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INSIDE



Nihangs, Punjab residents oppose H.P. entry tax

CHANDIGARH
Faced with the burden of Himachal Pradesh's vehicle entry tax, residents along Punjab's boundary with the hill State, traders, truck operators, and drivers have united under 'Sangharsh Morcha' to make their voices heard against the tax. » PAGE 2



About 6 crore names deleted in first year of SIR

NEW DELHI
The special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, which has so far led to the deletion of nearly six crore voters and triggered acrimony between the Opposition and the Election Commission of India, has completed one year, as the exercise continues in 19 States, Union Territories. » PAGE 4

‘Kuki-Zo Council’s ‘regret’ for killings is not enough’

GUWAHATI
An apex Naga students’ body in Manipur on Friday said the “so-called apology” issued by the Kuki-Zo Council on the killing of six Naga civilians was unacceptable. The All Naga Students’ Association, Manipur, criticised the apex Kuki-Zo body for using a derogatory term while referring to the six slain people. » PAGE 4

‘Students studying in CBSE Classes 7 to 9 can keep learning two foreign languages for now’

Maitri Porecha
NEW DELHI

Students studying in Classes 7, 8 and 9 in Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) affiliated schools can continue learning foreign languages under the three-language policy until Class 10, sources in the Ministry of Education stated on Friday.

The clarification comes over a month after CBSE stated that students in Class 9 must study three languages, of which two should be native to India, from July 1 in the 2026-27 academic year.

This led to CBSE schools instructing their students who had opted for foreign languages like French, German, Spanish and so on to switch to a native lan-



The CBSE is expected to reverse its May 15 circular which had mandated at least two Indian languages for Class 9 students. PTI

guage, in case they are already studying English.

Strong pushback
There are at least six lakh students who study French and 1.5 lakh students who study German in all schools across India spread across various grades, including CBSE

schools. An official spokesperson from the German Embassy confirmed that the diplomatic mission is in touch with the Government of India over the issue.

Sources also stated that there had been a pushback by German and French Embassies against the

Centre's three-language formula which will gradually lead to phasing out of foreign language teaching from CBSE schools by 2030-31, if not sooner.

Sources have clarified that the three-language formula will apply to students entering Class 6 who will have to study three languages, two of which will be native to India.

The CBSE circular led to protests from parents, students and teachers, who had approached Supreme Court against the abrupt switch, arguing that students in Class 9 who have already studied a foreign language for the past three to four years will find it very difficult to suddenly switch their language option.

CBSE is expected to re-

verse its May 15 circular which had mandated a three-language formula under the National Education Policy to be applied to Class 9 students, the sources added.

The clarification comes over a week after the Supreme Court refused to grant interim relief on petitions challenging the implementation of the board's three-language policy for Class 9 students in 2026-27.

It is expected that CBSE will withdraw the latest circular in light of the controversy and will direct schools to gradually implement the three-language policy over five consecutive academic years up to 2030-31, rather than rolling it out for all classes from 2026-27.

Training time



Police personnel being trained for rescue and relief operations for flood and other natural calamities at Saduperi lake in Vellore, Tamil Nadu, on Friday. The three-day programme is being held by the Tamil Nadu Commando Training School for 52 personnel. C. VENKATACHALAPATHY

All eight accused in Ram Temple fund case sent to judicial custody

Around ₹80 lakh recovered from those arrested, says prosecution officer; close aides of the temple trust chief, Champat Rai, among those held; VHP denies reports of the chief resigning; big-wigs of the alleged scam protected, says Opposition in U.P.

Mayank Kumar
LUCKNOW

The eight people named as the accused in a first information report (FIR) regarding the alleged embezzlement of donations received at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya have been arrested and sent to judicial custody until Monday.

“The eight accused will be produced before the Special Court dealing with corruption-related matters on Monday. A total of ₹79.85 lakh has been recovered from them,” prosecution officer K.C. Verma told journalists outside the court in Ayodhya on Friday, where heavy police security was deployed.

The accused include close aides of Champat Rai, general secretary of the



Champat Rai, chief of the temple trust, during the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya in January 2023. SANDEEP SAXENA

Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, who is said to have resigned from the post. However, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) social media head, Rakesh Pandey, denied such reports as fake news.

The accused – Lavkush Mishra, Anukalp Mishra, Manish Yadav, Ramashankar Yadav alias Tinnu, Sub-

hash Srivastava, Avinash Shukla, Rama Shankar Mishra, and Karunesh Pandey – have been booked on charges including theft, criminal breach of trust, cheating, and criminal conspiracy. “At the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, devotees deposited money in the donation boxes. The money was allegedly sto-

Cong. demands SC-monitored investigation

NEW DELHI

The Congress on Friday demanded a Supreme Court-monitored investigation into the allegations of the embezzlement of donations at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya and called for immediate disbandment of the current temple trust. » PAGE 4

len by employees of the trust,” the prosecution officer said. As per the FIR, the accused were responsible for counting the cash and valuables donated by devotees at the temple.

The FIR was registered on Thursday, after a preliminary investigation by a Special Investigation Team.

Uttar Pradesh Opposition parties claimed that, while the FIR accused trust employees, the real big-wigs behind the alleged scam – such as Mr. Champat Rai, fellow SRJTK trustee Anil Mishra, and temple construction in-charge Gopal Rao – have been protected by the BJP.

“We will launch a campaign against this massive corruption and attempt to protect powerful people,” said U.P. Congress chief Ajay Rai.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath vowed to enforce accountability. “Tampering with people's faith cannot be tolerated. As soon as the SIT report was received, action was initiated immediately,” he said.

AT THE CENTRE OF THE ROW
» PAGE 4

Govt. releases names of 6 personnel killed in Operation Sindoor

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

In the first official disclosure of military casualties from Operation Sindoor, the Centre on Friday published the names of six armed forces personnel who laid down their lives during the cross-border operation in May 2025.

The names of the six personnel, five from the Indian Army and one from the Indian Air Force, have been included in the Roll of Honour on the National War Memorial website.

The fallen personnel are: Subedar Major Pawan Kumar of Headquarters 10 Infantry Brigade; Rifleman Sunil Kumar, Vir Chakra, of 4 Jammu and Kashmir Light Infantry; Lance Naik Dinesh Kumar of 5 Field Regiment; Agniveer Mood Muralinaik of 851 Light Regiment; Havildar Sunil Kumar Singh of 237 Field Workshop Company; and

Fallen heroes

The six personnel who laid down their lives during the cross-border operation in May 2025:

- Subedar Major Pawan Kumar
- Rifleman Sunil Kumar, Vir Chakra
- Lance Naik Dinesh Kumar
- Agniveer Mood Muralinaik
- Havildar Sunil Kumar Singh
- Sergeant Surendra Kumar, Vayu Sena Medal

Sergeant Surendra Kumar, Vayu Medal, of 39 Wing.

The names of the six men were released with the annual list of troops killed during various military operations in 2025. Their names will be inscribed on the Tyag Chakra (Circle of Sacrifice) at the National War Memorial in New Delhi.

CONG. SLAMS DELAY
» PAGE 4

Iran reasserts its right to control shipping in Strait of Hormuz after vessel hit

Reuters
DUBAI/LONDON

Tehran reasserted its right on Friday to control shipping in the Strait of Hormuz and warned Gulf states against siding with the U.S., a day after an attack on a ship near Oman highlighted the fragility of a preliminary deal to end the Iran war.

Iran was responding to what it called an “interventionist, irresponsible and provocative” joint statement by the U.S. and six Gulf states that rejected Iran's insistence that it could charge tolls on vessels transiting the strait.

“Safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz cannot be guaranteed under ambiguous arrangements, parallel routes or decision-making that does not take Iran's role as a coastal state into account,” Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi said on X.

Underlining the risks facing shipping, Iranian state TV later reported that three foreign tankers attempting what it called an “unauthorised passage” of the strait were turned back after a warning from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Rubio in the Gulf

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio – wrapping up a tour of the Gulf to reassure nervous regional allies about the interim pact – told presspersons on Thursday that if Iran threatened or blocked ships in the strait, “we're going to have a problem”.

In their joint statement, Mr. Rubio and the GCC called for “free, uncondi-



Perilous passage: Vessels at the Strait of Hormuz, as seen from Musandam, Oman, on Friday. REUTERS

tional, and unrestricted navigation” in the strait without tolls or “attempts to assert control”, and said a lasting peace must address Iran's ballistic missiles, drones and support for proxy groups.

Iran's Foreign Ministry responded on Friday by saying the U.S. military presence in the Gulf was the source of regional insecurity and division, and that the strait should be governed by Iran and Oman in line with the terms of the interim deal.

“We warn against the continuation of hostile and interventionist policies in the region,” it said.

Tehran took effective control of the waterway after U.S.-Israeli strikes on Iran on February 28 triggered the war, disrupting oil flows and rattling global energy markets and the wider economy.

Ali Akbar Velayati, top adviser to Iran's Supreme Leader, issued a warning to Washington's Gulf allies.

“The stability of the Persian Gulf Arab states is indebted to Iran's century-long management of the Strait of Hormuz... their strategic survival is at the

mercy of Tehran's tolerance,” Mr. Velayati said.

Taiwan's Evergreen Marine said earlier on Friday its Singapore-flagged ship Ever Lovely had been hit close to Oman on Thursday by an “unknown object” while on a route recommended by the British navy agency UKMTO.

No one hurt

Nobody was hurt in the incident and the ship later resumed its journey out of the strait. Two U.S. officials told Reuters that Iran had fired on the ship. Iran's Persian Gulf Strait Authority – established by Tehran to manage requests for ships to travel through the strait – said passage through unauthorised routes would be “the responsibility of the owner, operator, and vessel commander”.

There was no immediate comment from the U.S. government.

U.S. President Donald Trump warned this month that if Iran did not honour the interim deal, including reopening the strait, the U.S. would probably go back to bombing the Islamic Republic.

INBRIEF



Vande Mataram mantra for reconstruction of India: Shah

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday said *Vande Mataram* is not merely a patriotic song but a “mantra for the reconstruction of India”, as he paid tributes to Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay on his birth anniversary while addressing a meeting on the country’s anti-narcotics strategy. At the 10th apex-level meeting of the Narco-Coordination Centre, Mr. Shah stated that June 26 is a significant day for campaign against narcotics. He said it also marks the birth anniversary of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, who played a key role in awakening the nation’s self-confidence during British rule. PTI

3 dead, 10 injured as tazia touches power line in M.P.

Three persons were killed and 10 others injured after a *tazia* came in contact with a high-tension power line during a Muharram procession in Ratlam district of Madhya Pradesh, officials said on Friday. The incident occurred late Thursday night in Hatnara village located under Piplauda police station limits, they said. Taking serious cognisance of the occurrence, the power distribution company suspended one of its employees and dismissed two labourers for negligence in duty. Following the incident, District Magistrate Misha Singh and other senior officials visited the medical college to inquire about the health condition of the injured. PTI

Sukhu seeks Himachal’s 7.19% claim over Chandigarh, return of power project from Punjab

The Hindu Bureau
CHANDIGARH

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu on Friday urged Punjab Governor and Chandigarh Administrator Gulab Chand Kataria to resolve issues concerning the hill State’s rights, reaffirming Himachal’s claim to a 7.19% share in the Union Territory of Chandigarh.

Mr. Sukhu met Mr. Kataria here and discussed several long-pending issues of vital importance to Himachal Pradesh.

The Chief Minister, referring to the provisions of the Punjab Reorganization Act, 1966, said Himachal Pradesh is a successor State to the erstwhile Punjab and is entitled to its due share based on the population ratio of the areas transferred to the State.

He also sought intervention for the settlement of



Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu meets Punjab Governor Gulab Chand Kataria in Chandigarh on Friday. ANI

long-pending dues related to the Bhakra Beas Management Board. “The Supreme Court had recognised Himachal Pradesh’s entitlement to a 7.19% share in BBMB projects and associated benefits,” he noted.

Mr. Sukhu also sought assistance in securing the return of the Shanan power project from Punjab.

“The Shanan Hydroelectric Project is located in

Mandi district of Himachal Pradesh, a region that was never included within the transferred territories as defined under Section 2(n) of the Punjab Reorganization Act, 1966. Consequently, provisions of the Act have no applicability to the area in which the project is situated. The lease executed in respect of the project for a period of 99 years expired on 2 March 2024,” he said.

Rajasthan families face boycott for not serving ‘ghee malpua’ at funeral

Press Trust of India
JAIPUR

Over 40 families in a village in Rajasthan’s Sirohi district are allegedly facing “social boycott” for not serving the traditional ‘malpua’, a sweet dish, during a funeral feast, officials said on Friday.

It all reportedly happened in Mandwariya village under Barloot police station limits, where a financially weak family purportedly arranged a simple meal on the occasion of a funeral. According to a complaint, the family could not afford to serve “ghee malpua”, apparently angering over a dozen community elders, who on June 18 allegedly issued a

diktat boycotting the bereaved family, along with 42 other families who supported them.

The affected families alleged that since the “boycott”, they have been denied access to essential services. Local shop owners are refusing to sell them rations, they are not being allowed to draw water from the village well, and farm owners have declined to employ them. “The situation has become very difficult,” Tejaram, one of the affected persons, said.

The diktat reportedly warns that anyone violating the “boycott” would face a penalty of ₹11,000 and be required to host a community feast.

Nihangs, Punjab border residents oppose H.P. entry tax

Vikas Vasudeva
CHANDIGARH

Faced with the burden of Himachal Pradesh’s vehicle entry tax, residents along Punjab’s boundary with the hill State, traders, truck operators, and taxi drivers have united under the banner of the ‘Sangharsh Morcha’ to make their voices heard against the tax. A faction of ‘Nihang’ Sikhs has also renewed its threat to revive a separate agitation against the levy.

Under the Himachal Pradesh Tolls Act, 1975, the government levies a tax on vehicles entering Himachal Pradesh from other States. The latest vehicle entry tax ranges between ₹100 and ₹900. Annoyed over the vehicle entry tax, members of the Sangharsh Morcha have been holding in-



Members of the Sangharsh Morcha have been holding demonstrations over the past few months. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

termittent demonstrations over the past few months near Gara-Maura, twin villages on the Punjab-Himachal boundary, where a toll barrier is situated on the Kiratpur Sahib-Manali national highway, demanding a complete rollback of the entry tax.

For Pradeep Singh Sekhuria, a taxi operator from Kiratpur Sahib in Rupnagar district in Punjab, taking his cab across the State

uram, and M. Mohan, 59, of Tondiarpet, and factory manager R. Daniel, 70.

Toll rises to 15

Two more women workers died, taking the toll to 15 on Friday, according to a bulletin issued by the Health Department.

The deceased were identified as Priti Devi of Jharkhand and Budhubari Naik of Odisha. While the bulletin has not disclosed the age of the deceased, it reflected a change in the identity of one of the victims. The name of the 13th victim, earlier listed as Pinki Juanga of Odisha, was changed to Deepanjali Juanga of Kendujar district, Odisha.

A total of 40 persons are undergoing treatment at various hospitals. Two of them are on ventilator support and nine are receiving nasal oxygen. The condition of 29 patients is stable.

The Hindu Bureau
DHARMASTHALA

Denying business or any other links with Congress leader and Karnataka Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar, the State unit president of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) B.Y. Vijayendra on Friday said his own party colleagues have spread “false information”.

“If I had links with Mr. Shivakumar, I would be as guilty as some of our MLAs, who cross-voted in the MLC elections and are working against the party,” he told presspersons in Dharmasthala, rejecting allegations that he was responsible for alleged cross-voting by BJP MLAs during the recent MLC polls in the State.

In the MLC elections, the ruling Congress won five of the seven seats, while the BJP secured two and the JD (S) drew a blank. Alleged cross-voting by some BJP and JD(S) legislators helped the Congress secure 11 votes more than the expected 140, leaving the BJP red-faced,



Karnataka BJP chief B.Y. Vijayendra at the Sri Manjunathaswamy Temple in Dharmasthala on Friday. RAGHAV A M

according to sources. The BJP’s Central leadership has pulled up State leaders over the issue.

“I categorically deny business or any other links with D.K. Shivakumar. I know some of my own party colleagues have spread this misinformation. Though voting in the Legislative Council elections was through a secret ballot, which BJP legislators cross-voted will come out in the coming days. The truth will reveal soon,” Vijayendra said.

“I have left it to the party high command to take action. I was among the party

workers who were hurt following cross-voting. The day after the poll results, with much pain I said a legislature party meeting should be held in Dharmasthala and the legislators should take oath of truth before God [to demonstrate loyalty] at the holy place. But following the advice of senior party leaders not to involve the holy place in the matter, the plan was cancelled,” he added.

Mr. Vijayendra said he met party leaders in New Delhi over three days, and directly came to Dharmasthala on Thursday night.

Karnataka BJP chief denies link with Shivakumar as cross-voting row deepens

Vijayendra blames party colleagues for spreading ‘false information’; says if he had links with Chief Minister, he would be as guilty as BJP legislators who ‘cross-voted’ in the recent MLC elections

Person converting to Islam can’t claim Backward Class status: Madras HC

B. Tilak Chandar
MADURAI

A convert to Islam cannot claim the status of a Backward Class Muslim, he is only a Muslim, and that’s all there is to it, the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court has ruled, while declaring a 2024 Government Order (G.O.) allowing converts to claim such status unconstitutional.

The court was hearing a petition filed in 2022 by a man from Thoothukudi district, who had embraced Islam and changed his name. He was born to Hindu parents.

The certificate issued by the Sunnath Jamath, Kayathar, in 2015 stated that the petitioner had embraced Islam. He had applied for a community certificate certifying him as ‘Muslim Lebbai’, a faith he claimed to follow. However, the Kayathar Tahsildar rejected his application. Challenging it, he moved the court.

Meanwhile, a G.O. issued in 2024 ordered that a convert to Islam from the Backward Classes, Most Backward Classes, Denotified Communities or Scheduled

Castes may be treated as BC (Muslim) for getting the benefit of reservation, and on such conversion, (s)he may be issued with a community certificate as belonging to one of the notified seven sects.

‘Social balance’

However, the State said a convert from a forward community to Islam would not get the BC (Muslim) tag. Only those who already enjoyed the benefit of reservation in their original religion would not lose it on account of conversion to Islam. Social balance will not be affected, it was submitted.

A Division Bench of Justices G.R. Swaminathan and P.B. Balaji said that as held by the Division Bench of the Madras High Court more than 75 years ago, one becomes a Muslim upon conversion to Islam. He cannot be pigeonholed into any particular sect or community which can be only by virtue of one’s birth therein. When the proposition laid down by the Division Bench is holding the field, it cannot be undone by issuing a mere G.O., the court said.

HC says gram pradhans in U.P. can’t remain administrators; Akhilesh lauds court order

Press Trust of India
PRAYAGRAJ

Holding that gram pradhans, or village heads, cannot be permitted to continue as administrators, the Allahabad High Court has asked the Uttar Pradesh government to specify a time frame for conducting panchayat polls in the State.

The court passed the recent order based on a plea challenging the State government’s May 25 order, appointing existing gram pradhans as administrators upon the completion of their five-year term.

In a series of X posts on Friday, Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav hit out at the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government. He said the court had “punctured the BJP’s propaganda” by reprimanding the government and declaring its decision to appoint outgoing gram



Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav.

pradhans as administrators unconstitutional.

“Meanwhile, the contractors who were awarded work will also be knocking on the pradhans’ doors, demanding payment of bills for this intervening period,” he added.

Detailed schedule

The petition had sought directions to the State Election Commission to place on record a detailed schedule for the completion of

the entire three-tier panchayat election process in compliance with Articles 243E, which deals with the tenure and continuity of panchayats, and 243K, which governs panchayat elections. Calling upon the State to file a counter-affidavit, the court observed that under Article 243E, the term of a panchayat is of a fixed tenure, i.e., five years from its first meeting and no longer.

The State counsel told the court that, in a separate but related case, the government had contended that, as it had appointed a commission to determine reservation under the OBC category, panchayat polls could not be held until the conclusion of the panel’s exercise.

“Learned counsel for the petitioner is permitted to implead the OBC Commission as a party,” said the court.

Nihangs’ stand-off with police ends after talks

Press Trust of India
DEHRADUN

After hours of a stand-off between a group of Nihangs and the administration at the Himachal Pradesh-Uttarakhand border, the group returned to Paonta Sahib in Himachal Pradesh in the early hours of Friday following negotiations with authorities.

The development brought an end to the tension that prevailed at the Kulhal checkpoint in the Vikasnagar area on Thursday, where a group of the Sikh sect clashed with the police and pushed through barricades in an attempt to move towards Hemkund Sahib in Uttarakhand.

CM
YK

Congress seeks SC-monitored probe into Ram Temple case

Exploiting Lord Ram for votes and money unacceptable, says Congress, demanding dissolution of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust; accountability must be fixed at the top, it adds

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Friday demanded a Supreme Court-monitored investigation into the allegations of embezzlement of donations at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya. Addressing a press conference, senior Congress leader Rajeev Shukla said the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust should immediately be disbanded, and the management of the temple handed over to religious leaders like Mahant and Sankaracharya. “What is this temple Trust within a party? This is happening with meticulous planning. First, capture the Trust of the big temples, appoint your own people, then take out the donations and use it for political purposes,” Mr. Shukla alleged. “Exploiting Lord Ram



Sharp attack: The Congress says the FIR is against lower-level officials, and accountability has to be fixed at the top. PTI

for votes as well as for [currency] notes is unacceptable to us,” the Congress leader said. **Appeal to PM** Mr. Shukla said Prime Minister Narendra Modi should intervene since he had done the consecration of Lord Ram’s idol in Ayodhya. The Congress leader asserted that with the Uttar

Pradesh registering a first information report (FIR) in the alleged embezzlement case after the special investigation team (SIT) report, it is clear that the State government has acknowledged that there has been “a loot to the tune of thousands of crores”. “This is a very serious matter which concerns the faith of millions of people,” Mr. Shukla said. “I would

request the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court that an inquiry should be ordered under his supervision.”

‘Missing records’ He said women from South India often followed a tradition of offering their personal jewellery to Lord Ram. “Can you imagine that there was no record of such jewellery donation? Where are our principles? Poor people saved and donated ₹50 or ₹100, and even that money was siphoned off,” the Congress leader added. Mr. Shukla said that the FIR was against lower-level functionaries and officials, and accountability had to be fixed at the top. “Last elections, there was a slogan that those who brought Lord Ram should be brought to power. Now, those who have looted Lord Ram, what’s the punishment?” he asked.

The RSS pracharak at the centre of Ram Temple donation controversy

NEWS ANALYSIS

Ishita Mishra
NEW DELHI

Few individuals have been as closely associated with the Ram Janmabhoomi movement as Champat Rai. For decades, the 79-year-old worked largely behind the scenes as an RSS pracharak and senior Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) functionary, helping steer the movement through organisational, legal, and administrative challenges, before taking charge of the temple’s construction and management after the Supreme Court’s 2019 verdict. Now, barely two-and-a-half years after the temple’s consecration, Mr. Rai finds himself at the centre of a controversy, with allegations of corruption with regard to donations received by the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra (SRJK) Trust. The investigation has brought unprecedented scrutiny to the



Champat Rai

project he has overseen since its conception and has transformed Mr. Rai’s own public role from a low-profile organiser to one of the most recognisable faces of the temple project now being brought to account. Mr. Rai was born in Nagina in Bijnor district of Uttar Pradesh. He studied chemistry and briefly worked as a lecturer before becoming a full-time Sangh pracharak. He later joined the VHP, becoming one of its most trusted organisers whose contributions were largely used during the de-

cadec-long Ram Janmabhoomi campaign. Here, he handled organisational coordination, documentation, and liaison with legal, religious and administrative stakeholders, earning a reputation for meticulous planning rather than public visibility. The Supreme Court’s 2019 judgment, which cleared the way for the construction of the Ram Temple, marked a turning point in his career. Appointed as general secretary of the Trust, Mr. Rai became the operational head of the temple project, overseeing construction, finances, pilgrim management, and coordination with multiple government agencies. His public profile grew further during the nationwide donation drive launched in 2021, which mobilised contributions from millions of devotees. Along with the campaign came greater scrutiny. Opposition parties and activists questioned a series of land transactions linked to

the Trust, alleging irregularities after land prices rose sharply between successive sales. Mr. Rai emerged as the Trust’s principal public defender, repeatedly rejecting allegations of wrongdoing. He maintained that the transactions were lawful, independently valued, and essential for the temple’s long-term expansion. **Unwelcome spotlight** The latest allegations about donations, however, have thrust him into an unwelcome spotlight which he is trying to avoid. The Uttar Pradesh government has constituted a Special Investigation Team to probe the matter and several arrests have been made, but no court has yet held the trust guilty of any wrongdoing. Social media speculation about Mr. Rai’s resignation was also dismissed by VHP office-bearers, and the man himself has not emerged from his self-imposed silence to either confirm or deny the rumours.

Cong. ‘surrendered’ Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka, says BJP

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Friday targeted the Congress over what it called the “surrender” of Katchatheevu island to Sri Lanka during its rule on June 26, 1974, without taking any stakeholders into confidence. Addressing the media, BJP MP and spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi called it a “black spot” in the entire history of the “Congress’s record of surrenders”. “It began with surrendering to the Muslim League, the creator of Pakistan, in 1947; then surrendering Pakistan-occupied Jammu & Kashmir (PoJK) to Pakistan; then surrendering Aksai Chin to China. It almost surrendered Assam to China and also lost access to



Sudhanshu Trivedi

Mansarovar,” he said. “On June 26, 1974, the Congress government surrendered Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka. None of the stakeholders were taken into confidence. Fishermen today face enormous difficulties due to this. Even the Catholic community, which earlier visited there for the St. Anthony shrine, is not allowed to have the Indian flag on their boats,” said Mr. Trivedi.

UCC will be implemented in Bengal through proper procedure: Suvendu

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari on Friday said a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) would be implemented in the State through a proper procedure instituted by a committee headed by a judge. “The way it [UCC] was implemented in Gujarat, Uttarakhand, and Assam by following a procedure. Similarly, it will be implemented in West Bengal. I will inform the Assembly on Monday [on the development],” Mr. Adhikari said. The remarks come at a time when speculation is rife about the UCC being introduced in the ongoing Assembly session. Its implementation was promised by Union Home Minister Amit Shah during the campaign for the West



Suvendu Adhikari made the remarks on the sidelines of an event to pay tribute to poet Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay in Kolkata. ANI

Bengal Assembly election. Other Ministers in the State Cabinet have welcomed the move. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Sankar Ghosh said the implementation of the UCC would be a historic step. “The UCC is one of the utmost important Bill to be introduced in West Bengal. The State government has decided to introduce UCC on Monday. There are other States such as Uttarak-

hand which has already passed the Bill. The UCC Bill has already been placed in the Assembly in Bihar and a few other States. So, this is one of the historical steps taken by West Bengal,” he said. **Concerns raised** The Trinamool Congress, in a statement, said that reform could not be imposed; it must be built through dialogue, trust,

and constitutional values. “Our concern is with the agenda of the BJP. Whether a UCC is being pursued through consensus, constitutional morality, and genuine concern or whether it is being used and weaponised as another instrument of political polarisation. India’s strength lies in combining equality with respect for diversity,” the party said in a statement. Observing that no personal law should perpetuate discrimination, the Trinamool said “the BJP is known for exploiting sensitive issues for political gain”. “There must be greater consultation with all stakeholders such as vulnerable groups and adivasi communities,” the Trinamool said. Adivasi communities in the State have expressed concern over the implementation of the UCC.

‘BJP govt. chose to hide the sacrifice of heroes for a year’

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Friday attacked the Centre for its one-year delay in recognising the sacrifice of six soldiers who laid down their lives during Operation Sindoor. Operation Sindoor was launched in response to the Pahalgam terror attack. Congress leader Pawan Khara said it was a shame that the government that wraps itself in nationalism had denied the heroes the recognition they deserved for a year. In a post on X, he named the six personnel and said they are the brave sons of India who laid down their lives defending India’s honour. “Their names should have been etched into the national consciousness.



Pawan Khara

Their families should have seen a grateful nation honouring their sacrifice. Instead, for an entire year, the BJP government chose to conceal their martyrdom from the nation,” Mr. Khara said. “The same government that wraps itself in the flag and speaks endlessly of nationalism denied these heroes the recognition and remembrance they deserved. Such a shame!” he said.

Nearly 6 crore names have been deleted in first year of SIR of electoral rolls

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, which has so far led to the deletion of nearly six crore voters and triggered acrimony between the Opposition and the Election Commission of India (EC), has completed one year, as the poll roll clean-up exercise continues in 19 States and Union Territories. The pilot SIR exercise commenced in Bihar on June 24 last year, ahead of the Assembly polls. Following the Bihar SIR, the State’s electoral roll was pruned by nearly 65 lakh voters, amid allegations by the Opposition and activists that the poll authority was working at the behest of the BJP to disenfranchise citizens. In March, the Supreme Court unanimously upheld the constitutional validity of the EC’s move to carry out the SIR. Individuals whose names were deleted dur-



In March, the Supreme Court unanimously upheld the constitutional validity of the EC’s move to carry out the SIR. PTI

ing the SIR are being excluded from State welfare benefits in West Bengal and Bihar. Following recent Assembly elections, both governments announced that voter roll purification data is being linked to social security. SIR is now part of the NCERT’s Social Science textbook, describing it as an exercise to ensure that no eligible citizen is left out and no ineligible person is included in the electoral roll. In the second phase of

the exercise – in Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Puducherry, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Goa, the combined voters’ list was pruned by 10.2%. The voter base before the poll roll clean-up across these States and Union territories stood at over 50.99 crore. Post the exercise, the voters’ list stands at 45.81 crore – a decline of over 5.18 crore.

Rahul completes two years as Leader of the Opposition

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Rahul Gandhi, who completed two years as the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, said that he would continue to carry the voice of the people to the corridors of power and fight for issues. In a post on social media platform X, accompanied by a three-and-a-half-minute video of his speeches and interventions over the past two years, Mr. Gandhi said that he had devoted every day since assuming office to representing the concerns of ordinary Indians. “Today marks two years since I became the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha. Every single day of these two years has been dedicated to one task – to carry the voice of every Indian to the corridors of power,” he said. “Whether it’s the fight for NEET aspirants, exposing electoral fraud, or defending the Constitution, I have stood with you on ev-



Rahul Gandhi

ery front. I stand with you today, and I always will,” he said. Mr. Gandhi said the trust reposed in him by the people, “from the streets to Parliament”, remained his greatest strength. “The journey is long, but my resolve remains the same – I will keep fighting every battle for you. Jai Hind. Jai Constitution,” he said. Later in the day, Mr. Gandhi also took a swipe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi after the latter wished Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on his birthday and praised his efforts in implementing the National Education Policy.

Kuki-Zo Council's apology for killings is not enough: Manipur Naga youth body

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

An apex Naga students’ body in Manipur on Friday said the “so-called apology” issued by the Kuki-Zo Council (KZC) on the killing of six Naga civilians was unacceptable. The All Naga Students’ Association, Manipur (ANSAM), criticised the apex Kuki-Zo body for using a derogatory term – ‘Kacha Naga’ – while referring to the six slain people from the Liangmai Naga community. Kacha means ‘raw’. On Thursday, the KZC had said it regretted the killing of the six Naga civilians abducted from Kangpokpi district’s Leilon Vaiphei village, after the killing of three Thadou church leaders on May 13. The Thadous are divided about their identity as Kukis. A section claims they are a distinct community, while another insists they belong to the greater Kuki group.



A rally by the All Naga Students’ Association, Manipur, demanding justice for the killing of six Naga civilians, in Imphal. ANI

The ANSAM said the KZC’s “regret” was neither an apology nor an admission of the “unlawful and inhumane” crime. “On the contrary, it is tantamount to a direct challenge and insult to the Naga people and reflects an alarming disposition of arrogance and perceived supremacy...,” it said. The students’ body also said that the use of a pejorative for the victims revealed a “disturbing persistence of prejudice and communal disdain”. “The Association categorically asserts that no

apology can be deemed credible, sincere, and acceptable until the perpetrators responsible for the abduction, torture, mutilation, and brutal killing of the six innocent Naga hostages are identified, apprehended, and punished in accordance with the rule of law,” the ANSAM said in a statement. The association pointed out that the Nagas have no access to or influence over the areas between the Kuki-dominated Kotzim and Kotlen villages of Kangpokpi district, where the three church leaders were killed.



GROUND ZERO



Fire personnel conduct a dousing operation at the commercial building in Aliganj, Lucknow. PTI

The rules that failed 15 lives in Lucknow

On June 22, a fire broke out in a building in Uttar Pradesh's capital city, claiming 15 lives, most of them students and staff of an animation centre. According to eyewitnesses, bystanders, and survivors, the building lacked basic fire safety systems. **Mayank Kumar** reports on the tragedy and the regulatory gaps it exposes amid rapid urbanisation in India's most populous State

For 26-year-old Rishabh Mishra, the images of the afternoon of June 22 will always haunt him – people jumping from a burning building or clinging to live wires in an attempt to survive. One in particular refuses to fade: a man pleading from a window, his face flushed and his eyes desperately seeking help as flames raged behind him.

It was around 2:30 p.m. when Mishra, a bystander, noticed the fire in a three-storey commercial building in Sector D in Aliganj, Lucknow. The building housed a pet shop and a clinic on the ground and first floor, a video gaming zone and 3D art and design animation centre named Head Hoppers Studio on the second floor, and an IT networking office on the third floor.

Mishra says he immediately swung into action. “I made two trips to the King George’s Medical University (KGMU) – once by car and once by ambulance – ferrying injured people,” he says.

Despite having gone to the hospital twice, a visibly exhausted Mishra cannot recall the route when he gets ready to go the third time, this time on his bike. “I was just focused on getting people there. I didn’t notice the way,” he says. Taking a sip of water from a bottle for the first time after nearly three hours, he asks a police constable how to get to the premier medical institute, 5 kilometres away.

The fire claimed 15 lives, most of them students and staff of the animation centre, while nine others sustained injuries and were admitted to the KGMU Trauma Centre. As per the post-mortem reports, the 15 of them did not have major burn injuries; they suffocated to death.

On the same day, the Uttar Pradesh government formed a two-member Special Investigation Team to conduct an impartial and time-bound investigation into the fire incident. The team has been instructed to submit its report within seven days.

The Lucknow fire is yet another addition to India’s summer of fire tragedies. Early this month, a fire in a bed-and-breakfast took the lives of 23 people in South Delhi’s Malviya Nagar; last month, nine people were killed in a major fire which broke out at a residential building in Shahdara in East Delhi. In all these incidents, violations of safety guidelines and administrative negligence have been the causes.

No room to escape

A First Information Report filed by the Uttar Pradesh police says that a short circuit may have originated in the air conditioning duct on the first floor or the pet shop located on the ground floor.

According to Abhishek Pandey, an eyewitness who tried to enter the building but was forced to retreat due to the clouds of smoke, the fire spread rapidly across the upper floors. “There were no emergency exits. The only staircase in the building was obstructed by the thick smoke



There were no emergency exits. The only staircase in the building was obstructed by thick smoke

ABHISHEK PANDEY
Eyewitness

Some people took refuge in washrooms to evade the fire,” says Pandey.

A survivor says the digital lock of the animation centre was non-functional amid a power shortage. This left students and staff trapped. He adds that the route to the roof was blocked, forcing some people to leap in panic from windows.

Pandey says it took firefighters at least 30 minutes to reach the spot. “Firefighters, police, and SDRF (State Disaster Response Force) personnel arrived to discover that there was no space for evacuation. Unable to access the main entrances, rescue teams had to breach the walls of the building to extract bodies,” he says. Nineteen firefighting vehicles extinguished the fire in about four hours, according to records of the Lucknow Fire and Emergency Services accessed by *The Hindu*.

Anamika Samanta, an animation artist with three years of experience at Head Hoppers Studio, and Nilesh Kumar were among the 15 people who died in the fire. The two of them were in love and were engaged to be married.

Anamika’s father, Vishwanath Samanta, who lives in West Bengal, is devastated. While collecting her body from the post-mortem facility at KGMU, he weails in anguish. “Our family is shattered,” he says, adding that his wife repeatedly fainted on hearing the news.

Nilesh’s family is distraught too, he says. “We had visited his house 2-3 times earlier,” says Samanta. “We had also met his parents.”

He last spoke to his daughter on the morning of the incident. “She told me, ‘I am going to work now.’ That is the last time I heard her voice.”

Sagar, a 3D artist in training at the institute, was another victim. His friend Rahul Singh rushed to Aliganj after receiving a call from a mutual friend. “Sagar had called my friend and begged him to save him. I reached the spot in 15 minutes, but I could not enter the studio,” he says. “I pleaded with the authorities to drag my friend out. But they told us that they were unable to access the main entrances. Rescue teams had to enter the building from neighbouring buildings to pull out trapped victims. That took a lot of

time. Precious time was wasted and my friend died,” says Singh, bursting into tears at the entrance of the post-mortem house in Lucknow.

The Aliganj pet shop and clinic sold pet food, accessories, and habitat supplies and also provided medical and surgical care for pets. It advised owners on the right food and products based on their pets’ breed and age. At least 25 pets, including cats and dogs, were inside the shop when the fire broke out.

“When we received information about the fire on our helpline, our seven-member team reached the spot within 20 minutes. Many animal lovers also gathered at the fire site,” says Shubham Pratap Singh, a member of Jeev Aashraya Foundation, a Lucknow-based NGO that rescues and rehabilitates pet animals. “We pushed for the immediate rescue of pets as cats and dogs are vulnerable to fire disasters due to their inability to adjust to high temperatures. After our efforts, more than 10 cats and dogs were handed over to us. We kept them for a few hours in the house of a man called Vishal Melhotra, who allowed us to use the AC in his house as well. Sadly, some cats who were on the first floor died in the fire.”

Flouting rules

The building where the fire broke out was being used for commercial purposes even though it had been approved by the Lucknow Development Authority (LDA) only for residential use, show the Lucknow Fire and Emergency Services records. According to the FIR, the building also lacked basic fire safety measures, including emergency exits, smoke ventilation systems, fire extinguishers, and other fire protection features.

The building, spread over about 1,992 square feet, was owned by Virendra Pratap Shukla and Surendra Pratap Shukla from January 2013. The LDA approved a residential building plan for the property in 2014 under its self-certification scheme, under which a licensed architect or engineer certifies that the building plan complies with local building bylaws. However, officials later found unauthorised construction on the premises and registered a case against Virendra Pratap Shukla in 2016. Following an investigation, the LDA ordered the illegal portions to be demolished on May 10, 2016, but revoked the order less than two months later, on July 5, raising questions about why the decision was reversed.

An enquiry by the LDA into the incident found 18 officials and engineers of the Authority, many of them retired now, guilty of regulatory lapses linked to the building.

So far, four people – Virendra Pratap Shukla, the owner; and Suresh Kumar Sahu, Ramkrishna Upadhyay, and Tushak Krishna Jaiswal, all of them tenants occupying different floors of the building – have been arrested. They were booked under Sections 105 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder), 110 (attempt to commit culpable homicide), and 125 (rash or negligent act endangering human life) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, and provisions of the Uttar Pradesh Fire and Emergency Services Act, 2022. Four officials – Gaurav Kumar, Executive Engineer (Collection), Jankipuram; Kamleendra Kumar Singh, Fire Station Second Officer, Indira Nagar; Anil Kumar, Assistant Engineer; and Pramod Pandey, Junior Engineer – have been suspended.

Singh issued a statement accusing higher officers of making him a scapegoat and demanded that Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath fix accountability on the Lucknow chief fire officer for the lapses linked to the incident. He sought a review of the disciplinary action taken against him. Later, he retracted his statement.

Inspection drive

Following the fire, the LDA launched a citywide inspection drive on June 23 to identify and take

action against buildings and establishments operating in violation of safety and building regulations. They sealed 71 establishments and issued notices to 83 building owners/managers on the first day of inspection.

An LDA official said, “This campaign, conducted on the instructions of LDA Vice President Prathamesh Kumar, in collaboration with a joint team of the fire department and the Lucknow police, has targeted dozens of coaching centres, libraries, dance studios, playgroup schools, blood banks, computer institutes, nursing homes, hotels, commercial complexes, and other establishments.” Officials also took similar action in other parts of the State. They say they will carry out the campaign for three weeks.

The U.P. government also directed all the District Magistrates to conduct a comprehensive survey of all the coaching institutes operating in their respective districts to ensure compliance with safety standards. The inspection includes aspects such as building arrangements, fire safety, electrical safety, and other necessary facilities.

Yogendra Upadhyay, Higher Education Minister in the State government, said in an official statement, “All District Magistrates have been directed to conduct a comprehensive survey of all coaching institutes operating in their respective districts and prepare a list. Strict action, as per rules, is being ensured against institutions that are not registered under the Uttar Pradesh Coaching Regulation Act, 2002.... Any kind of irregularity or negligence will not be tolerated.”

The opposition Samajwadi Party (SP) criticised the government and administrative authorities. “The safety of students and citizens is paramount. But initiating a sudden drive after such a tragedy... shows an attempt to hide failure and corruption,” said Uday Veer Singh, an SP spokesperson. “Safety shouldn’t be compromised. Why was the government asleep for the past 10 years? Where did the government get so much staff in a single day to issue notices to thousands of people across the State after conducting inspections?”

Singh said a massive fire in April had damaged a labourers’ settlement near Sector-12 in Vikas Nagar, Lucknow. “We had demanded strict implementation of safety protocols then too, but no action was taken,” he said.

The way forward

Vineet Singh, a police officer in the State police force, who spent a decade serving in Lucknow, suggests a practical approach to the crisis. Many buildings were constructed decades earlier when upgraded safety protocols were not in place, he says. “We need to retrofit old buildings with modern fire safety solutions. There may be structural limitations as some older structures were not designed to house modern systems such as smoke detectors or sprinklers, but wireless fire alarms are ideal for retrofits as they reduce extensive wiring challenges,” he says.

Singh adds that sprinkler retrofits can use flexible systems, which are easier to install in tight spaces. “Fire-resistant coatings can be applied to structural elements without altering the appearance, and retrofitted fire doors with self-closing mechanisms can improve evacuation safety,” Singh says. “We need to develop retrofit plans that balance safety standards with architectural preservation.”

In older buildings, emergency evacuation can be improved by upgrading to LED exit signs and photoluminescent wayfinding markings. Around the world, many retrofit projects also involve installing wireless fire alarm and sprinkler systems in multi-storey residential buildings constructed decades ago without modern fire safety measures, he adds.

A photograph showing a large crowd of people gathered in front of a building, likely a government office or a public institution. In the foreground, a green directional sign with white text points left towards 'बिलौटी Bilauti'. The scene is set in an open area with some vegetation and a clear sky.

Cause of a death

A IN-Y

KERALA



Pulling the trigger: A member of the elephant monitoring team bursts a firecracker using a locally made bazooka to scare away elephants from the vicinity of human habitations in Athirappilly. THULASI KAKKAT

Jumbo chasers of Chalakudy

In the Athirappilly forest area, teams of forest officials are constantly on the vigil, chasing away wild elephants that venture close to human habitations. **K.S. Sudhi** travels with a team to see firsthand how they operate in batches round the clock to avert human-wild elephant conflicts

Venkateshwaran, a young Divisional Forest Officer of Chalakudy in Thrissur, and his men have been on their toes since morning at Chiklayi, in the Athirappilly forest stretch, on a day in the second week of June.

An alert call from an elephant watcher on the presence of a herd of wild elephants near the human habitation of Kumbidammudi, a fragmented patch in the rainforest of Athirappilly, which forms part of the Western Ghats, spurred the team members to action. Two drone pilots quickly launched their remotely piloted aircraft systems to zero in on the exact location of the animals. Relying on the drones' inputs, a group of animal trackers moved towards the area where the elephants had appeared.

The team tediously made their way through the forest, as the golden rays of the morning sun filtered through the thick canopy of the rainforest. The verdant forest had grown darker in the monsoon showers. The chirping of the crickets filled the air. Traversing through the wild track was a treacherous task as some segments of the path had turned slushy in the overnight rain. The overgrown wild grass and shrubs obstructed movement. Risk lurked in the form of wild elephants that could position themselves behind the tall and thick patches of vegetation.

The sound of crushing foliage or the breaking of tree branches made the team instantly wary since one wrong step could turn fatal. Some of the team members held their pump-action guns ready. The pellets shot from the guns can inflict deep pain but would not injure the animal. Pain serves as an effective deterrent while handling wild animals, they say.

The trackers carried locally made bazookas, with a long metal pipe and a pistol grip, for bursting firecrackers. Once ignited, the gun will launch the cracker to a distance of 50 metres before it explodes, scaring away wild animals. A team member tightened his grip on the handle of his long machete.

"Ideally, animals should be driven out of human habitations during the daytime, when there is sufficient light. The operation becomes more dangerous at night and in forest terrains. Yet, we undertake such assignments," said Jobin Joseph, a Range Forest Officer, who is currently involved in the operations.

Lives at risk

The officials said they put their lives at risk while engaging in such operations. "During a recent operation, one tusker charged at us. The risk multiplies in forest areas at night and during rain, when the terrain becomes slippery. We have to deal with an animal that can move faster than us," said Jobin. As night fell over the Kumbidammudi hills, the team of officials began "disturbing" the wild elephants in an attempt to drive them safely out of human habitations and into the wild.

The animal movements are tracked 24x7. Two watchtowers are being set up inside the forest. A 100-member strong team is involved in the operation

K.K. SUNILKUMAR
Deputy Conservator of Forests

The officers stood in a formation, keeping a pathway open for the animal to move out. The animal was pushed out of the human habitation for around 12 km. Suddenly, the jumbo moved in another direction, upsetting the officials' plans. Anticipating trouble, the team leader placed his index finger on the trigger of his 212 rifle as the team members renewed their attempts.

Death, 10 metres away

It was yet another day at work for the elephant chasers of Athirappilly, tiring and perilous. "The team members, who are engaged in the risky business of chasing away wild elephants, have come face-to-face with death on several occasions. Once, I saw death positioned hardly 10 metres from me in the form of an irate elephant herd and froze for a moment. When the team members shouted on top of their lungs and fired the bazookas, the animals retreated," recounts Venkateshwaran.

On May 30, 2026, Mohanan, 63, a dairy farmer of Vaissery in Athirappilly, was killed in an encounter with a wild elephant. A lone tusker, which forayed into his holding, trampled him early in the morning as he tried to scare it away with a freshly lit torch. The animal, which remained hidden under the cover of darkness, killed him in a flash. "The elephant had attacked two others a few days ago. It was first spotted foraging in the area a fortnight ago," said Adarsh,

Mohanan's son. It was following the death of Mohanan, which shocked the residents of the popular tourist destination, that the Forest department launched its operations on June 2 to secure the human habitations by driving away the marauding elephants. Specially trained teams, which have members of local communities as well as tribespeople who know the terrain, have been patrolling the forest since then to spot the animals.

Signage alerting the passengers about the animal crossing points and possible presence of wild animals could be seen along the Athirappilly-Vazhachal road that leads to Sholayar.

Tracking movements

The field operation of driving the elephants begins with data collection.

"The drones track the movements of the elephants and give inputs to the animal trackers. The teams then disturb the animals and drive them out of the holdings using various techniques. The plan is to push back the animals to the Athirappilly forest across the Chalakudy river through select exit points," said K.K. Sunilkumar, a Deputy Conservator of Forests, who heads the expert team of elephant chasers.

"The animal movements are tracked 24/7. Two watchtowers are being set up inside the forest. The action plan for a given day is finalised by around 7 a.m. after analysing the data on ani-

mals. A 100-member strong team is involved in the operations," said Sunilkumar, who appeared sleepy and worn out after a nearly 13-hour-long operation, which ended around 4 a.m.

The animal trackers, as well as the residents, are familiar with the physical characteristics and behavioural patterns of the elephants that frequent the area. The residents have even assigned each animal a unique name.

Ottakaathan has a big hole in his broad ear flap, probably the remnant of a fight with another one of his tribe. Punyalan (the saint) used to regularly arrive on the church premises at Vettilappara in the evenings. "Ezhattumukham Ganapathy, a cute-looking and gentle tusker, was the first one to appear in the area. Chillikomban has thin, long tusks whereas Manjakomban got the moniker from his yellow tusks. Murivalan derived his name from his short, injured tail," T.A. Preethikumar, a member of the tracking team, listed the names of the elephants that they regularly encounter during their vigil.

"Some elephants like Pottan Aana (deaf elephant), cannot be easily scared away as they ignore the sound of crackers," observed Preethikumar. On a given day, the trackers cover around six kilometres on foot, looking for the animals. "I am not scared of the elephants as I encounter them regularly," said Ratheesh, another animal tracker, while taking a short lunch break after covering around four kilometres.

Another tracker demonstrated the functioning of the bazooka by lighting the wick of the firecracker with his cigarette lighter. The loud boom of the cracker, which echoed across Pillapara, a part of the mountain chain of Western Ghats that runs through the area, was followed by a trail of thick smoke.

Land use pattern

"The rampant changes in the land use pattern of the area might have aggravated the incidents of human-wildlife conflicts in the region," notes I.S. Suresh Babu, Divisional Forest Officer, Vazhachal. "The widespread farming of pineapple and palm oil and the year-round availability of water in the Chalakudy river have been attracting the elephants. Currently, there is a resident population of around 15 elephants in the region," notes Suresh.

Some of the elephant corridors, which have been used by several generations of wild elephants, were obstructed by the solar fences that were drawn through the region, forcing the animals to seek alternative routes to reach the fodder and water sources. Some of their new navigational paths run through human settlements, thus opening new frontiers of conflicts with humans, observed Suresh.

The wild elephants have to be disturbed to drive them out of human settlements to secure human lives and property. Like the elephants flushed out of the holdings, the elephant chasers too spend their nights all awake and stressed.



Keeping a close watch: Members of the elephant monitoring team of the Forest department keeping a close watch on the movement of a tusker that approached a human habitation recently. THULASI KAKKAT

Business

INBRIEF



GMR Airports takes over operations of Nagpur airport

Airport developer GMR Airports Ltd. took over the operations of Nagpur’s Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar International Airport on Friday. “The first phase will focus on expanding the passenger terminal to accommodate three million travellers annually, ensuring a seamless and efficient travel experience,” chairman, GMR Airports, GBS Raju was quoted in a press statement. Future phases aim at raising the airport’s capacity to serve up to 30 million passengers annually, backed by extensive airside infrastructure upgrades, including the construction of a new Air Traffic Control tower. The airport will feature a state-of-the-art cargo terminal with an annual handling capacity of 20,000 metric tonne. GMR Nagpur International Airport Ltd. (GNIAL) signed a 30-year concession agreement in November 2024 with MIHAN India Ltd. to operate, manage, develop and modernise the airport.

Middlemen offer Iranian oil to India refiners on U.S. waiver

Several middlemen have offered Indian refiners discounted Iranian oil as Tehran looks to expedite sales after Washington’s temporary sanctions waiver, Indian refining sources said. On Monday, the United States waived sanctions on Iran for 60 days after the first talks under a nascent peace deal, opening a narrow window for renewed energy trade. The approaches to Indian refiners have come directly from National Iranian Oil Co (NIOC) and through intermediaries saying they have been allocated oil by the Iranian state producer, the sources said. “Apart from NIOC, several traders are contacting us for the sale of Iranian oil. But my priority is to give a chance to NIOC,” said a refining source. The sources declined to be named. NIOC is telling Indian buyers Iranian crude would be \$3 to \$4 a barrel cheaper than similar regional grades. The traders are mainly from small and mid-sized trading firms based in Singapore and Dubai, the sources said, declining to name them. REUTERS

Govt. to simplify drug import rules for test, examination, analysis

Ministry already amended New Drugs and Clinical Trials Rules, 2019 in Jan. 2026 introducing similar notification system for local test licences

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

Union Health Ministry has proposed amendments to the Drugs Rules, 1945 to simplify the procedure for securing permission for import of drugs for examination, test or analysis. The change introduces an acknowledgement-based system for import of all drugs in small quantities for analytical and non-clinical testing purposes.

Under the revised provisions, applicants intending to import such drugs will be required to submit a prior intimation form and may import the drug based on the acknowledgement generated upon submission of such intimation.

The procedure is applicable for import of drugs for analytical and non-clinical testing, except for certain drugs belonging to the categories of sex hormones, cytotoxic drugs, beta lactam drugs, biologics containing live microorganisms and narcotic and psychotropic substances, said a release issued by the Health Ministry.

The Ministry has already carried out amendments to the New Drugs and Clinical Trials Rules, 2019 in January introducing a similar notification system for domestic test licences. The present proposed amendment expands it to imports also.



Right prescription: The amendment is expected to significantly cut compliance burden on applicants. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

The amendment is expected to significantly cut compliance burden on applicants by eliminating licensing needs for importing small lots of drugs for testing or R&D purposes.

Deregulation role

“This will play a substantial role in deregulating the R&D sector in pharmaceuticals and enable start-ups and industries to quickly initiate testing or analysis. The online intimation system will offer a seamless and instant gateway for the stakeholders,” said a senior health official. The draft has been placed in the public domain for stakeholder consultation.

Meanwhile, the Ministry also published a draft notification proposing amendments to Rule 31 of the Drugs Rules, 1945 with the goal of rationalising the residual shelf-life norm for imported drugs and proposed ease of doing business in the pharma sector.

The draft amendment proposes to revise the norm of a minimum residual shelf life of more than 60% for imported drugs to a minimum residual shelf life of 12 months at the time of import. However, in view of specialised nature and public health considerations, the existing norm of a minimum residual shelf life of more than 60% shall continue to apply to biological products and radio pharmaceuticals.

The proposed amendment seeks to aid more efficiency in the pharmaceutical supply chain while maintaining availability of quality medicines for patients. By ensuring imported drugs have a minimum remaining shelf life of 12 months upon entry into the country, the proposal provides sufficient time for distribution and consumption before expiry, thereby ensuring patients continue to receive medicines with adequate usable shelf life.

IMO pauses Gulf vessel evacuation as Iran attacks ship

M. Kalyanaraman
CHENNAI

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) Secretary-General Arsenio Dominguez said the agency has paused its involvement in the evacuation of vessels stranded in the Persian Gulf following an Iranian attack on a commercial ship transiting the Strait of Hormuz through the southern Oman route.

Mr. Dominguez said the vessel, Taiwan’s container ship *Ever Lovely*, was not transiting under the IMO-facilitated plan.

The IMO Secretary General said he did not know whether the ship had been in touch with the U.S. Navy before the incident. No one was injured and the vessel resumed its voyage.

The attack followed a joint declaration by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States, including Oman, after a meeting attended by the United States, stating that there should be no “tolls, fees, or attempts to assert control over the strait.”

Iran criticises move

Iran has criticised The International Maritime Organization plan, arguing it does not adequately recognise Tehran’s role in managing traffic through the strategic waterway.

Mr. Dominguez, however, said the Foreign Ministers of Oman and Iran met on Monday (June 22, 2026), and the Organisation’s plan was announced the following day based on those discussions.

According to a statement issued by Iran after

About 500 ships are in the area and evacuating them could take about five weeks, says IMO

the conclusion of that meeting, the “two countries had agreed to continue talks through a joint committee of their Foreign Ministries to reach an understanding on the future management of shipping in the Strait of Hormuz, the services to be provided and the associated costs, in accordance with international standards.”

115 vessels transit Strait

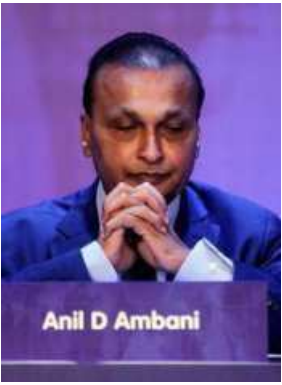
Mr. Dominguez said some 115 vessels had transited the strait from the beginning of the week to the pause. Since the attack, four ships have used the northern route and 11 the southern route. He said shipowners should conduct their own risk assessments before transiting the strait now that IMO has paused its role.

‘Assurances needed’

The IMO remains in contact with Iran via its embassy in London, where the organisation is headquartered, he said.

Mr. Dominguez said the IMO would resume its role once all stakeholder-nations provide ‘guarantees’ on safety of ships and seafarers.

About 500 ships are in the area and evacuating them could take about five weeks, he added, noting that both Oman and Iran exercise jurisdiction over the Strait of Hormuz.



Anil Ambani

SEBI rejects Anil Ambani’s settlement plea for RInfra

Reuters
MUMBAI

India’s financial markets regulator has rejected applications by industrialist Anil Ambani and his corporate group to settle allegations of misusing almost \$700 million of company funds, documents reviewed by *Reuters* show.

The Securities and Exchange Board of India last week rejected the requests over allegations that Ambani and Reliance Infrastructure were involved in improperly routing ₹6,526 crore (\$691 million) to entities related to controlling shareholder Ambani, the documents show.

Mr. Ambani, the younger brother of billionaire Mukesh Ambani, has faced growing scrutiny from regulators and enforcement agencies over the past 18 months. Several group executives have been arrested on fraud charges and some of Mr. Anil Ambani’s properties frozen.

A spokesperson for the Anil Ambani group said: “The allegations are categorically denied. The matters are sub judice.”

SEBI did not respond to a request for comment.

Govt. eases Quality Control Order rules

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

The Union government has eased the most stringent aspects of the Quality Control Orders (QCOs) it has passed for various sectors, allowing manufacturers to use an alternative mechanism to transition to the more stringent version over the course of five years.

From 2020, the government has been issuing QCOs in an attempt to improve the quality standards of Indian manufacturing and protect consumer interests. These standards, however, met with significant opposition from local manufacturers who said the compliance process was long and paperwork arduous.

The latest notification by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, called

the Transition Facilitation (Quality Control) Order, 2026, “introduces an alternative risk-based compliance mechanism to facilitate a smooth transition for industry while maintaining quality assurance and consumer protection,” the Ministry said.

Basically, the notification allows selected local firms to procure supplies from manufacturers holding licences under the less rigorous Scheme II of Schedule II of the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) regulations, instead of the more rigorous Scheme I.

As per the notification, this relaxation would apply to the QCOs on toys, personal protective footwear, air conditioners, rubber footwear, electric water heaters, washing machines, hinges, furniture, and electrical safety equipment.

What everyone wants



Precious cargo: Copper ingots ready for exports at the Kamoa Copper S.A. facility in Kolwezi, in DR Congo. In vast warehouses at the mine, mountains of reddish rocks pile up as machines grind away day and night. The deposit is one of DR Congo’s hidden treasures coveted by international markets for its exceptionally high copper content. China has long been mining it and now, the U.S. is vying for a share. AFP

HDFC says legal review finds no support for ex-chair’s claims

Reuters

HDFC Bank said on Friday an external review found no evidence in board committee minutes or communications supporting the concerns raised in former Chairman Atanu Chakraborty’s resignation letter.

In March, *Reuters* reported HDFC Bank appointed two local law firms and a U.S.-based law firm to review are signation letter from Mr. Chakraborty.

Mr. Chakraborty abruptly resigned from the bank’s board in March, citing dif-



Atanu Chakraborty

ferences over “values and ethics,” which led to a stock selloff and prompted the lender to undertake a damage control effort.

HDFC Bank said the three-month legal review

found no evidence that Mr. Chakraborty raised concerns about his personal-values and ethics, or disagreed with board decisions regarding the “Dubai matter.”

Mr. Chakraborty previously told media the bank delayed taking action against officials involved in mis-selling Additional Tier-1 (AT1) bonds to investors in Dubai. The bank added it and external law firms repeatedly asked Mr. Chakraborty to participate in the review but the interview did not take place.

Uber India’s Prabhjeet Singh steps down

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Uber India and South Asia President Prabhjeet Singh has stepped down, after more than a decade at the ride-hailing company.

Mr. Singh had joined Uber in August 2015, and was appointed the company’s President for India and South Asia in July 2020. Uber confirmed Mr. Singh is moving on from the company for another leadership opportunity.

Businessline MSME meet on crisis resilience

BL Bureau
CHENNAI

Celebrating MSMEs, *The Hindu businessline* brings its 5th annual MSME Conclave to two cities. After kicking off in Bengaluru on June 25, it reaches Coimbatore on June 27 where it will focus on financing strategies to aid small firms navigate crisis and shift to clean mobility.

It will discuss MSMEs’ contribution to the Indian growth story. The theme for Coimbatore event is ‘Resilient Routes: Financing MSMEs from Crisis to Clean Mobility’. Keynote speaker is Jairam Varadaraj, MD, ELGI Equipments.

Businessline Editor Raghuvir Srinivasan will address the audience.

The event will have two panel discussions and a fireside chat. There will be a special address on ‘Kerala: Your next investment destination’. The first panel will discuss ‘Financing in times of war’ and have Karthikeyan Mounaguruswamy, immediate past President, CODISSIA; Rahul Jyothi Kumaran, Head-SME business, Sundaram Finance and Kumar Duraiswamy, CEO, Eastern Global Clothing and Joint Secretary, Tiruppur Exporters Association and session moderated by Lokeshwarri S. K., Data Editor, *The Hindu businessline*.

The second panel is on ‘The Clean Mobility Opportunity for MSMEs’. The panellists include Dr. S. Chandrasekar, Corporate Director - Roots Group of Companies, Founder Trus-

tee & VP - Society for Smart E-mobility; Shreshth Mishra, Co-founder & Chief People Officer, Simple Energy and Sudeepth Puthumana, Head of Mobility, L&T Electronic Products and Systems with the session moderated by Ramesh M, Consulting Editor, *The Hindu businessline*.

The fireside chat with Ravichandran Purushothaman, Chairman-CII Southern Region and President, Danfoss India will be hosted by Richa Mishra, Resident Editor, *The Hindu businessline*. A special address on ‘Kerala: Your next investment destination’ will be given by Arun K. Vijayan, IAS, Director, Industries and MD, KSIDC.

The conclave is co-powered by Kerala State Industrial Development Corporation and the Central Bank of India. The Associate Partners are Bank of Baroda, Tally, SSVI Institutions, Indian Overseas Bank, Salzer, South Indian Bank, Turbo Engineering, Zorian Systems, Suguna Pumps & Motors, Malles Construction, eRoyce Motors India, and Ruh Continuum School. The Realty Partner is G Square and Lifestyle Partner is Lexus.



Hezbollah chief says Israel must 'unconditionally' leave Lebanon



EU proposes to refuse military-age Ukrainian men refugee protection



Ex-Trump adviser Bolton pleads guilty in classified documents case



South Korea to train 5 lakh 'drone warriors' to counter North Korea



'China's Bangladesh ties doesn't target third party'

Lebanon, Israel, U.S. sign trilateral framework accord in Washington

OpenAI defers public rollout of GPT 5.6 as U.S. seeks early access

Venezuela twin earthquakes toll rises to 920, says official

Trump threatens 100% tariff on countries over tech taxes

He also conceded that the Russian army were unable to fully protect the peninsula.

How Trump’s posts on Iran zigzagged during the war

U.S. President’s social media messaging reveals how his rhetoric on the Islamic Republic repeatedly swung between warnings of destruction, calls for regime change and overtures of diplomacy; four months since the conflict unfolded, whether strategy or contradiction, it is difficult to ignore that one issue has quietly disappeared from Washington’s public messaging — regime change in Tehran

NEWS ANALYSIS
Smriti Sudesh

U.S. President Donald Trump spent six months threatening to destroy Iran, encouraging regime change, overseeing military strikes and warning that “all Hell” could break loose. Yet, he ended the crisis, for now, by signing a memorandum of understanding with Tehran. The period saw Mr. Trump taking several flip-flops, including an offer of support for Iranian protesters, a threat to erase Iran’s civilisation, a claim that Tehran had already seen regime change and a preliminary deal with Iran, pending more talks.

The story began on the streets of Iran. The country saw street protests in January, triggered by a deepening economic crisis. Some protesters called for an end to the Islamic Republic itself and in parts of the country, the protests turned violent. On January 2, as the crisis was spreading across Iran’s main cities, Mr. Trump posted on Truth Social: “If Iran shoots and violently kills peaceful protesters, the United States of America will come to their rescue. We are locked and loaded and ready to go.”

Within days, Iran cracked down on the protests, which it said were triggered by “rioters” and “terrorists”. According to authorities, at least 3,000 people were killed.

A few weeks later, Mr. Trump told Iranians “help is on the war”. “Iranian Patriots, KEEP PROTESTING - TAKE OVER YOUR INSTITUTIONS!!!... HELP IS ON ITS WAY. MIGA!!!” he wrote in a post.

Here, Mr. Trump was not merely expressing concern about the events unfolding inside Iran. He was directly encouraging Iranians to topple their government.

The message was clear: the U.S. was openly sympathetic to forces seeking change within Iran. Mr. Trump sent U.S. warships, fighter jets and aircraft carriers to the region.

On February 28, when Iran was holding talks with the U.S., Mr. Trump, in an eight-minute video, announced the launch of ‘Operation Epic Fury’, a major military campaign, along with Israel’s Operation Roaring Lion. American and Israeli forces jointly struck Iran’s nuclear facilities, missile sites, military centres and infrastructure in one of the largest military operations in West Asia in decades. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran’s Supreme Leader, was assassinated, along with several other top leaders.

Even as the bombs fell, Mr. Trump framed the campaign as something larger than a military operation. Addressing Iranians directly, he declared: “When we are finished, take over your government”. The message was clear: America and Israel wanted regime change.



Donald Trump began the crisis by encouraging Iranians to challenge their government and ended it by celebrating a deal with the very Islamic Republic he once appeared determined to overthrow. REUTERS

Iran, however, was swift to retaliate. Ballistic missiles and drones targeted U.S. military bases across the Persian Gulf, while Tehran also announced the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world’s most important energy chokepoints.

Hot and cold rhetorics

For weeks, Mr. Trump warned Iran against escalation while Tehran vowed resistance. On March 6, he demanded Iran’s “unconditional surrender”. But Iran kept hitting back. Lebanon was drawn into the conflict as Hezbollah entered the war. Almost every Gulf nation felt its impact. Concerns over global

supply chains intensified as Hormuz remained closed. In March, behind the scenes, diplomacy also took stage. Pakistan emerged as a crucial intermediary, facilitating communication between Washington and Tehran. But threats continued.

On March 22, Mr. Trump issued one of his starkest warnings. “If Iran doesn’t FULLY OPEN, WITHOUT THREAT, the Strait of Hormuz, within 48 HOURS from this exact point in time, the United States of America will hit and obliterate their various POWER PLANTS, STARTING WITH THE BIGGEST ONE FIRST!”

But Iran did not budge.

Before the deadline expired, Mr. Trump changed the tone. “I AM PLEASED TO REPORT THAT THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, AND THE COUNTRY OF IRAN, HAVE HAD, OVER THE LAST TWO DAYS, VERY GOOD AND PRODUCTIVE CONVERSATIONS REGARDING A COMPLETE AND TOTAL RESOLUTION OF OUR HOSTILITIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST...,” he wrote.

This is now a Trump classic. First he issues wild threats, and then he backs off.

The pattern continued. On March 27, Mr. Trump again expressed optimism about the talks, saying negotiations with Iran were

progressing at a good pace. He also announced that, at Tehran’s request, he was pausing the threatened destruction of Iranian power plants for 10 days. Such messages suggested that Washington now saw diplomacy as a viable path forward. Yet even as he spoke of negotiations, Mr. Trump kept military pressure firmly on the table.

On April 1, he claimed that Iran’s new leadership had requested a ceasefire. Three days later, he issued another ultimatum, warning that time was running out. He didn’t stop there. On April 5, Easter Sunday, he posted: “Open the F***** Strait, you crazy bastards, or you’ll be living in Hell - JUST WATCH!”

For observers attempting to understand Washington’s strategy, the signals were increasingly difficult to decode. That uncertainty reached its peak on April 7.

Twists, turns in tone

In what would become one of the most extraordinary moments of the entire crisis, Mr. Trump posted: “A whole civilization will die tonight, never to be brought back again... We have Complete and Total Regime Change...” The statement sent shockwaves, but only for Mr. Trump to announce what he called a “double-sided CEASEFIRE” within hours.

The ceasefire, however, did not mean the pressure campaign had ended.

On April 11, Mr. Trump got back to issuing threats again. He warned Tehran against testing American patience and added that military options remained available if negotiations stalled. On April 12, he said “most points were agreed to, but the only point that really mattered, NUCLEAR, was not.” After talks in Islamabad failed to reach any breakthrough, Mr. Trump imposed a naval blockade on Iran, while holding on to the ceasefire.

By April 17, after he announced a ceasefire in Lebanon, Mr. Trump said in all capital letters: “The Strait of Hormuz is completely open and ready for business and full passage, but the naval blockade will remain in full force... until such time as our transaction with Iran is 100% complete.” But the ceasefire in Lebanon never held, with Israel continuing its strikes. And Iran held its tight control over the Strait. High tensions led to occasional military skirmishes over the strait.

Nevertheless, throughout April and May, negotiations accelerated. By late May, Mr. Trump suggested a deal was close. “It will only be a Great Deal for all or, no Deal at all.”

In early June, he “called off” another planned bombing of Iran to allow talks another chance. Negotiations had by then expanded beyond the immediate crisis and were focused on shipping access, the future of Iran’s nuclear programme, sanctions relief, energy security and long-term guarantees

regarding the Strait of Hormuz. By mid-June, Mr. Trump declared that a memorandum of understanding had been reached.

The agreement sought to end months of hostilities by ensuring freedom of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz, laying down a framework for addressing Iran’s nuclear programme through negotiations and creating a pathway for easing of sanctions in return for Iranian commitments.

“The Deal with the Islamic Republic of Iran is now complete. Congratulations to all! I hereby fully authorise the toll-free opening of the Strait of Hormuz, and, simultaneously herewith, authorise the immediate removal of the United States Naval blockade,” Mr. Trump posted on June 16. “Ships of the World, start your engines. Let the oil flow!”

While Mr. Trump hailed that the deal will bring “peace and security to the whole region”, one issue had quietly disappeared from Washington’s public messaging: regime change.

Mr. Trump began this crisis by encouraging Iranians to challenge their government, oversaw a military campaign that killed Iran’s Supreme Leader, repeatedly spoke of regime change and warned that “all Hell” could break loose.

Yet, he ended it by celebrating an agreement with the very Islamic Republic he once appeared determined to overthrow.

New Zealand internal report warns of Chinese military forays in Pacific

Agence France Presse
WELLINGTON

Chinese ballistic missile tests and naval forays will become a “persistent” feature of the Pacific as Beijing expands its security presence, New Zealand officials said in an internal document. The warning was issued in a December 2025 report by New Zealand’s Defence Force and Ministry of Foreign Affairs while they were monitoring a People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLA-N) flotilla in the Philippine Sea.

“New Zealand is in close contact with Australian counterparts and maintaining situational awareness of these vessels,” said the document obtained by AFP under freedom of information laws.



Strategic shifts: China has directed billions of dollars into defence in recent years, a trend that has unnerved some states. REUTERS

“More broadly we anticipate that Chinese actions, such as the PLA-N task group that transited the Tasman Sea in February and China’s launch of an inter-continental ballistic missile into the Pacific in September 2024, will be a persistent feature of our strategic environment.”

The 15-page report was

sent to the New Zealand Prime Minister and his Ministers for defence, foreign affairs and intelligence.

China has directed billions of dollars into defence in recent years, a trend that has unnerved some governments despite Beijing insisting its aims are peaceful. “China’s military development is for the

purpose of safeguarding national sovereignty, security and development interests, and is not directed against any country,” Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun told reporters.

The Navy in particular has expanded rapidly as Chinese leaders seek to grow their country’s reach in the Pacific, where the U.S. has long been the predominant military power.

Most of the report given to AFP was redacted, citing privacy, national security and confidentiality concerns. But in the remaining sections, officials said China’s February 2025 deployment to the Tasman Sea was conducted in accordance with international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Hostile homes



Malawian undocumented migrants, some with their hands marked to indicate their documents have been vetted, wait to board buses taking them back home, in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, on Friday. The country has seen intense anti-migrant demonstrations in recent weeks. AFP

Thai beer dynasty feud casts spotlight on controversial ‘ungrateful child’ law

Agence France Presse
BANGKOK

A bitter court case pitting members of one of Thailand’s wealthiest families against each other is raising questions over a century-old law reinforcing traditional values of obedience and hierarchy.

The measure, known as the “ungrateful child law”, is intended to protect parents from neglectful children.

It enables them to revoke gifts if their offspring are deemed ungrateful, physically abusive, neglectful in old age – or responsible for serious reputational harm.

Now, Siranudh “Psi” Scott, a fourth-generation member of the billionaire family behind Thailand’s Singha beer empire, is be-

ing sued by his own mother.

He triggered a firestorm of controversy in May with allegations that he had been sexually abused by his older brother and his babysitter. Mr. Siranudh’s mother argued that he damaged the family’s reputation, and is seeking to reclaim land worth millions of dollars gifted to him by his late grandfather.

‘Outdated view’

Mr. Siranudh said the law reflects an outdated view of family relationships.

“Looking at the fine print, this law is an attempt to kind of silence any damage done to a family name. Anything remotely damaging to the name is considered disobedient possibly by the law,” he told AFP.

“It has really no place in

a liberal society that places importance on the welfare of children,” he added.

The lawsuit is based on 1908 legislation that enshrines in law the central place of family in Thai society, where children are widely expected to repay their parents’ sacrifices through respect, obedience and material support.

“While the closest English translation would be ‘ingratitude’, the Thai term carries a much stronger moral meaning,” Jiraporn Laocharoenwong, an anthropology professor at Chulalongkorn University, told AFP.

“It refers not simply to failing to appreciate someone’s kindness, but to betraying or violating a relationship of care and obligation.” Mr. Siranudh’s



Siranudh “Psi” Scott, a fourth-generation member of the family behind Singha beer empire, is being sued by his own mother. AFP

mother, Chiranuj Bhirombhakdi, filed the lawsuit in February, prompting him to post his allegations on social media.

The court was seeking “an amicable resolution, with the ultimate goal of reuniting the family”, one of her legal representatives told reporters after a hearing. “The mother is experiencing significant stress,

as this case involves a person who she loves,” he added.

Lawyers told AFP most cases under the filial piety provision occur in wealthy families with substantial assets. Most are resolved through court-mediated negotiations rather than judicial rulings, according to Pimyaphat Jullaphan of the Thailand Lawyers Net-

work, a family lawyer of nearly two decades.

“The focus is on compromise to help repair family relationships, rather than having a judge declare a winner and a loser, which can leave permanent scars,” she said.

As a result, cases rarely reach the public eye. But one exception came in 2021, when an elderly couple who owned a petrol station outside Bangkok sued their son and his wife after being told to leave the family home. The court ruled in the parents’ favour.

A lawyer also warned a Thai actor this year that publicly admitting he was no longer in contact with his mother could expose him to a similar lawsuit.

“It’s often used when children fail to take care of

their parents, which is one of the highest values in Thai culture, and doesn’t always have a direct equivalent in the western societies,” said Pimyaphat.

Siranudh’s Bhirombhakdi family is listed as Thailand’s 15th richest by Forbes, which estimates their net worth at \$1.75 billion. He and his mother are due to appear in court on July 8 after two rounds of mediation failed to resolve the dispute.

Power to govern

The ungrateful child provision forms part of a broader legal framework that puts strong emphasis on preserving the family institution. Thai law also obliges parents to care for their offspring, but legal experts said avenues for children to seek redress against de-

linquent parents remain limited, except in criminal cases.

And a child suing a parent would be considered contrary to Thai custom.

“Rather than asking only whether a child has repaid a debt to their parents,” Ms. Jiraporn told AFP, the Bhirombhakdi case “invites us to consider the conditions under which that moral debt is created, challenged, or even broken”.

Mr. Siranudh told reporters that after he informed family members about the abuse he was told to remain silent to preserve the family’s reputation.

“Please take your money and power away,” he said after a court-mediated hearing in June, referring to his family. “Because my dignity can’t be bought.”

Upstaged, but not unseated – yet: George Russell’s succession struggle



GETTY IMAGES

The British driver has long been viewed as a potential F1 champion — and in a title-contending Mercedes, he thought his moment had arrived. But over the first seven races, he has been outshone by a challenger to his status as team leader: teen sensation Andrea Kimi Antonelli

S. Dipak Ragav

Since time immemorial, one of the key conflicts humanity has faced is the battle for succession. It can play out within kingdoms, corporate boardrooms and families. Sport is no exception to this phenomenon.

Generational showdowns

Across various sports, generational showdowns have produced countless iconic moments, which have emerged from interesting narrative arcs. Sometimes the presumptive successor takes over; sometimes a disruptor challenges the natural line of succession.

In the world of Formula One, Mercedes driver George Russell is currently involved in one such fight.

The British driver, who made his F1 debut in 2019, was marked out for great things at a young age. He won nearly every major category leading up to F1, with titles in F4, GP3 and F2.

His big moment came when he subbed for Lewis Hamilton in Bahrain in 2020 and was immediately faster than the other Mercedes driver, Valtteri Bottas. In 2022, Russell got his dream gig when he was selected to partner seven-time champion Hamilton at the Silver Arrows.

However, Mercedes, which had won the con-

Russell can take a lesson from Norris’ title-winning run last year, in which the latter was behind McLaren teammate Oscar Piastri until late in the season before turning the tables

structors’ title from 2014 to 2021, was dislodged from its perch in the sport’s ground-effect era (2022 to 2025) by Red Bull and then McLaren.

It meant Russell never had a chance to fight for the title and had to settle for the odd win on days when the Mercedes found its sweet spot in certain conditions and on specific track layouts.

But in the first three years, the 28-year-old did have the opportunity to go toe-to-toe with the sport’s most successful driver in Hamilton. It was here that Russell proved his worth as a potential champion, getting the better of his illustrious teammate in two out of their three seasons together. In 2024, Russell out-qualified Hamilton 19-5, underlining his searing pace.

After Hamilton joined Ferrari in 2025, Russell became the natural team leader. So when Mercedes hit the ground running this season under F1’s new rules, which introduced a novel engine concept with increased electrification, the expectation was that Russell would lead the team’s title charge.

And it appeared everything was falling into place for Russell after the first race in Melbourne, which he dominated from pole. However, since then, things haven’t gone to plan for the Briton, who has seen a challenge emerge from the other side of his garage.

Andrea Kimi Antonelli, who joined Mercedes last year, is viewed as a generational talent by team boss Toto Wolff, who backed the Italian to step into Hamilton’s shoes at 18. In his rookie season, though, Antonelli had a baptism of fire in a tricky car and was comprehensively beaten.

Russell would have fancied his chances in a championship-winning car this season even as the teenager – highly rated as he may be – found his footing in the big league.

Unfortunately for Russell, he is staring at a sit-

Deep inside, Russell will have the unsettling feeling of knowing that the thing he has worked for all his life, which seemed near, is slipping away from him at a critical juncture

uation he would seldom have imagined after the Australian GP.

The early part of 2026 shows how much luck can influence matters, and how things can spiral out of control.

Russell is yet to step onto the top step of the podium after Melbourne, while his teammate went on a five-race winning streak. The result: Russell is now 50 points behind Antonelli and third in the standings behind even Hamilton, who won his first race for Ferrari in Barcelona.

Slippery slope

Things started going downhill for Russell in the second race in China where a technical issue compromised his qualifying. Though he recovered to qualify second, he got mugged at the start by the Ferraris and had to fight his way back to second, allowing his colleague to take his maiden win. In Japan, a Safety Car intervention led to him being jumped by Antonelli.

It was the start of a difficult run, and over the next three rounds, Russell was comprehensively

beaten in two – Miami and Monaco – while in between, in Montreal, he suffered a costly retirement due to engine trouble.

Although Russell trimmed his deficit in Barcelona, finishing second while Antonelli retired, the way the weekend unfolded was a source of more concern. Russell had the measure of the 19-year-old for most of the weekend, but the Bologna native slowly kept improving. By the time Antonelli retired, he had surpassed Russell on track with a fine overtaking manoeuvre.

Russell’s strength has been his one-lap pace, but so far this year, he trails 3-4 in qualifying. While a large part of the points difference is down to factors beyond his control, the recent dip in performance is the more alarming sign.

One reason the driver has identified is that his driving style is affecting the tyres.

“The difference is how we’re driving has such an impact on the tyres. He’s just getting the tyres in a nicer window than me, a nicer balance over the course of a lap, and the pace is just coming easier for him. I’m not sure why that is. I’ve been driving in this manner my whole career, and now, for whatever reason, it’s not working with this car,” Russell remarked recently.

He seemed perplexed that what worked in the first few rounds is now hurting him. At the same time, it could also be that he is over-driving to reassert his authority.

Known for his sophisticated and quintessentially British vocabulary, he has even resorted to mind games, tempering expectations by saying the title race is his rival’s to lose despite nearly two-thirds of the season remaining.

But deep inside, Russell will have the unsettling feeling of knowing that the thing he has worked for all his life, which seemed near, is slipping away from him at a critical juncture.

While he has experience on his side, it is no secret that over the last two years, his drive has been under threat from Max Verstappen, whom Wolff has courted for over a decade. In fact, the idea of promoting Kimi very early was driven by the fact that the Mercedes boss did not want to repeat the mistake he made by failing to sign Verstappen straightaway in 2014.

Considering his compatriot Lando Norris, whom he beat for the F2 title in 2018, is already a world champion, Russell would want to make full use of this opportunity. In F1, you never know when the next chance will present itself.

Crucial period

The races leading into August’s summer break could well prove crucial. Russell can ill-afford any more slips with Ferrari and McLaren mixing it up at the front with Mercedes.

In fact, he can take a lesson from Norris’ title-winning run last year, in which the latter was behind McLaren teammate Oscar Piastri until late in the season before turning the tables in the final stretch. Fortunately for Russell, he has more time to get things back on track. And it is often how one responds under pressure that determines how good one is. Can Russell show that he is a worthy successor to the line of Mercedes champions?



STACKING UP



ATP Men’s Top 15

#	Player	Age	Points	Events
1	Jannik Sinner	24	13,450	18
2	Carlos Alcaraz	23	9,460	17
3	Alexander Zverev	29	7,190	20
4	Felix Auger-Aliassime	25	4,440	24
5	Ben Shelton	23	4,160	23
6	Alex de Minaur	27	4,110	24
7	Taylor Fritz	28	3,915	23
8	Novak Djokovic	39	3,760	16
9	Daniil Medvedev	30	3,580	24
10	Flavio Cobolli	24	3,460	27
11	Alexander Bublik	29	2,620	26
12	Casper Ruud	27	2,425	22
13	Andrey Rublev	28	2,420	23
14	Jiri Lehecka	24	2,360	21
15	Lorenzo Musetti	24	2,325	22

Top Indians ▶



Sumit Nagal
Rank 285 ▼ 2 spots



Manas Dhamne
Rank 382 ▼ 4 spots



F1 Drivers’ standings

#	Driver	Team	Points	Wins
1	A.K. Antonelli	Mercedes	156	5
2	L. Hamilton	Ferrari	115	1
3	G. Russell	Mercedes	106	1
4	C. Leclerc	Ferrari	75	0
5	L. Norris	McLaren	73	0
6	O. Piastri	McLaren	68	0
7	M. Verstappen	Red Bull	55	0
8	P. Gasly	Alpine	41	0
9	I. Hadjar	Red Bull	34	0
10	L. Lawson	RB	28	0
11	O. Bearman	Haas	18	0
12	F. Colapinto	Alpine	16	0
13	A. Lindblad	RB	13	0
14	C. Sainz	Williams	6	0
15	A. Albon	Williams	5	0
16	E. Ocon	Haas	3	0
17	G. Bortoleto	Audi	2	0
18	F. Alonso	Aston Martin	1	0
19	N. Hulkenberg	Audi	0	0
20	V. Bottas	Cadillac	0	0
21	S. Perez	Cadillac	0	0
22	L. Stroll	Aston Martin	0	0



A.K. Antonelli



L. Hamilton

F1 Constructors’ standings

Pos	Team	Points	Wins
1	Mercedes	262	6
2	Ferrari	190	1
3	McLaren	141	0
4	Red Bull	89	0
5	Alpine	57	0
6	RB	41	0
7	Haas	21	0
8	Williams	11	0
9	Audi	2	0
10	Aston Martin	1	0
11	Cadillac	0	0



Badminton Men’s ranking

#	Player	Points	Events
1	Shi Yu Qi	1,05,305	12
2	Kunlavut Vitidsarn	92,565	16
3	Anders Antonsen	91,155	17
4	Jonatan Christie	88,431	17
5	Christo Popov	84,682	20
6	Chou Tien Chen	80,280	27
7	Alex Lanier	74,525	17
8	Li Shi Feng	73,083	16
9	Victor Lai	72,915	21
10	Alwi Farhan	70,369	19
11	Kodai Naraoka	68,020	21
12	Lin Chun-Yi	66,594	18
13	Loh Kean Yew	65,700	18
14	Lakshya Sen	65,213	22
15	Weng Hong Yang	59,341	17

Top Indians ▶



Lakshya Sen
Rank 14



Ayush Shetty
Rank 21



Test Batting

#	Player	Rating	Career best
1	Joe Root	871	932
2	Harry Brook	866	898
3	Travis Head	853	884
4	Steve Smith	831	947
5	Kamindu Mendis	781	784
6	Temba Bavuma	775	806
7	Shubman Gill	743	807
8	Yashasvi Jaiswal	733	858
9	Dinesh Chandimal	717	755
10	Rachin Ravindra	715	737

Test Bowling

#	Player	Rating	Career best
1	Jasprit Bumrah	870	908
2	Matt Henry	870	870
3	Mitchell Starc	838	852
4	Pat Cummins	832	914
5	Marco Jansen	825	825
6	Scott Boland	820	820
7	Noman Ali	817	853
8	Kagiso Rabada	807	902
9	Josh Hazlewood	775	864
10	Nathan Lyon	753	812

ODI Batting

#	Player	Rating	Career best
1	Daryl Mitchell	815	840
2	Shubman Gill	791	841
3	Virat Kohli	768	908
4	Rohit Sharma	754	879
5	Ibrahim Zadran	712	756
6	Babar Azam	689	894
7	Shai Hope	683	782
8	Harry Tector	679	730
9	Charith Asalanka	659	705
10	Harry Brook	656	656

ODI Bowling

#	Player	Rating	Career best
1	Rashid Khan	682	775
2	Abrar Ahmed	675	675
3	Jofra Archer	649	682
4	Keshav Maharaj	645	737
5	Maheesh Theekshana	641	680
6	Adil Rashid	629	671
7	Kuldeep Yadav	614	757
8	Mehidy Hasan	604	722
8	Shaheen Afridi	604	691
10	Mitchell Santner	599	656

T20I Batting

#	Player	Rating	Career best
1	Abhishek Sharma	875	931
2	Ishan Kishan	871	871
3	Sahibzada Farhan	848	848
4	Phil Salt	792	881
5	Pathum Nissanka	751	796
6	Tilak Varma	742	845
7	Suryakumar Yadav	722	912
8	Jos Buttler	716	794
9	Mitchell Marsh	706	706
10	Dewald Brevis	702	738

T20I Bowling

#	Player	Rating	Career best
1	Rashid Khan	753	828
2	Varun Chakaravarthy	740	818
3	Abrar Ahmed	736	757
4	Adil Rashid	721	747
5	Jasprit Bumrah	702	783
6	Adam Zampa	700	746
7	Nathan Ellis	675	678
8	Corbin Bosch	669	745
9	Wanindu Hasaranga	668	809
10	Mujeeb Ur Rahman	663	757



P.V. Sindhu
Rank 10



Unnati Hooda
Rank 24

Top Indians ▶



Sahaja Yamalapalli
Rank 328 ▲ 4 spots



Vaishnavi Adkar
Rank 399 ▼ 3 spots

Dennis Amiss has had a significant influence on cricket's evolution, going where no man had gone before in ODIs and mainstreaming protective headgear. The 83-year-old Englishman talks about living through a game-changing era, appreciating modern cricket, making big hundreds, and being tempted to return when he first wielded a modern bat

Dennis Amiss

Dennis Amiss scored the first ODI hundred in history. He introduced the helmet to cricket. And he had a penchant for turning his hundreds into bigger hundreds (of his 11 Test centuries, eight went past 150). Excerpts from an exclusive interview Amiss gave *The Hindu* at the Edgbaston Golf Club in Birmingham:

I first mentioned it to Tony Greig and said, 'Look, you know, we are going to Australia, for Kerry Packer's World Series Cricket. There are 16 bowlers who can all bowl at 90 miles an hour. Having been there with Lillee and Thomson, I think we need a bit of protection. I am at a helmet place at the moment. They might be able to provide us with helmets.' I don't remember how I came to

I was just tooting around and I saw this [motorcycle] helmet place. I told Tony Greig, 'There are 16 bowlers who can bowl at 90 miles an hour [in the Packer series]. We need a bit of protection

be there. But I suddenly thought, my gosh, helmets for cricket!

Well, Mike Brearley had his skullcap. But nobody wore a helmet.

Yes, I was just tooting around and I saw this helmet place. I went in and inquired. And they said they couldn't specifically make them for cricket, but what they could do, they might adapt what they have got. So, I told Tony and he said he would have a word with Kerry Packer. He had a word with Kerry and Kerry said, 'Bring it on'. He said, 'The more innovation, the better. We are going to play white ball cricket, we are going to play floodlit cricket, we are going to have coloured clothing. Why not helmets?'

So I took three helmets out, one of which I wore and Tony had the other one. And then David Hooke got his jaw broken trying to hook Andy Roberts at Sydney. There were so many fast bowlers. Michael Holding, Andy Roberts, Garth

Le Roux... Holding was the fastest, when he got his rhythm right.

I never thought it would take off in this country, but suddenly it did. And I was just amazed. And then we brought the grill out. And so, yeah, it was something I started. It is just amazing how it has all taken off and especially in this country which is very traditional.

Yes, we were facing defeat and we had lost the first Test in Trinidad. So, it was important, really important that we save that one and keep the series alive. We battled through and it was a really good wicket. And I suppose that Keith Boyce was slippery for the first few overs, as quick as anybody. So it was a matter of trying to see Boyce off and then they had Bernard Julien who was a good bowler, and of course Lance Gibbs and Gary Sobers.

I was coming back after being left out and hit on the head early in the series. There were no helmets then. So I ducked into one at Lord's. But anyway, I changed my stance. I went and did a little bit back and across, which Kenny Barrington had done successfully all his career, and that helped me. We had beautiful sunshine and there were good wickets. My coach, Tiger Smith, always said to me, 'Dennis, you will get noughts, lots of low scores, but when

I love short-form cricket. I am fine with all these innovative shots. What does concern me is the short boundaries. These days, with the bats, the ball springs off

you get in, you get 100. Take your guard again and get 150. When you get 150, take your guard again and get 200. And when you get 200 and so on.'

Well, we were on the [1972-73] tour of India with Tony Lewis, and you had the four spinners – Bedi, B. Chandrasekhar, Erapalli Prasanna, Venkatraghavan. And the wickets turned, and we had not come across wickets like that against such great bowlers.

And, you know, it gets in your mind, how do you play them and that sort of thing. We were going to Pakistan afterwards, after the tour. And I was left out for the last Test. Bishan came to me and he said, 'Why were you not batting well? At the beginning of the season, we thought you would be the main batter.' And I said, 'Well, you know, you bowl well at me and you have got me out. The only thing is I can't practise because the nets are in the middle.' He said, 'I will tell you what to do. Leave it with me. And he came back later and said, 'We have to get the net up after the match, tell the players to go home. You put your pads on. Pras, Venkat, and I will bowl at you, but not Chandrasekhar.'

And we played a match. 'Okay, that's two runs. Okay, that's one run. Four. Really good shot. Four. You would have been out there. I think we would have got you out there. So, you are one wicket down. One for 20.' That just gave me confidence. I went to Pakistan. It was very kind of Bish. And I think that he was chastised for that.

It was. It was a difficult time because the Warwickshire committee were entrenched in the England and Wales Cricket Board in London. They took a tough stand. It was only Packer saying that in the end, he would settle his disagreements with Australian cricket. Therefore, Test match cricket could resume, as long as all his players he had signed got a contract with their counties.

And of course, Warwickshire wouldn't give me a contract. So Richie Benaud, who was his number one on cricket, was in touch with Jack Bannister, who was chairman of the Professional Cricket Association and a Warwickshire player. They said Dennis has got to have a contract. Otherwise, Kerry Packer doesn't make the deal. So I was the last one to sign.

I think it is wonderful. I love short-form cricket. We played 40 overs.

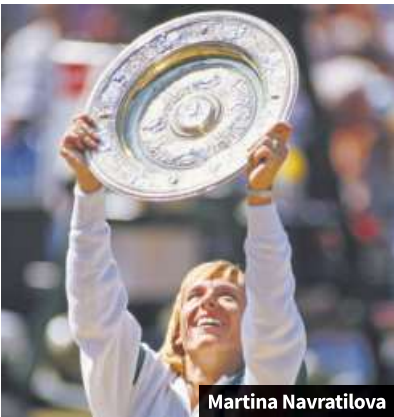
Yes. And we had players like Mushtaq and Hanif Mohammad playing the reverse sweep, before Mike Gatting. I am fine with all these innovative shots. What does concern me is the short boundaries. These days, with the bats, the new bats, the ball springs off. Ian Bell and Jonathan Trott lent me their bats, just to have a little knock in the nets. And I said, my gosh, I would like to make a comeback.

GETTY IMAGES

Wimbledon's greatest champions: **supreme on grass**

Novak Djokovic will be looking to equal Roger Federer's men's record of eight Wimbledon singles titles when the 2026 Championships begin on Monday. The 39-year-old hasn't tasted success at the grass Major since 2022, but has made two finals and a semifinal during this period. We look at the players who have won the most singles titles at Wimbledon. The first men's edition was played in 1877, the first women's event seven years later.

MOST WOMEN'S TITLES		
Player	Titles	Years
Martina Navratilova	9	1978, 1979, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1990
Helen Wills Moody	8	1927, 1928, 1929, 1930, 1932, 1933, 1935, 1938
Dorothea Lambert Chambers	7	1903, 1904, 1906, 1910, 1911, 1913, 1914
Steffi Graf	7	1988, 1989, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1995, 1996
Serena Williams	7	2002, 2003, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2015, 2016
Blanche Bingley	6	1886, 1889, 1894, 1897, 1899, 1900
Suzanne Lenglen	6	1919, 1920, 1921, 1922, 1923, 1925
Billie Jean King	6	1966, 1967, 1968, 1972, 1973, 1975
Charlotte Cooper Sterry	5	1895, 1896, 1898, 1901, 1908
Lottie Dod	5	1887, 1888, 1891, 1892, 1893
Venus Williams	5	2000, 2001, 2005, 2007, 2008
Louise Brough	4	1948, 1949, 1950, 1955
MOST MEN'S TITLES		
Player	Titles	Years
Roger Federer	8	2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2017
William Renshaw	7	1881, 1882, 1883, 1884, 1885, 1886, 1889
Pete Sampras	7	1993, 1994, 1995, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000
Novak Djokovic	7	2011, 2014, 2015, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022
Laurence Doherty	5	1902, 1903, 1904, 1905, 1906
Bjorn Borg	5	1976, 1977, 1978, 1979, 1980
Reginald Doherty	4	1897, 1898, 1899, 1900
Anthony Wilding	4	1910, 1911, 1912, 1913
Rod Laver	4	1961, 1962, 1968, 1969



Martina Navratilova

**Helen Wills**

Roger Federer

SOURCE: WIMBLEDON

A wide-angle photograph of a golf course during a major tournament. In the foreground, a large, dense crowd of spectators is gathered on a grassy slope overlooking a green. A golfer in a white shirt and dark pants is visible on the green, preparing for a shot. To the left, another golfer and a caddy are standing near a sand trap. The background features a large, two-story clubhouse with a prominent chimney and a covered porch. Several flags are flying on poles to the left of the clubhouse. The sky is clear and blue.

Shinnecock Hills is one of those golf courses that defy conquests — it simply doesn't want you to win.

The venue for the 2026 US Open, Shinnecock evokes awe among experts, players and golf historians, who look at it

as a timeless, albeit punishing, masterpiece.

This year's edition, won by Wyndham Clark with a score of four-under, featured just three players who finished under par. On the last two occasions the US Open was hosted by Shinnecock, only two players finished under par across both tournaments.

Just why is the links course such a challenge?

Set on sprawling open terrain, lashed by coastal gusts, it is shaped like a vortex that directs golfers into a path of constant wind direction changes as they navigate the holes.

According to those who have played there, Shinne-

cock's fairways create optical illusions off the tee, the canted greens are designed to keep the ball from the putting surfaces and the bunkers are downright malicious.

In addition to taming the course last weekend, Clark also had to master his nerves and overcome a hostile crowd to triumph.