

INBRIEF



Bittu appears before panel, apologises for ‘casteist’ remarks

Union Minister Ravneet Singh Bittu on Wednesday appeared before the Punjab State Scheduled Castes Commission and submitted a written apology for making alleged casteist remarks during a heated exchange with police in Dhuri town in Sangrur district in May. The commission had asked the Union Minister to appear before it to present his side of the matter. He had failed to appear on two previous occasions. Appearing before the panel on Wednesday, Mr. Bittu gave a detailed account of the May 26 incident and stated that being a Minister, he should not have uttered such words. PTI

Speaker Narwekar apologises for ‘incorrect’ spoken Marathi

Maharashtra Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar on Wednesday expressed regret for incorrectly uttering certain words while reading obituary references in the House on the first day of the Monsoon Session. Mr. Narwekar said the inadvertent error was caused by technical issues and an unclear printed copy of the speech, and that he had no intention of hurting anyone's sentiments. Maharashtra Navnirman Sena president Raj Thackeray on Tuesday lambasted Narwekar for “butchering” Marathi while reading out a condolence motion for singing icon Asha Bhosle in the House. PTI

Trouble mounts for Mann over video row

Opposition in Punjab demand immediate resignation of the Chief Minister after Haryana Police register FIR over ‘fabricated’ forensic reports on ‘objectionable’ video; ruling AAP, Mann deny allegations, accuses Opposition of misleading people in the name of religion ahead of Assembly polls

The Hindu Bureau
CHANDIGARH/DELHI/
GURUGRAM

Opposition parties in Punjab on Wednesday stepped up the heat on Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann amid the controversy surrounding an “objectionable” video purportedly showing him in an act that hurt Sikh sentiments.

On Tuesday, Haryana Police registered an FIR over allegations that forensic and cyber analysis reports presented by the Chief Minister to exonerate himself were fabricated and arrested two persons for allegedly conspiring to prepare the reports.

The ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Chief Minister have denied the allegations and said the Opposition was misleading people in the name of religion and resorting to petty politics ahead of the upcoming Assembly election. Mr. Mann earlier denied that the person in the video was him and dismissed the clip as “fake”.

Opposition parties, including the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Congress, and the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) demanded Mr. Mann’s immediate



Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann speaking at a ‘Sarpanch Milni’ programme in Bathinda on Wednesday. ANI

resignation.

Senior leader and former Punjab BJP president Sunil Jakhar said Mr. Mann’s video is not a political issue but one connected to religious sentiments. “This is an issue of how an arrogant person is challenging the Sri Akal Takht Sahib,” Mr. Jakhar said.

BJP leader and Delhi Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa alleged that some Punjab police officials were roped in and ₹10 lakh was

paid to produce the forged reports, which he said gave a “clean chit” to Mr. Mann. He also questioned the “silence” of AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal on the matter.

Demanding that the Punjab police register a case and arrest Mr. Mann, Mr. Sirsa accused the Chief Minister of insulting Sikhs and the Akal Takht.

Haryana BJP president Archana Gupta said the viral video “showed Mr.

Case file

■ In October 2025, a video went viral on social media purportedly showing Mr. Mann in an act that hurt Sikh sentiments. Following this, the Punjab Police registered an FIR. In January this year, the Akal Takht summoned the CM. Mr. Mann denied that the person in the video was him.

■ On June 15, the Akal Takht declared Mr. Mann “Guru Dokhi” (a betrayer of the Guru) and “Khalsa Panth Virodhi” (an opponent of Khalsa Panth or the Sikh community). Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Kuldeep Singh Gargaj, pronouncing the edict, said the video had been confirmed as authentic by two forensic laboratories.

■ On June 18, AAP said forensic tests by two independent laboratories found no match between the person in the video and Mr. Mann.

Mann indulging in an act of disrespect towards Sikh gurus” and that the people of Punjab and the country will never forgive his act.

“Orchestrating a fake forensic report to discredit a genuine video is a criminal offence. Punjab Police tried to secure a favourable report to shield Bhagwant Mann, but the Haryana government and Gurugram Police brought the facts to light,” she said, referring to the FIR and arrests made in

Will launch fast from July 5 if amendments to RTI rules not revoked, Anna warns govt.

Vinaya Deshpande Pandit
MUMBAI

Activist Anna Hazare on Wednesday gave the Maharashtra government until July 5 to withdraw the Maharashtra Right to Information (Amendment) Rules, 2026, warning that he would launch a hunger strike and a nationwide agitation if the changes are not scrapped.

Mr. Hazare described as “unsatisfactory” a meeting with a delegation led by Maharashtra Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) Rahul Pande at Ralegan Siddhi. “If they don’t withdraw the amendments, if people’s interests are jeopardised, I will again hit the field,” he told reporters.

Calling for a fight against the amendments, Mr. Hazare expressed dissatisfaction with the State government’s stand. “I did not get any satisfactory answers from the government dur-



Anna Hazare

ing this meeting. If the soul of the RTI Act has to be kept alive, a new committee needs to be formed immediately. This committee should consist of experts and officials who have in-depth knowledge of the RTI Act and who are pro-people,” he said after the meeting.

The noted activist had earlier written to the Maharashtra government seeking the complete withdrawal of the amendments, asserting that they weaken the spirit of the RTI Act and dilute its provisions. Mr. Hazare has opposed several provisions in the amend-

Prominent activists have served a legal notice to the government and demanded a complete rollback of the amendments

ed rules, including a three-fold increase in application fee, the introduction of a new fee for appeals, and a cap on free information for those living below the poverty line.

The rules also require that each RTI application pertain to a single subject and be limited to 150 words.

Satisfactory meeting
Mr. Hazare’s office said Mr. Pande had assured him that the discussion will be conveyed to Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, who will take a call on the matter. Mr. Pande described the meeting as “satisfactory”, claiming that Mr. Ha-

zare was pleased with the information presented to him.

Meanwhile, prominent activists on Wednesday served a legal notice to the Maharashtra government and demanded a complete rollback of the amendments, claiming that the changes were introduced without prior disclosure or public consultation.

The legal notice has been issued by former CIC Shailesh Gandhi, advocate Prahlad Kachare, RTI activist Vijay Kumbhar, journalist Vinita Deshmukh, and civil rights activists Vivek Velankar, Jugal Rath and Mohammed Afzal.

As per the notice accessed by *The Hindu*, the provisions of the amended rules “collectively reveal a pattern of restrictions that make access to information more expensive, more technical, more burdensome and more difficult than contemplated by Parliament”.

Video clip showing Tamil Nadu Minister touching girl athletes’ legs in Madurai sparks outrage

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

A video showing Tamil Nadu Higher Education Minister P. Viswanathan touching the outstretched legs of girl athletes while chatting with them at an event in Melur in Madurai recently has sparked outrage.

The athletes were resting after having run a marathon organised as part of the birthday celebrations of Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi.

After distributing prizes at the Melur Government School, where the event was held, the Minister greeted the athletes.

The video captures him touching the outstretched legs of the athletes and cracking their toes, while another guest is shaking hands with them.

DMK leader and former



P. Viswanathan

Minister S.S. Sivasankar expressed consternation over the incident, saying the good-touch bad-touch lesson, which is usually taught to schoolchildren, should be extended to members of the Cabinet.

‘Act more responsibly’
“A person of authority should act more responsibly rather than getting swept away by the moment or the intoxication of power,” said Vidya Reddy, co-

founder, Tulir-Centre for the Prevention and Healing of Child Sexual Abuse.

She wondered why, despite a large number of people being present at the venue, and with video cameras recording the event, no onlookers had raised their voice. “Bystander intervention becomes critical as it serves as an immediate check for abuse,” she said.

‘Don’t spread lies’
Reacting to DMK leader Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozhi, who had strongly criticised him over the incident, Mr. Viswanathan said the DMK will have to “face consequences” if it continues to “spread lies” through its IT wing.

In a statement, Mr. Viswanathan said Mr. Poyyamozhi attributing motives to the act was “uncivilised”.

Deepender links arrest of IAS officer to RS poll

The Hindu Bureau
GURUGRAM

Congress Rohtak MP Deepender Hooda on Wednesday linked the CBI arrest of IAS officer Pankaj Agarwal in the ₹504-crore IDFC First Bank scam to allegations of political interference during the Rajya Sabha election.

In a post on X, the MP claimed Mr. Agarwal was the Returning Officer during the RS poll and “at the behest of BJP” made a “concerted effort” to ensure a BJP-backed candidate’s victory by invalidating Congress votes. He alleged the BJP government used the threat of action against the officer, already “implicated in graft”, to serve political interests.

“The IDFC First Bank scam was of such magnitude that the CBI could not overlook it,” Mr. Hooda claimed.

Mizoram CM rejects alliance claim between ZPM and NDA

Press Trust of India
AIZAWL

Mizoram Chief Minister and Zoram People’s Movement (ZPM) leader Lalduhoma on Wednesday ruled out a formal alliance with the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) at the Centre and said that joining that coalition is not, and has never been, on the party’s agenda. His declaration came amid claims that the ruling ZPM has formally joined the NDA alliance.

Speaking at a press conference here, Mr. Lalduhoma said the party values cordial relations with the Centre but sees no immediate need for a formal alliance with the NDA.

He asserted that the ZPM remains committed to its identity as a regional politi-



CM and ZPM chief Lalduhoma

cal force with a national outlook.

Mr. Lalduhoma revealed that national leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, have repeatedly invited the party to join the alliance, but the ZPM has preferred to maintain a cooperative relationship without formal alliance.

“Even now, right from the first day we met after forming the government,

the Prime Minister and the Home Minister have constantly invited us to join them. However, we usually part on good terms by saying - Let us maintain a good working relationship; we are practically on your side. So, is it really necessary for us to officially align right now?” the Chief Minister said.

‘Chose a different path’
“We have not joined the NDA. While other parties have, we choose a different path. We want to maintain a very good relationship with the Centre, but an official alignment is not on our table,” Mr. Lalduhoma added. He said that the issue of joining NDA has never been tabled in any meeting of the party’s Political Affairs Committee.

‘Lack of jobs behind desperation’: Rahul on bonded labour in U.P.

Mayank Kumar
LUCKNOW

A day after reports emerged of the rescue of 12 men who were allegedly forced to work as bonded labourers at a factory in Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh, Rae Bareilly MP and Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday hit out at the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in the State over “disappearing jobs” and “assault on human dignity”.

“The case of bonded labour of workers in Muzaffarnagar is very shocking. In addition to being forced to work without pay, they were bitten by dogs, speared, whipped, and fed cattle feed. This is an assault on human dignity – the victims deserve justice



The U.P. police arrested Shiva Tyagi and Pradeep Balyan on Tuesday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

and rehabilitation, and the perpetrators deserve the harshest punishment,” Mr. Gandhi wrote on X.

He added, “It is also important for us to ask what compulsions force workers into such dangerous situations. As jobs disappear, incomes stagnate, and protections for the most vulnerable, such as MGNREGA and labour laws, are weakened, desperation grows. Those with

no other options or protections become easy prey for such exploitation. This isn’t a typical criminal incident – it is the debris of a collapsed economy.”

On Monday, joint teams from the Labour Department and the police raided the factory after receiving a tip-off and freed the workers, who hail from U.P., West Bengal, Bihar and Jharkhand. The workers said they were lured by promises of employment, fair wages and an improved quality of life. However, they were denied food and subjected to severe physical abuse.

On Tuesday, the police arrested two persons – Shiva Tyagi and Pradeep Balyan – in the case. A search is on for Ankit Balyan, who has been identified as the owner of the factory.

Heavy rain disrupts normal life in Mumbai, many areas inundated

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

Mumbai woke up to heavy rain on Wednesday, with the met office at Colaba recorded 248 mm rainfall and Santacruz logging 225 mm in the 24 hours.

An Orange alert has been issued for the city and neighbouring districts.

Worker falls into drain
Mayor Ritu Tawade inspect the on-ground situation as a sanitation worker fell into a open drain but was rescued. She warned that if any of the manholes is found open, the official in charge would be suspended. The downpour led to waterlogging at several areas, including subway in



Commuters navigate a waterlogged road in Mumbai on Wednesday. PTI

Everard Nagar, King’s Circle in Matunga area, and residential colonies in Dadar, disrupting normal life.

“Waterlogging in low-lying areas are being drained rapidly,” said Municipal Commissioner Ashwini Bhide.



Symbolism over substance? Public health officials slam T.N. govt.'s gold ring scheme

Under the new scheme, the govt. will spend ₹755.83 cr. annually to gift gold rings to newborns; however, several health professionals opine that while the gold may be intended as a celebration of birth, the more pressing need is investment in workforce and infrastructure that enable safe deliveries

Serena Josephine M.
CHENNAI

Every year, the Tamil Nadu government will spend ₹755.83 crore on gifting one-gram gold rings to roughly 4.42 lakh babies born in government hospitals under its new scheme, *Thaimaaman Thanga Mothiram Thittam*. The gold ring may be intended as a celebration of birth, but for many within the public health sector, the more pressing need is investment in the workforce and infrastructure that makes safe deliveries possible.

Already, the Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy Maternity Benefit Scheme provides maternal assistance of ₹14,000 in cash support and two nutritional kits valued at ₹4,000. With this in place, the questions raised are plenty – Can the State government sustain a recurring cost of ₹755.83 crore a year, or ₹17,000 per ring (today's gold rate), for 4,41,667 deliveries along with administration cost? Whether symbolic incentives such as gold rings are the best use of public resources when basic gaps in the health system remain unresolved? Does this self-defeat the State's family welfare measures by incen-

Nurturing newborns

A look at the salient features of the *Thaimaaman Thanga Mothiram Thittam*

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- Elevate the public healthcare setting from a baseline necessity to a preferred destination of pride and celebration, with dignity at birth

- Reclaim the status of government institutional deliveries by offering a high-value, permanent, tangible benefit that complements the existing maternity cash benefits and maternal kits

- Erase the socio-economic bias surrounding public health facility deliveries, recognising that every mother's journey is noble and every child is a treasure



TARGET BENEFICIARIES AND ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- Resident of Tamil Nadu

- All pregnant women giving birth at government institutions

- Mother should be registered on Pregnancy and Infant Cohort Monitoring and Evaluation portal with RCH ID

- Beneficiaries must submit residential proof through any one of the enlisted documents such as ration card, voter identity card or Aadhaar card

- The scheme extends coverage to all newborns, regardless of birth order. Mothers with higher-order births are eligible for benefits without restriction

- Gold rings to be distributed without any gender-based discrimination

KEY SPECIFICATIONS

- One-gram gold rings will be procured through the Tamil Nadu Medical Services Corporation (TNMSC). The TNMSC-empanelled vendor will supply the rings directly to 94 hospitals

- A State project/programme management unit will be set up to implement, monitor, and manage the scheme

- Each gold ring will have a fixed weight of one gram, with an official Bureau of Indian Standards hallmark. The Government of Tamil Nadu logo will be embossed on it

- Each unit will be uniquely serialised and protected by a tamper-proof seal with branding

Source: Government Order issued by the Health and Family Welfare Department

tivating higher order births?

‘Bizarre move’

A head of a government institution found it bizarre that the Tamil Nadu Medical Services Corporation

(TNMSC) is tasked with procuring and supplying the rings, based on the yearly indent given by the Director of Public Health and Preventive Medicine.

“TNMSC was set up in the 1990s with the objec-

tive of procuring quality medicines for government hospitals. But now, it is tasked with purchasing the yellow metal. How far this is ethical is a question to be asked,” he said.

A health officer said that

from a policy perspective, the scheme had no connection with the Sustainable Development Goal 3 (reducing global Maternal Mortality Ratio to less than 70 deaths per 1,00,000 live births and to end preventable deaths of newborns and children under five years of age by 2030).

Another public health officer said Tamil Nadu had already achieved near-universal institutional delivery coverage, with institutional deliveries exceeding 99%, leaving limited scope for further improvement on this indicator.

“A government's legitimacy comes from good governance, not symbolic kinship. Public resources should be directed towards strengthening systems and services that create lasting benefits,” he said.

While more incentives are being introduced, many frontline healthcare personnel continue to face inadequate remuneration, he said, adding that Reproductive and Child Health contract staff receive approximately ₹4,500 per month.

‘Self-defeating’

“There is an acute shortage of obstetricians and gynaecologists. The government should announce funds to

hire more OB-GYNs as and when they announce such schemes,” a doctor said.

“This scheme covers all newborns, irrespective of the third or fourth child. Isn't this defeating the government's own family welfare programme? On the one hand, we are motivating mothers to undergo sterilisation after having two babies, and on the other, the government is giving incentives to have any number of babies,” she said.

The doctor further added that certain conditions could be brought in for the scheme, including two mandatory post-natal visits for mothers at the end of the first week and the sixth week of delivery, and complete immunisation till 1.5 years of age for the child.

Former Director of Public Health and Preventive Medicine K. Kolandasamy said it was a good scheme as it would improve institutional deliveries.

The scheme could act as an incentive for families belonging to the lower-middle income group to opt for government hospitals for childbirth, thereby reducing their maternal and childbirth-related health expenditure in private hospitals, Mr. Kolandasamy added.

Iran invites Modi to Khamenei's official funeral ceremonies

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Iran's President Massoud Pezeshkian has invited Prime Minister Narendra Modi to travel to Tehran to attend the burial ceremonies of the late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei who was assassinated in a joint Israel-U.S. attack on February 28, diplomatic sources have told *The Hindu*.

The sources said the invite for Mr. Modi was conveyed to the Ministry of External Affairs on Tuesday though the MEA officials did not clarify whether Mr. Modi would travel for the funeral which will be held between July 3 and 9 and cover multiple cities such as Tehran, Qom and Mashhad.

Iran has announced the ceremonies for the late Supreme Leader will take place in Tehran and Qom from July 5 to 7 while the final ceremony will take place in Mashhad on July 9.

Mr. Modi is expected to visit Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand between July 6 and 11 and there is no official communication on whether the Prime Minister would visit for the official burial of the late Ayatollah.

Iran's Minister of Petroleum Mohsen Paknejad arrived in New Delhi on Wednesday to participate in the meetings related to energy cooperation among BRICS member-states, the Embassy of Iran announced.

Late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei was killed in an Israel-U.S. joint attack on Feb. 28

“During his visit, Mr. Paknejad is scheduled to hold talks with Indian officials and representatives of the country's energy sector...,” the Iran Embassy said.

War and ties

Former Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar had represented India in the official burial ceremony of Iran's then President Ibrahim Raisi who had died in a helicopter crash on May 19, 2024.

Since February, India has seen a disruption in its energy and fertilizer supplies because of the war between U.S.-Israel and Iran which has led to a chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz.

India has maintained communication with all sides to ensure safety for its civilians in the Gulf states. Mr. Modi visited the United Arab Emirates on May 15, and before that, Israel during February 25-26.

Nirav Modi must pay ₹108 crore to Bank of India, says U.K. court

Press Trust of India
LONDON

Fugitive diamond merchant Nirav Modi is liable to pay Bank of India (BOI) over \$11.5 million (£108 crore), including accruing interest on a personal loan guarantee, the High Court in London has ruled.

The 55-year-old jeweller, who remains in prison fighting extradition to India in a separate \$2 billion (£18,800 crore) Punjab National Bank fraud case, had disputed the enforceability of the personal guarantee related to a loan to a Dubai-incorporated firm, Firestar

Diamond FZE, associated with him.

In a judgment handed down at the London Circuit Commercial Court on Tuesday, Justice Simon Tinkler found in favour of the BOI. “The Personal Guarantee is not, as a matter of Indian law, void/unenforceable. Mr. Modi is therefore liable under the Personal Guarantee to the Bank for the principal amount due [₹38 crore],” the judge said. He also pointed to “the interest on that sum”, which adds up to about ₹108 crore until March, with further interest accruing after that date.

‘Passport is a travel document, not proof of citizenship’

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

The Indian passport is a “travel document” and not a “citizenship document”, a senior official of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Wednesday.

The purpose of the Indian passport is to help Indians transit and travel through foreign ports and territories and it should not be compared with other documents that are used to establish citizenship rights, the official said.

Highlighting the importance of passports in connecting the Indian workforce with the global economy, MEA officials said the government will intensify mobility engagements with western na-

tions and Japan in coming months to help citizens get secure employment opportunities in these industrialised economies.

Voter list exclusion

“Passport is a travel document, not a document of citizenship and theoretically speaking that distinguishes passport from other documents. Even though while travelling abroad, passport attests to your nationality, yet it is not a document of your citizenship,” a senior official said, in response to a question from *The Hindu* on whether the Indian passport could be used to challenge an exclusion from the voter list through the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls that



Passport is to facilitate foreign travel. It must not be compared with documents establishing citizenship, says MEA official.

is currently under way in 16 States.

Another MEA official said that the Indian passport is issued “after a lot of due diligence and we make sure that the person who gets it is actually entitled, and we also base ourselves on documents from several government agencies like the Aadhaar, PAN

card.” The second official said that the MEA will host a major event on international mobility – the Human Resource Mobility Forum to be held in New Delhi from June 30 to July 1 – that will focus on countries like Italy, Germany, Japan, Russia, and Denmark.

Ethical migration

A large number of recruitment agencies from across the country are expected to participate in the event that will highlight ethical migration and create awareness about how to avoid unscrupulous agents that use illegal means to send Indians to conflict zones and high risk areas.

“We have to demolish the myths that one can go to Italy or Greece using un-

fair means and then send home lots of money,” the official said.

Speaking on the occasion of the 14th Passport Seva Divas, marked on June 24, the official said that 27 countries have given visa-free entry status to Indian passport holders, while 47 countries offer visas on arrival and 66 countries provide electronic-visas (e-visas) to Indian passport holders. The MEA official said that around 10% of Indian passport-holders possess an e-passport, a chip-based document.

There are 545 passport seva kendras across the country catering to the needs of the growing number of passport applicants, and this passport network now covers almost every

Lok Sabha constituency.

In addition, one-stop centres for distressed women in the Indian diaspora have been opened in the Gulf countries and Singapore, supported by the Indian community. More such centres are expected to be established in other countries.

“Team MEA reaffirms its commitment to keep making passport services delivery faster, more transparent and accessible...” External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said on the occasion of Passport Seva Divas, noting that chip-enabled e-passports and the opening of new passport seva kendras (PSKs) have contributed to ease of travel, helping Indians get global job opportunities.

CRPF officer suspended, 20 others transferred after ‘kin protested against CAPF Bill’

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

Twenty Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) officers have been transferred and a Deputy Inspector General (DIG) rank officer has been suspended, allegedly because they or their families voiced their opinions against the Central Armed Police Force (General Administration) Act, 2026.

The legislation was passed by Parliament on April 2 and came into effect on April 9.

Retired and serving officials of the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) expressed concern about the suspension of the decorated DIG-rank officer.

‘Politically provocative’

On June 10, the officer, posted in Tripura, was informed about a pending enquiry against him for allegedly disseminating “au-

Retired and serving CAPF officials expressed concern about suspension of the DIG-rank officer

dio/video messages and poster/banner for changing of the Government established by law across social media.”

The letter said that an Inspector General-rank officer would probe his WhatsApp account and other encrypted platforms he was active on to enquire about the dissemination of “politically provocative” messages against the government. On June 17, the officer was served a suspension order based on the pending enquiry.

It is learnt that the officer has challenged the suspension, on the grounds that there is no “disciplinary proceeding contemplated or pending” against

him as required under the Central Civil Services (Classification, Control and Appeal) Rules, 1965.

‘Targeted harassment’

Ranbir Singh, the general secretary of the Alliance of All Ex Paramilitary Association said that officers whose families participated in a protest against the CAPF Act at Jantar Mantar in the capital on March 23 and May 6, and at Rajghat on April 9 were being targeted by the CRPF's top brass.

“We want to draw the attention of Home Minister Amit Shah to this targeted harassment of CRPF officers... For the first time in the history of the CRPF, the suspension of a serving DIG without cause has sparked resentment among the paramilitary personnel. Officers are being posted to the North East as a punitive measure,” Mr. Singh said.

Anxious relatives search for missing workers after tragedy in Kolkata

Senjuti Sengupta
KOLKATA

Family members of the workers who went missing after the Taratala warehouse collapse on Wednesday frantically searched for them at the site of the accident and in the State-run SSKM Hospital. But for many, the dash to the hospital took them nowhere.

“I learnt about the accident at 3 p.m. and since then I have gone to the spot and to the hospital but have found no trace of my brother Khaleq Sardar. He was working at the site,” said a youth who had come from Basanti in the State's South 24 Parganas district.

Another man from the city's Kidderpore area said he had last spoken to his relative on Tuesday night and after learning about the accident he had gone to the hospital and the construction site.

According to the West Bengal government, about 25 persons have been res-



Against the clock: An injured person being taken to safety after a warehouse under construction collapsed in Kolkata. PTI

cued from the site of whom five have died. There is no clarity on the number of people still trapped under the debris.

Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari said attempts are being made to identify the labour contractor. “Most of the workers were brought from Bihar's Munger and adjoining areas,” he said.

Mr. Adhikari lauded the efforts of locals who, along with the police, took part in the rescue operations within minutes after the

building collapse.

“I could see at least five to six people stuck under the debris screaming for help. Many of them were my neighbours,” said Biru Das. Mr. Das, who works in a nearby warehouse, said that he along with others rescued about six people from the rubble. “Of them, one died,” he said.

Ujjal Kumar, another local, recalled “a strong tremor like an earthquake” when the structure crashed. “After that, there

was a loud noise like an explosion,” he said. Mr. Kumar added that he and other workers were resting when the accident occurred and they rushed to the spot to join the rescue efforts.

An eyewitness, Raju, said the construction had been going on for the past six months and it had been only three days since work on laying the concrete roof of the third floor began.

“I knew some people from that godown. But I am not sure whether they escaped or are still trapped. Asgar Khan, the one who got the tender for the construction work, was also probably there when the accident took place,” he said.

Sajid, another local, claimed that many of the workers were called in because the roof seemed to be shaking. “Probably the heavy rain damaged the construction. Many workers might have gone there to check it,” he said.

NIA takes over investigation into killing of church leaders

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has taken over the probe into the killing of three church leaders in Manipur's Kangpokpi district in May, officials in Imphal said on Wednesday.

Armed miscreants ambushed two vehicles between Kotzin and Kotlen villages, killing three members of the Thadou Baptist Association on May 13. The murders triggered a hostage crisis and a fresh round of ethnic tension between the Kuki and Naga communities.

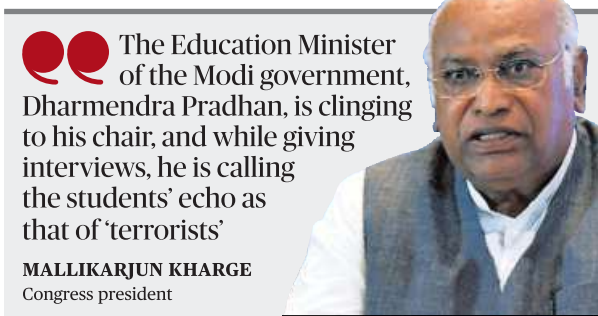
The case was registered on the day of the ambush at New Keithelmanbi police station in Kangpokpi district.

Officials said the case was re-registered at the NIA's Imphal unit on June 8, three days after the Ministry of Home Affairs issued an order to conduct the probe.

Kharge slams Pradhan for 'terrorist jibe' on students

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

In a post on social media platform X, Mr. Kharge linked the remark to concerns over examination



'Refused responsibility'
The Congress president alleged that despite the controversies surrounding examination irregularities, Mr. Pradhan had refused to take responsibility. "The Education Minister of the Modi government, Dharmendra Pradhan, is clinging to his chair, and while giving interviews, he is calling the 'students' echo' as

“*Chhatron Ki Goonj* (Congress’s ‘echo of students’ campaign) will echo

“Over the past 12 years, the RSS-BJP government has only pursued the privatisation, centralisation, and ‘sanghification’ of education, and done too little to prepare India’s youth for the future. The crisis today is not only one of unemployment but also of employability,” he said.

Donation theft in Ayodhya, land grab in Mahakal show new Modi model: Congress

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

"Ujjain and Ayodhya are international issues. People's faith is linked to these cities. People are frugal to be able to save and go on pilgrimages. Looting them money, carrying out a theft, is like stabbing people's faith," Mr. Khara said, referring to allegations that huge amounts of donations



Seeking action: Youth Congress workers staging a protest over an alleged Ujjain land scam, in Bhopal on Wednesday. PTI

Land grab row

The remarks come amid a controversy triggered by reports that Mr. Yadav's family members and real estate firms linked to them acquired large tracts of land in and around Ujjain after he assumed office in December 2023.

Mr. Khera said former Congress leader Ashok Chavan, who is now in the BJP, had to resign as Maharashtra Chief Minister over charges that his mother-in-law owned an apartment in the Adarsh Housing Society in Mumbai. "In this matter, no action is expected from Mr. Modi," he said.

On the draw



Shiv Sena (UBT) MPs seek copy of rebels' letter

Letter of caveat
“We had earlier given the Speaker a letter of caveat. He had accordingly called us. We asked him if the rebel MPs had given him any



Shiv Sena (UBT) Lok Sabha MPs Arvind Sawant and Anil Desai meet Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Wednesday. ANI

letter. We asked him if they came as a group or as individuals. We told him that he needs to inform us. We gave a copy of the Constitu-

tion, highlighting the provisions of the Tenth Schedule. A political party can merge if it wants to. But the party has to decide. There

“If anybody goes to meet the Speaker, the information is put out by his office. The photos are shared on his social media

“But considering that the previous case about the split in 2022 is itself pending, these names can now be added in the same petition,” Mr. Kalse said.

House panel seeks Ministry report on Great Nicobar Project

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

During his concluding remarks, Mr. Venugopal flagged the Great Nicobar Project, pointing to the rising panic among the residents there as 1.5 crore trees are slated to be felled to make way for the project. He further pointed out, sources said, that the naval base *INS Baaz* was not given additional land for its expansion; and the government was exploiting this fragile ecology for commercial activities. Congress MP Amar Singh also backed Mr. Venugopal, detailing the implications of the project, which the go-



K. C. Venugopal

On the listed subject of the day, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Institute of Medical Sciences, the panel pointed out there was a massive funding deficit and indefinite delay in completing the civil construction. The CAG report has also flagged deficiencies in equipment and patient care. The Home Ministry shifted the blame for these deficiencies to the Union Health Ministry.

Tax rates on low-alcohol beverages will be decided by the UDF, says Kerala CM

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Mr. Satheesan's remarks came amidst the protests raised by the Opposition Left Democratic Front (LDF) and reservations expressed within the UDF. In the Revised Budget pre-



The remarks by CM V.D. Satheesan comes amid protests over the proposal for lowering tax on low-alcohol beverages. A. JAYAMOHAN

LDF's policy
Mr. Satheesan said low-alcohol beverages as a new category was notified by the LDF government as part of its 2022-23 liquor policy. The present UDF government had merely fixed the tax rates. The LDF government had also amended the Foreign Liquor Rules to facilitate their sale, he said. Mr. Satheesan alleged that the LDF government had planned to

The LDF, which now exhibits distress over liquor addiction, had increased the number of bars in the State from 28, when it came to power in 1916, to more than 900, he said.

31% of Rajya Sabha MPs have declared criminal cases: report

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

A total of three of the four Rajya Sabha MPs from the TDP, all three MPs from the BRS, all three MPs from



The analysis covered 226 of the 233 Rajya Sabha members. FILE PHOTO

the CPI(M), two (67%) of the three MPs from the RJD, one (25%) of the four MPs from the AIADMK, one (25%) of the four MPs from the NCP, and one (33%) of the three MPs from the AAP have declared criminal cases against themselves in their affidavits. Of the MPs analysed, 31(14%) are billionaires. Among major parties, seven (7%) of the 107 Rajya Sabha MPs from the BJP, six (21%) of the 29 MPs from the Congress, two (50%) of the four MPs from the YSRCP, two (50%) of the four MPs from the TDP, two (67%) of the three MPs from the BRS, and two (50%) of the four MPs from the NCP have declared assets worth more than ₹100 crore.

BJP imposing vegetarianism in Bengal, says Trinamool

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

ISKCON spokesperson Radharaman Das said the meals would not contain eggs but would instead include ingredients such as paneer, kidney beans, and other vegetarian protein sources. Eggs have always been part of the menu for children in the State.

A IN-X

Kingmakers: meet the insects that make India’s favourite mangoes

A study has found that allowing wild insects to access flowers dramatically increased mango yield by 350%, highlighting the importance of wild insects for mango pollination; yet, native bees that transfer pollen around orchards are under threat from the insecticides that protect the crop from pests

Kavitha Kannan

More than a thousand varieties of mangoes exist in India, the popular ones being Banganapalli, Dassheri, Alphonso, Badaami, Imaam Pasandh, and Malgoa. There is even a “Lalbagh” variety in Bengaluru. Many of us associate the fruit with a summer childhood memory, of eating it with our bare hands, the mango juice dripping on our clothes. More recently, the fruit has become popular on social media platforms, where users explain hundreds of ways to cook and eat it. This year, the fruit’s popularity reached a new height: the red carpet at the Met Gala in New York. Mangoes and Indian summers go hand-in-hand, yet do you know how this fruit comes to be? In other words, the mango tree gives out flowers... and then what happens?

Making a mango

Between December and March every year, mango trees across the country bloom and issue a sweet yet slightly fermented odour. Look closer at a mango tree in this time and you will find a branch with several bouquets of small, cream-coloured flowers. Each branch, which botanists call a panicle, contains a few hundred to up to 10,000 individual flowers. And a single mango tree can carry up to some 3,000 panicles, depending on its size and branching. Each one of these flowers is the start of a mango in the making. Some flowers carry only the male parts while others only the female parts, and sometimes there can be flowers with both (which are biologically called hermaphrodites). Regardless, for the mango to form, pollen must travel between these flowers.

This is where pollinators make their mark. There is a curious history here. Mango cultivars had once insisted that mango flowers are pollinated only by wind. But this theory could not explain why the flowers issued a sweet odour. It had to be to attract insects. To confirm that insects were indeed pollinators, researchers in Bengaluru teamed up with their peers from Germany to survey several Badami mango farms in the city’s urban and rural areas. Their findings, published in 2023, were striking: “We found that allowing flowers access to ants and flying visitors (bees, hoverflies, nonsyrphid flies), dramatically increased mango yield by 350%, highlighting the importance of wild insects for mango pollination,” the study paper read. These flying insects were found to include wild bees such as the dwarf honey bee (*Apis florea*), giant honey bee (*Apis dorsata*), and stingless bees (*Tetragonula* sp.). Other important flying visitors included hoverflies, which look like bees (*Syrphus* sp.), the common house fly (*Musca domestica*), and the blow fly (Calliphoridae family).

Effective pollination

The researchers also observed that the mango yields dropped when they barred crawling insects, such as ants, from the flowers. Soubadra Devy, a senior researcher at the Ashoka Trust for



Fruit test: Visitors at a stall during a three-day mango and jackfruit fest organised by Shivamogga HOPCOMS in Karnataka in the first week of June. Attaching a monetary value to the crops could nudge policy towards actively protecting pollinators, through changes at the farm and landscape levels. S.K. DINESH

Research in Ecology and the Environment, Bengaluru, and an author of the study, said ants are “messy pollinators” and that it is essential to investigate them as pollinators of mango in future studies. Dr. Devy also said she anticipates that the pollinator community is not any different for other Indian mango varieties since the “floral traits, i.e. the flower structure, pollen, and nectar are likely to be very similar”. Researchers have conducted similar studies in Mexico, on the ‘Ataulfo’ mango, and in Australia, on the ‘Kensington Pride’ variety – and have revealed similar findings. Both teams also took more steps to determine which insects were the pollinators. They calculated a ‘pollination effectiveness’ metric based on the abundance of pollinators, the number of visits to flowers (with a ‘legitimate’ visits quantified using video cameras on trees), and the number of pollen grains deposited. And both studies showed that wild and native insects were most efficient at pollination, producing a higher yield of fruits. Non-native bees to Mexico, such as European honey bees (*Apis mellifera*), were abundant and contributed to 80% of the pollination. Paradoxically, however, that did not result in a higher yield. The reason was that these non-native bees stayed around the same trees or in the same orchard and delivered the wrong

pollen, resulting in malformed fruits. On the other hand, the native bees transferred pollen between orchards, giving rise to more full and juicy fruits. **Farmers’ friends** Yet these native bees are under threat from the same insecticides that protect the mango crop from pests. Neonicotinoid insecticides, which are commonly sprayed on mango trees, are neurotoxic and affect cognitive functions in bees, such as navigation, learning, and memory, and eventually their survival. This ripples through the entire colony, as the insecticides travel to the pollen and nectar and are brought back to the hive by bees. The Bengaluru-based study observed that fewer bees visited the mango flowers, and the harvested fruits were lighter by almost 30%, resulting in a three-way loss for the farmer: expensive pesticides, loss of pollinators, and a loss in the fruit yield. Dr. Devy said monoculture farms that prevail in rural areas are more prone to pest attacks, and hence suffer higher pollinator loss as well. However, she also said she sees hope in bee-safe pesticides and in farmers timing their sprays to avoid peak pollinator activity – practices already in use in several western countries. “One recent welcome move”, in her words, was the Indian government recognising pollinators in the country’s new ‘environmental accounting’

framework. This framework recognised that India has more than 800 bee species, plus butterflies, moths, beetles, birds, bats and flies as pollinators and that they are ecologically important for agriculture. The government has also attached a monetary value equivalent to 8-10% of the total crop output value, amounting to ₹2.6 lakh crore in 2021-22, to pollinators. **Rights of pollinators** Attaching a monetary value could nudge policy towards actively protecting our pollinators, through changes at the farm and landscape levels. These could include, as the Mexico study suggested, increasing the spread of natural and semi-natural areas near orchards, such as native forest patches and wildflower strips, to attract more wild insects. Dr. Devy also pointed out that in May, stingless bees in Peru had become the first insects to win the legal rights to exist, thrive, and be represented in court. This is significant for the conservation of the species against insecticides, climate change, and competition from non-native insects. The question then arises: will India accord similar rights to its pollinators, which carry the weight of the country’s agriculture? As you relish this season’s mangoes, it could also be your food for thought. (Kavitha Kannan is a biologist and science writer. kavithakannan1994@gmail.com)



Artisanal gold miners work at a mining site in Mongbwalu, Ituri Province, DRC on June 16. AFP

Gold miners keep working despite Ebola crisis in DRC

Agence France-Presse

In the mines of Mongbwalu, the epicentre of an Ebola outbreak in the northeastern Democratic Republic Congo (DRC), gold prospectors have no choice but to overcome their fear of the virus and carry on their backbreaking work. “Ebola is real and it scares us. But if I stay at home, what are my children going to eat?” Justin Okame, an artisanal digger, asked. The DRC’s 17th Ebola outbreak was declared on May 15 after several unexplained deaths in Mongbwalu in the mineral-rich but volatile Ituri province. It has claimed more than 250 lives with 1,000 cases in the vast central African nation but the real extent of the crisis is difficult to assess. In total, 209 people have been infected in Mongbwalu, 89 of whom have died, according to official figures.

The DRC’s 17th Ebola outbreak was declared on May 15 after several unexplained deaths in Mongbwalu in the mineral-rich but volatile Ituri province

Several miners were among the victims, Richard Lokudu, the head of the local hospital, said. Behind one miner, greasy, sticky earth stretched as far as the eye could see. The ochre landscape was pockmarked with holes that dozens of artisanal miners tirelessly dug through. Men and women caked in mud broke up rocks that were then crushed to free the gold particles. They spend hours side by side, sweating and wearing themselves out in dire health and safety conditions. Some come from other provinces or neighbouring countries such as Uganda, hoping to earn a few hundred dollars a week, at best. Jeannette Akelo, a mother of seven and day labourer at the open-pit site, said that the diggers had no choice: they must continue to work “to survive”. The current outbreak is caused by the Bundibugyo strain for which there is no vaccine or specific treatment. Existing Ebola vaccines, developed between 2018 and 2019, are only effective against the Zaire strain, which has caused previous major outbreaks. In the hills of the rural commune, Red Cross workers in full protective suits have regularly intervened over the past few weeks to wrap bodies and prevent post-mortem transmission of the virus. In the DRC, most gold production comes from artisanal mining. After long hours, some stopped to eat a plate of rice with a gravy made from leaves. Others preferred not to waste time. With their bare hands, they mixed mercury into the brownish material extracted from the ground. The small greyish, heavy, shiny lump that formed will, once heated, turn into raw gold. “We don’t know who is infected or not, and after work everyone goes home,” Jean-Baptiste Liwawi said. The digger said he took ginger and some concoctions to ward off infection. Since the start of the outbreak, many patients have preferred to consult traditional healers rather than go to hospitals. Public mistrust runs deep in a region that has for years been ravaged by violence waged by various armed groups, which regularly carry out massacres. In Ituri, almost all gold deposits are controlled by community-based militias, who derive substantial income particularly through the imposition of taxes, according to UN experts. Most of the illegally mined gold is smuggled to Uganda, the experts said in a report on the DRC at the end of 2025.

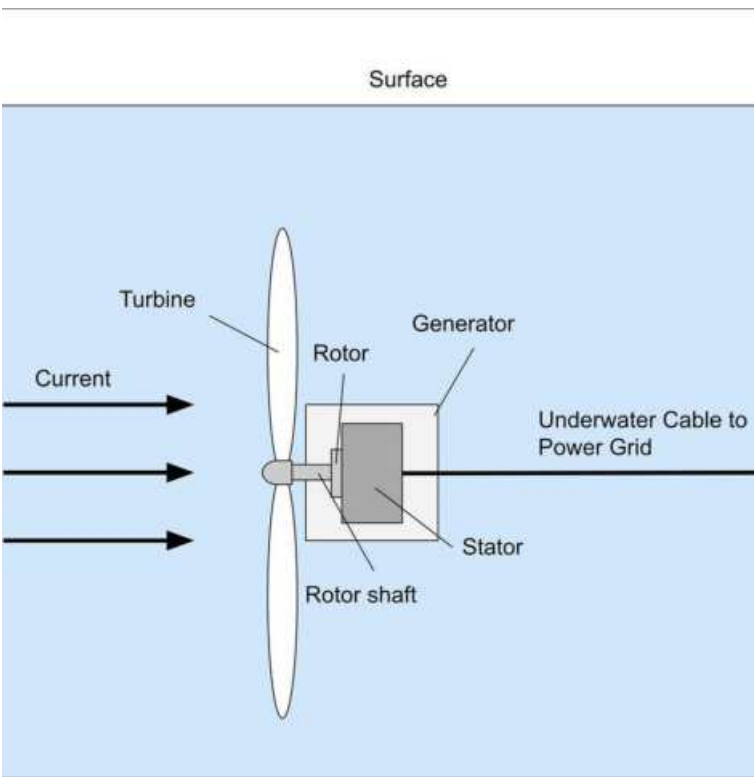
THE SCIENCE QUIZ

Unusual sources of energy

Vasudevan Mukunth

- QUESTION 1**
X uses a planet’s gravity to change a spacecraft’s speed and direction without using fuel. As the spacecraft swings by, it gains (or loses) momentum relative to the sun, borrowing a small bit of the planet’s orbital energy. The Voyager missions famously used this technique to get to the outer Solar System. Name X.
- QUESTION 2**
In 1969, the physicist Roger Penrose proposed that energy can be extracted from a rotating black hole. Within the _____ — the region just outside the event horizon — an object can be split in two, with one fragment spiralling into the black hole and the other escaping, carrying away more energy than it started with. Fill in the blank.
- QUESTION 3**
MHD generators produce electricity by passing an electrically conductive fluid, like an ionised gas, through a magnetic field. The

- moving charged particles induce a current, converting kinetic and thermal energy into electricity, no turbines needed. MHD generators are also highly efficient, but still experimental. What does MHD stand for?
- QUESTION 4**
A quantum physical phenomenon called the Y effect where two parallel, uncharged conducting plates placed really close together feel a force pulling them together. It arises because the plates restrict which virtual particles can exist between them versus outside, creating an unequal pressure from which a very small amount of energy can be extracted. Name Y.
- QUESTION 5**
Name the form of power that generates electricity from the difference in salt concentration between seawater and freshwater. As water flows across a semi-permeable membrane towards the saltier side, pressure builds between them and drives a turbine.



Visual: Name the turbine type described here. PUBLIC DOMAIN

- Answers to June 18 quiz:**
- When something you’ve just noticed seems to be everywhere – **Ans: Baader-Meinhof phenomenon**
 - Angle by which object flips in Dzhanibekov effect – **Ans: 180°**
 - Effect when a shampoo stream ‘leaps’ upwards – **Ans: Kaye effect**
 - When people respond to safety measures with more risk-taking – **Ans: Peltzman effect**
 - Star for whom information suppression backfiring effect is named – **Ans: Barbara Streisand**
- Visual: Magnus force**
- First contact:**
Tamal Biswas | K.N. Viswanathan | Anmol Agrawal | Pankaj Gharde | Prem Nath Tiwari

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



High heat and low rainfall is threatening agricultural produce

CM
YK

As a result, the Quad, rebuilt in Trump 1.0 as a

Suhasini Haidar

Paragraph 6 stipulates that the U.S., along with regional allies, will provide at least \$300 billion for Iran's reconstruction. These provisions imply commitments on behalf of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) states while giving Iran leverage on key issues – military, connectivity, and economic security. Oman and Qatar are now closer to Iran than

The U.S.'s reversion from INDOPACOM to PACOM suggests that its regional shifts run deeper than a simple name change

Judicial oversight may finally realise the constitutional right to trauma care

Aanya Singhal,
Noida, Uttar Pradesh

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portion of his speech was devoted to self-praise and DMK-bashing. Mr. Vijay cannot shirk responsibility by claiming that he has inherited long-standing problems and that addressing them will take time.

His foremost priorities should be preventing crimes against women and curbing the drug menace in the State. His reference to

the electoral defeat of DMK president M.K. Stalin through a “short story” was also unnecessary. That said, Mr. Vijay deserves credit for giving greater representation to Dalits and women in his Ministry, and for reaffirming his commitment to secularism, social justice and ending illegal mining.

The Chief Minister's gestures and dramatic flourishes, accompanied by gleeful clapping and hooting from the Treasury benches to score political points over the Opposition, resembled a scene from a masala potboiler rather than a legislative debate. Such conduct is an affront to the intelligence of the electorate. Our lawmakers would do well to restore

Hand in the till

It is distressing that the Ram temple is in the limelight for all the wrong reasons, especially since the government has sought to derive political dividends

Aanya Singhal,
Noida, Uttar Pradesh

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Sustaining India's low-fertility future

India is entering a new demographic phase. The latest Sample Registration System data puts the country's total fertility rate at 1.9 children per woman, below both the global average of 2.2 and the replacement level of 2.1 needed to keep a population stable. For a country that has long worried about population growth, this marks an important turn.

However, the decline is not uniform. Rural fertility is still around the replacement mark, while urban fertility has fallen to 1.5. The sharper divide is geographic. Delhi's fertility rate stands at an ultra-low of 1.2, while Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal are at 1.3. These levels are lower than those in the United States (1.6), Finland (1.4), and Japan (1.3). At the other end, Bihar remains at 2.9, followed by Uttar Pradesh (2.6), Madhya Pradesh (2.4), and Rajasthan (2.3).

The implication is that India has crossed into low fertility as a nation, but not as one demographic economy. While some States are already moving rapidly towards ageing, others still have large cohorts set to enter the labour force over the next two decades. India must create productive opportunities for young workers in poorer and younger States, while strengthening income, care, and health systems for older populations where fertility has already fallen very low.

A difficult shift

The transition could indeed be challenging. Western Europe and Japan aged after they had industrialised, brought a large share of workers into formal employment, widened their tax systems, and built welfare institutions with some capacity for risk-pooling. Even then, ageing strained public finances; Japan saw the burden push public debt above 200% of GDP.

India enters the same demographic passage on a weaker institutional and fiscal base. Its



Amarendu Nandy

Associate Professor, Economics & Public Policy Area, Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Ranchi. Views are personal

per-capita income is around \$2,800. Its direct tax base remains narrow, with net direct taxpayers accounting for only about 6% of the total population. State governments, tasked with much of the social-sector response, are already fiscally stretched.

The labour-market base is just as fragile. Since most workers spend their lives in informal or semi-formal work, old-age income security remains largely outside formal employment contracts. A contribution-based pension system works best when earnings are predictable, employment is formal, and workers can save regularly over decades. In India, that assumption holds for only a minority of the workforce.

Existing public safety nets acknowledge this vulnerability but do not provide meaningful income security. The Atal Pension Yojana assumes sustained contributions across one's working life, which is difficult for informal workers with volatile incomes. The old-age pension under the National Social Assistance Programme remains ₹200 a month for those aged 60 to 79 and ₹500 for those above 80. Such support does not protect the elderly from dependence.

Income security, however, is only one part of the problem. For generations, India's welfare state has been partly hidden inside the household. The joint family, co-resident children, and unpaid female care absorbed many of the costs of old age. That arrangement is weakening under the pressure of urbanisation, migration, nuclear households, and women's educational and work aspirations. Studies of left-behind elderly parents show that while children's migration improves monetary resources, it worsens loneliness and health vulnerability.

To be sure, India has about 150 million people aged 60 and above. By 2050, that number is projected to rise to 347 million, or nearly one-fifth of the population. Yet the income base of old age remains weak. NITI Aayog has noted that 70% of the elderly depend on

others while 78% have no pension cover. These numbers explain why India needs an inflation-indexed minimum pension floor, not as a substitute for contributory pensions, but as a basic layer of public risk-pooling for old age.

Ageing will also change the nature of healthcare demand. The pressure will come from the long-term management of hypertension, diabetes, dementia, disability, and palliative dependence. India has shown that sustained public investment can alter demographic outcomes. It did so for fertility, institutional deliveries, and child survival. The same mission-mode action will now be needed for embedding geriatric care into nursing practice, district health planning, and primary care.

The question of migration

The transition also has a federal dimension. The fastest-ageing States will increasingly need workers from younger States. This could be a source of national balance, but only if younger States invest aggressively in education, health, and skills, so that their workers do not merely move into low-wage informality elsewhere. It will also require older, richer, and more urbanised States to treat migrants not as temporary labour but as citizens who help sustain their economies and therefore deserve portable protection. A national labour market cannot rest on welfare systems tied narrowly to domicile. If workers move across State borders, their entitlements must move with them. Portability of welfare benefits must be one of the foundations of an ageing economy.

International evidence shows that low fertility can accompany prosperity. The difficulty is that India is entering mass ageing before completing the transitions that made ageing manageable elsewhere. India's low-fertility future will be sustainable only if stronger public systems gradually assume responsibilities that large families once carried quietly.

Furore over the Mekedatu project

Tamil Nadu may be waging a losing battle in its fight to get the project scrapped

STATE OF PLAY

T. Ramakrishnan

The row over the Meke-datu dam project, which has been a thorn in the relationship between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, has resurfaced with the Tamil Nadu Assembly adopting a unanimous resolution against the Karnataka government's proposal for constructing a drinking water-cum-balancing reservoir across the Cauvery river at Mekedatu.

The reason for the resolution was apparently the preparation on the part of the upper riparian State to go ahead with the submission of a revised Detailed Project Report (DPR) on the Mekedatu proposal in light of the Supreme Court dismissing Tamil Nadu's petition to review a November 2025 decision; the court termed the State's challenge to Karnataka's proposed dam as "premature". The project envisages impounding 67.16 thousand million cubic ft (TMC ft) through a ₹9,000-crore drinking water-cum-balancing reservoir at Mekedatu, about 100 km from Bengaluru. It would have a 400 MW (mega-watt) hydro power component but no irrigation component.

In the Supreme Court's 2018 judgment on the Cauvery dispute, Karnataka had been sanctioned an additional 4.75 TMC for Bengaluru's drinking water requirements.

On the face of it, the Meke-datu project, which is being proposed to cater to Bengaluru's requirements, should not even be a matter of concern to the lower riparian State. But what is complicating the issue is the trust deficit between the two riparian States, as a result of which Tamil Nadu views the



proposal with suspicion for legitimate reasons. The lower riparian State's basic point is that the Cauvery being deficit, no new project is permissible.

Karnataka Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar and his colleagues have said that the new dam will benefit Tamil Nadu too as it will serve as a balancing reservoir to regulate the flood flows from the upstream Krishnaraja Sagar and Kabini to the Mettur dam downstream in the lower riparian State.

A tense negotiation

In the last 10-odd years, the Tamil Nadu Assembly has passed, on several occasions, motions against the project.

However, a new element to the contentious matter is the lower riparian State's demand for a tribunal to examine the pros and cons of the project. Though the Tamil Nadu government sent a formal communication on March 4 to the Centre, this was kept under wraps till June 19, the day on which the House adopted the resolution.

The previous Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam government, which took the decision to seek a tribunal for the project, had, for inexplicable reasons, maintained silence and the present Tamilaga Vettri Kaha-gam government too followed suit till now.

However, the Leader of Opposition and former Deputy

Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin disclosed it last week in the House and requested Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay to include it in the resolution. Mr Vijay immediately agreed to the request but former Chief Minister and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami pointed out that there was a procedural lapse with regard to the way the amendment was incorporated in the resolution.

When Tamil Nadu had pursued the concept of a tribunal in the past to resolve the basic dispute over the sharing of Cauvery river water, it had done so after attending 23 bilateral or tripartite or multi-stakeholder meetings involving the governments of Karnataka, Kerala, and the Union Territory of Puducherry, besides the Central government. However, in the last 15 years, not even one meeting took place between the two principal States on the Mekedatu issue. Under such circumstances, it is not known whether the Union government will take a sympathetic view of Tamil Nadu's request, as the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act requires the Centre to accept the demand for a tribunal only when it is convinced that the dispute cannot be settled through negotiations.

Even if the idea is acceded to, there is no guarantee that Tamil Nadu will be able to succeed in its plan of scrapping the project.

To safeguard the interests of farmers and ensure that the drinking water requirements of Bengaluru be met, the two States can explore the possibility of building a dam in Rasimanal, which is in Tamil Nadu, for a similar capacity.

ramakrishnan.t@thehindu.co.in

Afghan women are increasingly turning to entrepreneurship

Female labour-force participation has fallen to around 5% while women's university enrolment has dropped from nearly 55,000 students in 2019 to zero

DATA POINT

Devvyanshi Bihani

The Taliban's draconian restrictions over the past five years have led to Afghan women facing an unprecedented rollback of rights and freedoms. As universities and many formal workplaces become inaccessible, a growing number of women are turning to small-scale entrepreneurship as one of the few remaining avenues to earn a livelihood. According to World Bank and ILO estimates, female labour-force participation declined from 14.6% in 2021 to 5.2% in 2022 and stood at approximately 5.1% in 2024 and 2025. Male participation remained close to 70% (Chart 1).

Data from Afghanistan's National Statistics and Information Authority shows the scale of the exclusion. In 2019, Afghan universities enrolled 54,861 female students. By 2023-24, that number had fallen to just 102, and by 2024-25 no female students were recorded in any universities. Female admissions followed a similar trajectory, dropping from 16,496 new entrants in 2019 to zero in both 2023-24 and 2024-25. Female graduates also disappeared from the system, falling from 9,937 in 2019 to 67 in 2023-24 and none in 2024-25 (Chart 2). Male enrolment also declined over the same period. UNICEF and UNESCO have attributed the deterioration in educational outcomes to a combination of restrictive policies, chronic underinvestment, recurring humanitarian crisis, widespread learning poverty, and teacher shortages.

These figures reflect the impact of Taliban policies that have barred women and girls from secondary and higher education. Additionally, more than 80% of female media workers lost their jobs when the Taliban returned.

As opportunities in education and formal employment narrowed, many women turned to bu-

sinesses. Data cited by the Afghan Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industry indicates that registered women-owned businesses increased from 2,421 before the restrictions to 9,162 afterward, while estimates of informal women-owned enterprises rose from 52,000 to 1,20,000 (Chart 3). Manufacturing (43%), services (30%) and trade (19%) were the largest sectors, including tailoring, handicrafts, carpet weaving and food processing.

As Afghanistan grapples with economic challenges and international isolation, Taliban officials have framed support for women-led businesses as part of a broader push for economic self-sufficiency. In a Reuters interview, acting commerce minister Haji Nooruddin Azizi said, "We always support women investors" and "We will support any item which can help us for self-sufficiency."

While the number of women-owned enterprises has grown, a 2024 UNDP survey of 3,122 women-led SMEs across 18 provinces highlights the challenges facing women entrepreneurs. Only 28% were formally registered and licensed, while nearly two-thirds operated without registration (Chart 4).

The lack of formal registration limits access to markets, finance and opportunities for growth. The strain is evident in the fact that 41% women entrepreneurs reported being in debt. However, only 5% had obtained loans from formal banks; for in order to secure a loan, you need to have a business background, a recommendation letter, and property documents which many Afghan women lack. So they primarily rely on family networks and personal savings to fund their businesses (Table 1).

As universities close their doors to women and their labour force participation remains among the lowest in the world, small businesses have become an economic lifeline for thousands of Afghan women seeking an income.

The last open door

The data for the charts were sourced from World Bank, Afghanistan's National Statistics and Information Authority, Afghan Women Chamber of Commerce and Industries and United Nations Development Programme

CHART 1: Gender-wise labour-force participation in Afghanistan before and after the Taliban's return to power in 2021

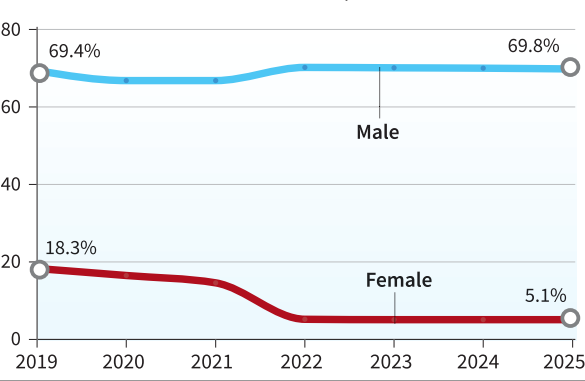


CHART 2: Female participation in Afghanistan's higher education system before and after the Taliban's return to power in 2021

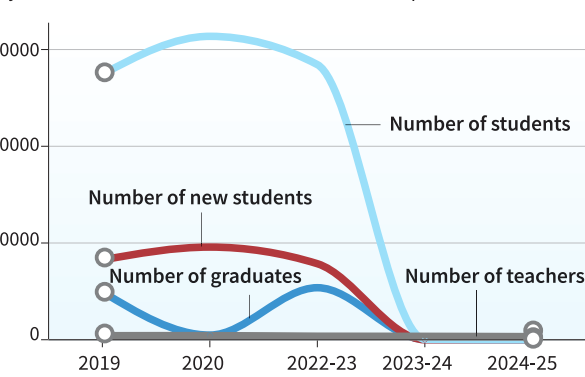


CHART 3: Number of registered and informal women-owned businesses in Afghanistan before and after the Taliban's return to power in 2021

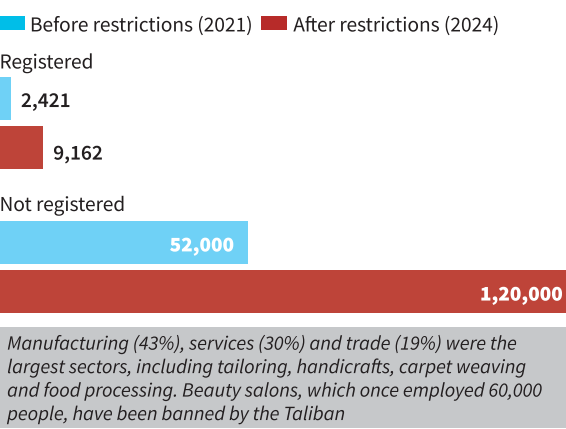


CHART 4: Registration status of women-led enterprises as of 2024, as per a UNDP survey

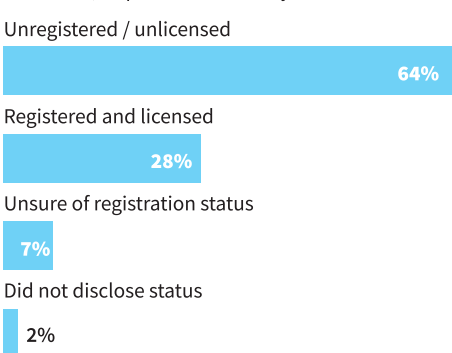


TABLE 1: Sources of financing for women-led small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Afghanistan as of 2024, as per a UNDP survey

Source of loan / financing	Percentage of women-led SMEs
Family	61%
Friends	45%
Other businesses	21%
Formal banks	5%
Remittances from abroad	5%
Microfinance institutions (MFIs)	2%
Community savings groups	2%
Money service providers/Hawalas	0.30%

Note: Survey respondents could select multiple options. Hence the percentages do not add up to 100%

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 25, 1976

Heavy rain likely along west coast

Madras, June 24: The west coast is likely to receive heavy rain in the next two days. According to a special bulletin issued by the weather office here, a well-marked trough of low pressure has formed in the east Arabian Sea over Lakshadweep and off the Kerala, Karnataka, Goa coast.

A low pressure area also lies over the central and adjoining northwest Bay of Bengal off Andhra and Orissa coast.

The southwest monsoon will revive over Kerala and coastal Karnataka in the next 48 hours and widespread rain is expected over Lakshadweep and in Kerala and coastal Karnataka. Isolated heavy rain is likely in the extreme western parts of interior Karnataka during the same period. Squally weather will prevail over Lakshadweep and along and off the Kerala and Karnataka coast during the next two days.

Our Trivandrum correspondent reports: Conditions are now becoming favourable for the strengthening of the southwest monsoon over Kerala according to a special weather bulletin issued by the Meteorological Centre, Trivandrum.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 25, 1926

Jubilee of the telephone

Rugby, June 25: The jubilee of the telephone is being celebrated today.

At the institution of Electrical Engineers, Sir Oliver Lodge delivered a lecture, which was broadcast, on the history of the development of the telephone. Newspapers pay tributes to the memory of Professor Alexander Graham Bell, who is regarded as "the father of the telephone." The story is retold how Mr. Bell, a native of Edinburgh, married a girl who had the misfortune to be deaf and how he tried to invent an instrument that would enable her to hear. He chanced to discover the machine that enabled one to hear from a long distance. This he patented in America where he and his wife were living. He brought his invention to England in 1877 and England's first telephone company was registered in June of the following year. The first exchange was opened in August, 1879 at Coleman Street in the City of London with fewer than a dozen subscribers.

THE HINDU

128 Lebanon has transferred 128 Syrian convicts to their home country, a Lebanese security source said on Wednesday, marking the second batch of handovers under an agreement the two sides signed earlier this year. Overcrowded Lebanese prisons host around 2,000 Syrian nationals held on various charges. *AFP*

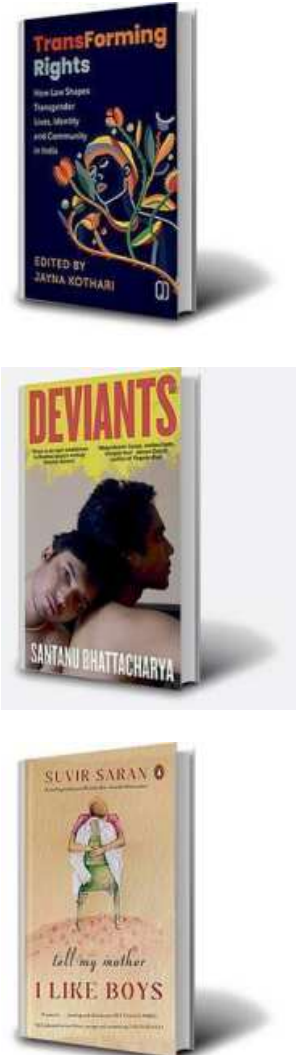
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BIBLIOGRAPHY



People take part in the Karnataka Swabhimana Habba Pride March on June 21. SUDHAKARA JAIN



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

S. Upendran

“Hi, Sorry, I’m late.”
“I have been waiting for an hour. Where have you been?”
“I went to see my cousin Vishvanath at the nursing home. He is going to be operated tomorrow. His appendix is being removed.”
“Doctors usually perform an operation on someone. They don’t ‘operate’ someone, they ‘operate on’ someone. Your cousin is being operated on for appendicitis tomorrow.”
“Operated on, eh? I see. How does this sound? The surgeon said that he planned to operate on the Principal some time next week.”
“Why don’t you leave your Principal out of your examples! Last week my best friend’s mother was operated on. Tell me, who is the doctor who is going....”
“....I heard this morning that the doctor who is going to operate on my cousin isn’t very good.”
“Who told you that?”
“Madhu. He said that the last person that this doctor operated, died on the... I mean that the last person that the doctor operated on died on the operation table.”
“That’s terrible. Did you tell your cousin about this?”
“Yes, I did. But he is not at all worried. According to his opinion, if someone...”
“...you cannot say ‘according to his opinion’. You can either say, ‘according to him/her’, or ‘in his/her opinion’.”
“I see. According to the doctors the operation is a minor one.”
“In the doctors’ opinion the operation is a minor one.”
“According to my cousin, the operation is so minor that even a medical student could perform it with his eyes closed.”
“Perform an operation with one’s eyes closed! Good grief! In my opinion your cousin isn’t taking things seriously.”
“That’s what my father thinks too! According to me, both of you....oops, sorry! You cannot say, ‘according to me’, right?”
“That’s right! It’s always ‘according to someone else’. If you want to express an opinion, then you have to say...”
“....in my opinion. In my opinion you correct me too often.”
“That’s a good example. Or you could say, ‘If you ask me, you correct me too often’.”
“If you ask me, there is too much corruption our country.”
“Let’s not start talking about it please. People in this country only talk about it. They don’t do anything about it.”
“There’s nothing we can do about it.”
“Can I say the corruption in this country...”
“Why are you so fixated on corruption?”
“Fixated? What does it mean?... Wait let me guess. When you are fixated on something, you are always thinking about it. Am I right?”
“Excellent. You don’t merely think about it, but you constantly talk about it as well.”
“Like our friend Raja. He is constantly talking about cricket.”
“Exactly! When you are fixated on something, it becomes your obsession. You are thinking about it excessively. You can be fixated on a person as well. My friend Janaki remains fixated on things which keep reminding her of her dead grandmother.”
Published in The Hindu on January 30, 2001.

Mapping queer lives through books: identity, resistance and equality in India

A selection of fiction and non-fiction works offers a layered understanding of the evolving realities of queer life in India, spanning law, personal memory, family, and workplaces; they show how identities are shaped by legal frameworks, lived experiences, and intergenerational shifts

Soma Basu

Every June, the world observes Pride Month, which traces its origins to the 1969 Stonewall riots in New York City. In response to a police raid at the Stonewall Inn at Greenwich Village in the U.S., the LGBTQI+ began protests and demonstrations. This marked a pivotal turning point for the modern LGBTQI+ rights movement.

In India, the LGBTQI+ rights movement has been dynamic, securing significant legal protections for the community. However, the latest Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Act, 2026 – which removes the statutory recognition of self-perceived gender identity, introduces medical-board certification and bureaucratic verification requirements, and mandates inclusion in a National Transgender Registry – has brought the gap between legal recognition and lived reality into sharp focus once again.

One step forward, two steps back

Medical gatekeeping is an infringement on dignity, autonomy, personal liberty, and privacy. So long as recognition remains conditional, equality remains incomplete. Advocate Jayna Kothari explains the relationship between law and the lived realities of transgender people in *Transforming Rights: How Law Shapes Transgender Lives, Identity and Community in India* (QD). The collection of essays examines India’s transformation in transgender rights, from the recognition of gender self-determination and the decriminalisation of same-sex relations to the recent legislative rollback of self-identification rights.

Even as the courts have laid down a framework for equal protection under the

law, the trans community continues to face exclusion and discrimination, and remains engaged in a struggle for basic rights to education, healthcare, livelihood, and shelter. Kothari questions the contradiction in the compilation of voices of scholars, activists, lawyers, policy researchers, and community members, who have experience in working with the wider LGBTQI+ community. The chapters explore the constitutional trajectory of equality and protection in transgender rights cases, the implementation of reservations, questions of intimacy, the impact of increased surveillance and safety measures on trans lives, public attitudes, and structural exclusion. Drawing on legal, social, and community-based perspectives, the essays outline the progress made over the years, the continuing challenges, and the reforms still needed.

Lived experiences

While the legal framework helps us understand the rights framework, it does not capture the lived realities of the community. It is in personal narratives, memoirs, and community storytelling that these experiences find expression. Existing outside traditional narratives is not easy for queer people, who are often compelled to create their own spaces. To write a memoir is to be deeply vulnerable with the reader.

Michelin-starred chef Suvir Saran’s *Tell My Mother I Like Boys* (Penguin Random House) is a deeply personal and hard-hitting memoir. It is a frank account of the abuse he endured and how he found sanctuary in the kitchen.

For Saran, cooking was never just about taste, but about memory and survival. The story oscillates between the opening of Devi, the first Indian

restaurant in North America, and Saran’s reckoning with identity and the loneliness that followed his success.

He writes that he suffered enough heartbreak to stop being afraid of his own truth, and could therefore write an emotionally naked memoir without resorting to self-pity. He describes himself as an “unsummoned third child kept almost by accident,” raised in Delhi in the 1970s, when plurality was an instinct rather than a slogan. Saran does not downplay the trauma of children who do not fit the mould; his accounts of teasing, shame, and internal panic are unflinching.

The book also explores his life in Manhattan, marked by ambition, love, betrayal, infidelity, and loneliness. The honesty with which he lays bare his emotional interior strengthens the book. Saran is open about the relationships that shaped or broke him and talks about his mother who helped him heal when he returned to India. As Saran writes in the preface, “This book is not a chronicle. It is a monsoon. It pours, it pauses, it floods, it recedes, it returns.”

Queerness across generations

Saran’s account opens up a broader question of how queer identity is also shaped within families and across generations. In *Deviants* (Fig Tree), Shantanu Bhattacharya writes a bold, multi-generational story of three gay men from the same family who, from the 1970s to the present day, fight against the tide for love and dignity. It is about Vivaan, a teenager, who discovers boundary-breaking love on his smartphone. His parents are aware of his gender identity, and Vivaan can count on their support.

But Mambro, his uncle, born 30 years earlier, had it different when he fell in

love with a male classmate at a time when the persecution of gay people was rife under a colonial-era law criminalising homosexuality.

And Mambro’s uncle, Sukumar, a young man hopelessly in love with another young man, was forced by social taboos to keep their relationship a secret.

Interweaving three distinct voices on queer life in India, the book provides insight into changing laws and attitudes towards homosexuality and offers a poignant account of how these shifts directly impact individuals.

Apart from narratives of love and family, there are also books that explore queer identity in relation to institutions and workplaces. *Queeristan: LGBTQ Inclusion in the Indian Workplace* by Parmesh Shahani (Westland) is groundbreaking as a part memoir and part manifesto for HR professionals and executives on how to build safe, equitable, and profitable corporate environments in India. The author draws from his decade-long journey as a gay man in the corporate world in the post-Section 377 landscape to make a cogent case for LGBTQI+ inclusion and lay down guidelines for reshaping office culture in the country. The book traces the benefits reaped by industry giants such as Godrej, Tata Steel, IBM, Wipro, and the Lalit group of hotels, who have tapped into the power of diversity and revolutionised LGBTQI+-friendly workspaces.

These books – memoir, fiction, and non-fiction trace the changing contours of queer life in India – its intimacies, its institutions, and the unfinished fight for equality. They reflect the ongoing struggle for acceptance in an unforgiving society, and help us understand how much has changed, and how much has remained the same.

THE DAILY QUIZ

As we enter the second half of 2026, here’s a quiz on video games released so far. Identify the titles from the hints provided below

Mohammed Hidayat

- QUESTION 1**
A reimagining of James Bond from the studio behind the Hitman series.
- QUESTION 2**
The latest instalment of the long-running survival-horror franchise. You play as dual protagonists.
- QUESTION 3**
This new IP from Capcom follows an astronaut and an Android youngling as they fight their way through AI threats while trying to return to Earth.
- QUESTION 4**
A meditative yet tense mountain-climbing survival game with stunning landscapes.

- QUESTION 5**
From the makers of Returnal, this third-person roguelite shooter is set on a shape-shifting planet. Fast-paced combat and elements of cosmic horror elevate the gameplay. The main character is Arjun Devraj.
- QUESTION 6**
_____ is a 90s’ coming-of-age narrative adventure game complete with stop-motion inspired animation and a loaded jukebox. It chronicles the last day of summer of three high-school friends. Fill in the blank.
- QUESTION 7**
This hard to play 2-D game with an anthropomorphic mouse evokes retro nostalgia with its pixel-art aesthetic and has generated constant Game of the Year buzz.



Visual Question: Unarguably the most awaited video game of the year. Pre-orders are expected to begin today. Identify the open-world video game title from the promotional still.

- Questions and answers to the previous day’s daily quiz:**
1. Who holds the record of scoring the most goals in a single World Cup match? **Ans: Oleg Salenko, Russia**
 2. Who holds the record of having played in most minutes in World Cup history? **Ans: Lionel Messi, Argentina – 2315 minutes till 2022 edition**
 3. Who is the only player to have won the Golden Ball and Golden Glove awards in the same World Cup tournament? **Ans: Oliver Kahn, Germany**
 4. Who won the Golden Boot and Golden Ball in the same World Cup and was part of the winning team? **Ans: Paolo Rossi of Italy**
 5. Who has won the World Cup as a player, coach/manager and also won the Best Young Player award? **Ans: Franz Beckenbauer, Germany**
 6. Which country withdrew from the 1950 World Cup because FIFA required players to wear boots, while they were accustomed to playing barefoot? **Ans: India**
 7. Visual: Who holds the records for youngest goal, hat-trick, and final goal in World Cup history? **Ans: Pele**
- Early Birds**
Tamal Biswas| Piyali Tuli| Sudhir Thapa| Suchit Narottam

Word of the day

Estival:
of or occurring in summer

Synonyms: summery, aestival

Usage: The clear blue sky had a distinct estival feel to it.

Pronunciation: newsth.live/estival

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ˈɛs.tɪ.vəl/

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



Tourists visit the archaeological ruins of Nisa, an ancient fortress near capital Ashgabat in Turkmenistan. AFP

Ultra-reclusive so far, Turkmenistan slowly opens up to tourists

Agence France-Presse
ASHGABAT

From a gas crater dubbed the “Gateway to Hell” to the shimmering marble buildings of its capital, Turkmenistan is tentatively opening up to tourists after decades of isolation.

One of the world’s most reclusive countries, the former Soviet republic adopted strict visa requirements after gaining independence in 1991 and closely monitors travellers.

Now, tour agencies in the Central Asian nation have noticed a recent decrease in visa rejections and this year authorities announced plans to expand the tourism sector.

At the archaeological ruins of Nisa, an ancient fortress near the capital, Ashgabat, AFP spotted a Western tour group taking advantage of this tentative thaw.

“I wanted to see what the mystery was about,” said Nick Frey, a 28-year-old U.S. tourist admiring the fortress. “I think the uniqueness is really what stood out.”

Ashgabat has the highest density of white marble buildings in the world, according to Guinness World Records.

Turkmenistan’s odd architecture and reclusiveness has made it a magnet for content creators on social media, some of whom have dubbed it the “world’s weirdest country”.

Before arriving, all holidaymakers must prove their tourist credentials and their itinerary is strictly mapped out.

President Serdar Berdymukhamedov appears to be warming to the new visitors.

“The country’s tourism industry is increasingly expanding,” he said earlier this year, adding that he wanted to develop international cooperation.

Sudan’s war refugees recount horrors in Egypt’s jails as deportations surge

Former detainees describe extortion, overcrowding, scarce water, and abuse; authorities have deported over 5,500 people since November, a sharp rise from about 100 each in 2023 and 2024, security officials say; UNHCR says returns to Sudan should not take place under current circumstances

Reuters
CAIRO

Al-Nazir Al-Sadig sought safety in Egypt from the civil war in Sudan. Instead, the 18-year-old died of pneumonia after more than three weeks in a squalid Cairo jail, where he had suffered beatings and extortion at the hands of other inmates, his friends and relatives said.

A high-school student, Al-Sadig was detained as part of what lawyers and human rights groups describe as a sweeping crackdown on refugees that contrasts sharply with Egypt’s stated role as a safe haven.

Egypt rejects the claims that it is unwelcoming to refugees. It took in more than a million people when war broke out in Sudan in 2023, acting as a buffer to those who might otherwise continue north to Europe. But authorities, facing an economic crisis and rising anti-migrant sentiment, have since taken an increasingly strict line with a series of arrests and deportations.

Starting late last year, plain-clothes security officers have detained thousands of refugees and other migrants in homes and workplaces, pulling them off streets into unmarked vehicles, according to 45 refugees, seven lawyers, and eight advocates. The reporting found some left Egypt, taking their chances

in war-torn Sudan rather than risk being separated from their families and deported. Others have gone into hiding, at a time activists warn a newly implemented law risks further eroding asylum protection.

Authorities have deported more than 5,500 people since November, a fraction of the overall refugee population but a sharp escalation from around 100 formal deportations each year in 2023 and 2024, three security officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity and citing figures not reported previously.

Egypt does not publish detailed immigration data and Reuters could not independently verify the deportation and detention figures in the current crackdown.

‘Unprecedented’ move
Reuters documented three fatalities of Sudanese refugees in Egypt’s overcrowded prisons this year: a 30-year-old who collapsed 72 hours after he was detained; a 67-year-old diabetic man, and the high schooler Al-Sadig. Two of the security officials said a total of nine Sudanese nationals had died in custody, without elaborating on the circumstances of the deaths. Reuters could not independently verify the other fatalities.

Ten former detainees in police-run jails described refugees sleeping in shifts



Home calls: A file photo of Sudanese refugees waiting in Cairo to board a train to Aswan, ahead of a journey to Khartoum. REUTERS

because of a lack of floor space, beatings and other abuse, assaults for clothing and food, and filthy sanitary conditions. One Eritrean refugee detained in the crackdown recounted a violent sexual assault by other female inmates, her account supported by medical records from a Cairo hospital.

Karim Ennarah of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, a human rights group, described the scope of the campaign as “unprecedented”, going against Egypt’s obligations under international law that restrict deportations of refugees.

“Protection as it existed in Egypt for decades has collapsed,” he said.

Egypt’s State Information Service said in a statement to Reuters that deportation is “generally carried out only through clear legal procedures and judicial guarantees,” and only when an individual is

proven to have broken the law or to pose a national security threat. It denied that a broad-based campaign against refugees exists.

Egypt’s government has said individual incidents do not reflect state policy, highlighting that millions of Sudanese and other migrants live, study, and work in Egypt and benefit from public services such as education and healthcare.

Egypt had the second highest number of asylum applications globally in 2025, according to U.N. numbers, “reflecting the confidence of individuals seeking protection,” in the country, the information service said in a statement to Reuters.

Reuters questions to relevant authorities were sent via the information service, which liaises with foreign media in coordination with other Egyptian institutions.

At a bus stop in the heart of downtown Cairo, Hosna, a 40-year-old school teacher, waited with her four children and hundreds of other people for transport back to Sudan.

‘There is no safety’
Ms. Hosna said she feared her two teenage sons could be arrested because, despite receiving U.N. refugee status upon arrival two years ago, the family was still awaiting an appointment for Egyptian residency. The children of two families in her apartment building in Cairo had been detained and deported, she said.

“I came here searching for safety but there is no safety. It’s better to die in my country than lose my children,” Ms. Hosna said, giving only her first name. More than a dozen refugees, including Ms. Hosna, expressed concern about returning to a precarious security situation in Sudan, where the capital Khartoum suffers frequent drone strikes and barely functioning basic services despite the army regaining control from paramilitary forces last year.

Sudan’s information ministry did not respond to a request for comment about deportations from Egypt and risks deportees may face. The civil war that started in 2023 has displaced millions of people fleeing racially charged

campaigns of ethnic cleansing and other violence.

A new asylum law Egypt passed in 2024 grants refugees the right to work and seek education and health-care. But it drew criticism from UNHCR, the U.N. refugee agency, for giving officials wide discretion over who qualifies as a refugee.

Mr. Ennarah said implementing bylaws published this month offered insufficient protection from refoulement, the forcible return of refugees to a territory where their life or freedom is at high risk.

“The law’s expanded grounds for denial and revocation risk codifying the crackdown,” he said.

In its statement to Reuters, the Egyptian government said the law “affirms respect for human dignity and the principle of non-refoulement” and guarantees refugees the right to be free from discrimination or inhuman or degrading treatment.

UNHCR said it was concerned by the arrests, detention, and deportations, including of women and children registered with the U.N.

“Returns to Sudan should not take place under the current circumstances, given the ongoing conflict and humanitarian situation, which do not allow for safe and sustainable return,” UNHCR said in response to questions from Reuters.

Stepping up



Shaking a leg: People from Malawi, a country in southeastern Africa, dance in front of St. Peter's basilica on Wednesday, the day Pope Leo holds the weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican. REUTERS

Right-wing leader Keiko Fujimori set to win presidential run-off in Peru

Agence France-Presse
LIMA

Conservative Keiko Fujimori appeared to win Peru’s presidential election on Tuesday.

The election has been one of the tightest Latin American leadership contests in decades, with crime and political instability dominating a race to choose the country’s ninth leader in a decade.

Ms. Fujimori’s victory would mark the return of her family name to power, more than two decades after the fall of her father, former president Alberto Fujimori.

With 99.86% of ballots tallied, Ms. Fujimori held 50.12% of the vote, a margin of just over 43,000 over



Leading lady: With 99.86% of ballots tallied, Fujimori held 50.12% of the vote, a margin of over 43,000 over rival Roberto Sanchez. AFP

er her leftist rival Roberto Sanchez, according to the National Office of Electoral Processes data.

Before declaring the winner, election officials need to process 131 tally sheets, which represent around 39,000 votes - an insufficient number to al-

low Mr. Sanchez to catch up. Mr. Sanchez said he would not recognise a government headed by Ms. Fujimori, claiming a “serious violation of the electoral process”.

Mr. Sanchez alleges administrative irregularities in the handling of the over-

seas vote, which represents around 3,00,000 ballots, by the electoral authority.

The overseas vote largely favoured Ms. Fujimori, who was propelled by massive support from voters in the U.S. and Japan.

According to Mr. Sanchez, if votes cast abroad were excluded, he would hold a lead of around 25,000 votes over Ms. Fujimori.

He requested on Monday the annulment of these votes by the National Jury of Elections. The request was denied Tuesday.

The winner will take office July 28 for a five-year term and will inherit a stable economy, with GDP growth of over three percent and low inflation.

Europe swelters under record-breaking heatwave; France, Spain most-affected

Agence France-Presse
PARIS

Europe struggled to cope with a record-breaking heatwave on Wednesday, with at least 94 million people expected to experience temperatures above 35 degrees Celsius, most of them in France and Spain.

AFP estimates based on analysis of forecasts from the German weather service and 2025 population projections from the Joint Research Centre suggest maximum temperatures will surpass 30 degrees Celsius for more than 350 million people - more than two-thirds of the continent’s population.

The extreme weather - whose effects have been made worse by buildings and infrastructure not de-

signed to cope with high temperatures - is being driven by atmospheric patterns trapping hot air.

But a scientific study published this week said the current heatwave was “significantly exacerbated by human-induced climate change”, without which the current temperatures would have been 2-4 degrees Celsius cooler.

The World Health Organization’s head Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned on Wednesday that the heatwave is imperilling the health of Europeans, urging the continent’s leaders to invest in making their health services more climate-resilient.

‘We’re suffocating’
Around 44 million of the nearly 67 million people in

France are currently under the highest red alert level for heat, according to an AFP estimate.

Average daytime and nighttime temperatures reached 29.8 degrees Celsius on Tuesday - the hottest since current records began in 1947 - with 39 degrees Celsius to 41 degrees Celsius expected on Wednesday from northwestern Brittany to Paris.

Conditions at schools, offices and factories have become unbearable as temperatures rise, forcing early closures and employees to work from home.

“We’re suffocating,” said Nordine El Kaouri, 48, an automotive worker at a Renault plant in Douai, northern France.

“We feel waves of heat.



Under shade: Tourists cross a road holding umbrellas to protect themselves from the scorching sun in Paris, France, on Tuesday. AFP

Some people even faint at times. It’s extremely, extremely hard to keep up at work,” he told AFP.

On a building site in London, electrician Harrison Hammond, 29, said bosses had told employees to take the heat seriously.

But he said it was “a dif-

ferent story” as he travelled home by train to Essex, east of the British capital, on Tuesday night.

“They had no air conditioning on. Everyone was really suffering,” he said.

Power outages have been reported in France, including in the northwest

department of Finistere, where high temperatures knocked out a transformer late on Tuesday, leaving about 68,000 households without electricity.

In the U.K., where temperatures are forecast to hit nearly 40 degrees Celsius, electricity grid operator Neso warned that supply could be squeezed due to pressure on the system.

Sales of fans and air conditioners have skyrocketed.

French hypermarket Carrefour on Monday said it had sold 30,000 units by 6:30 pm - “a thousand times more than on a normal day”, CEO Alexandre Bompard said.

Engineer Yana Markevich complained about legal restrictions in the U.K. on installing air conditioning,

which has been criticised by some green campaigners for its high energy consumption.

“We already live in a world where heatwaves are becoming more intense. I don’t think denying ordinary people access to proper cooling in their own homes is a serious climate policy,” she told AFP.

Tourism hit
June is a key month for tourism in Europe but popular landmarks, including the Eiffel Tower and Louvre museum in Paris, and the stainless steel Atomium in Brussels, have been shutting early because of the heat.

“Visiting Paris in this heat is awful,” said American engineer John Beeler, wearing a fisherman’s hat

and holding a small fan.

Curators at University College London’s Grant Museum of Zoology said some of the thousands of specimens it houses from across the world were potentially under threat.

The heatwave is expected to extend into eastern Europe in the coming days.

Poland’s weather service issued high-level heat warnings for the western part of the country from Thursday to Saturday, and predicted temperatures could break the record of 40.2 degrees Celsius set in 1921.

Croatia’s popular Adriatic coast was also put under red alert for Friday and Saturday, while Hungary said it was imposing a maximum level alert from Saturday to Tuesday.

HARD-FOUGHT CONTEST

Panama out of World Cup after narrow loss to Croatia



▶ Panama was eliminated from the World Cup after Croatia kept its hopes of progressing to the last 32 alive with a 1-0 win in Toronto on Tuesday. Ante Budimir's 54th-minute goal proved enough to see off the spirited Central Americans in the Group L contest that marked Luka Modric's 200th international appearance.

PAYING HOMAGE

DR Congo's living statue fan makes his World Cup debut



▶ DR Congo's famous living statue finally made his World Cup debut on Tuesday. Michel Nkuka Mboladinga, who gained fame during the AFCON for posing as a statue of Congo's assassinated independence leader Patrice Lumumba for the entirety of games, attended the match against Colombia after missing the opener against Portugal.

BARREN

England sets dubious distinction for the most goalless draws



▶ England set an unwanted record for the most goalless draws in FIFA World Cup history after its 0-0 stalemate against Carlos Queiroz's Ghana in the Group L clash in Massachusetts on Tuesday. England's total number of goalless matches in FIFA World Cup history has risen to 13.

BEST IN THE BUSINESS

Record for most goals scored in the group stage broken



▶ The first 48 matches of the 2026 World Cup have produced 141 goals, the highest tally in the group phase of a single edition of the global tournament. The previous record stood at 136 goals, which was set during the 2014 World Cup that had 48 group-stage games. The latest mark was created in Portugal's 5-0 rout of Uzbekistan.

Colombia overcomes obdurate DR Congo

Munoz's strike in the second half sends the South Americans to the top of Group K with six points and in to the knockout round of 32

FIFA WORLD CUP

Agence France-Presse
GUADALAJARA

Colombia finally broke down a stubborn DR Congo side on Tuesday to secure a 1-0 win that guaranteed its place in the World Cup knockout rounds.

The victory, courtesy of a 76th-minute goal from Daniel Munoz, took it top of Group K with six points – two clear of Portugal which it will face in the final round.

The South Americans dominated the early stages peppering Lionel Mpasi's goal. Munoz squandered a chance and shortly afterwards had a goal ruled out for offside while James Rodriguez unleashed a stinging shot that was brilliantly saved. Mpasi made further sharp stops from Johan Mojica and Luis Diaz as the Colombians, playing with pace and invention, continued to dominate.



▶ **Breaking through:** Munoz celebrates after scoring Colombia's winner. REUTERS

THE RESULTS

▶ **Group K:** Colombia 1 (Munoz 76) bt DR Congo 0.

▶ **Group L:** England 0 drew with Ghana 0; Panama 0 lost to Croatia 1 (Budimir 54).

test and pose their own occasional threat.

Mpasi made another stunning save with his leg from Diaz in the 50th minute to keep the game goalless.

DR Congo briefly threatened but Crystal Palace defender Munoz made up for his first-half miss when his shot was deflected past a wrong-footed Mpasi.

At 41, Ronaldo shows he still has it in him to deliver

Ayon Sengupta
HOUSTON

For about eight months, the goals had stopped coming in international football.

By Cristiano Ronaldo's standards, that drought felt almost unnatural. His last international goal had come on October 14, 2025, against Hungary, and after a below-par performance in Portugal's opening World Cup game against DR Congo, the critics were circling around.

Thierry Henry used his platform on Fox Sports to make a pointed observation. "One thing that's important, people, please, at home: The team needs to score, not you need to score."

On Tuesday, Ronaldo delivered his answer. He netted twice as Portugal defeated Uzbekistan, ending a barren run that had stretched for long. At 41 years and 138 days, Ronaldo became the second-oldest goal-scorer in World Cup history, behind Roger Milla, who had struck against Russia in 1994 when he was 42 years and 39 days old.



▶ **Relief and belief:** Ronaldo lets out his emotions with a trademark SIU after scoring a brace against Uzbekistan. GETTY IMAGES

thing is our work and the confidence we showed," Ronaldo said, perhaps sending a message to the detractors, who had questioned his adaptability as a team man. "The team performed really well and improved a lot. As the saying goes, every cloud has a silver lining. Obviously, speaking personally, records are always nice, but my goal is always to help the national team achieve its objectives."

That response reflected a player who understands his place in the final chapter of a remarkable career. Ronaldo no longer needs to prove he can score goals. He has spent more than two decades doing

precisely that. He, now, seeks one last meaningful run with Portugal.

Roberto Martinez, the Portugal coach, came to Ronaldo's defence. "Our captain is an icon, and he is a role model who works hard for the Portugal team both on the pitch and also in the dressing room. And it is not just the goals he scores but what he creates, the passes he makes. He is already preparing for the next match," Martinez said.

After months of questions and scrutiny, the night brought confirmation that even at 41, Ronaldo remains capable of deciding the biggest occasions.

Stat attack

1

Ronaldo is the first player to score in six editions (2006, '10, '14, '18, '22, '26)

2

Mendes is the second Portuguese (after Ronaldo vs. Spain, 2018) to find the target off a direct free-kick at the marquee event

3

Ronaldo (Portugal) has joined Laudrup (Denmark) and Messi (Argentina) as the youngest and oldest scorer for his country at the quadrennial extravaganza

4

Ghana is one of four teams (after Argentina, Mexico and Spain) yet to concede a goal in this year's tournament

5

Colombia's Luis Diaz is the first player to be caught off-side five times in a World Cup contest (vs. DR Congo) since Robin van Persie (6 vs. Costa Rica, 2014)

10

Ronaldo has gone past Eusebio (9) to become Portugal's top-scorer in the football showpiece

13

England has the most goalless draws at the World Cup

22y 183d

Uzbekistan's Karimov (18y 320d) and Portugal's Ronaldo (41y 138d) had the biggest gap between two starting players in a World Cup game

41y 138d

Ronaldo is the second oldest to score at the World Cup (after Cameroon's Milla, 42y 39d in 1994)

79

England's possession percentage against Ghana, the highest by a team that failed to score in the World Cup in the last 60 years

COMPILED BY ANIRUDH VELAMURI

England left frustrated in a goalless stalemate

Agence France-Presse
FOXBOROUGH

England suffered a FIFA World Cup setback on Tuesday as Thomas Tuchel's side was held to a frustrating 0-0 draw by Ghana, leaving it with work still to do as it bids to progress to the knockout stage as Group L winner.

Nico O'Reilly came closest to scoring with a late header for England that hit the bar, but after the promise of its opening 4-2 victory over Croatia, this was

a performance that will raise doubts as to its chances of going all the way and winning the tournament.

It dominated possession and had 19 shots to its opponents' two, yet rarely looked like scoring past Ghana's stand-in goalkeeper Benjamin Asare.

Both teams have four points with one game still to play in Group L, with progression to the next round all but assured, but their final positions are still in the balance.

Japan, Sweden ready to joust with qualification on the line

Ayon Sengupta
DALLAS

Group F remains delicately poised heading into the final round of matches, and neither Japan nor Sweden will feel entirely comfortable when they meet at the Dallas Stadium.

Both still control their own destinies, but the margin for error is considerably narrower. Japan arrives with momentum after Hajime Moriyasu's side produced one of the performances of the tournament in a 4-0 demolition of Tunisia. With four points and a superior goal difference, Japan knows a draw will guarantee a place in the knockout rounds.

Sweden's journey in this World Cup, however, has been more turbulent. Graham Potter's side opened with an emphatic 5-1 victory over Tunisia but was brought crashing back to earth by a big defeat against the Netherlands.

Despite the setback, Sweden remains well placed on three points. Another point could be enough to secure progression, depending on results elsewhere. Its greatest source of optimism remains up front. The partnership of Viktor Gyokeres and Alexander Isak has the potential to emerge as one of the most dangerous attacking combinations.

Japan will be without attacking midfielder Takefusa

Table and fixtures

As the teams head into their final group games, a look at how they are placed and who they meet

GROUP D

	M	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	Points
USA (Q)	2	2	0	0	6	1	5	6
Australia	2	1	0	1	2	2	0	3
Paraguay	2	1	0	1	2	4	-2	3
Turkiye (E)	2	0	0	2	0	3	-3	0

Friday's matches: *Turkiye vs. USA and Paraguay vs. Australia, both 7.30 a.m. IST*

GROUP E

	M	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	Points
Germany (Q)	2	2	0	0	9	2	7	6
Ivory Coast	2	1	0	1	2	2	0	3
Ecuador	2	0	1	1	0	1	-1	1
Curacao	2	0	1	1	1	7	-6	1

Friday's matches: *Curacao vs. Ivory Coast and Ecuador vs. Germany, both 1.30 a.m. IST*

GROUP F

	M	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	Points
Netherlands	2	1	1	0	7	3	4	4
Japan	2	1	1	0	6	2	4	4
Sweden	2	1	0	1	6	6	0	3
Tunisia (E)	2	0	0	2	1	9	-8	0

Friday's matches: *Japan vs. Sweden and Tunisia vs. Netherlands, both 4.30 a.m. IST*

* The top two from each group and the eight best third-placed sides will advance to the round of 32

Q: Qualified | E: Eliminated

nership of Viktor Gyokeres and Alexander Isak has the potential to emerge as one of the most dangerous attacking combinations.

Japan will be without attacking midfielder Takefu-

sa Kubo, who is nursing a knee injury.

With qualification at stake, Dallas could witness one of the fiercest contests of the final group-stage round.

I would say I'm an all-rounder: Shafali

P.K. Ajith Kumar
MANCHESTER

Shafali Verma took the new ball for India against South Africa. She enjoyed every minute of it, giving away just three runs.

Is she seeing herself as an all-rounder these days?

"Yes, I would say I am an all-rounder now," she said, smiling, here on Wednesday, on the eve of India's crucial T20 Women's World Cup match against Bangladesh. "In domestic cricket, playing for Haryana, I have always tried to bowl, as a captain too, and used to think what I could do if I get a chance to bowl for the Indian team."

She revealed she had visualised the very situation (bowling the first over of the innings). "I had prepared for it, and worked

hard. That is why I could execute well," she said. "As a player I would like to put my hand up and serve the team in a given situation."

Shafali said her father had asked her to bowl from her earliest days. "My brother is a leg-spinner and he said I too should bowl," she said. "My father now is happy and tells me it was good that I bowled on those days."

Looking forward to the Bangladesh match, Shafali said: "We can't take any team lightly. They also came here to play good cricket. We will go game by game and try to play our best cricket and try to win that game."

She said the morale was down after the loss to South Africa. "But we motivated each other for our last two group matches".

Today's matches

India

vs.

Bangladesh

Manchester, 7 p.m. IST

HEAD-TO-HEAD

Played: **23**

India **20**

Bangladesh **3**

South Africa

vs.

Netherlands

Bristol, 11 p.m. IST

HEAD-TO-HEAD

Played: **1**

South Africa **1**

Netherlands **0**

LIVE ON STAR SPORTS 1 & JIHOTSTAR

A IN-X

INBRIEF



Vanshika and Shiva win 10m air pistol mixed team silver

Vanshika Chaudhary and Shiva Narwal delivered a composed performance to clinch the 10m air pistol mixed team silver medal at the ISSF Junior World Championship in Suhl, Germany, on Tuesday. They shot 469.7 to finish behind Poland’s Malgorzata Dabrowska and Ivan Rakitski (471.9). The bronze went to Taiwan’s Cheng Yen-Ching and Hsieh Hsiang-Chen (410.0). India continued to top the medal standings with 16 medals – five gold, four silver and seven bronze.

Treesa-Gayatri duo advances at US Open badminton

The women’s doubles pair of Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopi Chand advanced to the second round of the US Open Super 300 badminton tournament after overcoming Spain’s Paula Lopez and Lucia Rodriguez in a three-game battle at Fullerton. Treesa, making her return after an ankle injury layoff, and Gayatri won 21-12, 14-21, 21-13 in a 51-minute opening-round contest. The Indian duo will next take on Japan’s Sumire Nakade and Miyu Takahashi.

Shileima to lead Indian junior women’s hockey team

Midfielder Khaidem Shileima Chanu will lead a 24-member Indian junior women’s team for an exposure tour of the United Kingdom from July 5 to 14, Hockey India (HI) announced on Wednesday. Under new coach Tim White, the team will play seven matches in Scotland and England.

The squad: Goalkeepers: Nidhi, Engil Harsha Rani Minz. **Defenders:** Pooja Sahoo, Supriya, Madhu, F. Lalbi Aksiami, Lalneihpuii, Parwati Topno. **Midfielders:** Khaidem Shileima Chanu (Capt.), Tanuja Toppo, Supriya Kujur, Pooja Malik, Binima Dhan, Geeta Yadav, Roshni Aind, Tanushree Dinesh Kadu; **Forwards:** Sukhveer Kaur, Shashi Khasa, Lalrinpuii, Nisha Minj, Purnima Yadav, Kajal, Sanika Chandrakant Mane, Krishna Sharma.

Indian men’s foil team secures Asian Games spot

On the final day of the 26th Asian senior fencing championships in New Delhi on Wednesday, Japan clinched gold in the men’s foil team event through a solid display anchored by individual champion Kyosuke Matsuyama. While Hong Kong launched a fierce campaign to claim silver, the Chinese pocketed the bronze medal. In this category, the Indian team secured eighth position to seal a direct qualification spot for the upcoming Asian Games. In women’s epee, South Korea captured gold. China and Kazakhstan won silver and bronze respectively.

Former New Zealand fast bowler Bob Blair passes away

Former New Zealand fast bowler Bob Blair died on his 94th birthday (June 23). Blair represented New Zealand in 19 Tests between 1953 and 1964, claiming 43 wickets at 35.23, Blair also enjoyed a distinguished First Class career, taking 537 wickets in 119 matches at 18.54, primarily for Wellington.

Standoff between Manika and TTFI over her exclusion from Asian Games squad intensifies

Amol Karhadkar
MUMBAI

The standoff between Manika Batra and the Table Tennis Federation of India (TTFI) over her exclusion from the Asian Games squad intensified on Wednesday, with the ace paddler hinting at legal recourse even as the federation issued a detailed response explaining the selection process and the circumstances that led to her omission.

The three-page reply, accessed by *The Hindu*, was sent after deliberations within the TTFI hierarchy over the last five days and outlines the selection crite-

ria, the evaluation process and the discussions held by the national selection committee. According to TTFI, despite not fulfilling the prescribed criteria because of her absence from the domestic circuit for the last two seasons, World No. 51 Manika was still considered in recognition of her achievements and stature in Indian table tennis.

The TTFI also rejected comparisons with the selection process for the 2022 Asian Games, stating that the earlier policy “cannot be determinative” for the 2026 edition. It maintained that Manika’s omission “was not due to any single factor” but was based on a

cumulative assessment comprising national performance, global performance, comparative evaluation of competing players, team composition, medal prospects and strategic suitability, besides the views expressed and votes cast by the selection committee members.

Manika maintained that her concerns were about transparency rather than selection. “If I do not receive satisfactory answers regarding the basis of this decision, I will be left with no option but to explore all remedies available to me, including legal recourse,” she said in a statement issued earlier in the day.

Anushka, Dev Meena and Jyothi book their Asiad tickets

ATHLETICS

Y.B. Sarangi
BHUBANESWAR

Eighteen-year-old hammer thrower Anushka Yadav smashed a nine-year-old National record, pole vaulter Dev Meena bettered the National record and hurdler Jyothi Yarraji made a stunning comeback from injury in the National interstate athletics meet at the Kalinga Stadium here on Wednesday.

The evening belonged to an unheralded Anushka, a National under-20 record holder hailing from Baghpat, as she unexpectedly broke the National mark in her second attempt (65.64m). She bettered it in her last throw to log 67.02m, a five-plus metres



Star performers: Hammer thrower Anushka lowered a nine-year-old mark, Meena soared to 5.46m in pole vault and Jyothi asserted her class in 100m hurdles. BISWARANJAN ROUT

improvement on her previous best of 62.89m, to qualify for the Asian Games.

“I had a knee injury in March while I was handling agricultural equipment to help my father in our field. I made a good recovery to perform here,” said Anushka.

Meena overcame the challenges of competing in humid weather by staying



hydrated and booked his Asiad spot with a mark of 5.46m.

Jyothi asserted her class as she timed 13.14 in the women’s 100m hurdles heats to achieve Asian Games qualification before clocking 12.99 in the final to win the race. “I waited for this moment. The same day last year I got injured. I was in no mood to give up,” said Jyothi.



National record holder Gulveer Singh, who is still acclimatising after returning from his training base in the USA a week ago, ran a slow race in ‘hot’ morning conditions to clock 13:52.92 and emerge victorious. However, he could not achieve the coveted qualification mark.

Altogether 15 athletes qualified in the men’s 800m heats.

The results (finals): Men: 5000m (Asiad) Q mark 13:39.18): 1. Gulveer Singh (UP) 13:52.92, 2. Abhishek Pal (UP) 13:54.18, 3. Harmanjot Singh (Pun) 13:54.60; **Pole vault (Asiad Q mark 5.45m):** 1. Dev Meena (MP) 5.46m (NR, Old 5.45m, Kuldeep Kumar, 2026), 2. Reegan G. (TN) 5.30m, 3. Kuldeep Kumar (MP) 5.20m. **Women: 5000m (Asiad Q mark 15:36.58):** 1. Seema (HP) 16:11.04, 2. Bharti (Har) 16:17.10, 3. Ravina Gayakwad (Mah) 16:32.92; **100m hurdles (Asiad Q mark 13.34):** 1. Jyothi Yarraji (AP) 12.99, 2. Nandhini K. (TN) 13.22, 3. Pragyan Prasanti Sahu (Od) 13.48; **Triple jump (Asiad Q mark 13.34m):** 1. I. Asha Ilango (TN) 13.89m (NMR, Old 13.72m, Mayookha Johny, 2014), 2. Niharika Vashisht (Pun) 13.22m, 3. Mallala Anusha (AP) 13.13m; **Hammer (Asiad Q mark 61.72m):** 1. Anushka Yadav (UP) 67.02m (NR, Old 65.25m, Sarita Singh, 2017), 2. Tanya Chaudhary (UP) 61.70m, 3. Harshita Sehrawat (Del) 60.92m.

Anand honoured with SJFI Medal

Chess icon says he is proud to be a catalyst for the growth of the sport in India; terms the award a recognition by his peers for real achievements

GENERAL

Sports Bureau
CHENNAI

Five-time World chess champion Viswanathan Anand was honoured with the Sports Journalists’ Federation of India’s ‘SJFI Medal’ at a well-attended function at the Madras Cricket Club here on Wednesday.

The event was hosted in partnership with the Tamil Nadu Sports Journalists’ Association (TNSJA).

Anand, who is serving as the deputy president of FIDE, joins an esteemed list of awardees that includes Sunil Gavaskar, Vijay Amritraj, Prakash Padu-



Rewarding excellence: Srikkanth congratulates Anand after presenting the SJFI Medal as Baskaran, right, and SJFI’s Ramesh and Saraju Chakraborty look on. B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

kone, P.T. Usha, and Milkha Singh (posthumous). The medal was presented to the 56-year-old

by former India cricket captain and 1983 World Cup winner K. Srikkanth. “I am proud in a way to

have been a catalyst for the growth of chess in India. This is very much a recognition by my peers for real

achievements and contributions. This is very special because it is hardcore; these are people who will appreciate you for what you did and not necessarily the impact it had or anything else,” said an elated Anand.

True champion

Srikkanth was at his witty best. “Way back in 1985 or 1986, I played chess with Anand and that is my claim to fame. As usual, I got knocked out in five or six moves, but that is fine. Being the world champion in an individual sport... just imagine. He deserves a standing ovation,” said Srikkanth as the attendees rose in unison to celebrate the achievements of the le-

gendary Grandmaster.

Olympic gold-winning hockey skipper V. Baskaran hailed the SJFI for “doing a wonderful job in promoting sports”. Veteran journalist R. Mohan read the citation that was presented to Anand. A customised caricature was also given to the champion.

The SJFI president Saraju Chakraborty delivered the welcome address, while the federation’s secretary V. Ramesh, proposed the vote of thanks.

Other eminent sports personalities, including GMs K. Sasikiran, Shyam Sundar, IMs Manuel Aaron, V. Saravanan, P. Konguvel and former hockey player Mohammed Riaz also graced the function.

Vaishali has a ‘reasonable chance’ against Ju Wenjun: Anand



Full backing: Anand is confident of Vaishali’s prospects. FILE PHOTO: R. RAVINDRAN

C. Shyam Sundar
CHENNAI

R. Vaishali’s rise as a challenger for the World title is an important moment for Indian women’s chess, according to the legendary Viswanathan Anand.

He gave her a reasonable chance in the World Championship match against China’s Ju Wenjun. “Already, the fact that she’s a challenger again after so many years without Koneru Humpy is very good news for Indian women’s chess. And obvious-



The fact that Vaishali is a challenger again after so many years without Humpy is good news for Indian women’s chess. And if she wins, that will be magnified

ly if she wins, that will be magnified,” Anand said on the sidelines of an SJFI event, where he was honoured on Wednesday.

Further, the five-time World champion said Ju re-

mained a formidable opponent, but felt motivation could become a factor.

“I would still say Ju Wenjun is very strong, but already it’ll be what, six years or seven years, since she became the World champion... I think it’s going to be harder for her to motivate herself. I think it is much easier for Vaishali to do so. So, I think her chances are quite reasonable.”

With regard to the title match between the reigning champion D. Gukesh and challenger Javokhir

Sindarov, Anand said it has given the India-Uzbekistan rivalry a sharper focus beyond the Olympiad.

India would be defending titles in the Open and women’s sections at the forthcoming Olympiad, and Anand said Uzbekistan, apart from China and the USA, would be the ones to watch out for.

He also said the key for Gukesh would be to return to the simple demands of playing strong chess, rather than getting caught up in the noise around being the World champion.

Limansa, daughter of Dilshan, carries his legacy with pride

Tarun Shastry
CHENNAI

When the daughter of a cricket legend takes the field in national colours, one question is practically inevitable: did you take up the sport after watching your father play?

That query was posed to Limansa ‘Limmy’ Thilakarathne – daughter of Sri Lankan icon Tillakaratne Dilshan – following Sri Lanka’s narrow 11-run defeat to India in the second Women’s Youth T20 at the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium on Wednesday.

“Honestly, I’m really proud to be his daughter,” Limansa said. “I started playing cricket not because of him, but because I was inspired by him. I’m lucky to have him as my father and I’m proud to carry that name.”

For the 17-year-old, who resides in Victoria, Australia, the journey began far



Limansa. TARUN SHASTRY

from her father’s immediate gaze.

“When I first started, my dad wasn’t even around; he was travelling. I was playing for fun. I wasn’t thinking seriously about it,” she recalled. “My mum was the one who encouraged me. She would send videos of me playing to my dad, and he felt there was some potential there. That’s really how

everything started.”

That spark soon became something more serious.

“Later, I got selected for Victoria’s under-19 women’s programme. Things were progressing well, but we chose to pursue the opportunity to represent Sri Lanka. Looking back, I’m very happy with that decision.”

While her father was a devastating top-order batter, Limansa is carving her own path.

“When I started, I could bowl a wrong’un naturally, just off the back of my hand. My dad noticed it and thought I could develop more as a leg-spinner, and he helped me keep the wrong’un as a variation.”

A family reunion on Indian soil might be on the cards soon. “Dad mentioned he might come over, perhaps to Puducherry for the 50-over series,” she said. “We’ll see how it works out.”

In the Group-J encounter against Austria at the Dallas Stadium on Monday, the little wizard scored his 17th and 18th goals to become the singular holder of the record for most World Cup strikes. Nearly four years after enjoying his greatest night in Argentina's sky blue and white in Qatar when he won the coveted prize, the forward has raised hopes of an encore in North America for the South American giant

Vivek Krishnan

It is the fifth minute of stoppage time. There is a 1-0 lead to protect. There is qualification for the knockout stages of the FIFA World Cup to seal.

With barely a minute left for the final whistle, the practical thing for mere mortals to do would be to take the ball to a distant corner and waste as much of the remaining time as possible.

But when has Lionel Messi, long immortalised in Argentina's iconic sky blue and white, ever been constrained by the parameters applicable to the rest of the universe? Never, not even at 38 years old, is the answer.

He hares down the right flank with the bounding enthusiasm of a restless teenager, looks up and finds Julian Alvarez sprinting down the middle with an inch-perfect pass.

Alvarez, 13 years younger, takes a couple of touches before shooting straight at goalkeeper Alexander Schlager. By this stage, Messi has positioned himself unmarked in the 18-yard box. He attracts the ball again, and navigates his way around the goalkeeper and another Austrian player before taking aim at goal. The shot is blocked, but he hammers the rebound past a row of bodies and into the back of the net.

In these few frames, the drive and desire of the irrepressible genius from Rosario are perfectly encapsulated. Of course, Messi, who turned 39 on Wednesday, was born to do things with a football that few can envision, let alone execute. But more compellingly, the little wizard, having won the World Cup in Qatar four years ago and conquered everything there is to conquer in the beautiful game, retains the fire within him to light up the global stage at this phase of his extraordinary career.

Perhaps, we shouldn't be surprised. For, the determination to not let standards drop is a timeless trait that binds otherworldly champions across the sporting landscape – Novak Djokovic, who also turned 39 last month, is another contemporary example from the world of tennis. Xavi drew a parallel with basketball icon Michael Jordan in his column for *The Athletic*, for there is no footballing equivalent to his former Barcelona teammate in his view.

Another record

Messi's aforementioned goal in a Group-J encounter against Austria at the Dallas Stadium in Arlington was his second of Monday afternoon in a 2-0 win. It was also his 18th strike across six World Cups. The 17th, which came earlier in the day in the air-conditioned venue, steered him clear of Miroslav Klose as the singular owner of the record for most goals in the history of the quadrennial show-piece. He

could have eclipsed the former Germany striker even earlier in the game if not for sending his penalty wide in the ninth minute, strangely his third miss from the spot in three consecutive World Cups. It is reassuring to know that he can err too.

Otherwise, his tally of World Cup goals is another stratospheric feat in Messi's long list of individual and collective accolades. During this very tournament, he has become only the third player, after Frenchman Just Fontaine and Brazilian Jairzinho way back, to score in six consecutive World Cup matches – the last time he failed to score was in Argentina's final group-stage match of the euphoric 2002 campaign against Poland. With his hat-trick against Algeria last week, he also became Argentina's youngest and oldest scorer in the tournament, a glowing stamp of his longevity.

The game against the Algerians, notably, marked 20 years to the day that he had come off the bench against Serbia and Montenegro for his World Cup debut and scored in the German city of Gelsenkirchen. His was the final goal in a 6-0 win, the only time ever that he has played supporting cast in the marquee event.

Heartbeat

That he is the main man for the Albiceleste – he has scored all five of his team's goals at this tournament so far – even two decades later appears to blur

the lines between fact and fiction. Never mind the welcome U-turn after announcing his international retirement in 2016, it is nearly four years since his greatest night in an Argentine shirt in Qatar. And still here he is, raising hopes of an encore in North America as the heartbeat of the three-time champion. "When Leo gets activated, everyone gets activated," Argentina's head coach Lionel Scaloni told the media after the victory over Austria.

Messi's record-breaking opening goal on Monday was a fitting example of how the rest of the Argentine players are geared towards facilitating the legend in their midst. Among Messi's teammates are Enzo Fernandez and Alexis Mac Allister, mainstays in the midfield for elite Premier League clubs. Lautaro Martinez, Inter Milan skipper, finished on top of the goal-scoring charts in the 2025-26 Serie A season. Atletico Madrid's Alvarez, used as a substitute by Scaloni so far, is keenly sought by Real Madrid. Rodrigo De Paul served Atletico with distinction before joining up with Messi at Inter Miami in Major League Soccer (MLS). Yet, if all of them want to intuitively look for one man as often as possible on the pitch, it is telling of Messi's unabated greatness.

They did exactly that in the 38th minute. Messi, with his back towards the Austrian goal, started the move by finding Thiago Almadia in the middle of the park. The 25-year-old Atletico Madrid winger

charged with the ball towards the edge of the 18-yard box, and then fed it out wide to Facundo Medina on the left. The left-back could have offered a cross past the last line of defence for Lautaro to latch onto, but instead passed the ball back in the direction that it came from. In anticipation of the great man running in behind him, Almada let the ball go between his legs, aptly for Messi to pass the ball past Schlager's outstretched right arm and pump his right fist in celebration.

In a career as long as his, Messi has scored every category of goal imaginable. There have been unstoppable long-range thunderbolts and free-kicks, mesmerising solo runs, delectable chips and quintessential fox-in-the-box finishes. But if there is a type of goal that is synonymous with him, it has to be his unflinching propensity to pick his spot in the corner, open up his body and caress the ball into the net with his majestic left foot from the edge of the box.

Complementing his sublime skill and avid affection for the game is a razor-sharp brain too. It lends to his innate understanding of where he needs to be at any given juncture. He can no longer press the opposition with the intensity that a younger version of himself could, nor make gut-busting runs beyond the defence in the hope that a teammate finds him. Against Austria, as he often did in the previous World Cup, he covered a distance of nearly five kilometres merely by walking. It appears antithetical to the very essence of the sport, but it is simply his way of conserving energy in his twilight for the key moments that require him to inject his magic.

For Messi to be in the necessary physical shape for the rigours of a World Cup, the move to the MLS in 2023 has also helped. Even though the profile of the American league has grown in recent years, there isn't as much strain on Messi's wearing body from playing for Inter Miami as there would have been if he was still plying his trade in Europe. Without needing to operate at full throttle all the time, he has still become the fastest to 50 goals in MLS history.

Looking ahead, will Messi's goal-scoring record in the World Cup be breached? Possibly in this very tournament, given that France's talisman Kylian Mbappe, 27, is just two behind the Argentine. But to help understand Messi's legacy, the climax of Argentina's duel against Austria was instructive as well as poignant. As the television cameras panned to an old lady in the audience, she held up a banner that read, '100-year-old Messi fan'.

Beyond all the goals and trophies won, Messi spreads unadulterated joy to millions around the world like her. There can be no greater endorsement of his legacy.

THE GIST

Messi's record-breaking opening goal on Monday was a fitting example of how the rest of the Argentine players are geared towards facilitating the legend in their midst

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