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Plea seeks disclosure
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India should
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SC refuses DMK's
petition seeking
a gag on the TVK

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday said that imposing a judicial bar on Tamil Nadu's ruling TVK leaders from making public statements linking political rivals with the Karur stampede may amount to an injunction on "free speech". » PAGE 4



Le Pen cleared to
run for President,
but to wear tag

PARIS

French far-right chief Marine Le Pen's political future remained uncertain on Tuesday after a court cleared her to run but wearing an ankle tag, potentially hampering a campaign for next year's presidential elections when her party has its strongest chance of winning power. » PAGE 14



Minimum age for
marriage applies
to all faiths: HC

NEW DELHI

The Allahabad High Court has held that the minimum age of marriage prescribed under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act applies to all citizens irrespective of religion, adding that Muslim personal law cannot override provisions of the Central law. » PAGE 4

3 killed in debris slip at
tunnel site in Wayanad

Heap of excavated mud at a tunnel construction site in Kerala gives way amid rain; CM announces investigation; Minister says private construction firm ignored warnings by district administration



Close call: A CCTV screengrab shows people who narrowly escaped the mud deluge that swept away construction workers, passers-by, parked vehicles, and even earthmovers, in Wayanad on Tuesday. ANI

The Hindu Bureau

WAYANAD

At least three people were killed and five reported missing when a massive heap of excavated mud swamped the portal of an under-construction tunnel road in Wayanad district of Kerala on Tuesday. Emergency responders have rescued 10 people from the accident site so far.

The deceased have been identified as Chandra Bahn from Madhya Pradesh, Bikash Kumar from Bihar, and Anmol from Jharkhand, workers of the tunnel project.

Security cameras captured the moment when a sea of mud deluged the area around 11 a.m., sweeping away construction workers, passers-by, parked earthmovers, and a multi-axle tanker lorry.

Officials said a total of 18 people were caught in the incident. Of them, 10 were admitted to WIMS Hospital, Meppadi, with injuries and five were later discharged.

Local people told presspersons they heard a

crash, followed by a fast-moving wave of debris that seemed to swallow everything in its path. The mudslip occurred near the Meenakshi bridge entrance of the ambitious subterranean road project.

Chief Minister V.D. Satheesan and Agriculture Minister T. Siddique said heavy rain had rendered the "precariously piled" heap of earth at the Anakkampoyil-Kalladi-Meppadi tunnel's entrance unstable, causing it to come crashing down with a deafening sound.

They termed the incident a disaster caused by human error, abandonment of safety precautions, and sheer negligence, noting that government warnings had been ignored.

The rescue operation includes National Disaster Response Force units, the Fire and Rescue Department, the police, the State Disaster Response Force, and local volunteers. Rescue workers cross-referenced duty logs to determine the identity of the people who may still be trapped under the mud.

Mr. Siddique, the Minister in charge of Wayanad and Kalpetta MLA, said the district administration had repeatedly raised red flags, warning the private construction firm of an impending accident. The firm has been contracted by Konkan Railway Corporation Limited to construct the twin-tube tunnels connecting Kozhikode and Wayanad districts.

Mr. Siddique and his Cabinet colleague A.P. Anil Kumar visited the disaster site and held a review meeting at WIMS Hospital.

Mr. Siddique said the casualties would have been still higher if the construction operations, which were partially suspended due to heavy rain, had been in full swing. The debris pile that collapsed in the rain included rocks blasted for the construction of the approach roads and bridges to the tunnel, he said.

Mr. Satheesan announced an investigation involving multiple agencies to fix accountability. He said the district authorities had issued an ultimatum on June 20 to the builders

to remove the accumulated mud from the locality, noting that Public Works Department Minister P.K. Basheer had called a meeting of stakeholders and flagged the precarious nature of the heap of mined mud.

Bridge safety review

The government has shifted residents of the area to safer locations, halted traffic on the Meenakshi bridge, and ordered the PWD to review its structural safety.

Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Wayanad MP and Congress general secretary, said efforts were under way to rescue those trapped.

The Leader of the Opposition in the Kerala Assembly, Pinarayi Vijayan, demanded a thorough investigation to determine any lapse or criminal negligence that had led to the tragedy. He expressed support and extended solidarity to the rescue workers, the people of Wayanad, and the State government in the hour of crisis.

CONTRACTOR'S FAILURE

» PAGE 3

Modi highlights need for
two-state solution to end
Israel-Palestine conflict

Kallol Bhattacharjee

Saurabh Trivedi

NEW DELHI

Highlighting the role of dialogue and diplomacy in the "period of global turbulence", Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday reiterated the importance of the two-state solution to end the Israel-Palestine conflict.

"In this period of global turbulence, India believes that the role of dialogue and diplomacy has become more important than ever before. On the issue of Palestine, we continue to support a two-state solution and the pursuit of lasting peace," Mr. Modi said in Jakarta, Indonesia, the first leg of his three-nation visit. Mr. Modi also focused on commonalities between India and Indonesia globally important issues and said that the two countries are going to deepen cooperation on global issues.

A joint statement issued at the end of the official dialogue between Mr. Modi and Indonesia's President Prabowo Subianto said the leaders expressed "deep concern" over the war in West Asia and "its global effects".

Mr. Modi and Mr. Subianto also presided over the signing of 14 agreements and memoranda of understanding (MoUs), including ones that will allow India to deliver the Brah-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto on Tuesday. ANI

Mos supersonic cruise missile system and Astra Mk-1 beyond-visual-range air-to-air missiles to Indonesia.

Highlighting the "special importance" of the ASEAN grouping, he said, "There is strong synergy in our respective outlooks on the Indo-Pacific". "They welcomed the memorandum of understanding signed on 17 June 2026," mentioned the joint statement in reference to the agreement signed between the U.S. and Iran to end the war in West Asia, while adding that "transit passage through the Strait of Hormuz" has to be in "accordance with international law including the provisions of UNCLOS".

It further mentioned that the Indonesian President welcomed "India's interest in partnering on the integrated development of the Sabang Port" which

will include maritime industries, and "shore-based services supporting offshore energy activities in the Andaman Sea".

Highest honour

Indonesia bestowed the Prime Minister with its highest civilian honour 'Bintang Adipurna of the Republic of Indonesia'. Mr. Modi is the second Indian Prime Minister to receive this award. India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru received the same award posthumously on December 12, 1995. "It reflects the goodwill of the people of Indonesia and stands as a tribute to the historic and enduring bonds of friendship between India and Indonesia," said Mr. Modi in his press statement expressing gratitude to Indonesian leadership and people for the gesture.

'LNG tanker on fire in Hormuz'

Associated Press

DUBAI

A tanker travelling off the coast of Oman in the Strait of Hormuz was struck by a projectile and caught fire early on Tuesday, the British military said, in the latest attack targeting a vessel moving through the narrow mouth of the Persian

Gulf. Iranian state television said the liquefied natural gas tanker came under attack after ignoring warnings, but Tehran did not directly claim the assault.

According to the U.K. Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) Centre, three tankers were hit in the Strait of Hormuz in the past 24 hours.

The Islamic Republic, which has repeatedly declared that only its approved route through the strait is safe, is suspected of attacking other ships that have used another route close to the Omani shore.

FULL REPORT ON

» PAGE 14

Gujarat HC upholds death sentence for 38 convicts in Ahmedabad blasts case

Abhinav Deshpande

AHMEDABAD

Over four years after a special court convicted 49 persons in the 2008 Ahmedabad serial blasts case, the Gujarat High Court on Tuesday upheld the verdict, confirming death sentences for 38 members of the banned Indian Mujahideen (IM) and life imprisonment for 11 others while directing the State government to compensate the victims and their families.

A Division Bench of Justices A.Y. Kogje and Samir Dave dismissed all appeals filed by the convicts against the special court's February 2022 judgment and confirmed the sentences. A total of 78 persons had stood trial before

the special court, of whom 49 were convicted.

The Bench also accepted the State government's plea seeking confirmation of the death sentences.

The High court directed the State government to pay compensation of ₹10 lakh to the next of kin of each person killed in the blasts and ₹5 lakh to those who sustained grievous injuries. The compensation is to be disbursed before March 30, 2027.

Hospitals targeted

On July 26, 2008, 21 serial bomb blasts ripped through different parts of Ahmedabad within a span of 70 minutes, killing 56 people and injuring more than 200 others. Explosions also occurred at hos-



Charred vehicles at a hospital in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, after serial blasts on July 26, 2008 left 56 people dead. PTI

pitals where victims from earlier blast sites had been taken for treatment, marking the first known instance of hospitals being targeted in a terror attack in India.

The investigation culminated in a joint trial after 35 cases were clubbed together – 20 FIRs registered

from Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh and other States.

Special Public Prosecutor Amit Patel said the State had placed all evidence against the accused before the High Court. He said the court heard the matter extensively for more than one-and-a-half years, with day-to-day hearings being conducted from February this year before reserving its verdict.

The February 2022 verdict remains the first occasion on which 38 convicts were awarded the death penalty in a single judgment.

'Justice delivered'

"Today, the Gujarat High Court delivered one of In-

dia's strongest and most historic verdicts: near-total conviction, maximum punishment upheld for the guilty," said Gujarat Deputy Chief Minister Harsh Sanghavi.

Mr. Sanghavi, who also holds the Home Department portfolio, said the judgment was not only significant for Ahmedabad and Gujarat but also sent a strong message to the entire country and peace-loving nations across the world that terrorism would not be tolerated.

Calling it one of the biggest legal victories against terrorism and a landmark judgment in India's judicial history, he thanked the Gujarat High Court, the trial court and the investigating agencies on behalf

of the people of Gujarat for their efforts in securing the convictions. He said the investigation team had worked tirelessly over the years without any legal lapses or compromise, making the verdict possible.

"Justice had finally been delivered to the victims, their families and the people of Gujarat after years of legal proceedings," he said.

Referring to the High Court's direction to compensate victims, he said the Gujarat government under Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel would immediately implement the order by providing ₹10 lakh to the families of those killed in the blasts and ₹5 lakh to those who sustained grievous injuries.

CJP's original
X handle is
back online
after HC order

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The original X handle of the Cockroach Janata Party has become accessible after the Delhi High Court on Tuesday directed its restoration. The Centre informed the Bench that it no longer had any objection to unblocking the account. Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma passed the order while hearing a petition filed by CJP founder Abhijeet Dipke challenging the government's decision.

FULL REPORT ON

» PAGE 4

INBRIEF



Centre to refer *Satluj* to inter-departmental panel

The Centre plans to refer the Diljit Dosanjh-starrer *Satluj* to an Inter-Departmental Committee constituted under the IT Rules 2021 for a detailed examination and future course of action, government sources said on Tuesday, two days after streaming platform ZEE5 was directed to take down the film over “security concerns”. The film, which details the life of activist Jaswant Singh Khalsa in Punjab in the turbulent 1990s when the State was reeling under terrorism, was stuck with the censors for more than three years. Released uncensored on ZEE5 on July 3, the film was removed from the platform on July 5.

Two AIADMK rebel MLAs skip meetings chaired by EPS

Two rebel MLAs of the AIADMK, including former Minister K.C. Veeramani, on Tuesday skipped the party’s district-wise consultations chaired by general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami. The other MLA was S.M. Sukumar of Arcot. In the morning, Mr. Palaniswami reviewed the party’s performance in the Assembly election in Ranipet and Tirupattur districts. There are eight Assembly constituencies in these districts, and the AIADMK won two of them. Mr. Veeramani, who represents Jolarpet, and Mr. Sukumar were among the 25 dissidents who had supported the Tamilaga Vetti Kazhagam at the time of the trust motion in the Assembly in May.

Cracks wide open in Punjab Cong. as Channi camp skips Baghel’s outreach meetings

Punjab in-charge meets District Congress Committee chiefs, senior leaders as part of preparations for Assembly election; Warring downplays crisis, says Channi to meet Baghel within a day or two

The Hindu Bureau
CHANDIGARH

Congress’s Punjab in-charge Bhupesh Baghel on Tuesday met several State leaders even as a section of disgruntled leaders reportedly camped in New Delhi to press for a meeting with the party’s central leadership amid the ongoing infighting within the State unit. Former Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi and MP Sukhjinder Singh Randhawa were conspicuous by their absence from meetings convened by Mr. Baghel.

State Congress president Amrinder Singh Raja Warring, however, downplayed the ongoing crisis, saying that Mr. Channi would meet Mr. Baghel within a day or two.

The overhaul of the Punjab Congress on July 1 ahead of the Assembly poll due in early 2027 had sparked internal turmoil.

Mr. Baghel, who arrived in Chandigarh on Monday to iron out the differences and lay the foundation



Congress’s Punjab in-charge Bhupesh Baghel arrived in Chandigarh on Monday to iron out the differences within the State unit and lay the foundation work for the Assembly poll. FILE PHOTO

work for the Assembly poll, convened a meeting of the District Congress Committee presidents. He also met several senior party leaders, including Partap Singh Bajwa, Amar Singh, Vijay Inder Singla, Rana K.P. Singh, Sukhpal Singh Khaira, Hardial Kamboj, Kuljeet Nagra, Brahm Mohindra, Balbir Sidhu and Shamsheer Dullo, among others.

Mr. Warring said, “Our State in-charge met the heads of various committees on Monday, except two of them. Charanjit Singh Channi and Sukhjinder

Singh Randhawa, who heads the core committee, would both be meeting Bhupesh Baghel soon,” Mr. Warring said, adding that Mr. Channi has told Mr. Baghel that he would be away for a day or two.

While Mr. Warring was retained as the Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) chief in the recent revamp, Mr. Channi was appointed to lead the campaign committee ahead of the Assembly election. However, days later, a meeting of several party leaders and workers was held at Mr. Channi’s Morinda resi-

dence. Another meeting was held in Mohali on Monday. According to party insiders, the Lok Sabha MP is upset with the revamp and the meetings were intended to convey his displeasure to the party high command as he had expected to either be made the PCC chief or named the party’s chief ministerial face.

‘Dalit representation’ Last year, Mr. Channi had called for “greater Dalit representation” in the party, pointing out that Dalits were not getting their due representation, bringing the discord within the party to the fore.

The former Chief Minister faced a setback in the 2022 Assembly election when the Congress suffered a defeat. As the party’s chief ministerial face, he lost both the Assembly seats - Chamkaur Sahib and Bhadaur - he contested from, prompting scrutiny over his leadership.

However, he made a comeback by winning the Jalandhar Lok Sabha seat in the 2024 general election.

ED searches 5 places as part of probe into Trinamool accounts

Shrabana Chatterjee
KOLKATA

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Tuesday conducted searches at five premises across Kolkata as part of its investigation into the financial transactions of the Trinamool Congress and source of funds for the party leadership’s chartered flights.

“Searches are being conducted as part of the probe into alleged dishonest financial dealings, unlawful collection of money, and routing of suspected funds through certain bank accounts of the party,” a source said.

According to sources, the raids were conducted on the premises of Carewell Aviation India Pvt. Ltd., a Kolkata-based private chartered plane hiring and leasing company, which received around ₹160 crore from the party’s accounts between April 2023 and June 2026. The firm then allegedly routed ₹82.96 crore between 2023 and 2026 to a newly incorporated entity related to it.

According to sources, ED officials recovered evidence that the party used around ₹12 crore to purchase an Embraer Legacy 600 aircraft and an Agusta 109 SP chopper. Foreign

The party’s rebel faction had filed a complaint seeking a probe into the source of funds

funding may have been used to purchase some of these assets, a source said.

Last month, the Kolkata police had frozen debit operations of three bank accounts of the party, estimated to hold ₹440 crore and maintained with a private sector bank, following complaints by 10 MLAs aligned with the Ritabrata Banerjee-led faction of the Trinamool seeking a probe into the party’s source of funds. The cyber crime police station under the Bidhannagar Police Commissionerate then registered an FIR and launched an investigation.

The Calcutta High Court on July 2, while hearing a petition filed by the Mamata Banerjee-led faction of the Trinamool challenging the debit freeze of the party’s bank accounts, had directed the private bank to disclose the corpus held in those accounts. The court also directed the Bidhannagar police to place on record the complaint that led to the registration of the FIR and the probe so far.

CBI arrests three for links to BRO funds diversion case

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has arrested three people accused of being linked to the alleged misappropriation of funds belonging to the Border Road Organisation (BRO).

Among them is an Assistant Engineer (Civil) of BRO, Ladakh, and two labour supply agents from Kargil.

The Assistant Engineer was officer in-charge of Khaltse Batalik Sector. Allegedly he conspired with two manpower supply agents to misappropriate funds by creating non-existent labourers; the money was later deposited in his account by the agents, according to the agency.

The CBI has registered four cases alleging misappropriation of BRO funds in various projects in Ladakh.

Domicile proof must for driving licence in Maharashtra from Aug.

Press Trust of India
MUMBAI

The Maharashtra government will make the domicile certificate mandatory for obtaining a driving licence from August 1, 2026, as part of a new policy aimed at streamlining the licensing process, Transport Minister Pratap Sarnaik told the State Assembly on Tuesday.

He said the proposal for the new driving licence rules had been sent to the Law and Judiciary Department for approval and would be implemented after receiving the necessary clearance.

Replying to a question raised by MLA Dilip Lande during the Question Hour, the Minister also said that the government was taking action against unauthorised bike taxi services while working on a regulatory framework to legalise and reg-

State govt. working on a regulatory framework to legalise, regulate bike taxi services

ulate the sector, generate State revenue, and create employment opportunities for young people.

Under the proposed policy, bike taxi operators will be required to pay a daily fee of ₹5 to the government. An additional ₹2 from every ride will be deposited into a welfare fund for drivers.

Strict action

Mr. Sarnaik said strict action would continue against drivers who violate traffic rules or operate vehicles illegally. He said the Maharashtra Bike Taxi Rules, 2025, include special provisions to ensure the safety of women, students, and minor passengers.

Scientists develop a health tracker for high-altitude yaks in Himalayas

Rahul Karmakar
GUWAHATI

A team of scientists has developed an Internet of Things (IoT)-based smart system to monitor the health of the high-altitude yaks and keep tabs on their movement near the international border in the Himalayas.

The Indian yak (*Bos grunniens*), often called the ‘ship of the Himalayas’, is an integral part of the economy of mountain dwellers, who depend on it for meat, milk, and transportation.

Found at altitudes above 8,000 feet, this bovine animal has long been recognised for its resilience and adaptability to extreme conditions. According to the 20th Livestock Census, India has about 58,000 yaks, almost half of them in Ladakh. The rest are found in Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh,



Yaks are a vital livelihood resource for communities living in the high-altitude Himalayan region. AP

and Uttarakhand.

Monitoring the health of the yaks across the tough Himalayan expanse has literally been an uphill task. Yak specialists and *brokpas* (yak farmers) also face challenges due to livestock movement in difficult-to-access areas near the international border.

The newly developed technology – a device attached to an animal collar – seeks to reduce these

hurdles, according to Mihir Sarkar, director of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research’s National Research Centre on Yak (NRC-Y) at Dirang in Arunachal Pradesh.

He is one of four NRC-Y scientists – the others are Mokhtar Hussain, Vijay Paul, and Dinamani Medhi – who developed the device, along with Rupesh Mandal, Nupur Choudhury, Gita Das, and Jyoti Kumar Barman from the Guwahati-based Assam Don Bosco University.

The scientists said that this IoT-based smart system for geo-fencing and monitoring the health of yaks and predicting the stress they undergo is designed to address the challenges of yak management in remote, high-altitude regions, where continuous physical monitoring of animals is often difficult.

“Yaks are a vital livelihood resource for communities living in the high-altitude Himalayan region. However, yak farmers often face issues in tracking animal movement, detecting health problems at an early stage, and managing herds spread across vast grazing landscapes, often wandering to areas difficult to access,” Mr. Sarkar said.

“The newly developed technology can assist farmers by providing timely information,” he said.

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Deviating from tradition is hurting religious sentiments, said Puri temple authorities

‘Stop ISKCON from holding untimely Rath Yatra globally’

Press Trust of India
BHUBANESWAR

The Gajapati Maharaja and chairman of Shree Jagannath Temple Managing Committee (SJTM), Dibyasingha Deb, has written to President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking their intervention to stop ISKCON from holding untimely ‘Snan Yatra’ and Rath Yatra of Lord Jagannath across the globe by deviating from the age-old tradition and hurting religious sentiments of millions of devotees.

‘Deviating from norms’

Mr. Deb, the titular king of Puri, said, “Despite several requests, ISKCON have been deviating from the norms in sacred scriptures and century-old tradition while conducting festivals of Lord Jagannath.” The SJTM is the highest policy-making body of the 12th-century temple in Puri.

In a letter to the President and Prime Minister on July 4, Deb said, “I wish to submit here that over the last almost two decades, consistent efforts on the part of Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (Puri) to resolve this vital issue, as well as public statements in this regard issued by the Odisha government from time to time, have failed to stop the untimely Shree Jagannath Yatras performed by ISKCON in countries outside India.”

December target set for completion of ‘less trouble-prone’ highway to Manipur

Rahul Karmakar
GUWAHATI

In peacetime, Manipur prefers to travel or transport goods on National Highway-2, a lifeline that connects its capital Imphal to the rest of the country through Nagaland to the north.

During periods of conflict, however, the State reluctantly falls back on the other lifeline – the more arduous National Highway-37, connecting Imphal and Assam’s Silchar to the southwest via the inter-State border town of Jiribam.

NH-37 becomes almost unnavigable during the rainy season every year, but it has been a safer option than NH-2 whenever Manipur is on the boil. Inevitably, NH-37 gained strategic importance after the Kuki-Meitei ethnic conflict that

erupted in May 2023, followed by the Kuki-Naga hostility, which led to indefinite blockades along the hilly stretch of NH-2.

The State’s fate, partly tied to the condition of its highways, is expected to change after December 2026, the target set by the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL) to make NH-37 “comfortably motorable”. The project includes repairing six critical stretches—Keiphundai, Shantikhounou, Barak, Rungba, Rengpang, and Irang – covering a total of 39 km.

Meandering along the 110.6 km Imphal-Jiribam railway line, targeted for completion by December 2028, NH-37 is considered vital for India’s Act East policy, which envisages unhindered surface connectivity



National Highway-37 becomes almost unnavigable during the rainy season every year, but it has proved to be a safer option than National Highway-2 whenever Manipur is on the boil. PTI

with Southeast Asia. Accordingly, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways sanctioned a ₹1,300-crore project in 2022 to widen and upgrade 203 km of the highway’s 224-km length into an all-weather road.

Officials said the Centre has so far released ₹1,040 crore, or nearly 80% of the sanctioned project cost.

The project includes straightening the curves, fortifying landslide-prone areas and sink zones, and replacing ageing Bailey bridges with concrete ones under seven separate packages. NHIDCL officials said packages I and III have been completed, while work on the remaining five packages is 85-90% complete.

People using NH-37 said that the travel time between Imphal and Jiribam has been reduced to 4-5 hours from 7-8 hours earlier. However, they face the “same old problems” of potholes, waterlogging, and landslides during the monsoon months.

According to the NHIDCL, recurring damage during the rainy season has

been a major challenge to completing the NH-37 upgrade. Other challenges have been technical, administrative, and local.

NHIDCL deputy general manager Rafique Ahmad Choudhury said extensive surveys, land disputes, natural calamities, and protests by villagers living along the highway slowed the project.

He said a major problem arose when 488 households in the package II stretch sought compensation for land that fell within a protected forest.

“They were ineligible for compensation under the existing rules. The Manipur government resolved the issue by approving an ex gratia payment of ₹70,000 per household on humanitarian grounds,” he told *The Hindu* from Imphal, adding that all other time-consuming

legal hurdles had been resolved. He also said that a dramatic increase in traffic on NH-37 due to the closure of NH-2 since the ethnic conflict in May 2023 had accelerated the wear and tear on stretches under construction, affecting the progress of work.

Allegations rejected

The All Manipur Road Transport Drivers and Motor Workers’ Union, however, faulted the NHIDCL’s pace and quality of work. It blamed repeated landslides on steep vertical hill cutting during road widening and rainwater flowing across the carriageway due to blocked roadside drains.

The NHIDCL rejected the allegations, claiming that there had been no compromise in the quality of construction or maintenance work.

A photograph of a man with grey hair and a mustache, wearing a light blue button-down shirt and khaki pants, standing on a suspension bridge. The bridge has yellow railings and metal mesh sides. In the background, a large suspension bridge with two tall white towers is visible against a hazy sky.

CJP’s X account back online after High Court order

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The original X handle of the Cockroach Janata Party (CJP) has become accessible after the Delhi High Court on Tuesday directed its restoration. The Centre informed the Bench that it no longer had any objection to unblocking the account.

Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma passed the order while hearing a petition filed by CJP founder Abhijeet Dipke challenging the government’s decision to withhold the account in India. Appearing for the Centre, Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta told the court that the account had been blocked as a precautionary measure before the June 21 NEET (UG) re-test. Now that the exam was over, he said, the Centre had “no difficulty” if the account was unblocked.

The Solicitor-General said the precautionary measure was taken over the argument that certain posts on the account had the potential to create confusion and panic among the lakhs of candidates and parents. “Several posts would have created chaos among the students and their parents. Of course,



Abhijeet Dipke

now the examination is over,” Mr. Mehta said.

“Since NEET is already over, the primary concern is no longer of any relevance. In these circumstances, the order is revoked. The petition is allowed,” Justice Sharma ordered.

During earlier proceedings, senior advocate Akhil Sibal, appearing for Mr. Dipke, argued that the CJP’s content was “pure satire”, and contended that if the authorities found any individual posts objectionable, only those specific posts should have been restricted.

The CJP emerged on social media in May as a satirical digital movement following controversy surrounding remarks made by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant.

Four States reach a pact on Narmada project payments

Union Home Minister says that issue of pending payments had remained unresolved for a long time and it had been settled amicably; water and electricity have reached all four States, he adds

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The States of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh reached an agreement on Tuesday on the settlement of pending payment issues among the Narmada Award beneficiary States.

The agreement was signed in the presence of Home Minister Amit Shah and Union Minister of Jal Shakti C.R. Patil. Chief Ministers Devendra Fadnavis (Maharashtra), Bhupendra Patel (Gujarat), Bhajan Lal Sharma (Rajasthan) and Mohan Yadav (Madhya Pradesh) signed the agreement, which relates to the cost-sharing arrangements for the construction of the Sardar Sarovar Project.

Under the agreement, the payments to be made towards the final settlement of pending dues have been resolved through a one-time settlement. Mr. Shah said that the issue of pending payments under the Narmada Award had remained unresolved among the four States for a long time, and that it had been resolved



Common platform: Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Union Minister of Jal Shakti C. R. Patil with the Chief Ministers of Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan. PTI

amicably on Tuesday. He said that with the completion of the dam, water and electricity have reached every part of the four States.

He added that while the benefits accruing to Rajasthan may appear modest at first glance, the areas that have received Narmada waters have witnessed a transformation in both the value of the land and the fortunes of the farmers.

The Union Home Minister said that let it be Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana or

Maharashtra, the water ultimately served the people of the country, especially the farmers. Regardless of which part of the country the water is utilised in, the ultimate beneficiary will be an Indian, he said.

Water-sharing issues

Recently, significant progress has also been made in resolving long-standing water-sharing issues between States, such as those concerning the Kishau Dam project in Himachal Pradesh and the water dispute between Rajasthan

and Haryana, officials said. On June 29, Rajasthan and Haryana signed an agreement for the construction and implementation of the Yamuna Water Project, resolving a nearly three-decade-old issue.

Additionally, on June 16, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and Rajasthan agreed to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the implementation of the Kishau Multipurpose Project to rejuvenate the Yamuna river.

(With PTI inputs)

Plea claims ‘silent compulsion’ in E20 petrol roll-out

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

A petition has been filed in the Supreme Court claiming an element of “silent compulsion” in the E20 petrol roll-out, while seeking full disclosure on chemical composition and safeguards that may be in place in the case of legacy vehicles.

The petition, filed by Supreme Court advocate and petitioner-in-person Narendra Kumar Goswami, besides invoking the fundamental freedoms of equal treatment by the law, and the right to earn a livelihood and lead a dignified life, raised Article 300A (right to property) and the Consumer Protection Act of 2019 to contend that the right to know the composition, quality, standard, and compatibility consequences of a product was not a “decorative consumer slogan but a constitutional requirement when the state itself creates a nationwide compulsory market”.

Mr. Goswami said ethanol was not an inert additive. “Ethanol is hygroscopic, may affect certain fuel-system materials, has lower energy density than petrol, and may have implications for fuel efficiency,

Right to know the composition, quality, and compatibility effects of a product a constitutional requirement: petition

cy, engine performance, maintenance, warranty and long-term vehicle health,” the petitioner contended.

The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) had issued a separate E20 specification and the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways had created a staggered compatibility schedule, showing that E20 compatibility was “not universal but vehicle-specific”, the lawyer said.

“The petition does not seek to roll back India’s ethanol-blending policy. The contention in the petition is that a welfare policy cannot be implemented by keeping citizens in the dark about what they are buying, whether their vehicles can safely use it, and whether they have any meaningful alternative,” Mr. Goswami said.

The petition has sought the constitution of an independent expert committee to examine “real-world E20 compatibility”.

SC turns down DMK plea for judicial bar on TVK remarks

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday said imposing a judicial bar on Tamil Nadu’s ruling Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) leaders from making public statements linking political rivals with the Karur stampede may amount to an injunction on “free speech”.

The court advised the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) to make its own counter speeches, and battle “free speech” with “more speech”, rather than try for a judicial gag.

The remarks by a Bench headed by Justice K.V. Viswanathan came during the hearing of a plea alleging that TVK Ministers were

making false accusations and “threats” against political opponents in connection with the stampede.

The Karur tragedy had left 41 dead and 142 injured during a TVK rally on September 27 last year. The top court had ordered a probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation into the stampede on October 13, 2025.

Senior advocate Ranjit Kumar, appearing for the DMK’s organising secretary R.S. Bharathi, said TVK Ministers like Mr. Arjuna, who is also among the accused, must be restrained from making any such public statements during the pendency of the investigation.

“That may amount to an injunction on free speech,

Mr. Kumar. Which law sanctions it? You also make your speeches, you counter free speech with more speech,” Justice Viswanathan remarked.

The Bench questioned the propriety of entertaining a DMK plea for impleadment in a case in which it had ordered a CBI investigation and was monitoring progress. The court referred to Mr. Bharathi’s submission in the application that he would be filing a contempt petition against the public statements allegedly made by TVK leaders. Justice Viswanathan said the court could not be converted into a political forum.

Mr. Kumar, acting on instructions, finally chose to withdraw the application.

IIM-B to establish its first overseas campus in Indonesia: Modi

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday announced that the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore (IIM-B) would establish its first campus in Indonesia, describing the initiative as a major step towards strengthening educational ties and benefiting students across the ASEAN region.

The announcement was made during Mr. Modi’s visit to Indonesia in a joint press statement with Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto. The proposed campus will be set up at the Singhasari Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Ma-

lang and is aimed at advancing the internationalisation of India’s higher education ecosystem.

The campus will offer programmes focused on areas such as global supply chains, digital transformation, artificial intelligence, climate and sustainability, and healthcare management. The curriculum will also include interactions with industry leaders and eminent academicians.

The initiative will be implemented through a memorandum of understanding between IIM Bangalore and PT Intelegensia Grahatama, the managing and development entity of the Singhasari SEZ.

HC upholds uniform legal marriage age for all religions

Ishita Mishra
NEW DELHI

The Allahabad High Court has held that the minimum age of marriage prescribed under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006, applies to all citizens irrespective of religion, observing that the Muslim personal law principle recognising puberty as the age of marriage cannot override the provisions of the Central law.

The observations were made in a judgment pronounced on July 1 by a Division Bench of Justice J.J. Munir and Justice Achal Sachdev while hearing a writ petition seeking to quash an FIR registered against 19 people in connection with the alleged at-

tempt to solemnise the marriage of a 16-year-old girl in Bulandshahr district of Uttar Pradesh in February.

The petitioners argued that under the Muslim personal law, a girl who has attained puberty is competent to marry, and that the PCMA does not override the Shariat. They also relied on provisions of the Indian Majority Act, 1875, and the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937.

The Bench acknowledged that High Courts across the country have taken divergent views on whether marriages involving Muslim minors are governed by Muslim personal law or by the PCMA, and the Protection of Children

from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012. However, it agreed with the reasoning adopted by the Kerala High Court in *Moidutty Musliyar v. Sub Inspector, Vadakkencherry Police Station*, which held that personal law cannot override the statutory prohibition on child marriage or dilute the operation of the POCSO Act.

“The age of marriage, in our considered opinion, for every citizen of the country, irrespective of religion, is that which is spelt out by the PCMA,” the court said. It added that permitting the marriage of a person below 18 years would be inconsistent with the POCSO Act, which criminalises sexual relations with a child.

WhatsApp username debate brings informational privacy to the fore

NEWS ANALYSIS

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

What is perhaps *sui generis* (unique) about the WhatsApp “username” debate is that both the instant messaging platform and the Centre, in different ways, ultimately seek the same objective: protecting the informational privacy of users.

The Supreme Court, in its August 2017 judgment delivered by a nine-judge Bench, held that “informational privacy” is a facet of the fundamental right to privacy under Article 21 of the Constitution. The court recognised that threats to privacy in the information age could arise not only from the state but also from non-state actors.

WhatsApp claims that its optional “username” feature, publicly announced on June 29 but yet to be rolled out in In-



WhatsApp says the optional feature enhances privacy, but the Centre is wary of cyber risks.

dia, enhances user privacy. A username would prevent a user’s phone number from being accessed by someone who does not already have it.

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), however, is apprehensive that the feature could lead to an increase in cybercrime. In its communication to WhatsApp, the Ministry listed an array of online crimes that could compromise informational privacy.

cy. These included online fraud, phishing, digital arrest scams, impersonation and identity spoofing, including impersonation of individuals, public authorities, financial institutions and government agencies, by permitting the adoption of usernames closely resembling those of genuine persons or institutions.

Critics argue that the government cannot intervene in a company’s launch of a lawful feature without a clear statutory basis. The government, however, may contend that its communication seeking clarification from WhatsApp on the feature is consistent with the legitimate aims of the state to protect national security and safeguard public welfare.

The 2017 judgment in the Justice K.S. Puttaswamy case observed that while the “web is a source of lawful activity”, concerns of national security also arise because “the seamless structure of the

web can be exploited by terrorists to wreak havoc on societies. Cyber attacks can threaten financial systems”.

However, the Constitution Bench also held that any encroachment on privacy must be justified by a fair law, backed by a legitimate aim, and must satisfy the test of proportionality.

While observing that “law and technology seldom mix like oil and water”, the top court, in the Anuradha Bhasin case, posed a pertinent question: “What do we need more, liberty or security?”

“Although the choice is seemingly challenging, we need to clear ourselves from the platitude of rhetoric and provide a meaningful answer so that every citizen has adequate security and sufficient liberty. The pendulum of preference should not swing in either extreme direction so that one preference compromises the other,” the court had said.

Amarnath yatra sees uptick in pilgrims; record 1.3 lakh visit shrine in first five days

The Hindu Bureau
SRINAGAR

The ongoing Amarnath yatra in south Kashmir on Tuesday registered a record number of 1.13 lakh devotees visiting the cave shrine, at an altitude of nearly 3,888 metres, in the first five days of the 57-day annual pilgrimage.

“So far, more than 1.13 lakh devotees have performed *darshan* at the holy cave. Our goal is to make this pilgrimage a truly memorable experience for everyone and they have access to the best possible amenities. Safety, security and hassle-free darshan of Baba Barfani must remain our top priority,” said Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha, who is also chairman of the Shri Amarnath Shrine Board.

Officials said over 20,000 pilgrims paid obeisance at the shrine on Tuesday. This pushed the



Pilgrims proceed towards the holy cave shrine of Amarnath during the ongoing ‘Amarnath Yatra’ in Ganderbal district on Tuesday. PTI

number of devotees visiting the shrine to 1.3 lakh, which is a record.

The numbers are showing an upward trend a year after militants attacked tourists at Pahalgam, one of the twin routes, in south Kashmir’s Anantnag and killed around 26 civilians. The attack negatively impacted the turnout of devotees last year. Only 3.5 lakh pilgrims visited the

shrine in 2025 against 5.12 lakh in 2024.

Mr. Sinha urged all stakeholders to work together in close coordination to make this year’s yatra truly historic and set a benchmark for spiritual tourism across the country.

“Such a collective effort can create a model that inspires similar pilgrimages nationwide,” said Mr. Sinha.

CBI files first chargesheet in ₹4,097 cr. RCFL case

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation on Tuesday filed the first chargesheet against seven accused in the Reliance Commercial Finance Limited (RCFL) case.

Reliance Infrastructure Ltd., Reliance Home Finance Ltd. (RHFL), and five former senior executives of RCFL – then director Devang Pravin Mody, directors Ravindra Somayajula Rao and Dhananjay Bhagwanprasad Tiwari, executive risk officer Rajesh Krishnamoorthy, and former chief risk officer Lav Chaturvedi – have been named.

They have been accused of criminal conspiracy, and cheating with intent to cause huge losses to public sector banks. The total loss was estimated at ₹4,097 crore. The CBI has so far arrested three accused persons in the case.

RSS-VHP ‘captured’ administration of temple, says Gehlot

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Tuesday sharpened its attack on the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Sangh Parivar over the alleged embezzlement of donations at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, with former Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot accusing the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) of having “captured” the temple administration “in an unauthorised manner”.

Mr. Gehlot alleged that the subsequent action was aimed at “whitewashing” the scandal rather than fixing accountability. He said the sequence of events – denial, constitution of a Special Investigation Team, registration of an FIR and then resignations – pointed to an attempt to contain the fallout while protecting those at the top.

“First they said nothing has happened. Then came the SIT, then the FIR, then the resignations. There is an attempt to whitewash the entire issue,” he added, a day after the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust accepted the resignations of its general secretary, Champat Rai, and member Anil Mishra.

He said the controversy had punctured the moral and political claims of the Sangh Parivar on the Ram Temple movement. “Their real face has been exposed. Their style of functioning, character and the face is now in front of the country,” he said.



Ashok Gehlot

Mr. Gehlot argued that the BJP and the RSS for decades had reaped political dividends from the Ram Mandir issue but were now unwilling to answer for the alleged wrongdoing in an institution built on public faith and donations.

‘PM can’t remain silent’
The Congress leader said Prime Minister Narendra Modi could not remain silent on allegations of “chanda chori” in a temple project that the BJP had projected as the fulfilment of its ideological promise.

Mr. Gehlot said Mr. Modi had taken full political ownership of the temple and must now explain what had transpired under a “double-engine government”.

In a post on X, Congress leader Jairam Ramesh described the alleged theft of donations as a “grave betrayal of the faith” of crores of devotees.

He repeated the party’s demand for dissolution of the trust, a Supreme Court-monitored probe and a public disclosure of all donations made to the temple.

Staff stole cash, security protocols not enforced: Ram Temple SIT report

CCTV footage shows some counting staff hiding currency notes in clothes, pockets, and shoes; SIT identified procedural flaws in management of donations, to conduct re-audit of accounts

Mayank Kumar
LUCKNOW

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) appointed by the Uttar Pradesh government to probe the Ram Temple Trust embezzlement case has found *prima facie* proof of stealing and pilferage during the counting of donations at the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Temple.

A part of the report, submitted on June 23 and accessed by *The Hindu*, says the team reviewed CCTV footage from April 27 to June 5, which captured certain counting staff hiding bundles of notes and cash in their clothes, pockets, shoes, and other areas. It documented occasions when other employees seemed to assist or protect such actions.

According to the SIT, the footage revealed around 70 instances of suspected theft. The report added that based on employee testimonies and inconsistencies between the counted cash and bank deposits, similar incidents may have occurred prior to April 27. However, the lack of earlier CCTV footage hindered evaluation of their scope.

The SIT gathered testimonies from Trust officials, bank personnel, security staff, and counting employees, in addition to



Closer look: So far, eight accused have been arrested in connection with the embezzlement case. FILE PHOTO

bank records, seizure documents, and standard operating procedures (SOPs).

On Trust’s SOPs

The report indicated that mandated security protocols, such as frisking, biometric attendance, limitations on personal items, CCTV surveillance, and other protective measures outlined in the Trust’s SOPs were not properly enforced.

It concluded that these shortcomings fostered an environment conducive to theft and pilferage. Additionally, the SIT identified procedural flaws in the management of valuable donations, including irregularities in documentation, weighing, and sealing

processes. Based on CCTV footage, recovery records, financial documents and witness statements, the report said that Avinash Shukla, Anukalp Mishra, Lavkush Mishra, Manish Kumar Yadav, Karunesh Pandey, and Ramashankar Mishra had *prima facie* involvement in the matter.

It said Mr. Shukla and Mr. Yadav were repeatedly seen removing or conceal-

ing cash, while the others were seen assisting or engaging in similar acts.

The SIT is likely to conduct a re-audit of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust’s accounts for the past five years after the initial findings suggested large-scale anomalies and irregularities. The re-

audit is likely to cover construction-related expenditure as well as jewellery and other gold and silver items received as donations.

The SIT team will also carry out a detailed scrutiny of the Trust’s financial records for the five-year period.

Eight accused, the six named above and Ram Shankar Yadav and Subhash Srivastava, have been arrested in connection with the case and remanded in 14-day judicial custody since June 29. The case has been posted for next hearing on July 13. A court in Ayodhya approved one-day police custody of Mr. Pandey, Mr. Lavkush, and Mr. Anukalp.

‘Deeper conspiracy’

Vibhuti Narain Rai, a former Director-General-rank officer of Uttar Pradesh Police, said CCTV record of a very limited period was the “tip of the iceberg”.

“If CCTV records between April 27 and June 5 are available, then the evidence is only a tip of the iceberg of a bigger organised corruption, as during the Maha Kumbh, the foot-fall of pilgrims was much higher and donation amount would have been very high. It might have been stolen by an organised racket,” said Mr. Rai.

Three-member panel to probe Badrinath Temple ‘irregularities’

Ishita Mishra
NEW DELHI

Amid complaints of alleged irregularities in the handling of donations and offerings at the Badrinath Temple, the Uttarakhand government on Tuesday constituted a three-member high-level committee to investigate the matter.

According to an order issued by Tourism Secretary Dheeraj Singh Garbyal, the committee will be headed by Garhwal Commissioner Anand Swaroop. The other members are Sandeep Tiwari, Managing Director, National Health Mission, and Jagat Singh Chauhan, Director (Finance) in the office of the Director-General, Medical and Health Services.

The committee has been tasked with conducting a comprehensive investigation into the alleged irregularities related to

donations and offerings received by the temple, and submit its report, along with recommendations, to the government within 15 days.

The order authorises the panel to seek assistance or expert opinion from any official or other person considered necessary during the course of the inquiry.

Staffer suspended

The development coincided with disciplinary action by the Shri Badrinath-Kedarnath Temple Committee, which suspended Pramod Nautiyal, personal assistant attached to the office of the panel’s chairman, with immediate effect. Mr. Nautiyal was issued a show-cause notice on July 3 after *prima facie* allegations of serious irregularities in the discharge of his official duties surfaced, according to the panel.

Will respond after final report: Champat

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Senior VHP leader Champat Rai said on Tuesday that he would respond to all allegations against him only after the SIT probing the alleged donation theft case at Ram Temple submits its final report.

In a letter addressed to the “devotees of Lord

Ram”, the former general secretary of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust said several “false narratives” and “baseless allegations” had been circulated against him since the alleged theft came to light, but he had maintained silence. “I will give detailed answers to all the questions being raised,” he said.

Panel unlikely to finish report on simultaneous polls by Monsoon Session

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

The Parliamentary Joint Committee reviewing the Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024, which aims to introduce simultaneous elections, is unlikely to meet its deadline and submit a report during the Monsoon Session of Parliament.

The panel, headed by Lok Sabha member and senior Bharatiya Janata Party leader P.P. Chaudhary, is going to Uttar Pradesh on July 9 for consultations. Speaking to *The Hindu*, Mr. Chaudhary said, “We will be visiting more States and speaking to a wider base of stakeholders. This is going to be one of the defining reforms in our post-Independent history. We have some more work remaining.” In Uttar Pradesh, he



P. P. Chaudhary

said, the panel would meet government representatives and Opposition leaders.

Committee’s deadline

The panel’s deadline had been fixed for the first day of the last week of the upcoming Parliament session. It is likely to seek an extension again.

The panel, formed in December 2024, has held 18 meetings in Delhi. So far,

six former Chief Justices of India have spoken to the panel. Among them, Justice U.U. Lalit and Justice Sanjiv Khanna have argued that the Bill runs afoul of the Basic Structure of the Constitution as protected by the *Kesavananda Bharati* judgment.

But four former CJs, Justice B.R. Gavai, Justice Ranjan Gogoi, Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, and Justice J. S. Khehar, told the panel that the Bill does not violate the Basic Structure.

The committee has to address several tricky questions to enable synchronisation of the election cycles.

It is considering a provision that would bar the introduction of a no-confidence motion against an incumbent government if only one year of its term remains.

CPI(M) leader faces ‘egg attack’ in West Bengal, blames BJP

Shrabana Chatterjee
KOLKATA

Amid the growing ‘egg attacks’ on Opposition leaders in West Bengal, Communist Party of India (Marxist) leader Minakshi Mukherjee was targeted in a similar incident when eggs were hurled at her car in Cooch Behar on Tuesday.

This is the first time a Left leader has faced such an attack after several senior Trinamool Congress leaders across the State were attacked with eggs following the party’s rout in the Assembly election.

Local BJP leaders carried out the attack, the CPI (M) leaders alleged.

Ms. Mukherjee was in Cooch Behar’s Sitalkuchi area to meet the family of a deceased party worker, Montu Miya, when she was attacked. She documented

She was in Cooch Behar’s Sitalkuchi area to meet the family of a deceased party worker

the attack in a video released on her social media handles. She accused the local police of inaction over the death of her party worker, and on the incident with eggs.

“All of this happened in front of the police. They stood and watched. Who are they favouring? For all these years, they used to work for Trinamool, and now they are working for the BJP. The government changed in Bengal, but the rule of law could not be established here,” Ms. Mukherjee said in the video.

Later, CPI(M) leaders staged a protest at the local police station.

Ritabrata-led faction of Trinamool Congress gets more time to reply to EC

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Election Commission is understood to have given an extension till Friday to the Ritabrata Banerjee faction of the Trinamool Congress for submitting a response to notices regarding claims on organisational elections and authorised signatories of the party.

The EC had last week written to both factions of the Trinamool, led by former West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and Leader of the Opposition Mr. Ritabrata, respectively, seeking responses regarding “claims and counterclaims” made by them and asked them to submit it by Monday.

While the Mamata-led group submitted its response rejecting the rival group’s claim over the par-



Trinamool Congress leader Ritabrata Banerjee along with his party members met the full Bench of the EC in New Delhi on July 2. ANI

ty on Monday, Mr. Ritabrata sought more time.

Last week, a full Bench of the poll body met the rebel faction of the party led by Mr. Ritabrata.

The Mamata side of the party had, however, questioned the EC’s decision to grant an audience to the rebel faction, alleging that the meeting violated the poll body’s own procedures of granting appointments to only authorised

signatories of a recognised political party.

In their response submitted on Monday, the Mamata Banerjee-led group rejected the rival group’s claim over the party, underlining that the Leader of Opposition in the West Bengal Assembly, Ritabrata Banerjee was not even a member of the party committee at the time of the last round of organisational elections in 2022.

Congress raises questions after three aides of Environment Minister removed

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Tuesday sought to link the removal of key aides of Union Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav to its long-standing allegations over political funding, asking whether the “*Pradhan Mantri Chanda Do Dhandha Lo*” (Give donation, take business) scheme had “gone awry”.

The remarks came after the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate

Change relieved the Minister’s private secretary and three additional private secretaries of their duties through separate orders dated July 3.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh described the development as “shocking”, saying the appointments themselves reflected the functioning of the Modi government.

“It is no secret how such appointments are made in the first place during the Modi regime. Can there be so much smoke without

any fire? Could this be an instance of the *Pradhan Mantri Chanda Do Dhandha Lo* scheme having gone awry,” Mr. Ramesh said in a post on social media platform X.

‘Govt. must explain’

Congress leader Supriya Shrinate said the wholesale replacement of a Union Minister’s staff was “not an ordinary matter” and demanded that the government explain the circumstances behind the move. “The public has the

right to know the truth about any irregularities,” she said.

According to the Ministry’s orders, private secretary Amar Singh was removed on “administrative grounds”, while the appointments of additional private secretaries Ayush Saran and Shailesh Kumar Singh were terminated or curtailed.

Shailesh Kumar Singh has been repatriated to his parent cadre in the Department of Personnel and Training.

NC leaders meet civil society members, pass resolution on Statehood for J&K

Peerzada Ashiq
SRINAGAR

Ahead of the ruling National Conference’s (NC) upcoming protest in Delhi over Statehood and constitutional guarantees, Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Tuesday held a meeting with members of civil society.

“The meeting was extremely productive and Dr. (Farooq Abdullah) Sahib was able to get a lot of useful feedback and good sug-

gestions. The meeting passed a unanimous resolution, calling on the Union government to fulfil its promise and restore full Statehood to J&K without further delay,” Mr. Omar Abdullah said.

Earlier in the day, NC president Dr. Farooq Abdullah informed civil society members of the protest scheduled to be held at Jan-tar Mantar in New Delhi on the first day of the Monsoon Session of Parliament on July 20.

NC leaders briefed

members on the Supreme Court judgment of December 2023, where the apex court had asked the Centre to “restore Statehood [at the] earliest”.

‘Inordinate delay’

The NC leaders termed the delay in restoration of Statehood as “inordinate” and described the Centre’s “appropriate time phrase” as a “vague and timeless expression”.

“Statehood had to follow delimitation and Assembly polls, held in 2024.

It has not. We have decided to protest in Delhi,” a senior NC leader said.

Delegations representing the travel, tourism and business sectors also raised issues concerning tourism promotion, business facilitation, and the overall growth of the economy in J&K, a government spokesperson said.

J&K has been a Union Territory since 2019, when the Centre ended seven decades of special status under provisions of Article 370 granted to the region.

INBRIEF



Eight wildlife sanctuaries, 281 forests encroached in Assam

Eight wildlife sanctuaries and 281 reserve forests are under encroachment in Assam, the State’s Forest and Environment Minister, Jayanta Mallabaruah, told the 126-member Assembly on Tuesday. Presenting data on encroachment and human-elephant conflict in the House, he said 3,15,996.1251 hectares of land in these protected areas and reserve forests was under illegal occupation on February 12, 2016. The State government has so far evicted squatters from 25,588.7675 hectares, including 16,937.2466 hectares during the past five years. The BJP-led NDA formed the government in Assam in 2016, ending the Congress’s 15-year rule.

NCERT releases revised Class 8 textbook after row

Months after it stoked a controversy for allegedly defaming the judiciary, the NCERT has released a revised Class 8 social science textbook dropping the disputed portions. The “Big Questions” section at the start of the chapter has seen a change. Instead of asking students why an independent judiciary is necessary, it asks why justice is important for a “just and harmonious society”. Gone entirely is the section on “Challenges Faced by the Judicial System”, which had detailed the “massive backlog” of cases and blamed it on a shortage of judges, cumbersome procedures and weak infrastructure. PTI

Contact lost with Drishti, world’s first OptoSAR satellite

Hemanth C.S. BENGALURU

The Bengaluru-based space start-up GalaxEye has lost contact with Mission Drishti, the world’s first OptoSAR satellite, as it encountered an anomaly following a geomagnetic solar storm, the company said on Tuesday.

Mission Drishti, which was launched in May, is also India’s largest privately developed earth observation satellite.

“In the final stage of LEOP (Launch and Early Orbit Phase), the maiden spacecraft encountered an anomaly following a geomagnetic solar storm. Initial root cause analysis indicates that radiation effects associated with the event likely impacted a critical onboard system,” the company said.

It said subsequently, communication with the



Mission Drishti is also India’s largest privately developed Earth observation satellite.

spacecraft became intermittent and was eventually lost. “While recovery efforts are ongoing, the likelihood of recovery currently appears low,” it added.

Mission Drishti was launched on May 3 aboard a Falcon 9 by SpaceX from Vandenberg, California. The satellite integrated electro-optical (EO) and synthetic aperture radar (SAR) sensors into a single operational platform.

School dropout rate falls across key stages: report

More schools get Internet; learner progression across stages grows stronger; teacher strength up by 8.3% compared with 2022-23; 55% women teachers bring ‘gender balance’ in sector, says govt.

The Hindu Bureau NEW DELHI

The Union Education Ministry on Tuesday released the comprehensive report on the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) for the academic year 2025-26, which reflected a downward trend in dropouts.

The preparatory level (Classes 3 to 5) dropout rate fell from 2.3% (2024-25) to 1.8% this year. More notably, secondary level (Classes 9 to 12) dropouts dipped from 8.2% to 7.0%. Dropout rate tracks the rate at which students quit school. “The consistent decrease across all levels suggests that schools are becoming more supportive and responsive to students’ needs,” the Ministry said.

Women now form the majority of the nation’s teaching force, accounting for 54.9% of total teachers, up from 54.2% in 2024-25. The government said this “marks a positive shift towards gender balance in the education sector”.

Enrolment of girls



Enrolment of girls across the country grew marginally to 48.4% from 48.3% last year. S. S. KUMAR

The Gross Enrolment Level Ratio at the secondary level surged to 71.7% from last year’s 68.5%

across the country has seen a marginal increase to 48.4%, from 48.3% last year.

Student retention at the middle level (Classes 6 to 8) climbed to 83.7% (from 82.8%), while secondary level retention increased to 51.9%, up from 47.2% last year. Student retention is an educational metric that measures the percentage of students who continue

their education at the same school or within the school system from one academic year to the next.

The Gross Enrolment Level Ratio (GER) at the secondary level surged to 71.7% from last year’s 68.5%. GER is a statistical measure used in education to determine the percentage of students enrolled in a specific level of education (such as primary, middle, or secondary school), regardless of their age, relative to the total population of official school-age children for that same level.

Learner progression across transitional stages

grew stronger, the report noted. Notably, the transition from middle to secondary school jumped from 86.6% to 88.3%.

Also, the total number of teachers in India has risen by 8.3% compared with 2022-23. Additionally, the Ministry’s strategic rationalisation of teacher placement has resulted in a 3% reduction in single-teacher schools and a 29% drop in schools reporting zero enrolment, the Ministry said.

One of the most notable improvements is the increase in the number of schools with computer access, increasing from 64.7% in 2024-25 to 69.9% in 2025-26. Access to Internet facilities in schools has seen a considerable increase in the academic year 2025-26. The percentage of schools with internet connectivity increased from 63.5% in 2024-25 to 67.4% in 2025-26.

The report said that 95% of schools are powered with electricity, 98.5% have girls’ toilets, and 97.2% have boys’ toilets - ensuring dignity and hygiene for all students.

Taking efforts to curb child sexual abuse content: Meta

Press Trust of India NEW DELHI

Meta on Tuesday published a blog detailing its efforts to curb child sexual abuse content across its apps, citing AI-powered detection and large-scale enforcement actions, days after the government issued a notice over reports of such content being promoted via Instagram ads.

Calling child exploitation a horrific crime, Meta said it works aggressively to fight this kind of abuse on and off its platforms. “We’re aware of recent reports about Instagram ads in India that violated our policies against child exploitation. And we want to be clear: we take these concerns seriously, we never want this content on our platforms, and we’re committed to improving our efforts to combat it,” it noted.

BRICS nations call for timely exchange of information on drugs

The Hindu Bureau GUWAHATI

The BRICS nations on Tuesday adopted the Guwahati Declaration, reaffirming their commitment to strengthen cooperation to prevent and combat illicit drug trafficking and related organised transnational crime.

BRICS, an intergovernmental organisation of major emerging markets and developing countries, is an acronym for Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. It expanded to include Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Indonesia.

The joint declaration by the heads of anti-drug agencies of the participating nations brought the curtains down on a two-day meeting at a resort on the outskirts of Guwahati.

The BRICS nations underscored the need to

boost the timely exchange of information, intelligence and best practices, consistent with national laws and international obligations. They expressed concern over the evolving nature of drug trafficking, the proliferation of synthetic drugs and new psychoactive substances, the diversion of precursor chemicals and the misuse of emerging technologies and virtual assets.

Anurag Garg, Director-General of the Narcotics Control Bureau, said India has adopted a zero-tolerance policy against drugs, and a three-year road map (2026-29) based on a network-centric approach. “The strategy focuses on dismantling entire criminal networks, preventing drug abuse through mass awareness campaigns, and strengthening treatment, de-addiction, and rehabilitation measures,” he said.

Independence of the Bar is crucial for preservation of rule of law: Supreme Court

Krishnadas Rajagopal NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday said independence of lawyers is just as important as independence of the judiciary. In fact, the court said the legal profession’s independence from the Executive and Legislature formed the foundation of the rule of law and democracy in the country.

The court’s observation is of significance as appointments to the Bench is made from the legal profession. “Independence of the Bar constitutes an indispensable condition for preservation of the rule of law,” a Bench headed by Justice P.S. Narasimha observed in a judgment.

“The principle of self-regulation has historically been regarded as the defining feature of indepen-

dence of the legal profession. The idea underlying such autonomy is that advocates, as officers of the court and participants in the administration of justice, must remain insulated from external pressures,” Justice Narasimha wrote.

The court said pendency mounting up across courts was “one of the greatest challenges to the justice delivery system”, but the judgment queried why backlog continued to be seen almost exclusively as a judicial responsibility.

“Despite frequent references to the Bar and Bench as the ‘two wheels of the chariot of justice’, the Bar is seldom called upon to share responsibility for reducing delays and improving efficiency. A paradigm shift is necessary. Tackling pendency must become a collaborative mission of the Bench and

the Bar,” the top court said.

Justice Narasimha proposed the establishment of a full-time “National Legal Academy” along the lines of the National Judicial Academy.

He highlighted the need for the “continuing legal education” of advocates, noting that there was a “glaring dearth in institutionalised learning for advocates after enrolment”. The court directed the Bar Council of India to undertake a “comprehensive performance audit” of the disciplinary mechanisms administered by it and the State Bar Councils and submit a report.

It gave relief to a lawyer who was included in the “caution list” by the Indian Banks Association on the ground that he gave negligent legal advice to a bank, exposing it to financial risk.

FAITH

Causes of mental unrest

Vidura is regarded as the very embodiment of dharma. He constantly contemplated righteousness, sought only the truth, and walked unwaveringly on the path of virtue. Among all the elders in the Kaurava court, Vidura alone dared to speak out for justice when Draupathi was publicly humiliated. In contrast, even great scholars and revered elders such as Bhishma and Drona remained silent. Tirukudanthai Dr. Venkatesh said in a discourse that Vidura possessed absolute devotion to Lord Krishna and explained that at the conclusion of Krishna’s earthly incarnation, His thoughts were filled with affection for Vidura. From this, we can understand that Vidura had a special place in Lord Krishna’s heart.

On one occasion in Hastinapura, King Dhritarashtra was unable to sleep due to deep anxiety. Realising that only the wisdom of Vidura could bring him peace, he immediately summoned him. Vidura explained that sleeplessness and mental unrest arise from four causes: fear, worry, excessive attachment, and the burden of sins committed. Vidura further revealed the true causes of the king’s distress: his silent approval of the deceitful gambling match against Yudhishtira and the Pandavas, his failure to condemn the humiliation of Draupathi in the royal assembly, and his refusal to restore the kingdom and rightful possessions of the Pandavas even after they had completed their 13 years of exile. These acts of adharma weighed heavily upon Dhritarashtra’s conscience, robbing him of peace and sleep. Vidura advised him to surround himself with wise and virtuous advisers so that he could regain inner peace.



People walk through debris after a flash flood triggered by heavy rain in Thathri in Doda district of J&K on Tuesday. PTI

Houses, shops hit by mudslides in Doda after cloudburst

Peerzada Ashiq SRINAGAR

Torrential rain triggered flash floods and mudslides in the Chenab Valley’s Doda district on Tuesday morning, damaging houses and shops.

An official said the flash floods and mudslides hit Thathri town following a cloudburst. Scores of houses, shops, and vehicles were submerged and many were buried under the debris.

Officials said civil infrastructure was also damaged due to boulders and mud. Several vehicles were washed away. Vehicular traffic was also hit because of the closure of the Doda-Kishtwar National Highway at a number of locations.

Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant-Governor Manoj Sinha reviewed the situation following the cloudburst. A Lok Bhavan spokesman said Mr. Sinha had directed the district administration to provide immediate relief to the affected families and speed up restoration work.

Mr. Sinha also spoke to the Doda Deputy Commissioner and assessed the situation. “Several houses and shops have suffered damage. Fortunately, no casualties or injuries have been reported,” he said. “I have directed the DC to ensure immediate relief and assistance to the affected families and expedite restoration work, including the clearance of NH-244,” he added.

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

11 Indian governesses restricted a damage for Shia leaders (10)

12 Announced proper ceremony (4)

13 Publicity fool, unleashes English to make sense (3,2)

14 Gallant and fearless leader undone by rumour about First Lady (3,5)

16 Women are covering cold border violations by army men (3,5)

18 Colour copies, having original impressions flipped (5)

20 Time to perish or run (4)

21 A cyber cell formed with potential future utility (10)

23 Back to pressing bold and blunt point (7)

24 Secret desire! Most embarrassed! (7)

25 Fool with some secret ingredients (6)

26 Still hope endlessly (6)

Down

1 Common folks in Los Angeles city consuming cocaine (5)

2 Taken into team mission, possibly for decompositions (2-5)

3 Sort of half blue, typical trees in Nilgiris (9)

5 W-W signs (5)

6 High ground, with bit of ethical stand (7)

7 Hint - I can still play! (9)

10 Position of a knight in new cybernation (9)

13 A form of carbon that is not needing oxygen to exist (9)

15 Holds itch, struggling to find a cleaning fabric (9)

17 Cabal's exotic erotic energy (7)

19 Priest passed on gold at table (7)

21 Unlimited trade limit, oddly for bones (5)

22 Screen church parasite (5)

SUDOKU

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to previous puzzle

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

Finerenone helps slow kidney disease in patients without diabetes

Three global studies published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, *Journal of the American Medical Association*, and *The Lancet* suggest that finerenone, a drug previously used mainly in diabetes-related kidney disease, could help a much broader group of patients

Anirban Mukhopadhyay
NEW DELHI

In chronic kidney disease, the kidneys gradually lose their ability to filter waste from the blood. While diabetes is one of its leading causes, many patients develop the condition because of high blood pressure, autoimmune disorders, or other conditions that damage the kidney’s filtering units. Doctors can slow the disease using medicines that lower blood pressure and newer drugs that lower blood sugar while reducing strain on the kidneys. Yet many patients continue to lose kidney function over time, creating a need for additional treatments that can delay kidney failure.

Beyond diabetes
Now, three global studies published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA), and *The Lancet* suggest that finerenone, a drug previously used mainly in diabetes-related kidney disease, could help a much broader group of patients.

Across different forms of chronic kidney disease, researchers found that the drug slowed disease progression, reduced protein leakage in urine, and lowered the risk of kidney failure. “The findings did not come as a complete surprise,” Rajiv Agarwal, an emeritus professor of medicine at Indiana University and a co-author of the studies, said. Finerenone does not target diabetes itself. Instead, it blocks inflammation and scarring inside the kidneys – processes that can occur in many forms of kidney disease, he added.

Evidence across diseases
The first of the three studies, known as FIND-CKD, enrolled 1,584 patients with kidney disease who did not have diabetes. Participants received either finerenone or a placebo in addition to their usual treatment. Researchers found that patients taking finerenone lost kidney function more slowly over nearly three years and were less likely to experience major kidney or heart-related complications. In another study, researchers focused on more than 900 participants from the FIND-CKD trial who had glomerular diseases, conditions that damage the kidneys’ filtering units and are among the leading causes of kidney failure worldwide. These included IgA nephropathy, an autoimmune disease that damages the glomeruli, as well as focal segmental glomerulosclerosis and membranous nephropathy – two other major causes of kidney failure. Finerenone slowed the worsening of kidney disease, reduced protein leakage in urine by about 42%, and lowered the



Patients receiving lifesaving dialysis treatment in the nephrology ward at Stanley Hospital in Chennai, Tamil Nadu. FILE PHOTO

risk of kidney failure or major loss of kidney function in this group. The findings suggest finerenone’s benefits extend beyond any single glomerular disease. “I wouldn’t specifically isolate IgA nephropathy,” Prof. Agarwal said. “Anybody who has glomerulonephritis can use this drug. The alternatives are much more expensive. Some targeted therapies for IgA nephropathy cost \$400,000 to \$500,000 a year. How many people can afford that?”

Shared pathway
The third study took a broader view. By combining data from FIND-CKD with two earlier finerenone trials, researchers examined whether the drug was working only in certain kidney diseases or targeting a process common to many of them. Across 14,574 patients, the benefits remained consistent across different causes and stages of kidney disease and in patients with or without diabetes. The consistency suggested finerenone may be acting on a shared pathway involved in kidney damage rather than on any one diagnosis alone. Beyond the biology, Prof. Agarwal said the findings reflect a broader shift in medicine away from relying on a single drug and towards combination treatment. Much as cancer specialists use multiple medicines together, kidney specialists increasingly combine drugs that target different aspects of disease.

He cautioned, however, that the findings should not automatically be extended to every kidney disease. For one, finerenone is not without side effects. The main concern across the studies was hyperkalaemia, or high potassium levels in the blood, which can sometimes trigger dangerous heart rhythm disturbances. About 17% of patients receiving finerenone developed elevated potassium levels but severe cases requiring hospitalisation were uncommon, per Prof. Agarwal. “The people you won’t treat are the people who have potassium that is above normal,” he said. “So anyone who has potassium more than 5 – you won’t start them on this drug.” He was referring to a blood potassium level of 5 millimoles per litre or higher. That risk can usually be managed with routine blood tests. For Indian patients, cost and access may become an important part of the conversation. Finerenone is already available in India and currently costs around ₹80-90 a day, Prof. Agarwal said. However, he said he expected the drug to become significantly cheaper once it loses patent protection in 2028. But even at current prices, Prof. Agarwal said the costs compare favourably with many other kidney therapies. A patient with diabetes-related kidney disease can receive a full course of modern kidney-protective therapy for less than ₹200 a day in India. Patients without diabetes could potentially be treated for

around ₹100 a day, he said. **Detecting the smoke**
Yet Prof. Agarwal argued that the larger challenge was not treatment but detection. The problem may be particularly acute in India, where people appear more genetically susceptible to diabetes and high blood pressure than many Western populations and where the prevalence of both conditions is rising rapidly. Many patients learn they have kidney disease only after substantial damage has already occurred. The growing number of effective therapies, he said, makes early diagnosis more important than ever. “The people who are really going to make a difference are not the nephrologists but the primary care doctors,” he said. Patients with diabetes and high blood pressure often spend years under the care of family physicians before ever seeing a kidney specialist. A simple, routine urine test that checks for protein leakage can identify kidney damage at a stage when treatment is most effective. “We must detect the smoke before it becomes a fire,” he said. The message is especially important now because doctors increasingly have multiple therapies capable of slowing kidney disease once it is detected. (Anirban Mukhopadhyay is a geneticist by training and science communicator from New Delhi. anirban.genetics@south.du.ac.in)

THE GIST

Across different forms of chronic kidney disease, researchers found that finerenone slowed disease progression, reduced protein leakage in urine, and lowered the risk of kidney failure. Finerenone, researchers say, does not target diabetes itself. Instead, it blocks inflammation and scarring inside the kidneys – processes that can occur in many forms of kidney disease. The drug is already available in India and currently costs around ₹80-90 a day. However, it is expected to become significantly cheaper once it loses patent protection in 2028

BIG SHOT



Fluffy flock: Atlantic puffins gather on a cliff on Britain’s Inner Farne Islands in Northumberland on Monday during the National Trust’s 2026 annual census, monitoring the seabirds’ breeding population. REUTERS

QUESTION CORNER

When might life on the earth end?

Vasudevan Mukunth

Researchers from the U.S. have estimated how long photosynthetic life will last on the earth. As the sun ages, it also becomes brighter, eventually emitting a colour too hot for plants to survive. Previous studies had tried to answer this question using simplified climate models, finding the biosphere’s twilight could occur in 100 million to 900 million years. The new study made use of a more sophisticated model, which also accounted for the effects of clouds, humidity, and planetary circulation on temperature. The new estimate: around 1.68 billion years for land plants and total extinction by 1.87 billion years. The researchers explored two primary trajectories of future climate. The first, called strong weathering, assumed the planet’s carbon cycle could successfully draw carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere to offset the sun’s heat. While the traditional minimum for plant survival is 10 parts per million (ppm) of carbon dioxide, the authors suggested that crassulacean acid metabolism plants and certain aquatic species could even survive at as low as 1 ppm. This could extend the lifespan of the vegetative biosphere to around 1.84 billion years. In the second trajectory, weak weathering, carbon dioxide levels



Plants need at least around 10 ppm of carbon dioxide in the air to survive. MICK HAUPT/UNSPLASH

remained constant while the temperature rose. In around 1.68 billion years, the global average surface temperature reaches the thermal limit for complex life. Around 1.87 billion years from now, the climate becomes too hot for all land plants, marking the end of the vegetative biosphere. And in 2.1 billion years, the earth begins losing its oceans to space.

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Grand ambitions

India's cooperative sector can serve as a worker-centric model of development

Hypercompetitive business models that dominate the economic lives of people have undesirable social consequences. The cooperative model offers an alternative, albeit with its own imperfections. India's Ministry of Cooperation, which completed five years on July 6, is a bold experiment in harnessing the potential of this approach. Traditionally confined largely to agriculture, cooperatives now have the opportunity and a requirement to expand into other sectors, particularly services. Cooperatives, by their very character, are relatively small-scale and fragmented; organising them, and connecting them to the broader economy that disproportionately rewards hyper-scalers is a balancing intervention – an economic, political and social imperative. The Ministry aims to transform the cooperative landscape by bringing policy coherence across agriculture, dairy, fisheries, banking, housing, consumer cooperatives, and exports. This requires collaboration with States and national federations, capacity building, wise use of digital technology, and market linkages. Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) are the foundation of rural cooperatives. Through a reformed legal framework, they have been empowered to undertake over 25 business activities, transforming them into multifaceted institutions delivering many economic services in rural India.

The Ministry has facilitated new national-level multi-State cooperative societies, expanding market access for members and strengthening cooperative value chains from production to global markets. Cooperative enterprises are being encouraged to grow and compete, and a National Cooperation Policy is in the making. But there are challenges amid the opportunities. Corruption and inefficiency eroded the potential of India's cooperative sector, and the fear of local communities and States losing control of cooperatives to a national-level mechanism needs to be assuaged. The task is in finding the sweet spot of consolidation and decentralisation; localisation and nationalisation; technology and human labour, for boosting the sector. Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who holds the portfolio, is pushing the cooperative sector to expand into production and marketing, beyond agricultural credit and input facilitation, which could help mitigate the sector's endemic crisis. A well-coordinated, yet federated, cooperative sector can offset the social, environmental and political costs of global capitalism, which is the default model of the economy. Government and business leaders worldwide are viewing cooperatives with renewed interest, as the pitfalls of hypercapitalism become pronounced. India can develop its cooperative sector as a global model.

Deceptive dispute

Courts should not waste their time in examining figments

In 2015, a civil suit sought to declare the Taj Mahal a Hindu temple. This April, after an Agra trial court refused the petitioners' request to appoint an Advocate Commissioner to survey the monument, the Allahabad High Court – hearing the petitioners' challenge – has sought responses from the Centre and the ASI before deciding whether the lower court's refusal should stand. The legal position aside, the matter is both frivolous and vexatious. The idea today that the Taj Mahal was 'originally' a Hindu temple is associated with the late 20th century writings of Pुरुषोत्तम Nagesh Oak. Professional historians and archaeologists have repeatedly rejected his claims because they bank on speculative linguistic arguments and unsupported historical assertions. On the other hand, evidence that Shah Jahan built the Taj Mahal is rooted in contemporary chronicles, administrative records, European travellers' accounts, architectural histories, and archaeology. No archaeological study has produced evidence of a medieval Hindu temple beneath the Taj. Even though the ASI has previously submitted in affidavits that some rooms are locked because they are structurally vulnerable, supporters of the temple idea have alleged that they conceal Hindu idols. A Bharatiya Janata Party leader also unsuccessfully filed a PIL in 2022 and activists tried to offer 'gangajal' in 2024. Given the right historical, political, economic, and social conditions, an idea can persist long after its origins from pseudohistory.

The ongoing case resembles aspects of the Gyanvapi and Mathura disputes, where requests for ostensibly objective surveys were also platforms to advance revisionist political narratives. Courts are empowered to reject pleadings that disclose no sustainable cause of action – even as they are not commissions of historical inquiry and should not treat every speculative historical hypothesis as sufficient grounds for a supervised investigation. Equally, civil procedure should not tolerate re-litigating claims lacking any real evidentiary foundation. All major monuments accumulate materials of additions and alterations over time but heritage scholars draw a line between studying a monument's evolution and redefining its identity outright. The Taj Mahal became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1983. Repeated attempts to redefine its identity can also muddle international perceptions of India's stewardship of the monument and disrupt the region's tourism-based economy. The High Court may ultimately agree with the trial court's order after due examination, but the claim deserves not a breath of air. The petitioners have not advanced any new evidence, even as heritage institutions continue to face sustained legal pressure to manufacture controversies from figments.

The United States and Iran agreed to a 14-point preliminary Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) towards ending the West Asian crisis and reopening the Strait of Hormuz. Although there have been initial hiccups, it is expected that, with the reopening of the Strait, global crude oil supply will stabilise and prices will normalise at a lower level. Following these developments, India should adjust its strategies, keeping in mind both the 2026-27 outlook and medium-term growth prospects.

The West Asian crisis has resulted in a period of relatively higher crude prices. The monthly average price of the Indian crude oil basket was \$114.5 per bbl in April 2026. It declined to \$106.2 per bbl in May 2026 and further to \$86.3 per bbl as of June 24, 2026. For the remaining three quarters of 2026-27, crude oil prices are expected to remain below this level, provided the truce continues.

2026-27 growth prospects

The National Statistical Office's provisional estimates of GDP growth of 7.7% for 2025-26 confirm India's strong post-COVID-19 pandemic recovery. This was preceded by real GDP growth rates of 7.2% and 7.1%, respectively, in 2023-24 and 2024-25 as per the new GDP series. Real Gross Value Added (GVA) growth was even more impressive at 7.9% in 2025-26, with the manufacturing, trade, transport, and financial and real estate sectors recording growth rates exceeding 10%. With nominal GDP growth at 8.9%, the implicit price deflator-based inflation rate stood at 1.1% in 2025-26.

For 2026-27, growth prospects are likely to be impacted because of the disruptions in crude supply and higher prices affecting the first quarter, and due to a deficiency in rainfall associated with the onset of El Niño. The India Meteorological Department has estimated a 10% shortfall (as compared with the Long Period average). Up to June 24, 2026, the estimated shortfall is nearly 43%.

The combination of El Niño and fertilizer shortages pose a potential risk to India's agricultural output in 2026-27. In particular, in the immediate term, the *khairif* crop is likely to be affected. There may also be an impact on the *rabi* crop which is to follow. Therefore, it is important to build up fertilizer reserves and address issues



C. Rangarajan

Former Chairman, Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council, and former Governor, Reserve Bank of India



D.K. Srivastava

Former Director, Madras School of Economics

Changing dynamics present opportunities and challenges for the economy

of potential shortages when it comes to important crops, which may warrant a reconsideration of crop-specific import and export policies. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has projected real GDP growth of 6.6% for 2026-27.

Fiscal prospects, petroleum economy

One important feature of 2026-27 growth is the likelihood of relatively higher nominal GDP growth as compared to 2025-26. This is because the implicit price deflator (IPD), which depends on Wholesale Price Index (WPI) and Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation, is likely to be higher than the 2025-26 level of 1.1%. The RBI's June 2026 Professional Forecasters' median projections for WPI and CPI inflation for 2026-27 are 8% and 4.9%, respectively. With a resolution of the West Asian crisis, we consider WPI and CPI inflation rates for the full year to be lower at 6% and 4.5%; using weights of 60% and 40%, respectively, we can broadly estimate IPD-based inflation to be 5.4%. Combining this with a real GDP growth of 6.6%, we may have a nominal growth of about 12.4% in 2026-27, higher than the budgeted growth of 10.1%. This would have a positive impact on tax revenues. The Government of India should be able to realise its budgeted estimate of tax revenues absorbing the adverse revenue impact of any excise duty cuts. On the expenditure side, however, subsidies may be higher than budgeted.

The RBI has given a dividend of ₹2.69 lakh crore to the Government. This amount covers a significant portion of the budgeted 'Dividends and profits from RBI and Financial Institutions' in 2026-27 at ₹3.16 lakh crore. Given these developments, we expect the 2026-27 budgeted fiscal deficit at 4.3% of GDP to be either realised or only marginally exceeded.

The evolution of India's petroleum economy has been characterised by certain notable features. First, India's dependence on imported crude oil has increased to more than 90% in 2025-26 from 54.9% in 1998-99. Second, the volume of domestic production of crude oil has fallen over time to 26 million metric tons (MMT) in 2025-26 from a peak of 35.9 MMT in 2011-12. Third, demand for petroleum products/petroleum, oil, and lubricants (PoL) has increased, thereby generating the need for larger imports. Fourth, domestic consumption of PoL

products has increased to 243.2 MMT in 2025-26 from 90.6 MMT in 1998-99. Fifth, India has developed an impressive capacity for refining crude to produce various PoL products. This capacity has improved over time. Sixth, the energy intensity of India's output, as well as the intensity of use of PoL products in GDP, has fallen over time. This augurs well for sustaining an energy-efficient growth at a reasonably high level for a relatively longer period.

India may continue to augment its refining capacity, which has helped save refining costs compared to the situation if it had directly imported refined petroleum products. The trend towards growing dependence on imported crude oil needs to be reversed by emphasising the exploitation of domestic crude resources while accelerating the transition to greener and alternative energy sources, including nuclear power.

Build reserves

With a lowering of global crude prices and normalisation of supplies, the government should shore up its fertilizer reserves and reserves for other critical primary commodities including crude. There is a need to further diversify sources of imported crude and also reduce reliance on imports through the Strait of Hormuz. A policy for building strategic reserves of key primary commodities, along with estimates of the required volumes and needed infrastructure, should be put in place.

The current account deficit was 0.6% of GDP in 2025-26, with the fourth quarter showing a surplus of 0.7% of GDP. Prospects for 2026-27 indicate a deterioration in this magnitude. The RBI's June 2026 Survey of Professional Forecasters had estimated a current account deficit of 2.1% of GDP for 2026-27, as per their median estimate. With normalisation of the global oil market and the opening of the Hormuz strait, we expect this to be lower at about 1.5% of GDP.

The prospects of the Indian economy outlined above is on the assumption that peace will prevail in West Asia from now on. If this assumption turns out to be incorrect and if the war continues, India along with many other countries will face an extremely difficult situation.

The views expressed are personal

Beyond three Cs, the new lexicon of India-Australia ties

During his visit to Australia in May 2023, when the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between India and Australia was almost three years old, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had characterised India-Australia ties as having entered T-20 mode. He also stressed that the relationship had gone beyond the conventional three Cs – of Commonwealth, Cricket and Curry – and the subsequent three Ds – Democracy, Diaspora and *Dosti*. As Mr. Modi undertakes his third visit to Australia this week, it would be instructive to look at some of the recent progress in two other important dimensions, the Ds of Development and Defence.

Expanding trade and investment

Growing bilateral economic cooperation has brought dividends like never before for both countries. All Indian exports to Australia now have duty free access under the Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA), benefitting textiles, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, engineering goods, gems and jewellery. Preferential access to 90% of Australia's trade value has facilitated Australian exports of critical minerals, resources, wool, avocados, and macadamia. There is the shared ambition to raise bilateral trade from \$33 billion in 2025 towards \$100 bn by 2030.

The two-way cumulative investment is approaching \$50 billion. Australia's AirTrunk recently announced plans to invest \$30 billion by 2030 to develop digital infrastructure and Artificial Intelligence (AI)-ready data centre. Australian funds are increasingly active in India. At the same time, India is an important source of investment and technology. Indian investment in Australia's resources sector is well known. According to reports, Perdaman Chemicals & Fertilizers, founded by an Indian, is establishing Australia's largest urea plant in western Australia, with \$4.5 billion. This largest ever investment in Australia's fertilizer industry has also created millions of man hours of work in India where over 98% of the plant's modules are manufactured.

Defence represents perhaps the fastest growing sector of bilateral cooperation. In a clear signal of the importance of India as a reliable partner, Australia's Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Richard Marles visited India in his first foreign tours in both the terms of the Albanese government. Before his most recent visit for the Annual Defence Ministers' Dialogue last month, Mr. Marles had hosted Defence



Gopal Baglay

Former High Commissioner of India to Australia

A growing partnership now spans trade, defence, energy, education and innovation

Minister Rajnath Singh in Australia last year, marking the first visit by an Indian Defence Minister to the country in 12 years. Regular leadership and other senior level exchanges involving all the three Services and participation in bilateral and multilateral military exercises such as AUSINDEX, Malabar and Talisman Sabre foster operational understanding and coordination, significant especially in the maritime domain.

There are growing opportunities for defence industry cooperation in cyber, AI, drone, and in view of India's expanding ship-building capabilities.

The 'E' factor

Beyond the Cs and the Ds, there are also enriching Es: Energy and Education. India-Australia Renewable Energy Partnership is implemented through a Solar Taskforce and a Green Hydrogen Task Force, and guided at the ministerial level.

India's unprecedented renewable energy targets present immense potential for clean energy cooperation across critical minerals and materials, manufacturing, laboratory research, commercial-scale deployment, industrial use, and solar rooftops.

Very recently, Australian media mentioned that arrangements for future Australian uranium exports to India might be finalised shortly. Were that to happen, India's ambitious civil nuclear programme will receive a significant boost, as would Australia's uranium exports.

The India-Australia education and skills partnership is steadily contributing to creation of an enduring base for future-ready youth, innovators and entrepreneurs. While more than one lakh Indian students are enrolled in Australia, world class and affordable education is now available in India itself through Indian campuses of a growing number of Australian universities. Joint research in priority areas such as advanced computing, energy, health care, space and defence promises to create both intellectual assets and networks. Specific visa programmes have created new avenues for educated Indian youth seeking employment opportunities in Australia and await better utilisation.

Australia's global leadership in imparting vocational skills is being tapped in areas such as solar rooftop and mining, including in Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Odisha. Practical solutions can pave way for meeting Australia's huge workforce

shortfall and spur its economy with Indian workers temporarily assigned to Australia.

Sport has emerged as a new priority. Focused and broad based strategy can propel cooperation in sport education, training, medicine, goods, infrastructure and organisation of large-scale events, such as Commonwealth Games 2030 and Brisbane Olympics in 2032. With the growing Indian diaspora in Australia, now over ten lakh and rightly called the living bridge, Indian traditional sports such as kabaddi and kho kho are gaining popularity, even beyond the diaspora community.

Building multilateral partnerships

The upward trajectory of the bilateral relationship owes itself to a high degree of mutual trust, understanding and respect. Broad convergence of values and interests expands the format of cooperation to trilateral, such as India-Indonesia-Australia and India-France-Australia. The Australia-Canada-India Technology and Innovation Partnership, launched in November 2025, the India-Japan-Australia Supply Chain Resilience Initiative and a possible triad with the United Arab Emirates could play important roles in countering supply chain disruptions and market dominance and distortions in crucial areas such as critical minerals, rare earths, semiconductors and new technologies.

The shared vision of India and Australia for a free, open, safe, peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific manifests in their work through fora such as the Quad and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). The foreign visits this week by Mr. Modi and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese bring out the geopolitical logic for ever-growing cooperation between India and Australia at regional and global levels. Their existing ties with Pacific Island Countries provide a good basis for leveraging their respective strengths to the benefit of the region in areas such as education, health, technology, fintech, capacity building and disaster relief.

Mr. Albanese never tires of mentioning his connection with India as a young backpacker. His understanding of the significance of a consequential relationship with today's India and the close chemistry between the two leaders have set the perfect stage to progress bilateral ties in T20 mode but in the long format, and to multiple win-win outcomes for both.

The views expressed are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The U.S. at 250

The United States has reached a milestone in its democratic journey, guided by its cherished values of secularism and liberalism. As a land of immigrants who propelled its economic prosperity and technological advancements, the U.S. has

now positioned itself as the major superpower, though it faces significant challenges from China. However, all is not well, with the current incumbent of the White House undermining the foundations on which the American story was built. It is hoped that the

independent democratic institutions of the U.S. will protect and preserve the core ideals enshrined in the country's Constitution.

M. Jeyaram,
Sholavandan, Tamil Nadu.

Ensure transparency

The report, "Karnataka BLOs on SIR duty not

visiting homes, says NDA" (July 7), highlighting allegations of procedural lapses in the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, is deeply concerning. Whether the claims that Booth Level Officers bypassed mandatory door-to-door visits are accurate or

politically contested, they warrant a swift and impartial investigation by the Election Commission. Electoral roll revision must remain free of institutional shortcuts and partisan bickering. To sustain public trust in the democratic process, the Chief Electoral Officer should ensure strict

adherence to door-to-door verification guidelines. Administrative transparency is essential to safeguard every eligible citizen's voting rights without bias.

Andrea Anthony,
Hyderabad

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

An Opposition ridden with factions

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Government schools in Assam without power connection

676 A total of 676 government schools in Assam do not have any form of electricity, while 283 schools lack boys’ toilets, State Education Minister Ranoj Pegu said on Tuesday. The government has already earmarked ₹4 crore during the current financial year to provide electricity connections to all these schools, the Minister added. PTI

Rise in Foreign Direct Investment inflows to India in 2025

44 in per cent. Foreign Direct Investment inflows to India increased by 44% in 2025 to USD 39 billion, according to the UN, which said the country continued to strengthen its position as a major investment destination. FDI flows rose by 6% to USD 1.6 trillion. Inflows increased by 11% in developed economies and by 2% in developing economies. PTI

Number of people impacted by delayed domestic flights in May

1.77 Flight delays impacted more than 1.77 lakh passengers, and airlines spent a little over ₹ 4.24 crore towards facilitation, according to DGCA data released on Tuesday. Indian airlines carried 1.53 crore domestic passengers in May, over 11% higher than 1.38 crore people flown in April, according to official data released on Tuesday. PTI

Number of civilian casualties in Sudan drone strikes

15 Drone strikes on vehicles in Sudan’s North Kordofan state killed 15 civilians, including five women, in two areas controlled by the paramilitary forces, a rights group said on Tuesday. The Emergency Lawyers said that one vehicle was carrying wedding guests while another was transporting water. The group did not specify who was behind the attacks. PTI

Number of people killed in prison riot in Sri Lanka

27 Sri Lanka launched an investigation on Tuesday into its deadliest prison riot in years, as the death toll from clashes between rival drug gangs rose to 27. Armed police and commandos were not sent into the prison but were deployed to guard the perimeter of Negombo prison, following the clashes on Monday. AFP
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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On the method for caste enumeration

After decades of debate, caste will be counted as part of the 2027 Census. It is significant to look at the ongoing ‘pre-test’ and questionnaire design, as well as past anomalies during 2011 Socio-Economic Caste Census, as Independent India prepares to enumerate caste for the first time as part of the Census exercise

EXPLAINER

Vijaita Singh

The story so far:

The rehearsal or the “pre-test” of the second phase of Census, which started in 16 States and Union Territories on July 6, 2026, has an “open column” for respondents to record their castes, several officials involved in the exercise told *The Hindu*. The pre-test is on till July 20, 2026, and the outcome will decide how Independent India enumerates caste for the first time as part of the Census. Other than the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST), caste-wise population has not been enumerated in Independent India; the last time such data was collected was in 1931.

Background of caste Census

After repeatedly opposing caste enumeration, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) finally announced on April 30, 2025 that caste would be counted during Population Census 2027. Before this, the Opposition parties, particularly Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, had consistently demanded that the caste of all people be counted in India.

A few alliance partners of the BJP too made the demand. Unlike the 2011 Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC), which was done outside the purview of the Census, this time, caste will be enumerated with the second and final phase of the Census, giving it a statutory backing.

Significance of the ongoing pre-test

Though the ongoing rehearsal gives an indication of how caste is likely to be enumerated in the coming days, Census officials said the final methodology would be prepared based on the feedback received during the exercise. The pre-test exercise also allowed self-enumeration



The Opposition seeks wider consultations before the caste Census is conducted.C. VENKATACHALAPATHY

and the portal was accessible from July 1-5 only in the specific area where the rehearsal is being done.

The discourse on the methodology of caste enumeration has largely swung between either leaving an open column for caste, just as the 2011 SECC did, or preparing a list of castes for people to pick from – as the Bihar government did in its 2022-23 caste-based survey. The results of the SECC were neither released by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government nor by the NDA government after it came to power in 2014.

The open-column methodology had resulted in the 2011 SECC returning over 46 lakh different “caste names”, largely owing to the difference in what people understand by caste. The total number of castes during the 1931 Census conducted by the British was 4,147. In 2021, the Union government informed the Supreme Court in an affidavit, “Assuming that some castes may bifurcate into sub-castes, the total number cannot be exponentially high to this extent,” adding that the data cannot be relied on for reservation in education, employment or elections to

local authorities.

Anomalies reported during 2011 SECC

Officials said the SECC threw up lakhs of caste names as it was kept open-ended. Respondents were asked to name their castes. For example, people wrote Gupta, Agarwal and so on for the Baniya caste, which increased the numbers exponentially. Though the method is not final, the pre-test is providing the same open-ended column for respondents to record their castes.

According to the latest government data, there are about 2,650 Other Backward Classes (OBCs) on the Central List, 1,170 in the Scheduled Castes category, and 890 in the Scheduled Tribes (ST) list. The State governments maintain their own OBC list.

Concerns about the methodology

The Opposition parties have demanded wider consultation with all stakeholders before the caste Census is undertaken. On December 2, 2025, Mr. Gandhi asked in the Lok Sabha if the government has any proposal to publish the draft Census

questions and seek inputs from the general public or people’s representatives and whether it will consider best practices such as caste surveys done in other States.

Responding to this, Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai said, “The draft Census questionnaires are pre-tested in the field to assess their feasibility before finalisation of the same. Census has a history of more than 150 years. Learnings from previous Census are taken into consideration for conducting next Census. Before each Census, the inputs are also taken from stakeholders.” Throughout 2025, the government repeatedly stated that the final caste questionnaire had not been settled. Parliament was informed in February 2026 that questions relating to caste would be notified before the commencement of the second phase of Census operations. The Union Home Ministry said representations had been received from various organisations and State governments regarding caste enumeration, and that the final questionnaire would be prepared according to established procedures.

Reason for delay in Census exercise

The Population Census exercise is done in two phases – the Housing and House Listing Operations (HLO) and Population Enumeration, spanning over 11 months. The last Census was completed in 2011. The next exercise , Population Census 2021, was initially delayed owing to the COVID pandemic that surfaced in India around March 2020, coinciding with the first phase enumeration that was to begin from April 1, 2020. While the restrictions related to the pandemic were over by 2022, government did not specify the reasons to delay the exercise till now. On June 4, 2025, the government announced that the population Census along with the enumeration of castes will be conducted in two phases by February 28, 2027. The reference date of the people’s headcount will be 12 a.m., March 1, 2027.

THE GIST

▼ The BJP-led NDA government announced on April 30, 2025 that caste would be counted during Population Census 2027.

▼ The discourse on the methodology of caste enumeration has largely swung between either leaving an open column for caste, just as the 2011 SECC did, or preparing a list of castes for people to pick from – as the Bihar government did in its 2022-23 caste-based survey.

What does the lifting of gas curbs mean?

What led to the lifting of restrictions on energy supply imposed following the West Asia crisis?

Debayan Tewari

The story so far:

On July 4, 2026, the government lifted emergency curbs it had imposed on the supply of natural gas during the West Asia crisis in March. It cited “ceasefire and negotiations” and the resumption of “sea traffic through the Strait of Hormuz” to restore gas supplies to fertilizer plants, refineries, distributors and industrial users. The Petroleum and Natural Gas Ministry, in a notification, amended the Natural Gas (Supply Regulation) Order, 2026, and omitted provisions that had prioritised sale of domestically produced natural gas and imported Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) as per a priority list released by the government during the U.S.-Israel war on Iran.

On March 12, Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas Hardeep Singh Puri told Parliament about the “immediate priority sequence”.

“Domestic piped gas to homes and CNG for vehicles receive 100% supply with no cuts. Industrial and manufacturing consumers will receive up to 80% of their previous six-month average. Fertilizer plants will receive up to 70%, protecting the agricultural input chain ahead of the sowing season. Refineries and petrochemical units absorb a managed reduction, with that gas redirected to higher-priority sectors,” he had said.

Which sectors will benefit?

The latest measure follows a series of steps the government has taken to ease the supply of gas in the wake of an improved supply situation. On June 25, it restored the supply of industrial and commercial LPG to the pre-West Asia crisis levels.

The move is expected to benefit the refineries, city gas distributors, and industries such as ceramic. These sectors need reliable supply of natural gas at affordable rates.

According to Prashant Vasisht, senior vice-president at ratings agency ICRA, the biggest beneficiaries of this move will be the industrial and commercial users of natural gas. He said the supplies to fertilizer units and domestic users were all but normalised.

“The emergency measures had affected supplies of city gas distributors to their industrial and commercial clients. There were industries which did not get even alternate fuel to carry out operations. Hotels, for instance, had to stop making items that consumed more fuel,” he said.

Gas supplies to ceramic, power, sponge iron and petrochem sectors were curtailed. “So, factories that were operating in reduced capacity can now ramp up their capacities as and when the fuel supplies come in,” he said.

When the West Asia crisis peaked in March, ceramic manufacturing units based in Gujarat’s Morbi bore the brunt with reports indicating that 600 factories

and 4 lakh workers were affected amid a shortage of propane and natural gas, both used in the production of ceramic.

Which sector uses LNG the most?

Fertilizer plants are known to consume a bulk of India’s LNG. In an earlier interaction with *The Hindu* in March, Mr. Vasisht had said, “A little less than 30% of natural gas use goes into making fertilizers, while power plants account for 13% and city gas distribution 21%.”

Urea, which has around 46% of nitrogen, is the most common nitrogen fertilizer. It is produced by converting natural gas (methane) into ammonia and then combining it with carbon dioxide. The energy-dependent process, hence, makes LNG a crucial ingredient of the product.

What should be the next step?

India has been diversifying its energy sources. As Mr. Puri put it in a recent blog post, “The widening of our crude basket from 27 countries to 41, the doubling of our import terminals, and the pipelines and reserves built across a decade under Prime Minister Modi were not abstractions when the Strait finally closed; they were the very reason the lights stayed on.”

The road ahead now is one of capacity building. As Mr. Puri wrote, “Learning from this experience, we will build additional capabilities to strengthen our energy resilience...”

THE GIST

▼ On July 4, 2026, the government lifted emergency curbs it had imposed on the supply of natural gas during the West Asia crisis, citing “ceasefire and negotiations” and the resumption of “sea traffic through the Strait of Hormuz”.

▼ The move is expected to benefit refineries, city gas distributors and industries such as ceramics, which need a reliable supply of natural gas at affordable rates.

EXPLAINER



Key investor: Life insurers collectively hold close to a quarter of India's outstanding central government dated securities, based on RBI and IRDAI data. GETTY IMAGES

How India’s life insurance sector funds government expenditure

A significant share of life insurance premiums is reinvested in securities that finance government expenditure. While the case for deeper insurance penetration is often made in terms of household financial protection, it is equally important for sovereign fiscal stability

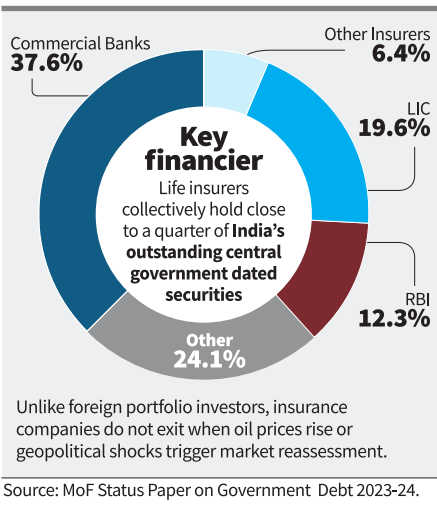
T.C. Suseel Kumar
R. Sudhakar

When the government borrows, the question that follows is rarely asked aloud: who lends? A large part of the answer is the life insurance sector. Every year, millions of households across India pay premiums into life insurance policies. That money is reinvested, for decades, in the very securities that finance government expenditure – roads, railways, water supplies, hospitals, defence. The household protecting itself against the loss of its breadwinner is simultaneously, and unknowingly, lending to the sovereign [the Central government]. Life insurers collectively hold close to a quarter of India's outstanding central government dated securities, based on RBI and IRDAI data – a share that has remained stable even as the total sovereign debt stock expanded by around 40 per cent in three years. This is not a number that appears in budget speeches or parliamentary debates. It is, however, a number that matters.

Patient capital in a volatile world
The stoic and resilient quality of the sector's sovereign support is as significant as its scale. Life insurers write policies with tenures of twenty, thirty, sometimes forty years. Government securities are the natural habitat of long-duration liabilities – the only asset class that absorbs this scale of funds at matching tenures without distorting the market. Unlike foreign portfolio investors, whose appetite fluctuates with global risk sentiment, insurance companies buy and hold. They do not exit when oil prices rise or when a geopolitical event triggers a reassessment of emerging market exposure. Their participation is counter-cyclical by design – stable

precisely when other buyers become unreliable. A steady domestic base of long-horizon holders reduces rollover risk and moderates borrowing costs across the maturity spectrum.
Life insurers buy when others sell, hold when others exit, and reinvest when others pause. That is the structural consequence of writing long-duration promises to millions of policyholders.

The heavyweight within the sector
The sector's contribution is not evenly distributed. The Life Insurance Corporation of India carries the dominant share – a consequence of its scale, its predominantly participating product mix, and the duration of its in-force book. Its March 2025 regulatory filing with IRDAI (Form L-26) confirms that sovereign paper accounts for nearly 63 per cent of its non-linked policyholder corpus – well above the regulatory minimum, and a direct expression of what long-duration liabilities demand at scale.
LIC holds approximately 19 per cent of all outstanding central government dated securities – a figure confirmed by the RBI's Public Debt Management Quarterly



Report for FY24, the most recently published data. LIC's IRDAI regulatory filings for March 2025 give the institutional reality in absolute terms: ₹20.2 lakh crore in central government securities alone, and ₹32.3 lakh crore in total government and government-guaranteed securities across all funds. These are not estimates. They are figures LIC files with its regulator every quarter and that any researcher can access on the IRDAI website. This makes LIC the single largest institutional holder of Indian government's debt.

Private life insurers, with a higher proportion of unit-linked and shorter-tenure products, contribute a smaller fraction today. As they grow and deepen their traditional offerings, their sovereign allocations will follow the same structural logic.
The regulator has already recognised the systemic dimension of this function: IRDAI designates LIC as a Domestic Systemically Important Insurer every year, describing it as an institution whose distress would cause significant dislocation in the financial system. That designation, rightly made on insurance-sector grounds, points toward a wider truth – the dislocation would extend into the sovereign borrowing programme itself.
Insurers in Japan, the United Kingdom, and South Korea are among the largest holders of their respective governments' long-dated securities, not because regulation mandates it but because their liability profiles demand it. India's life insurance sector is following the same path.

The fragility within the stability
India's life insurance penetration stood at 2.7 per cent of GDP in FY25, the third consecutive year of decline from a pandemic-era peak of 3.2 per cent, against a global life average of 3.0 per

cent. Three regulatory interventions between 2023 and 2024 – restructured distribution economics, taxation on certain high-value policies, and mandatory product repricing, simultaneously, has compressed new businesses. While each was defensible in isolation, their cumulative effect was adverse. The sector is recovering. But the episode illustrates a risk worth noting: when multiple regulatory actions compress new business at once, the household savings that would otherwise have flowed into the sovereign debt market through insurance, reduce or find shorter-duration homes elsewhere. The sovereign borrowing programme may not notice this in the short term. Over a decade, it would.

The unacknowledged pillar
Banking commands policy attention in proportion to its systemic importance. Insurance, which quietly holds close to a quarter of outstanding central government dated securities, does not.
The case for deeper insurance penetration is most often made in the language of household financial protection – the uninsured family, the inadequate sum assured, a mis-sold product or an unsettled claim. These are legitimate concerns. But there is a parallel case, made in the language of sovereign fiscal stability, that has not been fully articulated in public policy discourse. If the reliability of India's domestic sovereign funding base is a macroeconomic priority given the scale of annual borrowing requirements, then the depth and health of the life insurance sector remain directly relevant to that priority.
(T.C. Suseel Kumar is a former Managing Director of LIC India. R Sudhakar is a former Chief Investment Officer and Executive Director of LIC India. The views expressed are personal.)

THE DAILY QUIZ

On this day in 1497, Vasco da Gama sailed from Lisbon with four ships; ultimately opening a sea route from western Europe to Asia. A quiz on the explorer and the voyage

Sindhu Nagaraj

- QUESTION 1**
The fleet of ships arrived in which part of India on May 20, 1498?
- QUESTION 2**
What is the disputed doctrine called, based on whose authority the expedition was undertaken?
- QUESTION 3**
What were the fleets of ships funded by the Crown of Portugal, and dispatched on an annual basis from Portugal to India called?
- QUESTION 4**
In which year did the Battle of Calicut take place?
- QUESTION 5**
There is a port city in India which is named after Vasco da Gama. In which present State is the port in?



Visual question: How is this church in Kochi related to da Gama? FILE PHOTO

- Questions and answers to the previous day's daily quiz:** 1. The eight Sikh Guru born in 1656, who would go on to lead the faith at just five years old. **Ans: Guru Har Krishan**
2. Born in 1883, this scholar wrote Usne Kaha Tha, one of the earliest modern Hindi short stories. **Ans: Chandradhar Sharma Guleri**
3. An Indian revolutionary, born on this day in 1854, who served as the Prime Minister of the first Provisional Government of India established in Kabul, Afghanistan, during the First World War. **Ans: Mohamed Barakatullah Bhopali**
4. Born on this day in 1914,
- this composer introduced full orchestral music to Hindi cinema and is best remembered for his score in the film Kismet (1943). **Ans: Anil Biswas**
5. This 1981-born cricketer captained India to titles in three major white-ball ICC tournaments. He famously wore the number 7 jersey. **Ans: Mahendra Singh Dhoni**
Visual: Born in 1963, identify this director well known for films such as Rang De Basanti, Delhi-6 and Bhaag Milkha Bhaag. **Ans: Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra**
Early birds: Tamal Biswas| Pulkit Sathel| Tito Shiladitya| C. Saravanan| Aayushi



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

S. Upendran

“I have been coming here every day, but you are never around. Don't tell me that you are already busy with next month's conference.”
“A conference requires a lot of planning. There are so many rules and regulations to be followed. Even my boss is stymied by some of...”
“...your boss is what? What was the word you used?”
‘S..t..y...m..i..e. The ‘y’ in the first syllable is like the ‘y’ in ‘my’, ‘by’, and ‘cry’. The ‘ie’ in the second syllable is pronounced like the ‘i’ in ‘kit’, ‘bit’, and ‘hit’.
“But what does ‘stymie’ mean?”
“Believe it or not, it's a word that comes from the world of golf. How would you feel if you were to find your opponent's golf ball obstructing your path to the hole.”
“Well, if the opponent's golf ball is between mine and the hole, I would probably feel pretty annoyed and frustrated, I guess. I would probably feel that he placed the ball there to ensure that I didn't make any progress.”
“Excellent! When something ‘stymies’ you, it prevents you from doing whatever it is that you had planned to. There is an obstruction which leaves you confused.”
“In other words, you end up making no progress in whatever it is you are doing.”
“Exactly! Here's an example. The change that the new teachers tried to bring in was stymied by the administration.”
“We had a test in physics yesterday. Most of the students were stymied by the first question.”
“That's a good example.
So, how is the preparation for the conference coming along?”
“Our Coordinator has been sweating blood ever since...”
“....sweating blood? Good grief! That sounds serious. Have you taken him to the doctor?”
“Doctor? What for? I don't ... Oh I see. When you say that someone is sweating blood, it doesn't mean he/she is really bleeding. It means that the person is working really hard to complete something.”
“I see. Is ‘sweating blood’ an expression used in informal contexts?”
“That's right. Here is an example. The old man sweated blood to put his grandson through college.”
“....I wish that the Indian cricket team would sweat blood for the sake of the country.”
“They probably would if the Board made it clear that a player's pay would be determined by his performance, rather than his non-performance.”
“Some of the newspaper articles dealing in cricket were very interesting.”
“Dealing with and not dealing in.”
“What is the difference between the two?”
“When a shop or a company deals in something, it does business buying and selling those things.”
“I see. So when you ‘deal in’ something, you specialise in it. Is that it?”
“Well, yes. Here is an example. If you want to buy a good pair of jeans, go to my cousin's shop. He deals in jeans.”
“What does ‘deal with’ mean?”
“When a book or an article deals with a particular topic, it discusses or covers that particular topic. Here is an example. Corruption is a topic that is dealt with in detail in this book.”
Published in *The Hindu* on March 13, 2001

Word of the day

Debonair:
having a sophisticated charm

Synonym: suave

Usage: The actor's debonair manner won over the audience.

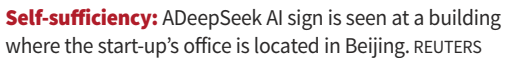
Pronunciation: newsth.live/debonair

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ˌdebəˈneɪ(ə)/

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

CM
YK

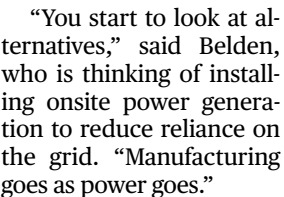
China's DeepSeek developing its own AI chip, sources say



A DeepSeek inference chip would target the fastest-growing segment of AI computing demand. As AI applications spread, more of the industry's computing work is shifting from training models to running them, which relies on specialised chips that can be cheaper and less power-hungry than general-purpose GPUs.

China's booming gig economy masks job market pain, hits welfare system

Big Tech data centres are driving up electricity bills at United States' Rust Belt factories



DAMASCUS

Explosions rock Syria's capital as French President Macron visits



Explosions rocked Syria's capital on Tuesday and injured at least 18 people as French President Emmanuel Macron met with his counterpart Ahmad al-Sharaa in a landmark visit to the country, Syria's Interior Ministry said. Mr. Macron was in the presidential palace when the explosions happened, and was reportedly safe. AP

LONDON

Prince Harry and others lose their privacy lawsuit against Daily Mail



Prince Harry, the estranged younger son of King Charles, and other high-profile British figures on Tuesday lost their privacy lawsuits against the *Daily Mail's* publisher. He and the other claimants alleged that dozens of stories published about them were based on information which had been obtained unlawfully. REUTERS

ISLAMABAD

Nine policemen killed in militant attack in Balochistan province



At least nine policemen were killed in a terrorist attack at a police post in Pakistan's Balochistan province, officials said on Tuesday. The incident took place on Monday night at the police post in Ziarat district's Mangi Dam area. The police confirmed that five others remained missing and operation to recover them is under way. PTI

CAIRO

Israeli fire kills six Palestinians in Gaza, say territory's health officials



Israeli strikes and gunfire killed at least six Palestinians in the Gaza Strip on Tuesday, the territory's health officials said. The Israeli military said they had targeted militants in some of these strikes. The Popular Resistance Committees, a militant group, said an Israeli strikes in Khan Younis killed a senior leader of the group. REUTERS

Tanker set ablaze after being struck by projectile in the Strait of Hormuz

Iranian state TV says an LNG tanker came under attack after ignoring warnings but does not say Tehran ordered the attack; Doha said targeting Qatari vessel in the strait was an 'unacceptable attack' on international navigation and energy security

Associated Press
DUBAI

A tanker travelling off the coast of Oman in the Strait of Hormuz was struck by a projectile and caught fire early Tuesday, the British military said, in the latest attack targeting a vessel moving through the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf. Iranian state television said the liquefied natural gas tanker came under attack after ignoring warnings but did not directly claim the assault. According to the UK Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) Centre, three tankers were hit in the strait in the past 24 hours.



A spokesperson for the Qatari Foreign Ministry called the attack a 'serious violation' of international law. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Tehran, which has repeatedly declared that only its approved route through the strait is safe, is suspected of attacking other ships that have used another route close to the Omani

shore. Previous attacks in the strait have sparked retaliatory strikes by the U.S. Iran then attacked Gulf Arab states. Meanwhile, talks between Iran and the U.S. ap-

peared to be on hold until after the burial of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who was assassinated at the beginning of the war. Authorities flew Khamenei's body to the Shia seminary city of Qom, where mourners honoured him on Tuesday. The UKMTO said the tanker was hit near Limah, Oman, in the strait. It said the projectile hit the port side of the vessel as it tried to travel south out of the strait toward the Gulf of Oman. The agency said there were no environmental effects from the strike. "UKMTO has received a report of a further incident involving a tanker transiting the Strait of Hor-

muz. The tanker was struck by an unknown Uncrewed Aerial Vehicle (UAV) and has sustained minor structural damage. Iranian state TV, quoting anonymous sources, implied that Tehran carried out the assault on a tanker it said was carrying natural gas from Qatar. However, there was no official claim from the Islamic Republic for the attack. Majed Al-Ansari, a spokesperson for the Qatari Foreign Ministry, said targeting the Qatari tanker, *Al Rekayyat*, in the strait was an "unacceptable attack" on international navigation and global energy security. He called it a "serious violation" of international law.

Trump praises Erdogan, slams NATO before summit

Agence France-Presse
ANKARA

U.S. President Donald Trump praised his "chemistry" with Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan as he arrived in Ankara for a NATO summit on Tuesday, while hitting out at European allies for their response to his war in Iran. Mr. Trump was greeted personally by Mr. Erdogan on the tarmac as he descended from Air Force One, before being escorted through the empty streets of the Turkish capital by a guard of riders on white horses. The summit comes at a fraught time for the 77-year-old transatlantic alliance, as Mr. Trump has lashed out at allies and Washington steps back from Europe. "I was very disappoint-



Donald Trump and American officials meet with Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Turkish officials in Ankara on Tuesday. AP

ed with NATO," Mr. Trump said, sitting next to Mr. Erdogan at the latter's vast presidential palace. "Frankly, if it (the summit) weren't held in Turkey, where my friend happens to be a very strong leader, a very strong person, it's possible that I wouldn't have attended." NATO officials are hoping Mr. Trump's strong re-

lationship with the Turkish leader could help smooth over the bad blood caused by the Iran war. In a potentially major boost for Mr. Erdogan, Mr. Trump said Washington would consider selling F-35 fighter jets to Turkey, after booting it out of the programme in 2019 over Ankara's purchase of a Russian system.

Cuba slowly gets power back after a nationwide blackout

Agence France-Presse
HAVANA

Cubans were gradually getting power back on Tuesday after the third nationwide power outage since the start of the year, causing mounting despair in the face of an energy collapse precipitated by a U.S. fuel blockade. The communist island was already struggling to keep the lights on before U.S. President Donald Trump cut off its oil supplies in January, depleting the dwindling supply of fuel for its power plants. Union Electrica (UNE), the state electricity company, announced a "total disconnection" to the entire island at midday on Monday, leaving the communist country's 9.6 million inhabitants without power while not providing a reason.

The electricity generation system, composed mainly of Soviet-era plants, is in shambles

It said early Tuesday that power was restored to over 30% of the capital, including 43 medical centres and nine water distribution installations. The blackout marks the eighth on the island since late 2024. The lack of fuel "undoubtedly complicates the restoration process," Lazaro Guerra, director of electricity at the Ministry of Energy and Mines, said on state television late Monday without giving a timeline for repairs. Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel blamed U.S. sanctions policy against the island.

"While the U.S. attempts to trigger social unrest through strangulation by blocking fuel access to Cuba, the UNE is mobilising to reverse the collapse of the National Electric System," the President said. "The work being done by electrical workers amidst a genocidal energy blockade is heroic," he added. This latest blackout comes as the state imposes increasingly draconian power cuts across the country – over 30 hours at a stretch in parts of Havana and over 70 hours in some rural areas – in an increasingly desperate attempt to conserve fuel. Power outages have been a feature of life for years in Cuba, where the electricity generation system, composed mainly of dilapidated Soviet-era plants, is in shambles.

Lost souls



Plots containing the coffins of victims of the June 24 earthquakes, at La Esperanza Cemetery in Carayaca, La Guaira state, northeast of Caracas, on Monday. The twin earthquakes have claimed the lives of at least 3,535 people, the Venezuelan government reported. AFP

Extremists kill 22 soldiers and militia in Burkina Faso

Agence France-Presse
ABIDJAN

At least 22 soldiers and civilian militia were killed in suspected attacks by extremists at the weekend in northern Burkina Faso, security sources said on Tuesday. Around 14 military personnel and seven civilian army volunteers were killed at a military base in Di, near Dedougou, on Saturday morning, while there were several deaths at Solhan, sources said. Burkina Faso has been led by a military junta since September 2022 but has been battling jihadists affiliated with al-Qaeda and the Islamic State group. The military has brought in civilians to help them in the fight but they have paid a high price.

Le Pen cleared to run for President, but to wear electronic tag

Agence France-Presse
PARIS

French far-right chief Marine Le Pen's political future remained uncertain on Tuesday after a court cleared her to run but wearing an ankle tag, potentially hampering a campaign for next year's presidential elections when her party has its strongest chance of winning power. A lower court last year had sentenced Ms. Le Pen, 57, to a five-year ban from public office and a two-

year sentence over a fake jobs scam at the European Parliament. The Paris appeals court found Ms. Le Pen guilty over the scam but reduced that sentence, banning her from office for 15 months as well as sentencing her to one year to be served with an electronic tag. Dating from March 2025, the ban is expected to have expired this year, clearing the way in principle for her to run in polls set for April and May next year.

Reform UK leader Farage resigns as MP, forces byelection

Sriram Lakshman
LONDON

Nigel Farage, the leader of the nativist Reform UK party, resigned from his parliamentary seat of Clacton-on-Sea on Tuesday, saying he would run again in the byelection that has been triggered by his resignation. The announcement was made towards the end of an approximately 15-minute speech, during which he railed against "the establishment", accusing the mainstream political parties in Britain and the media of unfairly targeting him. Mr. Farage is currently under investigation by a

parliamentary standards body for not registering a personal gift of £5 million from Thailand-based cryptocurrency investor Christopher Harborne weeks before he announced that he was running in the 2024 general election. Mr. Farage has offered different explanations of the gift – from suggesting it was a "reward" for his Brexit campaign to saying it was funding for his personal security. He has continued to argue that he did not break the rules by not declaring the gift. The probe, launched in May, has not yet concluded. There are, however, other allegations against the

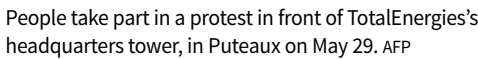


Reform UK chief. Over the weekend, the *Sunday Times* had published a report alleging that Mr. Farage received funding from a long-time associate and convicted criminal, George Cottrell, funding his security, housing and staffing. Mr. Farage reportedly

broke gift registration rules. The Liberal Democrats have referred this incident to the parliamentary standards commissioner. Mr. Farage has repeatedly insisted he has done nothing wrong, arguing that the parliamentary code did not cover what MPs spent in their private lives. "The press would rather our Members of Parliament had no assets and no wealth at all, they seem to fundamentally object to any MP that has outside income," Mr. Farage said in his broadcast on Tuesday, adding that he was earning well in the 1990s as a com-

modity trader but did not do well financially as a member of the European Parliament subsequently. Mr. Farage boasted that his actions led to Brexit (he had spearheaded the Brexit campaign as chief of the Eurosceptic UK Independence Party) and that he emerged from the process with "very little money". "Now I've decided that the people of Clacton should be the judges of my actions. This will be a people versus the establishment by-election." The £5 million was going to be needed for his security, Mr. Farage said, adding that he was the most physically and verbally at-

tacked politician currently. He said the country was about to get a Prime Minister without a mandate, referring to MP Andy Burnham, the former Greater Manchester mayor and MP, who is likely to succeed Prime Minister Keir Starmer imminently. Mr. Farage on Tuesday called for a general election. Reform U.K. had performed strongly in the May 2026 elections for local council seats in England and assembly seats in Wales and Scotland, at the expense of both Labour and the Conservatives although it has been losing voters to the far-right Restore Britain party.

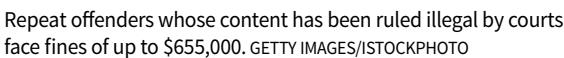


Agence France-Presse
LONDON

The case is thought to be the first time Ugandan environmental laws have been brought before a foreign court, said Avaaz.

Agence France-Presse
SEOUL

The Asian tech power-



With the revision to the information and communications network act, it

Now users who intentionally spread illegal false or manipulated information could be ordered to pay up to five times the ac-

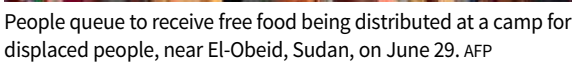
South Korea saw a surge in online misinformation following the botched 2024 martial law attempt, including unsubstantiated allegations of Chinese interference in the electoral system.

Rizmi Lia M.

The report documents widespread abuses against civilians in and around El

The investigation, conducted over eight months between August 2025 and April 2026, is based on interviews with 247 people, including 208 survivors (169 adults and 39 children) who experienced or witnessed conflict-related abuses. Amnesty also verified 89 videos and analysed satellite imagery from North Darfur.

Amnesty further finds that the pattern of destroying villages in Abu Zerega area, populated primarily



The report also says the

About 58% of Democrats now say the U.S. is 'too supportive' of the Israelis, up from 45% in an AP-NORC poll from January 2024. [AFP](#)

Only about one-third of U.S. adults view Israel as an “extremely” or “very” important issue to them personally. But it’s been a searing topic in American politics as the relationship between the two countries remains tense, just four months before high-stakes midterm elections determine the balance of power in Congress for President Donald Trump’s final two years in office. Vice President J.D. Vance recently criticised Israeli leaders who have expressed frustration with Mr. Trump,

Roughly 6 in 10 Democrats, 62%, say the U.S. is “not supportive enough” of the Palestinians, up from 49% in 2024. Younger Democrats (those 45 and younger) are more likely than older ones to say that the United States is “not supportive enough” of the Palestinians, but older Democrats are catching up to their younger counterparts. About 57% of older Democrats now say the U.S. should do more for the

Joy Jennik, a 73-year-old Democrat from Brookfield, Wisconsin, said she didn't have strong opinions about the U.S. relationship with Israel until after Hamas' October 7 attack. Now, she believes Israel is guilty of genocide. "The Gaza Strip, there's not a lot left of it. Those poor people are barely living," said Ms. Jennik, a retired home economics teacher.

Mike Cardona, a 70-year-old Republican from

Younger adults, regardless of party, are more likely than older adults to say they don't have an opinion about Mr. Netanyahu. But while older Republicans see him more positively than negatively, younger Republicans' views tilt unfavorably.

Pamplona special: Participants run ahead of bulls during the first running of the bulls at the San Fermin festival in Pamplona, northern Spain, on July 7, 2026. Thousands of people every year attend the week-long festival and its famous *encierros*, or running of the bulls. AFP

<u>Rizmi Lia M.</u>	Fasher between early 2024 and October 2025, as the	Amnesty concluded that the RSF committed		dents reportedly survived by eating ambaz a by-pro-					
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tives, who said they witnessed RSF fighters kill scores of people there. The report also documented

Call for action
Agnès Callamard, Amnesty
International's Secretary

The report further called on all countries to immediately stop supplying arms and ammunition to parties to the Sudan conflict. It specifically urged States to stop providing arms to the United Arab Emirates, which Amnesty described as the RSF's principal foreign backer, until it complies with the UN arms embargo.

R.K. Arjun

Formula 1’s back-to-back swing through the Red Bull Ring and Silverstone has reshaped the 2026 championship in ways few saw coming a fortnight ago.

At Spielberg, George Russell converted a controversial pole – set under yellow flags – into his second win of the season, holding off a fast-recovering Max Verstappen. The result pushed Russell back to second in the standings and cut Kimi Antonelli’s championship lead to 40 points, even as the Mercedes rookie’s third-place finish kept his team’s advantage at the top intact.

Days later at Lewis Hamilton’s home Grand Prix, it was Charles Leclerc who crossed the chequered flag ahead of the pack to secure his first win in well over a year. However, the headlines belonged just as much to the race’s chaotic finish following confusion surrounding the safety car restart procedure.

Same narrative

Two circuits, two very different races, but the same underlying narrative: a title fight that’s no longer a formality for anyone at the front.

Saturday’s qualifying in Austria set the tone for what followed. Kimi Antonelli, the championship leader heading into the weekend, aborted his final flying lap after mistaking single waved flags for a double-yellow zone, dropping down to fourth. With Ferrari’s Charles Leclerc and Lewis Hamilton sandwiched between the two Mercedes drivers, the grid was set for a tense Sunday.

Russell converted pole into a clean getaway, while behind him, the opening laps were scrappy. Antonelli ran wide almost immediately and rejoined in fourth, then went off-track again a lap later – forcing him to hand a position back after being flagged for gaining an advantage. It was a rough start for a driver who had looked untouchable through practice and qualifying, and he later admitted as much, saying he’d gotten “too excited” in the opening exchanges.

Further back, Hamilton was making his own case for the podium. He muscled past Leclerc for second early on, temporarily putting a Ferrari-Mercedes-Red Bull sandwich on its head. However, the Ferrari challenge faded away in the latter stages of the race and it was Verstappen who did the more sustained work. Starting fifth after his

qualifying crash, the Red Bull driver spent the middle stint locked in a physical battle with Hamilton before working his way up to second – setting up a genuine grandstand finish as he closed on Russell in the closing laps. Despite the scorching Spielberg

conditions and 4-time champion’s late surge, the British Driver crossed the line to take his second win of the season, finishing 1.986 seconds clear of Antonelli in the final reckoning – with Verstappen splitting the two Mercedes drivers in second.

Russell’s win moved him back past Hamilton and up to second in the drivers’ championship, cutting Antonelli’s lead at the top to 40 points. The Bologna native’s third place – messy as the drive was – still did enough to protect Mercedes’ overall advantage in the standings even as his individual buffer over Russell shrank.

Elsewhere, the picture was mixed. McLaren secured a double points finish with Oscar Piastri finishing fourth and Lando Norris seventh, while Ferrari left Austria with Hamilton fifth and Leclerc down in eighth – a quiet weekend by the Scuderia’s recent standards, reportedly attributed to over-focusing on Mercedes rather than their own car. Racing Bulls had reason to celebrate, with Liam Lawson and Arvid Lindblad scoring ninth and 10th, respectively.

Antonelli, for his part, takes the more instructive lesson from Spielberg – his pace was never in question, but a series of avoidable errors under pressure cost him a result that once looked routine. Verstappen’s recovery from fifth was arguably Red Bull’s most encouraging drive of the season. A driver who crashed out of contention for pole on Saturday produced exactly the kind of measured, race-long fightback that has defined his career, applying sustained pressure on Russell without the benefit of track position.

While Ferrari had a subdued weekend, with both cars outside the top four, the Scuderia’s underwhelming weekend would attract some scrutiny. For a team hoping to challenge for the title, a quiet weekend at the Red Bull Ring is one it can scarcely afford as the championship enters its more competitive phase.

Formula 1 arrived at Silverstone with barely time to catch its breath after Austria – and the British Grand Prix weekend wasted no time delivering drama of its own. After securing Spring Pole at his home race, Lewis Hamilton held the lead off the line at Turn 1, resisting early pressure from Antonelli, but the Mercedes driver never let the gap grow. On lap 8, Antonelli made his move down the Hangar Straight into Stowe, seizing the lead and pulling clear to win

by 2.745 seconds – his first career Sprint victory. Norris completed the podium, ahead of Russell and Leclerc, while Verstappen faded to sixth after a poor start. The result extended Antonelli’s championship lead over Russell to 43 points.

Antonelli backed up his Sprint win by topping qualifying outright and claiming pole position, with Leclerc second and Hamilton third for Ferrari. Russell could only manage fourth, surviving an off in Q1, as McLaren and Red Bull fought over the next four positions behind him.

Deserving attention

Sunday’s British Grand Prix will be remembered less for its outcome than for the extraordinary way it ended – but the race itself deserved attention on its own merits. Leclerc converted pole into control early, with Hamilton unwittingly playing shield at the front after complaining of graining, allowing the Monegasque to build a four-second cushion. Antonelli, however, was the fastest man on track. He cleared Hamilton at Copse on lap 11 and began chasing down Leclerc, closing to within three seconds by the time the Ferrari came into the pits on Lap 25.

What followed looked, for a long stretch, like the coronation of Formula 1’s championship leader. Antonelli, running on fresher rubber, had steadily eaten into Leclerc’s lead, and by the closing stages the gap between them stood at barely two seconds – the young Italian looked on course to overhaul him and take the win. Then it unravelled. Antonelli radioed that something had broken on his car, a wheel shield failure that forced two unplanned stops and ultimately dropped him out of contention entirely.

With Antonelli’s threat neutralised, the remaining drama centred on Russell and Hamilton. A slow puncture had earlier cost Russell track position to Hamilton, but the sequence reversed when Max Verstappen crashed heavily at Stowe on lap 48, losing the rear of his Red Bull for the second consecutive weekend.

The incident triggered a safety car, and both the Ferrari drivers pitted for fresh tyres - while Russell, gambling on used mediums, stayed out and jumped Hamilton in the process.

It’s what happened next that dominated the headlines. With just laps remaining, race control displayed a “Safety Car In This Lap” message, suggesting a green-flag restart and one lap shootout for glory at Silverstone. The message was then withdrawn, the safety car stayed out, and the race finished in formation – the first time an F1 race had ended fully behind the safety car since Monza 2022. The FIA later confirmed the message had been shown in error due to a software fault, and that regulations under

Article B5.13.5 required a full lap to be completed following the unlapping procedure regardless.

Leclerc crossed the line to end a winless run stretching back to Austin 2024, with Russell claiming second just 0.427 seconds behind after his tyre gamble paid off, and Hamilton completing the podium – though facing a separate yellow-flag investigation that was later resolved with only a reprimand.

Antonelli was classified 16th after a five-second penalty for track-limits violations compounded his mechanical misfortune. Norris took fourth, with Hadjar and the Racing Bulls pair of Lawson and Lindblad rounding out the points.

Exposing the vulnerability

Antonelli remains the fastest driver on the grid more often than not, but Spielberg and Silverstone both exposed the same vulnerability – small errors and bad luck combining at exactly the wrong moments.

A five-second penalty here, a wheel shield failure there, and the championship fight looks a lot more intense than it did a month ago in Monaco. Russell, meanwhile, has turned himself into the man applying that pressure.

A win in Austria followed by a hard-fought second at Silverstone has moved him past Hamilton put him in the rearview mirror of Antonelli.

For Ferrari, Silverstone offered exactly the response a title-chasing team needed

after Austria. A week after both cars left Spielberg anonymously outside the top four, Leclerc’s win alongside Hamilton’s third-place finish allowed the Scuderia to marginally close the gap in the Constructors’ Championship.

Circumstance and substance

Circumstance played its part – Antonelli’s late mechanical failure handed Leclerc a victory he may not have claimed on pace alone – but the substance behind the result was harder to dismiss. Leclerc controlled long stretches of the race from the front, while Hamilton could consider himself a little unlucky at the lack of a restart.

If Ferrari’s own admission of over-focusing on Mercedes was the diagnosis for Austria, Silverstone at least suggested the correction is taking hold. The real test now lies ahead: proving this was the start of a sustained title push rather than one bright weekend in an otherwise inconsistent campaign.

Two rounds, two winners, and a championship that suddenly feels wide open. Antonelli still leads, but the margin is shrinking race by race, and both Russell and Ferrari have shown they’re capable of capitalising when the moment arrives.

The next few rounds will tell us whether Austria and Silverstone were the start of a genuine four-way fight, or simply the mid-season wobble every dominant campaign goes through. Either way, the title race has found its edge again – and it’s about to get interesting.

THE GIST

Russell converted a controversial pole into his second win of the season, cutting championship leader Antonelli’s advantage to 40 points despite the Mercedes rookie salvaging third from a scrappy drive in Austria

At Silverstone, Leclerc ended a winless run stretching back to 2024, but the race is being remembered for its bizarre finish – a safety car restart aborted due to an FIA software error, the first race to end under the safety car since Monza 2022

Antonelli’s late mechanical failure in the British GP has handed the initiative to his rivals. Russell has moved ahead of Hamilton

Antonelli remains the fastest driver on the grid more often than not, but Spielberg and Silverstone both exposed the same vulnerability – small errors and bad luck compounding at exactly the wrong moments



A fortnight of fine margins: How Austria and Silverstone reset the tussle for the title

Saturday’s qualifying in Austria set the tone for what followed. George Russell claimed pole, but the lap came under scrutiny – set while yellow flags were out for Max Verstappen’s crash in his push lap



AFP, AP