

INBRIEF



Jharkhand govt. appoints 1,042 new teachers for govt. schools

Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren on Monday handed over the job letters to 1,042 newly appointed teachers for government schools during a programme held in Ranchi. Addressing the teachers, Mr. Soren said they will determine the future of the State's intellectual landscape and how the next generation will stand on its own feet. He said if the teachers discharge their duties with honesty and diligence, both society and the State will get the benefits. He urged teachers to adopt a sensitive and skilful approach in their interactions with children.

Nishant moves into house adjacent to CM's residence

Bihar Health Minister Nishant Kumar on Monday moved into a sprawling bungalow adjacent to the residence of the Chief Minister, which had served as his home until his father Nitish Kumar demitted office. The 44-year-old reclusive politician entered 5, Desh Ratna Marg, which has for nearly half a decade served as the official residence of the Deputy Chief Minister, after a religious ceremony, which was attended, among others, by his septuagenarian father. The new government headed by BJP leader Samrat Choudhary, a former deputy of Nitish Kumar who occupied 5, Desh Ratna Marg until elevation to the Chief Minister's post, has allotted a new bungalow, 7, Circular Road, to the JD(U) supremo. PTI

Death penalty for accused in Pune rape-murder of child

Terming it a 'rarest of the rare' case, judge rejects leniency plea based on age; verdict comes within 60 days of the crime; Maharashtra CM hails the judgment as a 'new benchmark' in speedy justice

Chinmay Gaikwad
MUMBAI

A special court in Maharashtra's Pune district on Monday sentenced a 65-year-old man to death days after he was convicted of rape and murder of a three-and-a-half-year-old girl in Nasrapur village of Bhor taluka.

Special Judge S.R. Salunke pronounced the sentence days after the court convicted Bhimrao Prabhakar Kamble on June 25 under multiple provisions of the Indian Penal Code and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. The court held that the prosecution had established the charges against the accused.

The verdict comes within 60 days of the crime on May 1 that sparked widespread outrage and protests across the State.

Terming the case "rarest of the rare", the judge rejected the defense's plea for leniency based on the age of the accused, highlighting his history of violence. "The offence was committed outrageously and involved inhuman treatment and torture of



A file photo of the police dispersing protesters who blocked the Pune-Bengaluru Highway on May 2 after the rape and murder. ANI

The police filed a chargesheet, including statements of more than 55 witnesses, within 15 days of the incident

the victim. The victim was an innocent, helpless child. It was a cold-blooded murder without provocation. The depravity shocked the conscience of the judiciary and society," the judge observed.

The victim's family was present in the court when the sentence was read out. The ruling is expected to be reviewed by the Bombay High Court if the accused files an appeal. Kam-

ble will remain in judicial custody pending further legal proceedings.

The trial, which commenced on May 21, concluded within two months of the crime, making it one of the fastest cases to be disposed of in the State's judicial history. The court conducted daily hearings in-camera given the sensitive nature of the case.

The police filed a 1,200-page chargesheet within 15 days of the incident. It included statements of more than 55 witnesses, circumstantial evidence, and technical evidence.

'Landmark ruling' Speaking to reporters outside the court, Special Pu-

blic Prosecutor Ajay Misar termed the ruling "landmark". He said the prosecution relied on 12 Supreme Court precedents to establish the "rarest of the rare" criterion. During the trial, the court recorded the statements of 10 witnesses, including children, in a single day, he said.

The prosecution proved all charges, including kidnapping, molestation, rape and murder, along with offences under the POCSO Act, Mr. Misar added.

The father of the victim expressed satisfaction over the verdict and said the family now wants the execution of the order. "We are satisfied with the decision," he told reporters.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis hailed the verdict as a "new benchmark" in speedy justice, saying the convict was handed the death sentence within 60 days of the crime. Making a statement in the Assembly, Mr. Fadnavis said the accused was convicted on June 25, the 55th day after the incident, and was awarded the death sentence on Monday after the examination of over 55 witnesses and completion of all legal procedures.



Amit Shah (centre), Haryana CM Nayab Singh Saini (left) and Rajasthan CM Bhajanlal Sharma (right) in New Delhi on Monday. PTI

Haryana, Rajasthan ink pact to implement Yamuna water accord

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Haryana and Rajasthan on Monday signed an agreement in the presence of Union Home Minister Amit Shah for the construction and implementation of the Yamuna Water Project, officials said.

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed on May 12, 1994 by the Yamuna basin States - Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and the National Capital Territory of Delhi - regarding allocation of the surface flow of the river.

After its creation in 2000, Uttarakhand was also included in the MoU.

Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma, Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini, Union Jal Shak-

ti Minister C.R. Patil and senior officials from the Central government and the State governments were present during the ceremony.

Underground pipeline Addressing the meeting, Mr. Shah said the project seeks to facilitate the conveyance of Rajasthan's allocated share of Yamuna waters through underground pipeline system from the Western Yamuna Canal, enabling the State to effectively utilise the water allocated to it under the 1994 MoU on the sharing of utilisable surface waters of the Upper Yamuna Basin.

He said the agreement has resolved the nearly three-decade-old water-related problem faced by the people of Haryana and Rajasthan.

Police file FIR after Shia groups clash in Kashmir

The Hindu Bureau
SRINAGAR

The Jammu & Kashmir Police on Monday registered an FIR in connection with a scuffle between groups of the Shia community in Budgam's Hardpanzoo.

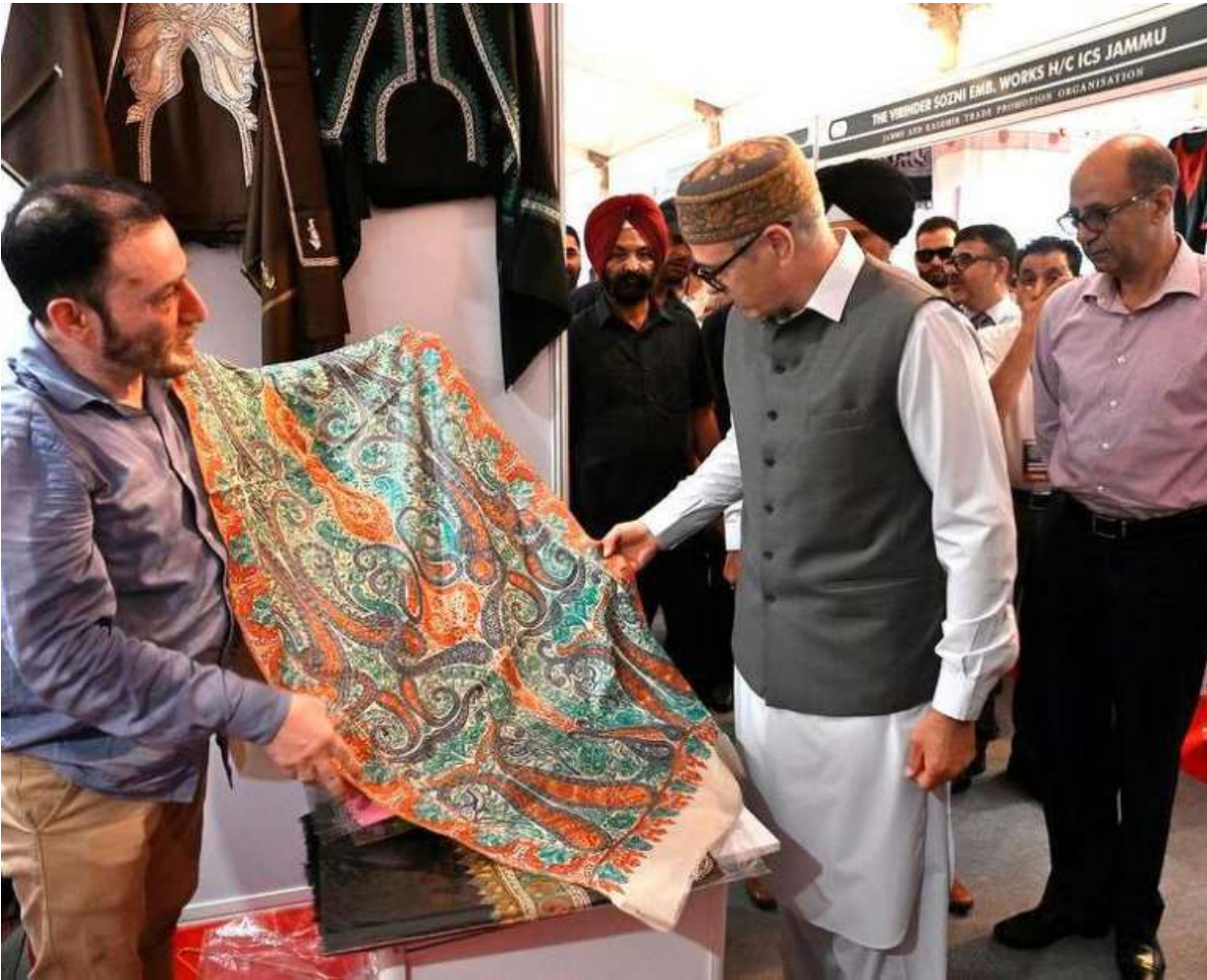
The All J&K Shia Association president Molvi Imran Reza Ansari blamed Pakistan-backed elements for the violence.

"A fair, impartial and evidence-based investigation is underway. Anyone found involved, irrespective of affiliation, will face strict legal action as per law," the police said.

The fight happened over a religious site where a procession is taken out on the day of Ashura every year. Officials said Mr. Ansari's relatives were among those attacked.

"We have full faith in the police and our Constitution," said Mr. Ansari.

Initiative for exports



Boost to trade: Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah visits a stall after inaugurating the J&K International Buyer-Seller Meet, 2026, at the Sher-i-Kashmir International Conference Centre in Srinagar, on Monday. IMRAN NISSAR

Omar seeks Mann's help to stop 'illegal' taxation on J&K livestock vehicles passing through Punjab

The Hindu Bureau
SRINAGAR

Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Monday wrote to his Punjab counterpart Bhagwant Mann over "unauthorized levy on livestock transport vehicles transiting through Punjab."

Referring to protests by the All-Kashmir Wholesale Mutton Dealers Union, Mr. Abdullah said, "Livestock-laden vehicles bound for J&K are allegedly being stopped by certain contractor groups and subjected to unauthorized fee collection despite carrying all valid permits and requisite documentation."

Mr. Abdullah said such interruptions "cause avoidable delays, financial losses and hardship to transporters, besides adversely affecting animal welfare."

Seeking the intervention of Mr. Mann on the is-

Such practices are inconsistent with the spirit of mutual cooperation, the J&K Chief Minister says

sue, the J&K Chief Minister said, "I would request your kind intervention in having the matter examined and in ensuring the smooth, secure and unhindered movement of livestock transport vehicles through Punjab". Mr. Abdullah asked the Punjab government to ensure "no unauthorized interference or collection of charges is permitted from transporters carrying valid documentation and complying with all statutory requirements."

The J&K government had the issue examined by the Department of Food, Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs through an internal committee.

According to the letter, the findings indicate that transporters are reportedly being compelled to make substantial payments per vehicle during transit without any apparent legal sanction.

'Exempted from GST' "The committee has further observed that livestock movement is exempted from GST and that the continued imposition of such charges is placing an additional burden on the livestock trade, with consequential impact on meat prices and consumers in J&K," said Mr. Abdullah.

Stating that Punjab and J&K "share longstanding bonds of friendship, cooperation and economic interdependence", Mr. Abdullah said any such practices, if found to be occurring, are inconsistent with the spirit of the mutual cooperation.

Delhi revives PPP slum revamp model; 'magicians' of Kathputli Colony still in transit

Suruchi Kumari
NEW DELHI

Lakshmi was born and raised in a family of performers in the now-razed Kathputli Colony in west Delhi's Shadipur. She was 19 when her family moved from the 'magicians' ghetto', as Salman Rushdie described the settlement in *Midnight's Children*, into porta cabins set up on a hillock named Anand Parbat about 3 km away. The arrangement was supposed to be temporary.

Her family was among the 4,000 displaced between 2014 and 2017 after the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) entered into an in situ slum rehabilitation agreement with private builder Raheja Developers. It was the first time the urban body had signed an agreement for

such a project under a public-private partnership (PPP) model.

As per the terms, the developer was to hand over 2,800 Economically Weaker Section (EWS) flats, along with all basic facilities, on around 60% of the 12.89 acres of land to the authority free of cost, and receive the remaining 40% for remunerative housing to sell in the open market and for commercial complexes. Of the remaining families, 492 were allotted flats in Narela while others were deemed ineligible for resettlement. The contract also held the developer responsible for meeting the basic civic expenses at the temporary camp.

The DDA has not entered into another PPP in situ redevelopment project since. However, the model is now set to be adopted



(Left) The transit camp at Anand Parbat where 2,800 families have been staying for as many as 12 years; buildings under construction at the now-razed Kathputli Colony. SURUCHI KUMARI/ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

under the Delhi Slum and JJ Cluster Rehabilitation and Relocation Policy, 2026, announced by Union Home Minister Amit Shah on June 16. Under the policy, which is yet to be notified, the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board is the nodal agency for works

carried out on Delhi government land.

Ms. Lakshmi is now 31 and lives with seven members of her family, including her children, in two one-room porta cabins, with no sign yet of the promised flats.

"When we came here in

2014, we were told the arrangement was only for two years. After that, the deadline kept getting pushed. Sometimes they said Deepavali, then the new year, and so on," she said. "The last I heard, we were supposed to move into the flats in May this year.

We have lost all hope," Ms. Lakshmi said.

Upon entering the transit camp at Anand Parbat, one is immediately confronted by open drains carrying human faeces, mounds of garbage, and a water tanker that residents say they are forced to rely on because the tap water is unfit for consumption.

In double bind

The residents here are trapped in a double bind. They cannot move out of their visibly worn-out plywood rooms because as per the terms of the contract, if any family is found during random inspections by the DDA or the developer to not be residing in the transit camp, their name can be struck off the beneficiaries' list.

The family of dhol players had plenty of work

to sustain their livelihoods before moving to Anand Parbat, she said.

Ms. Lakshmi added, "Our work continued through all seasons. People used to come looking for artistes and performers in Kathputli Colony. Now we have to find them."

When reached for comment, the DDA and Raheja Developers did not respond.

Prakash Bhatt, a 58-year-old puppeteer, quotes from the folklore *Veer Amar Singh Rathore* to describe the hopelessness of the families at Anand Parbat: "*Che mahine ka vaada karke saal bhar naa aaye* (After promising six months, you didn't even show up in a year)."

Another generational puppeteer, Puran Bhatt, said his work has been severely affected. His family

moved to Delhi from Rajasthan over six decades ago. He has performed in 30 countries, all before moving to the transit camp. "Since our address changed, nobody knows where we live," he said.

No clear deadline

When *The Hindu* visited the construction site in Shadipur, work appeared to have been paused.

Several yellow-painted EWS towers stood in the compound beside others still under construction, including a commercial complex.

A site engineer, who did not wish to be identified, said work has not resumed for nearly seven months, even after pollution-related restrictions were lifted. The site manager said the work had been paused due to "procedural hurdles".

Surveillance boost: Army to raise 'Baaz Battalions'

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Indian Army is raising dedicated 'Baaz Battalions' to significantly enhance its Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA) capability, a move aimed at strengthening battlefield surveillance, intelligence gathering and rapid response through a specialised drone force, defence sources said.

Sources in the Indian Army have confirmed the development and said that the new battalions will be built upon the Army's existing RPA Flights and will comprise a specialist pool of trained personnel responsible for operating and managing Remotely Piloted Aircraft systems.

The initiative is intended to bolster the Army's Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities by providing integrated aerial surveillance, persistent battlefield awareness and improved situational awareness for frontline formations.

The Baaz Battalions will centralise the Army's expanding drone capabilities and will be designed to handle the entire lifecycle of RPA operations, including deployment, maintenance, data exploitation and seamless integration with ground forces.

Bengal passes preventive detention, legal curbs Bill

Govt. can detain a person for a year to prevent anti-social activity; CM Suwendu Adhikari says State 'will not misuse [law]... for political vendetta'; law won't stand legal scrutiny, says Trinamool MLA

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

The West Bengal Assembly on Monday passed two controversial laws providing for detention of 'anti-socials' for a year and restricting access to a lawyer for such persons, and payment of compensation by those accused of damaging private or public property.

The West Bengal Public Safety and Control of Anti-Social Activities Bill, 2026 empowers the government to detain a person if it deems necessary to stop future anti-social activity for almost a year. It said the government can detain those "generally reputed to be desperate and dangerous to the community".

The Bill proposes constitution of an advisory board where every detention case will be scrutinised within three weeks. The board, which will comprise a chairperson who is or has been a High Court judge, will decide if a person remains in detention or has to be released.

Section 10 (4) of the Bill states, "A detained person shall not be ordinarily represented by a legal practi-

Cracking down

The West Bengal government says the newly introduced Bills aim to curb anti-social activities

■ The West Bengal Public Safety and Control of Anti-Social Activities Bill, 2026, allows preventive detention for up to one year if authorities believe a person may engage in future anti-social activities. Cases will be reviewed by an advisory board headed by a current or former High Court judge

■ The Bill states that detained

persons will ordinarily not be represented by a lawyer before the advisory board, though the board may make exceptions

■ The West Bengal Maintenance of Public Order (Amendment) Bill, 2026, empowers authorities to recover compensation from those found responsible for damage to public or private property

tioner before an advisory board." The proviso of the same sub-section says that the board may remove this prohibition in appropriate cases which should be recorded in writing.

Another legislation passed, titled "The West Bengal Maintenance of Public Order (Amendment) Bill, 2026", imposes a payment of compensation by persons committing offences such as damage to public or private property.

'Won't misuse'

Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari said such a law has

become necessary because of the criminalisation of politics and added that similar laws have been implemented in Maharashtra, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Jharkhand.

Mr. Adhikari referred to incidents of mob violence when the Trinamool Congress was in power, particularly the killings of Haragobinda Das and Chandan Das in April 2025.

"We will not misuse this law. This law will not be used against anyone for the purpose of political vendetta," he said, amidst

concern from the Opposition.

Trinamool MLA from Chanchal and former IPS officer Prasun Banerjee described certain provisions of the Bill as "scary" and said the law will not stand judicial scrutiny. He said by empowering the administration, the BJP government is creating a "Frankenstein" with sweeping powers. He said that by allowing District Magistrates to issue warrants, the Bill is trying to create a "State within the State".

'Anarchy is prevailing'

The State's Parliamentary Affairs Minister Sankar Ghosh said that "anarchy" was prevailing in society because of the Trinamool's 15-year rule and those opposing the Bill want the anarchy to stay. "Right to protest can be a fundamental right but right to destroy public property cannot be a right," he said.

Minister Agnimitra Paul said the Trinamool government was run by "goons" and the new law is an attempt at course correction.

Several Opposition MLAs said the Bill will curb peaceful protests and students' movements.

Bihar Governor and MoS to attend Khamenei's funeral

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

Bihar Governor Lt. General Syed Ata Hasnain (ret'd) and Minister of State for External Affairs Pabitra Margherita are likely to lead the Indian delegation to Iran for the funeral ceremonies of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, sources familiar with the plans told *The Hindu*.

The final composition of the delegation is yet to be firmed up, officials said.

Khamenei was killed in Israeli strikes on February 28, the first day of the U.S.-Israeli operation.

Last week, President Masoud Pezeshkian had invited Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the burial-related ceremonies in Iran. However, it is understood that Mr. Modi has prior commitments to travel to Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand from July 6.

Iran has invited a large group of foreign dignitaries to the burial-related events that will begin on July 3 and continue till July 9.

The choice of Mr. Hasnain and Mr. Margherita has drawn criticism from veteran diplomats here. Talmiz Ahmad, India's former Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, has said that he is "deeply disappointed".



Lt. Gen. Syed Ata Hasnain

"This is not the appropriate representation, given the high stature of the person concerned. Khamenei is held in very high regard in India. He has met all the Prime Ministers of the past four decades, including our present Prime Minister," said Mr. Ahmad, while referring to the changes sweeping the region that require India to make its diplomatic moves carefully.

Commentators here described the funeral as a "big opportunity" for India to restructure its West Asia policy. However, the choice of the delegation indicate that India is not recognising the importance of the event, they said.

In 2024, then Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar represented the government at the funeral of President Ebrahim Raisi, after he died in a helicopter crash.

T.N. CM directs Collectors, SPs to act without political interference

Press Trust of India
CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay on Monday directed District Collectors and Superintendents of Police to effectively tackle crimes by identifying the root cause and maximise public safety.

Stressing the need to crack down on drug trafficking and protect natural resources from plunder, he said no wrongdoers, regardless of their standing, should escape swift and impartial punishment.

Addressing the first two-day joint conference of Collectors, SPs and other senior police officials since his Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK)-led government assumed office in May, Mr. Vijay said the officials



C. Joseph Vijay

"could act without political interference".

"District Collectors and Superintendents of Police should actively monitor and take action against drug trafficking and smuggling of mineral resources," Mr. Vijay said at the conference held at the Secretariat here.

"Collectors and SPs should take steps to prevent criminal incidents by identifying the root cause.

A change should be brought about in the behaviour of those who disturb law and order," he said.

Ensure women's safety

Safety of women should be ensured and special arrangements should be made for their protection. Special attention should also be given to the safety of students, he said.

"Shops near schools should be continuously monitored.

Periodic checks should be conducted if necessary. Those involved in drug-related crimes should be immediately arrested and punished," Mr. Vijay said.

He suggested that Collectors hold a law and order meeting every month and coordinate with the relevant departments.

Chinmay Gaikwad
MUMBAI

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing the Maharashtra Teacher Eligibility Test paper leak has found that the case appears to be part of an inter-State racket. Of the three arrested accused, two are from Bihar, while the third, identified as Dheeraj Kumar, is from Haryana. Police teams have been dispatched to Bihar, Haryana, and Delhi as the investigation expands.

All the three accused are currently in police custody. Authorities are also examining whether provisions of the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA) can be invoked against those found guilty.



Opposition leaders stage a protest at the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly against the TET paper leak in Mumbai on Monday. PTI

The police had received a tip-off on the morning of June 27 about an attempt to sell the TET question paper in Bhiwandi.

Acting on the information, a trap was laid in the Kongaon area, where Rajiv Shah, Akash Kumar, and Dheeraj Kumar were ap-

prehended. During the operation, police seized mobile phones, debit and credit cards, cash, and four physical copies of the TET question paper intended for the June 28 examination. Officials from the Maharashtra State Council of Examinations (MSCE) later confirmed that the seized papers matched the original examination papers. A case was registered at Kongaon Police Station under the Thane City Police Commissionerate.

The accused have been booked under Sections 318 (4), 316(5), and 61(2) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), along with Sections 11(1)(2)(3) and 12(1)(2) of the Maharashtra Competitive Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024,

and Sections 6 and 8 of the Maharashtra Prevention of Malpractices at Universities, Boards and Other Specified Examinations Act, 1982.

Priya Shinde, Deputy Commissioner of the MSCE, said candidates do not have to register again for the re-test nor will they need to pay any fee when the test is rescheduled.

School Education Minister Dada Bhuse is facing calls for resignation from the Opposition parties over the paper leak.

He said that a committee headed by the Chief Secretary will be formed to work out modalities of conducting the TET and other State-level examinations through the online mode.

(With PTI inputs)

I&B Ministry sets up panel to boost film industry

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Information & Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Monday directed immediate structural measures to bolster film production, distribution, and technological integration. The Minister held a meeting with senior officials of the Ministry.

"The Ministry has set up a high-level study group. Praseon Joshi will chair this Group. It will include industry experts and technology partners as well," read a press release.

The group will study the opportunities and challenges before Indian cinema and will suggest ways to strengthen the sector. The group will also recommend steps to make Indian films more competitive globally. The Ministry has also prepared model State Cinema Regulations.

Delhi SIR begins today; will ensure inclusion of voters displaced by demolitions, says CEO

Suruchi Kumari
NEW DELHI

Ahead of the door-to-door exercise for the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls beginning in Delhi from Tuesday, Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Ashok Kumar on Monday said the Election Commission of India (EC) will work out a mechanism to ensure that voters whose homes have recently been demolished are not excluded.

Noting that the issue had emerged in the run-up to the exercise, Mr. Kumar said the concern was regarding electors whose registered addresses no longer exist because their houses have been demolished. "Since their houses at the registered addresses may have been demolished by the time of the Booth Level Officer (BLO)'s visit, and they might not be able to obtain alternative residence proof during the du-



Delhi CEO Ashok Kumar said BLOs will visit the address of a voter even if it is a pillar under a flyover. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

ration of the SIR, we will work out a plan to ensure their inclusion," he said at a press conference.

Month-long process

The month-long exercise will run until July 29, during which BLOs, including teachers, anganwadi workers and other government staff, will visit every household to distribute pre-printed enumeration forms in duplicate.

Delhi has 13,033 polling booths covering 1,45,10,298 voters, and each elector will receive two copies of the form at their registered address.

"Electors will have to fill the form and submit one copy to the BLO, who will issue an acknowledgement receipt. BLOs will also assist voters in filling out the forms during their visits. If a voter is unavailable, the forms will be handed over

to an adult family member or left at the residence if it is locked," Mr. Kumar said.

He added the draft electoral roll will be published on August 5, after which claims and objections may be filed until September 4. The claims and objections would be disposed of by October 3 and the final electoral roll would be published on October 7.

Homeless persons

Responding to a question about the inclusion of homeless persons, Mr. Kumar said BLOs would visit every registered address even if it were a temporary location.

"BLOs will visit the registered address of the elector even if it is a pillar under a flyover," he said. Asked whether the exercise could be affected by the monsoon and if the deadline for submission of enumeration forms could be extended, he said the

one-month period was adequate.

Electors are required to map their details with the electoral roll prepared during Delhi's last exercise in 2002 or with the last SIR roll of any other State. If a voter's name is not found in previous SIR rolls, they can establish eligibility by linking themselves to parents or grandparents whose names appear in those rolls.

Around 42% of electors were mapped in Delhi as part of pre-SIR mapping. Electors can check their own names or those of their blood relatives in previous SIR rolls through the ECINET app. If unable to map their names to any previous SIR roll, they will have to submit one of the 12 documents approved by the EC after receiving a notice from the Electoral Registration Officer following publication of the draft roll on August 5.

Cong. seeks Rajnath's resignation over Army deaths during Sindoor

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Stepping up its attack on the Centre over the deaths of six military personnel during Operation Sindoor, the Congress on Monday demanded the resignation of Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, accusing him of "lying" in Parliament by stating that no Indian soldier had been killed in the operation.

The party also demanded an apology from Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Addressing a press conference, chairperson of the Congress's Ex-servicemen Department Col. Rohit Chaudhry (Retd.) and Wing Commander Anuma Acharya (Retd.) alleged that by concealing the deaths of six personnel — five from the Indian Army and one from the Indian Air Force — during the May 2025 operation, the Naren-

dra Modi government had denied them due public recognition and honour.

Wing Commander Acharya claimed that previous governments had publicly honoured every soldier who made the supreme sacrifice, and accused the present dispensation of "politicising the armed forces".

Col. Chaudhry accused the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of using "soldiers as props" while seeking votes in the name of the armed forces, and questioned why it had taken 13 months for their names to be made public.

"When Defence Minister Rajnath Singh was lying in Parliament that no soldier had been martyred, BJP MPs were clapping. Rajnath Singh has insulted the country's army and soldiers. We demand his resignation," Col. Chaudhry said.

Amend anti-sacrilege law: Akal Takht to Punjab govt.

The highest Sikh temporal authority says the amendment was passed without consultations; it gives Punjab government a month to re-amend the legislation and remove objectionable clauses

The Hindu Bureau
CHANDIGARH

Akal Takht, the highest Sikh temporal authority, has asked the Aam Aadmi Party government in Punjab to re-amend the recently passed anti-sacrilege amendment law in accordance with Sikh sentiments. The government has been given a month to comply.

At a meeting with invited Sikh Ministers of the State Cabinet and Sikh MLAs in Amritsar on Monday, the Akal Takht asserted that the Jaagat Jot Sri Guru Granth Sahib Satkar (Amendment) Act, 2026 “was passed by the government without the opinion and consent of the Akal Takht Sahib, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) and Guru Khalsa Panth”.

The legislation, passed in the Assembly unanimously on April 13, was



AAP MLAs during proceedings at the Secretariat of Sri Akal Takht Sahib in Amritsar on Monday. PTI

aimed at giving harsher punishment for acts of sacrilege against Guru Granth Sahib, the holy scripture of Sikhism. However, Sikh clergy objected to certain clauses of the law. Hence, the Akal Takht called for the meeting.

After the discussions on Monday, Jathedar Giani Kuldip Singh Gargajji, who heads the Akal Takht, said the State government should re-amend the legislation in accordance with

Sikh sentiments and eliminate the objectionable clauses within a month.

Mr. Gargajji said that all Ministers and MLAs present at the meeting agreed to make further amendments to the law in line with Sikh sentiments. He also said that most of the MLAs admitted that they had not read the draft of the amendment before passing it, which showed that the law had been passed by the government

in a hurry. He said that 87 MLAs, including Ministers, were present at the meeting.

The amendment law was passed to amend the Jaagat Jot Sri Guru Granth Sahib Satkar Act, enacted by the Shiromani Akali Dal-Bharatiya Janata Party government in 2008.

Talking to presspersons, Punjab Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema said, “The Jathedar has proposed certain amendments, which will be forwarded through the Punjab Assembly Speaker. Upon receipt, a decision will be taken within a month after due deliberation.”

The Leader of the Opposition, Partap Singh Bajwa of the Congress, said the manner in which Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann and AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal handled the legislation reflected their disregard for Sikh principles and institutions.

Kharge reappointed Rajya Sabha Leader of Opposition; seeks stronger coordination

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and seven other newly elected members of the Rajya Sabha took oath on Monday. Mr. Kharge was also reappointed the Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha with effect from June 26.

After taking oath, Mr. Kharge expressed gratitude to the Congress leadership, including Parliamentary Chairperson Sonia Gandhi and Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, as well as Vice-President C.P. Radhakrishnan and Deputy Chairman Harivansh.

He also extended greetings to his colleagues in the INDIA bloc and the broader Opposition. Mr. Kharge said he was looking forward to “even stronger coordination” during the coming Monsoon Session of Parliament to make “the government of the day more accountable”.



Vice-President C.P. Radhakrishnan greets Mallikarjun Kharge after the oath-taking ceremony on Monday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

“We will continue to raise the burning concerns, aspirations, and voices of the people with sincerity, conviction and determination. That remains our foremost responsibility, and I shall discharge it with the utmost commitment,” he said.

He took oath separately in Mr. Radhakrishnan’s chamber. The Vice-President congratulated Mr. Kharge and said the Upper House would benefit from his long experience. Ms. Gandhi and other Congress leaders – Priyanka

Gandhi Vadra, K.C. Venugopal, Mukul Wasnik, Jairam Ramesh and Syed Naseer Hussain – were present during the event. Mr. Kharge’s wife, daughter, and granddaughter, along with her spouse, were present.

Mr. Radhakrishnan later administered the oath to seven other newly elected members – Mansingh Meraman Parmar, Tarun Chugh, Alka Singh, Jitendra Meghijibhai Kanzariya, Rajendra Hiralal Jain, M. Nagaraja, and Adhikari-mayum Sharda Devi.

Delhi govt. acted swiftly against lapses, says BJP

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Monday said the Delhi government promptly initiated a probe after receiving information about alleged irregularities in the Health Department by suspending the “officials involved”.

“The government acted immediately by suspending the officials against whom allegations were made. Now, those officials have also been arrested,” Delhi BJP chief spokesperson Abhay Verma said. He was responding to allegations made by Delhi Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) president Saurabh Bharadwaj on Sunday questioning the appointment of former Director General of Health Services Dr. Vatsala Aggarwal in 2025.

On Saturday, the Delhi government’s Anti Corruption Branch (ACB) arrested Dr. Aggarwal in connection with the alleged procurement scam involving medicines, surgical items, and medical equipment.

Plea seeks securing of digital evidence in Ram Temple case

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court, for the second time during its summer vacation, did not commit to urgently hearing petitions seeking its intervention in the Ram Temple embezzlement case even as one of the petitioners, an advocate, highlighted on Monday the possibility that electronic evidence could be “quietly lost”, erased, overwritten, or corrupted in the coming days.

“Electronic evidence is unlike a stone inscription. A CCTV system does not wait for court vacations. A DVR (digital video recorder) does not respect a listing schedule. Digital payment logs and access records can be modified, migrated or deleted. Therefore, when the relief sought is preservation of evidence, postponement itself may become denial of justice,” petitioner-advocate N.K. Goswami said after he made an unlisted oral mention before a Vacation Bench headed by Justice M.M. Sundresh.

Mr. Goswami said he was not seeking a final

The petitioner said he was not seeking a final hearing, but a non-prejudicial preservation order

hearing, but had only requested a non-prejudicial preservation order.

“My apprehension is that CCTV/DVR data, QR-UPI logs, hundi registers, counting sheets, bank and vault records may perish before the case is listed,” he said.

During the oral mentioning, Mr. Goswami told the Bench that the Supreme Court Registry had informed him the petition would be taken up only after the summer vacation, which ends on July 12.

Mr. Goswami went on to urge the court to pass an order to secure the electronic evidence. However, the Bench, without directly addressing the issue raised by the lawyer, asked him to follow the procedure for mentioning and listing of cases.

The petition has also asked the court to call for a status report from the ongoing SIT investigation.

Ayodhya case will have long-term consequences for the Sangh Parivar

NEWS ANALYSIS

Nistula Hebbar
NEW DELHI

The arrest of eight people in connection with the alleged embezzlement of donation money at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya is an event with repercussions both within the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)-led Sangh Parivar and outside it, especially with the Assembly election due in Uttar Pradesh early next year.

The most obvious repercussion for the BJP and the Sangh Parivar is, of course, the loss of a moral high ground.

The Ramjanmabhoomi movement catapulted the BJP to power, and the RSS and its frontal organisations closer to their ideological goal of cultural nationalism around the Hindu religion. The sordidness of the embezzlement issue has led to questions about the integrity of those who spearheaded the movement to build the Ram Temple in place of the Babri Masjid. This is despite the fact that the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, and the



Burning issue: The case revolves around alleged embezzlement of donation money at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya. PTI

working president of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Alok Kumar, were among the first to demand the filing of a first information report in the matter.

Hindutva and its advocates will have to come up with answers to questions that are becoming inconvenient by the day – on who knew about the wrongdoing and to what extent, even if they were not involved in the actual embezzlement. With Assembly election due early next year, the BJP will have to swiftly investigate, identify, and prosecute the wrongdoers in order to go to the polls with something to say on the issue.

Within the Sangh Parivar, too, there appears to

be a subtle reframing of who is to blame more.

The Trust had a large presence of VHP personnel and those associated with the temple movement in the past.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, although active during the Ramjanmabhoomi movement, entered the fray not as part of the management but as someone asked to clear up the mess via governmental probe. This may appear to be a small difference to many but the differentiation will matter within the Sangh Parivar, giving more of a moral high ground to the RSS’s political wing, the BJP, which is otherwise required to express filial devotion to its

parent organisation.

The third big repercussion of the alleged embezzlement is the harm done to the long-term demand by certain sections of the right-wing that the management of Hindu temples should be given over to private individuals or trusts. This was a demand that was made by many while comparing the management of religious institutions of other faiths in the country. Hindu shrines, especially in South India, have significant government supervision through Devaswom Boards.

In fact, in an interview in the wake of the allegations of embezzlement in Ayodhya, Nripendra Misra, chairperson of the Trust’s construction committee, suggested that the running of the Ram Temple be on the lines of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams, a statutory body of the Andhra Pradesh government which manages the Sri Venkateshwara Swamy Temple and other shrines attached to the main temple. This, he said, would bring more transparency and professional oversight into the running of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya.

Ayodhya donation row: all 8 accused in judicial custody

Mayank Kumar
LUCKNOW

A court in Ayodhya on Monday sent all eight accused in the alleged theft and embezzlement of donations from the Ram Temple to 14 days in judicial custody. The accused had earlier been produced before a remand magistrate on Friday, who had sent them to three days of judicial custody.

The eight accused – Ram Shankar Yadav alias Tinnu, Anukalp Mishra, Avinash Shukla, Karunesh Pandey, Manish Yadav, Lavkush Mishra, Ram Shankar Mishra and Subhash Srivastava – were produced before Special Judge, Anti-Corruption Court, Rajat Verma, through videoconferencing from the district jail, after the expiry of their three-day judicial custody. The case has been posted for hearing on July 13.

Earlier in the day, the Ayodhya Bar Association passed a resolution that none of its members will represent the eight accused. The association said if any member still wished to represent the accused,

they should pay a penalty of ₹5 lakh per accused into the association’s account. “... We will write a letter to the Central Bureau of Investigation for a probe. The Bar Association will approach the High Court for a CBI probe,” said Kalika Prasad Mishra, the Bar Association president.

The association also sought the registration of a case against Champat Rai, the former general secretary of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, trustee Anil Mishra, and temple construction in-charge Gopal Rao.

Criticises lawyers’ move On the Ayodhya lawyers’ refusal to represent the accused, Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) international president Alok Kumar said: “Our legal system says that even the worst of the criminals should get defence. The move of the Ayodhya Bar Association appears to be political.”

The Congress again sought a Supreme Court-monitored probe. A delegation, including State unit chief Ajay Rai and four Lok Sabha MPs, will visit Ayodhya on Tuesday.

Minister cites India’s border infrastructure push after claims of Chinese incursion in Arunachal

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

Days after a tribal body in Arunachal Pradesh alleged that it was “losing their land, inch by inch, day by day to China” in the Taksing area, Union Minister Kiren Rijiju said that although India had started “late”, it had begun building roads and other infrastructure in border areas.

Mr. Rijiju, who represents the Arunachal West constituency in the State, told *The Hindu* that Taksing was connected by road only in 2019.

“Though late, we are now building roads and other infrastructure in border areas. We are catching



Kiren Rijiju

up,” said Mr. Rijiju, when asked about the claims of Chinese incursions made by the Nah Welfare Society (NWS) at Taksing in Upper Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh.

The June 26 letter by Keru Chader, president,

NWS, to the Deputy Commissioner of Upper Subansiri district stated that in the past 10 to 15 years, activities of People’s Liberation Army (PLA) in the border areas of Taksing circle have increased manifold with an intention to occupy as much land as possible.

In a statement, the Indian Army said, “We have seen some media reports alleging recent encroachment by Chinese PLA and setting up of camps in Arunachal Pradesh. These reports are incorrect and without any basis.”

According to a Foreign Ministry response in Parliament in 2008, China disputes the International

Boundary between India and China in the Eastern Sector and claims approximately 90,000 square kilometres of Indian territory in Arunachal Pradesh.

Tache Chader, the general secretary of NWS, said that due to the presence of Chinese forces, the locals were unable to take their cattle out for grazing. He told *The Hindu* that the group was yet to get a response from the authorities regarding the letter.

“We can no longer access the land that belonged to our ancestors. The Chinese are expanding and building roads at a fast pace,” he said.

The June 26 letter said that the Chinese govern-

ment is expanding its territory by “occupying new and important places of our land situated at border area.” It said China had constructed roads, bridges and set up military camps in many places.

3,488-km-long border

India shares 3,488 km of border with China that runs along Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh.

According to Union Home Ministry, the border is not fully demarcated and the process of clarifying and confirming the Line of Actual Control is in progress.

After several notices, Rabri set to vacate official bungalow on July 5

The Hindu Bureau
PATNA

With the “final deadline” to vacate her official residence on 10 Circular Road in Patna ending on Monday, and most of her household goods already shifted, Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader Rabri Devi has sought, in order “to avoid any further controversy”, the “charge register” containing the list of household items provided at the residence when it was allotted to her in 2006 by the Bihar government, party sources told *The Hindu*.

The former Bihar Chief Minister is expected to vacate the bungalow on July 5, which is also the RJD’s foundation day.



A vehicle carrying household goods leaves the official residence of former Bihar Chief Minister Rabri Devi in Patna on Monday. PTI

She had been living in the bungalow along with her family for about 20 years.

The State government has allotted it to Bihar Dairy and Fisheries Minister Nand Kishor Ram.

The government had is-

sued several notices to Ms. Devi earlier. On June 22, the ‘final notice’ was issued to vacate the bungalow by June 29.

Most of her household goods have been shifted to her new official residence at 39, Hardinge Road.

Scientists test cockatoos to see if animals understand death

In a 2020 paper with cognitive scientist Antonio J. Osuna-Mascaró, philosopher Susana Monsó argued that two forms of anthropocentrism — the belief that human beings are superior to all others — undergird humans’ reluctance to acknowledge ability of animals to understand death

Sayantana Datta

One day in 2025, Jane perched facing a computer screen. The screen’s top half displayed a black circle on a magenta background. The bottom half had a black arrow on white. After what appeared to be a moment of deliberation, Jane extended her neck and touched the circle. Small pellets of food appeared in the tray before her. Then, the magenta was replaced by green.

When she touched the circle this time, the screen flashed a bright red before reverting to green. This time, no food appeared. Jane looked at the screen, checked the tray, and looked at the screen again. Then, she touched the arrow. A new background appeared, and with that came the renewed possibility of obtaining more food.

Jane is a Goffin’s cockatoo housed at the Messerli Research Institute, University of Veterinary Medicine (UVM), Vienna. With 14 of her peers, she has helped researchers demonstrate that the parrots can recognise and adapt to permanent non-functionality – the notion of something that previously worked ceasing to be functional in a specific context.

This might be the first step in testing experimentally whether an animal has the cognitive requirements to understand death, according to the researchers who conducted the study, published in *Scientific Reports* earlier this month.

But before that, people have to redefine what it means to understand death.

‘Minimal death’

For many philosophers and anthropologists, the ability to understand death has been a defining feature of humanity. For example, the German philosopher Martin Heidegger declared in a 1939 seminar that “mortals are they who can experience death as death. Animals cannot do this.”

“Only man dies. The animal perishes,” he added in his 1971 book *Poetry, Language, Thought*. By that, he meant that only human beings possessed the ability to understand death’s significance.

Philosopher Susana Monsó, associate professor at the National University of Distance Education, Madrid, disagreed. In a 2020 paper with UVM cognitive scientist Antonio J. Osuna-Mascaró, she argued that two forms of anthropocentrism – the belief that human beings are superior to all others – undergird humans’ reluctance to acknowledge animals’ ability to understand death.

One: the framing of death as an abstract concept, “as something that we know will inevitably befall all of us, but which we cannot point to or perceive with any of our senses.” The duo called this intellectual anthropocentrism. The second they called emotional anthropocentrism: “the excessive focus on grief as a reaction to death”.

These might be the reasons why existing accounts of animals’ reactions to their kin’s deaths are limited to those deemed exceptionally intelligent – chimpanzees, elephants, orcas, and crows – and focus overtly on their



Jane is a Goffin’s cockatoo housed at the Messerli Research Institute. With 14 of her peers, she has helped researchers demonstrate that the parrots can recognise and adapt to the notion of something that previously worked ceasing to be functional in a specific context. ANTONIO J. OSUNA MASCARÓ

human-like displays of grief and rituals.

Instead, Dr. Monsó proposed in 2019 the “minimal concept of death”: the bare minimum that would be required for an animal to understand what happens when an individual dies.

“It does not require a human-like concept of eternity, or a sophisticated understanding that another individual’s mind is gone,” Dr. Osuna-Mascaró, her collaborator, explained. “It requires only that an animal recognise death as the irreversible loss of the characteristic functions of a living body,” he added.

Recognising permanent non-functionality would be one of the cognitive components relevant to such an understanding.

Testing the bird

While Dr. Monsó thought about how they could test animals’ ability to recognise and adapt to permanent non-functionality, Dr. Osuna-Mascaró and his colleagues’ work had already shown that Goffin’s cockatoos are able to recognise and discard non-functional tools.

“So they were a great candidate species for testing whether animals can understand when something is irreversibly broken,” Dr. Monsó said.

To test whether Goffin’s cockatoos could comprehend permanent non-functionality, the team designed a touchscreen-based task. They trained parrots to learn that if they touched the round button on the screen, they received a food reward. The parrots could also touch an arrow to proceed to the next trial.

Then, the researchers tested the birds on a slightly more complex task. At times, when the birds touched the round button, the screen would flash and the button would stop working – but only against a



It does not require a human-like concept of eternity, or a sophisticated understanding that another individual’s mind is gone

ANTONIO J. OSUNA-MASCARÓ
Cognitive scientist

particular background. Against other backgrounds, the button still worked.

The question was whether the cockatoos could learn more than “this button no longer works,” Dr. Osuna-Mascaró explained.

In fact, they had to learn that a flashing event meant that the “particular context was no longer useful”, he added.

Further, the cockatoos had to distinguish the non-functional background from new ones in later trials.

The researchers found that as the trials proceeded, the cockatoos learned to skip the backgrounds in which the button had stopped working. However, they continued to touch it when it appeared against other backgrounds.

That is, “they had not simply lost trust in the touchscreen, but were adjusting their behaviour to the specific context,” Dr. Osuna-Mascaró said.

Thus, they concluded the cockatoos had “acquired flexible sensitivity to permanent non-functionality,” the authors wrote in their paper.

‘One cognitive capacity’

Some birds reacted strongly to the button’s dysfunction. Rose, a juvenile female, called out in a manner typically used to obtain food or attention. Renki, a juvenile male, displayed aggression.

Even though these displays were not a

part of the study’s analysis, they “made the task feel very real from the birds’ perspective. Something that had just worked suddenly no longer did,” Eleonora Rovegno, one of the study’s lead authors, said.

That said, all (independent) animal cognition researchers this reporter spoke to were reluctant to take this as evidence for cockatoos’ understanding of death – minimal or otherwise.

While calling the study “cool” and worthy of applause, Anindita Bhadra, professor of biology at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Kolkata, cautioned that the “study shows only that the cockatoos can learn the non-permanence of rewards and cues.”

Dr. Bhadra works on the social lives of free-ranging dogs.

“Being able to recognise non-permanence of inanimate objects is very different from understanding non-permanence of a living being,” she added. “Food rewards are very different from social interactions with other individuals.”

Similarly, Anindya Sinha, a cognitive ethologist and professor at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru,, said the cockatoos’ actions are “truly significant in terms of their mechanical problem-solving abilities” but added that there is still “no empirical evidence yet of any conceptualisation of inactivity following the death of a living being”.

Dr. Osuna-Mascaró agreed that the study “does not show that cockatoos understand death.” However, he added, “it does suggest that they possess at least one cognitive capacity that contributes to such an understanding.”

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Ignore a mosquito bite and the itch is ‘gone in five or 10 minutes for most people’. NIAID/UNSPASH

It’s a bad idea to scratch a bug bite, research says

Associated Press

A lot of things can cause itchiness, sometimes serious diseases. Whatever the cause, doctors have long warned that scratching too much can damage the skin. Now researchers better understand why even a mildly annoying itch could put you on an itch-and-scratch cycle if you give in.

How did they find out? In part by putting tiny “cones of shame” onto mice to uncover what happens on a cellular level when an itch gets scratched – or left alone. They also gained insight into why a good scratch at least at first brings a sigh of relief. After all, not just people and other mammals scratch, even fish do. The commonality suggests there must be some evolutionary reason and the mouse experiment hints at a little germ protection – but still not a reason to scratch.

Daniel Kaplan, a University of Pittsburgh dermatologist whose lab studies immune reactions in skin, was exploring a run-of-the-mill type of itch called allergic contact dermatitis, caused

Normal mice scratched and inflammatory immune cells rushed to the site, increasing swelling. The rash was much milder in mice bred with defective itch-sensing nerve cells

by irritants such as poison ivy or nickel in jewelry.

Kaplan’s research team put a rash-inducing irritant on the ears of mice. Normal mice scratched and inflammatory immune cells rushed to the site, increasing swelling. The rash was much milder in mice bred with defective itch-sensing nerve cells. But was the difference really the scratching?

Normal mice put into collars like those veterinary “cones of shame” so they itched but couldn’t scratch gave the answer: They, too, had much less swelling and fewer inflammatory cells.

Kaplan said that evidence matches people’s everyday experiences that scratching really can make things worse.

Ignore a mosquito bite and the itch is “gone in five or 10 minutes for most people,” he said. “But if you start scratching it, it’s your friend for a week,” getting itchier and more inflamed.

To understand what was happening in the skin, Kaplan’s team took a deeper look at mast cells, among the immune system’s first responders. When called into action, they release compounds that can help fight germs or toxins – or, through a compound called histamine, trigger itchy allergic reactions.

Scientists have long known that allergens can activate mast cells. But other signals can summon mast cells, too, including pain. And when we scratch, “we tend to scratch until it starts to hurt,” Kaplan noted.

Pain-sensing nerve cells release a chemical messenger called substance P. In findings published last year, Kaplan’s team reported that substance P can activate mast cells through a different molecular pathway than allergens do – a double whammy that explains why scratching further inflames itchy rashes or bites.

If we experience pain like touching a hot stove, we’ll learn not to do that again. Yet relief from a good scratch, in evolutionary terms, is positive feedback.

One long-held theory is that it may help creatures slough off parasites like fleas or mites. But Kaplan also was intrigued by other labs’ findings that mast cells could fend off a common type of skin bacteria called *Staphylococcus aureus*. Sure enough, mice who scratched had lower levels of that germ on their ears, maybe because of the extra inflammation or some other mast cell-related compound.

THE SCIENCE QUIZ

Diseases that changed history

Vasudevan Mukunth

QUESTION 1

Treponema pallidum causes X. While it is transmitted only among humans and baboons, it has had an outsized effect on the course of human history. Its helical shape allows it to move quickly through mucous membranes and its infections are hard to diagnose because the symptoms mimic those of other diseases. Name X.

QUESTION 2

Smallpox is caused by the Variola virus, with evidence of infections dating back to 1,500 BC. Its spread expanded manifold from the late 15th century onwards thanks to the _____, named for the famous Italian explorer. In this event, many plants, animals, and diseases were transferred between the Western and Eastern hemispheres. Fill in the blanks.

QUESTION 3

Mycobacterium _____ bacteria have shaped social and legal institutions over centuries through fear and stigma. Unlike its cousin, which causes tuberculosis, it depends overwhelmingly on its host for sustenance and only infects humans, nine-banded armadillos, and red squirrels. It was the first bacterium to be identified as the cause of a human disease. Fill in the blank.

QUESTION 4

Since the 19th century alone, Y has had seven pandemic outbreaks. In the course of studying it, physicians and scientists developed theories of disease and treatment that are useful even today. The physician Sambhu Nath De definitely proved that Y causes the disease it’s responsible for. Name Y.

QUESTION 5

This virus was first isolated from

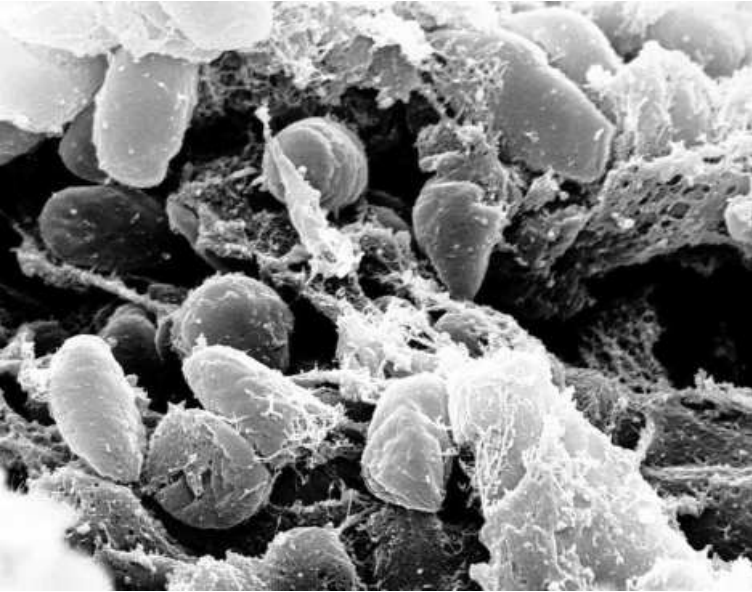
primates and spreads through blood and sexual contact. It mutates so fast that infected people develop slightly different versions. Scientists have struggled to contain it because it hides inside cells and constantly changes its genetic makeup. Name this virus.

Answers to June 25 quiz:

- Technique to acquire speed from a planet’s orbital energy – **Ans: Gravitational slingshot**
- Region just outside the event horizon of a black hole – **Ans: Ergosphere**
- Expansion of MHD – **Ans: Magnetohydrodynamic**
- Effect where two close plates feel an attractive force – **Ans: Casimir effect**
- Electric power based on a salinity gradient – **Ans: Osmotic power**

Visual: Tidal stream generator

First contact: Tamal Biswas | K.N. Viswanathan | Pankaj Gharde | Saif Malik Khan | Snehil Jain



VISUAL: Name the mass of bacteria shown here in the foregut of a flea. Scientists recently found that just 5,500 years ago, these bacteria could be transmitted directly; today, they spread via infected fleas. PUBLIC DOMAIN

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



Delayed honour

Operational secrecy during wars is a must, but there must be accountability

War is secretive and strategy may require deception. But that is no good explanation for the fact that the Narendra Modi government took over a year before formally acknowledging that six soldiers had lost their lives in Operation Sindoor in 2025. India had launched cross-border military strikes in Pakistan in retaliation for the Pahalgam terrorist attack, in April 2025, that killed 26 innocent people. From the beginning, the government has been reluctant to share any meaningful details of Operation Sindoor even as it continuously kept the hyperbolic self-congratulatory posture. Its decision to not publicly acknowledge and honour the supreme sacrifice of the fallen soldiers contemporaneously was hardly a sign of any wise strategy. Casualties can happen in any military operation and that is a key consideration in any military planning, and more importantly, the political decision to go to war or not. Not being transparent about losses, human and material, may serve the political interests of the ruling party, but not national interest. By trying to be clever and selective about facts, the government undermined its own credibility and did a disservice to those who paid with their lives. Soon after the operation concluded in May 2025, the then Director General of Military Operations (DGMO), Lieutenant General Rajiv Ghai, paid tribute, during a press briefing on May 11, 2025, to Indian military personnel who had made the supreme sacrifice, though their names were not disclosed.

The cremations were done with full military honours. In August 2025, Air Chief Marshal A.P. Singh visited the family of Sergeant Surendra Kumar, who was killed during the operation, while the Ministry of Defence also announced gallantry awards for the fallen personnel. Tributes were simultaneously carried on the Indian Army’s official social media platforms. In the Lok Sabha on July 28, 2025, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said that “no Indian soldiers were harmed” during Operation Sindoor. Following accusations that it has misled Parliament, the government is now explaining that the Minister’s remarks were made in the context of reports that Indian aircraft were shot down and were meant to clarify that no pilot was killed during the mission. The government has also maintained that details relating to aircraft losses during the conflict remain operationally sensitive and refused to disclose them. There is a distinction to be made between operational secrecy and requirements of public accountability. War is a stark demonstration of the fact that it is the public that always pays for all actions of the government. A public accounting of the gains and the losses is the best way to ensure wise decision making.

Caught in the middle

India must prioritise reduction of harm from drug abuse

India is located between two major drug-producing regions: Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran to the west and Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos to the east. While the West has historically dominated heroin production, the International Narcotics Control Board has said Myanmar has become the world’s leading source of illicit opium while East and Southeast Asia remain major sources of methamphetamine. Officials have said drugs are being received at Gujarat, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu via maritime routes. Similarly, some drugs are produced domestically using illegally diverted pharmaceutical ingredients, aided by the fact that individuals possessing small quantities of heroin can attract up to six months’ imprisonment, whereas drugmakers that cannot account for lakhs of doses often face only slaps on the wrist. The rise of Myanmar, where the territory under ethnic armed organisations is expanding, as a key source is also troubling since it shares a border with India. The Narcotics Control Bureau has noted a dramatic surge in the use of drones to smuggle drugs across borders, especially over Punjab. Traffickers are organising over the darknet and using cryptocurrencies. The pillars of India’s response thus aim to keep the enforcement regime from being out-innovated and improve regulatory certainty.

States are trying to adopt a ‘whole of society’ approach recognising the public health and social dimensions. However, India needs to do more. Physical abuse and forced detoxification are frequently reported from many private centres. Punjab has an extensive network of de addiction centres providing opioid substitution therapy, and some northeastern States to a secondary extent, but most large States have much less access relative to need. Most Integrated Rehabilitation Centres for Addicts are located in urban areas whereas the highest density of addicts in Punjab are in border villages and rural pockets. Likewise, relapse is often treated as a moral failure and many addicts avoid government centres fearing social ostracisation, particularly in rural North India. The persistence of criminal records for small-scale possession prevents youth from getting jobs, reducing their odds of escaping the drug-crime cycle. Although the Nasha Mukh Bharat Abhiyaan has said it has sensitised over six crore women, facilities dedicated to women are scarce and concentrated in urban areas; stigma, caregiving responsibilities, and lack of gender-responsive treatment keep many women from seeking or completing care. Finally, as evidence shows, disrupted supply can drive many users to cheaper alternatives unless accompanied by effective treatment. India must therefore shift public focus from seizures and arrests to the number of lives restored.

For 45 years after Independence, India grew at an anaemic 3% – the infamous “Hindu rate of growth”. Triggered by a balance-of-payments crisis, India found the gumption to liberalise. Within a decade, GDP growth surged. The lesson: crisis breeds reform, and reform breeds exponential outcomes. Artificial Intelligence (AI) provides the same transformational leverage that liberalisation provided in 1991. The question is not whether India can afford to invest – it is whether India can afford not to. After 12 years of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s leadership, India has reached another WhatsApp moment in reform – dare I say, to take it from a Hindu rate of growth to the Bharat rate of growth – 8% and beyond for the next decade.

The case for making tokens free

India has since proven that it can leapfrog entire generations of infrastructure. Aadhaar enrolled 1.38 billion people in a biometric identity system, the largest on earth. UPI now processes 250 billion annual transactions worth \$3.4 trillion, handling 50% of the world’s real-time digital payments. Reliance Jio, launched in 2016, added 100 million subscribers in just five months and made mobile data essentially free. How India can replicate its Aadhaar, data availability deluge and UPI miracles in the age of AI – by embracing open models, diversifying compute hardware, and making tokens as free as data.

India spends just about 0.65% of its GDP on research and development (R&D), well below China (2.4%), the United States (3.5%), South Korea (4.9%), and Israel (5.4%). The excuse of the socialist Congress governments of 1947-1991 was: “we can’t afford anything more”, which does not and should not apply now. The central question is this: Has the time come to make AI tokens free? If so, how do we do it? Can we begin by making tokens free for the country’s top 100 national R&D institutions and 5,000 schools, so that AI becomes a teammate for scientists and students alike?

India spends approximately \$49 billion each year subsidising calories, chemicals, and carbon. The question is whether it is now ready to subsidise cognition. The answer is that it already can – at a fraction of what it spends today. The entire AI token subsidy for the country’s top 100 universities and national R&D institutions, along with 5,000 high schools, would cost about \$2 billion annually – roughly 0.06% of GDP. The AI investment is around one-fourteenth of India’s food subsidy, one-tenth of its fertilizer subsidy, and less than the amount paid to compensate oil marketing companies for LPG under-recoveries in a single quarter. This is not a moonshot budget. It is a rounding error in India’s existing welfare expenditure – but one with the potential to generate transformative, compounding returns.

India does not need more money; it needs new priorities, new frameworks, and some reallocation. First, AI tokens can be funded



Srivatsa Krishna
IAS officer

Reforms 3.0 should focus on building an AI nation, and India cannot afford to miss this opportunity

without cutting a single rupee from existing beneficiaries by merely freezing subsidy growth for a year. (The fertilizer subsidy alone has been compounding at 11% CAGR over the past decade.) Second, India should forge a public-private partnership with hyperscalers such as AWS, Google, and Microsoft, exchanging data centre land, power subsidies, and data sovereignty assurances for free inference capacity. India’s 1.4-billion-user market gives it negotiating leverage that few countries can match, though such techno-commercial negotiations, shaped by geopolitics and uncertainty, will require considerable skill. Third, if necessary, paid enterprise tiers can cross-subsidise free access for schools and research institutions.

Free data worked and free tokens will too. The government did not directly subsidise Jio. Instead, it created the right regulatory environment through spectrum auctions, net neutrality, infrastructure sharing, and a controversial long pilot.

The result: data prices fell from about \$3 per GB to \$0.10 in under three years. The same playbook can apply to AI tokens. Create the right conditions, and the market will deliver abundance. India’s role is not to write the cheque, but to make it unnecessary.

Hosting models

India must build the competence to host and operate large language models, not merely consume them through APIs from San Francisco or Beijing. With Sarvam, it has already shown that frontier models can be trained on Indian soil. The next step is to host models such as Qwen, DeepSeek, Kimi, Llama, and Sarvam on sovereign infrastructure, even if some open-source models originate from China. The models may be free, but the intelligence to host them at scale is not. AI infrastructure should be treated as a strategic national capability, much like what the government has already done for space and nuclear programmes. India should pursue a hybrid strategy that combines sovereign and open-source models to avoid dependence on any single ecosystem. Open-source models offer four key advantages: sovereignty by reducing reliance on foreign APIs that can be restricted overnight; lower costs by eliminating per-token licensing fees, thereby enabling free education and research uses; customisation for Indic languages and cultural contexts; and transparency through auditable model weights for government and defence applications.

Hosting LLMs at national scale is not “just deploy a container”. India must develop deep expertise in availability (multi-region redundancy, 99.99% uptime SLAs for critical government services; latency (<200ms token latency across Tier-2/3 cities); efficiency (like batch scheduling to maximise tokens-per-watt); security (data residency compliance, prompt injection defence, audit trails).

India cannot afford to be locked into a

Preparing India for China’s missile challenge



Harinder Singh
Retired Lieutenant General and an independent analyst

India needs to build a rocket force before China’s missile advantage grows further

finite missile stockpiles, and is still developing its hypersonic technology. Importantly, its rocket force remains a conceptual construct, with significant policy and organisational issues yet to be resolved.

Without a rocket force, India would have little choice but to absorb a Chinese missile strike. On the contrary, if India has one, both get hurt to varying degrees. That is when the missile math kicks in - in terms of mutual vulnerability. If China launches 100 missiles, India must be able to inflict significant damage – not necessarily through equal numbers, but through comparable effects. India should therefore aim to build a credible conventional missile inventory; otherwise, it risks being forced into a stalemate even before the border war begins.

Ideally, India’s rocket force should deliver three effects. First, it should be able to hold the PLA’s Western Theatre Command (WTC) at risk by having the threat to target deep inside Tibet and Xinjiang. Second, it should be capable of degrading the PLA’s road and rail infrastructure, airbases, and logistics installations along the border. Third, it must enable field commanders to strike PLA camps, gun positions, and ammunition dumps in the tactical battle area. In essence, India needs a rocket force capable of engaging strategic, operational, and tactical military and economic targets from a single command authority.

Three aspects are important. First, at the doctrinal level, India must adopt counter-value strikes as part of its conventional missile strategy. This would require rethinking the scope and scale of its counter-force doctrine and developing a unified target list. Service- or agency-specific target lists have little place in time-sensitive missile warfare. The rocket force must also have the authority to execute pre-designated precautionary strikes in the opening hours of a conflict. Without pre-delegated launch authority, India would risk defeat at the outset.

single-vendor monopoly for its AI compute future. NVIDIA’s dominance comes at extraordinary cost – both financial and strategic. NVIDIA controls 80%+ of AI training hardware but creates deep vendor lock-in that extends far beyond hardware. For India to build sovereign AI infrastructure for 1.4 billion people, the math simply does not work at NVIDIA pricing.

India spent relatively little to build UPI; it cannot afford to spend \$50 billion on NVIDIA GPUs. The alternative hardware ecosystem is not just more economical – it is strategically essential. India should adopt a 40:30:30 hardware mix rather than rely on a single vendor. Around 40% should be built on AWS Trainium and AMD for cost-effective inference workloads available in India. Another 30% should use Google TPUs for research, model training, and academic partnerships. The remaining 30% should rely on NVIDIA for specialised training, legacy compatibility, and a domestic silicon hedge.

AI token policy, implementation timeline

India should announce a National AI Token Policy and implement it over the next 24 months. It should begin by signing public-private partnership agreements with AWS, Google, and Microsoft to establish a multi-vendor sovereign compute framework. The first pilot should provide unlimited research tokens to the top 20 IITs and the IISc. As hyperscaler inference capacity comes online, India should open an API sandbox for 500 startups, expand access to 100 universities, and launch an AI literacy pilot across 500 high schools in 10 States. The programme should culminate in the publication of the country’s first sovereign Indic AI model benchmarks.

Thereafter India needs to scale the ecosystem through cross subsidies as mentioned above and deploy fine-tuned models into health care, agriculture, judiciary and education. It must follow this up with full deployment at 5,000 high schools and all 22 languages. With this India’s token consumption will enter the global top five. In two years, India-trained models will become competitive on international benchmarks and 10,000+ AI-native startups will bloom, rocketing GDP growth.

In sum, India’s AI leapfrog is a *sine qua non* for national transformation. India needs to replicate its DPI (digital public infrastructure) miracles in the age of AI by embracing open models, diversifying compute hardware, and making tokens as free as data. India has all the necessary conditions – favourable policies, stable macroeconomy, prodigious talent and technology institutions – to become a global leader in AI applications. The sufficient condition is India’s decisive, visionary leadership. It will take three moves. One decade. And a transformed (AI) nation.

The views expressed are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Ayodhya row

There is a glaring contrast between the government’s policies in monitoring foreign funds flow to NGOs and the management of huge funds for the Ram temple in Ayodhya at home. There are hardly any safeguards and

accountability for the enormous funds given by the public for the Ram temple. The genuineness of the ruling party’s avowed love for Hinduism comes under a cloud when such scams are taking place.

Matthew Adukani,
Chennai

K. Bhagyaraj

The passing of filmmaker K. Bhagyaraj marks the end of a remarkable chapter in Indian cinema. Yet, even so, he has left behind a legacy that transcends his artistic achievements. His decision to donate his eyes stands as a profound testament to

altruism, compassion, and an unwavering commitment to the welfare of others.

Nagarajamani M.V.,
Hyderabad

Bhagyaraj had the rare ability to transform everyday situations into memorable cinematic

experiences. The title “Screenplay King” is a fitting tribute to a man who had the power to create unforgettable moments.

A.P. Thiruvadi,
Chennai

We have lost an extraordinary talent who

popularised Tamil cinema through diverse themes. Cinema has lost two stalwarts (Bharathiraja), marking the end of an era.

M. Pradyu,
Thalikkavu, Kannur, Kerala

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

Why artificial wisdom is the biggest AI risk

The debate surrounding Artificial Intelligence (AI) often revolves around a deceptively simple question: is AI enhancing humanity or destroying it? Like every major technological revolution before it, AI is generating both optimism and profound anxiety. There is little doubt that, if deployed responsibly, AI can dramatically enhance productivity across every domain of human activity.

Yet these opportunities come with substantial risks. Many commentators have painted doomsday scenarios ranging from mass unemployment to existential threats. However, not all AI risks are equally dangerous. To navigate the AI age effectively, one must distinguish between risks according to both their impact and the difficulty of mitigating them.

Need to reduce risk
Three risks deserve particular attention. The most widely discussed is the large-scale disruption of cognitive labour. For the first time, machines are not merely replacing physical tasks but appear capable of performing intellectual work once thought to be uniquely human. History, however, cautions against predictions of mass unemployment; technological progress has rarely eliminated entire professions. Instead, it has automated specific tasks while creating new forms of employment and productivity. The steam engine did not destroy labour; it created new industries. Technology redistributed labour rather than rendering humanity obsolete. AI will likely follow a similar trajectory. Some occupations will shrink, others will expand, and entirely new professions will emerge. The transition will be painful and require substantial investment in reskilling, but humanity has navigated such transformations before and can do so again.

The second risk lies in the political and economic



Saumitra Bhaduri
Professor at the
Madras School of
Economics

AI enthusiasts often position AI as a substitute for human cognition. In doing so, society is gradually internalising a dangerous misconception that AI generates knowledge

consequences of an unprecedented concentration of power. The economics of AI are inherently capital-intensive. Developing frontier models requires enormous investments in computing infrastructure, energy, specialised talent and proprietary data. Only a handful of companies – and an even smaller number of countries – possess the necessary resources to compete in this high-risk, high-return race. As a result, ownership and control of AI capabilities are becoming highly concentrated. History teaches that concentration of strategic resources rarely produces stable outcomes. Whether the resource was gold or oil, concentrated ownership has often translated into geopolitical leverage and, at times, coercive behaviour. AI risks becoming another strategic chokepoint. Fortunately, the world has experience managing such challenges through legal institutions, international treaties and negotiated frameworks.

The third risk is unique to AI and potentially the most pervasive because it is the least understood: the curse of “artificial wisdom.” AI enthusiasts often position AI as a substitute for human cognition. In doing so, society is gradually internalising a dangerous misconception that AI generates knowledge. It does not. At its core, an AI system is trained on vast amounts of data to learn patterns and statistical relationships. It uses sophisticated algorithms to predict the most probable next step in a sequence. By repeatedly making these predictions, it can generate human-like text, summarise information and perform many language-based tasks. The distinction is fundamental. Knowledge is not the same as information. Knowledge requires context, judgment, experience and an understanding of consequences. Only a human mind with domain expertise can evaluate whether an AI-generated output is useful and appropriate for the problem at hand.

The issue becomes even more serious when AI generates synthetic information that is more persuasive, accessible or appealing than genuine information. In such circumstances, individuals and institutions may struggle to distinguish fact from fabrication, creating fertile ground for manipulation, misinformation and other unethical uses.

The challenge extends far beyond individual users. Organisations are increasingly conducting research, coding, legal drafting, and financial analysis using AI. This creates an unprecedented form of systemic risk: decisions increasingly influenced by intelligence that nobody is qualified to verify. Ironically, the age of AI might make genuine expertise more valuable than ever; the rarest skill will be the ability to determine whether machine-generated answers are actually correct.

The need for regulation
If a pharmaceutical product causes harm, manufacturers can be held accountable. However, unlike traditional products, AI systems have largely operated without clear liability. The world, therefore, requires a new governance architecture for the responsible deployment of AI. Encouragingly, society is already beginning to redraw the boundaries of accountability for digital platforms. For example, Meta Platforms has faced lawsuits alleging that aspects of its platform design contributed to harm among young users.

The world needs both technical and institutional safeguards, backed by a global non-proliferation agreement on disruptive AI, that allow humans to limit or shut down systems operating outside their intended boundaries. Humanity has avoided nuclear catastrophe for eight decades. The hope is that it should be able to navigate AI too. However, doing so will require governing wisely than ever before.

A mysterious luncheon in Dachigam

J&K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah intends to put to rest party intrigues

STATE OF PLAY

Peerzada Ashiq

The surprise Dachigam alfresco lunch organised by Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah for his legislators on June 3 was dissected more for the venue and the selfies. Rules such as no Internet and self-service for the legislators during the luncheon turned the Dachigam National Park meeting into an enigma. The fact remains that it was a rare bid by the 20-month-old Chief Minister to address the growing anxiety within the party over a slew of brewing issues.

This year, Mr. Abdullah completed more than one-and-a-half-years of ruling J&K as a Union Territory (UT), which now has an enervated power sharing system in a region that once enjoyed the highest degree of autonomy. There are two-fold issues still at hand for Mr. Abdullah: one, establishing the writ of the elected government over bureaucracy and, two, implementing a governance model through above-par performance of Ministers. A fair assessment suggests that Mr. Abdullah has failed to deliver on these two counts.

The Omar Abdullah government has failed to finalise and ensure the ‘Transaction of Business’ rules, essential to determine the domains of the Chief Minister, the Council of Ministers (CoM) and the Lieutenant Governor (L-G). The seven-year-old UT is yet to determine the powers of the CM, the CoM and the L-G. This fluid situation has further hamstrung the elected Chief Minister. If the UT model takes away the CM’s say in security matters, the lack of Transaction of Business rules makes



him unable to control bureaucrats. Currently, J&K has *L-G-walla* bureaucrats, a term used for pro-L-G officials, and *CM-walla* bureaucrats, but no *J&K-walla* officers to address the governance issues of the people, who turned up in record numbers outside the polling booths in the 2024 Assembly elections.

Mr. Abdullah blames the Centre for the delay in approval of the business rules. But there has been no visible protest over the lack of it either. This has allowed a drift in official loyalty in other directions.

‘Internal matters’
Mr. Abdullah also faces palace intrigues. There is a growing desire among a large section of National Conference (NC) legislators to see a Cabinet expansion. In a 90-member UT, a Chief Minister can have a Cabinet size of 10% of the total strength of the Assembly. Mr. Abdullah has filled six ministerial berths and reserved three for its ally, the Congress. However, the Congress has taken the position “not to join the government till Statehood is restored”. NC legislators from Srinagar, who are around eight in number, are openly talking about the need to have a Minister from the summer capital of J&K. At present, the Omar Abdullah Cabinet gives fair representation to the Jammu division by having a deputy Chief Minister, who is not from the NC, and two Ministers from the region. However, several NC legislators argue

that the party won around 36 assembly segments from the Kashmir division and remains poorly represented in the Cabinet. While Cabinet Minister Sakina Itoo represents south Kashmir, Javed Dar is a voice from north Kashmir.

Mr. Abdullah has always brushed aside media questions on Cabinet expansion as an “internal matter of the party”. However, the fact remains that it is a question of representation and a matter of concern for his voters, even legislators. In Srinagar, NC voters yearn for interfaces with the government to raise their grievances, and get them addressed. Besides, most posts of the government boards remain unfilled, with the party being indecisive if legislators could be made heads or not. These headless boards have failed to work in sync with the government’s vision.

In 2009, when Mr. Abdullah became Chief Minister for the first time, he had 10 Cabinet Ministers and 14 junior Ministers. Currently, there are Ministers with around a dozen portfolios, impacting the functioning of these departments. More Ministers in the Civil Secretariat in Srinagar will bring more bureaucrats under the government to deliver policies in an efficient manner.

It was always a crown of thorns to be a Chief Minister of a UT. In fact, Mr. Abdullah, ahead of the 2024 election, had predicted the functioning of the UT government: “I can’t see myself in a position where I have to ask the L-G to pick my peon, sitting and waiting outside for him to sign the file”. For Mr. Abdullah, the only option is to put up a fight and ensure that on the governance front he does not draw flak from his voters.

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Rise in food poisoning cases highlights lapses in food safety

Nearly three-fourths of all States and Union Territories tended to have low or moderate scores on the Food Safety Index

DATA POINT

Sambavi Parthasarathy

Two suspected events of food poisoning reported this month, one at a private school in Indore in Madhya Pradesh, and another at a popular eatery in Bhiwandi in Maharashtra, which affected over 200 people have once again highlighted the need for strengthening the implementation of the Food Safety and Standards (FSS) Act.

As per the latest Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India report, a total of 1,122 people died due to food poisoning in India in 2024 (**Chart 1**).

Such avoidable deaths should be seen in the context of lapses in the implementation of the Act, as revealed by the government’s own State Food Safety Index released last for 2023-24. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) measures this index for all States and Union Territories based on five key parameters: human resources and institutional data, compliance, food testing infrastructure and surveillance, training and capacity building, and consumer empowerment.

While a strong correlation could not be established, the index showed that States that saw high numbers of food poisoning cases also tended to have low or moderate scores on the index (**Chart 2**).

Nearly three-fourths of all States and Union Territories scored less than 50 out of the highest-possible score of 100. Jharkhand, where over 130 persons died of food poisoning in 2024, scored 26.5. Uttar Pradesh, which reported over 200 casualties in 2024, scored 44.25.

The FSS Act mandates periodic inspections and analysis of food samples from all registered Food Business Operators (FBOs). An amendment to the Act notified this month has made the frequency of the inspections to be based on a dynamic risk-based assessment of

all FBOs, depending on the type of establishment, their past records and other such factors. While the amended provisions are yet to be implemented, FSSAI data for the year 2024-25 showed that inspections conducted and food samples analysed by various States were much lower when compared with the number of registered FBOs (**Chart 3**). For instance, only 20,877 samples were lifted in Maharashtra which has over 1.8 lakh registered or active FBO licences, as per the data available with the Food Safety Compliance System.

With the effective implementation of the regulations largely dependent on authorities working at the central and State levels, data showed that while the FSSAI is responsible for ensuring overall coordination, it is the State Food Safety Authorities who are primarily responsible for enforcement at the field level. However, these institutes suffer from vacancies.

The FSSAI, which has a sanctioned strength of 822 officers, saw vacancies increase from about 30% to almost 40% in the last five years. Further, data submitted in response to a question in the Rajya Sabha in March this year showed that only 2,997 of the sanctioned positions of 4,208 Food Safety Officers (FSO) across all States and UTs have been filled as of the third quarter of FY 2025-26.

The World Health Organization’s Foodborne Disease Estimates (2026) estimated that unsafe food causes around 866 million illnesses and 1.5 million deaths annually. It also stated that 57.1 million days of Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) were lost in 2021 from foodborne diseases, and 30% of this burden was borne by children under 5 years.

Though the total foodborne disease burden has declined since 2000, a country-wise analysis of the rate of years of life lost due to foodborne diseases showed that India ranked 15th, along with several low-income African nations (**Chart 4**).

Slipping safety standards

The data for charts were sourced from Food Safety and Standards Authority of India, Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India and the World Health Organization



CHART 1: More than a thousand cases and deaths due to food poisoning were reported in 2024

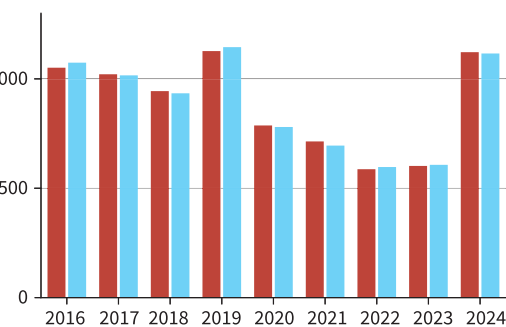


CHART 2: States that saw a high number of food poisoning cases tended to have low or moderate scores on Food Safety Index

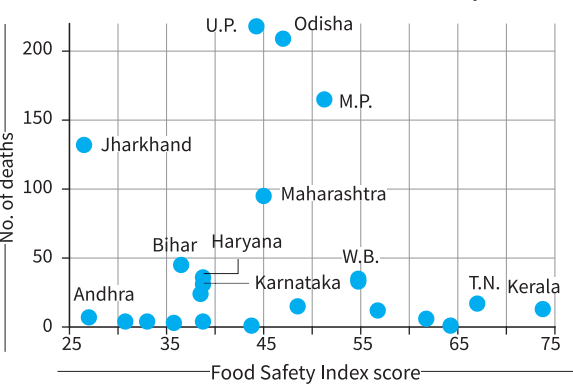


CHART 3: Samples collected for testing in 2024-25 compared with the total registered food business operators in select States

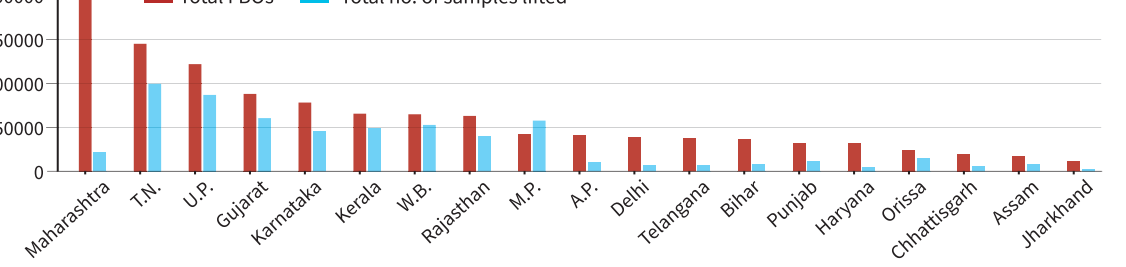
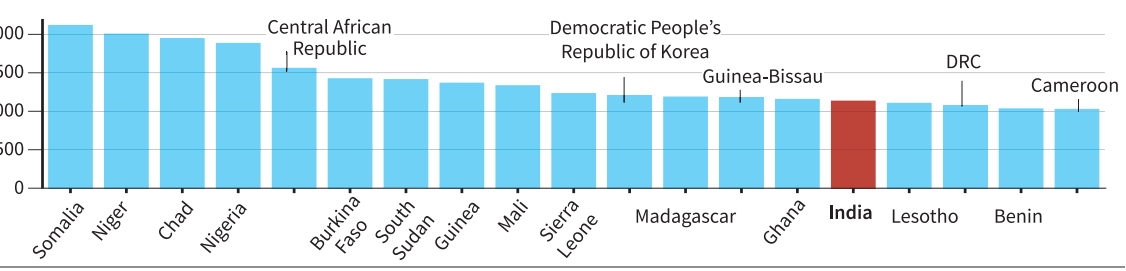


CHART 4: “Foodborne years of lives lost” per 1,00,000 persons. India is ranked 15th, along with many African countries



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 30, 1976

Old bullock cart is still the best

Bangalore, June 29: The rugged bullock-cart evolved by nameless village artisans over the centuries has come out successful and stood the test of modern science and technology.

Studies conducted by scientists connected with the cell for the Application of Science and Technology to Rural Areas (ASTRA) have shown that the traditional bullock-cart with its big iron-rimmed wheels is the best mode of transport for the rural roads of the country.

This was stated here to-day by Dr. M. R. Raghavan at the one-day seminar on “ASTRA projects at the Institute” held at the Indian Institute of Science. Dr. Raghavan who spoke on the topic “bullock-cart a force analysis”, said: “The traditional bullock-cart is a very good compromise for the rural roads. For unprepared terrain it is difficult to change the design. This is what our analyses have revealed.” However, Dr. Raghavan said the bullock-cart was unsuitable for urban areas. The use of carts with such wheels damaged the urban roads. He was of the opinion that there was need for modifications in the design of bullock-carts used in urban areas.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 30, 1926

Severe criticism of Mlle. Lenglen's conduct

Of all the sensations – there have been several – in connection with the championships at Wimbledon, the failure of Mlle. Lenglen to play on June 23 was perhaps the greatest, says “The Daily Mail” under the splash heading “Is Lenglen above rules?” according to the London correspondent of the “The Statesman”.

The newspaper says that the rules should apply equally to every competitor. Players should adhere to the time table or pay the penalty. Mlle. Suzanne Lenglen received preferential treatment, and the man in the street wants to know why.

Mr. Murah, the President of the Australian Lawn Tennis Association, in a letter to the press, says everyone is glad that the American girls defeated Mlle. Lenglen and Mlle. Vlaste.

Mlle. Lenglen’s behaviour was utterly inexcusable, but it was no more incomprehensible than that of the Committee controlling the tournament.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Outlay of clean technology scheme for steel sector

5,000 in ₹ crore. The Centre is planning to introduce a scheme to promote the adoption of clean technologies in steelmaking processes. The scheme named National Strategy for Sustainable Secondary Steel is expected to be launched in the next three months. PTI

Number of civilians in Afghanistan killed by Pakistan airstrikes

36 Overnight airstrikes by Pakistani forces have killed at least 36 civilians and injured more than 160 others, Afghan officials said on Monday. Hundreds of people have been killed in cross-border fighting since February, when Afghanistan launched retaliatory strikes after Pakistan carried out airstrikes inside Afghan territory. PTI

BLOs conducting special intensive revision in Delhi

13,000 The special intensive revision (SIR) of Delhi's electoral rolls will begin on Tuesday, with over 13,000 booth-level officers (BLOs) undertaking a door-to-door verification exercise, Delhi Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Ashok Kumar said on Monday. PTI

Japanese entities on which China imposed export controls

40 China imposed new export controls Monday on 40 Japanese entities it says are contributing to the country's "remilitarisation," as tensions with Tokyo continue to rise. Twenty entities have been placed on a control list, which prohibits Chinese and foreign exporters from selling to them dual-use items made in China. PTI

People in Europe facing temperatures above 35°C

130 in million. At least 130 million people in Europe, mainly located in the central and eastern parts of the continent, are set for temperatures exceeding 35 °C on Monday, according to AFP calculations. This is down from more than 191 million on Sunday. PTI
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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On the delay in India-U.S. trade deal

India and the U.S. announced in February 2025 that they would work towards a Bilateral Trade Agreement, but differences over agriculture and Russian oil, along with legal battles in Washington and investigations initiated by the Trump administration, have clouded its prospects

EXPLAINER

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan

The story so far:

India and the U.S. in February 2025 announced that they would work towards a comprehensive Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) that was to be finalised by fall 2025. Then, in February 2026, they signed a framework agreement for an interim trade deal that was to be implemented by April-May 2026. Neither deal has come to pass.

Why was the BTA delayed?

Soon after Prime Minister Narendra Modi and U.S. President Donald Trump announced their intentions to complete a BTA in February 2025, it became clear that a comprehensive deal would be elusive. The talk among government officials was about finalising at least the first tranche of the deal by fall 2025 (September-November 2025).

Talks intensified post April 2025, after Mr. Trump first announced his ‘Liberation Day’ reciprocal tariffs and then paused them for 90 days so he could negotiate deals with U.S. trade partners. However, despite several meetings, India and the U.S. could not finalise the first tranche, with key sticking points being India’s reluctance to open up its agricultural and dairy sectors, and its decision to buy oil from Russia.

In two successive announcements in late July and early August, Mr. Trump raised tariffs on imports from India to 25% and then to 50%, with the latter hike being a penalty for India’s Russian oil imports. This decision froze negotiations for a few months before matters thawed once again and talks resumed in October.

What is the interim deal?

Once talks resumed, Mr. Modi and Mr. Trump in February 2026 signed a



GETTY IMAGES

framework for an interim agreement on trade. This was not a trade deal itself, but the framework along which one could be worked out. At the time, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal expressed his confidence that the deal would be completed by April, or at the latest by early May 2026.

Under the framework, the U.S. was to reduce total tariffs on Indian imports to 18%, providing it a competitive advantage over its competitors. Both sides also committed to providing each other preferential market access in “sectors of respective interest”.

Why has this deal been delayed?

Soon after the framework was announced, the U.S. Supreme Court invalidated the reciprocal tariff system itself, saying the law it was based on – the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) of the U.S. – did not allow for such tariffs. That removed a major foundation on which the deal negotiations had taken place.

Since then, the U.S. has taken several decisions that have further added to the tariff uncertainty.

Right after the Supreme Court’s decision, Mr. Trump announced that he would be imposing a flat 10% tariff on imports from all countries under the Trade Act of 1974, which he said authorised him to take action to address the U.S.’s ballooning trade deficit. This tariff was temporary, supposed to last 150 days up to July 24. Mr. Trump said he would raise it to 15%, but never did.

The U.S. Court of International Trade deemed these illegal as well, but an appeals court put a stay on that order.

What fresh investigations have added more uncertainty?

In March, the office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) said it had initiated two investigations under Section 301 of the Trade Act into several of its trade partners that could potentially see further tariffs being imposed on them.

The first investigation against 16

economies, including India, was to see whether these economies were using excess manufacturing capacity to export to the U.S. in a manner that was hurting American businesses.

The second one, against 60 countries including India, was to look into whether these countries had taken “sufficient steps” to prohibit the import of goods produced with forced labour and how the “failure to eradicate” these practices impacts U.S. workers and businesses.

Under the forced labour investigation, the U.S. government in early June proposed to levy a tariff of 12.5% on imports from 54 countries, including India, as they have “failed to impose and effectively enforce” prohibitions on the import of goods produced using forced labour. To be sure, this does not mean the U.S. is saying that India uses forced labour, but that it has not stopped the import of goods that have been manufactured using forced labour.

India has made its representations to the U.S. on this matter and the final hearing is on July 7. The findings of the excess capacity investigations are expected in mid-July.

What is India’s stance on the deal?

As repeatedly expressed by Mr. Goyal, India remains committed to finalising a trade deal with the U.S. but is firm about the fact that it should receive a comparative advantage over its competitors as was agreed in February. For this, the Section 301 investigations will have to be completed and the tariffs decided on various countries.

In the meantime, the two sides continue to negotiate on the other non-tariff aspects of the deal, such as enhanced market access, digital trade, supply chain resilience, reduction of non-tariff barriers, and expanded cooperation in strategic sectors. The latest visit by USTR Jamieson Greer to India on June 23-24 did not yield any deadlines.

THE GIST

India and the U.S. missed both the planned 2025 Bilateral Trade Agreement and the 2026 interim deal after disagreements over agriculture, dairy and Russian oil imports, followed by shifting U.S. tariff policies and legal challenges that disrupted negotiations.

New U.S. Section 301 investigations into excess manufacturing capacity and forced-labour-related imports have delayed tariff decisions, while both sides continue negotiating non-tariff issues, with India insisting on a comparative tariff advantage before finalising the deal.

Has RBI changed the rules for scam compensation?

Who can claim compensation, how much can they receive, and what are the eligibility conditions?

Aroon Deep

The story so far:

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Wednesday issued fresh rules to protect customers from scam transactions where they lose money to fraudsters and cyberattacks. These directions amend the RBI’s 2017 circular on “Limiting Liability of Customers in Unauthorised Electronic Banking Transactions”. That previous framework only left banks liable to compensate scammed customers if transactions were not even authorised by customers, such as in a successful hacking incident. These rules are only a pilot for now, but may be extended in the future. They are effective from January 1, 2027, and last for the year.

What has the RBI changed?

In Wednesday’s amendments, a draft version of which was released for public comment in March, customers can get reimbursed when they fall prey to certain scams, like digital arrests (where they are “coerced” into paying money), or when

one-time passcodes (OTPs) are “fraudulently” stolen from them. Most financial fraud currently relies on “social engineering” attacks, which require hoodwinking customers in one way or another; since banks’ core cybersecurity infrastructure is heavily regulated and subject to RBI audits, “zero click” hacks are vanishingly rare.

The new key concept is “fraudulent electronic banking transactions (EBTs)”. RBI defines these as transactions which are “executed by a third-party using the credentials obtained from the customer through fraudulent means or executed by the customer by granting approval under coercion or duress from the third-party” or “an EBT which is not authorised by a customer and inter alia includes an EBT occurring on account of negligence by a bank and/or a third-party breach.”

This means that customers who ignore fraud signal warnings, such as those on a UPI PIN screen that a given transaction could be a scam, would not be eligible for any compensation. In cases of a third-party hack, the timeline for a customer to report the loss has been

increased to five calendar days from three working days. As in the 2017 rules, if any amount is deducted after a customer reports fraud, the customer bears no liability and is entitled to a reversal of the transaction.

Banks can waive customers’ liability even if a transaction is negligent, but this is subject to their own discretion. If a user does not have their latest phone number or email address registered with the bank, this counts as negligence, as the bank would not send fraud alerts to the right contact.

How much compensation can customers receive?

For losses up to ₹50,000, individual victims can claim 85% of the amount as compensation, only once in their lifetime, up to ₹25,000. (This means that for any amount from ₹29,412 till ₹50,000, customers will receive a flat ₹25,000 compensation.) Roughly three-fourths of the amount will be paid by RBI itself, while the customer and beneficiary banks will pay half the remaining amount. A customer must report to the

cybercrime helpline (1930) within five days to be eligible for this. It is worth noting that scams above ₹50,000 don’t seem to be covered in this framework at all.

What changed between the draft and final rules?

From the March draft, banks have been given more time to implement this new system; the draft rules had a July 1 effective date. This is now January 1, 2027. Complaint settlement timelines are also now increased to 45-60 days, with the latter applying for international transactions.

Dvara Research, a non-profit financial inclusion think tank, had suggested that the vulnerability of customers be taken into account. “Research suggests that Indians encounter fraud attempts multiple times a week, that these attempts are growing more sophisticated, and therefore, it is not unlikely that customers may fall for them more than once,” the body wrote.

“Vulnerable customers may not be expected to meet high standards of attentiveness or defend themselves against frauds that are sophisticated even for the more evolved customers ... Under the Indian Contract Act, contracts executed under information asymmetry, external influence, or fraudulent pretext are voidable... Bundling such different transactions under the common definition of ‘authorised transaction’ diminishes their fundamental difference and may even reduce the significance of a liability framework.”

THE GIST

RBI’s revised rules expand customer protection by allowing compensation for certain fraud caused by coercion or stolen credentials, not just unauthorised transactions.

Eligible customers can claim up to ₹25,000 for losses of up to ₹50,000 if they report the fraud within five days; the pilot framework takes effect from January 1, 2027.

INBRIEF



Apple accuses India of ‘copy-pasting’ rivals in probe

Apple has accused the Competition Commission of India of “copy-pasting” its rivals’ claims and failing to properly conduct its own investigation in concluding the U.S. tech giant breached competition laws, calling for the findings to be quashed, regulatory papers reviewed by *Reuters* showed. The June 25 Apple submission, being reported for the first time, marks the sharpest escalation yet in Apple’s fight with the CCI, where Tinder-owner Match and Indian start-ups are among its opponents. In 2024, CCI investigators privately issued a report saying Apple engaged in “abusive conduct” on the apps platform of its iOS operating system, and wrongly mandated the use of its payment system.

Centre eases metrology rules for first-time violators

The Department of Consumer Affairs on Monday said it has introduced an “Improvement Notice” mechanism under the Legal Metrology Act, 2009, allowing businesses to rectify first-time procedural non-compliances before facing penal action. The change has been effected through the Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Act, 2026, as part of the government’s Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) agenda. A Legal Metrology Officer detecting a specified first-time procedural or regulatory lapse may issue an Improvement Notice, identifying the deficiency and providing reasonable time to correct it. PTI

Tech Mahindra to deploy Perplexity AI platform

Tech Mahindra on Monday said it will deploy AI platform Perplexity across its sales and customer-facing teams for better client engagement. The integration of ‘Perplexity Enterprise Pro’ aims to equip senior sales leaders and customer partners with intelligent tools to research customer priorities efficiently, understand industry-specific challenges and identify emerging business opportunities, the company said. Equipping sales teams with intelligent tools that support faster decision-making and deeper customer understanding will improve sales performance while delivering more personalised and meaningful experiences for customers, it said. PTI

AI must not compromise data integrity: Mishra

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Even as India moves towards AI-ready datasets, such data can become an asset to the country “only when backed by robust standards of quality, privacy and transparency”, P. K. Mishra, Principal Secretary to the PM said on Monday.

Speaking at the 20th Statistics Day, Mr. Mishra said that while Artificial Intelligence (AI) offers “transformative opportunities” for statistical analysis and policymaking, its adoption must be guided by strong governance frameworks to address bias, accountability and explainability.

Datasets updated

Mr. Mishra acknowledged after decades of excellence, the statistical system faced challenges relating to outdated datasets, delays in data dissemination, fragmented statistical architecture and declining professional capacity.

“The concerns prompted a comprehensive reform exercise led by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) through extensive consultations with experts and stakeholders,” Mr. Mishra said. “Based on the deliberations, MoSPI accepted 216 recommendations for time-bound im-



P. K. Mishra

plementation under an institutional oversight mechanism.” He highlighted the reforms had already led to the introduction of new and user demand-based surveys, updating of macroeconomic indicators, improved data dissemination and significant procedural and process-oriented reforms.

Since February, the government had released updated series of national accounts, Index of Industrial Production, Consumer Price Index and Wholesale Price Index apart from introducing Producer Price Index and the Index of Services Production.

On India’s adoption of AI-ready datasets, he said: “Administrative data can become a powerful national asset only when backed by robust standards of quality, privacy and transparency.”

Only electric two-wheelers to ply on Delhi roads from 2028

Territorial government notifies new EV policy that mandates all two-wheelers to shift to EVs from April 1, 2028; only electric three-wheelers and N1 trucks to be registered from January 1, 2027

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Notifying its new EV policy on Monday, the Delhi government said that it would focus entirely on electric vehicles, and that no subsidies would be provided for hybrid vehicles. Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta announced that the Cabinet had approved the policy at a ₹7,000 crore budget with an overall investment of ₹15,000 crore, including for development of charging infrastructure, purchase and scrapping incentives.

The territorial government has also put into place deadlines for various categories of vehicles to be transitioned to EVs. From January 1, 2027, only electric three wheelers and N1 trucks will be registered. The deadline for two-wheelers to shift to EV is April 1, 2028. School buses would also need to convert at least 10% of their fleet to EV within two years of notification of the policy.

Calling the policy ‘transformative and revolutionary’, the CM said that the transition would be instrumental in combatting air pollution in the city. Ms. Gupta said that the new policy was likely to come into effect on July 1, 2026, and would remain effective till March 31, 2030.

The transport department will be the nodal



No entry: Transport Secretary Niharika Rai claimed 46% of air pollution was caused by two- and three-wheelers. FILE PHOTO

agency for the implementation of the policy with Delhi Transco Ltd. (DTL) responsible for developing charging infrastructure in the city, including collaborating with the power department and distribution companies to provide power for the EV transition.

Transport Secretary Niharika Rai said that 33% of air pollution was caused by commercial goods carrier vehicles and 46% by two- and three-wheelers. “The policy focuses on these vehicles specifically. We are trying to convert the entire fleet of these vehicles into EV,” she said.

The government has allocated a budget of ₹7,000 crore for implementation of the policy with an additional ₹3,000 crore as purchase and scrapping incentives. About ₹1,000 crore has been allocated for development of charging infrastructure in the city. Besides, citizens would also be exempted from road tax

and registration fee would be waived for all electric vehicles (EVs). The government was expected to lose ₹3,000 crore worth of revenue from these benefits, the officials said.

However, the officials specified that the road tax and registration fee exemption would be applicable for cars costing only up to ₹30 lakh, at ex-show-room price.

The official said that citizens would get purchase incentives of up to ₹30,000 for two-wheelers: ₹30,000 in the first year of notification of the policy, ₹20,000 in the second year and ₹10,000 in the third year. For three wheelers, the incentives will be ₹50,000, ₹40,000 and ₹30,000 respectively, for the first, second and third years. Similarly, a subsidy of up to ₹1 lakh would be provided for N1 commercial trucks in the first year of the EV policy.

Scrapping incentives for

vehicles below BS-IV emission norms categories would be around ₹10,000 for two-wheelers, ₹25,000 for three-wheelers and ₹1 lakh for four-wheelers. Scrapping N1 trucks would beget ₹50,000 as incentive and Gramin Seva units completing their lifecycle in the coming years, would also get ₹15,000 subsidy, the officials said.

Moreover, electric N2 trucks, i.e., those carrying loads from 3.5-12 tonnes, would be exempted from ‘No Entry’ timings for the next 10 years. However, this is applicable only to the first 1,000 N2 trucks purchased within three months of notification of the policy.

The officials also said that no subsidy would be provided for hybrid vehicles. A new dedicated EV portal would keep track of purchased and registered vehicles for which consumers would have to submit their documents to avail subsidies and incentives.

Consumers would be able to apply for the subsidies within 30 days of issuance of registration certificates. The subsidies would be provided within 60 days through DBT.

The government also plans to install 32,000 charging points infrastructure within the next four years, funded by PM e-Drive schemes as well as the Delhi government budget.

Union Cabinet okays ₹30,000 cr. additional investment in NIIF for new fund creation

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet has approved an additional investment by the Government of India of ₹30,000 crore in the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) to be used for its upcoming funds, the government announced on Monday.

The decision itself was taken last week, it said. This would take the government’s total commitment in NIIF to ₹60,000 crore. The NIIF is India’s sovereign anchored fund, in which the government of India is a 49% shareholder. It currently manages capital commitments of about ₹40,000 crore across its fundings and investment strategies, the government said.

“We are grateful for this allocation of ₹30,000 crore, which is a strong reaffirmation of Government support to NIIF and reinforces the catalytic capital model that has defined NIIF since inception,” Sanjiv Aggarwal, Managing Director and CEO of NIIF said.

New fund

According to a release by NIIF, this additional allocation from the government will help NIIF raise larger funds, attract investors across geographies, and deepen its presence in key sectors of the economy.



This additional investment of ₹30,000 crore will be used to set up NIIF’s second infrastructure focussed fund, the successor to its first flagship fund with this mandate

The government said that this additional investment of ₹30,000 crore will be used to set up NIIF’s second infrastructure focussed fund, the successor to its first flagship fund with this mandate.

“NIIF Infrastructure Fund II is proposed to have a target corpus of close to ₹30,000 crore and is expected to undertake investments across transportation, energy, digital infrastructure, and emerging areas such as urban infrastructure and e-mobility,” the government release said.

It added that the allocation will also support NIIF’s new fund strategies and upcoming bilateral and strategic funds.

“Over the past decade, GoI’s anchor commitment has enabled us to build a very strong institutional investor base, spanning leading sovereign wealth funds, pension funds, multilateral and bilateral institutions, and domestic financial institutions,” Mr. Aggarwal added.

FPIs pour in a record ₹53,300 cr. to compensate for debt equity exit

Ashokamithran T
MUMBAI

Foreign Institutional Investors (FII) poured a record ₹53,363 crore in all types of debt securities to compensate for a near equal amount sold in equities in

June 2026. This led to a net inflow of about ₹334 crore in all instruments, according to data from NSDL.

Debt security investments are classified into General Limit, Voluntary Retention Route (VRR) and Fully Accessible Route

(FAR) – a large section of which could be attributed to government securities.

Inflows in the General Limit and Fully Accessible Route (FAR) came in at ₹28,196 and ₹21,788 crore in June 2026. FAR bond investments were up five

times and General Limit investments increased from an outflow of ₹100 crore last month. The increase in inflows comes weeks after the Ministry of Finance exempted government securities from long-term capital gains and increased the te-

nors of bonds in the FAR category in a bid to deepen bond markets. The move also comes at a time when the overall foreign investor behaviour leans towards aversion to the Indian markets, largely due to sub-par returns in equities owing

to higher valuations and a depreciated rupee. Equity outflow, however, continued for the fourth consecutive month to ₹51,456 crore in June 2026. In the past six months put together, equity outflows alone were ₹2.76 lakh crore.

HDFC Bank names part-time chairman

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

The board of HDFC Bank approved the appointment of Former Finance Secretary Rajiv Kumar as additional director (independent director) for a period of four years and also as part time chairman for a period of three years.

Mr. Kumar, 66, is a 1984-batch IAS officer. He retired as Finance Secretary in 2020. Post retirement, he briefly served as Chairman of Public Enterprises Selection Board (PESB).

As Secretary, Department of Financial Services (2017-2020), he assumed charge at a time when public sector banks were grappling with high levels of unrecognised NPAs, capital inadequacy, lenders frozen out of fresh credit, rampant gold plating, diversion of equity and debt and recirculation to leverage fresh credit, governance challenges including large consortia, NBFCs struggling to fill micro credit gaps post demonetisation, Ponzi schemes defrauding citizens, etc.

Mr. Kumar will replace interim part-time chairman Keki Mistry who stepped in on the sudden resignation of part-time chairman Atanu Chakraborty on account of ethical concerns.

U.S. firm Signa forays into India, to curb counterfeiters with AI

Lalatendu Mishra
MUMBAI

U.S.-based brand protection and investigations firm Signa Techlaw Corp. has entered the Indian market, marking its first expansion into the Asia-Pacific region. Established in 2023 by Daniel Estrada and Andrés Argoti, the company combines artificial intelligence with investigative expertise to detect counterfeit products, unauthorized sellers, and illicit trade networks across digital and physical marketplaces.

Industry reports have consistently identified China, India, and Turkey as some of the world’s largest sources of counterfeit goods, underlining the scale of the global challenge

Mr. Estrada, who has served as a reserve police lieutenant attached to crime investigations and Interpol, aims to position Signa as a technology-driven platform supporting international organizations in tackling illicit trade originating from these regions.

“The problem is no longer limited to luxury goods or fashion accessories. Counterfeit medicines, cosmetics, food items, and alcoholic beverages are increasingly reaching consumers, posing significant risks to public health and safety,” Daniel Estrada,



On a mission: Founder and Chief Executive Officer Daniel Estrada, left, with co-founder Andrés Argoti. BY ARRANGEMENT

Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Signa, said in an interview.

“Today, the largest counterfeit marketplace is no longer a traditional street market—it is online. As consumers increasingly shop digitally, counterfeiters have followed them,” he emphasised.

India’s counterfeit trade is rapidly shifting to digital platforms, with e-commerce websites and social media emerging as key distribution channels, he added.

According to the ASPA-CRISIL State of Counterfeiting in India 2025 report, online platforms account for 53% of counterfeit purchases, while nearly 89% of urban Indian consumers have unknowingly or knowingly purchased counterfeit products at least once.

Signa’s technology plat-

form collects intelligence including seller identities, payment information, phone numbers, and location data to assist investigations and enforcement agencies.

The company is currently working with more than 32 brands across 12 countries and has identified counterfeit products worth over \$150 million globally, and has supported enforcement actions safeguarding products valued at more than \$40 million, it said.

With India’s digital economy expanding rapidly and online shopping becoming mainstream, brand protection is expected to become an even greater priority for businesses.

Signa plans to initially focus on sectors such as pharmaceuticals, healthcare, cosmetics, food, and beverages, where counter-

feit products can have serious consequences for consumer safety. Later, it will foray into garments and lifestyle segments.

The company is already supporting global clients including Procter & Gamble, Roche, Diageo, and several multinational pharmaceutical and spirits companies operating in India.

It is also collaborating with investigators, law firms, and enforcement authorities while strengthening its local presence. Additionally, Signa is developing a WhatsApp-based verification tool that will enable consumers and authorities to authenticate products simply by sharing a photograph.

The company’s infrastructure runs on AWS, where it uses Amazon DynamoDB as its primary operational database and event-driven serverless services to process millions of data points efficiently.

“On the AI side, we leverage OpenAI’s models together with our own proprietary detection and investigation pipelines to identify counterfeit products, analyse evidence, and automate complex enforcement workflows across marketplaces, social media, and the open web,” co-founder Andrés Argoti said.

Govt. plans ₹5,000 crore scheme for green tech in steel sector

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

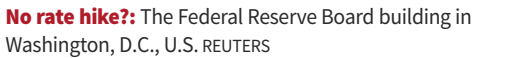
The government is planning to introduce a scheme to promote the adoption of clean technologies in steel-making processes with an outlay of ₹5,000 crore, according to an official.

The move is aimed at reducing carbon emissions from the domestic steel industry. The scheme named National Strategy for Sustainable Secondary Steel is expected to be launched in the next three months, a senior government official told PTI.

“The scheme may go for approval of the union cabinet,” another official in the know of the development said. The scheme will cover all steelmakers in the country. However, a major share of the funds will be earmarked for secondary players. The National Strategy for Sustainable Secondary Steel aims to promote the adoption of clean technologies and alternative materials across various steelmaking processes to reduce carbon emissions from the domestic steel industry.

The move assumes significance as India is a signatory to the Paris Agreement and aims to become a net-zero country.

*What's good
for the US
economy now
may not be
good for stocks*



The U.S. economy and the U.S. stock market are starting to go their own ways. An eventful June featuring the launch of the record-busting SpaceX IPO and Federal Reserve chief Kevin Warsh's first meeting has been full of contradictions. U.S. economic data has been solid, led by continued job gains and strong consumer spending, while sentiment is ticking up. Yet the Nasdaq and S&P 500 are down for the month and the once-unstoppable Magnificent Seven technology stocks are off more than 10% by one measure. Treasury bonds rallied, sending yields lower even after inflation exceeded 4% last week for the first time in three years.

This past week UBS cut its exposure to semiconductor and hardware stocks in its artificial intelligence portfolio, warning of possible future AI capital-expenditure cuts by hyperscalers given their share-price declines. Any reduction in AI capex would likely also hit the economy, given the scale of spending by the biggest tech firms.

Cheaper AI is better: soaring bills are reshaping how businesses pick model

Trump tariffs aren't saving jobs at Whirlpool unit

0 “We don’t need to spend the premium tokens on every level of effort.”

DEIR AL-BALAH

Two children among four killed in Israeli strike and shelling in Gaza



AFP

An Israeli drone strike hit a tent sheltering displaced people in Deir al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip on Monday, killing at least three Palestinians, including an 8-year-old boy, medical officials said. Separately, a 13-year-old girl was killed by shrapnel from Israeli tank shelling in southern Gaza, according to Nasser hospital. AP, REUTERS

BELGRADE

Europe's heatwave scorches Italy and Balkans as wildfire fears rise



AFP

Italy and the Balkans felt the impact on Monday of the heatwave that has caused hundreds of excess deaths across Europe. A red alert was issued in Croatia. In Serbia, soaring temperatures were predicted for next few days. Albania contained a raging wildfire. In Italy, 22 cities were covered by a red heat warning. REUTERS

WASHINGTON

U.S. Supreme Court rules Trump can fire independent agency heads



REUTERS

The U.S. Supreme Court on Monday backed President Donald Trump's firing of a Democratic Federal Trade Commission member, expanding his powers to fire leaders of independent regulators. The court, in another case, blocked Mr. Trump's firing of Federal Reserve Governor as it stood firm on the bank's independence. REUTERS

BERLIN

Six dead in shooting in northern Germany; two suspects arrested



AFP

Six people were killed in a shooting on Monday at a youth welfare facility in the northern German town of Stade, police said. Two people were arrested, including the suspected shooter. Police said they were working to establish the background to the shooting and what exactly happened. AP

Iran to get \$6 billion in frozen assets from Qatar: Pezeshkian

President praises interim agreement, calls it 'a great victory for the Iranian people'; United States and Iran pause strikes after four days but disagree on talks; no mention of assets release by Qatar

Associated Press
DUBAI

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Monday that Iran had requested a meeting with U.S. counterparts, though one of Iran's top negotiators said no further talks had been scheduled after attacks across the Persian Gulf over the weekend challenged negotiations to end the war.

Meanwhile, Iran's President on Monday said that \$6 billion in frozen Iranian assets would be released by Qatar.

"Based on the plans made, \$6 billion out of the total \$12 billion of Iranian resources in Qatar will be released and returned to the country, and necessary follow-ups are being carried out," he said.

Masoud Pezeshkian is the highest-ranking official within Iran to reference



A woman walks past a billboard featuring Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian in Pakistan — a key mediator in the negotiations. AP

the release of the funds held by Qatar, a key mediator in the negotiations. So far, U.S. officials say no frozen Iranian assets have been released. Qatar as well as has not acknowledged any such transfer and Iran attacked a tanker filled with Qatari crude oil this weekend.

In recent days, Iran has twice attacked vessels going through a route near

the Omani side, drawing retaliatory American airstrikes. Iran launched drone and missile attacks targeting Bahrain and Kuwait on Sunday.

Talks planned today

After four days of trading strikes, both sides appeared to pause their attacks on Monday. Mr. Trump said on social media that a meeting with

Iran would happen on Tuesday in Doha, Qatar. Mr. Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, the President's son-in-law, are flying to Qatar for the meeting, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said.

Pakistan, a key mediator, has said talks would resume on Tuesday.

However, Kazem Gharibabadi, the Iranian negotiator, cast doubt on the meeting in comments published by state-run IRNA news agency. "Reports by some media about technical talks by the working groups being held in Doha are not confirmed," he said.

IRNA also quoted Mr. Pezeshkian as calling the interim deal "a great victory for the Iranian people."

Meanwhile, Iran and Oman held a meeting about the strait on Monday in Oman.

Burnham to create 'No. 10 North' as PM, to oversee decentralisation

Sriram Lakshman
LONDON

Andy Burnham, who is likely to become the next Prime Minister of the U.K. previewed his economic policy on Monday, emphasising devolution of economic powers from London, towards the regions of England as well as to Scotland and Wales.

The former Greater Manchester Mayor, who returned to the U.K. Parliament in Westminster exactly a week ago after winning a byelection, said he would create an extension of the Prime Minister's office in Manchester — a 'No. 10 North' — to oversee and enable the devolution.

Mr. Burnham, whose relative popularity in the Labour Party provided an alternative to current Prime Minister Keir Starmer completing his five-year term, said he would "build the broadest possible coalition of people to lift Britain back up", during his Monday speech in Manchester.



Andy Burnham

Collaborative politics

"I am going to give Britain the circuit breaker it needs by building a more collaborative politics in Westminster, by taking power out of the centre and putting it in

the hands of the people and places who can use it best," he said.

Mr. Burnham is, for now, running uncontested to replace Mr. Starmer as Prime Minister and leader of the Labour Party. On Monday, he emphasised his desire for decentralisation, saying Britain was one of the most centralised countries in the world, as he presented a picture of the U.K. Parliament not working smoothly. He promised the "biggest rebalancing" the country had ever seen, with bottom-up regional planning to attract investments.

Mr. Burnham suggested he would adopt a 10-year plan to raise living standards, would focus on skills training as an alternative to university and push for greater public control of utilities. Britain would

see the largest public house building programme in the post-war era, Mr. Burnham said.

He has not yet provided details of how he would fund his plans, but reiterated that he would respect the current government's "fiscal rules", i.e., the self-imposed spending rules the government committed to. The former Mayor had, previously, ruffled feather in the markets and caused a rise in borrowing costs when he had indicated that the fiscal rules could be relaxed.

"Whilst not taking risks with the public finances, will seek to give Britain some breathing space as soon as I can," he said, on Monday.

Mr. Burnham could replace Mr. Starmer by July 17, if no other candidate enters the fray.

'Turkiye must be included in Europe security structures'

Agence France-Presse
ISTANBUL

Turkiye must be included in all of Europe's defence structures and defence trade restrictions between NATO members must be removed, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Monday ahead of a key NATO summit.

His remarks come as Europe revamps its defences to counter Russia and the risk of a U.S. pullback from NATO, which is to hold a summit in the Turkish capital Ankara on July 7-8.

"Turkiye's indispensable contributions to European security are sometimes overlooked," Mr.

At issue is Turkiye's access to the EU's 150-billion-euro Security Action for Europe initiative

Erdogan told parliamentary delegates from all 32 NATO member states. He said Turkiye wanted "to participate in all defence and security initiatives" on the continent.

At issue is Turkiye's access to the EU's 150-billion-euro Security Action for Europe (SAFE) initiative — to strengthen European defence capabilities.

"We expect your support, lawmakers, for Turki-

ye's inclusion in the defence and security initiatives announced by the EU," Mr. Erdogan said.

Within SAFE, firms from non-EU countries such as Turkiye, Britain and the U.S. can only supply up to 35% of the component costs of weaponry funded by the scheme.

If Turkiye wants its companies to be able to tap a bigger part of the funds, Ankara needs to sign a partnership with the EU and then negotiate special access with Brussels — a process that would require approval from all 27 EU members.

Greece has threatened to block such a move.

Ebola flare-up spreads to new province in DR Congo

Agence France-Presse
KINSHASA

A deadly Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo has spread to a fourth province - Haut-Uele, meaning the country's entire northeast - home to around 15 million people - is now affected.

The epidemic has claimed 360 lives out of 1,274 confirmed cases, according to World Health Organization. The conflict-hit Ituri province is the epicentre of the latest outbreak. North Kivu and South Kivu are the other affected provinces.

Reduced to rubble



A drone view shows buildings destroyed by earthquakes, in La Guaira, Venezuela. The toll rose to at least 1,719 on Monday. As rescue efforts enter critical hours, a low-magnitude aftershock hit capital Caracas on Monday. Over 5,000 people have been injured while tens of thousands have been reported missing. REUTERS

Russian drone and missile strikes kill 11, injure 40 in Ukraine

Associated Press
KYIV

Russian missiles and drones killed at least 11 civilians and injured 40 others in Ukraine on Monday in what President Volodymyr Zelenskyy described as "horrific attacks."

A Russian missile targeting infrastructure struck the central city of Dnipro, killing five people and wounding 29. Russian drones hit a passenger minibus in the southern city of Zaporizhzhia, killing three and wounding six, including a child, he said.

Russian drones also killed two people in the northeastern Sumy region. Russian strike killed one person and wounded five others in the northeastern city of Kharkiv.

Mr. Zelenskyy renewed his plea for Europe to step up its development of air defences.

"People need greater protection from such horrific attacks," Mr. Zelenskyy said. "It is essential that Europe is as active as possible in developing its own anti-ballistic defense."

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"People need greater protection from such horrific attacks," Mr. Zelenskyy said. "It is essential that Europe is as active as possible in developing its own anti-ballistic defense."

Deal with Israel foment divisions, will not be implemented: Lebanese Speaker

Reuters
BEIRUT

Lebanon's Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, a key ally of Hezbollah, on Monday slammed a U.S.-brokered agreement between Lebanon and Israel, warning it could lead to attempts to divide Lebanese and said it would not be implemented.

Israeli officials suggested the agreement would move forward in the coming days, but there were no reports of any aspects of the deal being implemented on the ground.

In comments to Lebanon's *al-Akhbar* newspaper, Mr. Berri described Iran-U.S. talks as the only realistic opportunity to secure Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon and that any



Vehicles drive past billboards that read in Arabic, 'Lebanon first', one of which has been set on fire along Beirut's airport road. AFP

attempt to separate Lebanon from the U.S.-Iran track would prolong Israeli occupation.

The agreement foresees Lebanon's Army taking over

territory pending verified disarmament of non-state groups — a reference to Hezbollah — saying this would enable Israel's military "to progressively redeploy out of" Lebanon.

Mr. Berri described the agreement as "diktats". *Al-Akhbar* quoted Mr. Berri as saying the most dangerous aspect of the agreement was not only its political content, but "the potential for it to incite internal divisions and draw the Lebanese into a confrontation among themselves".

The agreement "won't be implemented", *al-Akhbar* cited him as saying.

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China imposes new export controls on 20 Japanese entities

Agence France-Presse
BEIJING

China put 20 more Japanese organisations on a blacklist on Monday over the export of items with both military and civilian possible uses, deepening tensions with Tokyo.

The new additions, including major companies, "have participated in enhancing Japan's military capabilities", the Chinese Commerce Ministry said in a statement.

A Japanese government spokesperson called the

measures "unacceptable". The two countries have had strained relations since Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi suggested in November that Tokyo may react militarily to an attack on Taiwan.

The 20 additions to the export blacklist include firms involved in supplying components and engineering support for Japan's defence sector. China has said exporters must submit risk assessments and guarantees that dual-use items will not enhance Japanese military strength.



A slogan promoting ethnic unity in the new era, in Chinese and Uyghur languages, in China's Xinjiang region. AFP

Under China's new law, minorities warn of 'cultural erasure'

Agence France-Presse
GENEVA

Tibetan and Uyghur representatives urged countries at a UN meeting last week to push China to repeal a new law which they say is aimed at erasing minority communities.

The Ethnic Unity and Progress Promotion Law, which comes into effect on Wednesday, aims to forge a "shared" national identity among ethnic groups and "strengthen cohesion". But rights advocates charge it has been shaped to provide Beijing with legal cover for pursuing long-existing policies of forced assimilation with the Han majority.

UN rights chief Volker Turk has called for the law to be repealed, warning before the UN Human Rights Council earlier this month that it risked "deepening restrictions on freedoms of language, education, practice of religion, culture, expression and assembly".

At a council side event on Friday, Tibetan and Uyghur representatives described how, in their view, their cultural, religious and linguistic identities were being criminalised.

It is "legislating the erasure of Tibetans as a Tibetan identity, as a Tibetan culture, as a Tibetan language", Thinlay Chukki, the representative of the Dalai Lama and the Central Tibetan Administration in central and eastern Europe, said.

She said the law was legalising an existing system of forcibly sending Tibetan children to residential boarding schools, where they were "subjected forcibly to the Mandarin language".

Beijing wants "to disrupt our entire identity, to disconnect generations", Zumretay Arkin, the vice president of the World Uyghur Congress said.

They also highlighted a clause under which individuals and organisations outside China "can be explicitly prosecuted" under the law.

Israeli attacks 'led to genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity'

International criminal law defines genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes, and recognises that these offences may be committed against children and produce child specific harms; recently, an independent UN inquiry found that Israel actions deliberately targeted Palestinian children

EXPLAINER

Rizmi Lia M.

Israeli authorities and security forces deliberately targeted Palestinian children, resulting in genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes in Gaza, and war crimes in the occupied West Bank," an independent UN inquiry said on Tuesday.

International criminal law, as codified in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and customary international law, defines genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes and recognises that these offences may be committed against children and produce child-specific harms.

Act of genocide

According to Article 6 of the Rome statute of the ICC, "genocide" means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such.

The acts include, killing members of the group, causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group, deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part, imposing measures



Israel has killed over 73,000 Palestinians in the Gaza strip since October 2023. AFP

intended to prevent births within the group, forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Widespread attack

Under Article 7 of the Rome Statute, crimes against humanity are specific acts committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population, with knowledge of that attack.

The Rome Statute lists a range of acts that may constitute crimes against humanity, including murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation or forcible transfer of populations, unlawful imprisonment, torture, rape and other forms of sexual violence, persecution of identifiable groups on political, racial, national, ethnic, cultural, religious or gender

grounds, enforced disappearance, apartheid, and other inhumane acts intentionally causing serious physical or mental harm.

Geneva convention

Article 8 of the Rome Statute defines war crimes as serious violations of international humanitarian law committed during an armed conflict. The Court exercises jurisdiction particularly where such crimes are committed as part of a plan or policy or on a large scale.

War crimes include grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions, such as wilful killing, torture or inhuman treatment, wilfully causing great suffering or serious injury, unlawful destruction or seizure of property, compelling prisoners of war to serve hostile forces, denying prison-

ers a fair trial, unlawful deportation or confinement, and taking hostages.

The statute also criminalises a broader range of serious violations of the laws and customs of war. The statute applies these prohibitions to both international and non-international armed conflicts.

On Israel's actions

In a previous report dated September 16, 2025, the Commission has found that the Israeli authorities and Israeli security forces have committed and are continuing to commit four categories of underlying acts of genocide in the Gaza Strip with the specific intent to destroy, in whole or in part, the Palestinian group, as such. Three of those four categories are especially relevant to children, namely (i) killing

members of the group; (ii) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; and (iii) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part. They also found that the elements for crimes against humanity have been fulfilled in Gaza, namely that attacks by the Israeli security forces since October 7, 2023 have involved "multiple commission of acts" directed against any civilian population that are widespread or systematic.

The Commission has found in a previous report in September 2025 that (i) the extensive and deliberate targeting of Palestinians, including children, showed that the military operations were not conducted solely to defeat Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups as Israeli officials claimed, nor can they legitimately contribute to the other stated goals of defending the state of Israel and securing the release of Israeli hostages; and (ii) the intentional targeting of Palestinian children was intended to physically destroy the larger Palestinian group in Gaza.

The Commission finds that Israeli security forces have committed the following war crimes against and affecting Palestinian children, consistent with its findings in previous reports: wilful killing, tor-

ture and inhuman and degrading treatment causing severe physical and psychological harm, willfully causing great suffering or serious injury to body or health through deliberate deprivation and violence, intentionally directing attacks against the civilian population, destruction of property, and outrages upon personal dignity, designed to dehumanise and subjugate the Palestinian population, including children.

The report says that Israel continues to blatantly disregard the International Court of Justice (ICJ) advisory opinion of 19 July 2024 in respect of the 'Legal Consequences arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem', and importantly, the orders for provisional measures issued on 26 January, 28 March 2024 and 24 May 2024 in the case of the 'Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (*South Africa v. Israel*)', which are binding on Israel. In the case, South Africa accuses Israeli forces of genocide, but it could take years to reach a conclusion.

The Commission's findings, though not judicial determinations, may inform ongoing international investigations and proceedings.

Rushed out



Undocumented migrants in Durban, South Africa preparing to leave before their camp shuts down. They are to be transferred to the border with Zimbabwe. Anti-immigrant groups have set Tuesday 30 as the deadline for undocumented foreigners to leave. AFP

Russia continues to make advances in Ukraine's eastern 'fortress belt'

Reuters
KYIV/NEAR DRUZHKIVKA

Russia is grinding its way into Kostiantynivka, a key stronghold in Ukraine's eastern "fortress belt" long coveted by the Kremlin, even as its gains across the rest of the 1,200-km front line have largely stalled.

Fighting has begun to seep into the city itself. Small groups of Russian soldiers are attempting to infiltrate its outskirts, senior Ukrainian commanders said last week, suggesting close-quarters assaults could follow.

Kostiantynivka is the southernmost of four key settlements forming a defensive line central to Ukraine's effort to hold the Donetsk region.



Ukrainian servicemen unload a military vehicle as they arrive for a combat mission near Kostiantynivka on June 24. REUTERS

The push towards it underscores Moscow's enduring manpower advantage, even as Ukrainian mid-range drone strikes have weakened its fighting capabilities, analysts said.

"The effect (of mid-range strikes) hasn't been

so great that it would have forced the Russians to suspend their offensive," Emil Kastehelmi of the Black Bird conflict analysis team in Finland, said.

Occupying Kostiantynivka would provide Russian forces a foothold from

which to move north along the belt, now the central axis of their campaign.

But any advance would likely be long and bloody for its forces, in a possible echo of other costly sieges of eastern cities like Pokrovsk and Avdiivka.

President Vladimir Putin has insisted Russia must control all of Donetsk before the war ends. Ukraine still holds around a fifth of the region after more than four years of fighting.

Mr. Putin said last week Russia was close to capturing Kostiantynivka, whose pre-war population of nearly 70,000 has fallen to around 2,000. However, senior commanders of Kyiv's 19th Army Corps dismissed that claim as an exaggeration.

Palestinians live in fear of eviction as Israel tightens control over Hebron

Agence France-Presse
HEBRON

For Israeli settler Nitzan, Hebron's Old City and its sacred Cave of the Patriarchs shrine are a must-see for all of humanity, but for Palestinian Issa Amro, it has become a symbol of Israel's expanding grip on the city.

Holy to Jews, Muslims and Christians and believed to be the burial place of biblical figures including Abraham, the site has long represented the competing claims that define Hebron, the largest city in the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

Known to Muslims as the Ibrahimi Mosque, the shrine sits within a heavily controlled area where around 40,000 Palesti-

nians live alongside about 200 Israeli settler families – but under separate systems of movement and security.

Israeli authorities have installed checkpoints, gates and patrols across key streets in the area, citing security concerns, and Palestinians who do not live in the restricted zone are not allowed to enter freely.

Israel's rising control
Israel's far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich recently announced that the shrine's administration, including planning and construction powers, would be transferred to Israeli authorities, a significant shift that has alarmed Palestinians but cheered Israeli settlers.

"It's a place that all the humanity should visit to say thanks for Hashem, which is God," Nitzan, a resident of the nearby Kiryat Arba settlement said.

But for many Palestinians living in its shadow, the site now symbolises the tightening of Israeli control over a city where two communities live in close proximity but inhabit starkly different worlds.

"We feel that we live in a big jail in Hebron: the checkpoints restrict movement so nobody from outside can come to our houses," said Issa Amro, an activist.

Over time, many Palestinian shops in the Old City have shut, and the once vibrant thoroughfare flanked by old stone buildings now stands empty. Amro



Palestinians celebrating the Islamic Hijri New Year at the Ibrahimi Mosque, known to Jews as Cave of the Patriarchs, in Hebron. AFP

showed AFP a video of men throwing stones at his home's windows, saying they were Israelis who told him they had come to take his house. He said he is often harassed by settlers and Israeli soldiers.

The Oslo Agreements of the 1990s between Israelis

and Palestinians divided the West Bank into areas under each group's respective control.

Years later in 1997, Hebron became the territory's only Palestinian city to have an area under direct Israeli military control, named H2, which includes

the Cave of the Patriarchs. The holy site is also separated into an area for Jews and one for Muslims, each with a separate entrance.

"Before, any little construction here used to need the Prime Minister's involvement," Aaron Marwani, a city councillor in Kiryat Arba, said. "But little by little, the process got easier," he said.

Nitzan doesn't believe coexistence can happen in Hebron. "For me it's difficult to live with those neighbours. The Palestinians don't want us here," he said.

Like several Israelis, Nitzan saw the Jewish presence in Hebron as a return to historical roots.

The city long had a Jewish community, but the British colonial authorities

evacuated it after anti-Jewish violence in 1929, in which Arabs killed nearly 70 Jews. Some families returned, only to be evacuated again during the 1936 Palestinian uprising.

More bloodshed occurred in 1994 when Israeli-American settler Baruch Goldstein killed 29 Palestinian Muslims at the site.

Illegal settlements

Over 500,000 Israelis live in settlements in the West Bank, which Israel has occupied since 1967. Those settlements are illegal under international law.

In Hebron, some Israeli settler representatives say they want the city under full Israeli control. "We'd like to see the reversal of Oslo and to put this town under Israeli control," said

Ishai Fleischer, an Israeli-American, who serves as a spokesperson for the settler community in Hebron.

But Palestinians said they were feared of being evicted entirely.

Moatz Abu Snena, director of the Ibrahimi Mosque, said that Mr. Smotrich's decision was part of a wider trend. It is a "gradual takeover of the Ibrahimi Mosque, and also further Judaisation of the place and erasure of its religious character", he said.

For Amro, the issue goes beyond the religious site itself. "It means that we live in our own city under military law while the Israelis live under civilian law," he said. "It's apartheid, it's more segregation, more theft, more ethnic cleansing."

INBRIEF



Roach reaches milestone as WI completes SL rout

Kemar Roach reached the landmark of 300 Test wickets in leading the West Indies to an innings and 217-run demolition of Sri Lanka on the fourth day of the first Test of a two-match series in Antigua on Sunday. Trailing on first innings by 318 runs, the visitors were routed for just 101 half-an-hour after lunch as Roach led the fast bowlers' assault on Sri Lanka. His international career seemed over a year ago, only to be recalled to West Indies service amid a fast bowlers' injury crisis for the tour of New Zealand at the end of 2025.

The scores: Sri Lanka 308 & 101 in 31.2 overs (Chandimal 43; Roach 4/51, Seales 3/14) lost to West Indies 626/9 decl. in 160.5 overs (Jango 233, Chase 194; Ratnayaka 5/124). **PoM:** Amir Jango.

Srikanth goes down to Su in US Open final

K. Srikanth's wait for a BWF World Tour title was extended further after he went down to Taiwan's Su Li Yang in the men's summit clash of the US Open badminton in Fullerton on Sunday. The 33-year-old, facing an opponent who was nine years younger than him, pushed himself to find winning momentum but could not avoid a 21-15, 16-21, 21-9 loss in 69 minutes.

India loses in the Badminton Asia junior quarterfinals

India's campaign in the Badminton Asia junior mixed team championship came to an end on Monday following a 1-2 loss against Hong Kong in the quarterfinals at Yatsushiro, Japan, on Monday. After India won the first set 55-44, Hong Kong drew level with a 55-45 win before claiming the decider 55-43 to seal a place in the last four.



Mandaviya felicitates the Indian volleyball team

Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Monday felicitated the Indian contingent that won the country's first medal at the AVC Men's Volleyball Cup. Congratulating the players, coaching staff and support personnel on a third-place finish in Ahmedabad, Mandaviya said: "This medal is historic, but it should only be the beginning. Every achievement brings greater responsibility and higher expectations".

Ireland coach Malan steps down, Wilson the replacement

Ireland men's team head coach Heinrich Malan stepped down from his role on Monday, bringing an end to a four-year stint just a day after guiding the side to a 2-0 T20I series sweep over India. Gary Wilson has been appointed as the team's first Irish-born chief coach in more than 30 years and will replace South African Malan. Wilson played 292 games for Ireland in a 15-year international career before retiring in 2020.



Maresca unveiled as Manchester City manager

Manchester City on Monday unveiled Italian Enzo Maresca as its new manager, taking over from Pep Guardiola. Maresca, 46, signed a three-year deal that will keep him at the Etihad Stadium until the summer of 2029. "Manchester City is a club I know very well and to have the chance to manage this team is a brilliant opportunity for me," said Maresca, who previously coached Leicester in the EFL Championship and Chelsea in Premier League.

Can West Indies stop the Australian juggernaut for a place in the final?

Matthews' side has lost its last two matches while Molineux & Co. have been easily the most dominant outfit in the tournament

T20 WORLD CUP

P.K. Ajith Kumar
LONDON

London is cooling down. You don't find, at the moment, people travelling with their small, portable fans, or even one of those hand fans that Jane Austen's heroines from the Regency England would carry to the balls.

The form of the Australian team is only getting hotter at the T20 Women's World Cup, though. After scoring a comfortable six-wicket win in their last league match against India, the Aussies are all rea-

dy for their next opponent.

The West Indies' route to the knockouts hardly resembles Australia's. While Australia beat South Africa (by 65 runs), Bangladesh (nine wickets), the Netherlands (98 runs) and Pakistan (113 runs) before facing its strongest rival India, the Caribbeans just scraped through to the semifinal, to be played at the Oval on Tuesday.

Hayley Matthews' women, in fact, suffered a shock loss in their last match, to Ireland. And that was right after going down to host England. And they haven't done that well against Australia in the recent bilateral meetings as well. They lost all the three

Today's match

SEMIFINAL

Australia

West Indies

Australia

vs

West Indies

The Oval, 7 p.m. IST

HEAD-TO-HEAD

Played: 19

Australia

West Indies

17

2

LIVE ON STAR SPORTS 1 & JIHOTSTAR

ODIs and as many T20Is when they hosted the mighty Aussies just three months away.

So, the West Indies has nothing to lose. A point Matthews tried to drive

home at the press conference on the eve of the semifinal.

She also spoke of how the big guns in the team, like Deandra Dottin, Stafanie Taylor and herself, haven't fired yet. There hasn't been even a fifty from them. There cannot be a better platform than this to help their team.

For the Australians, stars big and not so big, have all been delivering. With the kind of talent at their disposal, they are easily the most intimidating side in women's cricket.

That they haven't won an ICC World Cup, in any format, for three years should motivate them further.



Red-hot: Australia has been on a roll. GETTY IMAGES

We have to rethink our T20 strategy: Muzumdar

P.K. Ajith Kumar
LONDON

India's campaign at the T20 Women's World Cup came to a disappointing end on Sunday. Again.

The Women in Blue had crashed out of the last T20 World Cup at the league stage in the UAE, too. Coach Amol Muzumdar concedes there is a need for a rethink. "I think we really have to rethink our strategy in T20 games," Muzumdar said after India's defeat in the must-win game against Australia at Lord's. "We really need to put our heads around and see what combination we are going to play. It didn't help Shreyanka (Patil) not being there. She would have made a difference on that pitch and ground.

"We also need to be a little aggressive with the bat, and we could have maybe 15-20 runs as cushion," he said. "But, if you look at our bowling attack, it is been very inexperienced



Tough times: Muzumdar and Harmanpreet have plenty of soul searching to do after India exited in the group stage. GETTY IMAGES

as far as international cricket is concerned. Give us 18 months and this attack will be a different one."

About not sending Richa Ghosh earlier, he said: "We had Richa in the dugout, and we wanted her to go out, and I thought that was a call needed to be taken at that time, and we just took it.

"It was the last over, we had Richa in the dugout. I

think it was best for her to go out there and smash a few balls, but she ended up facing only one ball. But so be it. That was the nature of the game. And at that time, we felt that that was the right call."

Muzumdar has full faith in Harmanpreet Kaur's captaincy. "It is up to the selectors to decide the captain," he said. "My short and sweet answer would be yes".

Vivek Krishnan

Shreyas Iyer's stint as T20I captain has begun on the wrong foot with India stung by the series defeat to Ireland on Sunday.

Having taken charge of a team that has won the last two T20 World Cups under Rohit Sharma and Surya-kumar Yadav, the 31-year-old would have been aiming to make an instant mark on his comeback to the T20I fold after nearly three years.

Instead, his low returns of three and 10 were accompanied by successive losses to Lorcan Tucker's Irish outfit. With a T20I series against England beginning at Chester-le-Street in Durham on Wednesday, the pressure will mount on the Mumbai batter if the Men in Blue don't quickly put up a display befitting their status as World champions.

In former India captain Sunil Gavaskar's view, however, Shreyas needs to be



Shreyas has lost his first series as India T20I captain. GETTY IMAGES

given some leeway before he settles into his new role. The legendary opener pointed to his fellow Mumbai-baiker's exemplary captaincy record in the IPL, whilst also noting that the step up to leading the national side isn't always seamless.

"With any new relationship, there will always be

just a little time taken for the support staff and the players to understand what is expected of them. Because of the change of leadership, Shreyas will probably take a little time. We just have to be a little patient," Gavaskar said during an online interaction on Monday.

"His leadership is proven (in the IPL). But again, when it comes to international cricket, it's a whole different ball-game."

If it was up to the 76-year-old, Vaibhav Sooryavanshi would be making his debut in India's opening T20I against England.

"I am hoping he plays the first game. Because it will be the start of a new series. If he gets the team off to a flying start, it is the best way to recover from the series loss in Ireland," Gavaskar opined.

(Watch India vs. England T20I series live on Sony Sports Ten 1 SD & HD, Sony Sports Ten 5 SD & HD and Sony MAX).

GCL draft: Nihal is the star attraction

CHESS

Amol Karhadkar
MUMBAI

Newly crowned Bullet champion Nihal Sarin emerged as the biggest attraction at the Global Chess League (GCL) player draft on Monday, while five-time World champion Viswanathan Anand switched franchises for the first time in the league ahead of the fourth edition to be played in Bengaluru from September 3 to 13.

Nihal was among the most sought-after names in the draft before FYERS American Gambits secured his services. The franchise had earlier won the race for 2026 Candidates tournament winner Javokhir Sindarov.

The other headline move of the day saw Anand leave his long-time home at Ganges Grandmasters to join PBG Alaskan Knights, where he will partner India's highest-rated player Arjun Erigaisi.

Defending champion Alpine APL Pipers picked Magnus Carlsen and Season-3 Finals MVP Anish Giri. The title-holder added Women's World Cup champion Divya Deshmukh, Koneru Humpy, Vidit Gujrathi and reigning World



Nihal. FIDE

Rapid champion Volodar Murzin.

The squads:
FYERS American Gambits: Javokhir Sindarov, Nihal Sarin, Daniil Dubov, Bibisara Assaubayeva, Sara Khadem, Marc'Andria Maurizzi.
Alpine APL Pipers: Magnus Carlsen, Anish Giri, Vidit Gujrathi, Divya Deshmukh, Koneru Humpy, Volodar Murzin.

Ganges Grandmasters: Ian Nepomniachtchi, Levon Aronian, Leinier Dominguez, Polina Shuvalova, Stavroula Tsolakidou, Leon Luke Mendonca.
upGrad Mumba Masters: Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, Shakhriyar Mamedyarov, Vladimir Fedoseev, Carissa Yip, Harika Dronavalli, Bardiya Daneshvar.

PBG Alaskan Knights: Viswanathan Anand, Arjun Erigaisi, Yagiz Kaan Erdogmus, Kateryna Lagno, Nino Batsiashvili, Abhimanyu Mishra.
Triveni Continental Kings: Alireza Firouzja, Wei Yi, Aravindh Chithambaram, Zhu Jiner, Alexandra Kosteniuk, Pranav Venkatesh.

I want to crack the top 10: GM Harshavardhan

C. Shyam Sundar
CHENNAI

G.B. Harshavardhan must have heaved a sigh of relief after becoming India's latest Grandmaster, achieving the title in his home town, four years after securing his first norm.

The 22-year-old is happy to have ended the wait after coming close several times. Now, he is keen to improve his rating and break into the top echelons of chess.

"My immediate priority is to increase my rating and crack the top 10," Harsha-



Harshavardhan.

vardhan, son of noted FIDE trainer K. Gopalakrishnan, told *The Hindu*.

Jerome credits Dragan for India's resurgence



Jerome led the team from the front. SAI

A bronze medal rarely feels as valuable as gold but in the India men's volleyball team's latest case, it definitely does.

As India returned to the international arena after a year of inactivity – it was away from the scene due to Volleyball Federation of India's mess – there were question marks over whether the players would be match-sharp at the AVC Cup in Ahmedabad.

But the World No. 42 side let its actions speak by earning a third-place finish in the 11-team event. At the

front and centre of India's resurgence was captain Jerome Vinith. The skipper credited head coach Dragan Mihailovic for instilling belief within the group and making his job easier. "Dragan is the man behind these performances," Jerome told *The Hindu*.

"In the past, we had teams with a good mix of experienced and young players, but the understanding was not as good as we have now. He brought unity within the squad. He emphasised that big things could be achieved only when we are 'one'. Dragan made it clear

that only achievements will lead to recognition," said the opposite hitter.

For Jerome, ensuring all his teammates were on the same page before and during the tournament gave him the greatest satisfaction. "I know how to lead the team because it is not that difficult to make them play on court. Making them stay together was important," he added.

Jerome stressed that more international exposure was the need of the hour. "If we continue to get those chances (playing top-quality opposition), we will only get better".

R. Kaushik

India's first Twenty20 International outing after lifting the 2024 T20 World Cup in the Americas ended in a crushing defeat to an unfancied opponent. History repeated itself last week as they courted a similar result in their first fixture after successfully defending the world crown at home this March.

Nearly two years earlier, in July, a second-string outfit led by Shubman Gill went down by 13 runs to Sikandar Raza's team at the Harare Sports Club. Fear not, said the intrepid bunch; Abhishek Sharma made up for a four-ball duck on debut with a stunning century in game two, the catalyst for what in the end was a commanding 4-1 score line that reiterated that defeat in game one was an aberration.

Worst imaginable start

Last Friday, India surrendered their unbeaten record against Ireland in the most unedifying of manners, slumping to a 34-run humbling in Belfast. It was the worst imaginable start to Shreyas Iyer's new avatar as India's T20I captain, a comedown from the highs of the IPL for stars weaned on terrific batting strips. The conditions at the Civil Service Cricket Club in Stormont were demanding, arduous, anything but ideal for unfettered ball-striking. India were found desperately wanting despite being at full strength from a batting perspective as a target of 183 proved well beyond them.

It happens, everyone said. You can sometimes be fixed by alien conditions. The opposition is allowed one terrific game, you are allowed one poor day in office, especially because as a team, the Indians had gathered together for the first time in more than three and a half months. Not an excuse, because Ireland outplayed them, but you could see some rationale behind what was indisputably a horror outcome.

But *a la* Harare and 2024, there were no comebacks this time. India conceded Sunday's second T20I too, admittedly by only a solitary run, as a proud record came to a juddering halt. An unbeaten streak encompassing 16 series spread over three years in the most unpredictable and unforgiving of formats was snapped ruthlessly by an honest Irish side that made capital of its familiarity with the conditions, though more than anyone else, one suspects, the Irish themselves would have been surprised at home tamely India's famed batting line-up capitulated.

Ryan ten Doeschate, India's refreshingly honest and forthcoming assistant coach, spoke of 'disbelief' within the camp after Sunday's tense finish. He stressed the need to adapt, and adapt quickly, when the team travels to Europe and to other parts of the world where seam can be a major factor. He pointed to the smarts the Irish displayed, silently bemoaning the lack of the same from his wards.

This was supposed to be the teasing appetiser before the sumptuous main course, which will unfold on Wednesday when India lock horns with England in the first of five T20Is. But the appetiser has left a bitter taste in the mouth and left Gautam Gambhir, the beleaguered head coach, with a fresh headache that he must find a solution to in double quick time.

Gambhir has overseen three excellent white-ball title-winning runs - at the Champions Trophy in March 2025 and the T20 Asia Cup that same September, both in Dubai, and at the home T20 World Cup earlier this year. But he has also been the central figure in unprecedented Test series routs at home against New Zealand in late 2024 and South Africa 12 months thereafter. When it comes to the Test squad, he alternates between the word 'transition' and 'inexperience'. He bistles at players only eight and ten Tests young being (unfairly) judged and bares his fangs at the slightest perception of criticism. But the numbers are stacking up against him. And cricket, more than any other sport, is a game of numbers.

Between the two T20 World Cups in 2024 and 2026, India lost just six out of 41 matches, a grand result considering that like now, they had a new captain. Rohit Sharma's retirement after the 2024 edition ushered Suryakumar Yadav into the job; the axe falling on the latter despite him leading his unit to the 2026 crown has thrust Shreyas into the hot seat. It will be unfair, to borrow from Gambhir, to judge the youngest of the trio of Mumbaiers to have led the T20I side in the last few years on the back of just one series, and that too given that India had very little time to get used to environs that they are reasonably unfamiliar with. But Shreyas will be mindful that he himself managed just 3 and 10 on his comeback to the T20I mix, and that will hurt him immensely because he is a firm believer in the 'leading from the front' philosophy.

Let's not grudge Ireland their moment of unmatched glory. They have produced stunning upsets, not least at the 2011



Supermen: Hollard and Moondra combined to torment the India batters and script an incredible series win for Ireland. The latter castled Samson (below) off the first ball he bowled in the opening T20I. GETTY IMAGES

50-over World Cup when a magical century from Kevin O'Brien pulled the rug from under England's feet in Bengaluru. But this will take precedence, one suspects, even though it came in what was a regular bilateral series - inasmuch as any series involving India can be termed 'regular'.

They were blithely expected to be lambs to the slaughter, to roll over without much resistance. But we should have known better. Ireland don't surrender, they don't throw in the towel. They are spirited, sure, but they are also very skilful and supremely self-confident. They leave nothing behind in the change room, and win or lose, they are content when they know that they have given it their all.

This time, their 'all' translated to an epochal 2-0 sweep against the World Cup winners and the No. 1 team in the world which had all its batting guns to fall back on, and with one of the most destructive modern-day weapons watching on from the dugout.

Vaibhav Sooryavanshi needs no introduction, not anymore, not after his spectacular deeds at the Under-19 World Cup and in the IPL and during the triangular 'A' series in Sri Lanka. At 15, he is already making heads turn, forcing people to reach for their remotes when he takes guard, delighting his millions of fans and sending chills and shivers down the spines of the most celebrated active bowlers in world cricket. The temptation to unleash this man-child beast must be immense, but ten Doeschate was emphatic in stating that like everyone else, the precociously unique talent must go through the processes and bide his time. That there will be no special treatment, no matter how special he is.

Learning process

That's part of the learning process, the growing-up stage, though with each passing failure for Sanju Samson or Ishan Kishan or both - two of the more influential cogs during the World Cup campaign, Samson the more feted for match-winning knocks in the last three matches but Kishan no less impactful - the clamour for Sooryavanshi's much awaited debut will gather pace.

Let's just hit the pause button and remember that he is 15. Fifteen. That he should not be - never mind that he is yet to make his maiden appearance - expected to carry the Indian batting on his strong and sturdy but very, very young shoulders. Let's not transpose our expectations onto him, let's not compare him with Sachin Tendulkar because hey,

Gambhir has overseen three excellent white-ball title-winning runs - at the Champions Trophy in March 2025 and the T20 Asia Cup the same September, both in Dubai, and at the home T20 World Cup earlier this year

how silly is that? The teen phenom will be desperate to make his first India appearance - which cricketer worth his salt wouldn't? - not so much because it will be another feather in his already overcrowded cap but because he genuinely loves playing and putting on a show. But he will learn the virtues of patience and being treated as just another player, which should stand him in grand stead in the long run.

Chastened by the Ireland humbling orchestrated by a software engineer from our own Tonk in Rajasthan, India will know the magnitude of the task that awaits them in England. Jai Moondra, a strapping 29-year-old who moved to Dublin in 2021 to pursue a master's degree in electronics and communication, still holds an Indian passport but did the country of his birth no favours, exposing an old Indian kryptonite - left-arm pace. Five wickets in his first two appearances for his adopted country, and the Player of the Series honours, is a high Moondra will soar on, deservedly and understandably, for a long time to come.

India will have arrived in England on Monday to blaring headlines about Ben Stokes' dramatic, sudden but almost inevitable retirement from international cricket following his latest dalliance with infamy. Stokes' announcement was the most visceral on a Sunday of high-octane cricketing entertainment in the British Isles. The Indian men's loss to Ireland came around the same time that the women were eliminated from the T20 World Cup after going down to Australia in their must-win final league tie at Lord's. Over in Nottingham, around the Stokes headline act, England and New Zealand were in a pitched battle for series honours and World Test Championship points.

India's most recent 20-over skirmish with England itself was not devoid of thrills and tension and agony and ecstasy. A total of 253 in the World Cup semifinal in Mumbai in March seemed inadequate when Jacob Bethell put on an exhibition, simultaneously sparking awe and dread among Indian spectators. India needed the genius of Jasprit Bumrah to come away unscathed, by the hair-raising

margin of just seven runs, but there is no Bumrah now - rested - and therefore it will be incumbent on the rest of the bowlers to step up.

The returning Harshit Rana showcased his combativeness in Ireland and Prince Yadav was impressive on his debut, suggesting that with Arshdeep Singh now in the role of the lead enforcer, the pace bowling is in pretty good hands. It's the lack of batting form that will trouble Shreyas, Gambhir and the rest of the leadership group.

Against singularly attack-minded teams like England, India have historically relied on their batting strength to bail them out. Now, that strength has become a temporary weakness. What corrective measures are put in place in a very straitjacketed time-frame remains to be seen. But these measures are imperative because otherwise, Harry Brook and embattled coach Brendon McCullum's England, themselves feeling no little heat, will feast on them with ill-concealed glee.



THE GIST

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Ireland don't surrender, they don't throw in the towel. They are spirited, sure, but they are also very skilful and supremely self-confident

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