestic care" in motor accident claims and mandated a 10% increase in this amount every three years.

### What was the dispute?

The ruling came in an appeal arising from a motor accident claim in Punjab. Following the death of a woman named Reshma in a road accident in November 2001, her husband and three children approached the Motor Accident Claims Tribunal (MACT) seeking compensation. In December 2003, the Tribunal awarded ₹2.42 lakh in compensation. Dissatisfied, the family moved the Punjab and Haryana High Court. In December 2024, the High Court enhanced the compensation to ₹8.43 lakh, along with interest at 7.5% from the date of filing of the claim petition. It said that if the amount was not paid within three months, the interest rate would be enhanced to 9% per annum, and to 12% per annum if payment was delayed beyond six months. Still aggrieved by the amount awarded, the family approached the apex court.

### What directions were issued to expedite compensation claims?

The Supreme Court pointed out that motor accident compensation claims often remain embroiled in litigation for years. It said the average pendency of such cases is around six years before MACTs and eight years before High Courts. It held that compensation appeals should not remain pending in High Courts for more than four years and emphasised that adjournments should be granted only for genuine reasons. Observing that the welfare-oriented objective of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, is frustrated when compensation claims remain pending for years, the Court directed the Chief Justices of all High Courts to accord priority to older motor accident compensation appeals and assess the need for additional Benches to expedite their disposal.

> The ruling pointed out that routine household tasks performed by homemakers play a vital role in supporting the paid workforce and enabling economic productivity

### How did the Court quantify unpaid domestic labour?

The Court held that in cases involving the death of a homemaker, tribunals and courts should award an additional amount of ₹30,000 per month under the head of "loss of domestic care". The amount, it said, would serve as a minimum benchmark to offset the inherent disadvantage faced by homemakers when compensation is assessed on the basis of a conservatively determined notional income. The Bench clarified that the ₹30,000 figure is to be treated as a "stand-in" monthly income in cases where the homemaker does not have a direct monetary contribution to the household, and directed that it be enhanced by 10%, on a cumulative basis, every three years. Where the homemaker is also part of the workforce, compensation under this head would be awarded in addition to any proven income.

The ruling pointed out that routine household tasks performed by homemakers, such as cooking, cleaning, and caregiving, play a vital role in supporting the paid workforce and enabling economic productivity. Yet, these contributions are rarely accounted for in conventional economic indicators such as GDP. The Bench described homemakers as the architects of India's "human capital", observing that they lay the foundation stones on which the edifices of "high-flying business persons, successful politicians, headlining artists, and sought-after lawyers" are built.

The Court enhanced the compensation payable to the deceased's family to ₹62.78 lakh, holding that the award must reflect not only her contribution to the household but also the loss of maternal care, spousal companionship, and the care and assistance that would have been available to other dependent family members.

### What are the implications?

The ruling does not spell out any specific mathematical or empirical basis for arriving at the ₹30,000 figure, though it acknowledges that "strict arithmetic calculation" cannot fully capture the economic, social, and nation-building role of homemakers. While the Court has previously cautioned against treating homemakers' services as having no economic value merely because they do not generate a formal income, this is the first time it has prescribed a concrete minimum benchmark for assessing the loss of domestic care.

# Why are there protests in PoK?

Why was the Joint Awami Action Committee formed in 2023 and what are their demands? What are the economic concerns in the region? Why is the demand for the abolishment of reservation for 12 refugee seats in the PoK Assembly at the heart of the protests? How has India reacted?

**Joan Sony Cherian**

**The story so far:**

Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) is again in the throes of civilian unrest as protests for economic justice and equitable political representation rage across the region. The Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC), which called for the protests, has since been banned by the regional government, for "engaging in terrorism".

### What is the JAAC and why did it call for protests?

The JAAC, an umbrella organisation of various civil society groups, trade bodies, students organisations and socio-religious groups based in PoK, was formed in 2023, out of protests against rising electricity tariffs and inflation. They brought out a 38-point Charter of Demands which included access to subsidised wheat flour, fair electricity pricing based on hydropower generation costs from the local Mangla dam, and the abolishment of the reservation of 12 seats for refugees in PoK's Legislative Assembly.

While the JAAC was given assurances regarding electricity tariffs, their "non-fulfillment" led to wider protests. In May 2024, the JAAC called for a march to Muzaffarabad over their demands, which led to the police arresting around 70 members of the organisation. Outrage against the arrests resulted in clashes between civilians and the police, leaving at least four dead and hundreds injured. In the wake of this violence, Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif approved the grant of a $86.25 million subsidy programme.

In October 2025, protests again emerged due to a breakdown of talks between officials and the JAAC. The ensuing violence killed at least 10 people. The government then agreed to some demands which included providing compensation for those killed in the violence, releasing funds for the implementation of health cards, and issuing a grant of PKR 10 billion for the improvement of the electricity system.

> The 12 reserved seats are for communities who migrated to Pakistan from Jammu and Kashmir during Partition. Over the years, these groups have integrated into Pakistani cities and polity

File photo of protesters of JAAC and activists at a funeral in Muzaffarabad, the capital of PoK, on May 14, 2024. AFP

While it was also decided that a high-powered committee comprising legal and constitutional experts would deliberate on the issue of members of the PoK Assembly, the central question remained unaddressed.

### How did the situation escalate?

Elections to the regional government of PoK have been scheduled for July 27. The JAAC announced that they would take out a protest march to Muzaffarabad, calling for an end to the reservation of the 12 refugee seats, on June 9 – the same day on which the filing of nominations for the elections was to begin.

In an effort to nip the march in the bud, the regional authorities banned the JAAC under a 2014 anti-terrorism law and placed a bounty for its most prominent leaders. They said the organisation had acted in a manner "prejudicial to peace and security" of the state. This led to widespread protests in various cities, particularly Mirpur, Rawalakot and Muzaffarabad, with police personnel clashing with civilian protesters.

On June 8, at least 11 people, including four police officers, were killed and dozens injured when regional authorities opened fire on activists and protesters gathered in Rawalakot for the funeral of a local trade activist who had been killed during an earlier protest.

While the proscribed JAAC has called for strikes, leaving life paralysed in the streets of Muzaffarabad, many parts of the region continue to witness violent clashes, with reports indicating that the death toll has crossed 30.

Regional authorities have deployed paramilitary troops in the region to restore law and order and have also issued a strict travel advisory urging visitors to avoid travelling to the region. Reports also say that Internet in the region has been severely restricted.

### Why has the reservation of refugees become a flashpoint?

The political question regarding the 12 reserved refugee seats is at the heart of the protests. The regional Assembly of the PoK has a total of 53 seats. Of these, 45 seats are directly elected by the public (33 are elected by the general public while 12 seats are reserved for refugees). The remaining eight seats are reserved (five for women, one for a technocrat, one for a religious scholar and one is a diaspora seat) and are filled via nominations after the general elections.

The 12 reserved seats are for communities who migrated to Pakistan from Jammu and Kashmir during Partition. Over the years, these groups have integrated into Pakistani cities and polity. In fact, most of these 12 seats have often been won by political parties such as the Pakistan Peoples Party or the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf. As the journalist Luv Puri writes, "...the 12 refugee seats account for around 4.36 lakh registered voters, while the remaining 33 directly elected seats in PoK have around 33 lakh voters. In effect, one refugee vote cast from Pakistan carries electoral weight far greater than that of a voter residing in PoK".

Pakistan maintains that PoK, or what it calls 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir', is an independent region with its own polity and that Pakistan supports its right to self-determination. At the same time, candidates who are elected to the regional Parliament have to sign loyalty oaths supporting the "cause of accession of the State of Jammu and Kashmir to Pakistan". This has led to questions regarding the undue influence of Islamabad in the regional politics of PoK.

In a further setback to such regional demands, on June 7, the Supreme Court of PoK observed that the 12 legislative seats reserved for refugees are constitutionally protected and cannot be abolished through administrative or executive measures; only a constitutional amendment can fulfil the demand to abolish refugee representation.

### How have the Indian and Pakistani governments reacted?

On June 9, India asked the international community to hold Pakistan responsible for the civilian killings and human rights abuses in PoK. "There are reports of severe police brutality in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir in which several protesters have been killed and many injured. We hope the international community will hold Pakistan accountable for its misdeeds and abuses," said Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal during a press briefing. National Conference president Farooq Abdullah condemned the violence and demanded a probe by the United Nations into the incidents of atrocities.

Pakistan Foreign Office spokesperson Tahir Andrabi dismissed India's statements "in their entirety" and went on to state that "it is untenable" for a country like India which has "consistently denied the people of Jammu and Kashmir their right to self-determination to claim concerns over the rights of Kashmiris."

The unrest has also generated global outrage. Human rights groups such as Amnesty International stated that the regional administration's sweeping crackdown on protests is a continuation of the "alarming deterioration of human rights in the region".

On June 6, a group of nearly 30 British parliamentarians, in a letter to the U.K. Foreign Office, raised concerns over reports of communication disruptions, arrests, and "escalating tensions" in the PoK. They urged the British government to engage proactively and use diplomatic channels to encourage a peaceful de-escalation in the region.

# Why is the Zojila tunnel a game changer?

Why is the tunnel an engineering marvel and what were the challenges in building it? How does it improve connectivity and ensure travellers' safety? How does it provide strategic access in the border region? When will it open for civilian traffic?

**Peerzada Ashiq**

**The story so far:**

The world's longest high-altitude tunnel, spanning 13.14 kilometres at an altitude of 11,578 feet, achieved a breakthrough on June 9, 2026. Built at a cost of ₹6,800 crore, the Zojila tunnel will provide all-weather connectivity between the Kashmir Valley and Ladakh, traversing a region that was long considered to be formidable in the Himalayas. Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari, who pressed the blast button for the 2.5 metre-long last leg, termed the breakthrough "a historic day for India's infrastructure development and a milestone in India's technical expertise, engineering prowess, and indomitable resolve".

### What makes the Zojila tunnel an engineering marvel?

Zojila tunnel is India's first longest single-tube bi-directional tunnel and an engineering marvel for several reasons. The underground works were highly challenging due to the difficult terrain. The western Himalayan range around the Zojila Pass has been daunting for engineers and planners, with the fragile geology, sensitive rock formations, avalanche-prone terrain, and harsh winter conditions all complicating the execution of the project.

> The Zojila tunnel is expected to provide year-long transportation access to the Indian forces stationed in Ladakh

(R-L): J&K LG Manoj Sinha with Union Minister Nitin Gadkari and Chief Minister Omar Abdullah at the breakthrough ceremony of Zojila tunnel, in Ladakh. PTI

The Zojila tunnel connects Sonamarg's Baltal in central Kashmir's Ganderbal district with Meenamarg in Ladakh's Drass district. To ensure safe passage up to the mouth of the Zojila tunnel at Baltal, additional roadways, three bridges, and two tunnels were constructed over a stretch of 31 km in Sonamarg. These were designed to withstand the vagaries of winter, as avalanches and snow slides are often reported in the area.

It is a combined system of tunnels and roadways that forms a comprehensive corridor between the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. The tunnel is equipped with catch dams, protection walls, and deflector dams over a 6-km stretch for protection from snowstorms. It will have automatic and emergency lighting, emergency phone, message signalling, and radio to ensure travellers' safety.

### Why is this a memorable project for engineers?

The tunnel was dug in extreme weather conditions, with temperatures dropping to minus 20 degrees Celsius on the Kashmir side and minus 30 degrees Celsius on the Drass side. Official estimates suggested that extreme weather conditions were prevalent for nearly 100 days a year. Then, there were avalanche risks: five major avalanches left two workers dead and over 172 workers stranded and later rescued. Snow accumulation was dealt with by a fleet of small and large snow blowers. Officials said the rock classification also changed 67 times across the 13-km stretch, "shifting constantly between good and poor formations."

### Why is the tunnel significant for strategic connectivity?

India has witnessed repeated military confrontations with China and Pakistan since 1947, particularly in the regions of Ladakh and Kashmir, most notably in 1962 and 1999. India's full-scale military response was always hampered by lack of connectivity and poor mobility of men and material in the region, both along the Line of Control in the west and the Line of Actual Control in the east. Officials believe that restricted movement of military vehicles led to delays. The Zojila tunnel is now expected to provide year-long transportation access to the Indian forces stationed in Ladakh, significantly improving mobility, logistics reliability, and strategic access in the border region. This is why Mr. Gadkari described it as "a game changer from a security perspective and the perspective of national integration".

### What does it means for locals?

Ladakh has always been cut off from the Kashmir Valley during winters. Heavy snow and landslides would often close the Zojila Pass for 4-6 months. There have also been frequent reports of commuter deaths on the Zojila Pass due to landslides triggered by rains and avalanches occurring during sunny winters. All this resulted in severe hardships for patients and students in the Kargil-Drass range. Stocks would deplete, but the problem could not be attended to because of road closure. Locals relied on sun-dried vegetables and cereals during winters. Now, the is expected to be movement of people and goods and no more weather-related isolation for the region. Additionally, the tunnel will put a spotlight on activities such as adventure tourism and skiing in Drass, which will contribute to the economy.

### When will the tunnel open for civilians?

In spite of the breakthrough, the tunnel is likely to take two years to be fully functional. Water seepage, benching, and electronic layouts are still being worked out. However, officials said the tunnel could be thrown open in case of emergencies, especially to security forces.

The tunnel will also help pilgrims on the Amarnath Yatra, whose base camp is in Baltal. Officials said vehicles can travel at a speed of 80 km per hour through the tunnel. Earlier, drivers could not drive more than 30-40 km per hour on the Zojila Pass, because of steep roads and hair-pin curves.

Officials said the project is moving closer to its long-envisioned goal of seamless all-weather connectivity that will spur long-term benefits in terms of mobility, economic integration, and strategic resilience.

# The house of cards

## FIFA

The governing body of the 'beautiful game', long dogged by allegations of corruption and abuse of power, now faces criticism for its muted response to U.S. immigration authorities denying entry to fans, officials, and team personnel

**N. Sudarshan**

The Federation Internationale de Football Association, known worldwide by its acronym FIFA, is the most powerful sports body outside the International Olympic Committee. It is the global custodian of football – popularly called 'the beautiful game' – and conducts the World Cup, the most prestigious single-sport competition in the universe.

What started in 1930 as a 13-team tournament has now grown into a behemoth. The ongoing edition in the U.S., Canada and Mexico is the 23rd World Cup, and features a record 48 teams and 104 matches.

Founded in 1904 in Paris, FIFA started with seven members – France, Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, and Spain. Its original mandate was to bring structure to the international game, organise fixtures, and agree on a common set of rules.

The British associations in England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, which predated FIFA and had already set in place organised football in their territories, joined FIFA starting in 1905. Though the equation was stormy in the initial decades – with the First World War and disputes over monetary compensation for amateur players competing at the Olympics leading to the British associations' withdrawal on multiple occasions – it stabilised after the Second World War and has remained so until now.

After Jules Rimet took over as president in 1921, FIFA was in charge of football at the Olympics for the first time at Paris 1924. The success of that, and of the event four years later in Amsterdam, prompted FIFA to think of a tournament of its own.

The inaugural World Cup was born in 1930 and was held in Uruguay, the nation which won the Olympic golds in 1924 and 1928. The in-form team, unsurprisingly, also became the first world champion. Since then, such has FIFA's growth been that it now has 211 members, more than the UN. At its core, it is a non-profit organisation that

REUTERS

"oversees and promotes the development of football at every level". But it is also among the richest bodies. At the end of 2025, FIFA's reserves, according to its own financial report, amounted to $2.69 billion. Cape Verde, which is competing in North America this summer and is the third-smallest nation ever to qualify (population less than six lakhs), has reserves of $0.78 bn (data from 2024).

### Generous powers

Understandably, the FIFA president, who sits atop this edifice, wields enormous power, and with a generous term limit of three four-year periods (consecutive or otherwise), he or she can take decisions that can have lasting consequences. Prior to 2016, term limits weren't enforced. In fact, for 41 years from 1974 to 2015, FIFA just had three presidents – Englishman Stanley Rous for more than 12 years, Brazil's Joao Havelange for a little over 24, and Swiss Sepp Blatter for more than 17.

Before that, Frenchman Rimet – whose name the World Cup trophy carried from 1950 to 1970 – was at the helm for 33 years (from March 1921 to June 1954). Current president Gianni Infantino has been the leading man since early 2016. It is this structure, which allows a FIFA president to turn the organisation into a personal fiefdom, that has given rise to most controversies. The bosses have never shied away from striking friendships with problematic political figures and authoritarian regimes in search of big capital.

FIFA, by virtue of being a non-profit, is duty-bound to redistribute its revenues to member nations. *Prima facie*, it's a democratic move, and even noble, considering that the money ensures the sport's survival and development in many countries. But this dole has often been weaponised in return for votes to keep the head in power for perpetuity. Every FIFA member, big or small, has a vote, and is directly involved in electing the president.

The 1934 World Cup was held in Benito Mussolini's Italy. The 1978 edition was conducted in Argentina, under dictator Gen. Jorge Rafael Videla's rule and Havelange's blessings. Rous was unwavering in his support for Apartheid South Africa while Blatter dangled the monetary carrot to the developing world to keep his throne for as long as he did.

It is ironic that Infantino would preside over a FIFA which has remained unchanged. He vaulted to power promising reforms after serious corruption charges related to the allotment of the 2018 and 2022 World Cups to Russia and Qatar, respectively, brought down Blatter's house of cards.

But he has since cultivated relationships with Russian President Vladimir Putin and U.S. President Donald Trump, and attracted a deal worth $1 billion from Saudi Arabia, the country which will host the 2034 World Cup. In 2019, he accepted the Russian Order of Friendship medal from Mr. Putin. Last December, his FIFA created the first-ever Peace Prize – literally out of nowhere – and awarded it to Mr. Trump.

Infantino has also moved to extend his term beyond the 12-year ceiling that was brought in at the Extraordinary FIFA Congress in early 2016 in the aftermath of the corruption scandal. The 56-year-old has said his first three years in office (2016-19) were from Blatter's unfinished term and hence would not stop him from being re-elected in 2027.

At the ongoing World Cup, FIFA has been heavily criticised for its cavalier attitude regarding American immigration authorities' arbitrary actions in denying entry to fans, match-officials and team personnel alike. Most notable was the rejection meted out to Somalian referee Omar Artan, the best men's referee from Africa in 2025.

### Limits of influence

Infantino has defended FIFA by saying there are limits to how much the governing body can influence an individual country's immigration policies. But a decade ago, when Mr. Trump had signed an executive order banning immigration from six Muslim-majority countries, Infantino had declared that "there is no World Cup" if supporters and officials do not have access.

While increasing the number of teams in the World Cup to 48 will help enlarge the game's footprint, the FIFA Club World Cup bloating to a 32-team affair starting 2025 from a modest seven outfits earlier further entrenches FIFA's power. The competition, which has replaced the Confederations Cup as a World Cup preparatory event, ran for a month in the U.S. last summer, a slot otherwise reserved for players' rest and recuperation.

Reportedly, there is an urge to make it biennial, and the $85 million Chelsea received as prize money for winning in 2025 is a big enough perk for the participants to agree.

All of this highlights a fundamental conflict at the heart of FIFA's functioning. On the one hand, it is the guardian of the sport, defines laws, puts in place the rules and is expected to act impartially in disputes between its members. At the same time, it has tournaments to sell and a partially self-imposed obligation to generate revenue, forcing it to turn a blind eye when those like the U.S. err.

Can such a system, where the referee is also a player, stay true to the cause?

### THE GIST

- Founded in 1904 in Paris, FIFA started with seven members — France, Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, and Spain
- After Jules Rimet took over as president in 1921, FIFA was in charge of football at the Olympics for the first time at Paris 1924. The success of that prompted FIFA to think of a tournament of its own
- The inaugural World Cup was born in 1930 and was held in Uruguay, the nation which won the Olympic golds in 1924 and 1928. The in-form team, unsurprisingly, also became the first world champion

# Virulent bacterium

## Shigella

Kerala has seen a new outbreak of shigellosis, caused by this gram-negative, contagious bacterium, which infects millions globally every year

**Ramya Kannan**

Stained, and viewed under a microscope, Shigella is a captivating sight. The rod-shaped bacteria resemble fat, furry cartoon caterpillars. In reality, however, this gram-negative, contagious bacterium, which causes shigellosis, can be remarkably dangerous. Shigella is back in the news, after an outbreak in Kerala that was first detected in late March 2026 and has continued into June. According to the Kerala health department, 132 confirmed cases and about 75 probable cases of shigellosis had been reported till June 12. Three deaths have been linked to the disease this year, two of which were children under five.

Shigellosis is a diarrhoeal disease marked by fever, abdominal cramps, and bloody diarrhoea (dysentery). It was bacteriologist Kiyoshi Shiga, who isolated the shigella dysenteriae, in 1897, after Japan experienced a severe dysentery epidemic. The genus eventually took his name.

Transmission is mostly through the faeco-oral route, when people ingest tiny amounts of faecal matter through contaminated food, water or hands. As low as 10-100 bacteria can cause the infection, and even an outbreak. It is estimated that globally, shigella causes 80-165 million infections annually and about 6,00,000 deaths, particularly among children under five in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

GETTY IMAGES

In an article in the *Indian Journal of Medical Research*, Neelam Taneja and Abhishek Mewara write about the epidemiology of shigella in India. "Though humans and primates are the primary reservoir of shigella, it has been isolated from various sources – aquatic bodies (rivers, surface waters as well as coastal waters), free living amoebae, insects, birds and wild animals."

Taneja and Mewara explain that several aquatic bodies in India have been found to show the presence of shigella. So a potential source of infection could be fish if it is harvested from sewage-contaminated water. Even ingesting small amounts of contaminated water while swimming or bathing, or the consumption of crops cultivated in soil/water contaminated by shigella can cause severe infection. The paper argues that while no individual can be considered immune to shigellosis, "certain individuals are at increased risk. Globally, the incidence of shigellosis is highest among children under five. The incidence of shigellosis has been reported to increase steadily after the age of 40."

### Outbreak in Kerala

In late March 2026, Kerala reported a shigellosis outbreak in Kuttikkattoor, Kozhikode, where a three-year-old girl died and over 60 residents (mostly children) fell ill. Soon, clusters came up in Wayanad, Malappuram and Kannur. A major cluster emerged at a Wayanad school where over 300 children were hospitalised. So far, experts have traced the infections to contaminated water and food sources, alongside poor hygiene practices in communal environments such as schools.

This is not Kerala's first brush with shigellosis. In 2009, over 300 people reportedly contracted a food-borne shigella infection across the State. In December 2020, an outbreak, again in Kozhikode, killed an 11-year-old and infected 40 others; in May 2022, shigella was said to be behind a mass food poisoning incident, in Kasargod, where 30 people were hospitalised and a 16-year old girl died. While mild shigella infections typically clear on their own with hydration, severe cases require antibiotics to shorten the duration of the illness, reduce the severity and prevent complications, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. However, some antibiotics are not effective against certain types of shigella. Healthcare providers must order laboratory tests to determine which antibiotics are likely to work.

Taneja and Mewara point out in their article that "there is a nationwide presence of multi-drug resistant shigella developing rapid resistance to most antibiotics available. Thus, judicious use of antibiotics is among the most essential measures to combat shigellosis." This calls for a continuous and strong surveillance of antibiotic resistance across the country for periodic updates of the local antibiograms, in order to allow doctors to effectively identify the right antimicrobial drug to use.

# Golfer, lawyer, spymaster

## Jay Clayton

U.S. President Donald Trump has nominated the New York attorney and former SEC chief as the new Director of National Intelligence

**Smriti Sudesh**

On a golf course somewhere, U.S. President Donald Trump may have found his next intelligence chief. And with that, a vacancy that has triggered days of controversy in Washington could finally be filled.

On June 11, Mr. Trump announced on Truth Social that he was nominating Jay Clayton, the former chair of the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and current U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, to serve as Director of National Intelligence (DNI). "Few people anywhere in the Legal Community are respected at the level of Jay," Mr. Trump wrote.

The nomination comes amid two sensitive moments for the White House: one, Congress had been in an uproar over Mr. Trump's earlier interim pick, Bill Pulte, a housing industry executive with little intelligence experience; two, lawmakers are debating the future of Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA), one of the most powerful surveillance tools available to U.S. intelligence agencies, which expired on June 12. Put simply, the White House needs Congress on board.

The DNI position became vacant after Tulsi Gabbard resigned in late May, citing personal reasons. Following her departure, Mr. Trump appeared to back away from his controversial push to install Mr. Pulte permanently in the role. Democrats had labelled Mr. Pulte "unqualified" and warned that he would politicise an office meant to coordinate the work of America's intelligence agencies.

ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR

### Heavyweight resume

Born on July 11, 1966, Walter Joseph 'Jay' Clayton III brings a heavyweight Wall Street resume to a job associated with spies, analysts and national security professionals. A former SEC chairman during Mr. Trump's first term, he currently serves as U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York. The Manhattan-based office handles everything from terrorism and espionage cases to securities fraud and corruption probes.

Mr. Clayton has spent much of his career moving between government and private practice. Before entering government, he was a partner at the New York law firm Sullivan & Cromwell and built a successful Wall Street career as a corporate lawyer. Mr. Trump first tapped him to chair the SEC in 2017, during his first term. His tenure at the SEC was marked by a generally pro-business approach, though the agency under his leadership also brought some of the first major enforcement actions involving crypto assets.

It was also under his watch that the SEC pursued a high-profile case against trillionaire and businessman Elon Musk over tweets related to Tesla – years before Mr. Musk bought Twitter.

More recently, as a U.S. Attorney, he has overseen several high-profile investigations and prosecutions, including cases involving Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro (who is currently in U.S. custody) and rapper Sean 'Diddy' Combs. He was also tasked with overseeing the federal investigation of the much-discussed Epstein files.

Yet for all his credentials, Mr. Clayton is hardly a conventional intelligence pick. Like Mr. Pulte, he has no operational experience in any of the 18 intelligence agencies overseen by the DNI. The difference, both the critics and supporters alike acknowledge, is that Mr. Clayton has never worked inside the intelligence community; but unlike Mr. Pulte, he arrives with decades of experience running large institutions, conducting sensitive investigations and navigating Washington. One lawmaker remarked that, had the White House settled on Mr. Clayton a week earlier, "a lot of pain might have been avoided". Another one, more bluntly, said anything is better than Pulte.

Mr. Trump, meanwhile, has praised the 59-year-old as a "great talent", and that nobody has "better credentials". He and Mr. Clayton are known to share a friendly relationship and have reportedly spent time together on the golf course, perhaps explaining why the story of America's next intelligence chief may have begun somewhere during that time together.

And now, while his supporters and critics are sharpening their respective arguments, It remains to be seen whether Mr. Clayton will win Senate confirmation.

# Meet the frogs that build 'cloudy' nests in South Africa's trees

**D.P. Kasbekar**

For most frogs, life begins as a game of odds. They lay their eggs in the water, where fish and insects gobble up about 98% of them before they even have a chance to hatch. The African grey foam-nest tree frog (*Chiromantis xerampelina*) figured a way out: it took its nest into the air.

In the rainy season between October and February, a female frog finds a branch overhanging a pool and begins secreting a special fluid. As the male and the female mate, the pair uses their hind legs like whisks to churn the secretions into a thick, bubbly froth. The result is a foamy nest.

A few days later, the eggs hatch inside this nest. When the tadpoles are ready, they simply break through the bottom of the foam and drop into the pool below, beginning the next stage of their lives.

While a single pair of frogs can build a nest, these frogs prefer a 'foam party' approach. Researchers from three Australian universities recently studied these frogs in South Africa and found that when it comes to nesting, there is real strength in numbers.

The findings were published in the journal *Evolution* on June 2.

Sometimes, a single female is joined by a dozen or more males. This results in a better home rather than chaos.

More males meant more legs churning, leading to nests up to three times larger than those built by a single pair.

While smaller nests dry out quickly, killing the eggs inside, larger nests hold onto moisture for longer, ensuring more tadpoles survive from the nest.

You might wonder: why would a male frog help build a nest if he is competing with 12 other frogs? Using DNA testing, the researchers found that in these crowded nests, paternity is often split. By cooperating to build a large, moist fortress, the males ensure at least some of their offspring survive, rather than losing all of them to a dried-out nest.

The scientists also suspected that the males' skin and fluids contain surfactants – compounds similar to laundry detergent – that keep the bubbles from popping.

The African grey foam-nest tree frog reminds us that survival is not always about being the strongest or the fastest. Sometimes, it is about having the best teammates, the best chemistry, and the most impressive bubble-making skills in the forest.

*(D.P. Kasbekar is a retired scientist)*

# Droughts can drive antibiotic resistance in soil bacteria

Research has revealed that drought-induced soil stress concentrates natural antibiotics, accelerating evolution of resistant bacteria; this phenomenon threatens to worsen global antibiotic resistance by 2050, particularly in drought-prone regions

**Sharmila Vaidyanathan**

Droughts can increase the levels of antibiotic resistance in soil, researchers from the California Institute of Technology have reported. Their study also projected that by 2050, several parts of India and other drought-prone countries will grapple with severe antibiotic resistance (ABR).

The study, in *Nature Microbiology*, revealed that when soil dries due to drought stress, the concentration of natural antibiotics increases, favouring the survival of resistant bacteria. Soil has been an important source of antibiotics.

"The current study spotlights a broader ecological perspective where climate-driven environmental changes might also influence resistance," the study's authors, postdoctoral research scholar Xiaoyu Shan and the Gordon M. Binder/Amgen professor of biology and geobiology Dianne Newman, wrote in an email.

By analysing soil DNA datasets from the U.S., China, and Europe and across cropland, wetland, grassland, and a forest site, the team found that drought increased the prevalence of genes that both produce antibiotics and help organisms resist them. The team also replicated the findings using synthetic soil samples inoculated with soil bacteria and treated with a known antibiotic. When the soil was dried, antibiotic-resistant bacteria better survived the adverse conditions.

"Previous studies have documented antibiotic resistance genes in wastewater, rivers, and soils, but these patterns have largely been interpreted as consequences of anthropogenic contamination, such as antibiotic overuse in medicine and agriculture," the two co-authors wrote. "Our work asked a fundamentally different question: could environmental stress, independent of direct antibiotic pollution, actively shape the evolution and enrichment of resistance?"

The links between climate change and ABR are becoming more prominent. In one recent study, scientists found that subjecting experimental grassland plots to warming conditions over 11 years rendered ABR genes 24% more abundant. Droughts are also becoming more severe due to climate change.

The study's authors examined hospital data in 116 countries and found that drier regions reported more infections due to antibiotic resistance. Research has already shown ABR resistance can move from the environment to humans through horizontal gene transfer, where genetic elements carrying antibiotic resistance are transferred to human pathogens, and bacterial transmission via aerosols, polluted soil and water, and agriculture.

"India is vulnerable because it simultaneously faces several challenges relating to increased frequency of droughts, heavy antibiotic use in humans and livestock, wastewater irrigation, dense human-animal-soil interactions, and heavy agricultural dependence," G. Ravikanth, senior fellow and convenor, Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment, Bengaluru, said.

"India's drought-prone regions overlap substantially with the rural districts where access to formal healthcare is weakest," Erta Kalanxhi, fellow and director of partnerships at One Health Trust, a global health research organisation, said. "In this context, climate change may intensify the selection pressure on [antibiotic resistance] in the populations least equipped to manage the clinical consequences."

Dr. Ravikanth emphasised the need for long-term monitoring stations in arid regions to track microbial community shifts, drought intensity, and antibiotic resistance. He added that existing Krishi Vigyan Kendrascould be mobilised for data on antibiotic residues in agricultural soils, poultry and dairy farms, and to understand the spread of resistant microbes.

In a recent One Health Trust policy brief, in collaboration with Christian Medical College, Vellore, the authors underscored the role of vaccines. "Apart from concentrating natural antibiotics in soil and intensifying resistance, droughts also create the conditions under which enteric pathogens such as *Salmonella typhi* thrive," Dr. Kalanxhi said. "Scaling up vaccination suppresses the disease burden that drought amplifies and reduces the empirical antibiotic demand that drives resistance selection in clinics."

The authors Drs. Shan and Newman also said the study encourages a deeper exploration of how these natural products shape the environments in which they reside – including understanding if antibiotics in soil have other functions or control the development of microbial communities near the roots of plants. They emphasised that integrated approaches that combine microbiome sampling and sequencing of soil, airborne dust, and the human body, epidemiological monitoring of exposed human populations, and longitudinal drought and climate records can help provide actionable insights.

*(Sharmila Vaidyanathan is an independent writer from Bengaluru)*

## Under pressure

When soil dries, the concentration of natural antibiotics increases, favouring the survival of resistant bacteria

Per a 2024 report, 91 districts in India are in the 'very high' drought risk category while 188 districts face 'high' drought risk. AFP

- New research has found that drought conditions increase natural antibiotic levels in soil, fuelling antibiotic resistance
- Researchers project that several countries, especially India, will face severe antibiotic resistance challenges by the year 2050
- Environmental stress from droughts independently shapes the evolution and enrichment of resistant bacteria within various soil ecosystems
- Antibiotic resistance can move from the environment to humans through horizontal gene transfer and contaminated agricultural products
- India faces heightened risks due to frequent droughts, dense populations, and heavy antibiotic use in livestock industries
- Experts recommend using vaccines and integrated monitoring systems to reduce the disease burden amplified by climate change

# How ants cope with disease outbreaks

SPEAKING OF SCIENCE

**D. Balasubramanian**

Ants are associated with a range of very positive qualities – including a self-motivated work ethic, preparedness and long-term thinking, and a preference for collective effort. Many ant species are also social, and living in social groups offers many advantages. However, there are downsides too.

Among humans, the occurrence of seasonal outbreaks of infections such as influenza and other diseases is the result of the nature of the social structures humans live in. That is how we have learnt the basic rules of limiting these outbreaks' effects. If you notice a general build-up of symptoms, you take leave from your workplace and isolate yourself for a few days.

Altering one's social contact networks reduces the spread of pathogens. This process requires collective discipline – just the kind of qualities that ants are famous for.

So how do ants living in their colonies cope with pathogens? In some ant species, individuals spread antimicrobial secretions from the metapleural gland on themselves, on larvae, and on their fellow nest dwellers. This gives rise to a 'social immunity': every individual in the colony has some protection against infections.

Other, more dramatic measures have been observed. Researchers at the University of Lausanne in Switzerland introduced a worker black ant whose leg had been experimentally injured back among its companions. It was seen that the fellow ants quickly amputated this leg by repeated bites at the joint linking the leg to the body (*Current Biology*, 34, 2024). A wounded limb would have attracted disease-causing microbes and endangered other ants in the colony.

Black garden ants tend to mealybugs. KATJA SCHULZ (CC BY)

A more recent study looked at how ant colonies respond to an epidemic (*Science*, 390, 266, 2025). The ant studied was the black garden ant, which is related to the Indian black ants that we see in and around our homes. The black garden ants build complex underground nests that have one main entrance, a central portion housing the queen, eggs, and larvae, and several satellite chambers used by other ants in the colony and to store food and collect waste. Tunnels connect various parts of the nest. There is a clear division of labour, with some worker ants acting as nurse caretakers and others acting as foragers.

In the experiments, a single queen, with around 200 worker ants, began to build a nest. All ants have miniature QR codes stuck on them and video cameras follow their movements. The scientists monitored the nest structures using micro-CT scans. One day later, 20 worker ants that had been exposed to a pathogenic fungus were introduced to the colony.

Over the next few days, the infected ants exited the nest more often and spent more time outside than their nestmates. This was self-isolating behavior. The architecture of the nest had also adapted: the entrances were spaced further apart than normal. The pace of work became frantic and focused on digging longer tunnels. There were also fewer connections between chambers.

Together, these changes led to more segregation and restricted interactions between the segregated groups. High-value ants like the queen and the nurses had significantly lower exposure to the forager ants and remained healthy.

Sounds familiar? Humans maintain quarantines, wear masks when interacting with others, and wash their hands often when faced with an epidemic in our communities. Ants seem to have evolved their own, very effective social distancing measures.

*(The article was written in collaboration with Sushil Chandani, who works in molecular modelling)*

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## SNAPSHOTS

### Sea star sports nature's optic fibres to focus light

A remarkable structure in the chocolate-chip sea star (*Protoreaster nodosus*) has come to light. On the tip of each arm, a skeletal part contains an array of cone-shaped structures that, like optic fibres, transmit 70% of incident light and concentrate it nearly 3x at the base. Overall, the array captures light from a 120° field of view and 'brightens' it 8x inside the arm. Scientists said engineers could use the design for lightweight sensors and displays.

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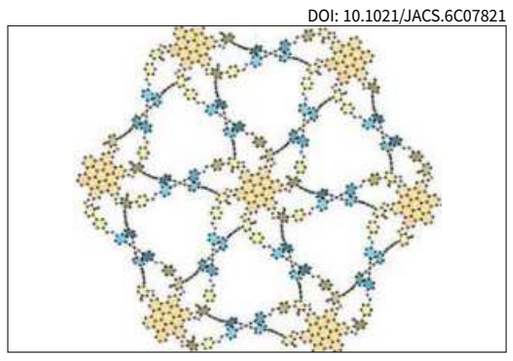

### Nanographene paves way for ultra-porous materials

Scientists, led by Nobel laureate Omar Yaghi, have a new way to build highly porous materials using nanographene. They designed a molecule called HBC-LA12, with 12 connection points arranged in a prism shape. By linking this molecule with others, they created two new 3D structures that are a breakthrough in reticular chemistry. One has a record surface area of 5,000 sq. m per gram. The findings expand the way to design materials to store gases.

### JUNO hits the ground to crack neutrino physics mystery

The Jiangmen Underground Neutrino Observatory (JUNO) collaboration in China has published its first results. Based on 59 days of data collected in late 2025, the group calculated how often particles called neutrinos from nuclear reactors change their flavour, or type, as they travel. The findings showed JUNO was working as expected and on track to help crack a tough open question called neutrino mass ordering: of the three flavours of neutrinos, which are heaviest and lightest?

## Question Corner

# Pattern of walks

**Do people have a tendency to walk in particular directions?**

The answer to this strange question is a stranger 'yes'. When people walk freely in an open space, they often begin to move in a counter-clockwise circle. While scientists believed people were simply following those in front of them or reacting to boundaries, a new study in *Nature Communications* has found a biological bias to turn in that direction. The researchers conducted experiments in Spain and Japan, observing groups of adults, teenagers, and nursery school children. They found that the tendency to move counter-clockwise exists even when a person is walking alone in an empty arena and social norms, such as whether a country drives on the right or the left, didn't change the pattern. The preference also didn't depend on whether one was left- or right-handed and whether they had a 'dominant' eye.

The children displayed the preference in the most pronounced manner, which suggested the preference could be an intrinsic part of human locomotion.

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

## INBRIEF

### 'Tata's iPhone parts factory contaminated groundwater'

An Indian pollution regulator has alleged wastewater discharged from a Tata components factory for Apple's iPhone has contaminated the groundwater for nearby farms and warned of a forced shutdown unless Tata gives a satisfactory explanation. The Tata plant under investigation is in Hosur in southern Tamil Nadu and makes back panels and other components for iPhones. Complaints led to five state inspections between December 2025 and May 2026. Inspections found that Tata discharged wastewater into a rainwater harvesting pond inside its facility and that the pond overflowed to contaminate "groundwater in the open wells located in the adjacent agricultural lands," the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board's warning notice to Tata said. Tata Electronics told *Reuters* in a statement it had commissioned an independent analysis through an accredited laboratory and that the study determined the company was "in full compliance with all regulatory norms".

### Nasscom launches UK Technology Advisory Council

Nasscom, through its UK forum, in partnership with the High Commission of India in the United Kingdom, recently announced the constitution of a UK Technology Advisory Council (TAC), at the Nasscom UK Forum meet held at the High Commission of India, London. The UK Technology Advisory Council will serve as a strategic industry advisory body to the High Commission of India in the UK, providing structured inputs on accelerating India-UK technology partnership including the government-led Tech Security initiative on Artificial Intelligence, enhancing cross border trade, investment and talent development, streamlining ease of doing business to help achieve the FTA target of doubling the bilateral trade, and achieving the goals of Vision 2035.

# Where Indian seafarers' safety is at stake

Seafarers operating in regions where commercial shipping is entangled in geopolitical conflict are at a greater risk; diplomatic engagement alone may not suffice, they should not be compelled to sail through war-risk zones without full disclosure of risks and their informed consent

OPINION

**Capt. Daniel J Joseph**

The deaths of Indian seafarers Aditya Sharma, Shivanand Chaurashiya and Patnala Suresh aboard Settebello are a stark reminder of the risks borne by those who sustain global commerce. While geopolitical tensions dominate headlines, the human cost is frequently carried by civilian merchant mariners navigating the world's most dangerous maritime corridors.

In the aftermath of recent attacks on merchant vessels, debate has emerged within maritime circles over the role of so-called "sanctioned vessels" – much of it marked by misunderstanding and oversimplification.

A sanctioned vessel is one designated under an economic, trade or security sanctions regime imposed by a government or international organisation. Such sanctions may originate from the UN Security Council, the United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom or other national authorities.

Vessels may be sanctioned due to their ownership, involvement in prohibited trade, restricted cargo, links to terrorism, or participation in sanctions-evasion practices such as deceptive shipping and unauthorised ship-to-ship transfers.

Yet sanctions are not universally applicable. A vessel sanctioned by one country is not automatically sanctioned everywhere. Unless restrictions arise from a binding UN Security Council resolution, unilateral sanctions generally apply only within the jurisdiction of the imposing country and to entities subject to its laws. A vessel sanctioned by the U.S. Office of Foreign Assets Control, for instance, does not automatically become illegal under Indian law.

**Choppy waters:** The Strait of Hormuz remains one of the world's most critical maritime chokepoints. ANI

Nor does a sanctioned vessel cease to be a merchant ship. Unless its registration is withdrawn, it is detained, or its flag State takes specific action, it may continue operating internationally. Such vessels often face port access restrictions, insurance challenges, banking limitations and heightened regulatory scrutiny – but they do not simply vanish from global trade routes.

The larger issue, however, is not the legal status of individual ships. It is the safety of seafarers operating in regions where commercial shipping has become entangled in geopolitical conflict.

**Industry expectations**

The maritime community expects India to adopt a stronger, more proactive posture. Attacks on merchant shipping and civilian seafarers, irrespective of nationality, should be unequivocally condemned. India continues to advocate adherence to international maritime law and freedom of navigation while raising concerns at multilateral forums including the UN, the International Maritime Organization and regional maritime-security platforms.

Diplomatic engagement alone may not suffice. India must work closely with flag States, shipowners and operators to ensure appropriate security measures for vessels transiting high-risk areas. Indian seafarers should not be compelled to sail through war-risk zones without full disclosure of the risks and their informed consent.

There is growing expectation that India will strengthen its maritime-security posture in the region. Enhanced naval deployments, expanded Coast Guard surveillance, rapid-response capabilities and preparedness for hostage-rescue or evacuation operations would reassure the thousands of Indian seafarers serving aboard international vessels. Timely dissemination of actionable intelligence and regular threat assessments to shipowners and operators is equally important.

The welfare dimension of maritime crises often receives less attention than security concerns. Families of seafarers frequently depend on fragmented information and rumours during emergencies.

Establishing dedicated contact points, providing verified updates and offering psychological and logistical support to affected families should form an integral component of any crisis-management framework. The industry has also argued that seafarers who decline assignments in declared war-risk areas should not face professional penalties. Existing contractual protections, war-risk compensation provisions and insurance mechanisms must be fully honoured. Enhanced war-risk allowances and adequate insurance cover, negotiated with Protection and Indemnity Clubs and hull-and-machinery underwriters, have become increasingly necessary as maritime threats evolve.

**Banning no solution**

The question of whether Indian seafarers should be prohibited from serving on vessels transiting the Strait of Hormuz has surfaced repeatedly. A blanket ban, however, is neither the primary demand of the maritime industry nor a practical solution.

The Strait of Hormuz remains one of the world's most critical maritime chokepoints, handling a substantial share of global energy trade. Thousands of Indian seafarers earn their livelihoods aboard vessels that routinely transit the region without incident. A comprehensive prohibition could have significant consequences for employment, global supply chains and India's standing as one of the world's leading suppliers of maritime manpower.

What the industry seeks is a calibrated, evidence-based approach. Periodic risk assessments, clear advisories, mandatory informed consent for deployment in high-risk areas and enhanced security protocols are widely viewed as preferable to outright restrictions. Should the threat environment deteriorate significantly, temporary advisories against joining certain vessels or routes may become necessary – but the objective should remain protecting seafarers without unnecessarily undermining their employment opportunities.

An equally important question concerns regulatory authority. Can India's maritime regulator prohibit seafarers from joining such voyages, or does that authority lie elsewhere?

The Directorate General of Maritime Affairs (DGMA) exercises regulatory oversight over merchant shipping and seafarer certification. However, its jurisdiction is primarily linked to Indian-flagged vessels. The Ministry of External Affairs, on the other hand, holds authority over Indian citizens abroad, diplomatic engagement and travel advisories.

It can influence maritime-security policy through diplomatic channels and, where necessary, through measures affecting international travel.

Any meaningful restriction on Indian seafarers joining high-risk voyages would require coordinated action across multiple ministries – Ports, Shipping and Waterways; External Affairs; and Labour.

India would benefit from an inter-ministerial maritime-security framework capable of escalating measures in proportion to the threat environment – one that brings together maritime regulators, foreign-policy officials, defence agencies, intelligence organisations, shipowners' associations and seafarers' unions to facilitate real-time decision-making.

*(The writer is Deputy Director General of Shipping. Views are personal)*

# AI sovereignty hawks see red as U.S. moves to block Mythos, Fable models

**Aroon Deep**
NEW DELHI

The U.S.'s abrupt decision to restrict access to AI firm Anthropic's Mythos and Fable large language models is leading an "I told you so" moment for national security hawks within the Indian government, who had dealt for months with skepticism and sparse resources in supporting sovereign efforts to develop an Indian AI stack.

"Globalisation is dead, and Bharat must find its own way ahead," Sridhar Vembu, founder of Zoho and a member of India's National Security Advisory Board (NSAB), declared on X shortly after Anthropic announced the export controls. "What can our government do right now? Ensure that organisations in India embrace smaller models, both Indian and Chinese open-source ones. With a bit of effort, we can make them work. Anyway, why pay money to people who don't even want to sell to you?," he posted.

The U.S. government ordered Anthropic to disable Mythos and Fable access for non-U.S. nationals, even within its own company, on Friday evening.

Mythos is a model which Anthropic claims has been highly accomplished in finding and patching cybersecurity vulnerabilities that even human researchers had missed over decades.

Amid concerns that AI-generated cyberattacks may be a threat to Indian companies and government entities, India sought access to Mythos, and some entities joined the so-called Project Glasswing to gain some access earlier this month. That access

India had sought access to Mythos amid AI-generated cyberattack concerns.

may now be disrupted. The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) and the Ministry of External Affairs, which have been in touch with Anthropic and the U.S. government regarding Project Glasswing, did not respond to queries from *The Hindu*. The Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C), which reportedly gained access to Mythos this month, along with the cybersecurity agency CERT-in, which operates under MeitY, also did not respond.

Even some less cybersecurity-focused projects are experiencing disruptions due to the U.S.'s move.

The restriction of Fable, which has been available for all paying users of Claude, had immediate fallout on Saturday.

For instance, Vikram Chandra, an entrepreneur and journalist, said on X, "I have projects that were to run on Fable today – and they will come to a grinding halt... Yes, guardrails for frontier AI are essential – and Anthropic itself has argued for them. But creating national barriers isn't the solution."

India's capabilities to train a frontier AI model lag behind those of China, which itself is a few steps behind the U.S. While Beijing is home to firms like DeepSeek, which uses slightly older graphics processing units (GPUs) in large quantities, with abundant access to data centre capacity and electricity, to try to catch up to the more efficient U.S. models made by firms like Anthropic and ChatGPT, India has a relatively limited capacity of such resources to train large language models (LLMs) like Claude's Opus, Mythos, and Fable.

While a hypothetical Indian alternative to Mythos wouldn't be subject to abrupt geopolitical interruptions, actually creating such an LLM is dependent on the availability of abundant quantities of expensive AI chips from firms like Nvidia, data centre capacity, and electricity availability to boot.

Since the costs run into tens of billions of dollars, sovereign AI proponents' ambitions have been limited. Even Mr. Vembu, who has been critical of over-reliance on foreign tech and whose firm has been appointed to run email inboxes of Union government employees, struck a realistic note on the potential.

"We must deepen our R&D," Mr. Vembu said.

"Sarvam has been on it and we have been on it, but remember that the latest models cost not only huge GPU budgets to train; the GPUs themselves are restricted. So, we can't afford the scale of money (of the order of $100+ billion to even get in the game!), and even if we could come up with the money, we can't get all the GPUs. I would not like to ask the government to fund tens of billions of dollars on this anyway – the money has far better uses," he said. He advocated lower-cost research like what Zoho was undertaking.

"We are way behind and need a national mission to get going quickly," T.V. Mohandas Pai, former CFO of Infosys, who consults closely with the government on technology-related issues, said on X.

"Existing government programs are too slow, way too small to make any large impact. We need an annual ₹50,000 crore fund for deep tech and AI, a ₹2,00,000 crore ELGS [Emergency Credit Line] Guarantee Fund to build Hyper cloud, hardware and chips."

At least one firm has seen some progress, however: Bengaluru-based Sarvam AI launched a 105 billion parameter LLM that is specifically trained with an Indian bias (to counter the U.S.-centricity in most LLMs). While this model is capable of coding tasks, it is far from a frontier-class model for ambitious cybersecurity work.

"A few Indian friends of mine who had access to the Mythos model told me genuinely how terrifying it was," C.S. Akshay, a cybersecurity researcher who has uncovered several vulnerabilities in Indian government and private websites in the past, said in a LinkedIn post. "You just point it to anything and it does uncover vulnerabilities unlike anything they have seen before." While responses to Mythos are occasionally tempered by less advanced LLMs discovering similar software bugs, its true potential remains gatekept to Project Glasswing members of whom there are only a few dozens, most in the U.S.

## *Striking march*

**Up in arms:** Women take part in a demonstration as part of a day of women's strike action ahead of the upcoming G7 summit, in Lausanne, Switzerland, Saturday. AP

# Dr. Reddy's launches generic cancer drug Bosutinib in U.S.

**N. Ravi Kumar**
HYDERABAD

Dr. Reddy's Laboratories announced on Saturday the first-to-market launch of Bosutinib Tablets 400 mg, a generic equivalent of Pfizer subsidiary Wyeth's cancer drug Bosulif, in the U.S. Bosutinib Tablets (400mg) was a first-to-file product and thus eligible for 180-days of generic drug exclusivity for this strength, in the U.S., Dr. Reddy's said.

While the exclusive marketing rights for the product in the U.S. rest with Dr. Reddy's, another Hyderabad-based generic drugmaker MSN Laboratories is responsible for the development and manufacturing of the product,

A view of Dr. Reddy's Laboratories in Hyderabad

the company said.

The Bosulif brand (400 mg) had U.S. sales of approximately $253.8 million for the latest 12-month period ended April 2026, it said, citing IQVIA National Sales Perspectives data.

"With this launch, we remain focused on strengthening our oncology portfolio and partnering across the healthcare system to ensure that critical treatments are both accessible and affordable," CEO-North America of Dr. Reddy's Milan Kalawadia said.

The successful development and commercialisation of Bosutinib Tablets demonstrates MSN's strong scientific, regulatory, and manufacturing capabilities in complex oncology products, said Bharat Reddy, Executive Director of MSN Laboratories.

According to the U.S. FDA, Bosulif is a kinase inhibitor indicated for the treatment of adult patients with newly-diagnosed chronic phase Ph+ chronic myelogenous leukemia (CML); and chronic, accelerated or blast phase Ph+ CML with resistance or intolerance to prior therapy.

### 'U.S., India to tackle trade at G7, but deal not imminent'

**Reuters**
WASHINGTON

U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer will travel to India the week after the G7 leaders summit, a senior U.S. administration official said on Saturday, saying a trade agreement was possible.

Trade would be an issue discussed during President Donald Trump's meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during next week's gathering in France, but no agreement on a trade deal was expected at the summit, the official said.

Mr. Trump would insist on reaching "a very good deal," the official said.

**TEHRAN**

## 'Iran's former Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei to be buried on July 9'

AFP

Iran's former Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, who ruled the country for nearly 37 years before being killed by Israeli and U.S. air strikes on February 28, will be buried on July 9, state television reported on Saturday. The burial in his hometown, the northeastern holy city of Mashhad, will follow three days of funeral ceremonies. AFP

**WASHINGTON**

## Workers begin removing Trump's name from the Kennedy Center

AP

Workers began removing U.S. President Donald Trump's name from the facade of the Kennedy Center early Saturday, hours after a court-ordered Friday deadline to remove references to Mr. Trump from the building and other aspects of the iconic performing arts venue's operations. AP

**STOCKHOLM**

## Swedish fighters intercept two Russian combat jets near border

AFP

Sweden said on Saturday it had scrambled two pairs of JAS 39 Gripen fighter jets a day earlier to intercept two Russian combat aircraft flying over the Baltic Sea near its airspace. The two incidents occurred on Friday in the southern and northern parts of the Baltic Sea. Swedish airspace was not violated, it said. AFP

**PESHAWAR**

## Pakistan forces kill '21 militants' in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province

AFP

Security forces killed 21 militants in a series of intelligence-based operations in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in northwest Pakistan over the last three days, the military's media wing said on Saturday. Among those killed were four ring leaders belonging to Fitna-al-Khwarij, the media wing said. PTI

# 'UAE agrees to unlock billions of dollars for Iran amid deal talks'

Two regional sources say the Gulf Arab state has agreed to release a total of $10 billion; the UAE officially denies the report, calling claims of any transfer of funds 'entirely false and unfounded'; Vance says funds won't be released for signing a deal

**Reuters**
DUBAI/LONDON

The United Arab Emirates has agreed to unlock billions of dollars for Iran, four sources said, in a tactical shift after weeks of Iranian attacks on the wealthy Gulf Arab state during the U.S.-Israeli war with the Islamic Republic. Word of the move, which has not been previously reported, coincides with the final stages of broader negotiations between Tehran and Washington on ending the war, talks that diplomats say could involve the release of tens of billions of dollars in Iranian oil revenues frozen in foreign banks under U.S. sanctions.

Two regional sources told *Reuters* the UAE had agreed to release a total of $10 billion, more than $3 billion of which had already been delivered. Two other sources with knowledge of the arrangement put the total funds involved at $20 billion, adding that the move had been agreed in return for a halt to Iranian attacks on the UAE.

One of the sources with knowledge of the arrangement also said a first tranche of $3 billion had already been made available. *Reuters* could not establish whether the funds earmarked for the transfers belong to the UAE or originate in long-blocked Iranian accounts in the UAE banking system, or elsewhere. The UAE Foreign Ministry issued a statement early on Saturday categorically denying reports of the transfer "including allegations concerning $3 billion". The UAE statement "affirmed that these allegations are entirely false and unfounded, stressing that no frozen Iranian funds have been released, transferred or facilitated through the UAE."

**Time out:** The move had been agreed in return for a halt to Iranian attacks on the United Arab Emirates, say sources. AP

The White House did not respond to a request for comment on the move. In Washington, Vice-President J.D. Vance said on Friday that funds would not be released to Iran for signing a deal with the United States or attending a meeting, adding that the potential deal is structured to ensure that economic benefits would flow to Tehran if it meets its obligations.

# China flays Pentagon move against Chinese tech firms

**Reuters**
BEIJING

China is "strongly dissatisfied" with a U.S. move to add several large Chinese companies to the Pentagon's list of firms it says are aiding China's military, the Commerce Ministry said on Saturday.

The Foreign Ministry has also expressed concern about the U.S. Defense Department's long-awaited update to its list on Monday, which included such top technology names as e-commerce giant Alibaba, Internet search provider Baidu and automakers BYD and NIO.

It later added the world's largest solar panel makers to the list: Trina Solar and JA Solar Technology.

The list includes a broad swathe of China's top technology firms key to advancing Beijing's military and industrial prowess, reflecting Washington's security concerns amid intense geopolitical competition between the countries.

> China urges the U.S. to immediately stop its erroneous practices, withdraw relevant measures and return to the correct track of building a constructive strategic and stable China-U.S. relationship
> COMMERCE MINISTRY OF CHINA

"China is strongly dissatisfied and firmly opposes this," the Commerce Ministry said in a statement. "China urges the U.S. to immediately stop its erroneous practices, immediately withdraw relevant measures and return to the correct track of building a constructive strategic and stable China-U.S. relationship."

If Chinese firms are not treated fairly, it said, Beijing will "inevitably retaliate resolutely and forcefully".

The Pentagon update supersedes a list from early 2025 and comes a month after Presidents Donald Trump and Xi Jinping met in Beijing and maintained a delicate trade-war truce.

The Ministry statement said the Pentagon's move "ignored the consensus" reached between the two leaders.

# Lebanon pulls troops from southern village after Israeli incursion

**Associated Press**
BEIRUT

The Lebanese Army on Saturday withdrew its troops from a base in a southern Lebanese village after Israeli troops advanced in an area nearby, a military official said.

Israeli strikes were also reported on the country's south, according to state-run media.

The departure from the Army barracks in Kfar Tebnit came as the Israeli military issued an evacuation warning for about 20 locations, including the southern city of Nabatiyeh and nearby villages.

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency reported airstrikes on Saturday on different villages near Nabatiyeh, including one that killed two people in Deir al-Zahrani and another strike that killed a local official in Rihan. It added that Nabatiyeh was subjected to artillery shelling on Saturday.

A senior Lebanese military official said that the Lebanese Army moved its forces from the Kfar Tebnit barracks following an incursion by Israeli forces into the area.

Israeli troops were likely trying to capture the strategic Ali Taher hill on the edge of Kfar Tebnit. Israeli troops held the hill for 18 years until they withdrew from Lebanon in 2000.

***Political crossroads***

**Civic tensions:** Demonstrators march behind a banner reading 'Remigration and Reconquest' in Rome on Saturday, supporting a proposal calling for the forced return of irregular migrants to their countries of origin. REUTERS

# U.S.-Venezuela joint operation kills leader of Tren de Aragua

**Agence France-Presse**
CARACAS

The leader of the transnational gang Tren de Aragua was killed in a joint operation by the United States and Venezuela, authorities in the South American nation said on Friday.

Founded in Venezuela, Tren de Aragua has been designated a terrorist organisation by the U.S. and is also active in Colombia, Peru and Chile.

"There were clashes with members of these criminal structures, in which Hector Rusthenford Guerrero Flores, alias 'Nino Guerrero,' was neutralised," Venezuela's Ministry of Communications said in a statement.

Explosion following a strike carried out by U.S. forces that killed Nino Guerrero. REUTERS

U.S. President Donald Trump said earlier Friday that American forces carried out a deadly strike on the gang leader. "At my direction, the United States Southern Command delivered a swift and lethal kinetic strike to successfully execute Nino Guerrero."

# PM Modi's Europe visit begins in Nice, with tech, bilateral relations in focus

**Sriram Lakshman**
LONDON

Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrived in Nice on Saturday evening, the first stop on his six-day tour of France and Slovakia. The Prime Minister's visit to the French Riviera revolves around a tech summit, Bharat Innovates 2026, on Sunday, which he will inaugurate with French President Emmanuel Macron.

The tech event, as per the government, is aimed at bringing together deep-tech ventures and higher education institutes from India, among others, to explore cooperation in research and co-development, investment and technology transfer.

Following the event, Mr. Modi and Mr. Macron will lead bilateral discussions between the two sides which are expected to cover a broad range of subjects including defence, tech, regional and global issues.

It is expected that the U.S. and Israel conflict with Iran will be discussed between the sides, with U.S. President Donald Trump saying a settlement was due to be signed on Sunday.

India and France had formally elevated their partnership to a 'Special Global Strategic Partnership' in February this year and announced that 2026 was the India-France Year of Innovation.

Narendra Modi

Mr. Modi will travel to Slovakia on Sunday evening and return to France for the G7 Summit in the alpine resort of Évian-les-Bains. India has been invited as an outreach partner, along with other countries. At Évian, there is a possibility of a bilateral meeting with Mr. Trump. Following the G7 Summit, Mr. Modi will arrive in Paris for another tech focused event, VivaTech on June 18. India is the AI Country Partner for the event which is held annually.

The PM's arrival in France was foreshadowed by rising tensions between India and the United States after an attack by U.S. forces killed three Indian seafarers off the coast of Oman.

"In addition to Nice, this France visit includes programmes in Evian and Paris. There will be bilateral and multilateral meetings, which will be aimed at improving India's friendship with key development partners," Mr. Modi wrote on X, shortly after landing in France.

# Armed men in Haiti's capital seize a top security official in rare abduction

**Associated Press**
SAN JUAN

Armed men in Haiti have kidnapped James Boyard, cabinet director of the Defence Ministry and a highly respected security expert who also serves as inspector general of Haiti's police, a person with the knowledge of the situation said on Saturday. He is the highest-ranking official to be kidnapped in the gang-wracked Caribbean country in recent years.

A person with knowledge of the situation who was not authorised to speak publicly about the case confirmed the kidnapping on Saturday.

Local media reported that Mr. Boyard was seized on Thursday in Bourdon, one of the few areas in Port-au-Prince that is considered relatively safe. An estimated 70% of the capital is controlled by a powerful gang coalition known as Viv Ansanm, which the U.S. designated as a foreign terrorist organisation in May last year.

**Unsafe streets:** Police patrol around Bernard Mevs hospital in Port-au-Prince where armed gangs have spread violence. AFP

Mr. Boyard, who is also a political scientist, was tasked with helping rebuild Haiti's armed forces and has helped assess Haiti's National Police to implement reforms.

It was not clear who kidnapped him or whether a ransom has been requested.

"A person of this rank clearly has a fairly important security detail," said Diego Da Rin, an analyst with the International Crisis Group. He said the abduction of Mr. Boyard possibly suggests the kidnapping was planned with great detail and might have depended on the collaboration of someone close to his security detail.

Mr. Da Rin said kidnappings are increasing in areas of Port-au-Prince once considered safe, with gang members sometimes donning police uniforms and stopping drivers as part of fake operations.

PRECAUTIONARY MEASURE

## Pulisic allays injury worries after being substituted at half-time

AP

United States' star Christian Pulisic played down injury concerns after he was substituted at half-time in the World Cup co-host's 4-1 win over Paraguay in Los Angeles. "I just got a bit of a kick in the first half. I was taking a little bit of precaution. But I am hoping that I will be fine in the next few days," said Pulisic.

GALAXY OF STARS

## Celebrities enjoy the first men's World Cup match on Canadian soil

REUTERS

Cyle Larin's goal not only saved the World Cup opener for Canada but also gave a bunch of Canadian celebrities a reason to celebrate. *Deadpool* star Ryan Reynolds, *in pic.*, NHL standout Connor McDavid and actor Mike Myers were among the stars spotted at BMO Field for the first men's World Cup match on Canadian soil.

OOZING POSITIVITY

## Spain is full of confidence and is very motivated, says Grimaldo

GETTY IMAGES

Alex Grimaldo believes that Spain can emulate its golden generation by winning the World Cup two years after being crowned European champion. "I see us as a favourite. The team is full of confidence and is very motivated. We are desperate to do a good job because we have the team to do so," said Grimaldo.

TAKING A DIG

## Infantino quips Italy might qualify if WC is expanded to 64 teams

AP

FIFA president Gianni Infantino joked that struggling Italy might manage to qualify for the World Cup if the competition was expanded from 48 to 64 teams in 2030. "Maybe Italy qualifies with 64 teams, or we could even go up to 208 teams," Infantino told Brazilian digital broadcaster *CazeTV*.

# USA off to a dream start with a thrashing of Paraguay

A Balogun brace and Reyna curler put the co-host in pole position to advance from Group D; the visitor plays the perfect obliging guest with an own goal to start off the proceedings; contest as good as over after the first half

FIFA WORLD CUP

**Agence France-Presse**
LOS ANGELES

The United States could scarcely have scripted a better start to its World Cup as a Folarin Balogun brace and Gio Reyna curler fired the co-host to a 4-1 drubbing of Paraguay on Friday.

It took the lead within seven minutes thanks to an own goal, and by the end of an utterly dominant half, the home fans were in dreamland, their side up by three. The USA piled wave after wave of attacks on the South Americans, with Reyna polishing off the win after Mauricio had pulled one back.

The win and emphatic scoreline put the USA in a favourable position already to progress from Group D, which also contains Australia and Turkiye.

The night's only potential sour note was the half-time withdrawal of forward Christian Pulisic.

**Unstoppable:** Balogun fires in United States' third past a hapless Paraguay. AP

Paraguay could not have been a more obliging guest from kickoff. In the seventh minute, Weston McKennie picked up the ball in the centre circle and drove upfield, finding Pulisic. The 27-year-old darted between two defenders and returned the ball to McKennie, whose pass to striker Balogun was bundled into his own net by a hapless Damian Bobadilla.

Balogun had a goal ruled out in the 28th minute for straying offside, as had Pulisic in the buildup.

But the Monaco striker got on the scoresheet three minutes later, thanks to a superb ball down the left flank by Antonee Robinson to Pulisic, whose cross to Balogun took a fortuitous deflection.

The US added a third on the cusp of half-time. Malik Tillman found Balogun, who evaded Omar Alderete's challenge, skipped inside Gustavo Gomez and curled his shot perfectly into the top-left corner.

Reyna scored a superb fourth with the outside of his right foot that curled just inside the far post.

**THE RESULTS**

**Group B:** Canada 1 (Larin 78) drew with Bosnia-Herzegovina 1 (Lukic 21).
**Group D:** United States 4 (Bobadilla 7-og, Balogun 31, 45+5, Reyna 90+8) bt Paraguay 1 (Mauricio 73).

# Canada earns first WC point after draw with Bosnia and Herzegovina

**Promise delivered:** David, right, provided the assist for Larin's equaliser. GETTY IMAGES

**Agence France-Presse**
TORONTO

Canada grabbed a second-half equaliser to draw 1-1 with Bosnia and Herzegovina on Friday in the first men's World Cup game played on Canadian soil.

Cyle Larin (78th) produced the equaliser for the co-host after Jovo Lukic put Bosnia ahead with a header in the 21st minute of the Group B clash. Thanks to Larin's effort, Canada earned its first point in World Cup history. Canadian sides had a perfect record of futility at two previous tournament appearances in 1986 and 2022, with six losses.

Lukic's goal from a corner sent the small but enthusiastic Bosnian contingent into a frenzy.

Behind just before the first hydration break, Canada had the majority of the ball in the opening period but failed to generate any real chances.

In the 17th minute, forward Jonathan David had a clear shot on goal but it was easily handled by Bosnian 'keeper Nikola Vasilj. Canada's Ismael Kone had a golden opportunity around the hour-mark, with his strike sailing well over the net and prompting groans from thousands of Canadians who blanketed the stadium in a sea of red.

The second half began in similar fashion as Canada was largely on the attack but unable to find the net. Veteran Serbian defender Sead Kolasinac saved a certain goal when he diverted a strike from David onto the crossbar, extending Canada's agony.

But Larin's equaliser in the 78th minute marked a high point in Canada's limited World Cup history, causing the majority of the 43,000 fans to erupt.

# Ecuador's rock-solid defence faces the power and panache of Ivory Coast

**Ayon Sengupta**

Every summer, visitors gather around the Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia to revisit America's past.

On Sunday evening, the city will welcome two nations looking to shape their footballing future when Ivory Coast and Ecuador open their World Cup campaigns at the Lincoln Financial Field.

They arrive from opposite shores of the footballing map, one carrying the hopes of West Africa, the other representing South America's enduring depth. But both are united by the same ambition to announce themselves on the sport's grandest stage.

In a group that also contains Germany and Curacao, neither side can afford a slow start. Three points here could prove decisive in the race for an automatic qualification to the knockout rounds.

For Ivory Coast, the World Cup offers an opportunity to confirm that its recent resurgence is no passing phase. The 2023 African champion has rebuilt impressively after a period of uncertainty, with coach Emerse Fae concentrating on bringing in defensive stability.

The pace and directness of Simon Adingra, Amad Diallo and the experience of captain Franck Kessie give Ivory Coast a mixture of power and panache that has for long embodied its football.

**The orchestrator:** Chelsea midfielder Caicedo will be tasked with dictating the rhythm of Ecuador's play. GETTY IMAGES

The Ivorians are unlikely to lack attacking intent. Their strength lies in transition, where pace and direct running can quickly turn defence into attack. Against an Ecuador side that prides itself on organisation and discipline, those moments could prove decisive.

Ecuador, meanwhile, has quietly become one of South America's most reliable teams, finishing second in the CONMEBOL qualifiers. Moises Caicedo, the Chelsea box-to-box midfielder, will be tasked with dictating the rhythm of Ecuador's play. Around him, the side possesses a young and dynamic spine, with Piero Hincapie anchoring the defence and a new generation of attacking talent seeking to make an impact.

While Ivory Coast will look to make the game open and physical, Ecuador is more likely to rely on structure and patience. The contest could ultimately hinge on which side succeeds in imposing its preferred tempo. One will look to finish chances, the other to prevent them from materialising.

Lincoln Financial Field, home of the Philadelphia Eagles, is among the venues introducing World Cup football to one of America's most passionate sporting cities. Known for demanding excellence from their teams, Philadelphia's fans appreciate intensity and commitment, qualities both Ivory Coast and Ecuador are expected to bring in abundance.

Neither nation begins the tournament among the favourites, but both know that World Cups are often shaped by teams capable of seizing opportunities. Their road to the knockout rounds begins in Philadelphia, where history is celebrated daily and new stories are always waiting to be written.

## Curacao set for a tough debut against Germany

**Reuters**
HOUSTON

Germany will look to start its World Cup campaign with a big win over Curacao, with the four-time champion out to repair its damaged international reputation following first-round exits in the previous two editions.

It could not have hoped for an easier first opponent than Curacao, the smallest nation to qualify for the World Cup.

Julian Nagelsmann's team is on a nine-match winning run, including a 4-0 victory over Finland and a 2-1 win over World Cup co-host United States.

Curacao is a rank outsider, with most of its players plying their trade in the Netherlands or in lower European leagues.

But veteran coach Dick Advocaat, who at 78 will become the oldest coach in World Cup history, relishes facing Germany in Group E. "We will find out immediately where we stand," said Advocaat.

**Monday's matches**

**Group F**
Netherlands vs. Japan, 1.30 a.m.
Sweden vs. Tunisia, 7.30 a.m.
**Group E**
Ivory Coast vs. Ecuador, 4.30 a.m.
**Group H**
Spain vs. Cape Verde, 9.30 p.m.
*The day and time(s) pertain to India*

## Stat attack

**1** Promise David assisted Cyle Larin's equaliser for Canada with the only pass he completed all game

**1** Canada won a World Cup point in its seventh attempt

**2** Larin was the second man (after Alphonso Davies vs. Croatia, 2022) to score for Canada in a World Cup

**2** Paraguay became the only team the USA has beaten twice in World Cup history

**4** The number of times USA benefited from own goals in its World Cup journey, tying it in the second spot with Germany and Italy. Only France (6) has more

**6** Bosnia and Herzegovina's draws in its last six games, five ending 1-1

**31** Larin's goal tally pulled him second behind Jonathan David (39) for most goals for the Canadian men

**38y 250d** Tim Ream became the oldest to play for USA in the football showpiece

**96** Folarin Balogun earned the distinction of being the first USA player to score two goals in a World Cup match in 96 years since Bert Patenaude performed the first hat-trick in 1930 (also against Paraguay)

**83** Chris Richards completed all 83 of his passes, the most without mispassing in a World Cup match since 1966

Compiled by **ANIRUDH VELAMURI**

# Japan and Netherlands' coaches have key decisions to make

**Reuters**
DALLAS

Japan coach Hajime Moriyasu must decide who will replace retired captain Wataru Endo at the heart of his midfield as it prepares to kick off its World Cup campaign against the Netherlands here on Sunday.

Endo had formed a midfield partnership with Ao Tanaka in Japan's most recent friendly against Iceland. But Moriyasu's confidence in his options was reflected in his decision to replace Endo with forward Shuto Machino. Tanaka could be paired with Germany-based Kaishu Sano or Daichi Kamada.

Netherlands boss Ronald Koeman has concerns of his own. Goalkeeper Bart Verbruggen is recovering from a knock while forward Memphis Depay has played little over the last three months.

"We know that Depay had a few injuries but he is back. Every day, he is closer to his 100% fitness," Koeman said. "He is our top scorer, and we need him if we would like to go in a good way in this tournament. We need all the players but, of course, we need Depay as well."

# India aims for the perfect start against Pakistan

Harmanpreet & Co. start as favourite in the marquee clash; injury scare for rival skipper Fatima; the Women in Blue well aware of the need to pick up early points in the Group of Death

T20 WORLD CUP

**P.K. Ajith Kumar**
BIRMINGHAM

**All in readiness:** The expectations are high as India begins its pursuit of glory. X@BCCIWOMEN

Under the clear, blue West Midland skies, dotted by some impish, puffy clouds more white than grey, Harmanpreet Kaur and her women got down to work on Saturday afternoon.

It had been cold and windy earlier in the day. Now it was bright and sunny.

Weather can be fickle in England. Not unlike fortunes in cricket.

And yet, you could say with a fair amount of conviction that India starts the strong favourite in the T20 Women's World Cup against Pakistan at Edgbaston.

No doubt an India-Pakistan rivalry on a cricket field attracts unparalleled attention and the teams battle bitterly. Of late, however, the Indian men have been far too dominant.

The Indian women have always been even more ruthless against their rivals across the border. They should be hoping they would score a convincing win against Pakistan that will give them a perfect start to their campaign.

For an India-Pakistan match, now that the two countries play only on neutral grounds, you could not have hoped for a better venue than Birmingham. Your cab driver could well likely be a Pakistani if not an Indian.

So expect a lot of noise, right through the match. Stiff upper lips and gentle applause not for these folks, thank you.

Pakistan may not, by any stretch of imagination, be India's strongest rival in Group A, but the team cannot afford to take it lightly. In the Group of Death, featuring Australia and South Africa, the Women in Blue have to begin well.

The warm-up match and before that the three-match T20I series against England may not have gone quite according to the plans for the Indians, but there have been some positives. Richa Ghosh's brilliant knock that brought them close to the win in the warm-up game could not have been timed better: in the lower-order that lacks firepower, she is crucial; and the 22-year-old is one of the best finishers in the game.

Yastika Bhatia has also looked good on her return from injury and she offers another option in a batting line-up that oozes class, in the form of Smriti Mandhana, Shafali Verma, Jemimah Rodrigues and Harmanpreet. As for bowling, India has a good mix of seam and spin.

For Pakistan, there was an injury scare after the training session for captain Fatima Sana. She said she was hopeful of playing. Pakistan needs her to play: the team trails India 3-13 in T20Is overall.

### Today's matches

| | |
|---|---|
| Bangladesh vs Netherlands | India vs Pakistan |
| **Birmingham,** 3 p.m. IST | **Birmingham,** 7 p.m. IST |
| HEAD-TO-HEAD | HEAD-TO-HEAD |
| Played: 5 | Played: 16 |
| Bangladesh 4 \| Netherlands 1 | India 13 \| Pakistan 3 |

LIVE ON STAR SPORTS 1 & JIOHOTSTAR

## First game always sets the tone, says Harmanpreet

**P.K. Ajith Kumar**
BIRMINGHAM

**Compliment:** Harmanpreet reckons Richa is a game-changer. X@BCCIWOMEN

Harmanpreet Kaur has been one constant for India's remarkable resurgence in women's cricket. The 37-year-old feels she is grateful to be leading the country in yet another major ICC tournament.

Harmanpreet sounded confident, too, on the eve of India's opening T20 World Cup match against Pakistan at Edgbaston here on Sunday. She believes a win is important in the first match.

"That first game always sets the tone for you, and all of us are looking forward to the match," she said. "We want to go to the tournament with the same positive attitude ahead of the last ODI World Cup."

She would not deny the pressure that is there ahead of a match against Pakistan. "I have experienced that pressure from the time I started watching cricket as a supporter, and now that I am playing, there is more pressure," Harmanpreet said. "But we tell each other that it is always better to enjoy these games. And more than anything else, it is just another game."

There was the inevitable question at the press conference about the handshake with the Pakistan players.

"We are here for cricket and we don't talk about anything else," she replied.

Harmanpreet talked at length about Richa Ghosh's superb innings against England in the warm-up match. "We were waiting for Richa to get her confidence back," she said. "She is a key player, a game-changer for us. After that match, she is looking really good. One good innings always gives you a lot of confidence".

## 'This WC is important for future of game in Pakistan'

**P.K. Ajith Kumar**
BIRMINGHAM

Pakistan captain Fatima Sana believes the Women's T20 World Cup is important for the future of the game in her country. "The ICC has taken an initiative by letting Pakistan host the next World Cup," she said.

"This tournament is important for us because if we play well here, we will get more support in Pakistan."

Fatima said if her team did well here and in the next World Cup in Pakistan, more parents would want their daughters to play cricket. "And it is nice to see so much support for our team here in Birmingham," she said. "We have already seen that."

## England posts thumping win

**Associated Press**
BIRMINGHAM

England began its home ICC Women's Twenty20 World Cup campaign with an emphatic 87-run win over Sri Lanka on Friday.

**The scores: On Friday: Group B:** England 219/1 in 20 overs (Amy Jones 53, Danni Wyatt-Hodge 105 n.o., Nat Sciver-Brunt 46 n.o.) bt Sri Lanka 132 in 20 overs (Nilakshika Silva 39, Charlie Dean 2/18, Sophie Ecclestone 2/27, Freya Kemp 4/22). **Toss:** Sri Lanka; **PoM:** Wyatt-Hodge.

**On Saturday: Group A:** Australia 172/8 in 20 overs (Phoebe Litchfield 50, Ellyse Perry 36, Georgia Wareham 32, Ayabonga Khaka 2/33, Nonkululeko Mlaba 2/22, Nadine de Klerk 2/35) bt South Africa 107 in 16.4 overs (Laura Wolvaardt 44, Sophie Molineux 2/17, Alana King 2/26, Georgia Wareham 3/13). **Toss:** Australia; **PoM:** Wareham.

**Group B:** Scotland 161/5 in 20 overs (Kathryn Bryce 60, Sarah Bryce 49, Ava Canning 3/27) bt Ireland 121 in 19.1 overs (Amy Hunter 39, Orla Prendergast 33, Kathryn Bryce 2/19, Kirstie Gordon 3/16, Katherine Fraser 3/19). **Toss:** Ireland; **PoM:** Kathryn Bryce.

# On a day of Gs, India cruises past Afghanistan in a rain-hit game

AFGHANISTAN IN INDIA

**S. Dipak Ragav**
DHARAMSHALA

**Jeez, what a show!** Gurbaz, Gurnoor and Gill were on top of their game in Dharamshala. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

In the space of two weeks, Shubman Gill has played in all three formats and seamlessly adapted to each one of them.

A 732-run IPL season was followed by a Test century against Afghanistan. Facing the same opponent but in the ODI format, the India skipper extended his purple patch, striking a well-composed unbeaten 84 (66b, 11x4, 2x6) to help the Men in Blue clinch a seven-wicket win in a rain-truncated first game of the three-match series at the HPCA Stadium here on Saturday.

Persistent rain from morning meant the start was delayed by more than four hours. The covers came off only at 4.40 p.m, consigning the contest to 25 overs per side.

Chasing 195, Gill was at his sublime best in a knock filled with elegant drives and good use of the feet against the spinners. Though watchful at the start, the right-hander switched gears later and neutralised the Afghan spin threat, collecting three boundaries off AM Ghazanfar.

He welcomed Rashid Khan by swinging through the line over long-on before launching Mohammad Nabi for a brace of boundaries and a six to bring up his half-century.

The opener found an able ally in Ishan Kishan. The duo added 70 for the second wicket, bringing the asking rate under seven. While the visitors briefly fought back with two wickets, K.L. Rahul (39 n.o., 19b, 4x4, 3x6) snuffed out any hopes when he plundered 20 runs off Ziaur Rahman in the 22nd over. The hosts cantered home with 13 balls to spare.

Earlier, Rahmanullah Gurbaz showcased his striking ability in a scintillating effort of 102 (51b, 8x4, 8x6) to help Afghanistan post 194.

Despite his team being reduced to 26 for three at the end of the PowerPlay (five overs) – thanks to Arshdeep Singh and debutant Gurnoor Brar's fiery opening spells – Gurbaz counter-punched by being clear-headed while often taking the aerial route.

The Afghan opening batter was severe on Prasidh Krishna, nonchalantly lofting the pacer down the ground, over the covers, and ramping him over short-third.

He did not spare the spinners either, hitting two maximums each off Harsh Dubey and Washington Sundar en route his ninth ODI century, which came off just 48 deliveries.

However, once Nitish Kumar cleaned up Gurbaz, the Afghan innings came undone as the away side lost the last seven wickets for just 52 runs.

It was the opening India needed, and Gill's men capitalised on it to take a 1-0 lead.

**SCOREBOARD**

**AFGHANISTAN**

Rahmanullah Gurbaz b Nitish 102 *(51b, 8x4, 8x6)*, Ibrahim Zadran c Gill b Gurnoor 1 *(4b)*, Sediqullah Atal lbw b Arshdeep 0 *(2b)*, Rahmat Shah c Harsh b Arshdeep 3 *(8b)*, Hashmatullah Shahidi c Rahul b Harsh 27 *(30b, 3x4)*, Azmatullah Omarzai st. Kishan b Harsh 26 *(16b, 3x6)*, Mohammad Nabi c Arshdeep b Nitish 9 *(14b, 1x6)*, Rashid Khan b Gurnoor 9 *(13b, 2x4)*, AM Ghazanfar c Gill b Harsh 0 *(2b)*, Ziaur Rahman c Arshdeep b Gurnoor 4 *(8b, 1x4)*, Mohammad Saleem (not out) 1 *(1b)*; Extras (b-1, lb-7, w-4): 12; Total (in 24.5 overs): 194.

**FALL OF WICKETS**

1-13 (Ibrahim, 1.5 overs), 2-16 (Sediqullah, 2.3), 3-26 (Rahmat, 4.3), 4-142 (Gurbaz, 15.3), 5-144 (Shahidi, 16.3), 6-172 (Nabi, 20.3), 7-182 (Omarzai, 21.2), 8-182 (Ghazanfar, 21.4), 9-193 (Rashid, 24.3).

**INDIA BOWLING**

Arshdeep 5-0-27-2, Gurnoor 4.5-0-27-3, Prasidh 5-0-35-0, Harsh 5-0-47-3, Washington 1-0-19-0, Nitish 4-0-31-2.

**INDIA**

Rohit Sharma run out 16 *(16b, 2x4, 1x6)*, Shubman Gill (not out) 84 *(66b, 11x4, 2x6)*, Ishan Kishan b Rashid 34 *(22b, 3x4, 1x6)*, Shreyas Iyer c Saleem b Ziaur 12 *(15b, 1x4)*, K.L. Rahul (not out) 39 *(19b, 4x4, 3x6)*; Extras (lb-1, nb-1, w-8): 10; Total (for three wkts. in 22.5 overs): 195.

**FALL OF WICKETS**

1-46 (Rohit, 5.4), 2-116 (Kishan, 12.5), 3-142 (Shreyas, 17.3).

**AFGHANISTAN BOWLING**

Omarzai 3-0-28-0, Ziaur 4-0-39-1, Ghazanfar 5-0-28-0, Saleem 3.5-0-36-0, Rashid 5-0-37-1, Nabi 2-0-26-0.

**Toss:** India; **PoM:** Gill.

*India won by seven wickets with 13 balls remaining to lead three-match series 1-0.*

**Second ODI: June 17**, Lucknow, 1.30 p.m.

## SNAPSHOTS

### Kush Maini wins Formula 2 sprint race

BARCELONA: Kush Maini registered his first victory of the 2026 Formula 2 season by claiming the sprint race at the Barcelona GP on Saturday. The Indian racer made a strong start and led in every lap to secure his third overall win in F2. "I won it from P2 on the grid. ART has given me a great car, and it has been giving me a great car all year, so it really deserves it... I'm really glad to give the team a win," said Kush Maini, who drives for ART Grand Prix. He is competing in his fourth season in Formula 2.

**Dazzling display:** Kush Maini sprinted home in style, leading in every lap of the race. X@FORMULA2

### Russell clinches pole for Barcelona F1 GP

George Russell seized pole position for a race that could snap championship-leading teammate Kimi Antonelli's winning streak while Lewis Hamilton split the Mercedes pair in Barcelona-Catalunya GP qualifying on Saturday. Italian Antonelli, who will be seeking a sixth win in a row on Sunday to extend what is currently a 66-point lead over seven-time World champion Hamilton, qualified third with McLaren's World champion Lando Norris fourth. Mercedes has taken pole in all seven F1 races so far in 2026, winning them all, and Saturday was Russell's third of the season to 19-year-old Antonelli's four – a morale boost for the Briton as he seeks to bounce back from two races without scoring.

**Starting grid: First row:** George Russell (Mercedes), Lewis Hamilton (Ferrari); **Second:** Kimi Antonelli (Mercedes), Lando Norris (McLaren); **Third:** Max Verstappen (Red Bull), Isack Hadjar (Red Bull); **Fourth:** Oscar Piastri (McLaren), Liam Lawson (Racing Bulls); **Fifth:** Nico Hulkenberg (Audi), Charles Leclerc (Ferrari); **Sixth:** Arvid Lindblad (Racing Bulls), Gabriel Bortoleto (Audi); **Seventh:** Franco Colapinto (Alpine), Pierre Gasly (Alpine); **Eighth:** Oliver Bearman (Haas), Carlos Sainz Jr. (Williams); **Ninth:** Esteban Ocon (Haas), Alexander Albon (Williams); **10th:** Sergio Perez (Cadillac), Valtteri Bottas (Cadillac); **11th:** Lance Stroll (Aston Martin), Fernando Alonso (Aston Martin).

### Manu terms Rana's demise an 'irreparable loss'

NEW DELHI: Ace Indian shooter Manu Bhaker on Saturday described the death of her mentor Jaspal Rana as an "irreparable loss" as the country's shooting fraternity mourned the demise of one of the sport's most revered icons.

Manu bids a tearful adieu to her coach Rana. PTI

Rana, one of India's finest pistol shooters who successfully transitioned into coaching, guided Manu to her historic twin bronze medals at the 2024 Paris Olympics. He died at the age of 49 after battling cardiac complications.

His illustrious competitive career spanned more than 15 years, with the crowning achievement coming at the 2006 Doha Asian Games, where he produced a sensational haul of three gold medals and a silver, while also equalling the then World record in 25m center fire pistol (590 points).

In a brief two-word post in Hindi on social media, Manu shared three photographs of herself with Jaspal and wrote, "Apurniya Kshati (irreparable loss)."

### Ramit Tandon pulls out of squash trials

CHENNAI: Ramit Tandon, India's third-highest ranked squash player, has withdrawn from the ongoing Asian Games selection trials at the ISTA Academy here owing to a patellar (knee) injury.

In a communication to the Squash Rackets Federation of India, the 33-year-old said he would be unable to continue because of the injury. He conceded his opening pool match to Yash Fadte on Saturday.

### Poonacha-Isaro duo bags title

LYON: India's Niki Poonacha and Pruchya Isaro of Thailand thrashed Skander Mansouri of Tunisia and Austria's Maximilian Neuchrist 6-0, 6-1 to win the doubles title in the Open Sopra Steria de Lyon 2026 Challenger tournament on Saturday. This was Poonacha's 10th Challenger doubles title.

Distraught family members of the victims wait outside the hospital premises, following the fire accident that claimed nine lives at the Visakha Steel Plant; (below) rescue and recovery operations under way after the industrial accident. V RAJU

# A legacy of steel scarred by disasters

A blast in the Vizag Steel Plant on June 8 has claimed the lives of nine persons and injured six others, triggering demands from the victims' kin for accountability and long-term support, while sparking a nationwide debate on industrial safety, management accountability and privatisation. **V. Kamalakara Rao** reports on how the accident unfolded and how it has aggravated the suffering of workers who have been on the warpath ever since the Union government announced its proposal for 100% disinvestment of the plant

The recent explosion in the port city of Visakhapatnam reflects the human costs of an industrial tragedy that dominates the headlines for a few days and is forgotten till another tragedy strikes. A heart-rending video recorded on June 8 and now going viral on social media, depicting a father's final message to his son.

One of the victims, 53-year-old K. Paidiraju, knew that his time was running out, as he suffered over 90% burns in a massive explosion that occurred in the Plant. The skin on his chest had been burnt away, and every breath was an agonising struggle. Yet his voice carried the weight of a father's final message.

"Varma... Daddy," he whispered, addressing his eldest son. "Take care of your brother. Take care of your mother. Continue your studies. Don't fight with anyone. Stay united."

Within 48 hours, on June 10, Paidiraju succumbed to his injuries at MGM Seven Hills Hospital in Visakhapatnam, becoming the ninth fatality of the devastating industrial disaster at the Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited (RINL)-Visakhapatnam Steel Plant.

The video soon went viral across social media platforms, emerging as the haunting symbol of a tragedy that reduced hardworking men to ashes within seconds.

Among those who perished were technicians Gonitha Bhanu Kumar, G.V. Appa Rao and M. Krishna Nagu; general foreman K. Prabhakar Rao; and a promising young manager, Bheem Kumar, also known across the Plant as "Gold Kumar".

The intensity of the inferno was such that several bodies recovered from the wreckage of Steel Melting Shop-1 (SMS-1) were beyond recognition. Forensic teams at the King George Hospital (KGH) mortuary had to rely on DNA analysis to identify the victims and hand over their remains to grieving families.

As investigators continue examining the twisted remains of Caster-2, the human cost of the disaster is visible across Visakhapatnam.

In Gangavaram, not far from the steel plant, Paidiraju's home is filled with mourners. His wife remains inconsolable, while his two sons repeatedly watch the video carrying their father's final words.

## Heartbroken families

Like Paidiraju's family, relatives of the other victims are struggling to come to terms with their loss. Appa Rao's wife, Rachamma, recalled that her husband, on the fateful day, left for the Plant from a hospital where their elder son was admitted due to a high fever. After arriving, Rachamma called Appa Rao, when he asked her to "take care of the children", a visibly grief-stricken Rachamma recounted it to be her husband's last words.

Besides their grief, the victims' kin are demanding accountability and long-term support.

> Take care of your brother. Take care of your mother. Continue your studies. Don't fight with anyone. Stay united
>
> **K. PAIDIRAJU**
> Victim

"We need immediate government intervention and livelihood support. Fair compensation alone is not enough. We need security for our future," several family members said outside the KGH mortuary while awaiting the release of the bodies.

## The anatomy of an inferno

To understand the magnitude of the disaster, one must know the scale of the operation inside SMS-1. At around 4.15 p.m. on June 8, a massive industrial ladle, identified as Ladle No. 19, was suspended from an overhead crane. It contained approximately 150 tonnes of molten steel heated to nearly 1,500°C.

The molten metal had been processed through converters and was being positioned above the casting machine for transfer into a tundish before entering the continuous casting process. Workers stationed below were carrying out routine preparations for the opening of the ladle's mechanical slide gate.

Then, without warning, disaster struck. According to preliminary findings compiled by the Chief Inspector of Factories, gases trapped inside the molten steel may have caused a sudden pressure build-up. Before the slide gate could be opened, an explosion ripped through the vessel.

Ravi, a supervising technician working nearby, vividly recalls the horrifying moment. "I heard a sound like a supersonic bomb blast. Within seconds, a huge ball of fire shot up nearly 80 feet to the ceiling. Overhead Crane-2 caught fire almost instantly. The molten steel did not simply spill. It exploded outward like pressurised foam, raining down like volcanic lava over a vast area. We ran for our lives, but those directly underneath had no chance," he said.

The molten steel, glowing white-hot at temperatures approaching 1,600°C, instantly engulfed the workers below. Several were killed on the spot, while others suffered catastrophic burns.

## Political reverberations

The tragedy quickly acquired political dimensions. As RINL is a Navratna Central Public Sector Enterprise, the accident triggered a national debate on industrial safety, management accountability and privatisation. Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed grief over the incident and announced an ex gratia payment of ₹2 lakh from the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund for the families of the deceased and ₹50,000 for those injured.

Union Minister for Steel and Heavy Industries H.D. Kumaraswamy arrived in Visakhapatnam shortly after midnight on June 9. Accompanied by Union Civil Aviation Minister and Srikakulam MP, Kinjarapu Rammohan Naidu, he visited the injured workers undergoing treatment at various hospitals and reviewed the situation. Kumaraswamy announced a relief package of ₹25 lakh for the family of each deceased worker, along with a permanent job in RINL for an eligible family member. For the injured, compensation of ₹10 lakh each was announced, while the company committed to bearing the full cost of medical treatment and rehabilitation.

> The molten steel did not simply spill. It exploded outward like pressurised foam, raining down like volcanic lava over a vast area. We ran away, but those underneath had no chance
>
> **RAVI**
> Supervising technician

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu closely monitored the situation from Amaravati and directed officials to ensure speedy rescue and relief operations. State IT and HRD Minister Nara Lokesh visited the accident site and met the bereaved families. "We are not merely providing financial assistance and moving on. After the mourning period is over, we will invite the affected families to Amaravati and discuss long-term support measures, including education for their children and their overall welfare," he said.

Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan also raised questions regarding industrial safety protocols, pointing to reports of technical issues in a nearby unit a day before the accident.

Meanwhile, YSRCP president and former Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy demanded a transparent and independent investigation into the incident, alleging that safety standards may have suffered due to the Plant's financial difficulties.

## The disinvestment debate

Beyond the immediate tragedy lies a larger and more contentious issue. For several years, workers and trade unions have been protesting against the proposed 100% disinvestment of RINL by the Union government.

Many employees believe that the Plant's financial difficulties have directly affected safety standards. Trade union leaders, including D. Adinarayana, J. Ayodhya Ramu and Mantri Rajasekhar, argue that the company has been struggling under severe financial pressure, resulting in reduced operational capacity and a shortage of funds for maintenance and infrastructure upgrades. "When a large steel plant is starved of resources, the first casualties are preventive maintenance, safety audits and equipment replacement," Adinarayana said.

Ayodhya Ramu pointed to increasing dependence on contract labour in specialised operations. "There is a severe shortage of regular employees. Many critical functions are now being handled by contract workers who may not have the same level of training and experience. This creates additional risks in a highly hazardous environment," Ramu said.

However, Minister Nara Lokesh rejected attempts to link the accident directly to privatisation. He noted that the Central government had recently extended substantial financial support to RINL to stabilise operations and address debt-related concerns.

Despite such assurances, workers remain skeptical. Many believe that unless the Plant secures captive iron ore mines and achieves greater financial stability, it will continue facing operational and safety challenges.

## Seeking accountability

To determine the exact cause of the explosion, the Ministry of Steel has constituted a three-member independent inquiry committee headed by the Director-in-Charge of SAIL's Bokaro Steel Plant.

The committee is expected to examine several critical issues. Why did the safety systems fail to detect possible gas accumulation inside the molten steel? Was the refractory lining of the ladle adequately monitored and maintained? Were there any operational pressures to accelerate production despite warning signs?

The answers to these questions will be crucial in determining accountability and preventing future tragedies.

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has also taken cognisance of the incident and sought a detailed report from the Andhra Pradesh government within two weeks. The NHRC has requested information on the condition of the injured workers, the compensation provided, and the measures being taken for the affected families.

## Regional pride and sacrifice

This is not the first time the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant has witnessed such tragedy.

Popularly known as "Vizag Steel", the Plant occupies a unique place in the socio-political history of Andhra Pradesh. It emerged from the historic "Visakha Ukku-Andhrula Hakku" movement of the 1960s, during which 32 protestors lost their lives in police firing while demanding a steel plant for the State.

For many people, therefore, the Plant is more than an industrial unit – it is a symbol of regional pride and sacrifice. Yet its history has also been scarred by repeated industrial accidents.

The darkest chapter occurred in June 2012, when an explosion in the oxygen control unit of SMS-2 claimed 19 lives, including senior officials and union leaders.

In the years that followed, minor gas leaks, pressure valve failures and other accidents periodically claimed lives and exposed vulnerabilities in safety systems.

In May 2022, an explosion at Blast Furnace 3 injured several workers and renewed concerns about safety standards. Trade unions argue that a common thread runs through these tragedies.

According to them, chronic staff shortages, delayed maintenance schedules and excessive dependence on contract labour have steadily weakened the Plant's safety culture.

"The problem is not a lack of engineering expertise. It is a gradual erosion of safety practices," said a senior trade union leader.

For the people of Visakhapatnam, the steel plant remains a symbol of sacrifice, pride and perseverance. But every industrial accident chips away at that legacy.

As investigations continue and families mourn their loved ones' deaths, one painful question lingers: how many more lives must be lost before industrial safety becomes non-negotiable?

Until that question is answered, the proud moniker of "Ukku Nagaram" (Steel City) will continue to carry the bitter taste of avoidable tragedy.

# A CM's promise and many doubts

The Chief Minister's recent assurance that the Kerala govt. will permit 'non-dangerous' vehicle modifications was warmly welcomed by automobile enthusiasts. However, when the MVD came up with a list of permitted modifications, there was disappointment all around. **M.P. Praveen** does a reality check on the legal and practical aspects of the proposal

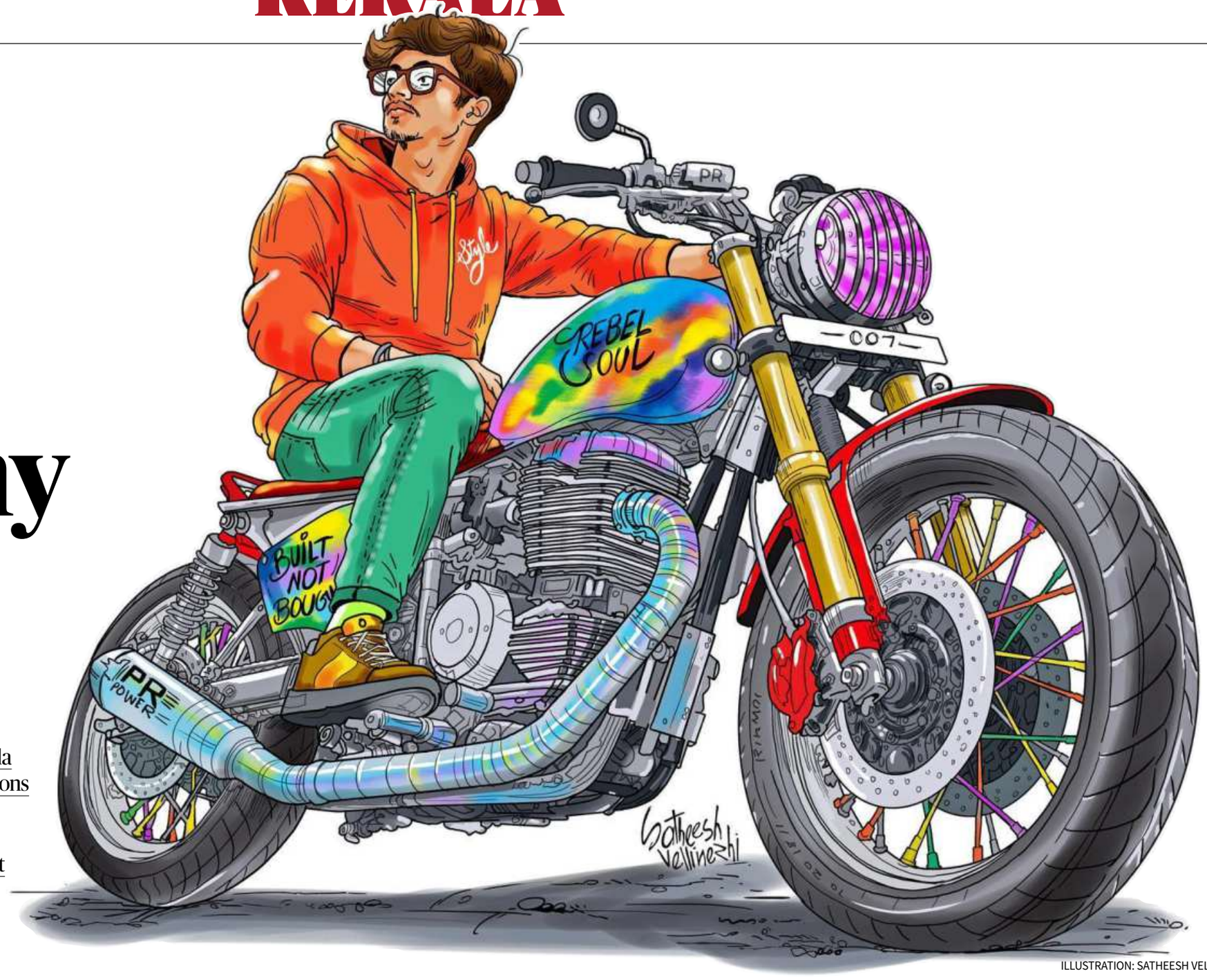


ILLUSTRATION: SATHEESH VELLINEZHI

Barring Gen Z, not many in Kerala had heard of the term 'pookie' until May 14.

By nightfall, though, social media was awash with memes and hashtags, celebrating V.D. Satheesan's 'pookie face,' a playful grin, at his first press conference as Chief Minister-designate. A social media term till then only popular with Gen Z to express love and adoration, became the talking point across the State, cutting across all age groups.

Satheesan broke into his now-viral "pookie" face – as if to say it would be taken care of – in response to a YouTuber's poser on whether he would honour his promise on vehicle modifications. In the run-up to the recent Assembly election, his assurance that modifications not compromising safety would be permitted if the United Democratic Front (UDF) came to power was an instant hit with automobile enthusiasts. "If promised, it will be delivered. That is what we are here for; to fulfil promises," he said, further reinforcing his commitment.

## Enter the memes

However, nearly three weeks later, on June 4, another wave of memes swept across social media, this time mocking a list of 18 vehicle modifications published by the Motor Vehicle Department (MVD) that could be carried out without prior permission.

The list includes hardly any modifications but accessories already in widespread use – featured seat covers, floor mats and steering wheel covers. Then there were the chrome garnishes, door visors, mud flaps, non-obscene body stickers and ambient interior lighting. Dashcams, reverse cameras, parking sensors, GPS trackers, Android infotainment systems, additional speakers, tyre pressure monitoring systems, tow hooks (provided they did not exceed the overall dimensions of the vehicle), roof carriers for personal luggage within prescribed size limits, and sun films on side windows with a minimum visibility of 50% completed the list drawn up by the department, for the consideration of the State government.

Gen Z and automobile enthusiasts were obviously not impressed. "I didn't know that I was already driving around a modified car," read a sarcastic Facebook post by Aneesh Panthalani, State president of Progressive Techies, a collective of IT professionals.

"It was a just a promise to impress the youth during the election campaign and is unlikely to be met. The MVD's list of permissible alterations has proved it," he says.

## Centre's approval mandatory

However, the MVD officials clarify that it was not a proposal for fresh permissible alterations, as had been widely perceived. With discussions on vehicle modifications already in circulation, the department had merely codified existing permissible practices as part of laying the groundwork, explains State Transport Commissioner C.H. Nagaraju. He did, however, acknowledge that any changes to the Central Motor Vehicle Rules (CMVR) require the Centre's approval and must be incorporated at the manufacturing stage itself.

For instance, about a decade ago the Centre made crash guards mandatory for heavy vehicles. But these were not to be fitted at random; manufacturers themselves had to integrate them into that category of vehicles and obtain a Type Approval Certificate from government-accredited testing agencies such as the Automotive Research Association of India and the International Centre for Automotive Technology. The same principle applies to every vehicle component, which must be designed in compliance with safety parameters. Every major accident is studied from three perspectives – driver, environment, and vehicle behaviour – based on which safety features are continually added to vehicles, he notes.

> The promise was not merely populist but also deceptive, as it conceals the legal impediments faced by a State govt. in a matter governed by a Central statute
>
> **KALEESWARAM RAJ**
> lawyer

"Only Parliament has the legislative authority to amend the Central Motor Vehicle Act (CMVA) and Rules. No State government can alter it. The promise was not merely populist but also deceptive, as it conceals the legal impediments faced by a State government in a matter governed by a Central statute. Even insurance companies can object to accident claims involving modified vehicles, citing that such modifications violate standard norms," observes lawyer Kaleeswaram Raj.

## Minister stays non-committal

Transport Minister C.P. John has remained non-committal to the media on the promised modifications. While the idea was to permit non-dangerous alterations for a fee, the Minister noted that no discussion had taken place at the ministerial level.

His predecessor, K. B. Ganesh Kumar, however, had ridiculed the promise when it was first made. Neither Satheesan nor his leader Rahul Gandhi could allow vehicle alterations by relaxing the Central law, he had mocked.

"If Kerala is to legalise modifications for motor sports and 4×4 vehicles, the emphasis should be on permitting alterations that enhance safety, durability, recovery capability, and off-road functionality without creating risks for other road users. Such modifications are permitted outside India," suggests Sam Kurian Kalarikkal, a Kottayam-based automobile enthusiast.

"Motor sports ought to be promoted as a diversion for the youth from drugs. Instead, the MVD even slaps fines on modified vehicles transported on flatbeds (open trucks) to dedicated tracks on private properties for off-road events that pose no public safety challenges. These vehicles also prove invaluable in accessing difficult terrains during calamities such as floods," says Sam, who founded one of the first online communities of off-road users in south India and is engaged in restoring vintage cars.

## Sky is the limit for modifications

For connoisseurs with deep pockets, the sky seems the limit when it comes to modifications. Installation of high-beam lamps, excessive suspension lifts that raise ground clearance, oversized wheels protruding beyond the vehicle body, winches (heavy-duty mechanical pulling devices attached to the front or rear bumper), snorkels (external air intake pipes extending over the vehicle roof), and loud or modified exhaust systems are among the alterations routinely intercepted during enforcement drives in the State. There are even dedicated firms catering to such modifications, alongside specialists who focus exclusively on select alterations. One sought-after modifier, for instance, specialises in exhaust systems crafted entirely by hand. He attends to only one vehicle at a time, with services available strictly by appointment rather than on a drive-in basis. Recently, he modified the exhaust of a hatchback for ₹70,000. "What I do are classy modifications of the entire exhaust system, unlike some others who merely tinker with the muffler, use a single component of the exhaust, to produce loud, stuttering noise that brings disrepute to people like me," says the youngster, who runs his firm in Kochi city limits, but declines to be named for fear of being targeted by enforcement officials.

## Costly accessories

Sree Shankar, an off-roading buff, vouches that Kerala is known for the most tasteful vehicle modifications, unlike the loud and garish makeovers seen in other States. Accessories used in such modifications run into lakhs depending on whether they are imported or not.

"There are even headlamps priced between ₹45,000 and ₹1.25 lakh. Customers pay for these accessories only to have the MVD fine them for unauthorised modifications and order restoration to the original condition. Why not ban the sale of such accessories altogether? Original spare parts of old vehicles will no longer be available, leaving users with no option but to customise them," he laments.

Accessories for modifications are sourced by dealers, often through imports, entirely at the owners' risk. The government levies taxes on these accessories at different levels, and the tax at the retail point was reduced from the earlier high of 28% to 18% during the recent Goods and Services Tax revision.

"For the government to profit from taxation and then penalise customers for it is unfair. We supply legally permissible accessories. It is up to the customer to decide on how they use them. To put it simply, accessory sales are a bit like cigarette sales. While the sale of cigarettes is legal, it is up to customers not to invite penalties by smoking in public," observes Mohammed Shafi, State secretary of the Car Accessories Dealers and Distributors Federation.

Organisations working in the field of road safety and sustainable mobility, however, remain unimpressed by the very idea of permitting vehicle modifications – dangerous or otherwise.

## The opposite angle

"We are not at all in agreement with the proposal, which we have been discussing internally. At some point, such modifications may lead to far bigger problems, including law-and-order issues, as it would not be easy for enforcement agencies to identify and track down such modified vehicles. We will certainly take up the matter with the State government authorities in due course," says Deepanshu Gupta, co-founder of the more-than-a-decade-old Indian Road Safety Council, one of the prominent youth-driven non-profit organisations working on road safety and accident mitigation.

> We do not agree with the proposal. At some point, modifications may lead to far bigger problems, including law-and-order issues, as it will not be easy for enforcement agencies to track down such modified vehicles.
>
> **DEEPANSHU GUPTA**
> Co-founder, Indian Road Safety Council

Road safety experts feel that modifications shall be permitted on a case-by-case basis verifying whether it has safety implications for the driver and other road users. "Tinkering with the electric side for mounting a heavy-duty music system could make the vehicle vulnerable to fire accidents. Similarly, modifications disrupting the structural stability of the vehicles cleared by an authorised testing agency at the time of manufacturing could not be allowed either. Safety should be sacrosanct and should not be compromised," says G. Adarshkumar, a road safety expert and director of the Road Safety Institute, SCMS in Kalamassery.

Till now, there have been no policy-level interventions by the State government to implement the promise of permitting vehicle modifications. Since the issue lies far down the priority list, it appears unlikely that any action will be forthcoming soon.

For the moment, the Chief Minister's now-famous "pookie" face is all that motor enthusiasts have to hold on to.

**Party mode:** Tourists travel on a bus with enhanced interior lighting. S.K. MOHAN