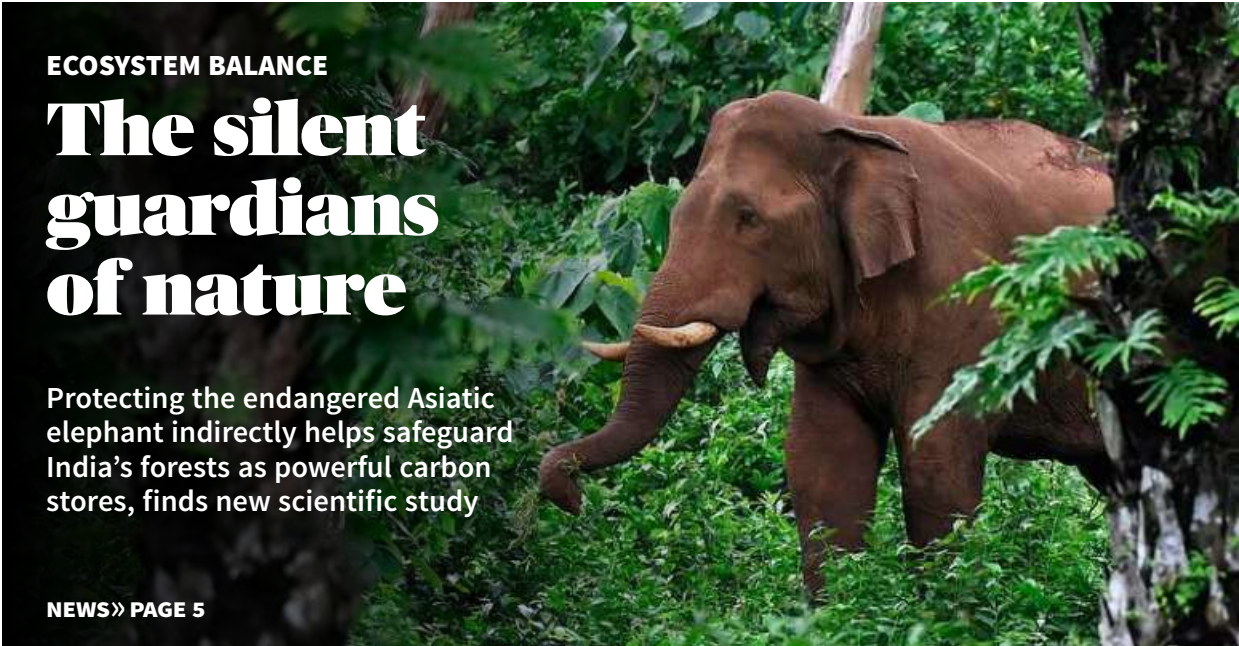


ECOSYSTEM BALANCE

The silent guardians of nature

Protecting the endangered Asiatic elephant indirectly helps safeguard India's forests as powerful carbon stores, finds new scientific study

NEWS» PAGE 5



INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

COPYRIGHT PATENTS

Fake patents poisoning India's race for academic excellence

SCIENCE » PAGE 10



What does the FCRA amendment mean for NGOs?

FAQ » PAGE 8



India meets Australia, needs a win to make it to the semifinal

SPORT » PAGE 13



INSIDE



Maharashtra TET postponed over 'paper leak'

MUMBAI
The Maharashtra government on Saturday postponed the Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) 2026 over allegations of a "paper leak". Around six lakh candidates were expected to appear for the exam scheduled on Sunday. » PAGE 3

Explosion, gunfire rock Karachi; 3 personnel killed

KARACHI
At least three paramilitary soldiers were killed on Saturday after militants rammed an explosives-laden vehicle into the provincial headquarters of the paramilitary Pakistan Rangers. » PAGE 12

SIR in Delhi and four States to begin on June 30

NEW DELHI
The enumeration phase for the SIR of electoral rolls in Karnataka, Meghalaya, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, and Delhi is set to begin from June 30. The final list will be out on October 7. » PAGE 3

Shah attacks cab aggregators for 'unfair' model

NEW DELHI
Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday launched a sharp attack on private app-based cab aggregators such as Uber and Ola, alleging that their business model exploits drivers and commuters. » PAGE 5

Ram Temple Trust general secretary resigns

Member Anil Mishra also submits resignation; Trust promises fair investigation into incident

Trust assures devotees that their offerings are safe, reiterates that the guilty will be punished

Congress demands the arrest of Champat Rai and alleges that the State government is shielding him

Mayank Kumar
LUCKNOW

Amid the uproar over the Ram Temple donation embezzlement case, the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust on Saturday announced that its general secretary Champat Rai and member Anil Mishra had submitted their resignations. "At its next meeting, the trust will take a decision on their resignations," Trust treasurer Govind Dev Giri said in a statement on Saturday. The statement comes a day after the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) denied reports of Mr. Rai's resignation.

Mr. Rai is also the vice-president of the VHP. In its first public statement amid the controversy, the Trust, which administers the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, said it would ensure a fair investigation into the incident. "We are deeply pained, shocked, and extremely saddened by the incidents that have come to light in recent days at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya. As agents of all Ram devotees and Ram sevaks serving the lord, we are committed to ensuring a fair investigation and restoring the confidence of devotees," the statement added. Mr. Rai and other Trust members are facing criticism over the donation theft case in which eight people have been arrested on charges of embezzlement, criminal conspiracy, fraud and breach of trust. In the statement, the Trust said silver bricks, jewellery, and other offerings that the devotees had personally handed over to its officials are "safe and fully accounted for".

"Truth will come out" "As regards the alleged embezzlement of money from the temple's donation boxes, an FIR has been filed, based on the interim report submitted by the Special Investigation Team (SIT). Legal proceedings are under way, truth will



The Ram temple Trust general secretary, Champat Rai, and other members are facing criticism over an embezzlement case. PTI

come out and the guilty will be punished," reads the statement. However, the war of words over the episode intensified on Saturday, with the Samajwadi Party (SP)

president Akhilesh Yadav vowing to "restore and nurture the eternal glory of Ayodhya as a centre of faith and devotion". He claimed that a new SP-led Uttar Pradesh go-

vernment will develop 'Ayodhya' as a unique and exemplary religious city, where devotees will experience true spirituality. Congress leaders continued to demand the arrest of Mr. Rai and alleged that the government was shielding him. "Champat Rai is a small fish of the whole nexus, the real thieves are sitting in Delhi. The whole BJP-RSS ecosystem stole money from common devotees and used it to generate hate in society against marginalised sections," senior U.P. Congress leader Anil Yadav said. It was on June 25 that the Ayodhya police registered a first information re-

port (FIR) in the case, on the basis of a petition from the Trust. Eight accused were booked on charges of embezzlement, criminal conspiracy, fraud and breach of Trust under sections 305, 306, 317, 317 (5), 61 and 3(5) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). All the eight - Avinash Shukla, Anukalp Mishra, Luvkush Mishra, Manish Kumar Yadav, Karunesh Pandey Rama Shankar Mishra, Subhash Srivastava, Rama Shankar Yadav alias Tinnu - were arrested the same day and sent to judicial custody for three days till June 29.

DISSOLUTION DEMAND » PAGE 4

Two BJP-ruled States question VB-G RAM G financial burden

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

At least three States, two of them with BJP-led governments, have raised concerns over the increased financial burden on them under the new rural employment programme, the Viksit Bharat-Guaranteee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G), which comes into effect on July 1. Under the scheme, a majority of the States have to bear 40% of the total expenditure, in contrast to its predecessor legislation, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). Under MGNREGA, the Centre bore 100% of the wage bill and the States had to pay only a part of the material bill, which accounted for only 10% of the total budget.

Budget concern		
States are required to bear 40% of the total expenditure under the VB-G RAM G scheme		
	Current share*	For 125 days of work
Bihar	₹4,477 cr.	₹15,939 cr.
M.P.	₹4,168 cr.	₹20,037 cr.
Jharkhand	₹1,804 cr.	₹9,293 cr.
The new scheme is set to come into effect on July 1		
*As per interim fund allocation		

As per a Right to Information (RTI) reply, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh - both ruled by the BJP - and Jharkhand have explicitly asked for a reconsideration of the funding pattern with analysis showing that the 40% share of interim allocation under the scheme will be inadequate to keep the promise of 125 work days. The Union Rural Development Ministry shared this information on a RTI

application filed by Chakradhar Buddha of the National Campaign for People's Right to Information (NCPRI). Mr. Buddha had asked for records relating to meetings and consultations organised by the Centre with the States regarding VB-G RAM G. Early clearance of dues In its reply, the government shared responses of only 13 States. Of them, almost all States had pointed to delays in wage and related payments, seeking early clearance of dues. Even States such as Sikkim and Uttarakhand, which fall under the 90:10 Centre-State sharing pattern [applicable to the northeastern and Himalayan States], had sought a review of the clause. STATES SEEK REVIEW » PAGE 4

Iran accuses U.S. of violating peace agreement; both sides exchange fire

Agence France-Presse
TEHRAN

Iran on Saturday accused the U.S. of violating their deal to end the war, after Washington launched strikes on Iranian territory and Tehran responded with attacks on U.S. targets in the Gulf. The trading of fire, which came after Washington accused Tehran of attacking a cargo ship in the Strait of Hormuz, raised doubts about efforts to keep the crucial waterway open while both sides negotiate a final deal. U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) said the latest American strikes, which targeted Iranian missile and drone storage sites and coastal radar positions, were a response to "unwarranted aggression against commercial shipping by Iranian forces" that "clearly violated the cease-



Vessels seen in the Strait of Hormuz near Bandar Abbas in Iran following the signing of the deal with U.S. to end the war. REUTERS

fire". It described the latest strikes as "a powerful response" to the "attack on a commercial ship that was transiting the Strait of Hormuz". "Violence will be met with violence" if Iran carries out any further attacks, U.S. Vice-President J.D. Vance said. Iran said "these brutal attacks... are a blatant violation" of the deal to end the war, which began with U.S.-Israeli strikes on Iran

in late February. Its Revolutionary Guards said they had struck U.S. sites in the Gulf region and that "if the aggression is repeated, our response will be broader". Strikes in Bahrain Bahrain said it was targeted by several Iranian drones early on Saturday and accused Tehran of "sabotaging peace efforts". Also on Saturday, British maritime security agency UKMTO said an "unidenti-

fied projectile" damaged an oil tanker in the strait. On the U.S. strikes, Iranian media reported an explosion at a pier in the southern city of Sirik late on Friday. It quoted a military source saying a "projectile impact" caused the blast. "Sirik Port is operating normally," Mehr news agency later said. U.S. President Donald Trump had earlier denounced what he described as an Iranian drone strike on the vessel as "a foolish violation of our ceasefire agreement". Iran has warned vessels not to enter or leave the Gulf through the strait without permission, but ships have continued to move, some using a route not authorised by Tehran. A SHIPWRECKED HEGEMON » PAGE 9 'GRAVE BLUNDER' » PAGE 12

Screenplay maestro and everyday hero of Tamil cinema takes his last bow

B. Kolappan
CHENNAI

Renowned Tamil actor, director, writer, and screenwriter K. Bhagyaraj, whose mastery over screenplay was widely acknowledged and who created a storytelling formula that has influenced generations of filmmakers, died on Saturday. He was 73. Sources said he suffered a massive heart attack. Speaking at his residence, actor Suhasini Maniratnam said Bhagyaraj had returned to Chennai on Friday night after attending actor Khushboo's daughter's wedding in Goa. On Saturday morning,

he went for a walk with his wife Poornima, but complained of chest pain on his return home. He was rushed to Apollo Hospital and efforts were made to resuscitate him, but they proved futile. Bhagyaraj directed, produced and starred in numerous hit films celebrated for their engaging storylines, memorable songs, and relatable characters. *Mounageethangal*, *Anthu Ezhu Naatkal*, and *Munthanai Mudichu* are some of his films being studied even today. Nearly every film of Bhagyaraj spoke loudly about an idea which found an echo within Tamil society.

An assistant of Bharathiraja, who also died recently, he forever changed the perception of the Tamil film hero by proving wit, intelligence, and ordinariness could be as compelling as physical prowess and a striking presence. He combined qualities of a hero and a comedian, making his bespectacled appearances as hero both entertaining and deeply human. His idea of a hero was not even the man next door, but one among the many on the streets. He also tried his hand at politics, being an ardent fan of M.G. Ramachandran, though he was not very successful in this



K. BHAGYARAJ (1953-2026)

sphere. He edited the Tamil weekly magazine *Bhagya* and authored several novels as well. His funeral will be held on Sunday afternoon at the Besant Nagar Crematorium with State honours.

He began working in the film industry in the mid-1970s as an assistant director under Bharathiraja, working in iconic films such as *16 Vayathinilale*, *Kizhakke Pogum Rail*, and *Sigappu Rojakkal*. He

developed his skills as a dialogue and screenplay writer. Prolific career His debut as a hero was in the movie *Pudhiya Vaarpugal*, co-starring Rati Agnihotri, and his directorial debut was with the film *Suvarillatha Chithirangal*. In 1981, he married co-star Praveena, but she died in 1983. The next year, he married Poornima, his co-star from movie *Darling*, *Darling*, *Darling*. He has directed 27 feature films across the Tamil and Hindi languages. When the hit Tamil film *Oru Kaidhiyin Diary* (1985) - originally directed by Bharathiraja

and starring Kamal Haasan - was remade in Hindi as *Aakhree Raasta* (1986), Bhagyaraj was roped in as the director. Following this success, Bhagyaraj went on to direct *Mr. Bechara* (1996), the Hindi remake of his own hit Tamil directorial venture, *Veetla Visheshanga* (1994), casting Anil Kapoor and Sridevi in the lead roles. He later helmed *Papa the Great* (2000), a Hindi remake of his 1998 Tamil film *Vettiya Madichu Kattu*, starring Krishan Kumar and Nagma. However, this particular venture failed to make a mark at the box office.

In the subsequent phase of his directorial career, the only film that stood out was *Chokka Thangam*. Beyond his work behind the camera, Bhagyaraj has had a prolific acting career, appearing in over 80 films across Tamil and other regional languages. Demonstrating his versatility, he also composed the music for five films. His corneas were donated to an eyebank in Chennai. (With inputs from K. Muralidharan and Ramya Kannan) RELATED REPORTS ON » PAGE 16

INBRIEF



Bhadrachalam temple redevelopment work begins

The much-awaited redevelopment works at the renowned Sree Seetha Ramachandra Swamy temple in the temple town of Bhadrachalam in Telangana commenced on Saturday, marking the start of the Phase-I works. In March this year, the State government accorded administrative sanction for ₹351 crore for the redevelopment and rejuvenation of the historic 17th-century temple in Bhadrachalam. A comprehensive master plan has been approved in three phases.

Five youth fined in Munnar for reckless driving; car seized

Five youth were spotted hanging out of the windows and the sunroof of a moving car along the Gap Road stretch of the Munnar-Bodimettu highway on Saturday. Upon noticing the dangerous behaviour, Munnar Dy.SP S. Chandrakumar intercepted the vehicle and had it moved to the Munnar police station. Mr. Chandrakumar stated that fine was imposed on the offenders and an awareness class will be conducted for them.

There are no grounds to book actor Tiny Tom: Kerala Police

The Kerala Police have decided not to register a case over a complaint filed by actor Anisiba Hassan against fellow actor Tiny Tom, accusing him of making communal and defamatory remarks against her. In a report submitted to the Assistant Commissioner of Police, Ernakulam Central, the station house officer of the Kadavanthra police station stated that the investigators could not find solid grounds to register a FIR after a preliminary investigation.

Tax rates on low-alcohol liquor to be included in Finance Bill

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Amid the political row over lowering the sales tax on low-alcoholic beverages in Kerala, the revised tax rates have been included in the Finance (No. 3) Bill, 2026, which will be introduced in the Legislative Assembly on July 1. Section 3 of the Bill says the words ‘low-alcoholic beverages’ is to be inserted after ‘horti-wine’ in the Kerala General Sales Tax Act, 1963.

The rates have been pegged at 120% and 175% respectively for alcoholic beverages with alcohol strength ranging from 0.5% v/v (volume by volume) to 10% v/v, and those with strength above 10% v/v and up to 20% v/v. These were the rates announced by Chief Minister V.D. Satheesan in the Revised Budget. At the same time, the specific amendment will not come into force immediately even if the Bill gets passed. The Bill notes that it will come into force when the government notifies it in the official gazette. The announcement sparked a major political storm, with the Opposition Left Democratic Front (LDF) alleging that it promotes alcohol addiction. Mr. Satheesan had informed the Assembly on Wednesday that a final decision rests with the UDF. Mr. Satheesan had also pointed out that low-alcohol beverages as a new category was notified by the LDF government as part of its 2022-23 liquor policy.

SIT set to submit Sabarimala case report to HC tomorrow

Probe team questions key accused Unnikrishnan Potti again; it looks at board's decision to resend temple's gold-plated copper panels to a firm in Chennai, though they were refurbished in 2016

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Kerala High Court-appointed Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing the Sabarimala gold theft case has reportedly questioned Unnikrishnan Potti, the prime accused, again, ostensibly to tie up any possible loose ends concerning the previous Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB)'s decision to re-send the temple's gold-plated copper panels to Smart Creations, a metal works factory in Chennai, for electroplating in 2025.



Probe on: The SIT is probing whether fake defects were cited to send the panels at the Ayyappa temple for replating. LEJU KAMAL

The SIT is scheduled to submit its latest report in the case to the High Court on Monday. According to officials privy to the investigation, the SIT was reportedly

probing whether the previous TDB administration under the LDF government had cited non-existent defects to dispatch the gold-plated copper panels covering the Dwarapalaka

statues to Smart Creations for replating to facilitate the suspected pilferage of gold through an in-house chemical process. They noted that SIT officials were sceptical of the decision's authenticity, given that the TDB had sent the same gold-plated copper panels to Smart Creations in 2019 for repair and refurbishment. The firm then issued a warranty, guaranteeing that the panels would retain their golden sheen for at least 40 years. The firm also promised to repair or replace the panels free of charge if the warranty failed.

Farmers block entry of YSRCP leaders in Amaravati

V. Raghavendra
VIJAYAWADA

Tension flared up in Amaravati, Andhra Pradesh, as a large number of farmers blocked the entry of YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) leaders, including Perni Venkataramaiah, Ambati Rambabu, Lella Appi Reddy and Devineni Avinash, into Undavalli, Penumaka and other villages on Saturday.

The YSRCP leaders, under the banner of the CRDA Rythu Parirakshana Committee, wanted to visit the villages to highlight the injustices allegedly meted out to the farmers who have parted with their land

for the construction of Amaravati. Several farmers blocked the entry of the YSRCP leaders into their villages, strongly objecting to the latter's claim of fighting on their behalf. The farmers insisted that the YSRCP leaders had no right to visit Amaravati, accusing them of creating unrest for political gains.

They eventually left as the farmers refused to let them inspect the lands. The farmers stated that YSRCP president Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's new proposal to develop 'Mavigun' (Machilipatnam, Vijayawada and Guntur) region as the capital of the State reflected his reluctance to ac-



YSRCP leaders and farmers exchanging heated arguments at Undavalli in the capital region of Amaravati on Saturday. THE HINDU

cept Amaravati as the capital, therefore, the YSRCP leaders have no moral ground to visit the capital region. As tempers raged, both

sides came to blows even as the police tried to pacify Mr. Venkataramaiah and others when the situation became tense due to stone-pelting, in which a consta-

ED attack case: plea in HC to cancel bail

The Hindu Bureau
KOCHI

The Directorate of Enforcement (ED) has moved the Kerala High Court seeking the cancellation of bail granted to Harish Kumar, the ninth accused in the attack on Enforcement Directorate officials, during the raid on former Chief Minister of Kerala Pinarayi Vijayan's residence in May. The bail was granted by the Thiruvananthapuram Sessions Court on June 24. The ED expressed apprehension that the prosecutor of the Sessions Court may have misinformed the court when the bail plea was considered, which resulted in the court granting him bail. The agency suspects that there

could be other leaders who have called for the alleged attack, and they have not been investigated. The court will consider the petition shortly. Further, the ED argued that the Supreme Court has condemned ‘mob’ attacks against judicial officers. The sessions court should have denied the bail to the accused after considering the stance taken by the top court regarding the attack on officials, it argued. A PIL is also pending before the High Court, seeking a probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation into the attack. The court has asked the State to file a statement regarding the steps taken after the FIR was registered for the offence.

Farm fresh



Tradition revived: A farmer uses a bullock-driven wooden 'ghani' to extract oil through traditional methods on his field on the outskirts of Warangal in Telangana. The age-old practice is seeing renewed interest as consumers seek healthier options. NAGARA GOPAL

Kerala HC seeks report on ‘gold theft’ from Ezharapponnana

The Hindu Bureau
KOCHI

The Kerala High Court has ordered the Chief Vigilance and Security Officer of the Travancore Devaswom Board to inspect the temple registers as well as the Ezharapponnana of Ettumanur Mahadeva Temple and to submit a report with his opinion and findings on allegations pertaining to the gold plates on the elephant statues. The Ezharapponnana (which translates to seven-and-a-half golden elephants) consists of eight statuettes of elephants – seven of them two feet high and the



The Ezharapponnana idols at the Mahadeva temple, Ettumanur, Kottayam.

eighth one, half the height. The officer was directed to engage a goldsmith to examine the weight, quality, and originality of the gold. The Division Bench

of Justices Raja Vijayaraghavan and K.V. Jayakumar was considering the suo motu case based on a request by a devotee for an inquiry into the suspected misappropriation of gold on the Ezharapponnana. The complaint further said that during the repairs to the gold plates of Ezharapponnana, the originals were replaced with copper or other low-value metals. The Administrative Officer and the Assistant Devaswom Commissioner had filed reports stating no records indicated any maintenance work or any misappropriation on the Ezharapponnana.

Telangana govt. launches e-autos to ease travel woes of persons with disabilities

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

The Telangana government on Saturday launched e-autos for 14 neighbourhood centres as part of its efforts to strengthen welfare services for persons with disabilities. Inaugurating the e-autos on the birth anniversary of Helen Keller, Minister for Panchayat Raj and Rural Development Dansari Anasuya, popularly known as Seethakka, said the newly launched e-autos would address transportation challenges faced by families and ensure free door-step transport for children



The government views persons with disabilities as equal partners in society, Seethakka said. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

requiring regular therapy and training, particularly those with autism and intellectual disabilities. Launching the service at Jyotirao Phule Praja Bhavan, she also announced that the government would further strengthen neighbourhood centres and establish new facilities wherever necessary. Stating that the government views persons with

Global bids invited for Amaravati riverfront plan

Sambasiva Rao M.
AMARAVATI

The Amaravati Growth and Infrastructure Corporation Limited (AGICL) has invited global bids to appoint a consultant for preparing a comprehensive master plan, detailed project report (DPR) and financial plan for the proposed Amaravati Riverfront Development Project along the Krishna River, with implementation support for a pilot project targeted for completion before Krishna Pushkaralu-2028. According to the Request for Proposal (RFP), the project is a part of the Andhra Pradesh government's vision to develop Amaravati into a world-class, sustainable and future-ready capital city.



A satellite map showing the location of the proposed Amaravati Riverfront pilot project. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The proposed project covers nearly 27 km of the Krishna River, extending from Undavalli in the east to Vykuntapuram in the west, including seven river islands spread over about 20 square kilometres. As the first phase, a priority pilot project has been identified at Uddandirayunipalem. The selected consultant

will prepare the master plan, engineering designs, landscape concepts, environmental management strategies and implementation roadmap. The consultant will also assist AGICL in obtaining statutory approvals, preparing tender documents, supporting bid management and supervising implementation of the pilot project.

INBRIEF



Vigil stepped up over security threat to Delhi, Uttarakhand

Intelligence agencies have issued a security alert for Delhi and Uttarakhand following a possible Khalistani terror threat, with key religious sites, government establishments and police installations put under heightened surveillance, sources said on Saturday. According to sources, the alert was triggered after an email surfaced warning of possible attacks in the coming days. This threat comes in the backdrop of a standoff at the Nagrasu gurdwara in Uttarakhand's Rudraprayag district between a group of Nihangs and the authorities. Sources said the Delhi Police have launched a probe into the email to ascertain its authenticity and trace its origin. PTI

Civilian dies in explosion near LoC in Jammu and Kashmir

A civilian was killed in an explosion near the Line of Control (LoC) in the Gulmarg area of north Kashmir's Baramulla district on Saturday, officials said. Officials identified the victim as Zabir Ahmad Bajad, son of Mohammad Rafiq Bajad, a resident of Baramulla district. Initial official assessment suggested that the civilian died after an unexploded shell went off. However, the Army and the police could not provide details about the exact circumstances leading to the blast. The unexploded shell was apparently lying close to the Asha Post near the LoC in Gulmarg.

4 killed, 8 injured in lightning strikes in Madhya Pradesh

Four people were killed and eight others injured in two separate incidents of lightning strikes in Chhindwara district of Madhya Pradesh, police said on Saturday. According to the police, Baihar police station in-charge said Satish Walke (19) and Lucky Meravi (18) died on the spot after being struck by a bolt from the sky, while Jhaam Singh Taram (34) succumbed to injuries during treatment in the hospital. He said that two seriously injured people have been shifted to the district hospital, while four are undergoing treatment at Baihar Hospital. Chandravati Pusam (39), was also struck by a bolt from the sky in the Garhi police station area. PTI

Assam police arrest 2 ULFA(I) members, avert 'terror strike'

The Assam police claimed it averted a major terror strike by apprehending two members of the banned United Liberation of Asom (Independent) in Tinsukia district on Friday. They were identified as "second lieutenant" Humenjyoti Baruah (27), and "second lieutenant" Papu Moran (30). Tinsukia's Superintendent of Police, Mayank Kumar, said the duo was caught with the help of central agencies near Arunachal Pradesh border. Two AK-56 assault rifles, two hand grenades, 172 rounds of AK ammunition, opioids, and jungle survival kits were recovered from them. "Preliminary investigations revealed that the ULFA(I) had tasked them to target and kill people in Tinsukia town indiscriminately to create terror," he said.

SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

How saving elephants helps forests breathe easier

Rahul Karmakar
GUWAHATI

Protecting the endangered Asiatic elephant (*Elephas maximus indicus*) indirectly helps safeguard India's forests as powerful carbon stores, a new scientific study has said.

The research, however, warned that long-term carbon stabilisation cannot be ensured merely by declaring more areas as elephant reserves but by improving habitat quality, restoring wildlife corridors, and strengthening forest management. Carbon stabilisation, a vital mechanism for removing greenhouse gases and mitigating climate change, is the process of trapping atmospheric carbon and locking it into stable, solid forms (such as in soil or organic matter). This helps resist decay, erosion, or the release of carbon back into the atmosphere.

The study, published in the latest issue of the *Journal of Threatened Taxa*, assessed the relationship between elephant conservation efforts, the expansion of elephant reserves, and wildlife-associated carbon stock enhancement in India from 1992 to 2025. Noida-based Amity University's Tarun Kathula and Tanu Jindal are its authors.

The researchers found that India's elephant reserve network expanded from 18,297 sq. km. (across three elephant reserves) to 80,777 sq. km. (33 elephant reserves), while the elephant population increased by about 6.7% from 25,604 estimated during 1992-93. Despite the marginal increase in the number of pachyderms, the estimated carbon stored within the elephant reserves increased by 38%. The increase should not be interpreted as the ele-



Elephants remain ecologically vital, despite their limited contribution to faunal biomass, the researchers said. THULASI KAKKAT

phants directly creating more forest biomass, the researchers said, as it "primarily reflects enhanced protection and reduced degradation of pre-existing forest carbon stocks."

The study estimated that about 95% of the increase in carbon storage resulted from the expansion of protected forest areas. However, elephant reserves are not uniformly conserved in the same

manner as legally designated national parks or tiger reserves.

Ecosystem engineers
Elephants, often described as ecosystem engineers, remain ecologically vital, despite their limited contribution to faunal biomass, the researchers said. The gentle giants, they pointed out, disperse seeds, enrich soils with dung, create space for di-

verse vegetation, and help maintain healthy forests capable of storing carbon over the long term.

The researchers also found a weak relationship between the number of elephant reserves and the elephant population growth, suggesting that administrative declarations alone cannot secure the species' future if habitats remain fragmented or poorly managed.

Declining numbers
The study further underlined a worrying trend – the decline in elephant numbers under a new census methodology called Synchronised All-India Elephant Estimate (SAIEE) 2021-25, while the number of elephant reserves has stabilised. The SAIEE count of 22,446 was 4,065 elephants fewer than the 2017 estimate, but the enumerators asserted that the two different counting

methods should not be compared.

Comparable patterns were observed in the African savannah ecosystems, where mega-herbivore management improved vegetation carbon stocks by 20-30%. "Such consistency across regions supports the ecological principle that mega-fauna protection complements forest-carbon goals," their study said. "Policy integration of these results can strengthen India's commitments to achieve 2.5-3 billion tCO₂ (total carbon dioxide) equivalent additional carbon sink by 2030. Incorporating wildlife-inclusive accounting within REDD+ frameworks could generate measurable ecosystem-service credits while ensuring co-benefits for biodiversity," the study said. REDD expands to 'Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation'.

U.S. names Indian firm, CEO in Sudan sanctions

Press Trust of India
WASHINGTON

The U.S. imposed sanctions on eight persons and entities, including an Indian national associated with an explosives manufacturing firm, for allegedly fuelling the civil war in Sudan.

The U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) on Friday said the targeted networks enabled both the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) to expand and intensify civil war in the African nation and created the "world's worst humanitarian crisis and provided space for terrorist groups to operate".

Among the sanctioned individuals is Alok Choudhari of Raipur, the Chief Executive Officer of SBL Energy Limited, also known as Amin Explosive Private Limited, which allegedly supplied over 200 shipments of explosives and materials to a company that maintained the SAF's arsenal.

The Treasury Department also imposed sanctions on Raipur-based SBL Energy Limited.

Shah attacks cab aggregators over 'unfair' business model

Union Minister says newly launched cooperative ride-hailing platform Bharat Taxi is an alternative that will safeguard interests of drivers, passengers; it will expand to over 500 cities within 2 years

Abhinav Deshpande
AHMEDABAD

Union Cooperation Minister Amit Shah on Saturday launched a sharp attack on private app-based cab aggregators such as Uber and Ola, alleging that their business model exploits both drivers and commuters through practices that prioritise corporate profits over fair treatment. He said the newly launched cooperative ride-hailing platform, Bharat Taxi, was conceived to provide an alternative that safeguards the interests of drivers while ensuring better service for passengers.

Addressing the launch of Bharat Taxi in 14 cities across Gujarat, Mr. Shah, without naming the companies, alleged that private platforms deduct hefty commissions from drivers, delay payments and suspend their registrations based solely on passenger complaints without giving them an opportunity to present their case.

He said the cooperative



Union Home Minister Amit Shah takes a taxi ride during the launch of 'Bharat Taxi' in Gujarat. PTI

model was introduced to eliminate such practices and ensure that drivers are treated as stakeholders rather than service providers dependent on private companies.

Competitors' challenge
"I received phone calls today and some newspapers have reported that Bharat Taxi's fares are higher. I want to tell customers across the country that wherever Bharat Taxi begins operations, competing companies immediately slash their fares and are

prepared to incur losses. Our intention is not to inflict losses on anyone, but reducing fares and offering higher commissions to *sarathis* (drivers) is being done only to prevent Bharat Taxi from entering the market," he said.

"They want Bharat Taxi to fail so they can once again function arbitrarily," he said, adding that such strategies would not succeed in India, where "the spirit of cooperation and the desire to work for the welfare of others are the greatest strength".

Bharat Taxi, which was soft-launched in Gujarat last December, is being projected as India's first cooperative-owned, driver-led ride-hailing platform. Operating on a zero-commission model, it allows drivers to retain the entire fare while also giving them ownership in the platform.

The platform was formally launched in Ahmedabad, Surat, Vadodara, Rajkot, Dwarka, among other cities across Gujarat. It will initially offer services in three categories – two-wheelers, auto-rickshaws and four-wheelers.

Mr. Shah said Bharat Taxi would begin operations in Nagpur, Pune, Mumbai, Lucknow, Chandigarh, Jaipur and Kolkata before July 31, and services would be extended to more than 500 cities and towns over the next two years.

Addressing the drivers, he said they had become part of the country's larger cooperative movement, which already includes crores of farmers.

Second body recovered after floods in Arunachal

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

Rescue teams on Saturday recovered the body of one of the four persons missing after a cloudburst and resultant flash floods hit a hydropower project colony in Arunachal Pradesh's Keyi Panyor district on June 24.

The district's SP, Angad Mehta, said locals identified the victim as 30-year-old Ballari Marak, hailing from Meghalaya's Ri-Bhoi district. Hers was the second body recovered after that of Nirmala Gupta, 35, a teacher at NEPCO's Vivekananda Kendriya Vidyalaya, on the day of the disaster.

"The State Disaster Response Force and Keyi Panyor police personnel are continuing the search and rescue operations for three other missing persons, despite adverse conditions," Mr. Mehta said.

He also said the strategic Potin-Kimin Road, a lifeline for six districts of Arunachal Pradesh, remained blocked due to persistent landslide activity, and continuous slippage of earth and debris, despite repeated clearance efforts.

Govt. to launch affordable digital management system for clinics

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

Aimed at helping small outpatient clinics that face challenges with manual processes and lack of affordable digital solutions, the Union Health Ministry is all set to launch the e-Sushrut@Clinic.

eSushrut@Clinic is a light Hospital Management Information System (HMIS), created by Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) to address these challenges by providing a simple, affordable, and user-friendly digital solution specifically tailored for small outpatient clinics.

"Large HMIS are often too complex and costly for these clinics and this results in small clinics struggling with inefficiencies in digitisation of the health system," said a release issued by the Ministry.

It added that the need of having a government-backed and affordable

Ministry proposes to open light HMIS for govt. primary health centres, sub-centres and private clinics

HMIS has been coming from various microsite participants in spite of a large number of private HMIS players. Many States/Union Territories have also expressed interest to use a light HMIS for their public facilities.

The Ministry proposes to open the light HMIS for government primary health centres, sub-centres and private clinics, etc.

C-DAC implementing it
Currently, over 800 health facilities are onboarded on eSushrut@Clinic, generating over 680 health records. C-DAC is also implementing the eSushrut software, which is being installed at more than 15 AI-IMS and in various State government hospitals.

Listing the features, the Ministry said that e-Sushrut@Clinic provides a lightweight, cloud-based HMIS designed specifically for outpatient clinics which simplifies tasks like patient registration, billing, etc., thus making work easier and reducing mistakes. C-DAC will take care of maintenance and upgradation of the software.

"It is designed to be simple and intuitive, with no technical expertise needed from clinic staff. Also, this simple platform can be accessed from any device, without needing complex setups," said the release.

The cost of eSushrut@clinic is estimated to be ₹499 per month for five users. A discount of ₹200 will be given making the effective rate to be ₹299 per month. The software will be offered at no cost for the initial three months. Each additional user beyond the included five-user limit will be charged at a rate of ₹50 per user.

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

In a move aimed at reducing delays in medical treatment and reimbursement under the Central Government Health Scheme (CGHS), the Union Health Ministry has now substantially enhanced the financial powers of senior CGHS officials to approve cashless treatment, settle medical reimbursement claims and sanction unlisted investigations and procedures.

The revised delegation of powers enables additional directors heading CGHS cities and zones, as well as senior officials at the CGHS headquarters, to approve significantly higher-value cases than before. The changes are expected to reduce the number of proposals that require referral to higher authorities, speeding up decisions on treatment approvals and claim settlements.

Under the revised dele-

Changes expected to benefit pensioners, elderly – accounting for a substantial share of CGHS users

gation, additional directors heading CGHS cities and zones can now sanction medical reimbursement claims and hospital bills at approved rates – of up to ₹15 lakh, compared with the earlier limit of ₹7 lakh, for directors the revised power stands at ₹25 lakh from ₹15 lakh, and for Additional Secretary and DG, CGHS has revised financial approval power of ₹50 lakh, up from ₹25 lakh.

Cases exceeding ₹50 lakh shall continue to be referred to the Union Health Ministry for approval with the concurrence of the Integrated Finance Division.

For unlisted investigations/procedures and implants, additional directors heading CGHS cities and

zones, director, and additional secretary and DG, have revised approval powers up to ₹2 lakh, ₹5 lakh and ₹10 lakh respectively.

The order, dated June 25, now raises the financial limits for settling medical reimbursement claims submitted by beneficiaries after treatment. Such claims, particularly those involving high-cost procedures or emergency care, have often required multiple levels of scrutiny before reimbursement could be sanctioned.

Speaking about the revision, a senior health official said the changes are expected to particularly benefit pensioners and elderly beneficiaries, who account for a substantial share of CGHS users and often require costly tertiary care.

Delays in administrative approvals and reimbursement of medical expenses have remained among the most common grievances of beneficiaries.



Generational craft: A craftsman heating a *khukuri* knife in a furnace before shaping it by hand in Patan, Nepal. The skills have been passed down through generations.



Precise detailing: A blacksmith shapes a red-hot *khukuri* blade with a hammer during the traditional forging process at a workshop.



Final touches: The knife is sharpened on a machine during the finishing process in a traditional workshop.



Mark of pride: Nepali Army personnel place their *khukuris* against their chests as a mark of respect before beginning a drill. The *khukuri* continues to play an important part in military training.

Khukur: a symbol of courage and loyalty

Once used by the Gorkha soldiers to fight the British Army, the *khukuri* knife's uses have transformed over time according to the needs of the Nepali people, who continue to use it extensively in combat as well as in their homes



Prabhat Khanal

The *khukuri* knife is an iconic symbol of the Gorkha military, originally from Nepal, and is closely associated with the Gorkha soldier, symbolising strength, courage, bravery and loyalty. A typical *khukuri* blade has a distinctive curved shape, and a hard blade, measuring 16 to 18 inches, can be used as both a weapon during combat and a tool in Nepal. *Khukuris* are forged from spring steel with a notch at the end of the blade, designed so that blood and sap drip off the knife instead of seeping onto the hardwood handle. According to the Nepal Army, after 1744, the *khukuri* worn by the Gorkha soldiers who fought under the leadership of Prithvi Narayan Shah, who was the king of the Gorkha kingdom, in the Nepal Unification Campaign, made a significant contribution to the creation of modern Nepal. When Britain initially encountered Gorkhas in the mountains of Nepal in 1814, the Gorkhas fought so fiercely and admirably with their *khukuris*. After that, the *khukuri* became the symbol of courage, bravery, and warfare skills of

the Gorkha soldier, and they were recruited into the British Army. Now, the Indian Army currently fields seven active Gorkha Rifles regiments and the British Army has one primary Gorkha infantry regiment, The Royal Gorkha Rifles (RGR). The Nepal Army uses the *khukuri* as a combat weapon, a survival tool in field operations, and an important part of military training. It is also carried during parades and ceremonial events, cultural events, symbolising the courage, tradition, and identity of Nepali soldiers. Though the *khukuri* is best known as a ruthless combat weapon, the knife has several other uses. Gorkhas can use their *khukuris* to chop or carve wood, cut meat and vegetables, dig, and hunt wild animals. The act of sharpening a *khukuri* is a ritualistic process, symbolising the soldier's commitment to duty and honour. People of Nepal worship the *khukuri* during various festivals. Although the *khukuri* has undergone some changes in its appearance from ancient times to the modern era, its importance, respect, and identity have not diminished.



Firm grip: A man demonstrating the proper handling of a handcrafted *khukuri* knife in a factory, showcasing its precision, balance, and readiness for action.



Fierce loyalty: Personnel of the Nepal Army performing a synchronised *khukuri* drill during a military display in Kathmandu, Nepal. The blade is showcased by soldiers during parades, ceremonial events and cultural events as symbol of loyalty and courage of the soldiers.



Warriors in rhythm: A drill that forms part of a military display, showcasing precision, discipline, and the traditional combat weapon.



Secure build: A worker at a workshop in Patan handcrafting a *khukuri* sheath. This sheath is worn around the waist by soldiers, to carry the blade securely and draw it with ease.



Razor sharp: A worker shapes and sharpens the *khukuri* on a machine during the finishing process.



Combat ready: Personnel of the Nepal Army seen with bayonets on their rifles which are not the same as the *khukuri*.

CMYK A IN-X

PROFILES

The story of a shipwrecked hegemon

War on Iran

The war the U.S. and Israel launched has come to a fragile pause with a preliminary agreement between Washington and Tehran, but it has already diminished America’s presence in the region, prompting Gulf countries to seek a new *modus vivendi* with Tehran, while Israel, isolated and angry, is clinging on to its Lebanon card

Stanly Johny

“When we are finished, take over your government. It will be yours to take. This will be probably your only chance for generations,” President Donald Trump told Iranians on February 28, after the U.S. and Israel launched an all-out war on their country. He asked the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), armed forces and police to “lay down” weapons. “You will be treated fairly with total immunity, or you will face certain death,” warned Mr. Trump.

The initial blow was devastating for Iran. More than 40 senior officials were killed, including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, IRGC commander Mohammad Pakpour and Defence Council chief Ali Shamkhani. Senior Israeli officials had likened the June 12, 2025 strike on Iran, which killed a host of military officers, to the ‘Red Wedding’, the infamous massacre of House Stark members in *Game of Thrones*. But that attack paled in comparison with the February 28 strikes. This was Iran’s true ‘Red Wedding’ moment.

The U.S. and Israel expected the decapitation strike to trigger the collapse of the Iranian state or plunge the country, already rocked by January’s violent protests, into chaos, paving the way for a more amenable leadership to emerge. Mr. Trump wanted a quick, Venezuela-like solution. This confidence was reflected in his conversation with allies during the early hours of the war. According to Israel’s *Ynet News*, Mr. Trump told British Prime Minister Keir Starmer that the war would be over “in three days”. When he urged Mr. Starmer to deploy aircraft carriers to West Asia, the British PM said he would first consult his team the following week. “But the war has already started. Next week, the war is going to be over... in three days,” said Mr. Trump.

But he was wrong.

Iran’s response rested on three pillars. One, preserving the state and preventing regime collapse; two, retaliating by regionalising the war; three, enhancing the global economic cost by wielding its most potent strategic lever – the Strait of Hormuz. The state recovered quickly from the initial shock. Ali Larjani, secretary of the National Security Council, was already in charge of critical decision-making. President Masoud Pezeshkian focused on managing the war-time economy and civil administration. Within days of the U.S. attack, Ahmad Vahidi, the ‘ghost general’ of the IRGC, took command of the war effort. (Larjani was later killed in an Israeli strike and was swiftly replaced by Mohammed Bagher Zolqadr, another IRGC commander).

Iran also started striking U.S. bases in Persian Gulf countries and Jordan, besides directly attacking Israel. Among the six Gulf kingdoms, all but Oman have permanent U.S. military bases. Bases, missile defence batteries and sites of American economic presence were all targeted. Russia reportedly shared intelligence with Iran. On March 1, the second day of the war, the IRGC Navy announced that the Strait of Hormuz, through which one fifth of the world’s seaborne oil passed before the war, was closed to all traffic. Shipping companies halted transits, commercial traffic collapsed, insurance costs rocketed and the price of crude oil soared, pushing the global economy to a cliff.

Mr. Trump, having failed to meet his objectives quickly, doubled down on his rhetoric. On March 6, he demanded Iran’s “unconditional surrender” and ruled out any deal with Tehran. Two days later, Iran’s Assembly of Experts chose Mojtaba Khamenei, son of the former leader Ali Khamenei, as the new ‘Leader of the Revolution’. In his first message as the leader, Mojtaba termed the war an “existential struggle”, and said the fighting would continue and that the Strait of Hormuz would remain shut. He delivered a clear message: Iran, despite the punishing American, Israeli attacks, preferred war over surrender.

“Iran was trying to avoid this war from the very beginning. A political solution was available [before the war started]. But Trump and [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu were not interested in an agreement. They wanted to change Iran’s government and take over Iran’s oil, creating Israel’s hegemony in this part of the



Troubled waters: Vessels at the Strait of Hormuz, as seen from Musandam, Oman, on June 16. REUTERS

world,” Foad Izadi, professor of world studies at the University of Tehran, told *The Hindu*. “Of course, they have inflicted huge damage on Iran’s infrastructure and killed a lot of people. But they have failed [to meet their objectives]. And when they realised that they have failed, they entered negotiations,” he added.

Stubborn realities

In Mr. Trump’s view, the U.S. secured a decisive victory over Iran. He said Iran’s navy, air force, air defences and much of its attack capability had been destroyed, and that Tehran was begging for a deal. Yet, he faced a series of stubborn realities. The swift victory he had anticipated remained elusive; Iran’s state survived the bombing; there was no viable military option to reopen the Strait of Hormuz; and Iran’s nuclear programme remained unaddressed and unresolved. “The war has deeply scarred the entire region. Iran suffered heavy blows. Its Supreme Leader was killed, key military and nuclear sites were destroyed, yet it survived and proved it could strike back asymmetrically,” Mohammed Soliman, author of *West Asia: A New American Grand Strategy in the Middle East*, and a senior fellow at The Middle East Institute, told *The Hindu*.

Mr. Trump had two options: press ahead with the air campaign, further depleting America’s offensive and defensive stockpiles; or engage Iran diplomatically. If continuing the strikes did not produce a desirable outcome, prolonging the campaign would become futile. He chose the diplomatic alternative. It was at this point Pakistan, a nuclear power with good ties to both Washington and Tehran, stepped in to offer mediation. On April 8, just hours after threatening to erase Iran’s civilisation, Mr. Trump announced a “double-sided ceasefire”.

But the ceasefire did not mean an end to the conflict. Mr. Trump declared that the Strait of Hormuz would be open. Both Iran and Pakistan said the ceasefire covered Lebanon as well. Israel had seized parts of southern Lebanon after the war broke out. Israel continued its strikes, which strained the U.S.-Iran ceasefire. Tehran did not reopen the strait. After direct talks between the U.S. and Iran in Islamabad on April 11-12 failed to make any breakthrough, Mr. Trump announced a blockade of Iranian ports aimed at choking the country’s already broken economy further. He did not want to return to active war, but he wanted to make Iran concede on his critical demands. Iran’s closure of the strait and the American blockade led to repeated skirmishes between the two sides. But despite the tensions, they stayed engaged in talks, exchanging drafts through Pakistan. Iran took a phased approach towards the conflict. It wanted to negotiate a preliminary deal first to bring the war to an end and remove the bottlenecks for shipping in and out of the Persian Gulf, and then, in phase two, hold discussions on the nuclear question. The Trump administration, despite its public protests, accepted this line.

On June 15, U.S. and Iran announced the memorandum of understanding, extending the ceasefire by 60 more days and paving the way for more substantive talks on critical issues such as Iran’s nuclear programme and western sanctions. The memorandum also said the ceasefire should come into force on all fronts, including

Lebanon; the U.S. blockade would be lifted; Tehran would get access to its frozen funds and the U.S. would help create a development plan for Iran, involving \$300 billion. On the other side, Iran promised never to make a nuclear bomb (Iran’s official position has always been that it is not seeking to build a bomb, a position which it put on record in the 2015 deal signed with the Obama administration). Iran also promised to ensure safe passage of ships through the Strait of Hormuz without any charge for 60 days.

Mr. Trump’s claims of victory do not align with the text of the MoU. The U.S., which started the war seeking regime change, ultimately offered substantial concessions to the same government, in exchange for commitments not to pursue a nuclear bomb, and to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, which had been open before the war. “It is both a strategic and a military defeat. No strategic or military goals were attained. The region will now have to recalibrate its relation to the U.S. and abandon unrealistic expectations about American power,” Bruno Macaes, a Portuguese political scientist and author, told *The Hindu*.

A new security order

Before the war began, West Asia looked like a different region. Israel, after regionalising its post-October 7 wars, looked confident of meeting its final objective – bring down the Islamic Republic and build a unipolar West Asia where it would act as the principal security player. The Abraham Accords, which saw the UAE, Bahrain and Morocco sign normalisation agreements with Israel, built the foundation for this ‘new Middle East’. Gulf countries were worried about Iran but felt protected by American military presence. America’s promise for security had been the bedrock of the U.S.-Gulf partnership for decades. As Jimmy Carter said in January 1980, “Let our position be absolutely clear: An attempt by any outside force to gain

control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States...” Iran upended not just the Carter doctrine but also the Trumpian effort to reshape West Asia around Israel as its core and Arab states as its pillars.

The U.S. could do little as Iran unleashed its drones and missiles at American bases across the region. Rather than providing security, the bases became magnets for Iranian projectiles. “The idea before the war was that the U.S. would provide security to the Gulf countries. But what happened was that the Gulf countries were burning through their defensive weapons to protect U.S. bases on their soil,” said an Emirati official, requesting anonymity.

At least 13 American bases in the Gulf, including the Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, the Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia, the Ali Al Salem Air Base in Kuwait, the U.S. Fifth Fleet headquarters in Bahrain and the Al Sader and Al Ruwais facilities in the UAE, were damaged. According to a *Wall Street Journal* visual investigation based on satellite imagery, Iranian attacks devastated the U.S. Navy’s base in Bahrain. The U.S. could do little when Qatar’s Ras Laffan Industrial City, the world’s largest LNG export complex, was hit on March 18. Gulf countries watched with pain and shock as Iran drilled holes into the U.S.-led security architecture.

“Stability will have to come from within since the U.S. proved incapable of providing it. As for U.S. policy, it will become almost entirely mercantile: focus on deals in energy, AI and, of course, weapons,” said Mr. Macaes. Mr. Soliman of the Middle East Institute agreed: “Gulf Arab states will now accelerate their security self-reliance, diversify their defence relationships in addition to the U.S., and seek more pragmatic ways to manage relations with Tehran.”

Gulf states have already begun moving in this direction. They seem to have recognised that the Islamic

Republic is not going anywhere, and for their own security and for the safe passage of shipping through Hormuz, they will need to work with Tehran on the basis of peaceful co-existence. What they require is regional stability, and for that stability, as Mr. Macaes put it, they would have to bring “Iran back from the cold”.

“Part of what we are doing now, as regional countries, is to create this regional security framework between us and Iran,” Qatar’s Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed Al Thani said recently in an interview. “That will hopefully have economic cooperation in the future between all of us,” he added. Saudi Arabia reportedly reached out to Iran to reach an understanding so that the kingdom would be spared if war resumed. U.S. Vice President J.D. Vance recently said the UAE, which has very close ties with Israel, “is having conversations with Iran that have never happened before, including with the IRGC, about economic incentives.” Oman has always kept the diplomatic channels open with Tehran despite the war.

The pre-October 7 push by the U.S. to bring Gulf monarchies and Israel, the two pillars of America’s West Asia policy, closer to build a joint front against Iran appears to have been shattered by this war. “The Abraham Accords and the effort to create a Sunni-Zionist alliance against Iran are dead,” Trita Parsi, executive vice president of Quincy Institute, told *The Hindu*. “The war proved that the containment of Iran only leads to war, instability, and the defeat of such an alliance. The Arab side sees Israel as a greater threat than needs to be contained, and Iran as a state that they – from a security standpoint – need to integrate with economically, because containment and war failed.”

Israel, left alone

One country that had long sought this war, and was among the most affected by it, was Israel. It was the principal architect of the campaign. Yet, as the conflict went against the initial expectations, Mr. Trump sidelined Israel and chose talks with Iran, ultimately reaching the MoU. With Iran now rewriting the regional security order and engaging in direct talks with the U.S., Mr. Netanyahu’s big push to remap West Asia appears to have backfired. “The end result (of the war) may be the decontainment of Iran and the recontainment of Israel – perhaps going back to the pre-1991 era in which Israel was the regional and international outcast,” said Mr. Parsi.

Israel stands increasingly isolated on the world stage. Without the U.S., its ability to shape security and geopolitical outcomes is limited. Many in Israel see the U.S.-Iran deal as a major strategic setback. “Israel is going to regret this war because nothing was achieved and Israel lost Trump,” Gideon Levy, Israeli journalist and author, told *The Hindu*. “Israel should learn now that not everything can be achieved by force, but unfortunately Israel will not draw this lesson.”

At this point, Mr. Netanyahu’s focus is on the trump card he possesses – Lebanon. On June 26, Israel and Lebanon, under U.S. mediation, agreed to a deal under which Israeli troops would stay in southern Lebanon. Iran and Hezbollah have demanded a complete Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon. The first article of the MoU calls for respecting Lebanon’s “territorial integrity and sovereignty” – an indirect call for Israeli troop withdrawal. If Israel doesn’t withdraw, clashes with Hezbollah will persist, meaning a ceasefire in Lebanon would remain out of reach. Tensions have already spilled over into the Strait of Hormuz, where Iran insists that ships should follow its designated route. It attacked a vessel transiting an “unauthorised” route last week, and the U.S. struck Iran on Saturday and Tehran retaliated by attacking U.S. bases in the region. But the U.S. strikes are unlikely to force Iran to give up its newly asserted control over the strait.

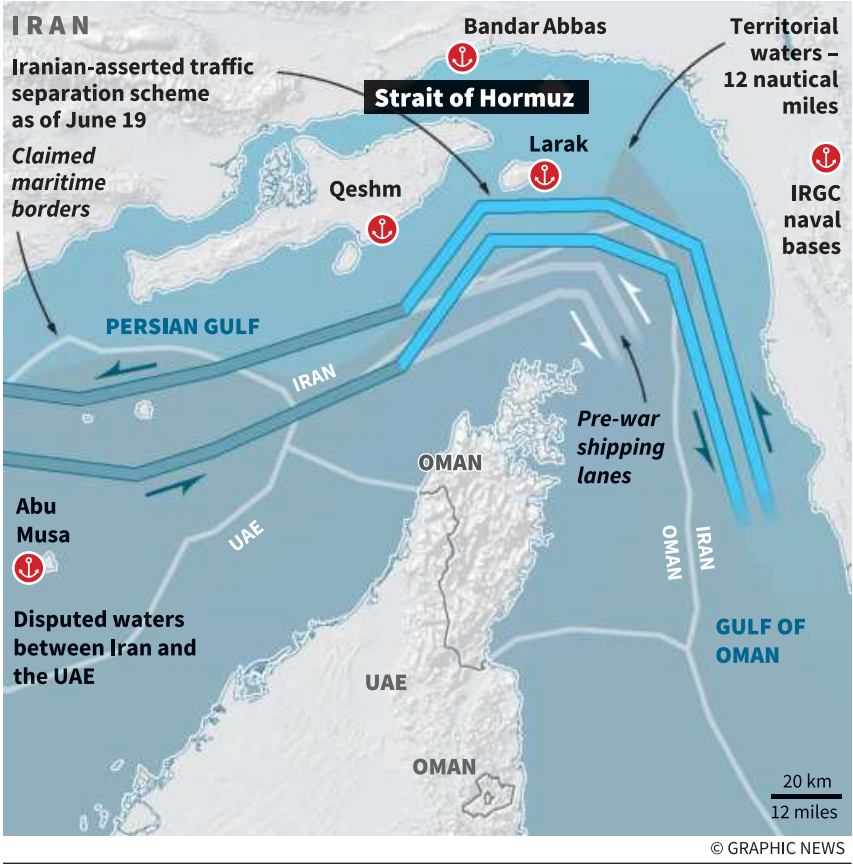
“We have to wait and see whether the U.S. and Israel are done with the war or this is just a pause,” said Mr. Izadi, the Iranian professor. “Iran wants these attacks to stop; to get its money back; sanctions to be lifted and its authority over Hormuz recognised. The strait is in Iran’s territory, in its contiguous waters. These are our red lines,” he said. “The U.S. can accept these reasonable demands or they can start the war again. It’s a decision they have to make.”

THE GIST

- ▼ The U.S.-Iran MoU says the ceasefire should come into force on all fronts, including Lebanon, and that Lebanon’s sovereignty should be respected
- ▼ Tehran would get access to its frozen funds and the U.S. would help create a development plan for Iran, involving \$300 billion
- ▼ Iran has promised never to make a nuclear bomb and to ensure safe passage of ships through the Strait of Hormuz without any charge for 60 days

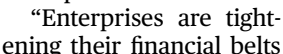
Iran reasserts control over Hormuz

Iran and Oman are to discuss a future joint administration for the Strait of Hormuz, including maritime services and associated costs. The U.S. has said it would not accept tolls or fees on the strategic waterway



Kotak Mahindra Bank on Saturday said its MD and CEO Ashok Vaswani will quit upon completion of a three-year tenure and will not seek re-appointment when his current term ends on December 31, 2026. The veteran banker assumed charge of the bank on January 1, 2024. "Ashok Vaswani, Managing Director & CEO of the bank, has informed the board that, for personal reasons, he does not wish to seek re-appointment upon completion of his current term on December 31, 2026," Kotak Mahindra Bank said in a regulatory filing. "The board has, at its meeting held today, respected his decision and has initiated the process for the appointment of a new Managing Director & CEO. The process will be completed within applicable regulatory timelines," it said. Mr. Vaswani replaced Dipak Gupta, who was the interim MD and CEO, following founder-director Uday Kotak's sudden stepping down as the head of the bank. PTI

Avinash Vashistha, Chairman & CEO of Tholons, a New York-based tech consulting firm and former Chairman & CEO of



According to him, corporate technology budgets have effectively frozen into a zero-sum game of forced reallocation. Instead of expanding total IT spend, boardrooms are aggressively flatlining or gutting traditional infra and maintenance budgets to fund mandatory cybersecurity and AI compliance mandates, he added.

The combined Persistent - Nagarro group would be better positioned to support multi-region enterprise clients requiring integrated AI, engineering, ERP / CX, data and cloud capabilities across local and global delivery models. The combination will create a \$2.9 billion AI-led engineering entity with ov-



The external law firms repeatedly requested Mr. Chakraborty to participate in the review, but the interview did not take place.

(The writer is with The Hindu businessline research bureau)

UNPERTURBED

It was a no-brainer: Norway coach on leaving out Haaland, Odegaard



GETTY IMAGES

Norway coach Stale Solbakken defended his decision to leave out star duo Erling Haaland and Martin Odegaard in Friday's 1-4 World Cup defeat to France. "It was a no-brainer, for me, for the physio and for the medical staff," said Solbakken after he made 10 changes to his starting line-up following the 3-2 win over Senegal.

TRIUMPHANT

Nagal wins in Targu Mures for his first title in two years



FILE PHOTO: K. MURALI KUMAR

India's No.1 Sumit Nagal beat Felix Balshaw of France 6-3, 7-5 to win the Targu Mures Challenger (Romania) on Saturday. It was his seventh Challenger title and fifth on clay. It was the first win for the 28-year-old since winning the Heilbronn Challenger in June 2024. He had beaten Cezar Cretu 6-3, 4-6, 6-1 in the semifinal.

EBB AND FLOW

Smith shines as New Zealand takes the lead against England



AP

Nathan Smith shone with four wickets as New Zealand ended day three with a 204-run lead over England in the third Test at Trent Bridge on Saturday. **The scores:** NZ 438 & 120/3 in 35 overs (Rachin 60 batting) vs. England 354 in 88.2 overs (Duckett 113, Bethell 74, Brook 58, Smith 4/91, O'Rourke 3/53, Foulkes 3/35).

THE WAIT ENDS

Ireland stuns West Indies, halts 21-game losing streak



GETTY IMAGES

Ireland ended a 21-match losing streak against West Indies when it won by six wickets in a T20 World Cup Group B clash in Bristol on Saturday. Windies would have qualified for the semis if it had won. **The scores:** WI 128/7 in 20 overs (Maguire 2/22, Murray 2/13) lost to Ireland 129/4 in 18.1 overs (Prendergast 63, Munisar 2/28).

Spain sends Bielsa's Uruguay packing after goalkeeper gaffe

The Iberian giant tops Group H and avoids a potential round-of-32 clash with Argentina; instead minnow Cape Verde will take on the title holder after securing second spot with a goalless stalemate against Saudi Arabia

FIFA WORLD CUP

Agence France-Presse
GUADALAJARA

Uruguay bowed out of the World Cup as goalkeeper Fernando Muslera's howler gifted Spain a 1-0 win to secure top spot in Group H.

Alex Baena's weak shot slipped through Muslera's grasp for the only goal as Spain avoided a last 32 showdown against Argentina.

The European champion will instead face Austria or Algeria next in Los Angeles on Thursday.

Uruguay's defeat allowed debutant Cape Verde secure second place and a meeting with the defending champion, thanks to a 0-0 draw against Saudi Arabia. Two-time winner Uruguay becomes the highest-ranked side to crash out in the group stages as the defeat rounded off a miserable tournament for Marcelo Bielsa and his squad.



Blunder: Muslera had Baena's weak shot covered but inexplicably allowed it to slip through. AP

The standings

GROUP H	M	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	Points
Spain (Q)	3	2	1	0	5	0	5	7
Cape Verde (Q)	3	0	3	0	2	2	0	3
Uruguay (E)	3	0	2	1	3	4	-1	2
Saudi Arabia (E)	3	0	2	1	1	5	-4	2

Q: Qualified | E: Eliminated

Source: FIFA

After draws against Cape Verde and Saudi Arabia, reports of a revolt in the Ur-

uguay camp emerged, with leading players, including Federico Valverde, clashing

with Bielsa over his tactics.

To rub salt into Uruguayan wounds, midfielder Manuel Ugarte was injured in the build-up to Baena's goal and stretched off with what appeared a serious knee injury.

Uruguay's miserable tournament was summed up when Agustín Canobbio was shown a straight red card in stoppage time for a wild lunge on Pau Cubarsi.

THE RESULTS

Group I: Senegal 5 (Diarra 4, I Sarr 56, P Gueye 59, 71, I Ndiaye 82) bt Iraq 0.
Norway 1 (Aasgaard 21) lost to France 4 (Dembele 7, 20, 32, Doue 90+4).
Group H: Uruguay 0 lost to Spain 1 (Baena 42).
Cape Verde 0 drew with Saudi Arabia 0.
Group G: New Zealand 1 (Just 84) lost to Belgium 5 (Trossard 28, 50, De Bruyne 66, Lukaku 86, Saelemaekers 90+4).
Egypt 1 (Saber 5) drew with Iran 1 (Rezaeian 14).

Confirmed round-of-32 games

South Africa vs. Canada; Brazil vs. Japan; Germany vs. Paraguay; Netherlands vs. Morocco; Ivory Coast vs. Norway; France vs. Sweden; USA vs. Bosnia and Herzegovina; Australia vs. Egypt; Argentina vs. Cape Verde

Monday's matches

ROUND OF 32

South Africa vs. Canada, 00.30 a.m.
Brazil vs. Japan, 10.30 p.m.

The day and time(s) pertain to India

Senegal's rout of Iraq does the trick; Dembele wreaks havoc

Agence France-Presse
LOS ANGELES

Ousmane Dembele scored a first-half hat-trick as France powered past Norway 4-1 to clinch top spot in World Cup Group I on Friday as Senegal thumped Iraq 5-0. Paris Saint-Germain's reigning Ballon D'Or winner Dembele scored in the seventh, 20th and 32nd minutes.

The Kylian Mbappe-Erling Haaland showdown never materialised after Norway opted to leave Haaland – and nine of the team's other regular starters – on the bench.

France will face one of the eight best third-placed teams in the last 32, while Norway will take on Ivory



Hat-trick hero: Dembele put the game beyond Norway. AFP

The standings

GROUP I	M	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	Points
France (Q)	3	3	0	0	10	2	8	9
Norway (Q)	3	2	0	1	8	7	1	6
Senegal (Q)	3	1	0	2	8	6	2	3
Iraq (E)	3	0	0	3	1	12	-11	0

Q: Qualified | E: Eliminated

Source: FIFA

Coast. Senegal, which has three points with a plus-two goal difference, sealed

its knockout spot Group G and Group H results went in its favour.

The standings

GROUP G	M	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	Points
Belgium (Q)	3	1	2	0	6	2	4	5
Egypt (Q)	3	1	2	0	5	3	2	5
Iran	3	0	3	0	3	3	0	3
New Zealand (E)	3	0	1	2	4	10	-6	1

Q: Qualified | E: Eliminated

Source: FIFA

Flawless Belgium and nervy Egypt advance

Agencies
VANCOUVER

Belgium defeated New Zealand 5-1 to book its place in the knockout rounds of the World Cup on Friday, securing its first win of the tournament to finish on top of Group G in Vancouver.

A double strike from Leandro Trossard and goals from Kevin De Bruyne, Romelu Lukaku

and Alexis Saelemaekers carried the Red Devils into the last 32 in first place ahead of Egypt on goal difference.

Egypt claimed the runner-up spot after a 1-1 draw with Iran in Seattle. The Iranians finished third.

Iran had a potential winning goal called back due to an offside, and will have to wait one day to find out its fate after the two teams played to a 1-1 draw.



Nakamura and Kubo. AFP

2017 U-17 WC, 2026 FIFA WC: the common thread
Japan: Keito Nakamura, Takefusa Kubo, Zion Suzuki, Yukinari Sugawara, Ayumu Seko; **France:** Aurelien Tchouameni, Maxence Lacroix; **Spain:** Eric Garcia, Ferran Torres; **USA:** Sergino Dest, Tim Weah; **NZ:** Bill Tuiloma Just, Liberato Cacace; **Turkiye:** Yunus Akgun; **Haiti:** Wilson Isidor; **Algeria:** Amine Gouiri; **England:** Marc Guehi; **Ivory Coast:** Seko Fofana.

India has its task cut out against high-flying Australia

T20 WORLD CUP

P.K. Ajith Kumar
LONDON

These Aussies come hard at you. They come harder when you hurt them.

After getting knocked out by India in the ODI World Cup semifinal at Navi Mumbai last October, the Australian women white-washed India in a three-match series Down Under. Before that, after being blown away by Harmanpreet Kaur in the semifinal of the 2017 World Cup at Derby, they did the same: they crushed India 3-0 at Vadodara.

When the sides clash in the last league match of the T20 World Cup at Lord's here on Sunday, the Aussies would want to avenge India for inflicting their first bilateral series loss at home in nine years (a 1-2 defeat in a three-match T20I series in February). But, the Women in Blue will be ready for the challenge as they are in a must-win situation.

Since the in-form South Africans are expected to win against Bangladesh, in the first match of the double-header at Lord's, the fight for the semifinal spot is hard for India. The Australians, thanks to their much superior Net Run Rate, are almost certain to reach the last four.

They have looked the most complete side. But, they must also be very conscious of the fact that India is one team that has given them tough competition of late. If it is a problem of



Moment of reckoning: A lot will depend on how Jemimah and Harmanpreet perform in the big game. GETTY IMAGES

plenty when it comes to the selection for the Australian team, India has not exactly been able to get the combinations perfect. If Australia is brimming with quality all-rounders, India hasn't really got one apart from that trusted servant of the team, Deepti Sharma.

There isn't much batting after her, but Radha Yadav, who took three wickets against Bangladesh in her first match of the tournament, makes the tail look less long. Sadly, it has been her dropped catches that have become a hot topic of discussion, but she remains the best fielder in the team.

India's catching overall has been disappointing, but this team is strong and

experienced enough not to be affected too much by it. And India has the firepower in batting to cause headaches for even a bowling attack as strong as Australia's.

If Smriti Mandhana, Shafali Verma, Harmanpreet Kaur or Jemimah Rodrigues, who regained her touch and helped India tide over a mini-crisis against Bangladesh, get going, it may not be easy for Australia.

The six-time champion is further strengthened by the recovery of Phoebe Litchfield, who hasn't played a game after getting injured in the first match against South Africa, in which she made a 24-ball 50.

We want to play aggressively against the Aussies: Smriti

P.K. Ajith Kumar
LONDON

When Smriti Mandhana has a bad day, which isn't that often fortunately for Indian women's cricket, she goes back to videos of Matthew Hayden and Kumar Sangakkara. So when she got an opportunity the other day to talk to the former Australian opener, she took advantage of that.

"When I saw him doing the commentary, I got excited," Smriti said ahead of India's T20 World Cup match against Australia.

"We had a good chat and I wanted to know about things like the grip. I wasn't sure about talking with him



Smriti and Hayden. ICC

before a game against Australia, but he was really kind and sweet. He shared a lot of things, which I hope I can apply to my batting."

Smriti said it was indeed a big match for India

against Australia. "We have all spoken a lot about how we really want to be playing the aggressive brand of cricket and that is something which we will all look to do on Sunday," she said. "Everyone is itching to go."

Smriti is glad that her opening partnership with Shafali Verma is rocking again, after a bit of wobble.

"We had a very quiet series in England (before the World Cup) but we both were really pumped up to get back to giving the good starts for India because whenever we lay the foundation, we are in a good place. I am really happy with the way Shafali is striking the ball."

Smriti was also glad to see the way her opening partner was contributing with the ball of late.

"She has been amazing," Smriti said. "She did that in the World Cup final, then a little bit in the WPL as well. I remember her getting the Player-of-the-Match award for her bowling in the WPL. It is quite handy to have her as a bowler".

Football's future steps into the present

Ayon Sengupta
DALLAS

Nine years ago, the first FI-Fa tournament hosted in India offered a glimpse into football's future.

Packed stadiums in New Delhi, Kolkata, Kochi, Navi Mumbai, Goa and Guwahati watched teenagers chasing their dreams. But many have disappeared into the game's unforgiving talent vortex. But 18 of those youngsters are now back on football's biggest stage, representing their coun-

tries at the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

No nation has produced more graduates than Japan. Five members of Hajime Moriyasu's squad – Keito Nakamura, Takefusa Kubo, Zion Suzuki, Yukinari Sugawara and Ayumu Seko – first experienced FIFA competition in India. And among the 18 players to have made that remarkable leap, none has left a greater mark on this World Cup than Nakamura (two goal contributions).

Nakamura's partnership

with Kubo has evolved over almost a decade. During Japan's opening match of the 2017 FIFA U-17 World Cup, Nakamura scored a first-half hat-trick in a 6-1 victory over Honduras. His first goal came from a Kubo corner before Kubo added one of his own before half-time.

Nine years later, the script remains familiar. Against the Netherlands, Kubo burst into the left side of the penalty area before cutting the ball back into what Japanese media call the "Keito Zone" – an area

where Nakamura has proved to be lethal since his days at the Mitsubishi Yowa youth academy.

The 2017 u-17 WC introduced Indian fans to a generation that is now reaching its peak. Nine years later, many of those teenagers – like Nakamura, Kubo, Aurelien Tchouameni, Eric Garcia and Ferran Torres – have become the faces of their national teams, proving that football's youth tournaments are remembered for the careers they set in motion.

INBRIEF



Mercedes driver Russell grabs pole for the Austrian GP

George Russell produced a dramatic late and contentious fastest lap in his Mercedes on Saturday to claim pole position ahead of the two Ferraris for Sunday’s Austrian GP in Spielberg.

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

Nabi’s four-wicket burst puts India-A in the driver’s seat

Pacer Auqib Nabi’s four-wicket burst put India-A in the driver’s seat with an overall lead of 170 runs against Sri Lanka-A on the third day of the first unofficial Test in Galle on Saturday.

The scores: India-A 452/6 decl & 48/0 in 17 overs vs. Sri Lanka-A 330 in 101.4 overs (Fernando 84, Bandara 70, Arachchige 72, Nabi 4/58).



Keys clinches her third Eastbourne title

USA’s Madison Keys won the Eastbourne title for a third time as she defeated Germany’s Tatjana Maria 7-5, 6-4 in the final of the Wimbledon warm-up event on Saturday. Keys, seeded second, saw off the World No. 112 in 93 minutes. It was the 31-year-old’s first title since her maiden Grand Slam crown at Australian Open last year.

Indonesia pips India, makes AVC Cup title decider

Indonesia halted India’s five-match winning streak in the AVC Men’s Volleyball Cup as it emerged victorious 15-25, 26-24, 25-20, 19-25, 15-13 in the semifinal in Ahmedabad on Saturday.

Jr Indian shuttlers enter the Asian mixed team quarters

India sealed a spot in the quarterfinals of the Badminton Asia junior mixed team championships with a 2-0 (55-31, 55-21) victory over Kazakhstan in its Group-C opener in Yatsushiro, Japan, on Saturday.

Jangoo and Chase keep WI in the hunt for lead

Amir Jangoo (78 batting) and captain Roston Chase (42 batting) took the West Indies within reach of Sri Lanka’s first innings total as the home side closed day two of the first Test in North Sound at 271 for five.

The scores: Sri Lanka 308 in 71.5 overs vs West Indies 271/5 in 84 overs (Jangoo 78 batting, Chase 42 batting).



Injured Osaka retires midway through Bad Homburg final

Naomi Osaka’s Wimbledon preparations received a setback when she retired at the start of the second set in Saturday’s Bad Homburg final because of a foot injury. The fourth-seeded Japanese, in her first grass-court final, was trailing 1-6, 0-1 to Karolina Muchova of the Czech Republic when she pulled out.

India eyes improved batting show in its bid to level series

After coming a cropper in the opening match, Shreyas’ men will hope to sign off the short tour on a winning note; the host is a step away from scripting another piece of history

INDIA IN IRELAND

Press Trust of India
BELFAST

India’s star-studded batting line-up will be under pressure to make amends when it takes on a buoyant Ireland in the second and final T20I here on Sunday.

After a shock defeat in the opener, Shreyas Iyer’s men need a win to level the series. Playing its first match since the T20 World Cup triumph in March, India was handed one of its biggest upsets as Ireland registered its maiden victory over the Men in Blue in any format.

With the five-game series against England beginning on Wednesday at Chester-le-Street, Shreyas will be eager to sign off the short Ireland tour on a winning note.

The biggest concern from the opening game was India’s batting collapse. Sanju Samson lasted

just four balls before becoming debutant Jai Moon-dra’s maiden international wicket while Ishan Kishan and Shreyas, too, fell for single-digit scores inside the PowerPlay.

Abhishek Sharma carried on in his explosive manner but lacked support from the other end. The team management, however, is unlikely to press the panic button after one just defeat.

Even as the batting unit disappointed in the first match, the bowling pack offered positives. Harshit Rana made an impressive comeback after a four-month layoff due to a knee injury, using his variations smartly to return figures of three for 24.

Left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh and left-arm spinner Axar Patel also bowled well. As for the Lorcán Tucker-led Ireland, it will be brimming with confidence after having scripted history on Friday.

(Match starts at 6 p.m. IST).



Pace threat: Hollard, who had posed a tough challenge to the Indian batters on Friday, will look to impress again. GETTY IMAGES



Class apart: India u-19 women proved too good for Sri Lanka.

Coach Nooshin aims to build bench strength

U-19 CRICKET

Rajdeep Saha
CHENNAI

The India under-19 women’s team sealed a 3-0 whitewash over Sri Lanka u-19 with a lap of honour around the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium as a mark of gratitude to the 500-odd spectators who egged them on. Watching on from a distance was head coach Nooshin Al Khadeer, who has made successes something of a habit.

Nooshin, who took over the u-19 set-up in 2022, will eye a hat-trick of T20 World Cup crowns when the third edition starts early next year. “We have zonal camps in April and May. Usually, they’re at different venues, but we were

lucky to have this year’s camp at the Bengaluru Centre of Excellence,” Nooshin told *The Hindu*.

Nooshin and the selectors will keep close tabs on the domestic season, which starts with the u-19 T20 Trophy Elite on Oct. 9, and assignments like the tour of England and the proposed Asia Cup to firm up the World Cup squad.

“The ultimate goal is to reach a point where we can push in two Indian teams coming in, and that’s going to happen... I’m not too crazy about the limelight. These players are the ones who are going to steal the show”.

The scores: Sri Lanka u-19 116/7 in 20 overs (Nethmi Upeksha 51 n.o.) lost to India u-19 120/3 in 18.4 overs (Bhavika Ahire 50); **Toss:** SL; **PoM:** Nethmi. **PoS:** Bhavika.

Federation confirms Neeraj’s participation in Asian Games

ATHLETICS

Press Trust of India
BHUBANESWAR

Indian javelin throw superstar Neeraj Chopra will compete in the Asian Games in Japan in September-October in his bid to defend the title, Athletics Federation of India’s (AFI) selection committee chairman Adille Sumariwalla confirmed on Saturday.

Recovering from a low-back injury he had sustained before the Tokyo World Championships in September 2025, Neeraj made a late start to the season at the Doha Diamond League where he finished fourth with a throw of 85.69m.

The 28-year-old two-time Olympic medallist has already confirmed participation in the Commonwealth Games but has not unequivocally said that he will compete in the Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya from September 19 to October 4.

“Yes. He (Neeraj) will participate both in the Commonwealth Games and the Asian Games. He has qualified already and he is recovering.

“He has done 86m (85.69m) in his very first event, which is fantastic,”



Big test: Neeraj will be featuring in a star-studded field at the Aichi-Nagoya Asiad. FILE PHOTO

Sumariwalla said.

“He won a gold with 88m (in 2022 Asian Games in China), so he is already close to 86m, then we see no reason why he will not do well in both the Commonwealth Games and the Asian Games.”

The AFI’s selection committee is expected to name the Indian team for the Asian Games on Sunday, the last day of the ongoing National Inter-State Senior Athletics Championships here.

Neeraj had won gold in the last edition of the Asian Games in Hangzhou, China, in 2023, with a throw of 88.88m.

In Aichi-Nagoya, Neeraj is expected to face rising Sri Lankan star Rumesh

Tharanga Pathirage, who breached the 90m mark earlier this year and won two Diamond League titles, including in Doha where Neeraj finished fourth.

Pakistan’s Olympic champion Arshad Nadeem could also be in the mix, which will make the Asian Games men’s javelin throw highly competitive.

Nadeem is also the reigning Asian and Commonwealth Games champion. He, however, pulled out of the Doha Diamond League after the organisers initially announced his name.

Neeraj was earlier named in the 32-member Indian team for the Commonwealth Games.

With packed grids and clear-eyed kids, India’s karting scene revs up



Plenty of interest: Seventy-five drivers competed across four categories in the opening round.

S. Dipak Ragav
COIMBATORE

India’s motorsport culture is still in its nascent stage, despite having hosted World championship events such as F1, MotoGP and Formula E. The country has had only two drivers in F1, the last of whom raced back in 2012. The key to keeping that supply line going is a proper grass-roots-level programme, starting with karting. It is where things have been slow to grow, but the sport has steadily progressed over the last few years.

The sight of tiny tots, all of eight or nine years old, decked in racing suits and helmets, with their parents cheering them on at the opening round of the 2026 edition of the Meco FMSCI National Karting Championship here at the CoASTT circuit, is proof of that rising interest. There

was a grid of 75 drivers across four categories: Micro Max (8-12), Mini Max (10-14), Junior (12-15) and Senior (above 14) on Saturday, with a few more drivers set to join from subsequent rounds. The increasing number of entries, with nine teams fielding drivers across classes, has also transformed the way the series is run.

Former National champion Armaan Ebrahim, who runs the M-Sport team, says: “The current championship has the biggest karting grid in Asia. Equipment-wise, we’re on par with the rest of Asia. The chassis used here is the same as in the World championships. There may be slightly different specifications, but fundamentally it’s the same equipment.”

The increasing professionalism has also translated into rising on-track stan-

dards. “I’m extremely impressed by the level of understanding shown by the youngsters. They are remarkably disciplined and focused. Even eight-year-olds display incredible concentration during races. They understand exactly what they’re doing, and that reflects the quality of coaching they receive,” says former racing driver Mira Erda, who is Chief of Race Control here.

More importantly, as drivers look to pursue the sport seriously, the teams have had to adapt as well. “Every team is highly professional and employs international engine tuners, coaches and mechanics. It shows how seriously they take performance development, and all of this is excellent for the sport’s growth,” Armaan adds.

(The writer was in Coimbatore at the invitation of MECO Motorsports)

Devika, Rounak and Srikanth in semifinals

BADMINTON

Press Trust of India
FULLERTON

Thailand Masters winner Devika Sihag upset third seed Riko Gunji of Japan, while Rounak Chouhan continued his dream run to reached the semifinals of US Open badminton tournament. Devika kept her nerves in the business end of both the games to beat Gunji 22-20, 21-19 in the women’s singles quarterfinals, while Rounak defeated Israel’s Misha Zilberman 23-21, 21-11 in just 38 minutes to reach his first men’s singles BWF World Tour Super 300 semifinal,

here on Friday.

Later in the day, Former world No. 1 K. Srikanth packed off Liao Jhuo-Fu of Taiwan 21-9, 12-21, 21-8 in the other quarterfinal..

Denmark’s Line Christophersen got the better of Tanvi Sharma in the quarterfinals 21-16, 11-21, 21-11, while Rakshitha Sree went down 15-21, 21-16, 21-12 against Canada’s Rachel Chan.

The results (quarterfinals): Women: Devika Sihag bt Riko Gunji 22-20, 21-19; Line Christophersen bt Tanvi Sharma 21-16, 11-21, 21-11; Rachel Chan bt Rakshitha Sree 15-21, 21-16, 21-12. **Men:** Rounak Chouhan bt Misha Zilberman 23-21, 21-11; K. Srikanth bt Liao Jhuo-Fu 21-9, 12-21, 21-8.

Djokovic inspired by Serena

Agence France-Presse
LONDON

Novak Djokovic is taking inspiration from Serena Williams’ sensational comeback as he sets his sights on a record-breaking triumph at Wimbledon.

Serena has returned to competitive tennis at the age of 44 and will play her first singles match in four years when she faces Maya Joint in the Wimbledon first round next week.

The American legend has won 23 Grand Slam singles titles in her remarkable career, just behind Djokovic’s men’s record tally of 24.

Djokovic, 39, is chasing an all-time record of 25 Slam singles titles and Serena’s astonishing return –



Life lessons: Djokovic is motivated upon seeing Serena make a stellar return. GETTY IMAGES

motivated by a desire to play in front of her two young daughters – prompted him to seek out the American to discuss her comeback.

“First and foremost, what she is doing is inspirational... it is epic. That is

what I told her. I always admired her career, her journey, her story,” Djokovic said on Saturday.

“For her to come back after years of being absent from the tour, two children later, and to give so much effort not just for her own

satisfaction is remarkable. I told her that whatever happens, what she is doing is truly inspirational for me personally. I am sure it is the same for millions around the world.”

Djokovic set the Open era record for the oldest men’s Grand Slam singles finalist when he was beaten by Carlos Alcaraz in the Australian Open showpiece in January. Ken Rosewall is the oldest man to win a Grand Slam singles title in the Open era, aged 37 at the 1972 Australian Open.

With Serena’s return giving him extra belief in his own history bid, Djokovic hopes the American also enjoys a sustained run at a tournament she last won in 2016.

KARNATAKA



Gone, but not forgotten: Filmmakers unanimously accept that the passing of Puneeth Rajkumar has dealt a huge blow to the industry as his movies gave the vibe of a wholesome family drama that the entire household would not want to miss. K. MURALI KUMAR

Where are Kannada cinema’s next stars?

Kannada cinema still leans heavily on its tried-and-true male heroes and familiar storylines. It’s time for the industry to embrace a new generation of talent that reflects its vibrant, diverse audience, writes **Vivek MV**.

On a Monday afternoon (June 23, 2026), several shows in Bengaluru were filling fast for the Samantha Ruth Prabhu starrer *Maa Inti Bangaaram*. This kind of response on the first weekday after the opening weekend is something any Kannada hero would give his right arm for.

Fans are praising Samantha as the “Lady Superstar.” The Telugu film is reported to have crossed ₹50 crore at the worldwide box office. The question of why Kannada has fewer female-led movies has no clear answer, as the industry continues to underutilise several gifted female performers.

‘Macho protagonists’

“I see fewer stories from a woman’s perspective in Kannada. I continue to see macho protagonists,” actor-politician Ramya, a bankable star in the 2000s, had often expressed her concern.

Malashree, who entertained a generation with her action-oriented role, will be seen in a movie also starring Rukmini Vasanth, the latest sensation in Indian cinema.



The movie, bankrolled by KVN Productions, the makers of Vijay’s *Jana Nayagan*, could be a relief from the “hyper masculine” stories in the Kannada film industry.

While we wait for the emergence of strong female-led films in Kannada, the last couple of months have reiterated an even more basic dark truth: local audiences have become far more receptive to stars from neighbouring industries. For example, *Peddi*, starring Ram Charan, released on June 5, 2026, went on to become a blockbuster, with impressive performance in Bengaluru.

The relatively small pool of stars in Kannada cinema, compared to other film industries, has added to the challenges faced by an industry.

“It’s like the Tenali Raman and the cat story,” director Tharun Sudhir (*Kaatera*, *Roberrrt*) tells *The Hindu*. “He gave the cat piping hot milk. On seeing the milk next time, it ran away, thinking it was being given hot milk. Similarly, the industry consistently produced poor content, leading several film buffs to lose trust in Kannada movies.”

Young actors need support

That said, Tharun wants the Kannada audience to be more welcom-

The industry consistently produced poor content, leading several film buffs to lose trust in Kannada movies

THARUN SUDHIR,
Director

ing of new actors aiming big in the industry. *Mango Pachcha*, the debut of actor Sanchith Sanjeev, nephew of superstar Kichcha Sudeep, had all the ingredients of an engaging crime drama. It was an unconventional launch, with no typical hero-introduction song or punch dialogues. The character-driven movie had enough scope for all actors to shine.

Apart from the moniker ‘Jr Kichcha’, the movie didn’t seem like a forceful attempt to capitalise on Sudeep’s legacy. “Throughout the movie, we were conscious that we would not show any scene that makes me look like a star. Because if I need to appear like a star, I need to have a certain kind of aura around me. I am building my reputation and still getting introduced to the Kannada audience. If I start behaving like a star too soon, the audience will write me off,” he tells *The Hindu*.

Sanchith’s sensible words, positive reviews from those who saw it in the first week, or critical acclaim, nothing helped *Mango Pachcha* attain box office success. The movie once again called attention to Kannada audiences’ resistance to watching their own movies in cinemas, especially those starring new actors. *Peddi*, which was released on the same day as *Mango Pachcha*, enjoyed good foothall, despite mixed reviews and a controversy involving the objectification of Jahnuvi Kapoor, the female lead.

Compared to their Telugu counterparts, Kannada stars have had long gaps between their projects. Yash, who last starred in *KGF: Chapter 2* in 2022, will be making his big-screen return after more than four years with *Toxic: A Fairytale for Grown-Ups*, on August 26, 2026. Rakshit Shetty has not announced his next project after featuring in the acclaimed relationship drama *Sapta Sagaradaache Ello Side B* in 2023. There will be no Sudeep release in 2026.

The reasons for stars featuring in fewer projects range from personal choices to stop-start plans. “If you love your profession, you need to take a break to feel fresh and get back to it. Cinema is a creative field, and you may go blank sometimes. I will not plan my career based on how another actor’s career is shaping up. I have no such insecurity,” Sudeep had told *The Hindu* ahead of his movie *Max* (2025).

No justification can satisfy fans. Frustrated by the lack of updates about Sudeep’s projects, the actor’s fans planned a “Wake Up Sudeep” cam-

paign on X. The development forced Sudeep to clarify the status of his upcoming movies.

Director Suri’s debut *Duniya*, the raw crime drama, made Vijay an overnight star. Eight years later, when he made the gripping road thriller *Kendasampige* with two newcomers (Vikky Varun and Manvitha Kamath), the director famously remarked that he could even make a coconut-seller a hero, a statement that reflected his confidence in his storytelling rather than star power.

“When I think about offbeat stars, Shankar Nag is the first actor who comes to mind. There was something about him that gave us hope about cinema. It was inspiring to see him say yes to roles that were considered risky for stars,” says Suri. According to the filmmaker, Raj B. Shetty is the last star yet to fully earn the audience’s trust in Kannada cinema.

“What he did with *Garuda Gamana Vrishabha Vahana* (2021) was so special that it gave me the creative high I got when I read my favourite books, such as *Kusuma Bale* and *Karvalo*. He is here to stay despite some slip-ups because he has earned the backing of people,” Suri reasons.

Industry insiders feel cinema has moved beyond stars. What does the gigantic success of *Obsession* tell us? It shows people are interested in films that give them an experience and not just entertain. Kannadigas are flocking to theatres to watch this horror sensation. The movie earned the most in Karnataka compared to the rest of the screenings across the country.

Blind pan-India chase

The success of the *KGF* and *Kantara* films helped Kannada filmmakers access a wider market and gain national visibility. “But did we utilise the platform set by those movies? No,” says Suri.

There was a noticeable rush among producers to chase the pan-India trend, often funding mediocre scripts in the process. Dhruva Sarja decided to take his stardom beyond Sandalwood and failed, delivering three forgettable movies: *Pogaru*, *Martin*, and *KD*. Upendra’s attempt with *Kabzaa* and *UI* did not yield the expected results.

Filmmakers unanimously accept that the passing of Puneeth Rajkumar has dealt a huge blow to the industry. “His movies gave the vibe of a wholesome family drama that the entire household would not want to miss,” opines Suri.

Director Pawan Wadeyar, who worked with Puneeth in *Rana Vikrama* (2015) and *Natasaaravahowma* (2019), says he was never conscious or obsessed with his star image. “If he were, he wouldn’t have done a social drama such as *Mythri* (2015),” says Pawan.

For producers and cinema owners, a despondent atmosphere in the ‘B’ & ‘C’ centres is an alarm bell. Darshan is one of the most dependable stars in the Kannada industry, with his fandom spreading across regions of the state. With him in prison in a murder case and no clarity on his future, it’s not happy news for many stakeholders in the industry.

Malayalam vs. Kannada

Amid a low turnout for Kannada movies, Vijay Raghavendra has quietly delivered an “OTT hit”. The actor’s *Second Case of Seetharam*

did decent, if not extraordinary, business in theatres. It was a different story altogether when the movie dropped on Prime Video. “So far, the movie has crossed 150 million streaming minutes,” informs Pawan, who presented the movie.

Second Case of Seetharam is a rare exception of a Kannada movie doing well on OTT and this is a welcome development for the industry.

“OTT platforms have shown me the data of people from Karnataka watching Malayalam content over anything else,” points out Tharun.

Malayalam thrillers are red-hot favourites for binge-watchers on OTT. “It’s reached a stage where if we see a Malayalam film poster featuring a cop, it’s given that it will do well.” Tharun’s claim isn’t an exaggeration, considering how *Dridam*, the recent cop thriller, has performed on OTT after being a theatrical flop in Kerala. The movie is one of the most discussed among the Kannada crowd on social media.

With no cushion of a sure-shot OTT deal, Kannada directors are left with the option of achieving theatrical success. The likes of Ganesh and Duniya Vijay had a dream start to their careers, setting box office records. If only they had chosen better scripts, they would have been a better box office prospect than they are today. When established stars fail to evolve with changing audience tastes, viewers naturally begin looking for fresh faces. The Malayalam film industry offers a striking example of this shift, with talents such as Mamitha Baiju and Anaswara Rajan achieving widespread popularity and star status before the age of 25.

The relatability factor

Swaroop Kodur, film writer, says relatability goes a long way in shaping stardom. “To be a superstar takes a journey. The audience should feel that he or she is a homegrown talent. For Yash, *Kirathaka* (2011) was a game-changer. The movie had the Mandya *sogadu* (flavour), the characters looked real, and Yash’s talent was on display. He pulled off the brute, village boy character convincingly,” he explains.

Swaroop highlights the importance of obtaining the filmgoers’ trust. “Every time a film of his came out, Yash never limited himself to acting. He gave the impression that he was building his career from scratch, ensuring every film of his was done well. This process included ignoring mediocre projects. It’s time stars take up more responsibility and take their reputation seriously.”

Gilli Nata, the latest Bigg Boss winner, is aiming for this kind of relatability in his acting career. With 2 million followers on Instagram, his popularity has spread beyond urban centres. People from rural pockets are going crazy about him.

Swaroop feels stardom is also propelled by regional affinity. “Rakshit Shetty is the best example for it. Stardom is a combination of factors. In Telugu, Allu Arjun explored a series of interesting characters, showcasing his skills in every movie. You must make the audience feel that you aren’t taking them for granted. Another important aspect is widening one’s ecosystem. Rakshit, Daali Dhananjaya and Rishab Shetty brought passionate individuals, like young directors and writers, to their team,” he reasons.

A star with a difference

Rangayana Raghu’s reinvention as a character-driven lead actor (*Shakhahaari*, *Agyathavasi*) is a big plus for filmmakers. “In commercial cinema, the popular notion is that an actor who can produce a strong opening is a star. I don’t see it that way,” says Nagaraja Somayaji, a one-film-old filmmaker whose next with Rangayana Raghu, *Devi Mahatme*, has created buzz for its intriguing trailer.

“Raghu sir has created an interest in his performance through his successful stint as a comedian for decades. He is capable of bringing value to unique scripts, and that’s a quality of a star, according to me.”





In mourning: Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay consoling the family of Bhagyaraj in Chennai on Saturday. ANI



Paying respects: Leader of the Opposition Udhayanidhi Stalin placing a garland on Bhagyaraj's mortal remains. ANI



Homage to an artist: Actor Rajinikanth at Bhagyaraj's residence to pay final tributes. J. JOHAN SATHYADAS



Solemn visit: Minister Vanni Arasu arrives at the residence of the late actor-director. J. JOHAN SATHYADAS

The quintessential man-next-door hero of Tamil silver screen



Bhagyaraj and Shobana in *Idhu Namma Aalu*. THE HINDU ARCHIVES

K.C. Vijaya Kumar
CHENNAI

Earthy humour, man-woman dynamics, and rooted stories defined K. Bhagyaraj's legacy. The ace director and actor, who passed away on Saturday, was Bharathiraja's favourite assistant director. The guru passed away on June 10, and the disciple followed suit after a fortnight.

As a bespectacled hero, Bhagyaraj cut through the preconceived notions of how a celluloid figure should appear. He was the quintessential man next door, often landing in a pickle and then finding endearing ways to extricate himself, while also offering a social message through his films.

Having started as an assistant to Bharathiraja in *16 Vayathinile* (1977), Bhagyaraj caught the eye of the lead stars Kamal Haasan and Rajinikanth.

"Bhagyaraj was the one who made me utter the iconic dialogue '*idhu yep-padi irukku*' with a particular tonal variation," Rajinikanth said recently. "At that time, we were not fully aware of the rich talent that was present in that film," Mr. Haasan stated, referring to Bhagyaraj.

After learning the ropes from Bharathiraja, Bhagyaraj branched out as a director and often cast himself as the hero.

He could laugh at himself, a rare attribute in an industry where self-obsession is presumed to be the norm.

If many stars had their distinctive fan bases, ranging from college-goers to senior citizens, Bhagyaraj drew in the women.

Homemakers found time to catch his hits, usually the matinee show, after finishing their household chores. Be it *Mundhanai Mudichu* or *Chinna Veedu*, Bhagyaraj kept the box-office humming. He launched actress Urvashi and in his films, women were never props, they had agency and spoke their minds.

He even directed Amitabh Bachchan's *Aakhree Raasta*, a remake of *Oru Kaidhiyin Diary*, helmed by Bharathiraja and starring Kamal Haasan.

A multifaceted figure

The multifaceted skills that Bhagyaraj possessed, ranging from writing to acting, inspired many others to follow suit, notably R. Parthiban and Pandiarajan.

Even at his peak, Bhagyaraj found time to direct Vijayakanth in *Chokka Thangam*. Later, he became a character actor, often lending believability to the roles he essayed.

Hailing from Erode district, Bhagyaraj came up with cheeky one-liners, something that also defined his buddies from the same *Kongunadu* region, including Sathyaraj and Goundamani.

Bhagyaraj defined a certain era in Tamil filmdom that was all about nuance. His departure is a massive loss to Tamil's creative space.

A master of screenplay and storytelling

The success formula of Bhagyaraj's hit movies was simple — stories woven around relatable everyday conflicts and sprinkled with good songs and situational humour

K. Muralitharan
CHENNAI

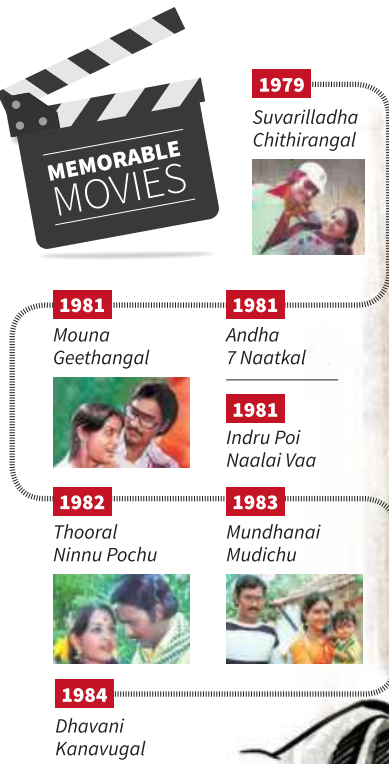
K. Bhagyaraj is one of the very few directors in the Tamil film industry who has been widely acclaimed for his screenwriting. During the late 1970s — a period when stalwarts like K. Balachander and C.V. Sridhar were actively dominating the industry — Bhagyaraj carved out a niche for himself through his engaging and interesting screenplay design.

Arriving in Chennai with the aspiration of becoming a film director, the first movie Bhagyaraj worked on, was as an assistant director for *Ezhai Panakkaran*. Directed by G. Ramakrishnan, the shooting of this film ground to a halt within just two days. It was after this setback that Bhagyaraj went on to join director Bharathiraja. Having worked on films like *16 Vayathinile* and *Kizhakke Pogum Rail*, he wrote the dialogues for *Sigappu Rojakkal*.

Although Bhagyaraj was highly skilled in writing screenplays and dialogues, a film featuring him as the lead actor was released even before a film under his own direction could hit the screens.

When Bharathiraja wanted to make the film *Puthiya Vaarpugal*, he chose Bhagyaraj as the protagonist. Bhagyaraj also penned the dialogues for the movie. Becoming a massive success, this film effectively established Bhagyaraj among the masses.

However, his talent truly shone on the silver screen when his directorial debut, *Suvarillatha Chithirangal*, was released in 1979. Struc-



turally, it was a deeply melancholic story. Yet, it was the lively and entertaining screenplay of the first half that turned the movie into a noteworthy success.

The movie *Indru Poi Naalai Vaa* is a prime example of Bhagyaraj's signature style. The film about the hilarious struggles of three young men trying to charm a young woman remains a cult classic comedy 45 years after its release.

Similarly, the movie *Antha 7 Naatkal* is a pivotal milestone in Bhagyaraj's career. The screenplay, dialogues, songs, and comedy of this film were all exceptionally well-crafted.

With a string of movies such as *Oru Kai Osai*, *Mouna Geethangal*, *Vidiyum Varai Kaathiru*, *Thooral Ninnu Pochu*, *Darling Darling Darling*, and *Munthanai Mudichu*, Bhagyaraj rapidly emerged as one of the most successful directors in the Tamil film industry. Many of the films he direct-



ed ran for over 100 days.

A prime example of Bhagyaraj's genius was reviving a stalled M.G. Ramachandran (MGR) film after several years by seamlessly weaving it into a brand-new screenplay. The film *Anna Nee En Deivam*, starring MGR, was originally being directed by C.V. Sridhar. However, since MGR became the Chief Minister, the film was shelved after shooting only about 5,000 feet of reel. Bhagyaraj took those existing scenes, wrote a completely fresh screenplay around them, and filmed it under the title *Avasara Police 100*. Re-

leased after MGR's demise, the movie enjoyed a successful run at the box office.

Beyond the script

Bhagyaraj's cinematic prowess, however, did not stop at acting, directing, and dialogue writing; he also demonstrated remarkable talent in music composition. Several songs from the movies he scored — such as *Idhu Namma Aalu*, *Aararo Aariraro*, and *Pavummu Pavunuthan* — became chart-busters at the time.

However, post-*Munthanai Mudichu*, critics noted that adult-themed and sex-

ual humour became noticeably prominent in his work. His film *Rasukutti*, in particular, marked the peak of this trend.

Over time, this style evolved to become a definitive hallmark of his cinema.

"As far as Bhagyaraj is concerned, he expanded the boundaries of Tamil cinema in the '80s and amplified its entertainment quotient. He achieved popularity by blending a lot of music, comedy, and glamour with realistic storytelling. It was because of these elements that his films achieved massive commercial success," said Tamil film historian Theodore Baskaran.

The genius director who effortlessly melded comedy and crisis

Ramya Kannan
CHENNAI

Acknowledged as an ace wordsmith and famed for his intuitive comic timing, K. Bhagyaraj, interestingly, believed that out of crisis comes comedy. The comic scenarios in his films do not run as a parallel track alone, but inside the main plot; they run alongside the conflict vein, mixing drama and crisis with comedy, elevating the resolution and making it Bhagyaraj's own.

This is particularly prominent in films where he donned hero roles. The fact that he brought down the hero from a pedestal — a bespectacled, skinny youngster not afraid of being vulnerable, poor, or self-deprecatory, and willing to be laughed at — lent itself to the humour track. While in his later films he

came to be known for infusing his comedy dialogues with a tinge of the bawdy and risqué, his signature was his craft of wedging situational humour into melodramatic situations.

As a result, the tension created feels human, not unresolvably heavy. There are relatable flaws, miscommunication, and a quiet desperation that drives the plot.

Take his classic *Antha 7 Naatkal*, for instance. The comedy in the movie initially derives from the reduced circumstances of a musician, Palakkad Mahavan; it soon gets intense as his lover Vasanthi (essayed by Ambika) is forced into a marriage with a stranger, played by Rajesh.

As the young woman finds her heart locked with her lover and her fortunes



Bhagyaraj and Radhika in *Indru Poi Naalai Vaa*. THE HINDU ARCHIVES

tied with her husband, Bhagyaraj, the master scriptwriter, introduces a climax that hinges on the value of the *thali*, a symbol of marriage and a sentiment many Tamil movies have exploited. The climax becomes bittersweet and predictable for the times he lived in, as Bhagyaraj leaves, respecting the woman's newfound love for

her husband and the *thali* that he has tied. Even when the situation looks tense, he finds a way to make the audience notice vanity, awkwardness, or emotional self-deception and the disrobing of all of these.

If you believe life's toughest situations are also life's funniest, Bhagyaraj was your man. He would

place his characters in morally or emotionally tricky situations, sometimes even contrived, drawing drama from their responses to the situation. His genius was to find comedy not out of conflict but inside it.

Humour and heartache

In *Indru Poi Naalai Vaa*, the plot of the film that Bhagyaraj claimed to have written overnight revolves around three men who vie for the attention of one girl. The humour sits on social and romantic confusion, slipping into a comedy of errors at the end. A legendary scene from this film is the comic track involving a Hindi master and the now-famous "*Ek gaon mein ek kisan Raghu thatha*," a dig against Hindi imposition.

While Bhagyaraj, as the hero Pazhanisamy, even-

tually wins the girl, played by Radhika, the film is another strong illustration of the director's ability to squeeze comedy from real-life situations and pressures.

In another of his much-loved films, *Mundhanai Mudichu*, the tension is already present — a girl falls in love with a widower who works as a teacher in the village and marries him by falsely accusing him of having had sex with her. But does she have his love yet? The central relationship is already charged with emotional and social conflict, but Bhagyaraj's touch allows the pressure to be moulded into playful, awkward comedy.

In *Darling, Darling, Darling*, again tensions between the hero and the heroine form the scaffolding for the movie. In a se-

ries of miscommunication and missed cues, emerges pathos but also situations where the audience is laughing and crying at the same time. Finally, technically as a hero, he manages to get the girl, but has to sweat for it. The later *Rasukutti*, where Bhagyaraj plays a spoilt landlord, also presents an endearing, clown-like hero who has to undergo a trial by fire in order to surface. The comic sequences in them are again intertwined with pathos, but he finds a way to smile inside it.

Few directors or actors could yoke together situational comedy and pathos so well. With the departure of Bhagyaraj, his movies remain as sterling examples of how to take a complex situation and effortlessly squeeze comedy out of it.



For fifty years, in the Tamil film world, through his extraordinary talent and creativity, he has given many successful films and earned an indelible place in the hearts of Tamil people—our friend Mr. Bhagyaraj. His sudden passing causes me immense sorrow and shock

RAJINIKANTH

The news of K. Bhagyaraj sir's passing is truly heartbreaking. A visionary filmmaker, brilliant storyteller, and exceptional actor. He brought laughter, warmth, and meaningful social messages through his work. Tamil cinema has lost one of its finest creative minds

SIMRAN

Deeply shocked and saddened by the sudden passing of our beloved Bhagyaraj sir. His untimely demise leaves a huge void in our creative world and we all mourn the loss of an icon. A renaissance man who has been

relevant to every generation, he leaves a lasting legacy for ages to come

GAUTAMI TADIMALLA

RIP Bhagyaraj. Heartfelt condolences. Deeply shocked and heartbroken beyond words

MAMMOOTTY

Bhagyaraj garu was full of life and joy. To wake up to the news of his passing this morning is simply unbelievable. A brilliant filmmaker, exceptional screenplay writer, and fine actor, his contribution to Indian cinema will always be remembered

CHIRANJEEVI

He happily attended actor Khushbu's daughter's wedding in Goa with us. He was very happy

SUHASINI

India's legendary screenwriter, director, and actor Bhagyaraj has passed away. I pay my heartfelt tributes to him and extend my deepest condolences to his family. Sir, when will we ever see a storyteller like you again?

ROHINI MOLLETTI