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EL NINO EFFECT

Govt. flags 111 districts as 'primary concern'

BUSINESS » PAGE 12

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Ronaldo is first man to score in six World Cups

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END OF RS TERM

George Kurian resigns as Union Minister

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DATA POINT

Why power utilities in T.N. are in debt

Successive governments didn't hike user charges

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SECOND SET

President Murmu gives away Padma awards

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INSIDE



Iranians reject UN inspection at key nuclear sites

TEHRAN
Iran said on Tuesday the UN's nuclear watchdog will not be able to inspect nuclear sites bombed by the U.S. and Israel last year, as the first round of talks to end the war wrapped up in Switzerland. » PAGE 14

Congress alleges 'scam' involving M.P. CM's family

BHOPAL
The Congress on Tuesday demanded a high-level probe into the alleged land scam by Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav's family members after a report claimed that they purchased lands on which infrastructure projects were later announced. » PAGE 5

Farmers' group flags ration risk in West Bengal

NEW DELHI
The Supreme Court on Tuesday said petitioners must move the Calcutta High Court with a plea that a West Bengal government order on June 4 deprived lakhs purged from the voters' list after the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) access to subsidised ration and nutrition. » PAGE 4

CUET-UG results out: one student tops in 4 subjects

NEW DELHI
The National Testing Agency (NTA) declared the results of the Common University Entrance Test-Undergraduate (CUET-UG) on Tuesday. One candidate secured a 100 percentile score in four out of five opted subjects. » PAGE 6

Kerala requires spending reform, says CAG report

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM
Kerala's economy registered a growth of 9.97% in 2024-25, but this development did not result in concomitant growth in tax collection, a report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) on State Finances tabled in the Kerala Assembly on Tuesday said. » PAGE 3

8 die of poisoning in Chhattisgarh, accused arrested

RAIPUR
A 46-year-old man has been arrested in Chhattisgarh's Balodabazar-Bhatapara district for allegedly carrying out a series of poisonings that left eight people dead and one person ill between February and June this year, the police said on Tuesday. » PAGE 2

Centre tightens norms for foreign donations

NGOs must stick to the activities specified by Centre in their category and geographical area

NGOs must declare everything they published: books, magazines, and articles in newspapers

Existing registrations must comply within the next year; a minimum fine of ₹1 lakh will apply

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) wanting to access foreign funds must now stick to a list of activities specified by the Centre, according to the latest amendment to the Rules of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), 2010, notified on Monday.

While NGOs seeking foreign funds are required to register under one of the five permitted categories, namely social, economic, educational, cultural, and religious, this is the first time separate activity lists have been laid out for those in each category.

NGOs must now disclose their activities, the geographical scope of their programmes, their websites, social media accounts, and publications. They must pay separate fees for each category and State or Union Territory they operate in, as opposed to the previous sin-

gle fee for FCRA registrants.

Any new registration must follow the new norms and existing registrations must comply with the changes within the next year. Any violations will be penalised with a minimum fine of ₹1 lakh, according to another order from the Union Home Ministry. The Ministry regulates all foreign donations through the FCRA.

Earlier amendments of the Rules only required NGOs to give an undertaking that their acceptance of foreign funds is not likely to affect the sovereignty and integrity of India or impact friendly relations with foreign states or disrupt communal harmony.

Key functionaries
The amended Rules also broaden the definition of an NGO's "key functionary" beyond office-bearers and directors to include trustees, partners, the Kar-ta or head of a Hindu Undivided Family, governing body members, and

Funding check

Under the fresh changes to Rules of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, all NGOs are required to disclose specific activities and geographical scope of their programmes to receive contributions under 5 permitted categories:



EDUCATIONAL

- Schools, colleges, and libraries
- Scholarships
- Research institutions and think tanks
- Civic-awareness and constitutional-rights programmes

ECONOMIC

- Livelihood generation
- Skill development
- Agricultural sectors
- Entrepreneurship and micro-enterprises
- Financial and digital inclusion

RELIGIOUS

- Places of worship
- Religious education
- Pilgrim services
- Meditation programmes
- Preservation of religious traditions

SOCIAL

- Public health
- Rehabilitation
- Sanitation and nutrition
- Disaster relief

CULTURAL

- Preservation of Indian arts and languages
- Museums, archives, and cultural festivals
- Heritage conservation

anyone else controlling or managing the organisation.

Associations having foreign nationals (other than persons of Indian origin) as key functionaries will ordinarily not be considered eligible for registration or prior permission, unless specifically permitted by the Centre, according to the new Rules. NGOs must

also declare whether their association or any of their key functionaries brought out any publication during the year, including books, magazines, and newspaper articles.

A senior government official said that the amendments were effected to bring uniformity in Foreign Contribution forms (F-C) and to avoid

Drenched dash



Monsoon scramble: People run for cover during rain in New Delhi on Tuesday. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

Vijay govt. moves SC on row over lighting of lamp on hill

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Tamil Nadu government headed by Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay has moved the Supreme Court challenging orders passed by the Madras High Court on lighting of a lamp at a stone pillar near a dargah on the Thirupparankundram hill in Madurai district.

The High Court's Division Bench had, in January, confirmed a previous Single Judge Bench order directing the Subramaniya Swamy Temple management to light the *Karthigai Deepam* at the *deepathoon* (stone pillar) atop the hill, besides the usual places.

The previous DMK go-



C. Joseph Vijay

vernment had been unable to convince the court that the lighting of the lamp may stir a hornets' nest and lead to public disturbances. The Single Judge had dismissed the apprehensions of the State as an "imaginary ghost".

"It is ridiculous and hard to believe the fear of the mighty State that by al-

lowing representatives of the Devasthanam [temple management] to light the lamp at the stone pillar near the top of the hill located within its territory of Devasthanam land, on a particular day in a year, will cause disturbance to public peace. Of course, it may happen only if such a disturbance is sponsored by the State itself," the High Court Single Judge Bench had observed.

It had reasoned that allowing a few persons to light the lamp and permitting worship was not an unmanageable task, the High Court had noted.

The State is being represented by advocate B. Karunakaran in the Supreme Court.

Wang Yi calls for resuming dialogue mechanism

Ananth Krishnan
BEIJING

China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi, in talks with National Security Adviser Ajit Doval in New Delhi on Monday, called for both sides "to accelerate the resumption of dialogue mechanisms and promote exchanges" in trade, finance, and other fields, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said in a statement on Tuesday.

He also called for the two sides "to respect each other's core interests and properly handle sensitive issues".

FULL STORY ON
» PAGE 4

UN maritime body secures safety pledges to evacuate ships stuck in Persian Gulf

M. Kalyanaraman
CHENNAI

International Maritime Organisation (IMO) Secretary-General Arsenio Dominguez has announced a plan to evacuate all the ships – and the 11,000 seafarers on them – stranded in the Persian Gulf due to the war in West Asia.

"This large-scale operation will be carried out in close cooperation with Iran, Oman, and all other coastal states in the region, the United States, and the maritime industry," he said.

Although his statement does not explicitly refer to Iran's plan, the plan put out by the Sultanate of Oman does mention both routes – one along the Omani coast and the other along the Iranian coast – that ships are currently using to transit the Strait of Hormuz.

The plan also asks vessels to contact the respective "coastal state" of their selected route to confirm transit.

Mr. Dominguez added: "We have secured the necessary safety guarantees and have thoroughly verified the conditions for safe navigation to support these operations."

The IMO, a UN agency, referred to a letter written by Oman's Ministry of Defence to Pakistan's National Hydrographic Office that gives a detailed plan for the evacuation.

Pakistan, along with Qatar, has been a mediator in the negotiations between Iran and the U.S.



The plan announced by IMO involves two routes that ships are currently using to transit the Strait of Hormuz. REUTERS

The letter says that the Sultanate of Oman has worked with the IMO to provide all vessels with the option of a temporary maritime corridor as per listed coordinates. To reduce risks and ensure safe navigation, the IMO has developed a phased approach based on groups of vessels.

Threat of mines
The letter says that the traditional traffic separation scheme is unsafe in a reference to mines, and two routes, one south and another north of it, shall be used for transit. Vessels will be contacted individually and advised of their allocated transit day by the parties coordinated by the IMO.

These two routes can handle 20-30 ships a day while the traditional route at the centre of the strait used to see some 130 ships transiting every day before the war.

Hundreds of ships are still stranded in west of Strait of Hormuz.

There will be a designated waiting area within international waters where ships will go. From there, the vessels will contact "the relevant coastal state", in a reference to Iran for the northern route.

The letter adds: "Each shipowner and master remains responsible for conducting an independent risk assessment prior to voyage."

The Automatic Identification System of the vessel shall stay on, the letter adds.

The letter gives the coordinates of the Omani route that ships should take.

A few days ago, Iran had announced that vessels that submit their passing requests to the Persian Gulf Strait Authority that it set up during the ceasefire "will be cleared for passage promptly."

'MOU HELPED ENERGY FLOW'
» PAGE 6

UNCERTAINTY REMAINS
» PAGE 15

INBRIEF



Court allows withdrawal of 2018 case against Hardik Patel

A Surat court on Tuesday allowed withdrawal of a case of unlawful assembly filed against Gujarat BJP MLA Hardik Patel and four others that was registered in 2018 during the Patidar reservation agitation spearheaded by the former activist. The case related to violation of conditions under which a pro-reservation rally in Surat was permitted by law enforcement authorities. Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate Jitendra Singh accepted the State government's application to withdraw the case against Mr. Patel and others, the ruling party MLA's lawyer Yashwant Vala said.

BMC demolishes 17 illegal structures in Andheri

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) on Tuesday demolished 17 unauthorised commercial structures in Mumbai's suburban Andheri as part of its crackdown on illegal encroachments. "Some establishments in Aram Nagar, J. P. Marg and Versova area of Andheri (West) had used the mandatory open space as a service area and erected unauthorised structures. Encroachments on footpaths too were removed," said a civic official. According to the BMC, the aim of the drive is to improve pedestrian movement, ease traffic congestion, and expand public infrastructure.

Mamata loyalists, rebels submit lists of Trinamool office-bearers to the EC

Group owing allegiance to former CM sends fresh list to EC in Delhi; faction led by Ritabrata Banerjee does the same, routing it through the office of Chief Electoral Officer, West Bengal

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

Amid the ongoing rebellion in the party, the Trinamool Congress led by party chairperson and former Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has sent a fresh list of its office-bearers and national working committee members to the Election Commission (EC).

The rebel faction of Trinamool, which had appointed a new party chairperson on Monday, also submitted their list of office-bearers to the EC through the office of Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), West Bengal on Tuesday.

According to the list of office-bearers submitted on Monday by Mamata loyalists, she remains the chairperson of the party while Subrata Bakshi is the vice-president and Abhishek Banerjee the national general secretary and party leader in the Lok Sabha. The list also names Rajya Sabha MP Derek O'Brien



Mamata Banerjee



Ritabrata Banerjee

and Dola Sen as joint secretaries and Subhasish Chakraborty as treasurer. The national working committee includes Ms. Banerjee, Mr. Bakshi, Mr. Banerjee, Mr. O'Brien, Ms. Sen and Mr. Chakraborty. Chandrima Bhattacharya has been listed as a member of the national working committee and as West Bengal TMC president, while Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay has been listed as a member and leader of the Legislature Party.

The development comes a day after the rebel faction led by Ritabrata Banerjee held a special ses-

sion in Kolkata and announced a parallel organisational structure. Former Minister Aroop Roy was appointed as the new chairperson of the party and MLAs from the Trinamool rebel camp - Mr. Ritabrata Banerjee, Mr. Sandipan Saha and Jawed Khan - have been declared as the general secretaries.

A day after Mamata loyalists wrote to the EC, Mr. Ritabrata Banerjee, the Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the Assembly, reached the office of CEO, West Bengal. He said following the national working committee meeting

where the party chairperson was election, it was necessary to inform the EC. "The Election Commission must be apprised whenever such events take place. It was a routine process; we had already apprised them in Delhi, and today we came here to do the same," the LoP said.

Showcause notice Meanwhile, sources close to the Mamata camp said the party has issued show-cause notice to the leaders of the rebel camp who have been appointed as office-bearers replacing Ms. Banerjee and Mr. Abhishek Banerjee.

Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari also spoke about the rebellion in the Trinamool Congress and said the party will never recover from the split.

On June 3, 58 MLAs of the Trinamool supported Mr. Ritabrata Banerjee in his claim as the LoP; the number of MLAs in his support has now increased to 65, he claims.

Chhattisgarh man held for poisonings that left eight dead

Shubhomoy Sikdar
RAIPUR

A 46-year-old man has been arrested in Chhattisgarh's Balodabazar-Bhatapara district for allegedly carrying out a series of poisonings that left eight people dead and one person ill between February and June this year, the police said on Tuesday.

"He has admitted to killing the victims due to old grudges, petty complaints, abuses, character doubts and witchcraft," Balodabazar Superintendent of Police O.P. Sharma said.

Start of streak

The accused, Ram Sahay Jaiswal, a resident of Kharve village, allegedly served poison-laced alcoholic drinks to all the victims, who were men aged 38 and above.

According to a statement issued by the police, the first of the murders took place on February 6, when Badri, who allegedly harassed the accused by frequently abusing him and demanding liquor, died after consuming liquor laced with borax (poison), allegedly served by Mr. Jaiswal. The police said the accused's motives va-

ried across incidents, including a ₹50,000 debt allegedly owed to the victim Chaituram, and suspicion that Chhatturam, another victim, had ill intentions towards his wife.

Suspicious deaths

The case came to light after villagers of Kharve submitted an application to the Kasdol Sub-Divisional Officer on June 6 regarding the deaths of eight people in the locality between February and May 14, expressing suspicion over the role of Mr. Jaiswal, a fellow villager. Following this, an investigation was launched. "The bodies of seven persons were exhumed and sent to Mekahara Hospital in Raipur for post-mortem. A team of doctors conducted the post-mortem at the Medicolegal Institute in Raipur. Among the deceased, the body of Budhram Jaiswal had already been cremated by his family," the statement added.

Mr. Sharma said villagers suspected Mr. Jaiswal's involvement because one survivor, Kartik, told them that the accused had served him a poison-laced drink on April 14, after which he fell ill.

Himachal CM flags concern over VB-G RAM G, warns of impact on 12 lakh workers

The Hindu Bureau
CHANDIGARH

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu on Tuesday said that around 12 lakh workers in the State could face severe hardship following the Central government's decision to replace the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) with the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission Gramin (VB-G RAM G) scheme.

According to a statement issued by the Chief Minister in Shimla, the Centre has directed all States to notify the new scheme by June 30 and has made it clear that only those States that do so will receive budget allocations.

Mr. Sukhu said the wage rate under the proposed provisions is currently



Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu

₹247 per day in non-tribal areas and ₹309 per day in Himachal's tribal areas. He said these rates are inadequate, given the State's geographical conditions, inflation, and cost of living, and directed officials to seek a reasonable increase from the Centre.

"Predetermined limits should not restrict employment in rural areas, and work should be provided according to need," he said.

In 2024-25, approximately 395 lakh person-

days of employment were generated under MGNREGA in Himachal Pradesh. However, for 2025-26, the Centre has allocated only 250 lakh person-days to the State, Mr. Sukhu said.

He said that, under the proposed provisions of the VB-G RAM G, the number of person-days could be reduced further, which may adversely impact rural employment and the income of lakhs of workers. "The issue will be raised with the Centre," he added.

Mr. Sukhu said a high-level committee had been directed to examine all aspects of the scheme and submit recommendations in the interest of Himachal Pradesh by June 29. "The State government will take a final decision on implementation of the VB-G RAM G scheme based on the committee's report," he added.

Lohagad Fort death: fiancée, friend held for pushing man into gorge

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

Two persons, including the fiancée, have been arrested for the murder of 26-year-old Ketan Agarwal at Lohagad Fort, the Pune police said on Tuesday.

On June 18, Ketan Agarwal, the son of a construction businessman based in Pimpri-Chinchwad, and his fiancée, Siya Goyal - whom he got engaged to in February and was due to get married in November - visited the fort to celebrate her birthday.

However, at 10.30 a.m. she informed authorities that Ketan slipped while taking photographs and fell into a valley. His body was recovered after a three-hour operation.

Pune (Rural) SSP Sandeep Singh Gill said that following an investigation, initiated after concerns raised by the victim's fami-

Siya Goyal claimed that Ketan Agarwal, to whom she was due to get married, had slipped while taking photographs

ly, it emerged that Ketan's fall was not an accident but a murder plot allegedly executed by his fiancée and her associate, identified as Chetan Chaudhary.

"Siya and Chetan knew each other for about a year. They used to work together," said the officer.

According to the police, Ms. Goyal was opposed to the marriage and allegedly planned Ketan's murder with her associate.

"Witness accounts and technical evidence indicate that Siya and Chetan conspired to kill Ketan. It is believed that the two pushed him into the gorge," said Mr. Gill.

'My govt. is clear on political opposition to, administrative cooperation with the Centre'

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay on Tuesday told the Assembly that his government stands firm in its policy of cooperative federalism and State autonomy.

He also reaffirmed his party remains ideologically opposed to the ruling party at the Centre, while making it clear that it would not oppose the Centre blindly. Mr. Vijay said his government was clear about the distinction between politics and maintaining an administrative relationship with the Centre.

"There will be no compromise on the State's rights or the TVK's political principles. We remain steadfast in this position, and there will be no deviation from it. Those who at-



T.N. CM C. Joseph Vijay

tempt to divert attention will fail," he said while speaking on the Motion of Thanks to the Governor's Address. "People, particularly minorities and our alliance partners, need not have any doubts about us. We are not anyone's team. We are solely the people's team. We are a secular and social justice-oriented movement," he said.

He said there was no second thought in the government that law and order should be maintained

and crimes against women should not be tolerated. "We are taking measures to prevent crimes against women and have launched the Singappen Special Force. Similarly, steps are being taken to curb the menace of narcotic drugs. These issues did not begin on May 10, 2026 [when he assumed office as Chief Minister]. They have existed for a long time and were neglected," he said.

'Spreading slander'

He also alleged that when Opposition parties raised law and order issues in Tamil Nadu, it appeared they did so not out of genuine concern but merely to spread slander. He questioned why there was no permanent Director-General of Police (Law and Order) for nearly 10 months during the previous government.

Present scheme for providing water to all, Bombay HC tells govt.

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

The Bombay High Court on Tuesday pulled up the Maharashtra government over lack of access to potable drinking water in the tribal belt of Melghat and remarked that even after 75 years of independence, people have to approach the court for drinking water.

A Division Bench of Justice Ajay Gadkari and Justice Kamal Khata directed the State government to present a scheme for providing drinking water to all citizens of the State. The court was hearing petitions over the issue of deaths of infants, pregnant and lactating mothers due to malnutrition in Melghat.

Senior Advocate Jugal-kishore Gilda, appearing for the petitioners, stated that there has been no water supply in Melghat for eight days. The Bench responded that the State must provide potable drinking water to every citizen, regardless of whether they live in Melghat or other regions.

"Tell us how you will provide drinking water to the last person of any village, provided you consider that person as a citizen of India. Give us a scheme tomorrow [Wednesday] itself by which each and every citizen will get water. They are not asking for subsidy. They are here for their fundamental rights," said Justice Gadkari.

Businessman, 13 others held for birthday bash on newly opened Brahmaputra bridge

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

Amid debates on Indian tourists showboating or creating nuisance in public spaces abroad, a Guwahati-based businessman was arrested on Tuesday for celebrating his wife's birthday on the newest bridge across the Brahmaputra River.

Thirteen others, including women, were also arrested for participating in the birthday bash. Four high-end vehicles used for the celebration were seized.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Traffic) Jayanta Sarathi Bora said the police learnt about the celebration from a video on social media on Monday evening. "While verifying the video, we identified



Businessman Gautam Baruah with his wife during the birthday celebration on the Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

the owner of one of the vehicles featured and called him. He told us that he celebrated his wife's 42nd birthday on the Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu on the intervening night of June 21 and 22," the officer said.

The Bharalumukh police station arrested the businessman, identified as

Gautam Baruah, along with others. They were booked under Sections 285 (danger or obstruction in public way or line of navigation), 270 (public nuisance), and 125 (act endangering life or personal safety of others) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

The police did not accept Mr. Baruah's claim

that the celebration, involving firecrackers and a red carpet laid out on one of the lanes on the bridge, lasted only five minutes.

Lack of civic sense

"People are expected to exercise their civic sense in public spaces. Celebrating a birthday on a strategic road or bridge for whatever the duration is unacceptable," Mr. Bora said.

Soon after the video went viral on social media, netizens said the event was a misuse of public infrastructure for a private function, a violation of traffic rules, and a threat to road safety.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had inaugurated the Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu, one of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's pet projects, in February.

Uttarakhand gurdwara stand-off resolved as Nihangs leave premises

Press Trust of India
DEHRADUN

The stand-off at the Nagarasu gurdwara in Uttarakhand's Rudraprayag has been resolved peacefully with a group of Nihang Sikhs who were holed up at the shrine since Saturday evening vacating the premises after talks with a delegation of sect members from Punjab, officials said on Tuesday.

"The gurdwara management and the police administration worked together to resolve the issue peacefully. All those involved have now left the premises, and normalcy has been restored," District Magistrate Vishal Mishra said.

Around half a dozen Ni-

hang Sikhs had stormed the gurdwara on the evening of June 20. They climbed onto the roof and blocked the entrance to the terrace while demanding the release of Nihang Sikhs arrested in connection with an incident that took place in Karnaprayag town of Uttarakhand on June 16.

According to officials, the dispute began when a group of Nihang Sikhs demanded accommodation for their upcoming demonstrations, which the gurdwara management could not fully provide due to limited capacity. The situation escalated following which the group moved upstairs to occupy the higher floors.

INBRIEF



Three killed as lorry ploughs into bus shelter in Kerala

A school student and two others were killed after a tipper lorry transporting sand collided with a motorcycle and crashed into a bus shelter in Kollam district of Kerala on Tuesday. Five were injured in the accident at Nileschwaram Junction in Kottarakara. As the lorry overturned, several waiting commuters got trapped in the debris. Preliminary police reports indicate that the truck was speeding and the driver lost control over the vehicle as it tried to overtake the motorcycle.

Three of family killed; search on for daughter and partner

A 55-year-old man, his wife, and their younger daughter were murdered, allegedly by their elder daughter and her partner at a flat at Seegehalli in east Bengaluru on Monday night. The accused, Shwetha, and her boyfriend Kenneth, were in a live-in relationship. Her parents are said to have opposed this, leading to frequent disputes. The police suspect that the couple stabbed them after an argument. Efforts are on to trace the accused.

A.P. Cabinet clears investment proposals worth ₹34,000 cr.

The Andhra Pradesh Cabinet, chaired by Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, on Tuesday approved a slew of key decisions aimed at accelerating investments and advancing the development of Amaravati as the State capital. The Cabinet gave its nod to investment proposals worth ₹34,000 crore that was earlier cleared by the State Investment Promotion Board (SIPB).

Two killed in industrial unit blast in A.P.'s Anakapalli

Harish Gilai
ANAKAPALLI

Two workers were killed in an explosion at a Dakshin Energy unit in Parawada Industrial Park in Anaka-palli district of Andhra Pradesh, on Tuesday.

The incident has occurred barely a fortnight after the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP) blast that left 10 workers dead, reigniting concerns over industrial safety and the protection of workers.

The victims were identified as B. Trinadh (24) of Jagannapeta in Atchutapuram mandal and V. Venkatesh (34) of Govada in Anakapalli.

According to the Parawada police, the incident occurred at around 5.30 a.m. The two workers who died were in the night shift.

Parawada Police Inspector L. Bhaskar Rao said firemen took around 90 minutes to put out the fire. Parawada Sub-Division DSP Mohan Rao said that the unit makes plastic pyrolysis oil from waste plastic.

Local MLA (Pendurthi) Panchakarla Ramesh Babu visited the site on Tuesday and voiced concern over the repeated industrial accidents despite regular safety reviews, assurances from industries, and constant monitoring by government departments.

Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) leader G. Sathanarayana too raised safety concerns and demanded that a compensation of ₹1 crore should be handed over to the victims' families.

Labour Minister Vasamsetti Subhash ordered an investigation into the cause of the explosion and said strict action would follow against anyone found negligent.

CAG stresses urgent need for spending reforms in Kerala

It says revenue receipts grew only 0.3% in 2024-25; it faults the practice of withdrawing funds from Treasury Savings Bank accounts; it calls for prudent management of salary and pension payments

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala's economy (gross State domestic product (GSDP) in nominal terms) registered a growth of 9.97% in 2024-25, but this growth in the economy did not result in concomitant growth in tax collection, a report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) on State Finances for the 2024-25 fiscal tabled in the Kerala Assembly on Tuesday said.

It noted that revenue receipts recorded a "negligible growth" of 0.30% in 2024-25 over 2023-24. "Revenue receipts as a percentage of the GSDP has registered a decadal low in



The Comptroller and Auditor General of India report on Kerala's finances was presented in the Assembly on Tuesday. FILE PHOTO

2024-25 during the period 2015-16 to 2024-25. The growth in the State's revenue receipts has been very discouraging after 2021-22. From 19.49% in 2021-22, it decelerated to 13.79% in 2022-23 and thereafter declined by (-) 6.21% in 2023-24," the report said.

Noting that the State's committed expenditure (salaries, pensions, and interest payments) of ₹98,563.59 crore accounted for approximately 79% of the revenue receipts in 2024-25, the CAG pointed to an "urgent need for expenditure reform" through

measures such as improved targeting and prudent management of salary and pension commitments to enhance fiscal flexibility.

Another report of the CAG, on State Revenues for the period ended March 31, 2024, also laid in the House on Tuesday, found fault with the Kerala government's practice of withdrawing funds parked in Treasury Savings Bank (TSB) accounts – public contributions made to the Chief Minister's Disaster Relief Fund (CMDRF) included – to the Consolidated Fund of the State. In the case of the CMDRF, ₹262.06 crore parked in Special TSB accounts were temporarily moved to the Consolidated Fund.

BJP probes cross-voting in Karnataka

Nistula Hebbar
NEW DELHI

Strong concerns were raised over lack of discipline in the rank and file of the Karnataka BJP, at a high-level meeting convened by party national president Nitin Nabin with party leaders from the State over cross-voting by its MLAs in the recent State Legislative Council polls.

Disciplinary action will be taken after a commit-

tee, headed by MLC C.T. Ravi with State vice-president N. Mahesh and MLA Mahesh Tenginakayi as members, submits its report. The panel has to submit its report by July 25.

Nabin disappointed

BJP Karnataka president B.Y. Vijayendra, Leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly R. Ashok, and BJP general secretary in charge of Karnataka Radha Mohan Das Agarwal were

present at the meeting.

According to sources present at the meeting, Mr. Nabin took an extremely dim view of the cross-voting even as party leaders explained that they had cautioned NDA ally Janata Dal (Secular) leader H.D. Kumaraswamy against fielding a seventh candidate in the polls. "Nitinji said that even if the extra candidate strategy of the JD(S) was faulty, how does that explain the cross-vot-

ing in the BJP's ranks?" said a source. The lone candidate fielded by the JD(S) lost the election. It is said that MLAs from both the BJP and the JD(S) cross-voted, leading to the win of the Congress candidate.

Some in the Karnataka BJP feel that Mr. Kumaraswamy made that move at the behest of an anti-Vijayendra faction in the State unit to expose the flaws in the latter's leadership of the State unit.

Manipur govt. may go soft on Arambai Tenggol members

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

The Manipur government may be lenient towards members of Arambai Tenggol, a radical group, while going hard at those who looted arms from police facilities soon after the ethnic conflict erupted in May 2023, State's Home Minister Govindas Konthoujam indicated on Tuesday.

Speaking on the sidelines of an event in Imphal, he said the government was trying to avoid arresting members of Arambai Tenggol, the outfit at the forefront of the ethnic conflict in the State, before the imposition of President's Rule in February 2025. He, however, asserted that there would be no let-up in the drive to recover illegally held arms and restore normality in Manipur.

Plea to surrender arms

More than 5,600 firearms, including INSAS and AK-series rifles, and 500,000 rounds of ammunition were looted from State armouries and police stations in the State in 2023. The groups accused of looting them included the Arambai Tenggol.

"Discussions have been held with the Director General of Police regarding the ongoing operations linked to the group. We have appealed to individuals and armed groups still holding such weapons to surrender them voluntarily so that



Govindas Konthoujam

further arrests can be avoided," Mr. Konthoujam said. De-weaponisation was necessary for lasting peace to return to Manipur, he said.

Continuing strife

Three major communities – Meitei, Naga, and Kuki-Zo, inhabit Manipur. The State has virtually been partitioned among these communities since the ethnic strife began in 2023.

Mr. Konthoujam appealed to the people of Imphal Valley to refrain from activities that could stoke unrest. His appeal followed protests by women across the valley, demanding the release of three Arambai Tenggol members arrested by the National Investigation Agency during the intervening night of June 19 and 20.

Members of Meira Paibi, an all-women civil society organisation, claimed that members of Arambai Tenggol undertook self-defence measures during a critical period when the government was unable to provide security to civilians.

Name, content of NCERT's Kannada book trigger row

Jayanth R.
BENGALURU

Amid the controversy over implementation of the three-language policy for Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) students, the title and content of the Class 6 R3 Kannada textbook implemented by National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) have turned contentious.

Educationists and writers have objected to the title of the textbook being 'Krishna', the inclusion of only *sattvic* foods as balanced diet, and the omission of non-vegetarian food.

As part of the implementation of National Education Policy (NEP-2020) and National Curriculum Framework for School

Educationists, writers object to textbook title 'Krishna', and omission of non-vegetarian food

Education (NCF-SE)-2023, the CBSE has taken steps to implement the three-language policy (R1, R2, R3) for Classes 6 to 10 from the 2026-27 academic year.

"It is shocking to see the R3 Kannada textbook for class 6 released by NCERT. It is dangerous to use books that are supposed to be designed for children's learning as a weapon for political and cultural oppression. As part of the imposition of Indian Knowledge Heritage of NEP-2020, the trend of infusing mythological virtues in education in NCERT

books is condemnable. Naming the textbook for class 6 as Krishna is an attempt to saffronise the textbooks," alleged Niranjanaradhya V.P., a development educationist.

In addition, vegetarian and non-vegetarian diets were mentioned as balanced diets in earlier textbooks. Now, it is alleged that only a vegetarian diet is emphasised in R3 textbooks for class 6.

"While talking about food in the Health is Wealth lesson, *sattvic* food is being discussed. There are crores of people in Karnataka who eat pork, fish, eggs, chicken, mutton. This is a technique to deliberately ignore non-vegetarian food. This is not education, it is cultural terrorism," Mr. Niranjanaradhya has alleged.

Parched river



Labourers mix concrete and sand on the exposed Krishna riverbed in Vijayawada, for routine maintenance work during the seasonal low-flow period. The Prakasam Barrage is in the background. K.V.S. GIRI

Why was no step taken to curb MSC Elsa 3 pollution, asks HC

The Hindu Bureau
KOCHI

Expressing its concern over the pollution caused by plastic nurdles and other hazardous cargo from MSC Elsa 3, which sank off the Alappuzha coast in May 2025, the Kerala High Court on Tuesday orally asked why the government agencies concerned had done little over the past year to implement containment measures.

There is lack of clarity regarding the environmental and safety risks posed by the vessel's wreck lying on the seabed, the court said, observing that reports submitted before the court do not match the claims made by the ship-



Plastic nurdles litter a beach in Thiruvananthapuram.

ping company. The court sought an action plan from the Centre to tackle the threat to the marine environment arising from the cargo in the over 600 containers the ship was carrying.

The HC had on June 16 directed the Additional

Solicitor General to obtain specific instructions from the Centre and the agencies concerned to place before the court a detailed status report stating the measures already undertaken, the steps proposed to be taken, the timelines, and the status of compliance with the concerns highlighted by the court.

The Centre submitted that a comprehensive action plan would be submitted within two weeks, after which the court posted the matter for next hearing on July 14. The court warned that plastic nurdles from the damaged containers could affect marine ecosystems, especially since fish might ingest the plastic, affecting seafood exports.

Vijayanagara-era inscriptions come to light in A.P.'s Seshachalam forest

A.D. Rangarajan
TIRUPATI

An expert team from the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has found three rare inscriptions dating to the 16th century in Sadasivakona, deep inside the Seshachalam forest in Tirupati district of Andhra Pradesh.

After an epigraphical survey carried out recently in the Nallamala Hills, the team focused its attention this time on Sadasivakona, a pristine and mostly under-explored forest stretch in Seshachalam range.

A team led by K. Munirathnam Reddy, Director (Epigraphy), ASI Mysuru, ventured deep into the for-



An ASI team taking an estampage of an inscription at Sadasivakona in Seshachalam forest range, Andhra Pradesh. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

est range and worked for three days to find the inscriptions.

The inscriptions contained text in Telugu, Tamil and Kannada, representing characters of the 16th century. The inscrip-

tions of the Sadasiva Devayaya era of Vijayanagara dynasty in 1554 were copied in the form of estampages for preservation and further study.

The main inscription records the construction of a

Siva temple and a monastery (mutt) at Papavinasa in Sadasivakona by King Sadasivaraya during his pilgrimage to the site. "It is thrilling to note that King Sadasivaraya personally visited this sacred spot to take a holy bath and grant a donation," Mr. Reddy said.

Though known to be India's first Siva temple, the 2nd-century BC shrine in Gudimallam remained overshadowed by other temples in its vicinity, which gained prominence over time. However, this latest inscription of the 16th century is a pointer to its past glory, when it was personally visited by the ruler of this region.

Centre is trying to dilute its promise, say Ladakh groups

Congress urges Centre not to rush into signing a trade agreement with the U.S.

 There is absolutely no need for India to be bamboozled into signing any trade pact which, as it stands now, is heavily against India's interests

JAIRAM RAMESH
Congress leader

"Such an agreement is not a deal but a steal by the U.S.," he said. "There is absolutely no need for India to be bamboozled into signing any trade agreement which, as it stands now, is heavily against India's interests," he said.

SIT submits initial report in Ram temple donation case

The Congress demanded the report to be made public and pushed for a White Paper on the issue with all records and bank statements.

BJP chief says Syama Prasad Mookerjee was a great nationalist

He said over 14 crore BJP workers were moving forward under the leadership of PM Modi, guided by the same nationalist ideology and commitment to the nation with which Dr. Mookerjee had founded the Jana Sangh in 1951.

INBRIEF



After a delay of 13 days, monsoon arrives in Mumbai

The southwest monsoon finally hit Mumbai on Tuesday, 13 days after its normal onset date. “The southwest monsoon has further advanced into remaining parts of central Arabian Sea, some more parts of Maharashtra including Mumbai, remaining parts of Telangana and Odisha, some more parts of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Bihar,” the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said in a release. The normal onset date of the monsoon in Mumbai is June 10. Notably, in 2023 the monsoon had arrived even later, on June 25, according to data. The IMD has forecast thunderstorms and rainfall in Konkan, Madhya Maharashtra, and Marathwada until June 26.

AAP MLA gets 7 years in jail for assault on forest officials

A sessions court on Tuesday sentenced Aam Aadmi Party MLA and tribal leader Chaitar Vasava, his wife, and seven others to seven years of imprisonment in connection with a 2023 case involving assault on forest officials and extortion. Additional Sessions Judge A.V. Hirpara convicted the accused for their role in an incident in Gujarat’s Dediapada town on October 30, 2023. Forest officials had removed crops cultivated illegally on government land, triggering a dispute, according to the prosecution. The officials were later called to Chaitar’s residence, where a heated altercation ensued.

India’s experience in diabetes care could guide other countries: expert

Ramya Kannan
CHENNAI

With four decades of diabetes work under its belt, India now has the ability to show other low- and middle-income countries how integrated, low-cost, and tech-enabled solutions can be deployed on the ground to launch effective interventions, according to an article by Chennai-based diabetologist V. Mohan, published in the leading journal *Diabetologia* on June 23.

Striking out for indigenous innovations over a copy-paste model from high income countries, he makes the case for local solutions, integrated diabetes care, and looking at the whole heterogeneity of diabetes.

Dr. Mohan begins with the idea that diabetes in South Asia is not the same as elsewhere. People in this region, he says, deve-



The article advocates local solutions and integrated diabetes care.

lop diabetes at a lower Body Mass Index (BMI), with more visceral fat and greater insulin resistance, indicating the need for region-specific screening and treatment strategies. An important component of these strategies are lifestyle, diet, and environmental factor, particularly the intake of highly refined carbohydrates and low levels of physical activity

among the population.

The “total diabetes care” model developed at his centre, the Dr. Mohan’s Diabetes Specialities Centre in Chennai, is no longer about just testing blood sugar, but looking at the total impact that diabetes has on the human body, and the range of metabolic disorders. There are lessons in this, Dr. Mohan argues, showing that an integrated approach to screening, treatment, education, lab work, eye, kidney, foot, and nutrition services has made care delivery more efficient. This reduces fragmentation of treatment and delays in delivering care.

One of the programme’s most valuable interventions for the region is the effort to overcome specialist shortages, by training physicians, diabetes educators, and technicians, using task shifting to make sure the care is extended

beyond the tertiary or secondary care settings.

Tech interventions

In the article, Dr. Mohan also recommends the deployment of technology to enable continuity of care, listing an electronic medical record platform, an AI chatbot, a patient app for appointments and results, telemedicine, particularly for ophthalmology, and a physician decision-support tool for classifying diabetes subtypes.

He explains that diabetes care is now moving away from a one-size-fits-all paradigm to a personalised approach based on precision medicine, appreciating that not all individuals with diabetes (or even with the same type of diabetes) are alike, and that they may vary in clinical characteristics, risk of complications and response to different treatments.

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The National Testing Agency (NTA) on Tuesday declared the results of the Common University Entrance Test-Undergraduate (CUET-UG), which was conducted from May 11 to 31, and on June 6 and 7. The test was held across 321 cities, including 13 centres outside India.

One candidate secured a 100 percentile score in four out of five opted subjects, while 22 candidates scored 100 percentile in three subjects, 180 scored 100 percentile in two subjects, and 3,214 scored 100 percentile in one subject, the NTA said in a statement.

The test was conducted in computer-based mode, and candidates were allowed to choose up to five subjects, depending on the subject-specific requirements of their preferred colleges or universities.

A total of 15,68,867 candidates registered for the test, of whom 11,64,098 appeared. Of the 7,74,607 registered female candi-



The examination was held across 321 cities, including 13 centres outside India. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

dates, 5,85,596 appeared for the examination, while 5,78,500 of the 7,94,257 registered male candidates appeared.

Subject experts

The NTA noted that there was an increase of over 15% in the total number of registered candidates and approximately 20% in the number of female candidates.

Of the three registered third-gender candidates, two appeared for the examination. Meanwhile, 3,894 of the 5,033 candidates with benchmark dis-

abilities or disabilities appeared for the test.

Across social categories, 67,859 economically weaker section, 4,98,652 general, 4,01,471 Other Backward Class, 1,28,871 Scheduled Caste, and 67,245 Scheduled Tribe candidates appeared for the examination. A majority of the candidates appeared in the English medium, followed by Hindi, the NTA said.

The NTA said the results would be shared with the universities and advised candidates to remain in touch with their respective

universities and institutions for further details.

It added that the results had been prepared on the basis of the final answer keys vetted by subject experts.

Technical difficulties

“The result declaration timeline is substantially streamlined, enabling the declaration of results within 16 days of the examination’s completion, representing a reduction of 14 days compared to the previous cycle,” the NTA said.

The NTA said on X, “Students can access their scorecard by logging in through the official CUET website using their credentials.”

This year, technical difficulties at some centres led to a re-test on June 6 and 7. Since 2022, the entrance examination has been mandatory for admission to undergraduate programmes in Central universities and is also used by some State and private universities, replacing the earlier system of relying on board examination marks or universities conducting their own entrance tests.

Iran-U.S. pact has helped in energy, fertilizer flow: govt.

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI



Randhir Jaiswal

The signing of a 14-point memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Iran and the United States on June 17 has had a positive impact on the flow of energy and fertilizers to India, the External Affairs Ministry said on Tuesday.

At a press briefing here, Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said there had been two-way traffic of India-specific vessels through the Strait of Hormuz at least since June 17, while officials indicate that a permanent pause in hostilities is essential to normalise maritime traffic through the waterway that faced Iran- and U.S.-imposed chokehold for nearly three-and-a-half months.

‘Positive situation’

“Since the signing of the MoU on June 17, 11 India-bound vessels have transited through the Strait of Hormuz. The vessels include three Indian-flagged crude oil tankers, each carrying over 2,85,000 MT [metric tonnes] crude oil; one foreign-flagged LPG carrier, one foreign-flagged crude oil tanker and six foreign-flagged bulk carriers,

carrying fertilizer cargo,” said Mr. Jaiswal, indicating that the shipping situation has been positive in the past few days.

“As of today, we have 10 Indian-flagged vessels which are still in the Persian Gulf region. In addition, two have recently arrived there,” said Mr. Jaiswal, further indicating that the 10 ships that remain in the Gulf are part of the international collection of vessels that are stuck in the Persian Gulf since the war erupted between U.S.-Israel and Iran.

“We hope that the remaining Indian-flagged vessels would also be able to cross the Hormuz soon,” added Mr. Jaiswal, explaining that the arrival of vessels indicated that the maritime flow had been helped by the MoU.

Ban on Telegram stretched meaning of ‘information’ under the IT Act

NEWS ANALYSIS

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Union government temporarily blocked Telegram to protect the sanctity of the NEET (UG) re-test by a single interpretative sleight of hand which compressed an entire intermediary platform into an expression: “information”.

The ban won the endorsement of the Delhi High Court by stretching the meaning of “information” under the Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000.

Section 2(l)(v) of the Act had traditionally defined “information” in diminutive units, including data, messages, text, image, sound, voice, codes, computer programme, software, and databases. The Telegram ban changed that legal interpretation.

The government argued

that an online platform like Telegram was an “aggregation” or “compilation” of these units. By reading entire platforms run by companies, which were legal entities by their own nature, within the ambit of ‘information’ under the Act, the government has effectively weaponised the content-blocking provision of Section 69A.

Section 69A of the IT Act gives the government power to issue directions to block public access to any ‘information’ through a computer resource. Here, the interpretation of the Centre has led to the successful replacement of the word ‘information’ with an ‘entire intermediary platform’.

The High Court, in its June 19 order, endorsed the Centre’s view that the “blocking power under Section 69A of the IT Act extends beyond individual pieces of content and, hav-



The ban won the endorsement of the Delhi High Court.

ing regard to its wide legislative scope, encompasses the software architecture, codebase, databases, and programmatic ecosystem constituting an application”.

Telegram had not accepted the “expansive” interpretation of the term “information” while noting that the government, acting through Section 69A, could only block access to “specific information”.

Such a sweeping ban had disproportionately affected the very section it

Access to app restored

Access to Telegram resumed on Tuesday after a week-long blocking order expired. The platform had approached the Delhi High Court seeking a stay on the order, but the court held that the blocking direction was proportionate.

deemed to protect. Many of the 150 million Telegram users were students and educators who used the platform to share study material and educational resources for NEET preparation.

The platform’s arguments are backed by the Supreme Court’s judgment in the *Anuradha Bhasin* case on digital freedoms, holding that restrictions on fundamental rights must be proportionate and only the least restrictive measure must be employed.

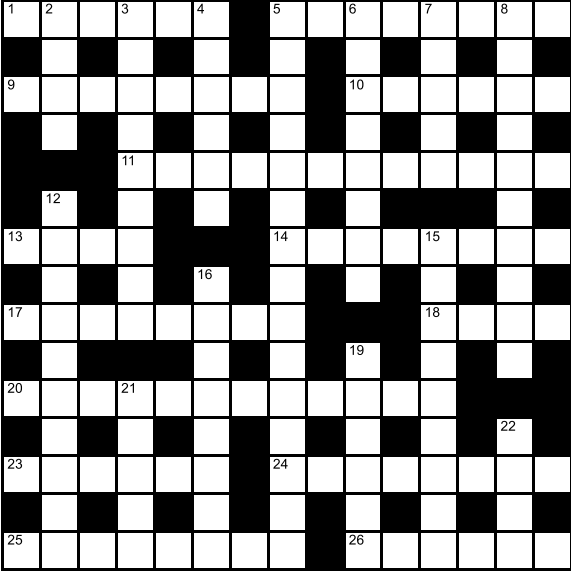


14828

(set by Avtaar)

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

SCAN TO PLAY



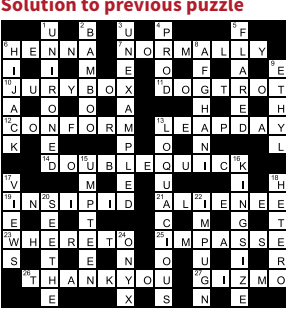
Across
1 Propose checking new inspector's authority (6)
5 Trainer given key after dropping institute's driver (8)
9 Land in Vakola is dug up (8)
10 Solid brown on tail of cat (6)
11 Perjury of leader being laid out in public? (5,2,5)
13 Force Republican to give up seat for head of party (4)

Down
2 Mostly unpleasant taste of imported fruit (4)
3 Real estate magnate's daughter constantly implicating staff in retreat (9)
4 Every now and then Yankee engages in money fraud (4-2)
5 One working for a mission from Africa has freed Government in trouble (6,9)
6 A cut gem's placed on hard floor (8)
7 Ferret circling a resort (5)
8 Opposition is hesitant when challenged (10)
12 Further stay set up by old European state (10)
15 Start batting at first, say, when given a stint at the crease (9)
16 Erotic film on email oddly missing essence of sex (8)
19 Excellent weed raised at the bottom of elevated mine (6)
21 Relative's smart act (2-3)
22 Randy's lodge, almost fully erected (4)



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★☆☆☆☆



Solution to previous puzzle


Solution to yesterday's Sudoku




The ultimate authority

To attain moksha we must adhere to dharma, said Paravastu Varadarajan in a discourse. But what is dharma? What is adharmā? Suppose two boys in a family are always quarrelling with each other. Their mother warns them that if they do not stop fighting, she will not give them a sweet she has made. If they still continue to fight, she will withhold the sweet. If she doesn't discipline them, there will be no peace in the family. A family has its rules, one of which is that everyone must be on friendly terms with each other. Likewise, a school has its rules. So everywhere there are rules, and not all of them are the same. A student has to wear a uniform when he goes to school, but he does not have to at other times. Two men fighting with each other in a family is wrong. But men fighting in an army against an enemy are respected. Dharma, or what is right keeps changing depending on the situation. So how do we know what dharma is?

Lord Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita that Sastras are the pramana. The rules laid down by them must be followed. “*Tasmaat sastram pramaanam*,” says Krishna to Arjuna. The scriptures are the authority that help us know what we should do (*kaarya*) and what we should not do (*akaarya*). If the Sastras ask us to do something, that is dharma. If they forbid us from doing something, that which is forbidden is adharmā. But what are Sastras? Although there is a lot of sacred literature, Vedas are the ultimate authority. It is said *shaasanaath sastram*. *Shaasana* means command. The Vedas command us to do certain things and to avoid certain things. The Vedas are the Sastra that we should follow.

The strange link between AI hallucination and creativity

A setting called temperature governs how adventurous an LLM's outputs are: the higher the temperature, the more likely the model reaches for the less likely options and surprises the user; this is the dial that one turns up when seeking a poem instead of a weather report; the trouble is that the same dial governs hallucinations

Viraj Kulkarni

In the prologue to his 1989 book *The Emperor's New Mind*, the Nobel laureate Roger Penrose narrates a story. At a grand public ceremony, an ultimate supercomputer is switched on for the first time before a packed auditorium. It is the most powerful machine ever built, designed to answer any question put to it. The presenter invites the audience to ask its very first question, but no one volunteers. Everyone is afraid of looking foolish before the intelligent machine. Then a young boy named Adam, who has grown up among computers and is not intimidated by them, raises his hand and asks the first question. There the prologue ends on a cliff-hanger. We are never told what the question is.

Penrose used this story to introduce a deeper argument about the limits of computation and the nature of human understanding. He contends that there are truths a formal mathematical machine cannot reach no matter how powerful it becomes.

But reading this story a decade ago, long before ChatGPT or Claude existed, brought a different question to mind: what if the ability to answer every question correctly is not always a virtue? What if some of the qualities we value most, such as imagination and creativity, depend on our ability to venture beyond what is already known?

Today, as we build machines that can answer questions, write essays, generate code, and analyse data, that question feels very relevant.

Natural instinct

For all their remarkable capabilities, these systems sometimes make things up. We call this hallucination. Ordinarily, a hallucination means to see or hear something that is not there. In artificial intelligence (AI), a model hallucinates when it produces an answer that sounds plausible but is factually wrong. It may invent a citation, misstate a number, fabricate a legal case, or attribute a quote to the wrong person.

This is not a minor flaw. In medicine, law, finance, science, and journalism, hallucinations can be dangerous. A medical chatbot that invents advice is not being imaginative but unsafe. A legal tool that fabricates case law is being unreliable.

Our natural instinct is to want to eliminate hallucinations but this is harder than it appears. Large language models (LLMs) do not work like databases, storing facts in neat rows and columns, and retrieving the right answer when asked. They are trained on enormous collections of text and learn statistical patterns in language. When prompted, they generate a response by predicting what will come next, one piece at a time.



As AI models are encouraged to be more adventurous, their creativity and hallucinations increase together. AEDRIAN SALAZAR/UNSPLASH

An LLM generates text one word at a time, each word a probability drawn from patterns it absorbed during training. A setting called the temperature governs how adventurous those draws are. If the temperature is low, the model will pick the safest, most predictable next word and produce an accurate and dull output. If the temperature is higher, the model will reach into the less likely options and begin to surprise you. This is the dial you turn up when you want a poem instead of a weather report.

The trouble is that the same dial governs hallucinations. A 2025 study reported evidence that creativity and hallucination tend to increase together as models are encouraged to be more adventurous and explore regions of lower probabilities. In other words, the model that dares to write something genuinely new is the same model that dares to make something up.

A different 2025 study found that the mechanisms that let these systems produce novel, imaginative text by departing from learned patterns are the same mechanisms that open the door to hallucinations.

It is also easier said than done to simply build a better model that does one without the other. In September 2025,

researchers at OpenAI and Georgia Tech argued that hallucinations are not bugs to be patched but a statistical inevitability of how these systems are trained and tested. Models are rewarded, like students in an exam hall, for guessing rather than admitting ignorance. A confident wrong answer may score better than an honest "I don't know".

Scrubbed of surprise

The second study went further, and this is where Penrose returns to the room. Drawing on the foundational theorems of computer science about the limits of computation, laid by the work of Alan Turing and Kurt Gödel, they argued that no computable model can ever be universally correct. There will always be questions on which any given machine must fail. Hallucination, thus seen, is not a flaw in our engineering but a long shadow cast by the limits of computation itself.

Penrose used just this family of ideas to argue that human thinking cannot be reduced to mere computation. Many philosophers and computer scientists think he is wrong but modern researchers are pointing at the same wall from the other side. Penrose said machines are bounded, human minds are not. Modern

researchers say machines are bounded, and here is the proof. Both agree that the wall is there.

We are pouring extraordinary effort into making these systems truthful, and we should. But if accuracy and imagination draw from the same well, a machine perfectly scrubbed of error might also be a machine scrubbed of surprise. This may also teach us something about ourselves. Human beings also hallucinate in a softer, broader sense all the time. We imagine futures. We invent stories. We see patterns. We form hypotheses. Much of this is wrong – but some of it becomes science, art, philosophy, and technology. The difference is that human societies developed methods to discipline imagination. Science uses experiments. Journalism uses verification. Philosophy uses argument.

Perhaps AI needs something similar: not a ban on hallucinations but better institutions of verification around it.

(Viraj Kulkarni is an entrepreneur and AI advisor who has been building, deploying, and scaling AI systems since 2012. He studied computer science at University of California, Berkeley. kulkarni.viraj@gmail.com)

THE GIST

For all their remarkable capabilities, AI systems sometimes make things up, called hallucinations

Ordinarily, a hallucination means to see or hear something that is not there

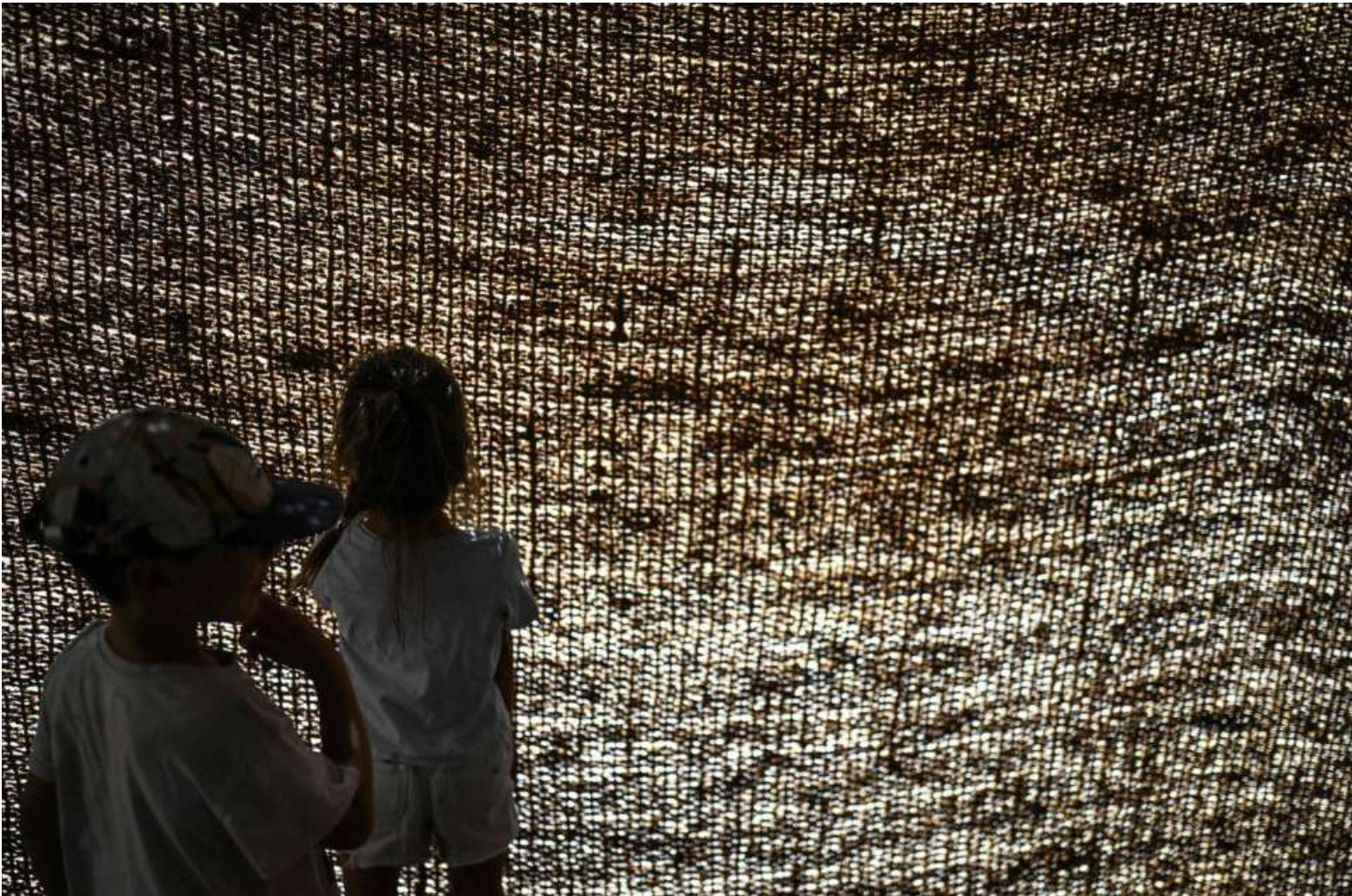
In AI, a model hallucinates when it produces an answer that sounds plausible but is factually wrong

A system may invent a citation, misstate a number, fabricate a legal case, or attribute a quote to the wrong person

But if accuracy and imagination draw from the same well, a machine perfectly scrubbed of error might also be a machine scrubbed of surprise

The difference between AI systems and human societies is that the latter developed methods to discipline imagination: science uses experiments, journalism uses verification and philosophy uses argument

BIG SHOT



Behind the veil: Children take shelter from the sun at a primary school in Grabels, near Montpellier, France, on Tuesday, where the Racine programme is being tested to reduce temperatures. The Racine programme aims at adapting primary schools to heatwaves with a set of sun protection, refreshments, and ventilation. AFP

WHAT IS IT?

Carbon isotopes: clocks of sorts

Reuters

Scientists studying the comet 3I/ATLAS have determined that this interstellar visitor formed an estimated 12 billion years ago in a primordial planetary system, and has a composition unlike anything in our solar system.

An evaluation of the chemical make-up of 3I/ATLAS, only the third interstellar object ever spotted in the solar system, provided guidance about the physical and chemical conditions in the planetary system where it formed, the researchers said.

They added that 3I/ATLAS appears to have been born in a much colder environment (-243C) than the one in which the earth and other bodies in our solar system formed roughly 4.5 billion years ago. They said it has travelled a vast distance since it was somehow expelled from its home planetary system.

The researchers measured the ratio of isotopes — different versions of chemical elements such as hydrogen and carbon — observed on 3I/ATLAS using the James Webb Space Telescope.

Its hydrogen isotopes offered evidence about temperature and radiation in the environment in which 3I/ATLAS formed. Its carbon isotope ratios offered clues about the composition of the interstellar gas cloud that gave rise to 3I/ATLAS and



The Hubble telescope's image of the interstellar comet 3I/ATLAS on July 21, 2025, when the comet was 446 million km from the earth. NASA

its home planetary system.

The carbon composition indicated 3I/ATLAS formed some 12 billion years ago during a period of intense star formation in its region. The universe is thought to have begun with the Big Bang event 13.8 billion years ago, so 3I/ATLAS would date to a time when the cosmos was only around 13% of its current age.

For feedback and suggestions for 'Science', please write to science@thehindu.co.in with the subject 'Daily page'



Evident distress

Stress from the West Asia crisis has revealed economic pain

As the resolution process of the West Asia crisis drags on, an increasing number of economic metrics are exposing key weaknesses in the Indian economy. Many of these existed before the crisis broke out in late February and are now becoming apparent as the economy faces stress. The latest data on the Index of Eight Core Industries show that these sectors cumulatively grew just 0.5% in May 2026, the second-lowest in 21 months. It would have been easy to pass this off as a war-related impact, but the data also show that the index grew by an almost equally anaemic 1.1% over the course of the entire financial year 2025-26. What remains a concern is that the domestic crude oil and natural gas sectors continued their multi-year streaks of contractions in May as well. By this time, the third month of the conflict, oil prices had settled somewhat lower than their April peaks. As a result, oil imports by oil marketing companies began rising once again to meet domestic demand. A strategic goal continues to be missed here. While imported oil can be used to meet demand, domestic production should nevertheless be ramped up to fill strategic reserves. This reserve oil, even of inferior quality, can be released in times of shortage. The same holds true for natural gas. With natural gas imports and domestic production contracting, it followed that the fertilizer sector would also contract. The good news, however, is that the contraction – of 0.9% in May 2026 – was much lower than it was even two months earlier. In any case, what impact the ‘super El Niño’ will have on fertilizer demand is still uncertain.

Coal production, too, contracted by the most in nearly a year. As the summer continues to heat up, electricity generation will increasingly have to rely on variable renewable sources or costly imported coal. Notably, the core sectors are not the only ones revealing economic distress. The latest Goods and Services Tax (GST) revenue data too show that domestic economic activity seems to be slowing. Revenues from domestic transactions contracted 2.6% in May 2026. The government argues that this is because of a one-time windfall transfer it received in May last year. Even so, the average growth of domestic GST revenue over the last six months was just 3.1%, lower than in 2025-26 and the year before that. This is not a supply issue, since merchandise exports hit a record high in May 2026. It is a demand problem, as low real wage growth meets rising inflation to squeeze wallets. These are all distressing signals even as India enters a deficient monsoon. Trade deals are no substitute for hard-hitting reforms.

Downing streak

Labour needs a progressive makeover to survive the far-right onslaught

Keir Starmer entered Downing Street in July 2024 with a landslide victory. Ending 14 years of Conservative rule, marked by Brexit and the chaos that followed, he promised to build a government for all and bridge the widening trust deficit between the public and the political elite. Less than two years later, the former lawyer who took pride in taking Labour back to the political centre after the brief left-wing interlude of Jeremy Corbyn, has resigned amid mounting public discontent and growing revolt within the Labour party. Mr. Starmer rode an anti-Tory wave but soon found the public turning against him over his lapses in judgment and slow economic progress. His uncharismatic, technocratic centrism failed to withstand the rapid changes shaping British politics at a time when far-right parties were surging across continental Europe. The tide began to turn after revelations that Peter Mandelson, Mr. Starmer’s choice as Britain’s Ambassador to Washington, had links to the late convicted paedophile Jeffrey Epstein. Pressure mounted after Labour lost local elections in England and polls in Wales and Scotland. When Andy Burnham, Labour’s ‘King in the North’, won the Makerfield byelection and returned to Westminster, Mr. Starmer’s fate was sealed, and he resigned on June 22.

Under Mr. Starmer, the U.K. saw modest improvements in key economic indicators. Its economy began growing faster than those of its G7 peers, while inflation remained broadly under control despite conflicts in Europe and Asia. New laws strengthened workers rights, and statutory minimum wage rates were raised. Yet, these incremental gains were insufficient to satisfy an electorate that had given Labour a commanding mandate. Mr. Starmer proved largely ineffective in addressing the economic anxieties of the working-class communities that delivered his majority, or the cultural grievances Reform UK had been amplifying. Labour MPs started turning against him, making it difficult for him to continue in office. Mr. Burnham, who belongs to the soft left camp of Labour, is expected to be elected as the party’s new leader and the next Prime Minister – and at a moment when the old bipolar consensus of British politics is breaking down. Reform is no longer a fringe force. With the conservatives, Britain’s traditional vehicle of the right, in deep decline, Reform is emerging as the second pole. Mr. Burnham should recognise that the Starmerite centrism is unlikely to withstand the onslaught of a far-right cultural politics entrenched in English nationalism. He must unite a fractious party around a progressive economic and foreign policy agenda and build a government that works for all while standing firmly on the right side of global issues. If Labour fails to reconnect with its core values and social base, it risks losing even the constituencies that have long sustained it.

Public health policies, like other public policies, are crucial in determining the overall health of the population and are an important contributor to a nation seeking to reap the benefits of its demographic dividend. One of the major claims of health policies in recent years has been the achievement of universal health coverage (UHC), a novel idea that seeks to ensure that every individual has access to needed health services without suffering financial hardship. Yet, populist ideas often dominate public policy despite evidence to the contrary, as seen in the case of publicly funded health insurance schemes. The changing nature of public health policy in recent years is particularly concerning, not only because it has often failed to be evidence-based, but also because of its inability to guarantee even minimal health benefits to the population.

More troubling is the failure of public health policies to improve access to health care at a time when such access is deteriorating significantly owing to rising costs in the private sector and poor quality in the public sector. Two recent government initiatives – the Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres and the Digital Health Mission – illustrate these inadequacies.

The interpretation

The Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres, introduced as a policy initiative in 2018, were intended to strengthen health infrastructure. What eventually happened, however, was that the names and identities of grassroots-level institutions – namely, the health sub-centres (SCs), primary health centres (PHCs), and community health centres (CHCs) – were altered by mandatorily adding “Health and Wellness Centre” as a prefix. The identity of these grassroots institutions and their mandates have evolved over time based on their roles within the district health system. The use of a common prefix has created considerable ambiguity among health professionals and policymakers regarding their actual mandate. Another consequence of the “health and wellness” approach has been a shift in focus from population health outcomes to individual well-being. The major challenge in using well-being as an outcome measure lies in the elusive and subjective nature of the concept itself.

A historical inquiry into the concept of wellness reveals that it was initially used to denote the absence of disease and was often contrasted with illness. It was also frequently used interchangeably with health. During the 1950s, the wellness movement popularised the idea of positive well-being by conceptualising health beyond its biological dimensions. The mental cure model similarly emphasised the psychological and spiritual aspects of healing. Influenced by these developments, the World



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Access to curative care and stronger institutions must anchor India’s health policy

Health Organization (WHO) defined health as not merely the absence of disease, thereby promoting the notion of positive well-being. Over time, wellness expanded beyond physiological health to include mental, spiritual, social and environmental dimensions, offering a more holistic understanding of health. In public health, however, the emphasis shifted towards health promotion – a population-based approach that recognises how social, economic and environmental conditions shape people’s ability to adopt healthy behaviours.

Another reason for preferring health promotion over wellness was the greater rigour and feasibility associated with measuring the former. There are no universally accepted measures of well-being at the population level, as the concept is inherently individualistic and deeply subjective. Unlike health promotion, the concept of wellness places the primary responsibility on individuals, assuming that they possess the capacity and opportunity to modify their health-related choices. In doing so, it often underestimates the structural and social determinants that shape health outcomes.

The individualisation of health

The shift from population health status to individual well-being is a consequence of the changing wellness narrative brought by the public health policy. The implication is that health status, which was previously assessed through unmet needs in preventive, promotive, curative and rehabilitative care – including access to basic services such as drinking water, food and nutrition, chronic disease management, emergency care, and maternal and child health services – is increasingly being replaced by the aspiration to achieve individual well-being. This shift in focus has contributed to the rise of health coaches and the proliferation of social media messages promoting individual well-being, often under the banner of public health.

When health outcomes are framed primarily in terms of individual well-being, there is a risk of failing to systematically capture a wide range of unmet health needs that remain significant for the population. The broader narrative increasingly suggests that the achievement of individual well-being is the ultimate objective of health and wellness centres. This presents a serious challenge. As the well-known principle in management states, “If you cannot measure it, you cannot improve it”. Given the inherently subjective nature of well-being, an excessive policy focus on this outcome may undermine the ability to evaluate health systems effectively and address concrete deficiencies in health care access and service delivery.

Another major public health policy initiative of recent years is the Ayushman Bharat Digital Health Mission (ABDHM), whose principal

objective is to create a digital repository of health information for every individual through a unique health ID, known as the ABHA card. In addition, the mission seeks to maintain registries of health facilities, health-care professionals and information related to health insurance. However, an information portal containing health records and details of health infrastructure cannot, by itself, address the challenges posed by inadequate access to health care. Nor does it justify the annual budget of around ₹300 crore to the ABDHM in the absence of measurable outcomes.

Factors behind inadequate access to care

It is well established that inadequate access to health care in India stems from the unaffordability of care in the private sector and the lack of quality health-care facilities in the public sector. Merely creating databases of individual health records, health facilities and health-care professionals cannot improve access to health care. If the argument is that information is the first step towards strengthening the health system, there exists a substantial body of reports and datasets that provide such information.

The more pertinent question is how information contained in an individual’s health record, through an ABHA card, can guarantee access to health care when health-care infrastructure remains grossly inadequate and unaffordable for large sections of the population. Even if every individual in a district possesses an ABHA card and all health facilities and health-care professionals are digitally mapped, the delivery of health care still requires a robust institutional mechanism. Unfortunately, the ABDHM, as currently designed, has little to say about the provisioning of care. It primarily generates information on individuals, facilities and health-care professionals, all of which continue to operate largely in silos.

It is therefore difficult to identify a compelling public health rationale for this scale of data generation. What is missing from current policy initiatives are concrete measures to strengthen public health-care institutions, as envisaged under India’s three-tier health-care system. Instead, these institutions continue to weaken in many parts of the country.

For most people, access to curative care constitutes an immediate and pressing need. Only after these basic health-care requirements are met can individuals meaningfully engage with preventive and promotive health interventions. When public health policies fail to recognise people’s felt needs, they risk becoming mere vehicles for advancing the priorities of policymakers and health-care providers rather than addressing the actual concerns of the population.

The views expressed are personal

India’s next challenge — from invention to global scale



Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw

Executive Chairperson, Biocon Limited

The country must transform innovation into globally dominant technology enterprises

despite its innovation, the supporting ecosystem was absent. Venture capital, software platforms, component supply chains and consumer markets were not mature enough to help it achieve global scale. A few years later, Apple transformed personal computing through the iPhone and built one of the world’s most valuable technology ecosystems. The lesson is clear: being first matters little if you cannot scale.

India has seen similar patterns elsewhere. It developed early expertise in computing, telecommunications and electronics. Yet, many pioneering initiatives remained prototypes, pilots or public-sector achievements rather than globally dominant businesses.

Models of success

Fortunately, history also offers examples of success. India’s pharmaceutical industry evolved into a globally competitive manufacturing powerhouse, making the country the pharmacy of the world and a leading vaccine producer. India also developed indigenous supercomputing capabilities through the PARAM programme. More recently, Aadhaar and UPI have shown how technology platforms designed for scale can transform a nation. Scale creates ecosystems, ecosystems create industries, and industries create global leadership.

Today, India stands at another technological inflection point. AI, quantum computing and space technologies are likely to shape the next half-century, just as semiconductors and software shaped the last. India already possesses significant strengths in software engineering and digital infrastructure. The challenge now is to build globally scalable AI products and platforms. The emergence of DeepSeek showed that technological leadership is not only about building the largest models. It is also about making intelligence cheaper and more accessible. The AI race may ultimately be won by those who make intelligence affordable, ubiquitous and widely available.

India is uniquely positioned to lead this

movement. Just as UPI democratised financial inclusion, India should aspire to democratise intelligence through low-cost, energy-efficient AI models that can serve billions of people.

Quantum computing presents another opportunity. Rather than merely replicating existing approaches, India should focus on reducing the cost of quantum infrastructure and developing practical applications in health care, materials science, climate modelling and drug discovery.

The same should extend to space. The successes of Chandrayaan and Mangalyaan proved that frugal innovation can coexist with world-class ambition. As computing demands escalate globally, concepts such as space-based data centres powered by continuous solar energy are attracting serious attention. India should not merely participate in these conversations; it should lead them. We should ask bold questions about orbital computing infrastructure, space-based AI platforms or even data centres and quantum communication networks.

These ideas may seem futuristic today. But so did semiconductors, smartphones and AI when they first emerged.

Stopping too soon

The deeper lesson from SCL, ECIL and Simputer is not that India failed, but that it often stopped too soon. We celebrated technological capability before building the ecosystems needed for global scale. The next phase of India’s technological journey must combine self-reliance with global ambition. The challenge is no longer merely to invent; it is to build, scale, commercialise and create enterprises that can compete globally.

India has already demonstrated world-class scientific and engineering capabilities. The opportunity now is to translate that ingenuity into globally competitive industries that shape the technologies of the future.

The countries that lead tomorrow may not be those that invent first, but those that scale best. This time, India must do both.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

No compromise on safety

It is deeply unfortunate that fires continue to engulf commercial complexes across India, with faulty electrical wiring and leakages emerging as perennial culprits. The tragedy in Lucknow’s Aliganj area (Front page, June 23) once again exposes the

criminal negligence that has become all too routine. Wiring standards for commercial establishments remain outdated, poorly enforced and often bypassed through corruption or sheer incompetence. Agencies responsible for public safety — including the electrical

inspectorate, urban development authorities, fire services and local municipal bodies — must be held accountable. A nationwide review and comprehensive overhaul of wiring standards is urgently needed. **A. Thirugnanasambantham,** Coimbatore

Sushruta statue

It was gratifying to read that a bronze statue of Maharishi Sushruta — revered as the Father of Surgery — has been unveiled at The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh. It would be truly inspirational to have well-sculpted statues of the sage surgeon in centres of

science and medicine across India. Tu Youyou, who was awarded the 2015 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for synthesising a life-saving antimalarial based on cues from traditional Chinese medicine, affirmed that cultural legacies inspire scientific work. “Let us

reach to a greater height to appreciate Chinese culture and find the beauty and treasure in the territory of traditional Chinese medicine!” she said. **Dr. G.L. Krishna,** Bengaluru

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

India’s patchy industrial climate strategy

The inevitable conclusion emerging from the ambitious targets set up by the government’s Make-in-India, Viksit Bharat (2047) and net-zero emissions (2070) commitments is that industrial decarbonisation is central to India’s long-term climate goals.

As the economy grows, both existing and emerging manufacturing segments expand, fuelling a steep rise in energy demand. Balancing this industrial growth on the one hand and population-driven consumption demand on the other with national emission reduction objectives requires highly targeted policies. The recently submitted First Biennial Transparency Report (BTRI) by India to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change provides a detailed account of national emissions. The report discloses that in 2022, over 20% of India’s total emissions stemmed directly from the industrial sector. Specifically, it shows that the fuel consumption in manufacturing industries and construction accounts for 13% of total emissions, while industrial processes and product use accounts for another 9%. This clearly demonstrates how much manufacturing activities contribute to the overall carbon footprint, a trend that has remained consistent over time.

Mitigation planning

To mitigate industrial emissions and energy consumption, the government has relied on two major market-based mechanisms. The BTRI acknowledges the Perform, Achieve and Trade (PAT) scheme as a primary initiative, which aims to reduce specific energy consumption across 13 energy-intensive industries. PAT is now transitioning to the Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS), which focuses on reducing the emission intensity of nine industrial sectors, including aluminium, cement, fertilizers, iron and steel, petrochemicals,



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Balancing industrial growth on the one hand and population-driven consumption demand on the other with national emission reduction objectives requires highly targeted policies

petroleum refining, pulp and paper, textiles, and chlor-alkali. The other four industries, which include thermal power plants, railways, DISCOMs and commercial buildings, will continue under the PAT scheme.

While these schemes set benchmarks, encourage energy efficiency, and reduce emission intensity, there is a clear gap in how mitigation planning is envisioned across Indian industries. These policies are designed almost entirely for well-defined, traditional heavy-emitting sectors such as cement, steel, fertilizers, refineries, and textiles. However, they de facto overlook a massive proportion of industrial emissions, specifically those generated by fuel consumption in, what India’s emission inventory classifies as, “non-specific industries”.

A careful analysis of emissions data for India’s manufacturing industries and construction sector for the latest reported year, 2020, reveals a crucial puzzle that needs to be solved urgently. The explicitly specified major industrial sectors accounted for slightly more than 55% of the total emissions generated from manufacturing industries and construction. Conversely, more than 40% of those sectoral emissions were caused by the “non-specific industries” category alone. A similar pattern has been seen in 2014, 2016, and 2019 as well, as per the detailed emission inventory available on NITI Aayog’s India Climate and Energy Dashboard. To sum up, the classification of sectors in India’s emission inventory reflects that a surprisingly large volume of emissions falls under a single, vague heading of “non-specific industries”.

The point of concern is that the scope of mitigation policies in India has relied on an enforcement and incentive-based structure around specific, identifiable sectors. For instance, some of the explicitly identified sectors in the emission inventory,

such as power, cement, non-ferrous metals, chemicals, and textiles, are covered by mitigation measures such as PAT and CCTS. Yet, a major part of industrial emissions remains in an administrative grey area, with serious implications for India’s broader industrial climate strategy. As this 40% block lacks specific sub-sectoral definitions, the various industries clustered therein effectively fall outside the primary scope of both PAT and CCTS. They are not subject to the same energy efficiency mandates or emission-reduction targets as industries such as steel or cement, despite their contributions to the emissions load. This policy gap keeps a significant portion of the country’s industrial base out of the green transition.

Need to identify industries

For India to successfully decouple its industrial growth from greenhouse gas emissions, the next phase of its national climate strategy needs more transparent, disaggregated data. This must begin with breaking down the existing “non-specific industries” in the emission inventory. For timely realisation of the net-zero emissions target, policymakers need to urgently focus on identifying exactly which sub-sectors contribute to these 40% emissions, how their specific energy consumption patterns are evolving, and the part in the process chain where emissions are primarily concentrated.

Transparency in climate reporting is often framed as an international obligation, a way to prove to the world that a nation is effectively traversing the path for honouring its pledges. But the real value of transparency is deeply domestic. It provides policymakers with an appropriate level of clarity to monitor exactly where the interventions are heading and where there is scope for course correction. Therefore, to build a low-carbon economy, exact knowledge on these passive outliers is non-negotiable.

A plausible rewiring in Karnataka

Private entrants in power supply should share the State’s responsibilities

STATE OF PLAY

Shridhar Prabhu

Recently, in Karnataka, Tata Power Company Limited (TPCL) sought distribution licences across areas presently served by State-owned Electricity Supply Companies (ESCOs). These applications have come as the Union government is again considering competition in distributing electricity licences. Therefore, what Karnataka is deliberating on is not just a routine licensing request; it is deciding what kind of power market other States may later be asked to emulate.

The promise is attractive. Consumers want reliable supply and responsive service. Moreover, it has precedents – Mumbai has overlapping licensees; Delhi and Odisha use distinct distribution companies with State participation; and Ajmer follows a franchise model. But these precedents also teach caution. Competition for a market, where an operator assumes a defined territory, is different from competition within a market where suppliers seek consumers in an area which is already being serviced. Karnataka appears to be testing the latter.

Electricity is not ordinary retail. Urban households, commercial establishments and industries are easier and more profitable to serve. In contrast, rural supply, irrigation pumps and dispersed connections cost more. As State utilities cannot simply walk away from remote or commercially unattractive consumers, if an entrant gains access to remunerative urban pockets while inherited obligations stay with the State, reform may privatise revenue while socialising cost.



This makes geography important. Public descriptions of the TPCL’s applications refer to clusters of adjoining districts. A closer reading, however, appears to indicate a narrower footprint centred on city and town municipal areas. Karnataka’s licensing regulations require maps of the proposed supply area and a list of the local authorities concerned. These are not just clerical attachments; without accessible maps and an exact territorial description, consumers cannot know whether they are affected. The chosen geography must be explained before the process advances.

Questions of cost

The harder question is financial. State utilities use contributions from higher-paying consumers to support subsidised categories. They also carry long-term power-purchase commitments, including fixed charges that do not vanish when demand migrates. How will cross-subsidy surcharge and additional surcharge operate if TPCL supplies to consumers which already have ESCOM coverage?

The applications reportedly invoke a Supreme Court ruling which states that an incumbent network must facilitate wheeling for a parallel licensee on payment of wheeling charges and surcharge. However, that proposition cannot simply be trans-

planted into Karnataka without a carefully designed framework. Section 42 of the Electricity Act addresses open access, protection of existing cross-subsidy and recovery of stranded fixed costs. Karnataka has not determined a clear inter-licensee surcharge mechanism for this arrangement. The regulator must decide who pays, to whom, on what basis, and whether consumers using Tata Power’s future wires stand differently from those using ESCOM infrastructure. Otherwise, attractive consumers may migrate before the costs left behind are allocated. There is danger at both ends. If no surcharge is recovered, remaining ESCOM consumers absorb the deficit. If an ill-designed surcharge is added despite cross-subsidy already being embedded in Tata Power’s regulated retail tariff, migrating consumers may pay twice. Competition requires a principled method, not an improvised levy determined after public scrutiny.

Network design presents another choice. Competition should not produce parallel forests of poles, cables and substations. Nor should a new entrant rely indefinitely on public infrastructure without transparent charges and maintenance duties. India needs a neutral framework for shared networks.

None of this is an argument against private participation. However, consumer choice cannot be built on unclear maps, selective geography, duplicated networks or unresolved surcharges. The real question is not whether competition should enter electricity distribution. It is whether competition will carry the same obligations as the public system it seeks to disrupt.

The writer is an advocate focusing on consumer rights.

Fiscal prudence is the need of the hour for T.N.’s power utilities

The approach of successive governments to not hike user or service provider charges regularly has led to power sector entities accumulating debt

DATA POINT

T. Ramakrishnan

The grim financial health of the Tamil Nadu government has been accentuated by the plight of State Public Sector Undertakings (SPSUs). The recently released White Paper on public finances of Tamil Nadu has highlighted the deteriorating financial situation of the SPSUs (there are 78 SPSUs with about 2.55 lakh employees).

Describing the aggregate financial trajectory of the SPSUs as one of “deepening losses,” the White Paper provisionally puts the accumulated debt of select major undertakings at ₹3.18 lakh crore as of March 31, 2026 (**Chart 1**). The reasons for the SPSUs’ poor financial performance are not far to seek. Fundamentally, the enterprises recover only a small portion of their operational costs. It is not because of their inability to recover costs but because of the approach of successive governments, which did not hike user or service provider charges at regular intervals as and when the situation demanded. Consequently, the SPSUs are left with no surplus for investments in new capital assets or for the proper maintenance of existing assets, besides a persistent increase in their consolidated debt and accumulated losses (**Chart 2**).

Before dwelling upon this further, it is worthwhile to highlight how the power sector SPSUs have been reorganised in the past 16 years. The Tamil Nadu Electricity Board (TNEB) – which existed as a vertically integrated power utility between 1957 and 2010 – was reduced to a shell firm with the formation of two companies: Tamil Nadu Generation and Distribution Corporation Limited (TANGEDCO) and Tamil Nadu Transmission Corporation Limited.

In 2024, TANGEDCO ceased to exist after it was split into three new entities. The Tamil Nadu Pow-

er Generation Corporation Limited (TNPGL) and the Tamil Nadu Power Distribution Corporation Limited (TNPDC) were created to handle generation and distribution respectively. TANGEDCO’s renewable energy operations and the Tamil Nadu Energy Development Agency were clubbed to set up the Tamil Nadu Green Energy Corporation Limited (TNGECL).

The policy of free electricity, which was initially offered to farmers regardless of the size of their landholdings and huts, and subsequently extended to a host of other types of consumers, has substantially eroded the fiscal autonomy of the TNPDC (previously the TNEB or TANGEDCO), rendering it perpetually dependent on the financial assistance of the State government, which is already struggling to meet its commitments.

Moreover, in the last 10-odd years, only twice did the end domestic consumer witness a tariff increase, once with a “suo motu” tariff order in 2014 by the Tamil Nadu Electricity Regulatory Commission (TNERC) and via another order in 2022.

The number of domestic consumers alone went up by about 70 lakh in these years. Costly power purchases and materials procurement have contributed in no small measure to the stress on the DISCOM’s finances. The power tariffs were increased in 2024 and 2025, but consumers were spared as the government decided to absorb the increase through tariff subsidies.

Chart 3 shows the gap between the Average Cost of Supply (ACS) and the Average Revenue Realised (ARR) narrowing. While the tariff hike in 2022-23 helped to an extent, what has led to a positive change in the DISCOM’s finances is the financial support given by the State government, after taking a bailout package in 2020-21 from the Union government (**Chart 4**).

These numbers underscore that, hereafter, fiscal prudence should become the norm for the TNPDC and its sister companies.

Firmly in the red

The data for the charts were sourced from the White Paper on public finances of Tamil Nadu, released on June 16, 2026



Chart 1: Outstanding debt of Tamil Nadu government’s select public sector undertakings as on March 31, 2026. Their total accumulated debt stood at ₹3.18 lakh crore

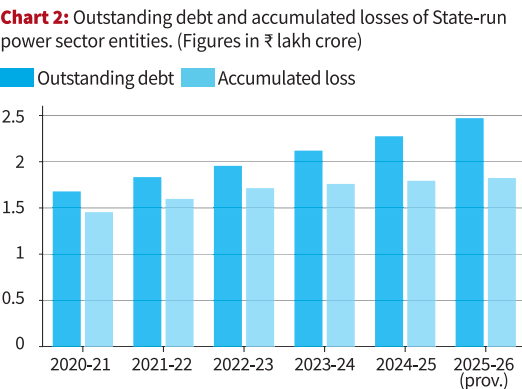
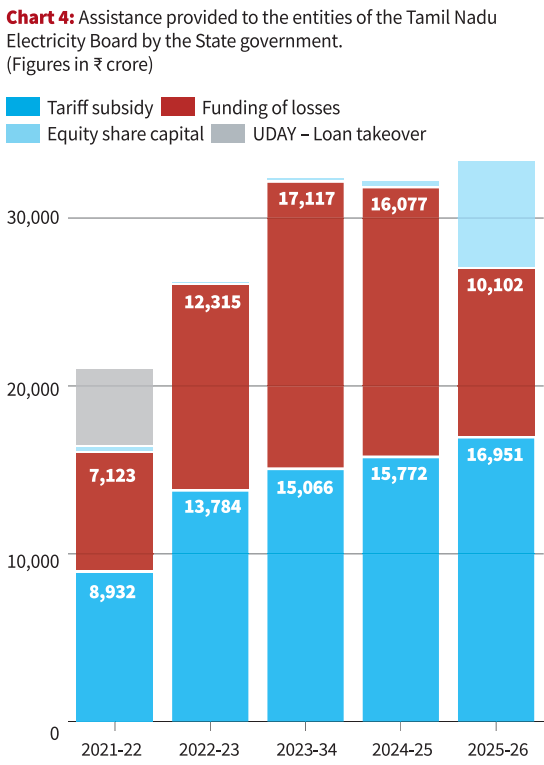


Chart 3: The gap between the Average Cost of Supply (ACS) and the Average Revenue Realised (ARR) has narrowed since 2023-24

Year	Power sold (MU)	ARR (₹ per unit)	ACS (₹ per unit)	Revenue gap (₹ per unit)	Revenue gap (excluding loss funding) (₹ per unit)
2021-22	82,076	7.65	9.23	-1.58	-2.4
2022-23	87,916	9.37	10.61	-1.24	-2.68
2023-24	92,735	10.66	11.14	-0.48	-2.32
2024-25	96,803	10.37	10.42	-0.05	-1.7
2025-26 (RE/Prov.)	99,885	10.41	10.37	0.04	-1.6

MU - Million units, RE/Prov. - Revised Estimate/Provisional



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 24, 1976

Indo-Pak accord on Amritsar-Lahore Express Train Link

New Delhi, June 23: An express train will start running between Amritsar and Lahore when rail traffic between India and Pakistan is resumed. An agreement to this effect was reached between the railway experts of the two countries to-day when talks began here on the restoration of the rail links that had snapped in 1965.

The timings of the proposed express train are under discussion, keeping in view the connections to long distance mail and express trains at Amritsar and Lahore.

The expert teams of India and Pakistan, which are now discussing the modalities of resumption of rail traffic, will divide themselves into two groups.

The first group will go into the mechanical aspects of carriage and wagon fleets, loco arrangements etc. while the second group will sort out details about freight rating and compensation claims. The two groups will be formed after discussing the operational and mechanical issues connected with the expected passenger and goods traffic between the two countries consequent on resumption of the rail link. These discussions will be held by the two delegations in full strength.

During the talks, the experts will discuss the basic principles for movement of passenger and goods traffic.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 24, 1926

Foreign advertiser reprimanded

London, June 22: Widely published reports of the tyreburst which recently occurred to the Prince of Wales when motoring at Thanet has had a sequel in the appearance of a semi-official reproof of an unnamed foreign advertising agency which states that the burst was not due to any defect in the tyre.

“The Prince uses British tyres and does not intend changing them for foreign ones. The attempt to exploit foreign tyres on account of the mishap is strongly resented by those responsible for the safety of His Royal Highness.”

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Persons arrested by Turkey weeks ahead of NATO summit

209 Two weeks before hosting a NATO summit that will be attended by leaders including U.S. President Donald Trump, Turkey arrested over 200 people with alleged ties to jihadist and far-left groups. Rights groups and local media said the detainees included a journalist, three lawyers, an academic and a union official. AFP

Number of districts most vulnerable to crop damage

111 The government has identified 111 districts as most vulnerable to crop damage as a 43% monsoon deficit driven by El Nino threatens Kharif sowing, Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said on Tuesday. Mr. Chouhan said weak monsoon conditions were likely to persist until July 2, leaving little time for farmers to plant the Kharif (summer) crop. PTI

Number of rape cases recorded in Maharashtra in 2025

8,643 Maharashtra registered 47,954 cases of crimes against women in 2024, the second highest in the country, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said on Tuesday. He stated that 8,643 rape cases were recorded in 2025, an increase of 703 from the previous year, while the number of crimes against children rose by 482. PTI

India-bound ships transited through Strait of Hormuz

11 Eleven India-bound ships have transited through the Strait of Hormuz after the U.S. and Iran finalised a Memorandum of Understanding to end the West Asia conflict. External Affairs Ministry spokesman Randhir Jaiswal said on Tuesday. The vessels include three Indian-flagged crude oil tankers, each carrying over 2,85,000 metric tonne crude oil, he said. PTI

Number of old flyovers to be repaired by Delhi govt. across city

44 The Delhi government plans to conduct structural audit of 44 old flyovers across the city in a move aimed at improving commuter safety, PWD Minister Parvesh Verma said on Tuesday. The Public Works Department has decided to hire a consultant to carry out the survey of the flyovers older than 15 years and submit a report. PTI

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Is RSS a legal person?

Should the RSS be formally registered under law? Has it been recognised in law or court cases? Can an unregistered body sue or be sued? Are RSS-affiliated organisations legally registered? What regulatory gap does the RSS debate highlight?

EXPLAINER

Rizmi Lia M.

The story so far:

Karnataka Home Minister Priyank Kharge, in a letter dated June 13 addressing the Sarsanghchalak (chief) of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Mohan Bhagwat, questioned the legal status of the RSS.

In an accompanying post on social media platform X, Mr. Kharge asked, “If citizens, labour, NGOs, trusts, temples and companies are expected to register, disclose and comply with the law, why should the RSS remain exempt?”

He raised similar questions towards the end of last year as well regarding the legal existence of RSS. He has asked about the registration, organisation structure, funding and donation and also about the overall functioning of the organisation.

What is a legal person?

According to legal theorist John Salmond, “A person is any being whom the law regards as capable of rights and bound by legal duties.” The term ‘person’ is further classified into two terms: ‘natural person’ and ‘juridical/artificial person’. Generally, in law, a living human being is considered a natural person. However, a juridical/artificial person is an entity created by law that possesses legal rights and obligations distinct from its members or the individuals associated with it. For example, companies incorporated under the Companies Act are artificial persons, statutorily recognised as legal persons.

To be a company, certain criteria must be met according to Section 9 of the Companies Act, 2013. That includes that, after registration, a company shall be a body corporate by the name contained in its memorandum - “capable of exercising all the functions of an incorporated company under this Act, having perpetual succession, having a common seal with power to acquire, hold and dispose of property both movable and immovable, tangible and intangible, to contract and to sue and be sued” by the said name.

How does RSS describe itself and what is its organisational nature?

In a similar exchange in December 2025, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat described the organisation as “a body of individuals”. RSS in itself is a socio-cultural voluntary organisation with an ideal “to carry the nation to the pinnacle of glory through organising the entire society and ensuring protection of Hindu Dharma”, according to the website.

RSS has been addressed as an “association of persons”, according to the *Commissioner Of Income Tax v Rastriya Swayam Sangh* on February 22, 1994, in which they have been sued with respect to tax exemption.

The Income-tax Appellate Tribunal has referred this matter to Patna High Court to address whether the amount received from members and devotees can be taken to be *Gurudakshina* (token of gratitude to teacher) and thus be exempt from taxation. The court held that the amount received from members can be taken to be *Gurudakshina* and be exempted from tax.

Section 2(31) of the Income Tax Act, 1961, defines ‘person’ expansively and includes a ‘body of individuals’, whether incorporated or not. Under the 1961 Act, the ‘body of individuals’ is a separate taxable entity comprising exclusively



Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh workers perform at a training camp closing ceremony, in Sambalpur on Saturday. RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat describes the organisation as “a body of individuals”. ANI

natural persons (human beings) who have come together for a shared purpose.

Generally, unregistered bodies cannot sue or be sued in their own names, as they are not considered separate legal persons.

The organisation is, however, named as a distinct party in cases including *Singhai Lal Chand Jain v Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* on February 15, 1996 in the Supreme Court of India. The case revolved around the eviction of the RSS from certain premises in Panna, Madhya Pradesh, initiated by the appellant, Singhai Lal Chand Jain. The appellant filed a civil suit seeking the eviction of the RSS and its office-bearers, alleging unauthorised occupation of the premises. Holding that the RSS was properly represented by its Manager, President, and a member who jointly defended the suit, the court upheld the eviction decree.

What are the legal options for registering a voluntary association in India?

Registering a voluntary association in India requires choosing one of three primary legal structures: a Society (under the Societies Registration Act, 1860), a Trust (under the Indian Trusts Act, 1882), or a Section 8 Company (under the Companies Act, 2013).

The company after incorporation intends to apply its profits, if any, or other income only for promoting its cited objects.

What about donations/Gurudakshina?

As mentioned earlier, the RSS's legal status came under scrutiny in the 1970s during tax proceedings in Bombay and Patna. The disputes centred on whether donations received as “*gurudakshina*” from RSS workers were taxable. In the case of *Commissioner Of Income-Tax v Rastriya Swayam Sevak Sangh* on 22 February, 1994, The Patna High Court addressed the matter and exempted RSS from taxes, considering donations from members as *Gurudakshina*. Also, the

Income Tax Act considers a ‘body of individuals’ as a ‘person’, as mentioned above.

There is the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), 2010, which regulates the acceptance and utilisation of foreign contribution or foreign hospitality by certain individuals or associations or companies. Any donation, delivery or transfer received from a ‘foreign source’ whether in rupees or in foreign currency, is construed as a ‘foreign contribution’ under FCRA, 2010.

Even for the grant of registration under FCRA, the association should be registered under an existing statute like the Societies Registration Act, 1860 or the Indian Trusts Act, 1882 or Section 8 of Companies Act, 2013 etc. The association should be in existence for at least three years and has undertaken reasonable activity in its chosen field for the benefit of the society for which the foreign contribution is proposed to be utilised. And the applicant NGO/association will be free to choose its items of expenditure (excluding the administrative expenditure as defined in Rule 5 of FCRR, 2011) to become eligible for the minimum threshold of ₹15 lakh spent during the last three years.

How can one join RSS?

According to the Frequently Asked Questions section of the RSS website powered by Bharati Web Private Limited, “there is no formal membership enrolment in the RSS. Anyone can approach the nearest ‘Shakha’, which is the fundamental unit of activity of RSS and become a swayamsevak. There are no fees, no registration form, and no formal application. Once you start attending the daily shakha either in the morning or in the evening as per your convenience, you become the swayamsevak of RSS. It is that simple. If someone does not know any shakha or Swayamsevak nearby, One can join the RSS online too.”

Any person who wants to work towards the *sanatan dharma* can join the RSS, even if they don’t visit the shakhas.

There is no formal procedure or criterion that stops anybody for that matter from joining the organisation. There is a registration form on the website that requires one to fill up primary details for the same.

What are the RSS affiliates and are they registered?

There are around 32 sister organisations that work under the umbrella of RSS, with many more like-minded organisations. The Akhil Bhartiya Vidhyarthi Parishad, the Vidya Bharti, Bharatiya Janata Party, Vishva Hindu Parishad, Bajrang Dal, Durga Vahini, Dharam Sansad or Religious Parliament etc.

The list of RSS-affiliated bodies is vast and spans every sector of Indian society: students, education, labour, agriculture, women, tribals, culture, science, law, economics, publishing, and more. However, each of these is registered under different laws.

For example, the student body Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad began its activities around 1948 and was registered on July 9, 1949, as a non-governmental organisation (NGO) under the Societies Registration Act of 1860. Thus, the units of the RSS function as registered entities.

Trade union Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh functions within the legal framework governing labour organisations. Educational, social-service and tribal welfare bodies associated with the Sangh generally operate through registered trusts and societies.

RSS continues to describe itself as a voluntary socio-cultural organisation and a body of individuals rather than a registered corporate entity. Court records show that it has been recognised in tax proceedings and litigation, while many organisations associated with the Sangh function through separately registered bodies.

Mr. Kharge’s questions, however, have renewed the debate over whether an organisation of the RSS’s scale and reach should continue to operate without a formal registration framework.

THE GIST

According to legal theorist John Salmond, “A person is any being whom the law regards as capable of rights and bound by legal duties.”

The RSS’s legal status came under scrutiny in the 1970s during tax proceedings in Bombay and Patna. The disputes centred on whether donations received as “*guru dakshina*” from RSS workers were taxable.

RSS continues to describe itself as a voluntary socio-cultural organisation and a body of individuals rather than a registered corporate entity.

EXPLAINER



Candidates leave the exam centre after appearing for the Civil Services Preliminary Examination, at a in Hyderabad in May. The exam has come under widespread criticism for the perceived inequity in the distribution and format of questions. G. RAMAKRISHNA

Civil Services Preliminary Examination 2026: tough by design or default?

An exam meant to filter talent is increasingly seen as rejecting it, raising questions about fairness, design, and whether the system is identifying merit — a warning that calls for deeper reflection and timely course correction, rather than remaining a mere instance of acknowledgement

Gopala Krishna V.

The story so far: The Civil Services (Preliminary) Examination, introduced in 1979 following the Kothari Committee’s recommendations, was designed as a screening mechanism – a ‘filter and funnel’ – to shortlist candidates for the descriptive Main examination. In its original format, it consisted of two components: an optional subject paper at the graduate level and a General Studies paper, with the optional paper carrying greater weight. For many years, this system functioned smoothly with minor changes.

The Alagh Committee set up in 2000 observed that the preliminary exam should have an optional paper to assess the intellectual competence of the aspirant and maintain its connection with the university system. It also proposed a Civil Services Aptitude Test (CSAT) which would evaluate skills such as general awareness, problem-solving, data analysis and decision-making. The committee also recommended that the questions at the preliminary exam should be made challenging and a case-study approach should be adopted.

In 2009, the S.K. Khanna Committee recommended that the Preliminary Examination should be renamed as the Civil Services Aptitude Test with two common papers at the Preliminary. The preliminary exam was reconstituted to comprise two papers – General Studies Paper- I and General Studies Paper- II. The Paper I covers all conventional areas in ‘Humanities’, while Paper- II has questions on quantitative aptitude, reasoning, comprehension, interpersonal skills and communication, decision-making and problem-solving. The components of Paper- II were designed to test whether the aspirant had the ability to imbibe new technologies.

Both the papers had equal weightage and the combined marks in both the papers were taken to determine merit. This change practically delinked the Preliminary Examination with the university system. After a few years, due to protests, Paper-II known as CSAT was made qualifying in nature. In practice, this meant that nearly five lakh aspirants were narrowed down to about 10,000 candidates solely based on their performance in the 100 questions attempted over two hours.

Bringing down the vast pool of aspirants to a manageable number through a paper comprising just 100 questions is an inherently difficult task. As a result, examiners were forced to constantly reinvent and compile the most unpredictable questions. Over time, it became quite evident that the objective of selecting candidates was being overshadowed by the need to eliminate them. Even the qualifying paper became a tool for rejection, with overall difficulty level of questions rising.

What changed this year? Against this evolving backdrop, the Civil Services (Preliminary) Examination held in May has come under widespread criticism for the perceived inequity in the distribution and format of questions. Many aspirants found the paper unusually difficult and unpredictable – concerns that were publicly acknowledged by the UPSC Chairman, who expressed empathy with candidates.

This has sparked a broader debate on whether the nature of the paper was an unintended outcome of systemic constraints or a deliberate shift in examination design, and more importantly, what course corrections are needed to ensure fairness, balance and credibility in the screening process.

This year, UPSC committed itself to greater transparency, and agreed to release the answer key of the preliminary

exam immediately after it. Openness also meant that the questions had to be set from verifiable authoritative sources. The questions were framed using carefully curated information drawn from government websites.

Attempting the question paper entailed sifting through 55 pages and comprehending 40,000 words in two hours. In addition to this, the subject-wise distribution of questions was distorted and the style of questioning underwent a noticeable shift. Consequently, the aspirants found no link between their preparation and the questions. They had to make guesses, “some informed” and “some wild”. Solving previous years’ questions, which was considered as the gold standard was also of no help.

This gap between the preparation and examination, coupled with the element of surprise, prompted the aspirants to voice their concerns. The democratisation of expression through social media platforms further amplified the protests, creating a snowballing effect.

The nature of the question paper, thus, appears to be less a matter of a deliberate design and more a consequence of systemic constraints – a by-product of a short-sighted examination pattern established 15 years ago. In retrospect, the committee which introduced the pattern overlooked a dictum that is crucial in policy formulation; that anticipation is the highest form of competence. It failed to adequately foresee the challenge of balancing the increasing number of aspirants with a relatively static number of vacancies.

What is the way out? The perceived unfairness of the Preliminary Examination has been widely voiced by aspirants and has also been recently flagged by a Parliamentary Committee. However, the Chairman’s acknowledgement of the paper’s difficulty should not remain a mere instance of

proverbial “ventilation therapy.” Many crises in governance are not sudden surprises; they are warning signals that were noticed but not acted upon in time. This appears to be one such signal – one that calls for deeper reflection and timely course correction.

It is time for the government to appoint a committee to revisit the examination pattern and make suitable long-term changes after public consultation. The UPSC has been collecting information regarding the socio-economic profile of the aspirants. They have information about the distribution of applicants based on place of birth, schools and colleges attended, status of parents etc. as they are collecting this information at the preliminary stage itself. This information should be used as an input to align the scheme of examination to the background of the aspirants.

Questions may be unpredictable by design, but aspirants should not feel that they are incapable of rising up to the required level of the questions or the highest positions in the country are beyond their reach. The government must undertake reforms both in the examination system and the university framework by introducing ‘bridge courses’ along the lines of the recommendations of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission. Such measures would help restore visible alignment between education and assessment.

The education system and public employment emanate from the same source – the government. Any disconnect between the two risks eroding their trust in the system. Respecting the aspirations of this generation and sustaining their faith is the order of the day. It is better to prevent a crisis rather than ‘firefight’ one.

The writer is the Director of Brain Tree, Hyderabad, an institute training candidates for the civil services examination.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

S. Upendran

What is the difference between “spectators” and “audience”? (Dr. S. P. Gupta, Agra)

Strictly speaking “spectators” usually come to “see” something. They come to see an event, a “spectacle.” The people who go to see a sporting event like a football game, a boxing bout, or a cricket match are called spectators. Usually in such events the focus is on what you “see” rather than what you “hear.” If you are walking along the road and you “see” two of your favourite stars shooting for a film, then you would be “spectator.” But when you go to the cinema hall and watch the film which you saw while it was being made, then you become part of the audience. The word audience is related to the word “audio.” You are at a specific event to listen to something. An audience is an assembly of ‘hearers.’ People who are part of the audience listen to or watch a performance. When you go to a music concert, a play, or a movie, you are part of an audience.

As you know, there is an exception to every rule. Readers are usually associated with the word “audience” – although reading has more to do with “seeing” rather than “hearing”! This could be because in the old days not many people knew how to read or write. The illiterates had to be read to – they had to “listen” to other people reading aloud.

What is the meaning of “tete-a-tete”? How do you pronounce the word? (B. Abdul Haleem, Alappuzha, Kerala)

While the first “e” in “tete” is pronounced like the “ay” in “bay”, “say”, and “gay”, the second one is silent. The word rhymes with the words “date”, “late”, and “hate.” In some American dictionaries, however, the word rhymes with “set”, “bet”, and “get.” The following “a” is like the “a” in “bath”, “calf”, and “path.” Some people, however pronounce the “a” like the “a” in “china” and “amount.” The main stress is on the second “tete.”

When you have a “tete-a-tete” with someone, you have a private conversation with him/her. It usually involves an intimate conversation between two people. The word is French in origin. The first “e” of “tete” and the “a” have accent marks on them. Here are a few examples.

Braj and Yamuna had a cosy tete-a-tete after the interview.

I understand they had a romantic tete-a-tete after dinner.

When I call someone up, should I say, “Can I speak to...?”, “May I speak to...?”, or “Could I speak to”? (C. Maneesh Goel, Faridabad)

It depends on the person you are talking to. If you are talking to someone whom you do not know and wish to sound polite, then you could say, “May I” or “Could I.” Of the two, “May I” is considered to be more polite. If, on the other hand, you are talking to someone you know fairly well, then you could say, “Can I.” The use of these three will depend on the person you are talking to and how you wish to sound. If you wish to sound polite, use “May I” or “Could I.”

Published in The Hindu on January 23, 2001

THE DAILY QUIZ

Here is a quiz to test your FIFA World Cup knowledge

N. Soorya Prakash

QUESTION 1
Which player holds the record of scoring the most goals in a single World Cup match?

QUESTION 2
Which player holds the record of having played in most minutes in the World Cup history?

QUESTION 3
Who is the only player to have won the Golden Ball and Golden Glove awards in the same World Cup tournament?

QUESTION 4
Who is the only player to

have won the Golden Boot and and Golden Ball Awards in the same World Cup tournament and ended up in the winning side too?

QUESTION 5
Who is the only player to have won World Cup as a player and as a coach/manager besides having won the Best Young Player award?

QUESTION 6
Which country withdrew from the 1950 edition of the World Cup because FIFA strictly required players to wear boots, while the players of this country were accustomed to playing barefoot?



Visual question: Identify the youngest player to score a goal, youngest to score a hat-trick and youngest to score a goal in final in the history World Cup Football? GETTY IMAGES

Questions and answers to the previous day’s daily quiz:

1. Which country established the first permanent research station in Antarctica, Orcadas Base, which has operated continuously since 1904? **Ans: Argentina**
2. The Antarctic Treaty applies to all territory south of which latitude? **Ans: 60° South latitude**
3. Which major scientific event of 1957-58 provided the immediate impetus for negotiating the Antarctic Treaty? **Ans: The International Geophysical Year (IGY)**
4. Which seven countries had overlapping territorial claims in Antarctica when the Treaty was signed? **Ans: Argentina, Australia, Chile, France, New Zealand, Norway and the United Kingdom**
5. How many countries currently have Consultative Party status, giving them voting rights in Antarctic Treaty decision-making? **Ans: 29**
6. Visual: Name this active volcano, located on Ross Island, which is the southernmost active volcano on Earth? **Ans: Mount Erebus.**

Early Birds
K.N. Viswanathan| Lalchand Bhutani| Sukdev Shet| Seema Abhijeet| Alisha Yadav

Word of the day

Gingham:
a clothing fabric in a plaid weave

Synonyms: checkered cotton, woven plaid

Usage: *The cozy kitchen featured matching blue and white gingham curtains.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/gingham

International Phonetic Alphabet: /dʒɪŋ.ɡəm/

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

U.S. curbs on AI spur European firms to spread the risk



Lowering dependence: AI (Artificial Intelligence) letters and robot hand miniature in this illustration. REUTERS

Reuters
PARIS

Limits on access to some U.S. artificial intelligence services are pushing major European companies to speed up spreading risk across multiple providers and reinforcing the need for more domestic alternatives.

Recent restrictions include the U.S. government ordering San Francisco-based Anthropic, the company behind AI chatbot Claude, to suspend access to its Fable 5 and Mythos 5 models for foreign nationals, citing national security concerns.

Vulnerability for companies
Such limits highlight a vulnerability for companies reliant on proprietary AI services delivered remotely - as those services can be restricted by their providers and cannot be run independently on a company's own servers.

Executives from Siemens, Renault Group, Orange and ChapsVision told *Reuters* at last week's VivaTech conference in Paris that they already use a mix of U.S., Chinese and European models to avoid dependence on any one provider.

Siemens said it uses Chinese models DeepSeek and Alibaba's Qwen, as well as Nvidia's Nemotron alongside other U.S. and European models.

EU officials have been trying to reduce dependence on U.S. technology, which they see as a threat to the region's economic future.

Yet, major companies say sovereignty is more about choice and diversity.

"You need flexibility," Cedrik Neike, chief executive of Digital Industries at Siemens, told *Reuters*. "Sovereignty often gets confused with autarky (economic self-sufficiency), and autarky is absolutely not the way to do it."

Europe's general-purpose AI providers, however, are few, headed by France's Mistral, while others like translation specialist DeepL have built strong positions in narrower fields.

The artificial intelligence market is broadly split into two camps: open-source or open-weight models, which companies can run on their own servers and proprietary models, which are accessed remotely and remain under the developer's control.

"Today, in open source, when you look at European models, they're not impressive. At one point, the Americans were there, then they moved to closed source, and now there are only Chinese models in open source," OVHcloud CEO Octave Klaba said.

Orange said its infrastructure could run all open-source models, including those developed in China, and described the risk in simple terms: running a Chinese model on European infrastructure is like buying a painting in China and bringing it home, because the model is self-operated and does not send data abroad when run on premises.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters
KARACHI

Pakistan's role in brokering a peace deal in the Iran war has led to widespread diplomatic acclaim that could bring Islamabad some economic benefits, but analysts question whether such gains can help resolve the faultlines in its economy.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and army chief Field Marshal Asim Munir attended talks between Iran and the U.S. in the Swiss-town of Buergerstock last weekend, the culmination of Pakistan's months-long role in one of the world's most consequential diplomatic negotiations.

"This guy. What's up, man?" U.S. Vice President JD Vance said upon seeing Munir in the resort town before giving the army chief a hug. Both sides, along with several world leaders, have thanked Islamabad for helping ease a conflict that could have disrupted the Strait of Hormuz for a long period, choked global oil supplies and shattered the world economy.

Raise profile
The breakthrough has raised Pakistan's profile and analysts say the country of 250 million people has an opportunity to convert that goodwill into some gains for an economy marked by decades of boom and bust. But they said any benefits were un-

Explained: Meta's \$900 million Cred investment, hiring Kunal Shah for WA

The move accomplishes dual aim of investing into a business focused on few million Indians with a credit card, and getting a leader for WA at a time it is pushing to leverage multi-billion user base Meta has been able to amass; WhatsApp has faced pushback in previous moves towards monetisation.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Aroon Deep

Cred founder Kunal Shah's appointment as WhatsApp's global head is, at first brush, an unexpected appointment. But while Mr. Shah has built his career as a founder in two large fintech ventures - the previous being the mobile wallet firm FreeCharge - he has also been a large investor focused on building up ventures. For the last seven years, Will Cathcart, a Meta veteran, has focused on growing WhatsApp's value.

Explained: Meta's \$900 million investment into Cred, hiring of Kunal Shah as WhatsApp chiefue to consumers with privacy features and all the additional things that people have come to expect from messaging applications.

With these underpinnings, WhatsApp has grown to over three billion users. But while that is indeed a massive number, the service is likely still cross-subsidised by other Meta products like Instagram and Facebook, where advertisements are a significant sight and monetising is straightforward. Until recent weeks, WhatsApp didn't even have a subscription model for individual users - most of its revenue comes from



Huge investment: A mobile user checks his WhatsApp app. PTI

business users paying for messages to customers (or likely customers).

Mr. Shah indicated that he'll change that. "While it's come very far, the delta between WhatsApp today and its full potential is massive," he said on X, formerly Twitter. "I look forward to working with Mark [Zuckerberg, Meta's founder and CEO], Chris [Cox, chief product officer], and the leadership across Meta for the next step in WhatsApp's journey."

"Kunal built CRED into one of India's most important technology companies, and he brings the kind of builder mentality and global perspective that will serve him well in running the world's biggest messaging app," Mr. Zuckerberg said. The firm is al-

so investing \$900 million in Cred, half of which will go towards the company, with the other half going to early investors. Cred is evaluating a public listing.

Meta has made big ticket investments into other firms in India, such as Jio Platforms Limited. These multi-billion Big Tech investments are as much a bet on a business as they are participation in the political capital of India's digital infrastructure. In Cred's case, the investment may have been necessary to convince Mr. Shah that the venture he has led for the better part of a decade is set up for its best shot at success in the coming years. Cred is now valued at \$4 billion following this investment.

While Meta also stands

to gain from deeper insights into the spending habits and behaviour of its wealthiest users in India, Mr. Shah has said that the firm will gain no consumer data as a result of this deal.

WhatsApp was acquired by Meta over a decade ago for \$19 billion. The firm has since taken pains to assure users that it is a secure and reliable platform, while investing billions of dollars over the years to keep the service free and attractive to users. Mr. Cathcart played a key role there, such as by being the public face of Meta's lawsuit against the NSO Group, which makes the Pegasus spyware, used in many countries, including India, to spy on journalists, activists and the political opposition.

Australia's tax overhaul chills love for property

NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters
SYDNEY

Just a short stroll from Sydney's famous Bondi Beach, auctioneer Clarence White struggles to drum up bids for an airy three-storey home that boasts offive bedrooms and an alfresco lounge - price tag, A\$5.2 million (\$3.64 million).

"We know everyone's cagey at the moment, but that's okay ... all power to those who are registered and those who take action," the veteran auctioneer tells small group of prospective buyers and onlookers, none of whom bids.

Failed auctions like this were once the exception in Sydney's red-hot property



Fading allure: An aerial view of Sydney Harbour with the Sydney Harbour Bridge and buildings. AFP

market. Now, clearance rates across the country have plunged, squeezed by an end to property investment tax breaks.

Policy shift
The policy shift unveiled last month is the biggest in decades and seen by some as ending Australia's obses-

sion with property, for generations the primary way to build wealth, making Sydney and Melbourne among the world's least affordable markets.

Already, weekend auction clearance rates nationally have fallen to below 50% in the month since the government announced its

change, to the lowest point since the pandemic, data from property research firm Cotality showed.

"Our viewer numbers are halved, the number of bidders for properties have halved, clearance rates have gone down to about 30, 35%," said Ray White's Avi Khan, an agent in Brisbane.

Investor pain
In a bid to address an imbalance in inter-generational wealth, Australia's centre-left Labor government will scrap the capital gains tax (CGT) discount from July 2027. Negative gearing, which allows investment losses to be offset against taxable income, will be banned on existing housing.

Property investors, the target of the tax reforms to

helpfirst home buyers compete in the market, are bracing for price falls of up to 10%, which experts say risk unintended consequences because of how heavily tied housing is to household wealth in Australia.

Around 70% of wealth is linked to the value of homes, which is made up of land and dwellings, and moves closely in line with home prices, according to AMP. More than 2 million people, or roughly 10% of working-age Australians, own an investment property. The central bank estimates around 70% of them own one investment property, while the remainder own several.

Auctioneer White said he had seen fewer investors bid at auctions than before the tax changes

were announced. "It's a tougher market that we're working in," he said. "It is mainly owner-occupiers that we're dealing with."

Kellie Adamson, an investor who owns two residential properties in Sydney, including one that is negatively geared, worth a combined A\$3 million, said she had "completely backflipped" on her buying strategy.

"I would want to be moving actually outside of Sydney altogether whereas before, I would never have considered that," she said. "I would even consider commercial (properties) as well."

Queensland-based investor Shaun Craike estimates the budget changes wiped around A\$500,000 from the value of his A\$6 million portfolio of 10 properties.

Can Pakistan's peacekeeping role in Iran war pay dividends?

NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters
KARACHI



Rising profile: Pakistani villagers clean cotton at a factory in Mirpurkhas in Sindh province. AFP

likely to fix deeper structural issues including social and economic inequity, a narrow tax base and repeated IMF bailouts.

Pakistan is targeting economic growth of 4.0%

and inflation of 8.2% for the coming fiscal year, compared with 3.7% projected growth in fiscal 2026 which ends in June, and 6.7% average inflation in the July-May period of

the outgoing year.

"A nation that delivers stability at home and helps advance stability abroad becomes a more credible destination for investment," said Khurram

Schehzad, adviser to Pakistan's Finance Minister.

Growth, reputation
"A growth-oriented economic agenda, coupled with a reputation as a force for peace and stability, places Pakistan in a uniquely favourable position to attract investment into its people, infrastructure, technology and future growth sectors."

Many analysts are expecting some largesse from the U.S., although there have been no signs of any such windfalls yet.

Alex Vatanka, senior fellow and director of the Iran programme at the Middle East Institute in Washington, said one gain for Pakistan was the "huge potential to be a more integrated part of the broader

Middle East," and eventually forging broader economic partnerships in the region that would also encompass defence.

Another possibility was that sanctions relief on Iran could allow "huge trade between Iran and Pakistan," particularly through their Balochistan land border, said Miftah Ismail, a former FM.

Seen this before
After the September 11, 2001 attacks and the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, alignment with Washington helped secure debt rescheduling from more than a dozen bilateral creditors, renewed support from the IMF and other multilateral lenders, and U.S. assistance. But Pakistan failed to take advantage because

of structural weaknesses, analysts say.

Khurram Husain, an economic commentator and journalist, said the current situation was similar to post-9/11, but with one crucial difference: that moment came at "the start of a long ruinous war in which Pakistan had to play a frontline role" while this time "Pakistan is playing the role of a peacemaker."

That distinction means Pakistan's leverage this time comes from being useful to multiple sides simultaneously - Washington, Tehran, Gulf states, Turkey and China.

Former FM Ismail said the diplomatic role had no effect on the high costs, weak exports and external repayments that keep it dependent on the IMF.

JERUSALEM

Israel should ‘break free’ of U.S. military aid, says PM Netanyahu



REUTERS

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called again for his country to increase its military autonomy and reduce its reliance on support from the U.S., according to a statement released on Tuesday by his office. Since 1948, Israel has received more than \$300 billion, adjusted for inflation, in U.S. aid. AFP

ISLAMABAD

Pezeshkian lands in Pakistan as U.S.-Iran teams work to finalise deal



REUTERS

Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian met on Tuesday with Pakistani officials mediating talks on a permanent end to its war with the U.S., as discrepancies emerged on what had been agreed upon so far and violence broke out again in Lebanon. This visit is followed by high-level negotiations in Switzerland. AP

KYIV

Zelenskyy to skip key Ukraine conference in Poland over row



AFF

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy will skip this year's Ukraine Recovery Conference hosted in Poland, Kyiv announced on Tuesday, amid a spiralling diplomatic spat between the allies and neighbours over the Second World War memory. The annual event is aimed at discussing the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine. AFP

KYIV

Russian strikes kill nine in Ukraine, including six near the frontline



REUTERS

Russian strikes killed nine persons across Ukraine on Tuesday, including six in the central Dnipropetrovsk region that borders the frontline, local authorities said. Moscow and Kyiv have intensified attacks in recent weeks, as U.S.-led talks on ending Europe's deadliest conflict since the Second World War remain frozen. AFP

‘Israel’s targeting of children key part of Gaza genocide’

Agence France-Presse
GENEVA

Israel is deliberately targeting Palestinian children in what has become a key factor in an ongoing “genocide” in Gaza, United Nations investigators charged on Tuesday, in a report slammed by Israel.

The UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry said it had found evidence that “Palestinian children have been deliberately targeted and killed by Israeli security forces”.

This, it said, was a key factor in establishing “the genocidal intent of the Israeli authorities and security forces to destroy the larger Palestinian group in Gaza”.

The three-member investigative team, which does not speak for the UN



Bleak future: Children watch as smoke billows near the Nuseirat camp for Palestinian refugees in the central Gaza Strip. AFP

itself, first determined in a report last September that Israel had committed “genocide” in the war in Gaza – a finding Israel flatly rejected.

In Tuesday’s follow-up report, they said the intense scale and systematic nature of Israeli military operations had continued, resulting in the “unprece-

dent” death, injury and trauma of Palestinian children.

There were “reasonable grounds” to conclude that Israel’s authorities and security forces “have continued to commit the crime of genocide” in Gaza, they said.

Israel slammed the report as “defamatory”.

Tehran says it won’t permit IAEA inspectors at bombed nuclear sites

U.S. President Trump and Vice-President Vance have said Iran would allow nuclear inspections of its sites ‘long into the future’; Mohammad Ghalibaf says the Strait of Hormuz ‘will never return’ to the days of free passage before the conflict

Agence France-Presse
TEHRAN

Iran said on Tuesday the UN’s nuclear watchdog will not be able to inspect key nuclear sites bombed by the U.S. and Israel last year, as the first round of talks to end the war wrapped up in Switzerland.

Tehran and Washington have signed a memorandum of understanding to end a war that sowed chaos across West Asia and rattled the global economy, embarking on a 60-day period to settle broader issues. Diplomacy on that final deal ramped up on Tuesday, with Iran’s leader



Destroyed buildings at Isfahan Nuclear Technology Centre after it was hit by U.S. air strikes, in Isfahan, Iran, on June 22, 2025. REUTERS

heading to mediator Pakistan, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio setting off on a tour of Gulf allies, and Lebanon and Israel due for direct talks in Washington.

But Iran denied the claim of U.S. Vice-President J.D. Vance that Tehran had agreed to invite International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors

back, after Iran blocked them from nuclear sites struck by its arch foes in a 12-day war last year.

“We have not had a meeting with the director general of the IAEA, nor do we have any plans for the agency to inspect Iran’s nuclear facilities damaged by the U.S. and Zionist military aggression,” Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baqaei told a press briefing.

But U.S. President Donald Trump later said Iran had signed off on comprehensive nuclear inspections.

“Iran has fully and completely agreed to highest level Nuclear inspections

long into the future,” he posted on social media.

When the U.S. joined Israel’s war with Iran in mid-2025, it bombed nuclear facilities at Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan.

Iran’s UN ambassador Ali Bahreini also told presspersons on Tuesday “there hasn’t been such a decision” to accept IAEA inspectors.

It came as Tehran’s top negotiator Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf said the strategic Strait of Hormuz “will never return” to the days of free passage before the war, despite both sides agreeing to set up communication lines to keep it open.

Activists of Awami League held during anniversary marches

Press Trust of India
DHAKA

Dozens of activists of deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s now-disbanded Awami League party were arrested overnight as they staged sporadic street marches to mark the party’s 77th founding anniversary in defiance of a nationwide security ban, authorities said on Tuesday.

Founded on June 23, 1949, when present-day Bangladesh was East Pakistan, the Awami League is the country’s oldest political party and led the nation’s 1971 Liberation War.

Through its social media

platforms, the Awami League urged supporters to hold digital discussions, hoist party flags, organise processions and conduct poster campaigns to mark the anniversary.

A police headquarters spokesperson said 26 activists of the “banned party” were arrested in Dhaka alone, while several others were detained in other places in the country for staging processions or attempting to defy the ban amid heightened security.

“We have foiled their plan so far, and I hope that within the remaining time, they will not be able to bring out a procession, or gather anywhere.”

Awaiting justice



Unbroken resolve: Relatives of political prisoners who have been camping outside the U.S. embassy in Caracas for 15 days call on President Donald Trump to intervene to secure the release of hundreds of prisoners in Venezuela. AFP

Hungary passes anti-graft measures, eyeing EU funds

Agence France-Presse
BUDAPEST

Hungarian lawmakers on Tuesday approved anti-corruption measures, part of new Prime Minister Peter Magyar’s sweeping reform drive and aimed at helping the country get billions of euros in withheld European Union funds.

The EU announced late last month it would unlock more than 16 billion euros for Hungary that had been frozen over rule-of-law concerns during nationalist Viktor Orban’s rule, if Budapest stays on track with a major reform push.

The anti-graft legislation easily passed Parliament



Peter Magyar

with 142 votes for, 39 against and three abstentions.

The EU froze billions of euros in funds earmarked for Budapest because of democratic backsliding, graft concerns and the restriction of LGBTQ rights under Mr. Orban’s rule.

Sri Lanka decides to appoint military-led dengue monitoring unit amid surge in cases across island

Meera Srinivasan
COLOMBO

Sri Lanka has decided to appoint a military-led team to monitor the sudden surge in dengue cases across the island, even as hospitals report overcrowding and mounting pressure on the public health system.

According to a statement from the President’s office, the decision was taken at a meeting chaired by Minister of Health and Mass Media, Dr. Nalinda Jayatissa, at the Presidential Secretariat on Monday.

The monitoring unit will strengthen legal enforcement measures and further reinforce dengue prevention activities through the “Community Empo-

werment and Public Safety Committees” established at the local level, the statement said.

As of June 20, the island’s health authorities have reported a total of 46,037 cases, with nearly 10,000 of those reported from the capital, Colombo. As many as 28 dengue deaths have so far been reported this year. The monitoring unit, “under the leadership of the Tri-Forces”, will strengthen legal enforcement measures and further reinforce dengue prevention activities, the statement said.

Last week, Sri Lanka’s Health Ministry said hospitals had exceeded their capacity due to a rapid spike in dengue patients being reported. According to me-



Dengue mosquito larvae inside a pipette tube after being collected during an inspection of houses in Colombo, Sri Lanka. REUTERS

dia reports, Mr. Jayatissa warned that the island’s hospital system could come under severe strain if dengue cases continued to rise.

Sri Lanka is widely credited with one of the best public health systems in the region. The country

was certified malaria-free by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2016, and the last indigenous malaria cases were reported over a decade ago, in 2012. However, the island grapples with chikungunya, which had experienced a large outbreak in 2025, and den-

gue outbreaks from time to time, especially around its monsoon seasons.

Sri Lanka witnessed a massive dengue outbreak in 2017 with a total of 1,86,101 cases, the largest outbreak so far, and 440 dengue-related deaths were reported. The years 2019 and 2023, too, saw outbreaks, prompting authorities to launch a ‘National Strategic Plan’ for the prevention and control of dengue.

The number of dengue patients increases during the second and fourth quarters of each year, coinciding with the monsoon rains. “Large-scale outbreaks of dengue have occurred every three to four years with high intensity,” a 2024 report pointed out.

Starmer vows transition of power ‘as easy as possible’

Agence France-Presse
LONDON

Outgoing U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer pledged on Tuesday to make the transition of power “as easy as possible”, as two Labour lawmakers considered whether to challenge frontrunner Andy Burnham amid concern about a coronation.

Mr. Starmer, who announced on Monday he was stepping down after losing the support of his own MPs, has authorised so-called access talks with prospective successors to begin “as soon as possible,” Downing Street said.

The PM, in office for almost two years, told his senior ministerial team during their weekly meeting



Keir Starmer

that he wanted an “orderly” handover and whoever replaces him “to succeed”.

Likely contenders

Labour veteran Burnham, 56, is the overwhelming favourite to replace Mr. Starmer, despite only becoming eligible for the top job after winning a parliamentary by-election last Thursday.

Former Armed Forces Minister Al Carns told an event on Tuesday that he wanted to hear Mr. Burnham’s “vision” for the country before deciding whether or not to stand.

“We’ll see where we go from there,” he added.

U.K. media reported that Government Minister Darren Jones was being encouraged to run by some MPs.

A person close to Mr. Jones said that he was keeping his options open until Mr. Burnham lays out more detailed plans for government, particularly on the economy, but that he considered a run “very unlikely”.

Mr. Burnham is due to begin setting out his policy platform next week.



High-decibel act: Joseph McGrail-Bateup is currently the world's loudest person as per Guinness World Records. AP

Canberra town crier shouts his way into Guinness records

Associated Press
MELBOURNE

Joseph McGrail-Bateup, an Australian professional air conditioner cleaner and honorary town crier, has been recognised as the world's loudest person.

Guinness World Records last week acknowledged that the 58-year-old Canberra resident recorded the loudest ever shout by an individual. He yelled "now" at 122.4 decibels (dB).

That broke the previous record of 121.7 dB set by Northern Ireland schoolteacher Annalisa Flanagan in 1994. She had yelled an ear-piercing "quiet." That is in the noise range of a chain saw, a jet aircraft taking off and an ambulance siren at close range.

The record attempt was not something Mr. McGrail-Bateup could train for, he said on Tuesday.

"There's no way that you can actually practice for it. You have to just keep it for the day, especially with the world record attempt," Mr. McGrail-Bateup said.

"It took me seven attempts just for one word, which was the word 'now,' and my voice was shot for the next couple of days as well. It was husky. It was terrible. So no, you can't really practice for it. But it's a lot of fun when you're doing it".

"I'm pleased that she (Ms. Flanagan) gets to keep her record. So she's still the loudest woman and I'm the loudest man in the world," Mr. McGrail-Bateup said.

Mr. McGrail-Bateup said he stumbled upon Ms. Flanagan's record when searching Guinness World Records unsuccessfully for feats in the realm of town crying.

His shout was recorded on May 2 in a radio studio. The files were sent to Guinness World Records, which announced the record on Friday.

Strait of Hormuz's future is unsettled even as more vessels venture through

Ships are moving but not at the pre-war pace; Iran has warned that it would shut the Strait if Israel attacks Lebanon and the U.S. has threatened tolls if a final deal is not reached within 60 days; experts say tolls would violate international maritime law; disruptions could continue for months

Associated Press
NEW YORK

While ship traffic has picked up in the Strait of Hormuz since Iran and the U.S. signed an interim deal to end a war that constricted global oil supplies and fuelled inflation, questions surrounding control of the vital waterway and whether vessels will be charged tolls to cross it remain.

Tehran and Washington clashed over the Strait of Hormuz again this past weekend. Citing Israel's latest attacks on Lebanon, Iran declared that it re-closed the strait. Maritime tracking data showed that dozens of ships passed through on Saturday and Sunday, though far fewer than the daily average before the war.

President Donald Trump suggested the U.S. might impose its own tolls on strait crossings if a final deal with Iran was not reached during the countries' 60-day negotiating period. Passage was free before the war, but Iran last month established a new governmental authority to collect money from ships and has said it still expects vessels to register with the Persian Gulf Strait Authority.

No one country owns the Strait of Hormuz, which borders both Iran and Oman. Last week's memorandum of understanding allowed Iran to



No 'strait' answer: Ships anchored in the Strait of Hormuz as seen from Musandam, Oman. Questions linger on the control of the vital waterway and whether vessels will be charged tolls to cross. REUTERS

manage the strait for now while holding discussions with Oman and six other Gulf states "to define the future administration and maritime services" of the waterway. Iran agreed not to charge transiting vessels tolls for 60 days.

Legal experts and maritime associations have stressed that a toll regime would upend decades of international trade precedent involving the world's waters. If the U.S. and Iran cement a final deal, analysts say it could take months for the flow of oil, natural gas, fertilizer and other commodities to return to pre-war levels.

Data and analytics company Kpler said its tracking confirmed 71 ships travelled through the strait

between Friday and Sunday, with a peak of 35 crossings on Saturday. In contrast, about 100 to 130 vessels a day made the journey before the U.S. and Israel launched strikes on Iran in late February, and Tehran responded with its own attacks and effective closure of the waterway.

Remove 'obstacles'

As part of the provisional Iran-U.S. framework, Tehran said it would conduct demining work within 30 days and remove "technical and military obstacles" to shipping.

Iran's lead negotiator and Parliament Speaker, Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, told Iranian state media on Monday that his country would manage the

strait in accordance with international maritime law.

The main central route of the Strait of Hormuz is still mined and remains closed. Ships have been using the smaller northern route, which goes through Iranian waters, and the southern route, which goes through Omani waters. But "caution is still clear" in the many vessels either sticking to Iran's prescribed route or trying to conceal their positions and identities by keeping their transponders off, Kpler said.

Early in the war, Iran threatened to attack ships that tried to use the strait without its approval and began vetting vessels in a pay-to-pass scheme that

shipping analysts dubbed the "tollbooth."

Although the Trump administration imposed sanctions on the Persian Gulf Strait Authority late last month to oppose what Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent described as Tehran's attempt to extort global maritime trade, the President on Saturday suggested the U.S. could impose its own tolls for "services rendered as the Guardian Angel to the countries of West Asia".

The administration has not provided details on how the U.S. would apply any charges on ships if talks with Iran do not yield a completed agreement.

Collecting tolls in the strait could violate an enduring principle of international maritime trade: freedom of peaceful navigation. The concept was codified by the United Nations' Convention on the Law of the Sea, which took effect in 1994.

Oman is among the more than 170 countries that have ratified the U.N. convention, but the U.S. and Iran are not.

James Kraska, a U.S. Naval War College professor of international maritime law, notes that the U.S. and Iran are both members of the International Maritime Organization, the U.N. agency that oversees safety and security measures in international shipping. Both countries also are parties to the International

Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, a treaty that governs standards for building and operating ships.

In straits like Hormuz, fees can only be applied at ports of entry or for services specifically requested by a ship, such as specialised navigation aid through hazardous areas, according to Mr. Kraska.

"You can't impose fees for a ship exercising its right of transit passage," Mr. Kraska added. "So the bottom line is, no – fees in this context are just not lawful."

Conditions in the Strait of Hormuz have escalated or deteriorated quickly over the course of the war. While the outlook for shipping has improved since the U.S. and Iran pledged to extend their ceasefire, "there is a degree of nervousness around the situation," said Marcus Baker, the global head of marine, cargo and logistics at insurance brokerage and risk management company Marsh.

"As far as the insurance position is concerned, there's a good deal of support for ship owners that are trying to move out" during this period, but the interim deal does not include language for keeping the strait toll-free beyond the negotiating window, Mr. Baker said.

"We'll see what the next six weeks brings us," he said.

Polarising mandate



Demonstrators hold signs reading "Fraud, this country will not be governed" and "Revolution or death" during a protest against the results of the presidential run-off election in Bogotá on Tuesday. Colombia's leftist candidate Ivan Cepeda called for calm and distanced himself from post-poll violence following U.S. President Donald Trump-endorsed hard-right candidate Abelardo de la Escribilla's narrow victory. AFP

Afghan Taliban hold rare talks with EU officials on deportations amid backlash

Agence France-Presse
BRUSSELS

Taliban representatives held talks with the EU in Brussels on Tuesday about returning failed asylum-seekers to Afghanistan, in a visit criticised by rights activists.

The European Commission invited the five-person delegation for discussions under a push to crack down on irregular migration and boost deportations, despite it not formally recognising the Taliban administration.

A source informed about the trip confirmed the delegation had arrived in the Belgian capital, where they were granted a one-day visa for the talks.

A second informed source said talks with the EU side took place as planned, with a focus on



Voices matter: An Amnesty activist protests before EU Commission headquarters in Brussels on Tuesday. AFP

resuming consular services for Afghans in Europe, on "confidence-building measures" and "a dignified return process."

The Taliban delegation was led by Foreign Ministry spokesman Abdul Qahar Balkhi, the source said.

The visit – the first by Taliban officials with EU representatives in Brussels –

has drawn fierce pushback, with human rights campaigners saying it flies in the face of the bloc's values.

"The Taliban have erased women and girls from public life," said Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai.

"Europe must not legitimise a regime responsible

for one of the worst human rights crises in the world," said the education activist, who aged 15 was shot by Pakistan Taliban militants on her way home from school.

"EU countries are undermining their credibility by condemning Taliban abuses and pursuing accountability on one hand, while cooperating with the Taliban to forcibly return Afghans on the other," said Fereshta Abbasi of Human Rights Watch.

A commission spokesman said the "technical level" meeting, which had yet to take place, had been arranged upon the request of 20 EU countries.

"The focus of these member states is to return persons who have committed serious crimes or who pose security threats," Markus Lammert said.

Off the rails: record-breaking heatwave wreaks havoc on Europe's trains

Agence France-Presse
PARIS

The extreme heat baking much of Europe this week is exposing the limits of rail infrastructure made during cooler times, leading to delays and cancellations along with warnings to travellers with health problems to avoid trips if possible.

Overhead power lines that expand and droop, tracks that widen even just a few millimetres when hit by the Sun and overtaxed air-conditioning systems are the main problems dogging train lines where maintenance investments have often lagged.

More recent high-speed lines notwithstanding,

much of the network and rolling stock in France and Belgium, where service cuts have been more prevalent, is several decades old.

More cancellations

If they do have air conditioning, the system often cuts off automatically if the wagons get too hot, prompting operators to pre-emptively cancel trains on the most exposed routes.

Belgium's national operator SNCB has removed trains without AC from service during rush hours, while France's SNCF withdrew 10% of Paris region trains to avoid overheating tracks that can be permanently deformed.

The overhead power lines, known as catenaries, can also sag as the metal expands under the heat, raising the risk they snag on passing trains.

A broken power line is "very strongly suspected" as the cause of a massive freight train outage at Paris Gare de l'Est station on June 18, said Severine Lepere, the SNCF's director for the greater Paris region.

Unlike a shorter spike in temperatures, the current heatwave is exceptional because the extreme heat has plateaued for several days without cooling meaningfully at night – with forecasts of several days at or above 40 degree Celsius still to come.

And track temperatures



Track trouble: Commuters at Gare du Nord, Europe's busiest train station. One in ten trains is being cancelled due to heatwave. AFP

can soar even higher, reaching 60 degree Celsius, causing the metal to dangerously stretch or widen, similar to the risk for power lines.

"Track buckles and derailments are what really

worry engineers," said John Lawrence, chair of the Railway Technical Network at the U.K.'s Institution of Engineering and Technology.

"That brings derailment risks, and overhead lines

can sag and catch on pantographs, halting train movements or forcing lengthy reroutes," he said.

Electronic signalling equipment can also fail under the extreme heat.

Trains run in the high heat of India and Africa, for example, but they have few high-speed trains like the French TGVs that can reach speeds of 320 km/h.

"The high speeds we have in Europe require extremely reliable tracks and better quality network – you can't have the slightest gap" in tolerances, said Pierre Plaindoux, a rail expert at the consulting firm MC21.

He also noted that in the United States and Canada, where passenger train tra-

vel is much less extensive, overhead power lines are hardly ever used.

"The vast majority of rolling stock is diesel trains on major lines," he said.

Possible solutions

Improved tracking of track temperatures could let operators impose speed limits instead of protectively cancelling trains.

Mr. Plaindoux said that in countries with cheaper labour costs, inspectors fan out across the network – but in France, for example, the plan is to install more sensors.

Another option is to paint tracks white so that they reflect the sun and heat instead of absorbing it, a practice increasingly

common in countries including Britain and Italy. "Reflective paint can shave five to 10 degrees Celsius of rail temperature," said Antonios Kanellopoulos, associate professor in innovative construction materials and director of the Centre for Engineering research at the University of Hertfordshire in England.

Another option is to install rigid power lines that would not face sagging risks in heat like wire catenaries. "In France, they've installed these over a couple dozen kilometres on high-traffic lines, and there will be more of them, but not over long distances – it would be too expensive," Mr. Plaindoux said.

Tuesday's scores:
Group B: Scotland 131/7 in 20 overs (Darcey Carter 72 n.o., Amelia Kerr 3/17, Sophie Devine 2/19) lost to New Zealand 132/4 in 18.2 overs (Izzy Sharp 62, Brooke Halliday 41 n.o., Kathryn Bryce 2/13, Rachel Slater 2/22).
Toss: New Zealand; **PoM:** Sharp.
 Ireland 130/5 in 20 overs (Gaby Lewis 59) lost to Sri Lanka 134/1 in 15.3 overs (Chamari Athapaththu 106 n.o.).
Toss: Sri Lanka; **PoM:** Chamari.

INBRIEF



Sooryavanshi receives his first Team India jersey

Fifteen-year-old sensation Vaibhav Sooryavanshi received his first official Team India jersey on Tuesday. Sooryavanshi was named in India's T20I squad for the tours of Ireland and England, as well as the Asian Games, after topping the IPL 2026 run chart. The BCCI released a video of the blue jersey being delivered to him, calling it “the moment the nation has been waiting for”. “Ever since I first held a bat and walked onto a cricket field to practice, I dreamed of this moment,” Sooryavanshi said.

Shedge replaces Nitish in India's T20I squads

Suryansh Shedge has replaced Nitish Kumar in India's squads for the upcoming T20I series against Ireland and England. Nitish reported left quadriceps discomfort after the third ODI against Afghanistan on Saturday. Following a subsequent medical assessment, the BCCI medical team has recommended a period of rehabilitation, ruling him out of both series. Shedge earned the call-up following a string of impressive performances for India-A in the recently concluded tri-series in Sri Lanka.

Tucker is Ireland captain ahead of T20Is against India

Lorcan Tucker was named the Ireland captain ahead of the two T20I matches against India, to be played on June 26 and 28. Ireland also gave maiden call-ups to pacers Matthew Holland and Jai Moondra for the two matches to be played at Belfast. The side will also be without Paul Stirling, who stepped down as captain after this year's T20 World Cup.

The squad: Lorcan Tucker (Capt., wk), Ross Adair, Ben Calitz, Gareth Delany, George Dockrell, Stephen Doheny (wk), Matthew Humphreys, Gavin Hoeny, Matthew Holland, Liam McCarthy, Jai Moondra, Harry Tector, Tim Tector, and Reuben Wilson.

Aussie Patterson named Indian rowing team coach

Rowing Federation of India has confirmed the appointment of Australian Antony Patterson as coach of the national team. The 60-year-old has coached national teams of Japan and Mexico apart from clubs in England and South Africa. “Paterson will be with the team till the Asian Games and if his performance is satisfactory, we will consider retaining him till the 2028 LA Olympics,” Balaji Maradapa, president of Rowing Federation of India, said in Chennai on Tuesday.

LIVE TELECAST

FIFA World Cup: Unite8 Sports 1, 2 & Z5 App, 7.30 a.m. 12.30 & 3.30 a.m. (Thursday)
Women's T20 World Cup: Star Sports 1 & JioHotstar, 11 p.m.

Delhi High Court directs AITA to expedite Constitutional amendments and election

TENNIS

N. Sudarshan
BENGALURU

The Delhi High Court directed the interim Executive Committee of the All India Tennis Association (AITA) to expedite the process of amending its Constitution and bringing it in line with the National Sports Governance Act, 2025 and National Sports Governance Rules, 2026. The Court said that a fresh election under the amended Constitution will have to be held on or before September 30, 2026. The nudge was part of the interim order passed on June 18 in an appeal filed by the AITA, and players Somdev Devvarman and Purav Raja, against the judgment delivered in late April which removed the stay on the results of the AITA election held in September

2024 and appointed Justice (Retd.) Gita Mittal as the AITA administrator. The AITA contended that the original judgment, which arose out of a petition filed by Devvarman and Raja, did not find any illegality in the elections, and the appointment of an administrator in such a scenario was impermissible and had created a “parallel structure”. The AITA also stated that tennis' world governing body – the International Tennis Federation (ITF) – may construe this as “third-party interference” and derecognise it. The remuneration of ₹10 lakh per month for the administrator was termed “excessive, arbitrary and unaffordable”. Devvarman and Raja, while welcoming the appointment of the administrator, had objected on the grounds that 2024 election was not held according to the law of the land then –

the National Sports Code, 2011 – and the officials thus elected cannot be part of the interim management. **ITF query** The Union Sports Ministry told the Court that it does not support the appointment of the administrator and submitted that it had indeed received a letter on May 18 from the ITF seeking clarification. The Ministry, however, stated that ITF recognised the temporary nature of the proceedings and that the world body would only act if the timelines in the original judgment aren't adhered to. **Race against time** The Court has now asked the AITA to examine the draft amendments already proposed by the administrator and submit its suggestions and objections by June 25. The administrator, after hearing the AITA, should finalise the amend-

ments by July 15. An Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) of the AITA should be convened by July 31 to ratify these amendments, and the whole process ought to culminate in an election by the end of September. Interestingly, the Court clarified that state associations affiliated to the AITA can vote in the EGM and in the new AITA election “irrespective of whether they are compliant with the Sports Act and the Sports Governance Rules at the time of voting”. The state bodies are required to comply with the new rules on or before December 31. The Court further said that any action at the EGM will be subject to the final outcome of the present case, and this would allay the concerns of Devvarman and Raja regarding the AITA not adopting the amendments proposed by the administrator.

Indian athletes make last-gasp effort for Asian Games qualification

Y.B. Sarangi
BHUBANESWAR

A sparkling new track, despite shipping issues in the Strait of Hormuz due to the Iran war, at the Kalinga Stadium here may offer surprises for the country's elite athletes when they seek to qualify for the Asian Games at the only selection opportunity, the National inter-State athletics meet, starting here on Wednesday. Laying of the track, costing about ₹22 crore, finished on Monday. “I'll have an idea about the track when I compete tomorrow [Wednesday] morning,” said 5000m National record holder Gulveer Singh. World championships finalist high jumper Sarvesh Kushare, who equalled his personal best 2.28m at the Federation meet in Ranchi, added: “I have competed



All in readiness: AFI officials and senior athletes after the press conference. BISWARANJAN ROUT

in these conditions before. I will give my best here.” Sprinter Animesh Kujur, who landed here on Tuesday after being part of India's gold-winning 4x100m men's team in the Asian Relays in China, had a clear target. “I hope to get back my (100m National) record,” said Kujur, who would compete in 100m and 200m.

Joint National record holder pole vaulters Dev Meena and Kuldeep Kumar wanted to repeat their Ranchi mark (5.45m) and qualify for the Asiad. National record holders, quartermiler Vishal T.K., woman high jumper Pooja, are among the leading athletes who will be seen in action. Following her injury lay-

off, hurdler Jyothi Yarraji is making a comeback after a year. Some top names, including former World and Olympic champion javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra, 100m National record holder Gurindervir Singh, National record holder decathlete Tejaswin Shankar, have got exemption from the meet.

Commitment thy name is Tilak

After captaining the triumphant India-A side in the island nation, the 'Falcon' flies back to produce a memorable knock in TG20

CRICKET

Anirudh Velamuri
HYDERABAD

Tilak Varma stood at the summit on Sunday, leading India to the tri-series title in Sri Lanka. By the end of the day, he was back in Hyderabad. For most players, the next step after an international triumph would be rest, recovery and a moment for it to soak in. Tilak, however, chose differently. He was back on the field, this time for the maiden season of TG20, Telangana's domestic T20 league, to captain his franchise Medak Falcons. “Tilak came to meet the players at the team hotel on Sunday evening and returned the next morning to



Take a bow! Tilak's skill and will came to the fore as he led his team home in a big chase. NAGARA GOPAL

have one-on-one conversations with them. He told them to enjoy the occasion,” T. Ravi Teja, Falcons'

designated skipper, revealed to *The Hindu*. A stacked calendar notwithstanding, Tilak priori-

tised motivating the squad and dangle perhaps the most irresistible carrot in the T20 universe – possi-

Scottish veteran Ian McLean, who played against Tendulkar, bats for women's cricket

P.K. Ajith Kumar
MANCHESTER



McLean. P.K. AJITH KUMAR

also brought players like Rahul Dravid and Vinod Kambli. He remembers Tendulkar as a quiet young boy. “He stayed with my friend Jackie Knight, who was the Scotland wicketkeeper for five days,” says McLean. “He took Sachin to meet his father's hero Budhi Kunderan. Sachin played against my club, Strath-

more in Forfarshire. I think he scored 80, but I didn't get to bowl against him.” McLean, however, has taken the wickets of former Australian Test players Kim Hughes, Justin Langer and Adam Gilchrist. “I have also played against Indian players such as Aunshuman Gaikwad and Ashok Malhotra,” he says. “When I played for Scotland Under-21 against England, I was the leading run-scorer in the series, while Kim Barnett was their top-scorer.” Among Gattani's young stars, it was not an Indian that made the biggest impression. “It was Aravinda de Silva,” says McLean. “He was about 18 and looked alrea-

dy a fantastic player.” McLean, now, though is more of a fan of Smriti Mandhana. He fell in love with women's cricket and has been travelling the world to watch the female cricketers live on the grounds. He has been watching the Women's T20 World Cup in England and is delighted that Scotland is playing in it. “I had been to India to watch the WPL, where I was happy to see Scotland's Sarah Bryce play for Delhi Capitals,” he says. “And I had gone to the UAE for the last Women's T20 World Cup. I enjoy watching players like Smriti and Shabnim Ismail, the fast bowler”.

FAI appeals Bhavani's suspension

Sports Bureau
NEW DELHI

Indian fencer Bhavani Devi landed in trouble during the women's sabre team event of the 26th Asian Senior fencing championships here on Tuesday. Following a defeat to Thailand in the round of 16, she was issued a Black Card for throwing her mask in frustration. In the aftermath of the incident, Bhavani is facing

a two-month suspension as per the applicable disciplinary regulations. It puts the participation of the 32-year-old from Chennai, who has the distinction of being the only Indian fencer to compete in the Olympics, in next month's World Championships in Hong Kong in jeopardy. Bhavani subsequently submitted an unconditional apology for her conduct. As per a release, the

Fencing Association of India (FAI) has requested the International Fencing Federation (FIE) for reconsideration and removal of the suspension. The appeal has highlighted Bhavani's exemplary disciplinary record through her international career. South Korea beat Japan to win the women's sabre event while Kazakhstan prevailed over Japan in men's epee.

DC and LSG complete Pant, Kuldeep trade

Sports Bureau
NEW DELHI

Rishabh Pant has moved back to Delhi Capitals while Lucknow Super Giants has acquired the services of Kuldeep Yadav, the IPL announced on Tuesday. It is one of the most high-profile trades in IPL history.

Usha expects Indians to better Hangzhou Asiad tally in athletics

Sports Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM



Usha. PTI

Indian Olympic Association (IOA) president P.T. Usha said she expected a better show from the Indian athletics contingent in the upcoming Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games. “Going by the recent performance of our athletes, I expect them to do really well and better the number of medals (29) we won in athletics in the previous Asian Games (at Hangzhou).

“Our athletes are in top form and some of them have recently come up with their personal best and I expect them to repeat that performance in the Asian Games,” she said during a media interaction ahead of the Asian Games Fun Run. Usha said the IOA was making every effort to make the athletes comfortable in Aichi-Nagoya and was thinking of taking Indian chefs for the Games. “Some athletes had expressed apprehension regarding the food served in the Asian Games Village. We are trying to ensure that our athletes don't miss the Indian food. “We are thinking of taking our chefs to Japan. However, during my last visit

Our athletes are in top form and some of them have recently come up with their personal best to the Games Village, I saw a couple of Indian restaurants nearby. So I think getting Indian food won't be a problem,” she said. Usha added the uncertainty surrounding the Commonwealth Games did affect the preparation of the Indian teams. “We were unsure of the CWG being held at all when Melbourne pulled out. Glasgow stepped in to save the Games but we don't have a full complement of events there and because of the uncertainty the preparations and camps started late. But I promise the 2030 CWG Games, which India will host, will be much bigger,” she added.

Is Catalunya a tipping point in a changing landscape?

No one could have left Barcelona thinking exactly the same way they arrived. For Ferrari, the weekend offered validation. For Mercedes, it provided a warning. For Hamilton, it delivered redemption. And for Formula One itself, it may have provided something even more valuable: a championship battle that suddenly feels alive again

Natalia Hannah Rice

Formula One likes to tell itself that every race counts the same. 25 points are available on a Sunday whether the paddock is in Melbourne, Monaco or Monza. Yet some weekends carry a significance that stretches beyond the numbers on the championship table. They trends, alter narratives and force teams to rethink what they thought they knew.

The 2026 Barcelona-Catalunya Grand Prix may have proved to be one such weekend. When Lewis Hamilton crossed the finish line to secure his first victory as a Ferrari driver, the result was significant enough on its own. The seven-time World Champion claimed the 106th victory of his career and handed Ferrari its first win of the season. More importantly, however, the race may have marked the point at which Formula One's competitive landscape began to shift. For much of the opening phase of the season, Mercedes appeared untouchable. Kimi Antonelli's remarkable rise had become the story of the championship, the 19-year-old building a commanding lead at the top of the standings. George Russell had provided consistent support, and Mercedes had set the pace from the start of Formula One's sweeping 2026 regulations. The championship seemed to be developing a familiar rhythm. Mercedes set the pace. The rest chased. Barcelona changed that.

Unique place

Historically, Catalunya has occupied a unique place in Formula One. Drivers often describe the Circuit de Barcelona-Catalunya as one of the most complete examinations of a racing car. Long corners expose aerodynamic weaknesses. Technical sections punish balance issues. Tyre degradation places a premium on race management. Unlike street circuits, where unusual circumstances can distort results, Barcelona tends to reveal the genuine competitive order.

That is precisely why teams have traditionally targeted the Spanish round with major upgrade packages. Engineers trust what they learn there. This year was no different. Ferrari arrived having spent the early part of the season chasing Mercedes, with Hamilton coming off the back of two second-place finishes at the Canadian and Monaco Grands Prix. He went into qualifying with relatively low expectations, having missed Friday's opening practice session to make way for an academy driver.

Instead, he produced a brilliant final lap to fall just 0.064 seconds short of Russell's pole position, securing his highest grid position since joining Ferrari and his first front-row start for the team. Hamilton himself admitted he was "really surprised" by the result, saying he genuinely hadn't expected to be fighting for the front row. Russell's own pole lap carried its own context. He had fallen 68 points behind his Mercedes teammate in the standings after failing to score points in the two Grands Prix before Barcelona, and needed a big weekend. He duly delivered one, producing a superb final lap to outpace Antonelli by around three tenths of a second and claim pole. It would prove to be his last clean shot at victory all weekend. Barcelona provided the clearest confirmation yet that Ferrari's underlying pace was strong. Hamilton's victory was not the product of luck alone. Ferrari's strategy was bold, but the pace underneath it was genuine.

The team pitted Hamilton early to

undercut Russell, then again on Lap 28 to undercut him a second time, with Mercedes choosing not to cover the move. Hamilton then built his advantage on fresher tyres before a Virtual Safety Car, triggered by Fernando Alonso's retirement, allowed him to take his final stop with minimal time loss and emerge in the lead with fresher rubber than the Mercedes cars behind him. He went on to win by close to 20 seconds. The result was a victory built on speed, race-long tyre management, and a fair amount of fortunate timing.

The significance extends beyond a single win. For the first time this season, Mercedes looked vulnerable. Antonelli's retirement, with four laps remaining and an apparent power unit issue, denied the championship leader what would have been a podium finish and cut his points advantage over Hamilton to 41. Mechanical failures are part of Formula One, but their timing can often shape a season. Until Barcelona, Antonelli's campaign had carried an air of inevitability. Instead, Barcelona reintroduced uncertainty.

Antonelli's failure was not an isolated data point, either. It was the second such retirement for Mercedes' factory team in three events, after Russell's car also failed while he was leading in Canada. Mercedes has since said it has traced the cause to the power unit's battery. Technical director James Allison said the issue "has laid a few Mercedes engine cars low over the season so far" and described the failures as "very, very painful," while team principal Toto Wolff said the team's reliability was "just not good enough." A single mechanical gremlin is a footnote. A diagnosed, recurring fault becomes a storyline rivals start planning around.

Hamilton's victory reduced the gap at the top of the standings and reminded the paddock that experience remains one of Formula One's most valuable assets. At 41, Hamilton became the oldest winner of a Grand Prix since Jack Brabham in 1970 and he reached that milestone a full 19 years after his first F1 win, for McLaren in 2007. The achievement was not simply a statistic. It was evidence that a driver many believed was entering the twilight of his career remains capable of shaping a championship. The emotional weight of the victory was impossible to ignore.

Since signing for Ferrari at the start of 2025, Hamilton had struggled to get to grips with the car, failing to score a single podium that year. There were encouraging signs once the new regulations arrived in 2026, with podiums in Canada and Monaco, but victory remained elusive. Questions inevitably emerged. Had Hamilton arrived too late and could Ferrari provide the machinery required for another title challenge.

Barcelona did not answer every question, but it provided the strongest response yet. Speaking on the team radio afterwards, an emotional Hamilton said: "Thank you so much for helping me achieve this dream. I just can't thank you enough... to my fans, thank you for continuing to remind me who I am. I couldn't have done this without you." More importantly, it transformed Ferrari from hopeful challenger into genuine contender. The broader significance of Catalunya



lies in what it revealed about the development race. The first season under a major regulation change often produces dramatic swings in competitiveness. Teams begin with imperfect understanding. Development pathways remain uncertain. Small discoveries can generate large gains. A concept that appears dominant in March can look ordinary by July. Barcelona suggested that Formula One may be entering exactly that phase. Mercedes remains the benchmark. Its advantage has not disappeared overnight. Russell secured pole position and ultimately finished second, underlining the team's continued strength. Yet the aura of invincibility has been broken. Rivals now possess tangible evidence that the silver cars can be beaten on merit. That psychological shift matters.

Championships are shaped as much by belief as by outright pace. A dominant team forces competitors into desperation. They gamble on radical developments, overreact to setbacks and lose confidence in their direction. Once dominance cracks, the equation changes. Teams become bolder. Drivers become more aggressive. Momentum begins to shift.

Ferrari is not the only team encouraged by Barcelona. McLaren continues to linger within striking distance. Lando Norris inherited the final podium spot after Antonelli's late retirement. It was his second podium of the season, coming after he had failed to score points at the previous two Grands Prix, on a weekend where McLaren looked more competitive than it had in those earlier rounds. The reigning World Champion may not yet possess the fastest package on a given Sunday, but Formula One history is full of title fights transformed by sustained pressure rather than outright superiority.

The race also delivered a piece of motor-sport history beyond the championship fight: with Hamilton, Russell and Norris filling the podium, it marked the first all-British podium since 1968. The European segment of the calendar has often acted as a dividing line within a season. Early races establish expectations. The summer races determine whether those expectations survive. Barcelona sits at the entrance to that stretch. Austria is next on the calendar. These circuits demand different strengths, exposing different weaknesses and creating fresh opportunities for development gains. Teams will arrive armed with new data collected from Catalunya. Engineers will spend long nights interpreting what they learned. Drivers will leave with altered perceptions of their chances. No one leaves Barcelona thinking exactly the same way they arrived. For Ferrari, the weekend offered validation. For Mercedes, it provided a warning. For Hamilton, it delivered redemption. And for Formula One itself, it may have provided something even more valuable: a championship battle that suddenly feels alive again.

Formula One has a habit of overturning conclusions just when certainty appears within reach. Yet, some races resonate long after the podium celebrations end. They become reference points, moments that historians revisit when explaining how a season evolved. If the 2026 championship develops into the multi-team fight many had hoped for, Barcelona may be remembered as the place where everything changed.

THE GIST

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