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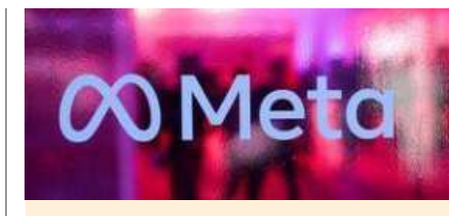

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EU warns Meta over 'addictive design'

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INSIDE

Police freeze 12 bank accounts of Trinamool

KOLKATA
The West Bengal Police on Friday froze 12 more bank accounts of the Trinamool Congress with deposits of over ₹1,000 crore, on complaints of illegal diversion of funds. The action was taken based on a complaint by Sandipan Saha, MLA, part of the Ritabrata Banerjee faction. » PAGE 3

Probe Bengal 'encounter', say rights groups

KOLKATA
The Criminal Investigation Department of West Bengal Police started a probe into the alleged encounter of an accused in the rape and murder of a 12-year-old girl in Baruipur in South 24 Parganas district on Friday. Several civil rights organisations, however, raised suspicion and demanded a judicial probe into the incident. » PAGE 3

Burnham set to be appointed U.K. PM on July 20

LONDON
Former Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham is all but certain to be U.K. PM Keir Starmer's successor after he secured the support of 322 of 403 party MPs to stake claim to the office at No. 10 Downing Street. He is expected to be chosen Labour leader by the end of next week and Prime Minister on July 20. » PAGE 12

HC halts byelections in 5 T.N. constituencies

- PIL says notifying bypolls before pending election pleas are cleared may create anomalous situation
- The elected representatives resigned, but their victories are under challenge before the court
- Court grants the respondents time till July 31 to file their counteraffidavits to the main case

Mohamed Imranullah S.
CHENNAI

The Madras High Court on Friday restrained the Election Commission (EC) from notifying byelections to the Tiruchi East, Perundurai, Ambasamudram, Viralimalai, and Karur Assembly constituencies until July 31. The elected representatives have resigned, but their victories are under challenge before the court.

Chief Justice Sushrut Arvind Dharmadhikari and Justice G. Arul Murugan passed the interim order following a public interest litigation (PIL) petition filed by K. Venkatachalapathy of Tirunelveli.

He had contended that the conduct of byelections before the disposal of the election petitions could lead to an anomalous situation of the constituencies being represented by two individuals if the petitions were allowed.

The court passed the interim orders after hearing the preliminary submissions made by senior counsel G. Masilamani for Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay; Advocate-General Vijay Narayan for the Legislative Assembly Secretary; advocate V.R. Shanmuganathan for the PIL petitioner; and EC counsel Niranjan Rajagopalan. The judges granted the respondents time till July 31 to file their counteraffidavits to the main case.

The PIL petitioner had contended that the EC could not treat the vacancies that had arisen due to the resignation of five legislators as a 'clear vacancy' under Section 151A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, since such vacancies would be subject to the result of the election petitions. He claimed that the conduct of byelections to these constituencies would run contrary to three Supreme Court decisions on the matter.

His counsel Mr. Shanmuganathan, argued that the top court had in *Sanjeevayya vs Election Commission of India* (1967), *Election Commission of India vs Telangana Rashtra Samithi* (2011), and *Pramod Laxman Gudadhe vs Election Commission of India* (2018), had held that byelections could not be conducted if election petitions related to those constituencies were pending adjudication.

He said that all five election petitioners who were the candidates in Tiruchi East, Perundurai, Ambasamudram, Viralimalai, and Karur in the election held this year, had not only challenged the victory of the returned candidates but also sought a consequential prayer to declare those election petitioners as the winning candidates.

'Great confusion'

Therefore, conducting byelections to those constituencies even before the disposal of the election petitions would cause great confusion owing to the election of the new representatives, he said. On the other hand, the A-G said, there must be a distinction between those who had resigned before the filing of the election petitions and those who had resigned after they were filed.

He said the Chief Minister had resigned from Tiruchi (East) on May 10 itself, but his rival candidate S. Inigo Irudayaraj had filed the election petition much later. Pointing out that a few others, too, had resigned much before the filing of the election petitions challenging their victory, the A-G sought time to file a detailed counter-affidavit to the PIL petition.

On his part, Mr. Masilamani, representing Mr. Vijay, questioned the *locus standi* of the PIL petitioner to dictate what the EC must do or what it must not do. The senior counsel said the PIL petition was premature since the EC had not taken any decision so far on conducting byelections to the five constituencies, and no notification to that effect had been issued.

After hearing all of them, the Chief Justice's Bench said that in matters touching upon the purity of the democratic process, a narrow and pedantic interpretation of *locus standi* could not be applied. The judges, however, agreed that the A-G's nuanced arguments concerning the date on which the vacancy had arisen compared with the dates on which the election petitions had been filed required a deeper examination. It decided to pass final orders on the PIL petition after issuance of notice to all the respondents and filing of counter-affidavits by them.

Five seats in limbo

MLAs who resigned after winning the 2026 Assembly election; the election results are under challenge before the Madras High Court

Tiruchi East C. Joseph Vijay (TVK)
Perundurai S. Jayakumar (AIADMK)
Ambasamudram Esakki Subaya (AIADMK)
Viralimalai C. Vijayabaskar (AIADMK)
Karur M.R. Vijayabhaskar (AIADMK)

Govt. defends E20, admits mileage may drop by 3-5%

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

While admitting that E20-blended fuel could result in a 3%-5% reduction in the fuel economy of "some vehicles", the government has sought to explain why the blended fuel is not currently cheaper than pure petrol or fuel with lower ethanol levels.

The core reason, it said, was that the government is seeking to compensate farmers adequately, and so E20 fuel becomes relatively more expensive to produce than pure petrol whenever oil prices fall to around $70 a barrel.

This statement, issued on Friday as an FAQ document by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, comes at a time when critics are questioning why fuel with 20% ethanol is not cheaper than pure petrol or fuel with 10% ethanol.

The document added that E20 fuel has a higher-octane rating and provides several other vehicular and emission-related advantages over unblended fuel.

"It is true that in some vehicles there may be a 3-5% reduction in fuel economy," the Ministry said. "But mileage is only one parameter. E20 offers a significantly higher-octane rating, superior anti-knock characteristics, faster combustion, better pickup, smoother acceleration and cleaner engine operation."

"It produces negligible particulate emissions and substantially reduces life-cycle carbon emissions by around 40%," it added.

"Today, the government purchases ethanol at remunerative prices so that Indian farmers are fairly compensated," it said. "Take maize-based ethanol. We have progressively increased its procurement price and today it is around ₹71.86 per litre, even before GST, transportation, storage and depot handling costs." "Therefore, if international crude oil is trading at around $70 per barrel, E20 is actually costlier to produce than pure petrol," the government explained.

However, it added that the price advantage of ethanol kicks in when crude oil prices reach $120-130 per barrel, as the economics naturally reverse and ethanol becomes even cheaper.

The fact that 20% of the fuel sold in India is ethanol has also insulated the Indian market against global oil price volatility and allowed the Indian government to pass on much lower fuel price hikes than in comparable nations.

Overall, the government also sought to assure the public that the decision to move to ethanol-blended fuel was not a "rushed" one.

"This has been a journey spanning over two decades from pilot projects in 2001, policy notification in 2013, institutional reforms after 2018, massive investments beginning in 2021, and then a carefully calibrated, phased increase in blending levels," the document said.

The document added that all stakeholders, including automobile manufacturing companies, testing agencies, oil marketing companies, and the Department of Food and Public Distribution, were consulted before rollout.

Youth Congress workers protest in Delhi on Friday against the Centre's E20 fuel policy. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Catholic body flags concerns over FCRA Bill to Amit Shah

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) submitted a memorandum against the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, to Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday, Jonathan Lalremruata, adviser to the CBCI, said.

Cardinal Anthony Poola, Metropolitan Archbishop of Hyderabad and CBCI president, and Anil Couto, Metropolitan Archbishop of Delhi, were present at the meeting. They wanted to raise concerns about the Bill and the FCRA Amendment Rules.

FULL REPORT ON » PAGE 4

IITs, IIMs, Central varsities push back against VBSA norms

Abhinay Lakshman
NEW DELHI

Institutes of National Importance (INIs), including IITs and IIMs, have pushed back against the Centre's Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025, asking to be exempted from many provisions of the Bill that intends to overhaul India's higher education regulatory framework.

These institutes, along with Central Universities, have cited the need to protect institutional autonomy, flagging contradictions in the Bill and criticising aspects such as the provisions for centralisation.

The Bill is under review by a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) headed by BJP MP D. Purandeswari. Submissions to the JPC show that the NDA-ruled States of Andhra Pradesh, Meghalaya, and Madhya Pradesh have objected to the provisions, as reported by *The Hindu* on Friday.

The Bill seeks to repeal statutory Acts governing the UGC, AICTE, and NCTE , and replace them with a single apex body. FILE PHOTO

Structural overhaul

The Bill proposes a structural overhaul of higher education in the country by repealing the statutory Acts governing the University Grants Commission, the All India Council for Technical Education, and the National Council for Teacher Education and replacing them with a single apex body called the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan, with regulatory, accreditation, and standards councils under it.

The government has defended the Bill by citing Clause 49, which promises to protect the autonomy of INIs and Institutes of Eminence.

The IITs, IIMs, along with institutes such as the Indian Institutes of Information Technology and IISERs, called for the Bill to explicitly include language exempting these institutes from the scope of the new regulatory structure.

While IIT-Kanpur, IIT-Hyderabad, IIM-Sambalpur, and IISER, Mohali, sought total exemption, IIT Madras said the IITs should be excluded from certain clauses on regulatory approvals for online programmes, opening new colleges, and the applicability of the Bill's penalty provisions.

Several other IITs, IIMs, and IISERs have expressed the need to ensure complete institutional autonomy for research, curriculum, and academic activities. The IIT-Dhanbad, IISER, Kolkata, and the University of Hyderabad have pointed out that there are other provisions in the Bill which imply that the new Bill will take precedence over the laws under which the IITs, IIMs, and IISERs were set up.

Graded penalty system

The IIT Bombay has questioned the logic of leaving law and medicine out of the Bill's scope.

Several institutes have criticised the proposed penalty structure. The Bill introduces a graded penalty system that could go up to ₹75 lakh in fines and/or closure of the institution.

While IIT Madras submitted that IITs should be left out of the clause, the University of Hyderabad suggested that penalties of a particular amount and above should be imposed only after the decision of an "independent adjudicator".

The Central Tribal University (CTU) of Andhra Pradesh, however, cautioned that the penalty clause could have "differential and unintended" consequences for small and rural institutions serving tribal or underserved areas. It said these institutes may fall short on indicators such as availability of faculty but "not due to institutional negligence, but because of structural and regional constraints".

IIT Madras said the idea of the envisioned single, unified, and institutional accreditation body may not be adequate to deal with the performance of different types of higher educational institutions in the country.

Hasina plans return to Bangladesh in Dec.

Reuters
NEW DELHI

Ousted Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, facing a death sentence back home where her party is banned, said she and senior party colleagues plan to return from exile in India around December and surrender.

The South Asian nation's longest-serving leader said she and members of her Awami League aim to return voluntarily to the country they left two years ago and present themselves in court, testing the current government's handling of its most prominent political opponent.

"They may arrest me on my return, they may even kill me," Ms. Hasina, 78, said in the nearly hour-long telephone interview late on Thursday and into Friday.

"Still, I have to go," she said. "My party leaders and workers are being subjected to tremendous repression. If death comes, I want it to come on my own soil, where my parents are buried and where their blood was shed."

Ms. Hasina left Bangladesh in 2024 after protests ended her 20 years as Prime Minister across multiple terms.

INBRIEF

Bihar CM transfers ₹1,423 cr. to 97.84 lakh beneficiaries

Bihar Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary on Friday transferred ₹1,423.94 crore via Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) to the accounts of 97.84 lakh social security pensioners from his official residence Lok Sevak Awas. The transfer includes payments for June under the State pension schemes, and for May and June under the three National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) pension scheme. The CM announced that the 10th of every month would henceforth be observed as 'Bihar Pension Day'. "It will be ensured that pension amounts reach the bank accounts of all eligible pensioners in the State via DBT on this day," he added.

Former corporator in police custody for assaulting doctor

A sessions court in Thane district on Friday remanded former Shiv Sena (Shinde faction) corporator Ramesh Mhatre to four days of police custody, till July 13, in connection with the alleged assault of a woman doctor on duty at a hospital in Dombivli. The court order came after Mr. Mhatre, who had admitted himself to a hospital citing chest pain, was declared medically fit for custody following an examination. Mr. Mhatre was arrested on Wednesday. According to the police, the incident occurred at a hospital in Shastrinagar, Dombivli, following a dispute over the treatment of a patient.

BJP's Kumar withdraws from bypoll, party fields new Bankipur candidate

Candidate Abhishek Kumar, alias Bunty, withdraws citing family reasons; some party insiders say Bunty was considered a weak candidate against Jan Suraaj Party (JSP) founder Prashant Kishor

Amit Bhelari
PATNA

In an embarrassing situation for the Bharatiya Janata Party in Bihar, Abhishek Kumar, alias Bunty, its candidate for the Bankipur Assembly byelection, withdrew from the polls a day after filing his nomination papers. The BJP candidate submitted the withdrawal letter on Friday to Bihar unit president Sanjay Saraogi.

Soon after the withdrawal, BJP's Central Election Committee announced the name of Neeraj Kumar Sinha as candidate for the bypoll. A resident of Nalanda district, Mr. Sinha has been mandal president twice and currently serves as president of Narendra Bharti Mandal. Earlier, he also held the post of Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM) district vice-president.

While addressing presspersons, Mr. Bunty said, "I am unable to contest the bypoll due to family reasons and I am grateful to the Central and State leadership of NDA who gave me the opportunity to become the candidate."

Bihar BJP unit chief Sanjay Saraogi, left, with Niraj Kumar Sinha, the new candidate from the Bankipur seat. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Party insiders said Mr. Bunty was considered a weak candidate against Jan Suraaj Party (JSP) founder Prashant Kishor. It is also being said that Mr. Kishor has in his possession documents of Mr. Bunty's alleged dubious financial transactions, which forced him to withdraw from the poll battle.

Mr. Kishor will file his nomination on July 13.

BJP stronghold

The seat had fallen vacant after the then BJP MLA Nitin Nabin was first nominated as party's national president and later, elected to the Rajya Sabha in April.

Bankipur Assembly constituency in Patna has been a stronghold of the BJP. Mr. Nabin won the seat in the 2025 Assembly election for the fifth consecutive term by defeating Opposition Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) candidate Rekha Kumari with over 51,000 votes. JSP candidate Vandana Kumari had finished third in the poll. Mr. Nabin's father, Navin Kishore Prasad Sinha, held the seat since 1995.

Reacting over the withdrawal of BJP candidate, Mr. Kishor who was busy in campaign told presspersons, "There is no power greater than the power of the people. Until now, people used to flee out of fear of the BJP, but for the first time, justice has been served in that a BJP candidate has fled."

The last date to file the nomination is July 13 and so far, 17 candidates have filed the nomination including Opposition RJD candidate Rekha Gupta. Polling will be held on July 30, and counting of votes will take place on August 3.

Datia byelection: BJP picks debutant over Narottam Mishra; his supporters upset

Mehul Malpani
BHOPAL

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has fielded Ashutosh Tiwari for byelection to Datia Assembly Constituency in Madhya Pradesh, ending days of speculation that former State Home Minister Narottam Mishra would be fielded again.

Mr. Mishra, a three-term MLA from Datia, lost to Congress' Rajendra Bharti in the 2023 Assembly poll. Mr. Bharti's legislative membership was, however, cancelled in April 2026, after he was convicted and sentenced to three years in prison by a special MP/MLA court in Delhi in a bank fraud case from 2015.

Datia will go to byelection on July 30 and the counting of votes will take place on August 3.

The announcement of Mr. Tiwari's name came soon after the Delhi High Court rejected a petition by Mr. Bharti seeking a stay on his conviction.

Mr. Tiwari, a debutant, is considered close to former Chief Minister Uma Bharti.

The candidate selection has come as a surprise to many in the State BJP as

Narottam Mishra

speculations of Mr. Mishra's candidature had been doing rounds since the announcement of the polls.

After Mr. Mishra was denied ticket, his supporters staged a demonstration in Datia and raised slogans against the State BJP leadership. Several BJP functionaries, councillors and local representatives in Datia, including district president Raghuvir Singh Kushwaha, resigned from their posts as a mark of protest.

Mr. Kushwaha also said that if Mr. Mishra is not made party's candidate "within 24 hours, they will also resign from the primary membership of the party". Party insiders told *The Hindu* that the decision on candidate selection may have been taken based on local feedback from party workers as well as speculation that the Congress would field someone from Mr. Bharti's family.

'People know who abandoned them': DMK hits back at Vijay over Karur stampede remarks

The Hindu Bureau
THOOTHUKUDI

DMK deputy general secretary and Thoothukudi MP Kanimozhi Karunanidhi on Friday hit back at Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay over his remarks on Karur stampede, saying people know very well "who stood by them and who abandoned them in their time of suffering and ran away from the scene".

Addressing mediapersons in Thoothukudi, she said the MLAs and Ministers of TVK are repeatedly visiting places they ought not to visit thereby creating problems for the people there. "They are visiting schools and behaving in a manner that affects the mental well-being of children and causes them distress," she said.

"When even the Chief Minister engages in such

DMK MP Kanimozhi Karunanidhi said TVK MLAs and Ministers are repeatedly visiting places they are not supposed to and 'creating problems for the people there'. FILE PHOTO

actions, people begin to question the direction in which this government is heading, as sensitivity is an important thing," Ms. Kanimozhi pointed.

Responding to the media's question on CM's remarks on the stampede, she said it is better to refrain from commenting on the issue, stating, "Everyone must understand the responsibilities entrusted to them. I do not wish to say much more about the issue, as it is currently under investigation. At least I feel it would be responsible on my part not to comment on the matter and I believe that would be the right course of action."

'Fled the scene'

"However, people very well know who stood with them during that time, who helped them and who left them to suffer and fled the scene," Ms. Kanimozhi said.

'*Satluj* reopens old wounds but ban may be counterproductive'

The Hindu Bureau
CHANDIGARH

The controversy over *Satluj*, the film pulled off an OTT platform within two days of its release over security concerns, has reopened old wounds - the dark phase of militancy in Punjab and the allegations of police excesses used to crush it, according to former Union Law Minister Ashwani Kumar.

Mr. Kumar, a veteran of Punjab politics, said the apprehension that the film could inflame passions could not be dismissed in the current climate, even though he cautioned that taking it down may prove counterproductive.

"The controversy has two aspects," he told *The Hindu*, adding, "One is the right of people to be informed and the right of free expression of the filmmakers. But no right is an

Former Union Law Minister Ashwani Kumar

absolute right."

"A film revisiting the period when terrorism was at its peak and when certain strong-arm methods could have been used by the police may trigger the rise of radical sentiments. Sagacity demands that old wounds are not reopened," he said.

However, he added a sudden ban is likely to be counterproductive because more and more people will find ways to watch the film.

'Polygamy practitioners to lose govt. jobs': BJP govt. proposes strict rules in Assam budget

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

The Assam government has proposed to amend its service rules to dismiss any employee found to have practised polygamy.

In his budget speech in the 126-member House on Friday, Finance Minister Jayanta Mallabaruah said the government would amend the Assam Services (Discipline and Appeal) Rules, 1964, to make any polygamist government service liable for dismissal from service.

The Minister also said any male practising polygamy in the State would not be eligible for benefits under any government welfare scheme. "This is keeping with our unwavering commitment to women empowerment, gender justice, and responsible family values," he said.

CM Himanta Biswa Sarma and State Finance Minister Jayanta Mallabaruah before the budget presentation in Guwahati on Friday. ANI

The government also proposed making any person convicted of any offence under any criminal law ineligible for any benefits under notified welfare schemes "to promote integrity and responsible citizenship".

Proposes green cess

Meanwhile, the government has proposed a 'green cess' on identified polluting industrial units and activities.

Mr. Mallabaruah said, the principle that those who cause environmental degradation should also contribute towards its mitigation guided the green cess decision. He said the green cess would be levied on stone crushers, coke-based industries, brick kilns, transfer of second-hand vehicles, commercial extraction of groundwater and such other environmentally sensitive industries and activities as may be notified by the government.

Protests over Ken-Betwa river link project resume in M.P.

Mehul Malpani
BHOPAL

Residents of several villages, mostly tribals, who are allegedly being impacted by the Ken-Betwa river linking project, have resumed their agitation in Chhatarpur district after talks with officials failed to reach a consensus.

Protesters have launched a symbolic agitation by placing hanging noose around their necks. The protest that has been going on the banks of the Barana river near Kupi village has entered its fifth day on Friday.

Earlier in April, the protesters demonstrated for days by lying on symbolic pyres over water, which had gained national attention.

The protesters complained of inadequate reha-

Tribal woman during a symbolic "hanging satyagraha" against the Ken-Betwa project in Chhatarpur on Friday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

bilitation package. Several villagers have also been left out of the rehabilitation plan of the Ken-Betwa project, and Majhgaon and Runjh irrigation projects. They are demanding that their rehabilitation package be increased from ₹12.5 lakh to ₹25 lakh.

Chhatarpur Collector Parth Jaiswal, however, told *The Hindu* that the people protesting "are not being impacted by the Ken-Betwa project".

"There are about 100 people protesting now and all of them are from Panna. None of them are impacted by Ken-Betwa, but by the other two irrigation projects. They are demanding that their rehabilitation package should be like the Ken-Betwa. We have sent teams of officials from both districts to talk to them," he said.

Mr. Jaiswal said after the April protest, a fresh survey was conducted and about 750 families were added to the rehabilitation plan of Majhgaon and Runjh projects.

"The State Cabinet this week has also passed a resolution to increase the amount of rehabilitation package [for Majhgaon and Runjh projects] by about ₹300 crore. Their compensation has been increased from ₹5 lakh to ₹12.5 lakh. We have communicated it to them," he said.

Mr. Jaiswal also said that the villagers are "being misled" by some local activists who are using the site of Ken-Betwa project for the protests. "The demands that are being raised now are not valid," he added.

Flagged off by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on December 25, 2024, the Ken-Betwa link project is the first of 30 such link projects under a National Perspective Plan (NPP) for water resources development and interlinking of rivers with 'surplus water' to those with 'deficit water'.

However, residents of several villages in Chhatarpur and Panna districts have long been protesting the projects over fears of displacement and demanding better rehabilitation and improved compensation. Various environmentalists, including Former Union Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh, have also expressed concerns over its potential impact on environment, local ecology and wildlife as a large part of the project falls inside the Panna National Park and Tiger Reserve.

Assets worth ₹3,800 cr. attached in online betting app case: ED

Shubhomoy Sikdar
RAIPUR

The Directorate of Enforcement (ED) here on Friday said the total value of properties attached, seized or frozen in alleged illegal betting operations has gone up to approximately ₹3,800 crore.

In a statement issued on Friday, the agency said that its Raipur Zonal Office has issued another provisional attachment order under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002, attaching movable and immovable properties of businessman Vikas Garg, his family members and entities owned and controlled by him, having a total value of approximately

The ED issued the statement a day after its counsel said that Saurabh Chandrakar was traced to Oman. FILE PHOTO

₹940.77 crore.

"The attached properties include residential properties, land parcels, equity shares and other securities. The attachment forms part of the ongoing money laundering investigation in the Mahadev Online Book / Skyexchange illegal online betting case," said an ED official, adding that this was in addition to the movable and immovable properties worth ₹2,825 crore (approximately), including foreign assets, that "had been attached/seized/frozen in this case earlier".

The statement was issued by the ED a day after its counsel said that Saurabh Chandrakar, the alleged kingpin of the Mahadev betting scam, was traced to Oman and efforts were on for his extradition. The official said investigation revealed that the betting syndicate operates through a franchise-based 'panel' network run from abroad and was generating proceeds of crime (PoCs) of more than ₹450 crore per month from illegal betting operations.

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Man hurls papers at SC Bench after incoherent address

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday decided not to take action against a man who hurled a bundle of paper towards a Bench during a hearing.

A litigant addressed a Supreme Court Bench of Justices K.V. Viswanathan and Alok Aradhe incoherently for a few minutes before hurling a bundle of papers towards the Bench earlier in the day. The papers flew into the air inside the courtroom. Security personnel immediately apprehended the man and led him away as the two judges and a stunned courtroom looked on.

The man, identified as Prabal Pratap, addressed the Bench as "Mr. Judicial Servant" while "ordering" the judges to take action against a senior police officer based in Lucknow.

Justice Viswanathan initially intervened to ask the man whether he was actually "ordering" the Bench. In response, the man gave a garbled reply about being "sovereign" before abruptly saying, "That is all from my side. Everything is on record." He then took loose papers from a file and threw them towards the Bench. Security personnel intervened within moments.

A court order, published in the evening, conveyed the decision of the Bench not to take any action against Mr. Pratap despite the fact that he made "unparliamentary utterances". "We, considering the condition of the petitioner, do not propose to take any action against him. As far as the merit of this case is concerned... we find no good ground to interfere with the judgment," the order dismissing the petition read.

The incident is reminiscent of a similar one in October last year when a lawyer flung an object at a Bench headed by the then Chief Justice of India, Justice B.R. Gavai. The lawyer had shouted slogans of "Sanatana Dharma" as he was escorted out by security personnel. Justice Gavai had brushed aside the incident and declined to initiate contempt proceedings against the man.

In 2009, a woman threw a slipper at Justice Arijit Pasayat (now retired) during the hearing of a contempt case. The slipper missed the judge, who ducked in time. The woman was taken into custody.

Police freeze 12 Trinamool accounts with ₹1,000 crore

The action follows complaints of illegal diversion of funds; the ED had earlier frozen three party accounts with ₹440 cr.; HC to hear case on Monday; MP asks ED when it will 'seize temple funds'

Senjuti Sengupta
KOLKATA

The West Bengal Police on Friday froze 12 more bank accounts of the Trinamool Congress with deposits of over ₹1,000 crore, following complaints of illegal diversion of funds.

The police, and later the Enforcement Directorate, had earlier frozen the party's three bank accounts with ₹440 crore. The Trinamool then challenged the police order in the Calcutta High Court, which allowed the party to withdraw money from the accounts under judicial supervision.

Party chief Mamata Banerjee moved the court on Friday, challenging the ED action.

According to police officials, the 12 accounts were frozen after the cybercrime unit of the Bidhannagar Police sent a notice to several national and private banks. "We have also sought the details of those accounts. For now, they have suspended those accounts for investigation purposes," an officer said.

The action came on an FIR registered on a complaint by Sandipan Saha, who has now joined the Ritabrata Banerjee-led faction.

The action came on a first information report (FIR) registered on a complaint by Sandipan Saha, MLA, who has now joined the Ritabrata Banerjee faction of the Trinamool. He has alleged illegal fund diversion from those accounts. The police have so far recorded the statements of seven MLAs of Mr. Ritabrata's faction over alleged illegal transactions.

After the cybercrime unit's FIR, the ED launched a probe in the case and froze the three accounts.

The Central probe agency also conducted a search across five locations in the city on Tuesday and filed another fresh FIR under Section 17 (1-A) of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act. (The section authorises the ED to freeze an asset, such as a bank deposit, when physical seizure is not practical)

On Friday, advocate Kishore Datta filed another petition on behalf of the Mamata Banerjee-led group, stating that the latest FIR by the ED posed hurdles to the party in withdrawing money.

The court is scheduled to hear the matter on Monday. On Thursday, Justice Saugata Bhattacharya-led Bench of the High Court allowed the Trinamool to operate the three accounts for the party's day-to-day administrative purposes. However, the transactions will be under the oversight of a special judicial officer, retired Justice Subrata Talukdar, the court said.

Derek O'Brien's poser

The Trinamool Rajya Sabha leader, Derek O'Brien, questioned the ED action, asking when it would freeze "temple funds", in an apparent reference to the alleged embezzlement of donations at the Ram temple in Ayodhya. "ED freezes TMC's 3 bank accounts with HDFC. When will ED freeze temple funds," he posted on X.

Trinamool leader Kunal Ghosh criticised Mr. Ritabrata's "double standard". "If Trinamool's bank account is problematic and the funds within it are illicit, then why did you [Mr. Ritabrata], two months prior, accept ₹25 lakh from that very account," Mr. Ghosh asked.

(With PTI inputs)

Couple arrested in Manipur over killing of six Naga persons

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

A joint team of the Manipur Police, National Investigation Agency, and Central Reserve Police Force on Friday arrested a couple for their alleged involvement in the killing of six Liangmai Naga civilians more than a month ago.

In a statement, the police said Pradip and his wife, Ayingbi, alias Mangaih, were arrested from Leilon Vaiphei village in the Kuki-dominated Kangpokpi district early in the morning. Both are residents of the village, located less than 30 km northwest of the State's capital, Imphal.

"They were identified by the families of the victims. [Their involvement was] also established in the NIA evidence," Manipur's Director-General of Police, Mukesh Singh, said. The police said they had carried out search-and-seizure procedures, while legal formalities were under way.

The six were among 48 people – 28 Kukis and 20 Nagas – abducted hours after unidentified gunmen ambushed and killed three church leaders from the

The six were among 48 people abducted after an ambush in Kangpokpi district on May 13.

Thadou community in Kangpokpi district on May 13. Eighteen of the 20 Nagas were abducted from Leilon Vaiphei village.

The Thadous are divided over their ethnic affiliation to the Kuki group.

The Kuki abductors released 14 Nagas and the Naga abductors released 14 Kukis in a hostage exchange deal on May 13. Among the Nagas released were the 12 abducted from Leilon Vaiphei.

Following appeals by various church organisations and the government's assurance to establish the identity of the six missing Nagas, the Nagas released the remaining 14 Kuki hostages on June 9. Security personnel recovered the bodies of the six Nagas from Kangpokpi district on June 10.

Submit voice sample by July 15, court tells Abhishek

The Hindu Bureau
KOLKATA

The Calcutta High Court on Friday directed Trinamool Congress general secretary Abhishek Banerjee to submit his voice sample to a judicial magistrate by July 15 in a case involving alleged intimidating comments he made during the 2026 West Bengal Assembly election campaign.

Justice Saugata Bhattacharyya expressed dissatisfaction over Mr. Banerjee's failure in providing his voice sample to the police in the ongoing case.

"When will you appear to give your voice sample? Otherwise, I will recall this order [to give interim protection against coercive action]. I will prepone the hearing... I have already given protection subject to cooperation. I will withdraw the protection," Justice Bhattacharyya said.

Civil rights bodies demand judicial investigation into Bengal 'encounter'

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

The Criminal Investigation Department of West Bengal Police started a probe into the alleged encounter of an accused in the rape and murder of a 12-year-old girl in Baruipur in South 24 Parganas district with a team of forensic experts visiting the site of the incident on Friday. Several civil rights organisations, however, raised suspicions about the incident and demanded a judicial investigation into the alleged encounter.

The West Bengal Police have taken five more suspects into custody over the mob violence that erupted after the body of the 12-year-old girl was found in Baruipur, raising the total arrests in the case to 35, officials said on Friday.

The five were arrested during overnight raids, officials said, adding that efforts are under way to apprehend other accused.

Forensic team at the site where Prabhas Mondal, an accused in the Baruipur rape-murder case, was killed in an 'encounter'. PTI

Four first information reports (FIRs) have been registered, one in the rape and murder of the 12-year-old girl, and three more in the violence, attack on police outpost and lynching of a youth.

In the rape and murder case, police so far arrested four persons - prime accused Anand Sardar, Prabhas Mondal, Dibakar Sardar, and Kabir Molla. Mondal was killed in a police 'encounter' on Tuesday night after he allegedly attempted to snatch a service firearm from a police officer and flee during the reconstruction of the crime.

"At this moment, we feel that the encounter was fake. We demand that all the three incidents be investigated by a sitting Calcutta High Court judge," Ranajit Sur, vice-president of Association for Protection of Democratic Rights (APDR), said.

"It is hoped that the Chief Minister will abide by the Supreme Court's directives, ensure a genuine investigation into the encounter death, take appropriate action, and secure exemplary punishment for the guilty through due legal process for all crimes, including the rape-murder in Baruipur and deaths caused by mob lynching," said Subha Protim Roy Chowdhury of *Amra Ek Sachetan Prayas*.

"In accordance with the Constitution, the Supreme Court's *PUCL v. Maharashtra (2014)* and *DK Basu v. Govt. of West Bengal (1997)* and National Human Rights Commission guidelines on encounter death, an FIR should be lodged against the Baruipur police in the killing of Prabhas Mondal," Mr. Roy said.

Kirity Roy of MASUM said the police reconstruction of crime without any cameras at 1 a.m. is not possible.

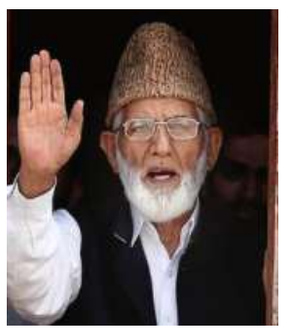
NIA files chargesheet against six separatist leaders in 1996 Kashmir mob violence case

The Hindu Bureau
SRINAGAR

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Friday filed a chargesheet against six senior separatist Hurriyat Conference leaders in connection with a 1996 case of mob violence and indiscriminate firing on police personnel in Srinagar. Three of the accused had passed away during the proceedings.

Those named are Democratic Freedom Party chief Shabir Ahmad Shah, Tehreek-e-Hurriyat leader Syed Ali Shah Geelani, J&K People's Conference founder Abdul Ganie Lone, J&K Liberation Front leader Javid Ahmad Mir, Islamic Students League chairman Shakeel Ahmad Bakshi, and Mohammad Yaqoob Wakeel.

The NIA said all the six separatist leaders were


Tehreek-e-Hurriyat leader Syed Ali Shah Geelani has also been named in the chargesheet.

charged under relevant provisions of the Ranbir Penal Code, 1989, for criminal conspiracy, attempt to murder, rioting, and assault on public servants, along with Section 13 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967.

"The charges against Syed Ali Shah Geelani, Abdul Ganie Lone and Mohd. Yaqoob Wakeel stand abated as they had passed away during the pendency of the proceedings. However, the chargesheet clearly established their roles in the criminal conspiracy and the common object of the unlawful assembly, along with supporting evidence," the NIA said.

According to the agency, it was ascertained during the investigation that all the six accused had led an unlawful assembly and instigated large-scale violence against police personnel during a funeral procession of terrorist Hilal Ahmad Beigh at Naaz Crossing, Srinagar, on July 17, 1996.

The investigation agency said the chargesheeted leaders had actively incited the violence, raising anti-India, pro-Pakistan and secessionist slogans. They had delivered inflammatory speeches advocating an armed struggle.

Mayawati, Azad spar over protests for rights of marginalised sections

Mayank Kumar
LUCKNOW

The issue of a Dalit girl's "murder" in Meerut and subsequent protests by the community members led to a war of words with the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) president Mayawati on Friday urging Dalits and other marginalised sections to fight "injustice through constitutional means" and refrain from taking to the streets, asserting that political empowerment through the ballot remains the key to securing their rights.

Ms. Mayawati, without naming any political party, hit out at the Congress and Aazad Samaj Party (ASP) chief Chandrashekhar Aazad, alleging that certain organisations and political parties first instigate violence and later their leaders visit the affected areas to "shed crocodile tears".

> They are saying that for justice, go to the court. It will take 10 years to get justice... should we remain silent?
> **CHANDRASHEKHAR AAZAD**
> Aazad Samaj Party chief

"Certain organisations and political parties, driven by narrow political interests, mislead and provoke members of the oppressed communities into launching protests. Such organisations, first instigate violence, disturbances and road blockades, and later their leaders visit the affected areas to shed crocodile tears and derive political mileage from the incidents," she said in a statement.

Mr. Aazad hit back at her saying, "We come to shed crocodile tears, You also come and shed crocodile tears, who is stopping you? They are saying that for justice go to the court, go to the Supreme Court. It will take 10 years to get justice, till then the honour of our sisters and daughters keep getting harassed kept getting looted and should we remain silent?" he said.

In the present case, a 20-year-old final-year BA student went missing on May 15 after leaving home for an exam. Days later her body was recovered from a sugarcane field. Police arrested the victim's alleged boyfriend, Ankush, who was later released on bail.

Dalit groups and the victim's family alleged involvement of more persons and protested outside the Collectorate on July 8 and 9. The police lathi-charged the gathering, took seven persons into custody and filed cases against approximately 50 unidentified persons.

On Friday, the police placed several Congress leaders, including former Meerut district president Avnish Kajla, former MLA Gajraj Singh, Zahid Ansari and city chief Ranjan Sharma, under house arrest.

PM's New Zealand visit will unlock new avenues of cooperation: govt.

Press Trust of India
AUCKLAND

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday arrived in New Zealand on the final leg of his three-nation visit.

He will hold talks with his counterpart Christopher Luxon and address the Indian diaspora in New Zealand.

Mr. Luxon received Mr. Modi at the airport. "This visit is historic, being the first Prime Ministerial visit to New Zealand in four decades. I look forward to holding talks with Prime Minister Luxon and discussing the complete range of the India-NZ friendship," Mr. Modi said in a post on X.

Boosting trade ties

During his two-day visit, he will hold talks with Mr. Luxon on ways to enhance economic, trade and commercial engagements.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with his New Zealand counterpart Christopher Luxon at the Auckland airport on Friday. ANI

In a post on X, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said: "This historic visit is set to strengthen bilateral ties and unlock new avenues of cooperation across several areas especially trade, defence, sports, culture, education, and people-to-people exchanges."

Mr. Modi arrived in New Zealand after concluding a three-day visit to Australia, where he held summit talks with Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. Both leaders reinforced the vital role of the bilateral partnership in ensuring a peaceful Indo-Pacific.

A major highlight of the summit talks between the two leaders was their focus on significantly ramping up defence ties, especially in the maritime domain. An agreement on civil nuclear energy to facilitate the commercial supply of uranium from Australia to India to fuel New Delhi's nuclear power projects was sealed after over two years of negotiations.

He also met Australia's Leader of the Opposition Angus Taylor on Friday and discussed bilateral ties.

Mr. Modi was in Indonesia before that, where 14 agreements were inked to boost cooperation in critical minerals, maritime security, and other key sectors.

Suspend, not remove, high functionaries after 30 days in jail: parliamentary panel

Draft report backs objective of preventing 'governance from jail', but seeks to dilute the Bill's arrest-based trigger, which can unseat a PM, CM or Minister; panel records concern that mechanism could be misused against Opposition leaders; most BJP rivals have boycotted the joint committee

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

A Joint Parliamentary Committee examining the Constitution (One Hundred and Thirtieth Amendment) Bill has recommended replacing the provision for automatic "removal" of a Prime Minister, Chief Minister or Minister after 30 consecutive days in judicial custody with "suspension", though the immediate consequence in both cases would be that the public functionary demits office.

Most Opposition parties, arguing that the Bill was driven by "malicious intent", had declined to join the panel headed by BJP MP Aparajita Sarangi.

The proposed constitutional amendment seeks to address what the government describes as a vacuum in cases where public functionaries continue in office during prolonged incarceration.

The panel has made five recommendations. These include replacing the Bill's provisions for a Minister's "removal" or requirement to "cease to be a Minister" with "suspension". The recommendation follows submissions from stakeholders that terms such as "removed" and "shall cease to be a Minister" carried "an unwarranted air of finality and stigma". By contrast, suspension is seen as a reversible measure, akin to service rules that place government employees under suspension after prolonged detention without presuming guilt.

Joint Parliamentary Committee chairperson Aparajita Sarangi (centre) addressing a press conference in New Delhi in June. PTI

Constitution silent

The committee has also recommended defining "serious criminal offences" as offences punishable with imprisonment of five years or more. It proposed an automatic reversal clause under which suspension would lapse upon discharge, acquittal, or failure of the prosecution to proceed within a specified period.

The panel called for fast-track courts to hear cases involving high constitutional functionaries and for a separate schedule listing offences that would attract the proposed provisions.

According to the committee's draft report, there was broad agreement among stakeholders that the Constitution and the Representation of the People Act, 1951, are presently silent on the consequences of a sitting Prime Minister, Chief Minister, or Minister being arrested and held in custody on serious criminal charges.

However, the report notes that the sharpest disagreements centred on the mechanism chosen by the Bill rather than its objective. "Notably, even within the supportive cluster, no stakeholder defended the Bill's present formulation without qualification; and even within the critical cluster, no stakeholder rejected the legislative objective itself," the report says. "The disagreement lies overwhelmingly in the design of the trigger mechanism and the safeguards attending it, not in the underlying policy goal."

The Union Home Ministry, the Ministry of Law and Justice, the 23rd Law Commission, and the State governments of Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh have broadly supported the Bill, treating it as a legitimate and overdue constitutional response to "governance from jail" and as an extension of constitutional morality.

Problematic clause

The most contested provision was the Bill's trigger mechanism, under which a public functionary would automatically lose office after spending 30 continuous days in custody in connection with offences punishable with five years' imprisonment or more.

The report says that "an overwhelming majority of stakeholders", including institutions otherwise supportive of the legislation, found the trigger constitutionally problematic because it was not linked to any judicial finding of guilt.

It notes that law universities, civil society organisations, and political parties repeatedly argued that arrest is "an executive/procedural device" and "is not a judicial determination of guilt". Consequently, attaching constitutional consequences to custody rather than conviction or even trial "risks treating an unproven accusation as a *de facto* disqualification".

Several institutions, including NALSAR, Hyderabad; National Law University, Delhi; West Bengal National University of Juridical Science, Kolkata; and the Association for Democratic Reforms proposed shifting the trigger to the stage of framing of charges by a court.

Several stakeholders argued that the five-year threshold was "poorly calibrated" and inconsistent with other laws that use a seven-year threshold for serious offences. Some pointed out that the provision could cover more than 140 offences, many of which have no direct connection with probity in public life.

The committee rejected the demand to raise the threshold to seven years but recommended a separate schedule of offences punishable with five years or more in prison.

The panel also recorded concerns that the mechanism could be misused against non-BJP-ruled States through the actions of Central investigative agencies.

Congress urges NDA State govts. to resist higher education Bill

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Jairam Ramesh

Congress general secretary (communications) Jairam Ramesh on Friday urged NDA-ruled States, particularly Andhra Pradesh, to oppose the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill when it comes up during the Monsoon Session of Parliament.

Sharing *The Hindu's* report on consultations held by the Joint Parliamentary Committee examining the Bill, where NDA-ruled States have objected to many provisions in the Bill that lead to greater centralisation of higher education, Mr. Ramesh called upon these governments to submit dissent notes and resist what he termed "Very Bad Shiksha Act".

Andhra Pradesh has presented the strongest objections to the draft legislation. Addressing Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, Mr. Ramesh posted on X that if he believed the Bill harmed States' interests, then he should "stand up boldly and be counted".

He argued that the Bill exceeds Parliament's powers under Entry 66 of the Union List, which is limited to coordination and determination of standards in higher education. According to him, the proposed framework encroaches on the powers of the State governments.

Mr. Ramesh criticised the absence of a dedicated grants council in the new structure. He said the National Education Policy, 2020 had proposed a Higher Education Council of India with four verticals, including one for grant allocation. The Bill, however, provides for only three councils.

As a result, he argued, grant disbursal powers currently exercised by bodies such as the University Grants Commission and the All India Council for Technical Education would shift to the Union Education Ministry, increasing Central control.

Resignations not the answer, judicial probe needed: CPI leader

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Communist Party of India (CPI) on Friday reiterated its demand for a judicial probe into the alleged embezzlement of donations at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, accusing the BJP-led Union government of remaining silent on the issue and seeking accountability from Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Addressing a press conference here, CPI general secretary D. Raja said the Centre had "betrayed the trust of people" and said resignations alone would not suffice.

"The Trust has betrayed the trust of the people. The Trust has become untrustworthy. Mr. Modi is keeping quiet. He has not uttered a word so far. Amit Shah has also not spoken on this issue," he said.

"Our party has been demanding from the very beginning that a high-level judicial probe be conducted. The probe must be completely transparent and nobody should be allowed to go scot-free. Resignations are not the answer," he said.

He also announced a nationwide campaign during which the party will organise *padyatras* and outreach programmes across States to highlight what it described as the Modi government's failure to address issues of livelihood, unemployment, rural distress, and the concerns of workers, farmers, youth, students and women. The campaign will culminate in a rally in Delhi on September 1, he said.

Congress questions govt. on Ram Temple donation theft

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Stepping up its attack over the alleged embezzlement of donations at the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, the Congress on Friday fielded several senior leaders across the country to address press conferences.

Rajya Sabha member Pawan Khera addressed a press conference in Jammu while Lok Sabha member Deepender Hooda spoke to presspersons in Lucknow. The head of the All India Congress Committee's Research Department, Rajeev Gowda, addressed the media in Chennai, while the party's social media head, Supriya Shrinate, raised the issue in Punjab. Senior leader Shaktisinh Gohil held a press conference in Haryana.

Congress leader K.C. Venugopal and AICC in-charge for Uttarakhand Kumari Selja at a press conference in Dehradun on Friday. PTI

In Uttarakhand, Congress general secretary K.C. Venugopal questioned Prime Minister Narendra Modi's silence regarding the alleged theft of offerings and donations at the Ram Temple and demanded a Supreme Court-monitored investigation into the matter. He said for several years, the BJP, RSS, and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) had been collecting donations in the name of the Ram Mandir, and the trust authority had misappropriated that money, gold, and other offerings.

"I have just one question: who is responsible for the theft of donations? The Ram Temple Trust was formed under the supervision of the Prime Minister [Narendra Modi]. Why is he silent on this issue?" Mr. Venugopal said.

CJI-led Bench to hear Ayodhya donations theft case on Monday

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

A three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant is scheduled to hear separate petitions seeking a CBI probe and protection of electronic evidence in the Ram Temple donations' embezzlement case on Monday, when the Supreme Court reopens after summer vacation.

A petition filed by Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) MP Sudhakar Singh to provide and publish complete financial details of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, including foreign contributions, is listed along with two other petitions on Monday.

Supreme Court advocate N.K. Goswami's petition focussed on the protection of electronic evidence such as CCTV footage which could be "quietly lost", erased, overwritten, or corrupted in the coming days.

Three separate petitions have been listed for hearing.

The third petition, filed by advocates Ajay Kumar Rai and Dinesh Kumar Yadav, has urged the court to either order a CBI probe or appoint a multi-disciplinary Special Investigation Team in the case.

AAP demands strict action in Ram Temple donation row

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) will launch a pan-India signature campaign on Sunday demanding that those who "stole donations given to the Ram Temple in Ayodhya be hanged". It also accused the Centre of protecting the culprits.

As part of the campaign, a letter addressed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be signed by people across India.

"It seems that the Special Investigation Team and the FIR are merely an attempt to mislead the public and bury the matter. Eight junior workers have been arrested while efforts are being made to shield the powerful," read the draft of the letter shared by the party.

Catholic body meets Home Minister Shah, flags concerns over FCRA Bill

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) submitted a memorandum against the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, to Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday, Jonathan Lalremruata, adviser to the apex body of the Catholic church in India, said.

Cardinal Anthony Poola, Metropolitan Archbishop of Hyderabad and CBCI president, and Anil Couto, Metropolitan Archbishop of Delhi, were present at the meeting.

The CBCI had sought an audience with the Home Minister to express concerns about the provisions of the Bill and the FCRA Amendment Rules, 2026, notified on June 22. The Rules mandate NGOs to specify the list of activities that can be pursued by them under the five permitted categories – social, political, educational, cultural, and religious – and also state the geographic area where they would operate. The Rules permit 16 categories of religious activities, "conduct of religious education, moral instruction, *satsangs*, discourses, and meditation retreats", but specifically bar "proselytisation".

Amit Shah

The CBCI said the term should be omitted as it had no relevance to the FCRA activities and without a definition was sure to be misused. "Inclusion of such words amounts to degrading the good intentioned charitable, educational, healthcare, and humanitarian services rendered by faith-based organisations. All such compassionate and charitable activities are directed only towards nation-building and public welfare, and should not be misinterpreted as acts of religious conversion," the CBCI said.

The Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha on March 25 but following an uproar by the Opposition parties, its discussion and passage were deferred. One of the key changes proposed in the Bill is the appointment of a "designated authority" to take over, manage, or dispose of assets created from foreign funds when an NGO's FCRA registration is suspended, cancelled, or not renewed. This authority will have the powers of a civil court and can order the transfer or sale of assets owned by NGOs to either the government or any other body.

The CBCI opposed the provision, stating it could be applied retrospectively. Its memorandum said the takeover of assets should take effect only after finalisation of the process of adjudication, including statutory appeal to a regular court."Violations of the law should be differentiated into minor and major. Technical violations or that of meagre financial value should be treated as minor and should not attract the major penalty of cancellation of registration / renewal or confiscation / cessation of assets," it said.

Reacting to the meeting, Congress general secretary K.C. Venugopal took to X, stating, "In typical BJP fashion, HM Amit Shah has lied to the CBCI about FCRA and is wrongly deflecting blame to hide his government's culpability in weaponising the FCRA laws."

AAP raises concern over attacks on Christians

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Aam Aadmi Party national spokesperson and MP Sanjay Singh on Friday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the "growing" number of attacks on churches, Christian institutions, and members of the Christian community across the country. He urged the Prime Minister to rise above "partisan politics" and take action.

He urged the Prime Minister to prevent the misuse of anti-conversion laws to harass innocent pastors, worshippers, and members of the Christian community. Mr. Singh wanted him to publicly condemn the attacks on churches and members of the Christian community, and direct independent, time-bound probes into all reported incidents across States.

United for Punjab, will inform Baghel of people's sentiments, says Channi

Press Trust of India
CHANDIGARH

Ending days of suspense over his political future, former Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi and senior Congress leaders considered close to him, will finally meet party general secretary in-charge of the State Bhupesh Baghel on Saturday, to place the party workers' "sentiments" before him. Mr. Channi himself made the announcement.

"United for Punjab, we have invited Punjab State Congress in-charge Bhupesh Baghel*ji* on July 11 to place before him the sentiments of party workers and the people of Punjab," he said in a post on X Friday evening.

After his arrival here on Monday on a five-day visit, Mr. Baghel has held a series of interactions with several party leaders and office-bearers, gearing up the party for the 2027 polls. He has now extended his visit. Mr. Channi, who is said to be "miffed" at not being appointed the State president, had not met Mr. Baghel.

Charanjit Singh Channi

On July 1, the Congress announced that Amrinder Singh Raja Warring would continue as the Punjab unit president and appointed Mr. Channi as chairperson of the campaign committee.

In his post, Mr. Channi also said senior leader and party MLA Rana Gurjit Singh will host the meeting at his residence here.

Sources said that besides Mr. Channi and Sukhjinder Randhawa, Pargat Singh and Bharat Bhushan Ashu could also meet Mr. Baghel. Mr. Warring would not be a part of the meeting.

Besides, Leader of the Opposition and senior party leader Partap Singh Bajwa will also be attending the meeting. He has been invited by Rana Gurjit Singh.

Several senior leaders held a meeting in Mohali in Mr. Channi's presence on Monday, days after several incumbent and former MLAs threw their weight behind the Jalandhar MP to be reconsidered for the State unit chief's post.

INBRIEF

First batch of Mansarovar Yatra pilgrims reaches Tibet

The first batch of pilgrims undertaking the Kailash-Mansarovar Yatra entered Tibet from Uttarakhand on Friday morning after crossing the Lipulekh Pass, situated at an altitude of 17,500 feet, officials said. The Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam (KMVN) is the nodal agency for the yatra, stationed at the Dharchula base camp. Dhan Singh Bisht, the officer-in-charge of the Dharchula camp, said, "Apart from the 48 pilgrims, the first batch includes a doctor and four support staff members." Mr. Bisht said the journey of the second batch, comprising 47 members, was slightly delayed due to a landslide at Lakhanpur, beyond Dharchula. PTI

Bihar govt. to sack 3,000 teachers with fake degrees

Following an investigation by the Vigilance Bureau into the recruitment of school teachers from 2006 to 2015, the Bihar government on Friday said it would dismiss over 3,000 teachers who used fake degrees and forged educational certificates to secure their job. The government would also initiate criminal action against them and recover the salaries paid during the service period. "The Bihar government will dismiss over 3,000 school teachers accused of securing jobs using fake degrees during 2006 to 2015," Bihar Education Minister Mithilesh Tiwary said. Several first information reports (FIRs) have also been registered against accused teachers.

Actor Rajpal Yadav gets jail in cheque-bounce cases

The Delhi High Court on Friday upheld actor Rajpal Yadav's conviction in seven cheque dishonour cases arising out of the financing of his 2012 directorial venture, *Ata Pata Laapata,* and sentenced him to three months' simple imprisonment. The film's poor box office performance was followed by a default in repayment of the loan, culminating in the cheque dishonour cases. Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma noted that despite paying around ₹2 crore during the proceedings, Mr. Yadav later refused to make any further payment to the complainant and even told the court he "would rather go to jail five times than returning the money."

No app can block calls from 1600 number series: TRAI

No app can block phone calls originating from 1600 number series that are meant for communications by regulated entities and the government to citizens, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India said on Friday, asserting its stance amid an ongoing tussle with caller identification app Truecaller over the labelling and identification of calls from the dedicated number series. TRAI clarified that promotional calls originating from 140 number series cannot be tagged or filtered by an app and can only be blocked by DND registry which is managed by the regulator. The key objective is to make such calls trustworthy for citizens, it said. PTI

4 'gangsters' shot dead in Gurugram, say police

The gang was planning to target the house of businessman to whom they had made several extortion calls, say police; one gang member critically injured, three police personnel wounded

Ashok Kumar
GURUGRAM

Four alleged gangsters were shot dead and one was injured in an exchange of fire with the police in Gurugram on Thursday night. Three injured police personnel are receiving treatment, the police said.

The alleged gangsters were reportedly working for Deepak Nandal, a notorious criminal running operations from abroad, the police said.

They were planning to target the house of a businessman, Vishal Berry, who had allegedly received several extortion calls from Nandal, who has also been named as an accused in the first information report (FIR) registered in connection with the alleged encounter.

The police said they were acting on intelligence received on a possible attack on individuals to whom extortion calls were made by the Nandal gang.

Subsequently, three police teams laid a strategic cordon in Block 'A', Sushant Lok Phase-I, a posh area at the heart of the city.

A forensic team and the police at the spot where four men were killed during a police encounter in Gurugram on Friday. ANI

"At 9.50 p.m., a vehicle suddenly sped into the area; it had black tape applied diagonally across its front and rear number plates. Five unidentified youth were inside it – two in the front and three in the middle row. They stopped the vehicle in front of Vishal Berry's house. Three men stepped out from the middle row, and one exited from the front. Immediately upon alighting, three of the youth began firing indiscriminately towards Berry's house and the neighbouring homes. During this incident, one of the operatives was also recording a video on his mobile phone," reads the FIR lodged under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and the Arms Act.

Escape bid

The alleged gangsters, when challenged, opened fire on the police in a bid to escape and the police team retaliated, said Naveen Sharma, Assistant Commissioner of Police, Crime.

Five modern pistols, live ammunition, and an SUV have been seized, he added. The police said more than 50 rounds were fired in the gun battle.

"During the operation, the team acted in accordance with established legal procedures and operational protocols. In the exchange of fire, all five shooters sustained gunshot injuries. Four were declared dead by doctors while one remains under treatment with serious injuries," said a press statement by the police

While Aryan, Ankit, and Nitin, all residents of Rohtak, and Deepa, a resident of Fatehabad, were killed in the shootout, Shivam of Nuh, was critically injured.

Constables Manjeet Singh and Shamsher Singh, and Assistant Sub-Inspector Sunil Kumar were the police personnel who sustained injuries.

Nitin had two previous criminal cases registered in Rohtak relating to attempt to murder and illegal possession of arms. Deepa, alias Sandeep, had 14 criminal cases against him, with charges under the Arms Act and the NDPS Act.

Govt. amends rules to regulate drugs containing alcohol

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

Aimed at strengthening regulatory control and preventing misuse of medicinal products with a high alcohol content, the Union Health Ministry has removed the exemption from licensing requirements for formulations containing more than 12% of ethyl alcohol.

In a release issued on Friday, the Ministry mandated that all formulations containing more than 12% v/v ethyl alcohol, in quantities exceeding 30 ml, shall no longer be covered under the exemption provided to them under Schedule K.

Consequently, such products will be required to obtain the requisite licences under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940.

The amendment also shifts these products to Schedule H1 of the Drugs Rules, 1945, which mandates sale against the prescription of a registered medical practitioner and stricter record-keeping.

The release noted that certain medicinal products, including tinctures of cardamom, ginger, and other aromatic preparations, had been exempted from licensing requirements under Schedule K of the Drugs Rules, 1945.

The Health Ministry has flagged misuse of formulations with high alcohol content. FILE PHOTO

Susceptible to misuse

"Some of these formulations contain high concentrations of ethyl alcohol, in certain cases up to 80-90% v/v, making them susceptible to misuse for intoxication. References were also received from certain State governments in this regard," the Ministry said.

The amendment is expected to strengthen regulatory oversight over those medicinal products containing alcohol, ensuring their availability only through the regulated pharmaceutical supply chain.

Kashmir colleges in a fix over fiat to screen 'objectionable' books

Peerzada Ashiq
SRINAGAR

Over 50 academic departments of the Kashmir University (KU) and Valley-wide colleges and schools are carrying out a comprehensive screening of books to remove literature suspected to contain "anti-India" or "pro-separatist" content, in the wake of official orders.

The KU's three main departments of Political Science, Law, and History are the most affected. "We have been identifying problematic books for the past two days," a senior professor said on the condition of anonymity.

Many Heads of Departments are grappling with the vague official order, which says all "problematic books should be removed without any titles or authors identified".

Meanwhile, the J&K School Education Department and Higher Education Department of Jammu and Kashmir have issued comprehensive circulars for a structured framework to evaluate books and academic material in all educational institutions.

It said academic resources available in institutions should possess established academic merit, factual authenticity, pedagogical relevance and educational value, while remaining consistent with the Constitution of India, laws in force, and National Education Policy (NEP).

"It should not contain material that directly or indirectly promotes, glorifies, legitimises or justifies terrorism, violent extremism, secessionism, radicalisation or any activity prejudicial to the sovereignty, unity, integrity and security of the Nation," it added.

SC pulls up Maharashtra govt. over 'disturbing' delays in criminal trials

Aaratrika Bhaumik
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday observed that it was "disturbing" that the Maharashtra government routinely opposed bail applications "tooth and nail" but failed to discharge its obligation of ensuring that criminal trials were conducted without undue delay.

The court directed the State to apprise it of any specific policy or mechanism in place to address delays in the conduct of criminal trials.

A Bench comprising Justices Ahsanuddin Amanullah and Sheel Nagu was hearing an appeal filed by a foreign national challenging a Bombay High Court order rejecting his bail application in a case involving charges of murder and rioting. The Bench noted that he had remained in custody for over four years, during which only two of the 45 prosecution witnesses had been examined.

Counsel appearing for the Maharashtra government told the Bench that "substantial progress" had since been made in the trial. "These are old matters. I can say that we are now improving... I know it is our fault, and we are trying to improve," he submitted.

Justice Amanullah, however, expressed serious reservations about the slow pace of the trial. He pointed out that the Maharashtra government had repeatedly come under scrutiny for delays that resulted in the prolonged incarceration of undertrial prisoners. "Every day we see that Maharashtra is in default. Tooth and nail opposing bail, but nothing on the ground. Double standards. We will expose you before the public," the judge remarked.

Detailed affidavit

The State counsel then sought an opportunity to file a detailed counter-affidavit explaining the reasons for the slow progress of the trial. He further urged the court to call for a report from the trial court to ascertain the "administrative problems" that had contributed to it.

The Bench accordingly directed the Maharashtra government to place on record an affidavit explaining the reasons for the prolonged pendency of the trial. "In the said affidavit, the State will come out with a specific policy of how it proposes to deal with such a situation," the Bench ordered.

Justice Amanullah also pointed out that the apex court had, only a day earlier, pulled up the Punjab government over delays in criminal trials and imposed costs of ₹50,000 on the Superintendent of Police, Amritsar, in a case where an accused booked under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act had undergone prolonged incarceration owing to delay in the trial.

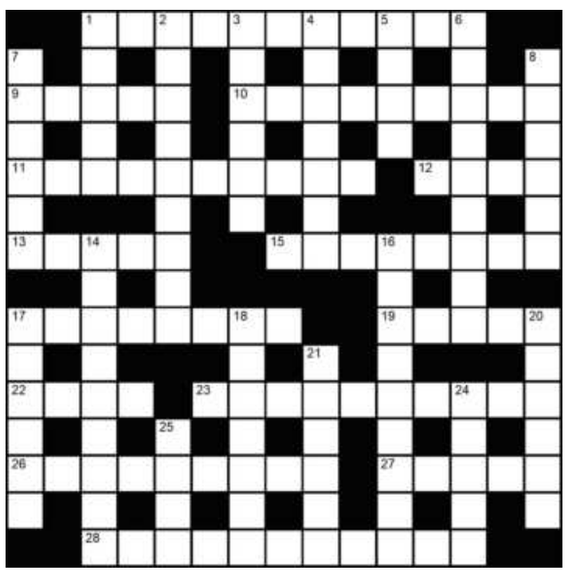
The Bench posted the matter for further hearing on July 24 to consider the affidavit to be filed by the Maharashtra government. It, however, declined to grant bail to the appellant, observing that no case for such relief had been made out at this stage.

TH CROSSWORD + 14843

(set by Incognito)

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

SCAN TO PLAY



Across

1 Esoteric song by model in administrative office (11)
9 A positive friend giving shock (5)
10 Guards dispatched in Welsh centres? (9)
11 Gag mum or dad for example (10)
12 Behind pig-pen, European gets eye problem (4)
13 Regrets about commencement of law and regulations (5)
15 Perhaps, IV needn't be conjured up (8)
17 Reduce vehicle slipping back on piece of land (8)
19 Manufactured solid items for veneration (5)
22 Piece having can rejected by university (4)
23 Ponder and take away freedom? (10)
26 Stops bucks consuming tangled net around midday (9)
27 Setter and doctor drink (5)
28 Carrying lever, gets in business units (11)

Down

1 Close tightly around top of pistil and part of calyx (5)
2 Settler: "Is with queen" (9)
3 Make certain nurse goes around before commencement of evening (6)
4 A mythological creature has name... an honorific name (7)
5 Egyptian goddess and international leader followed by sister (4)
6 A couple of cricket teams, perhaps, getting two ducks (6-3)
7 Weird dream about papa's piano pedal (6)
8 Climb 24 haphazardly carrying canine (6)
14 Processed Beirut lac and oil (9)
16 European spider scampers around top of my immaculate skin's outer layer (9)
17 Crush squid (not dead) near second hydrant (6)
18 Maker's reactor blown up (7)
20 Draw small sailing boat (6)
21 US brig sails around mountainous stretch of California coast (3,3)
24 Mountain range in South America and Spain (5)
25 Fly injured emigrant in absence of emir (4)

SUDOKU

	4		5					
6				7	3		2	
		5				8		7
		9			8	7	1	
	8	1	2			9		
9		4				1		
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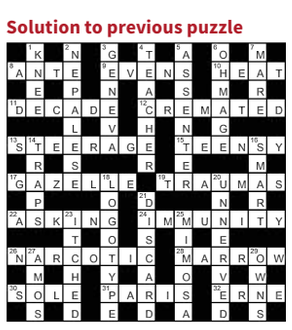
DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★☆☆

Solution to previous puzzle



Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

FAITH

Cauvery's tapas

A Gandharva named Vishvavasu once worshipped all the sacred rivers. There arose a quarrel between Cauvery and Ganga, as to which of them was superior. They sought Brahma's opinion. Brahma ruled in favour of Ganga, said Therazhundur Gosakan Bhattachariar in a discourse. He said Ganga had washed the feet of Vishnu during His Trivikrama avatara, and was therefore more sacred than Cauvery. Hurt by Brahma's judgment, Cauvery asked him what she should do to gain a status equal to that of Ganga. Brahma advised her to perform *tapas* on the banks of the Sara Pushkarini. This pushkarini is in a place called Thiruccherai in Tamil Nadu. Cauvery did *tapas* on the banks of the pushkarini.

On a Thursday, in the Tamil month of *Thai* (January 15 to February 15), in the star Pushya, Lord Narayana appeared in the form of a child and sat on Cauvery's lap. She opened her eyes and realised that the child was none other than the Lord Himself. She asked the Lord for three boons. She wanted to be recognised as greater than Ganga. She wanted the Lord to reside on the banks of Sara Pushkarini permanently. She prayed that those who worshipped in Sara Kshetra and even the flora there should get moksha. Cauvery also wanted to see the Lord's dasavataras. All the boons she asked for were granted.

Thirumangai Azhvar has sung about this kshetra. He says he will carry on his head Lord Saranatha's devotees. In case the Lord was hoping to find some space in his heart, he says his heart is always filled with the thoughts of the Lord's devotees. Thirumangai Azhvar's verses bring out his regard for the Lord's devotees.

Fix the house

Governments should regulate social media platforms, not users

The more wicked the problem, the more the people yearn for a simpler solution. This tendency has complicated the public debate on how and how much social media harm teenagers. While the idea that these platforms were stoking a mental health crisis prevailed in several countries for long, researchers have now adopted a more cautious stance. Social media use and mental health are clearly associated – more so among girls – but how much of that is actually causal and in what circumstances is still being debated. Recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke favourably of Australia's decision, in 2024, to ban social media access for those aged 16 and below. His words augur a similar ban in India, one that Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka have publicly mulled as well. However, Australian psychologists, digital health researchers, child-rights scholars, and online safety experts have criticised the ban because, while there is a credible body of evidence linking social media use and harm among children, evidence of a link between an age-based access ban and better mental health has been lacking. In the absence of a real-world precedent, Australia has effectively been conducting a natural experiment. And research has estimated that around 85% of 12-16-year-olds still use social media platforms.

While some psychologists and advocacy groups have argued that waiting for perfect evidence to act would recreate the mistake governments made with tobacco, many experts believe that the state should drop the ban and instead adopt a stronger duty of care, include digital literacy in school education, restrict addictive user interfaces/experiences, mandate a chronological feed for minors, enforce stronger content moderation, improve privacy protections, and introduce effective parental controls. Most studies of adolescent harm due to social media have also been observational and thus susceptible to reverse causation (depressed teenagers may spend more time online) and smaller average effects; experts have also noted that hours per day is less explanatory than passive versus active engagement, participation in supportive versus hostile communities, and so on. Indeed, while social media use can disrupt sleep and increase exposure to cyber-bullying, addictive recommendation patterns, and content about self-harm and eating disorders, it can also help maintain friendships and explore one's identity, offer peer support, and increase access to LGBTQIA+ communities and mental health information. The overall picture is mixed and the solutions are not simple. However, the first step could be: rather than regulate 'who may enter', governments should change how platforms operate.

Over and above

Women must find support to stay in jobs that match their degrees

With more Indian women entering university campuses, the gender gap in college classrooms has narrowed. The latest All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) data for 2023-24 reveal that absolute female enrolment rose by 42% over the past decade, climbing from 1.57 crore in 2014-15 to 2.24 crore. In comparison, male enrolment grew from 1.85 crore to 2.26 crore during the same period. Women have comfortably surpassed the male growth rate of 22.16%, pushing total higher education enrolment to a record 4.5 crore. They now account for nearly half (49.7%) of all students in Indian universities and colleges. With a Gender Parity Index of 1.08, 108 young women now enter higher education for every 100 men. This marks a hard-won victory, especially for marginalised communities, where female enrolment among Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes rose by 51.4% and 75.7%, respectively. Yet, a deeper look at the data demands caution. High enrolment numbers are a superficial veneer if the pipeline of employment opportunities beyond the college gate remains broken. While women make up 44% of STEM students, this number is heavily skewed toward the "S" (general sciences such as biology and chemistry), where they hold a 54.6% majority. In contrast, engineering and technology remain male-dominated, with women making up just 31.1% of enrolment. By clustering in traditional sciences, women are isolated from the future-proof economic drivers of artificial intelligence and software engineering.

Educational institutions remain largely patriarchal. While the student body reflects a 50-50 split, there are only 82 female teachers for every 100 male teachers. Women remain absent from top-tier leadership roles. Further, the influx of students has coincided with an explosion of private and low-tier colleges, which face acute faculty shortages and poor infrastructure. India also faces a disconnect between higher education and the formal job market. The Female Labor Force Participation Rate remains low due to societal expectations, domestic responsibilities, and safety barriers. According to the 2025 PLFS report, men dominate the regular salaried workforce (26.5% versus 18.2%) and earn more. Average monthly earnings stand at ₹24,217 for men, compared with ₹18,353 for women. While 64.2% of women are classified as self-employed, this categorisation is vague and the statistic often includes unpaid household or farm labour, failing to show where women students go after they exit lecture halls. As 2.24 crore young women claim their place on campuses, the burden shifts to policymakers, institutional heads, and industry leaders to ensure that these women stay on in fruitful paid employment aligned with their degrees.

Terrorism's data retreat hides emerging global threats

Shashi Tharoor

Fourth-term Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) for Thiruvananthapuram (Congress party), the Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs and the Sahitya Akademi Award-winning author of 29 books, including 'Pax Indica: India and the World of the 21st Century'

At first glance, the macroeconomic indicators of global security offer a rare moment of statistical comfort. Recent reports suggest that global terrorism experienced a noteworthy decline in 2025, with fatalities around the world falling to 5,582 across 2,944 recorded incidents – representing a 28% drop in deaths and a 22% reduction in overall attacks. With as many as 81 nations registering measurable improvements in their domestic security landscapes, a superficial reading of the data might suggest that the international community is finally turning the tide against terror, or as the strategists prefer to call it, asymmetric warfare.

Beyond statistical comfort

Yet, there lies a far more unsettling reality: the world is not necessarily becoming safer; it is becoming unevenly unsafe. The aggregate reduction in violence masks a profound structural mutation in how terror operates, where it thrives, and how we, as a global society, perceive it.

It raises a haunting philosophical and strategic question: have we begun to subconsciously accept terrorism not as a horrific aberration to be entirely eradicated, but as a "normal" tax on modern civilisation?

There is an insidious trap in treating aggregate declines as a triumph. When violence becomes highly concentrated, it risks becoming invisible to the global conscience. The data show that nearly 70% of all terrorism-related deaths are now compressed into five countries: Pakistan, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Niger, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly the volatile Sahel region, alone accounts for over half of all global fatalities.

Because the vast majority of this devastation occurs within these specific, vulnerable geographies, the wealthier and more stable quarters of the world are prone to a dangerous complacency. When terrorism is confined to nations already beset by chronic systemic fragility, the international community tends to relegate it to background noise – a tragic feature of post-colonial states.

This regional containment fosters a false sense of security. Not every terror incident is a Pahalgam: organised, ruthlessly planned and flawlessly executed. The rise of decentralised, transnational, and rapid digital recruitment has facilitated lone-actor attacks in many countries. When the methodology of terror shifts from massive, complex operations to low-tech, high-impact individual strikes incited on online echo-chambers, the threat becomes an internalised, ambient hazard of modern pluralistic societies. By treating these as an unavoidable operational hazard of the 21st century, we risk normalising the unacceptable.

> While the world may be recording fewer terrorist attacks, it is simultaneously confronting a far more resilient and adaptive adversary

Reaction to prevention

To prevent terrorism from metastasising further, counter-terrorism strategy must move away from reactive responses and toward addressing the structural ecology of extremist violence. There are two critical arenas where this intervention must take place: the blurring line between state conflict and terrorism, and the specific vulnerability of international frontiers.

First, the data establishes an overwhelming correlation between political instability and violent extremism: an estimated 99% of all terrorism-related deaths occur in nations already entangled in armed conflict. Terrorism is rarely an isolated phenomenon generated in a vacuum; it is the ultimate by-product of institutional or diplomatic collapse. Where state capacity is hollowed out, extremist groups swiftly step into the vacuum, offering alternative forms of primitive security, or ideological certainty to disillusioned populations.

Second, the geography of modern terror has become distinctly granular. Over 60% of attacks now take place within 100 kilometres of international borders. These frontier zones, frequently neglected (or weaponised) by central governments, offer ideal operational sanctuaries. In these porous margins, terrorist syndicates manage cross-border movements, establish illicit supply lines, and conduct recruitment enabled or unhindered by state authority.

Curbing this threat requires an intentional re-investment in state capacity, development and border sovereignty. If central authorities continue to treat borderlands as secondary priorities, they leave the door open for non-state actors to entrench themselves. Furthermore, development assistance must be strategically aligned with security imperatives, treating the reinforcement of judicial systems, localised policing, and basic administrative services as the primary bulwarks against extremist encroachment.

Whether the statistical downward trend recorded in 2025 will endure remains an open and highly precarious question. The contemporary security landscape is caught in a tug-of-war between institutional stabilisation efforts and powerful destabilising catalysts.

The constriction of violent extremism to a smaller pool of actors – specifically the five dominant networks (Islamic State, Jama'at Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM), Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Lashkar-e-Taiba and al-Shabaab) – means that counter-terrorism forces can achieve maximum impact through highly focused intelligence and interdiction efforts. As the threat becomes more localised and frontier-centric, multinational intelligence apparatuses must become equally agile, disrupting cross-border logistics before they can scale into wider insurgencies. Tech platforms and state regulatory bodies must continue to refine their capabilities to detect and dismantle decentralised digital radicalisation pipelines before they can catalyse lone-actor violence.

However, the headwinds militating against a sustained decline are formidable. The ongoing conflicts in West Asia threaten to completely reverse recent global gains. Prolonged warfare, mass displacement, and the systematic erosion of state institutions create a uniquely fertile breeding ground for extremist resurgence in 2026 and beyond. The persistence of major geopolitical conflicts, including India-Pakistan, lowers the barriers to entry for new, fragmented radical actors, further complicating the global threat matrix.

Furthermore, even within the current downward trend, the stark resilience and adaptability of organisations such as the TTP – which bucked the general decline by increasing its attacks – serve as a potent warning. Modern terrorist organisations are highly adaptive entities. When squeezed globally, they fragment, localise, and embed themselves within pre-existing domestic ethnic or political grievances, making them extraordinarily difficult to curb.

The complacency trap

The ultimate lesson of the contemporary security paradigm is that terrorism is not receding; it is simply reorganising. The international community cannot afford to be lulled into a state of complacency by declining aggregates; it is simultaneously confronting a far more complex, resilient, and adaptive adversary.

For nations such as India, navigating an immediate strategic environment surrounded by highly volatile neighbourhoods and cross-border security challenges, these transformations require a continuous, sophisticated recalibration of both domestic and regional counter-terrorism doctrines. We must not surrender the moral and strategic clarity required to defeat it. The numbers may be falling, but the structural risks are not. True security will not be achieved by celebrating statistical lulls, but by relentlessly dismantling the fault lines of conflict, governance failures, and digital radicalisation that allow the ideology of terror to survive.

A future of financial health for every Indian

Queen Máxima

of the Netherlands, is the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Advocate for Financial Health

Nar has been working for 45 years and is one of the longest-serving caddies at his golf club. Although he had a bank account for years, like many informal workers, he was focused on earning a living and supporting his family, leaving little opportunity to plan for the future.

That changed three years ago when he learned about the National Pension System and began saving for retirement for the first time. Today, his fund is growing, giving him confidence that after a lifetime of hard work, he can retire with financial security and dignity.

The meaning of financial health

In June 2026, I visited India in my capacity as the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Advocate for Financial Health. I have been advocating for and learning about efforts to improve financial health, which means ensuring that people have the right financial policies, products, and services to manage day-to-day expenses, stay resilient when unexpected shocks occur, invest in and save for long- and short-term goals, and have confidence in the future.

In practice, this is like Nar's experience – going beyond having a bank account to having investments that will help him in the future. It could also mean a person having affordable home insurance to help if a flash flood causes damage to their house. Or, it could mean receiving responsible credit to help with bills during a tough month.

India has recently undergone a remarkable transformation. According to the World Bank's Global Findex, account ownership among adults has risen from around 56% to 89% in just 10 years. This progress in access is impressive, and it creates an opportunity to do more to support people's financial health.

A financial health approach will be beneficial not just for families but also for the country. Household and individual-level financial health are crucial for country-level resilient growth and prosperity.

The Viksit Bharat 2047 goal to move from "welfare to wealth creation" would also be well supported by efforts to improve financial health, under the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

> India's next leap should be to ensure financial health for all

During my visit, I saw how so many in India – from the highest levels of government to pioneering fintech companies – are doing financial health work.

In New Delhi, I spoke with informal sector workers, who are now able to save, plan, and retire without relying on their children, thanks to opening retirement accounts with support from Universal Pensions. In Mumbai, I spoke with nurses at a hospital who have found more financial stability and decreased stress through workplace financial health products offered by SalarySe, such as responsible credit, individualised financial health scores, and insurance.

I met with regulators and bank leaders who are using innovation and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to help households make better financial decisions, grow their savings and investments, build resilience through access to insurance, and tackle challenges such as fraud and scams. Reserve Bank of India Governor Sanjay Malhotra and I discussed how India can expand on these opportunities to support financial health in the country.

Steps to take

In my conversations with Indian people from different walks of life, I heard directly how financial products and services could further build their trust in institutions and give them the support that they need to improve their financial lives. I want to thank the people in Mumbai and New Delhi who shared their stories with me.

Four actions will help move financial health forward:

First, further develop Jan Dhan 2.0 with financial health at the centre. As the Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) enters its second decade, there is an opportunity to transform accounts from simple payment and cash-withdrawal channels into a household financial resilience platform. This means fully integrating the PMJDY with Direct Benefit Transfers (DBTs), PM-KISAN, MGNREGA wage payments (now VB-G RAM-G), e-Shram, the Atal Pension Yojana (APY), Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY), Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY), and other social protection schemes for informal and gig workers.

Linking these programmes through a single account could help households build their financial health. Women, who hold the majority of PMJDY accounts, could particularly benefit, as would informal workers, migrants, and gig economy workers.

Second, build on India's robust digital public infrastructure to support better financial health. Innovations such as MahaVISTAAR, account aggregators, the Unified Lending Interface (ULI), DigiLocker, and emerging AI applications create opportunities to strengthen household financial capability, choice and agency at scale.

Third, use India's rich ecosystem of household surveys, administrative datasets, and digital infrastructure to gather data on financial health. This data could be used to strengthen policymaking, protect consumers, and ensure that the financial sector is accountable.

Public-private collaboration

Finally, build on the momentum to further mobilise financial institutions, employers, and market players. Government and regulators play a critical role in advancing households' financial health. The impact is amplified when it is a joint effort with the private sector. Countries including the Netherlands and Indonesia are already pursuing such public-private collaboration.

The vision of financial health is giving every person a better today, tomorrow, and future. Just as Nar should have the opportunity to save for a well-deserved restful retirement, all Indian families should have the financial policies, tools, and services that they need to thrive throughout their lives. After my visit in June, I am looking forward to working with the Government of India to make this vision a reality.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Platform bans

Australia's move may sound decisive (Front page, "Modi hails Australia's social media ban on minors, signals curbs" (July 10) but a blanket age cutoff risks pushing children into darker, unregulated corners of the Internet, where harm can multiply. India's digital landscape — with thousands of young users, diverse languages, and patchy identity verification — makes enforcement difficult. A ban that cannot be implemented fairly becomes performative rather than protective. Instead of chasing a legislative headline, we should invest in digital literacy in schools, require platforms to adopt safety-by-design measures rather than relying solely on age gates, and create rapid-response mechanisms for online abuse. Protecting children is non-negotiable, but good intentions without effective implementation can create more vulnerability than they prevent.

K. Chidanand Kumar,
Bengaluru

Breaking the ice

Although Mani Shankar Aiyar is often regarded, rightly or wrongly, as someone sympathetic to Pakistan, he presents a convincing case for not shying away from an India-Pakistan dialogue (Opinion page, 'Parley', July 10). As Jawaharlal Nehru observed, "The only alternative to coexistence is co-destruction." Since no country can choose its neighbours, it is wiser to build bridges than burn them. Reviving people-to-people dialogue would be a pragmatic way to cut through the fog of mutual distrust.

Ayyasseri Raveendranath,
Aranmula, Kerala

Enforce helmet rules

Despite the Motor Vehicles Act making helmets mandatory, many schools and colleges continue to ignore this basic life-saving rule. I have sent emails, personally visited institutions, and shared photographs and videos showing students riding without helmets. Unfortunately, most institutions have shown little interest.

Manikandan Gopinath,
Chennai

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

GROUND ZERO

The uncertain flight of Parandur airport

The proposed Parandur airport project in Tamil Nadu has been put on hold, though there is no official announcement yet. While the protesting residents of Ekanapuram, the village that falls within both the proposed runways, are happy that the government plans to drop the project, residents of other villages remain uncertain about their future. **Sunitha S.** reports on the challenges surrounding a project that has left many frustrated

Ekanapuram village, identified as the site where Parandur airport's runway would be built. VELANKANNI RAJ B.

Govindaraj Janardhanan is struggling to find words to describe his relief. A farmer from Ekanapuram village near Kancheepuram in Tamil Nadu, who also works part-time at a private firm, he is happy that the Tamil Nadu government has paused the Parandur airport project and may even drop it altogether. "This will save our village and agricultural lands from being destroyed," he says.

On May 4, when the results of the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections were announced and actor-turned-politician C. Joseph Vijay was elected as the new Chief Minister, a wave of excitement spread across many parts of the State.

For Ekanapuram, largely made up of agricultural lands, wetlands, and small-scale farms, the moment was significant. The village had been at the centre of a massive farmers' movement against the proposed ₹27,400 crore greenfield airport project at Parandur. Planned as Chennai's second airport, the project involved the acquisition of more than 5,300 acres from more than 13 villages in and around Parandur. As per the proposal, Ekanapuram was to fall within both runways of the airport.

Six months before coming to power, Vijay had visited the protesting villagers and extended his support to their cause, which had been ongoing since 2022. Today, the village, located nearly 50 kilometres from the existing Chennai airport at Meenambakkam, is cautiously optimistic. While the State Minister for Energy Resources and Law, R. Nirmalkumar, said that the State government would drop the Parandur airport project and look for alternative sites, a stance reiterated by the Industries Minister, S. Keerthana, an official announcement or a Government Order is still awaited in this regard. For industry representatives and several travellers, however, the government's decision has come as a disappointment.

Relief in Ekanapuram

The airport project faced strong opposition from the residents of Ekanapuram, who feared displacement, the loss of agricultural land, and environmental damage, particularly its possible impact on local water bodies. In the project area, 26.54% comprises wetlands, according to Tamil Nadu Industrial Development Corporation, the nodal agency executing the airport project.

"We were shattered when the announcement to build the airport was made in 2022," says G. Subramanian, Secretary of the Parandur Airport Opposition Joint Movement, a coalition of villagers, farmers, and environmentalists. "After protesting for nearly 1,000 days, we are glad that the government is going to drop the project now."

Subramanian explains that the project site is full of water bodies. "Nelvoy lake and water bodies including Vayaleri, Kadaperi, and Kalieri would have been affected. The path of the Kamban canal passing through the project area too would have been obstructed," he says.

Filling up water bodies with concrete and urbanising the area would not only destroy these villages but could also have wider consequences for Chennai, which has experienced flooding on several occasions during the monsoon season, he says. "The city may witness a disaster if this project is implemented," Subramanian says.

He is quick to clarify that the residents of the village are not opposed to development, but only want the government to pick a better location for the project. "We are not opposing a second airport for the city. We are only asking the government to look for other options," he says.

Villages in a limbo

After the airport project was announced in 2022, the protests continued even as the State government proceeded with the application process for various approvals. The project subsequently received site clearance and in-principle approval.

> Why would we want to spend money repairing or rebuilding a house without knowing if we will even have a life here in this village?
>
> **D. SHANMUGHAM**
> Resident, Nagapattu village

Land acquisition for the project commenced in July 2025. The government, however, avoided acquiring land in Ekanapuram and began registrations in the surrounding villages. So far, nearly 1,700 acres have been acquired from villages including Nelvoy, Nagapattu, Thandalam, Podavur, Valathur, and Akkamapuram.

While Ekanapuram is unaffected, the residents of the other villages who were forced to sell their lands worry about their livelihood and the uncertainty that lies ahead. They wonder if the government will return their lands.

K. Murugan, a resident of Nagapattu, who was compelled to give up his farmland, says he is now living off the money that the government gave as compensation. "We were left with no choice, so we parted with our farmlands," he says. "Now, we hear that the government plans to drop the project. But there is no clarity since there has been no official announcement yet."

Murugan says the situation has left the villagers frustrated. "Now that the government has taken away our land, they should execute the project and shift us to the nearby Karai village. That way, we can find a job. Access to transport too will become easier," he adds.

D. Shanmugham, another resident of the village, gave one acre of his land for the project. He believes that the government should return the lands to the farmers if they don't plan to go ahead with the project. "Our street lights have not been repaired. Our drains are still blocked. When we raise these issues with the local authorities, they don't rectify the issue claiming that it is an airport site and that the residents will be shifted soon anyway," he says.

Residents also say they have not been able to rebuild or repair their houses. Those living near the proposed airport site continue to struggle with leakages and other structural problems in their houses. As Shanmugham says, "Why would we want to take a risk and spend money repairing a house or rebuilding a house without knowing if we will even have a life here in this village?"

In some households, these structural problems have even affected marriage prospects, with families losing out on potential matches because of the condition of their houses.

D. Devaki Ammal, a resident of Nagapattu who lives in a single-room house, says her family has been looking for a suitable match for her granddaughter for a while now. "Families who come to visit us are unhappy with the state of the house. If I tell them that we may get a new house when the airport comes up, or we may renovate this one, they look unconvinced. My daughter and I are distressed over the problems this project has caused," she says.

Farmers of Ekanapuram village during their protest against the greenfield airport project at Parandur. VELANKANNI RAJ B.

Devaki says the authorities could consider moving them to a new, permanent site. "That will do us a lot of good. Some of these issues will be resolved," she says.

Some residents who took the risk of building houses say they do not expect to live in them for more than a few years, given the lack of clarity surrounding the project. S. Prema, a resident of Nelvoy, says residents are exasperated. Unaware of what is going to happen next, they have not even built toilets. "They are scared to invest money fearing it will be a waste," she says. "But my husband and I took the decision to reconstruct a house because the existing one had too many problems. Sometimes, snakes would enter the house through crevices. We decided to rebuild it for the safety of our children."

But Prema says the family is not able to set up the house as they wish. "If I like something which I know will look good in my house, I don't buy it because I am not sure how long we will stay here," she says.

Maintenance issues in Chennai

While the villages around the site are divided, aviation experts, industry representatives, and frequent travellers in Chennai are disappointed that the project has been paused and worry that it could be dropped altogether. Though Chennai airport has not reached its maximum capacity yet, many air passengers feel that the city requires a bigger, swankier airport with better maintenance and improved flight connectivity.

A. Sankar, a frequent traveller in Chennai, says passengers like him are unhappy about the many issues in the Meenambakkam airport, whether it is the maintenance of the airport or the difficulty in getting a cab. "Airports in other metro cities offer so much more in terms of experience. Passengers have many options to dine and shop. Time just flies by before boarding. I can't say the same about the airport here. When the authorities can't even open a cab boarding point on time, it's only natural for passengers to feel frustrated." He says passengers have waited for a long time for a second airport, and changing the site yet again will only affect them further.

Karthik K., another traveller, says the connectivity that other metro airports offer is far better than that of Chennai. "Bengaluru, Mumbai, and Delhi have direct flights to more domestic and international destinations than Chennai," he says.

An aviation expert says Chennai missed the opportunity for aviation-led development two decades ago when a second airport for the city was proposed at Sriperumbudur. That project did not take off, and the existing Chennai airport was modernised.

"The city has too much at stake in terms of air connectivity, industrial growth, and investment opportunities. It cannot afford to let this opportunity slip away yet again," he says.

He says the process to choose a site for the second airport commenced once again more than seven years ago. Initially, 11 sites were examined in all. Of them, four were shortlisted – Thiruporur, Padalam, Pannur, and Parandur. "The Airports Authority of India (AAI) inspected all the four sites and said an airport could be built either at Pannur or Parandur, pointing out the advantages and disadvantages of both. Parandur was finally chosen since there were fewer families to be relocated there," he says.

A source in the State government believes that any site spanning several thousand acres is bound to have its own set of challenges. "It is nearly impossible to find a site without water bodies in Chennai's vicinity. There are ways to mitigate issues. A hydrological study was already conducted by a team of experts and was submitted to the government in 2024."

> Airports in other metro cities offer so much in terms of experience. Passengers have many options to dine and shop. I can't say the same about the airport in Chennai. When the authorities can't even open a cab boarding point on time, it's only natural for us to feel frustrated.
>
> **A. SANKAR**
> Traveller

The aviation expert also notes that it is not easy to find a site for an airport. "This is not like building a railway or a bus terminal. Several factors have to be considered including obstacles, airspace availability, wind pattern, no fly zones in the region, and proximity to a defence site or another airport," he explains.

He says if the government decides to drop the proposal to build the airport at Parandur, Pannur is the only alternative for now. "But then, passengers will have to wait another eight or nine years because the government will have to yet again receive all the approvals and complete construction. Politicians come and go, but it is the passengers who suffer at the end of the day," he adds.

The importance of an airport

Industry representatives say airports are no longer just transit points; they have evolved into economic anchors that attract investments and drive large-scale commercial, business, and residential development. They add that when companies consider investing in a city, the quality of its airport and cargo infrastructure is a key factor in their decision-making.

Ganapathi Ramachandran, entrepreneur and board member of The Southern India Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SICCI), says it is evident that a modern, state-of-the-art airport with strong connectivity is crucial for attracting investments in business parks, logistics hubs, hospitality, the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) sector and tourism, and is vital for the State's development. Tamil Nadu should expedite the implementation of the Parandur airport project or, at the very least, pursue an alternative option and implement it soon, he says. He believes that any further delay will only prove costly for the State's development.

"The youth of today are different," Ramachandran explains. "With every passing decade, they have a new demand. Tamil Nadu, with its advantages such as a large talent pool, can attract major companies and benefit from robust aviation infrastructure and improvements in social infrastructure. Unless a city is vibrant in every aspect, it will be difficult to attract and retain young talent," he says.

V.N. Shivashankar, senior vice-president of SICCI, says Bengaluru and Hyderabad have witnessed a remarkable transformation over the past decade, with new modern airports playing a significant role. "The city expands significantly; better roads and infrastructure come up around the airport zone, and areas that were previously less popular begin to thrive," he says.

Bengaluru, he says, is a perfect example of this trend – it created an entirely new ecosystem, attracted more firms to set up offices, and generated new opportunities for the State.

He adds, "Chennai cannot afford to lose out on the second airport project, especially after coming this far in terms of clearances and land acquisition."

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Silence hangs heavy: Mechanised boats lay silent, a stark reminder of the fishermen lost at sea amid the unusual weather patterns in the Visakhapatnam Fishing Harbour. V. RAJU

When killer waves snuffed out six lives

Braving high seas and rough weather, fishermen along the Visakhapatnam coast generally face several storms to eke out livelihood. But this time, the bad weather and the strong water currents swallowed six of the seven fishermen, who went into the deep sea, leaving their families in the lurch, writes **V. Kamalakara Rao**

Under the humid Visakhapatnam sky, the fishing harbour, a roaring trade hub, has turned into a theatre of grief. The usual boisterous chatter about the vibrant catches among the fishermen has vanished, while people from the community sobbing for their missing family members has become a common sight in the past week.

Inside the tin roofs of the Mechanised Boat Owners' Association building, women wrapped in faded cotton saris stare blankly into the grey horizon of the Bay of Bengal. There are no tears left, only a hollow, exhausting silence.

On Saturday, July 4, the mechanised fishing vessel IND-AP-MM-V5-83, carrying seven fisherfolk, capsized just 10 nautical miles off the Gangavaram coast in Visakhapatnam. Six of the seven fishermen who went into the sea for the catch have been presumed to be dead.

"I survived, but I don't know how. I watched my brother, my nephew, and other family members disappear one by one before my eyes. We kept swimming, hoping someone would rescue us, but there was no one," Kari Chinna, the lone survivor and boat owner, says.

Chinna recounts a brutal 18-hour survival battle in the rough sea conditions. While he recovered from severe exposure and saltwater aspiration at KIMS ICON Hospital in Gajuwaka, Visakhapatnam, families at the jetty mourned the six who vanished - R. Bandiyya, 43, Meda Chinna Ammoru, 48, Kari Chinnayya, 32, Kari Seethodu, 55, and two young men, Amara Appalaraju, 24, and Kari Garagayya, 24, who were the sole breadwinners of their families.

On Wednesday evening, after a 72-hour multi-agency search operation, the administration quietly transitioned from a rescue mission to a recovery operation.

A three-member fact-finding committee submitted its report to the Andhra Pradesh government with a cold, devastating conclusion: "The six missing fishermen are officially presumed dead."

As State Minister for Excise and Mines Kollu Ravindra distributed ex gratia cheques of ₹10 lakh to the bereaved families, the reality settled over the coast like a winter fog. The sea had claimed its toll, leaving behind deep structural questions, community finger-pointing, and a coastline scarred by sudden tragedy.

> I survived, but I don't know how. I watched my brother, my nephew, and other family members disappear one by one before my eyes. We kept swimming, hoping someone would rescue us, but there was none
>
> **KARI CHINNA**
> Fisherman and lone survivor

The last call

The voyage had begun with the usual optimism on July 1. The crew, a tight-knit group of relatives and lifelong neighbours from coastal Visakhapatnam and neighbouring Vizianagaram districts, set off from the Visakhapatnam Fishing Harbour.

The weather was typical for early July - choppy but manageable for a sturdy mechanised boat designed to handle deep-sea swells.

For three days, the trip went according to plan, the hold gradually filling with the seasonal catch. But by July 4, the atmosphere over the Bay of Bengal had turned ominous. A powerful low-pressure system, which later weakened along the Odisha coast, developed rapidly, whipping up furious waves. On shore, anxious families tracked weather updates and called the crew, urging them to head back.

At approximately 2.30 p.m. on Saturday, Kari Chinna speaks to his family over a crackling phone connection. "We are near Gangavaram," he assures them while watching the coastline. "We will be inside the harbour gates within an hour." It was the last time anyone on shore would hear those voices.

Minutes later, the boat's engine failed, stripping the vessel of steerage and leaving it broadside to towering four-to-five-metre waves. A massive wave smashed into its side, tipping it violently.

"One of our boys, Kari Chinnayya, went below deck into the fish hold to secure the hatches," Chinna recounts. "Within seconds, a second wave flipped us completely. Chinnayya was trapped inside the belly of the vessel. We could hear him, but we couldn't reach him. He went down with the boat."

The remaining six fishermen scrambled onto the slippery, upturned fibreglass hull, clinging to it for six agonising hours through freezing rain.

Around 9 p.m., the trapped air escaped, and the hull sank to the bottom of the deep. Thrown back into the water, they held hands and swam towards distant ship lights, but the powerful undercurrents tore them apart one by one.

Chinna drifted until 9 a.m. on Sunday, when the Panama-flagged cargo ship MV Universal Wealthy, carrying Chinese nationals, spotted him, threw out a lifebuoy, and alerted the maritime authorities.

Anatomy of an air-sea rescue

The distress call triggered an immediate, large-scale search and rescue (SAR) operation across thousands of square nautical miles.

The Indian Coast Guard deployed frontline patrol vessels ICGS Kanaklata Barua and ICGS Veera to establish a search grid based on drift models generated by the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS).

Naval Advanced Light Helicopters (ALH) from INS Dega and fixed-wing Dornier aircraft scanned the turbulent waters using thermal imaging and advanced radar systems.

While the sheer depth of the continental shelf and heavy siltation complicated subsurface tracking, the state's coastal law enforcement worked around the clock to manage the search grid and coordinate with central defence agencies.

> The Eastern Naval Command deployed two ships and two helicopters, a Sea King and an Advanced Light Helicopter, for the search and rescue operation
>
> **GOPINATH JATTI**
> Inspector General, Coastal Security

"The Eastern Naval Command deployed two ships and two helicopters, a Sea King and an Advanced Light Helicopter, for the search and rescue operation. Electronic surveillance was maintained through the Regional Operations Station in Visakhapatnam. Despite the adverse weather, ships and aircraft deployed in the operation continued searching for the remaining six fishermen," Gopinath Jatti, Inspector General (IG), Coastal Security, said.

By Tuesday midnight, having exhausted all physical search efforts and survival timeframes, the active search was called off, and the case was handed over to the civilian administration.

The blame game

While the government moved swiftly with financial relief, leaders within the local fishing community pointed to systemic gaps. Janakiram, a prominent leader of the Visakhapatnam Mechanised Boat Owners' Association, questioned the initial response timeline, arguing that an earlier mobilisation during the midnight hours of Saturday could have changed the outcome.

The tragedy has brought broader, long-standing structural problems into sharp focus. Deep-sea fishers frequently venture far beyond the reach of mobile towers, leaving them completely cut off when weather systems suddenly turn volatile. While central guidelines permit 24-metre vessels, Andhra Pradesh's fleet is restricted to smaller 5 to 15-metre boats that struggle against heavy monsoon swells.

Most local vessels lack even the basic International Labour Organization (ILO) safety requirements, including satellite transponders, modern navigation tools, life rafts, and crew insurance.

Arjilli Dasu, General Secretary of the Federation of Indian Fisher Organisations (FIFO), emphasised that the core problem is the lack of protective infrastructure.

"We are sending men into the deep sea in vessels that lack satellite communication terminals and emergency position-indicating radio beacons (EPIRBs)," Dasu said. "The ₹10 lakh ex gratia is a band-aid on a gaping wound. We don't want compensation for dead bodies; we want investment in systems that keep our brothers alive."

The administrative resolution

To bypass the standard seven-year waiting period required under the Indian Evidence Act to declare a missing person legally dead, the Andhra Pradesh government invoked the provisions of G.O. 54.

A special panel comprising the RDO, DSP, and the Assistant Director of Fisheries combined survivor testimony with Coast Guard technical logs to issue an expedited "presumed dead" certification, enabling the release of ₹10 lakh directly to dependent nominees within 92 hours.

Yet, this tragedy highlights a much larger crisis unfolding along Andhra Pradesh's 1,053-km coastline, home to 2.35 lakh active fishermen across 694 villages. Over the last decade, maritime accidents have claimed nearly 700 lives.

Due to industrial pollution, municipal sewage discharge, and climate change affecting sea surface temperatures and current patterns, the traditional 5-km near-shore fishing zones have virtually disappeared.

Fishermen must now travel over 30 km offshore, transforming what was once a simple four-hour fishing trip into a gruelling deep-sea expedition lasting anywhere from 12-168 hours.

The haunted jetty

As the sun sets over Visakhapatnam harbour, fishing activity continues relentlessly. Yet, at the edge of the pier, veteran fishermen stare silently towards the Gangavaram headland. They know that ten miles offshore, beneath the heavy swells, lies the wreckage of IND-AP-MM-V5-83 - now a lonely underwater tomb for six of their own, swallowed by a sudden mechanical failure and a rogue wave on an otherwise routine Saturday.

The grieving families will return to their villages, using the compensation to clear mounting debts incurred for nets and diesel. Their children will grow up hearing stories of fathers who vanished into the deep blue, while the sea remains vast, indifferent, and forever hungry.

Families of the fishermen at Visakhapatnam fishing harbour after learning about the news of their loved ones going missing in the deep sea. V. RAJU

Crèche course: In Karnataka, while the obligation is on employers with more than 50 employees to provide crèches at the workplace, little does the law say about where liability lies when things go wrong.FILE PHOTO

Who will monitor the crèche?

The Karnataka government issued guidelines for establishing crèche/daycare centres back in 2015. The alleged child abuse incident in a centre for Capgemini employees in Bengaluru reveals that these have remained on paper, with not even a nodal agency named to monitor them, write **Shilpa Elizabeth** and **Rashmi Patil**

Neelima Rajendran, Bengaluru resident and a working mother with a three-year-old daughter, felt a chill down her spine when she saw the videos of the alleged child abuse at the daycare centre on the Capgemini premises in Brookefield.

Neelima's daughter started attending a daycare near her house when she was only a little past one. The parents, both working, found it near-impossible to find a reliable stay-at-home nanny for the toddler. "I wasn't fully satisfied with the daycare we finally settled for, as it didn't have a CCTV camera, but it was better than all the other centres we visited near our house. It was shocking to see the videos of children being abused at the centre. Now I keep wondering what a big risk we are taking by sending children to these facilities," Neelima exclaims.

Crèches and daycare centres are often the only viable childcare option for urban nuclear households where both parents work. The incident at the daycare at Capgemini, where children being allegedly abused by the staff was caught on camera, has left many parents like Neelima questioning whether their children are truly safe in such facilities. Further, it has exposed the gaps in the childcare system in the State, highlighting how the line of accountability blurs when things go wrong at workplace childcare.

Glaring gaps

In 2015, the Karnataka government issued guidelines for establishing crèche/daycare centres in corporate offices, industries, government and NGO establishments, MNCs, local bodies, societies, boards, trusts, and home-based facilities or those run by individuals.

The 24-page guidelines, issued by the Department of Women and Child Development, include all the stakeholders and factors required to run crèches, and list the duties of parents as well as staff, but fail to appoint one department or body as the nodal department to monitor these crèches.

Thippeswamy K.T., former member of Karnataka State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (KSCPCR), notes, "In 2015, there were allegations against crèches and daycare centres that they were feeding a liquid or a tonic that forced children to sleep. This was reported across the media and was discussed in the State Assembly. That was when the guidelines were framed and issued. However, it remained on paper as there was no nodal agency or department appointed to monitor them."

The guidelines mention that "periodic and surprise inspections of the crèche shall be conducted by prescribed authorities", but the guidelines fail to specify which authority or department. An official with the Directorate of Child Protection, Bengaluru East division, spoke about how inspections at several private crèches following the incident revealed an inadequate number of caretakers. "We have been inspecting several private crèches, and most of them have 30 children with only two caretakers. There should be at least six to eight caretakers for that number so that each child is given sufficient attention. In addition, there should be a limit on the number of children admitted in these crèches," the official said.

> Suggestions from all will be considered in revising the 2015 guidelines
>
> **SANTHOSH KUMAR,** Chairperson, Karnataka State Commission for Protection of Child Rights

Wake-up call

The incident has jolted the officials to re-examine these gaps. Speaking to *The Hindu*, Shamla Iqbal, Secretary, Department of Women and Child Development, said that the department will soon revise these guidelines and also appoint a nodal department or officers to monitor crèches.

According to the KSCPCR, a committee will soon be set up to revise the guidelines.

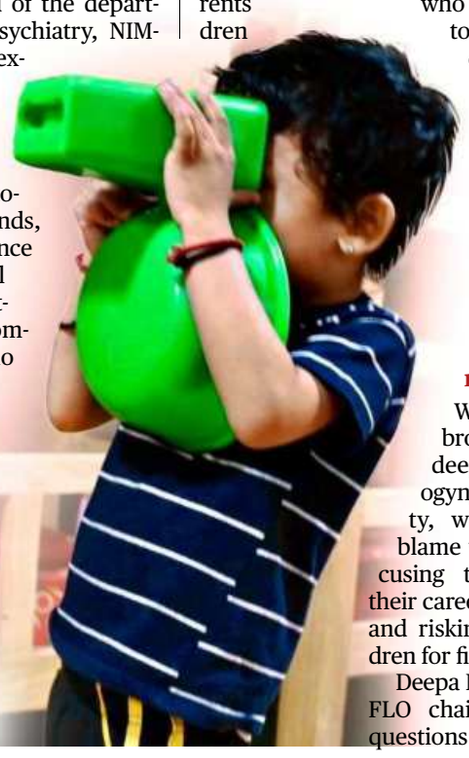
Admitting that the departments concerned have failed to monitor crèches or daycare centres, Santhosh Kumar, chairperson, KSCPCR, said, "Now, a committee will be formed comprising officials from the Department of Education, Women and Child Development, Labour, State police, psychiatrists and psychologists from NIMHANS, Directorate of Child Protection and others. Recommendations from all the officials will be considered in revising the 2015 guidelines and deciding the nodal department that will be in charge of monitoring and inspection of crèches."

According to him, the guidelines will address the maximum number of children that can be enrolled in crèches and daycare centres, the number of caretakers, mandatory registration of the centres through a government portal and CCTV cameras at the facilities.

Lasting consequences

Beyond questions of regulation and institutional lapses, experts say such incidents can have lasting consequences for young children, impacting their overall development and mental health.

While the impact may vary from child to child, John Vijay Sagar Kommu, head of the department, Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, NIMHANS, warns that children who experience trauma may suffer slower development of speech, language and cognitive skills. "As they grow older, they may become aggressive towards family members and friends, exhibit hyperactivity, or experience changes in their biological rhythms, including sleep and eating patterns. Nightmares are common among such children who may cling to parents and cry continuously," he notes.



Anxiety disorder and depression are commonly noticed when such children grow up to be adults. "If such changes are noticed in children, parents must seek immediate help," John cautions.

Who is accountable?

In Karnataka, workplace crèches are primarily governed by the Karnataka Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Rules, 2019. While it places the obligation on employers with more than 50 employees to provide crèches at the workplace, little does it say about where liability lies when things go wrong.

At a press meet following the incident, KSCPCR officials said that Capgemini does not bear liability in the incident as the facility was operated by the external provider Little Scholars. Responding to queries by *The Hindu*, the IT major said that the company has decided to temporarily suspend services at all crèche facilities operated by Little Scholars on Capgemini's campuses across India as a precaution, while the authorities conduct their investigation.

"To support affected families during this period, we have made flexible work arrangements, including work-from-home options. Employees may also access dedicated counselling services through our Employee Assistance Program, and a helpline has been established to address questions and provide additional support," it said.

The company has also reportedly filed a police complaint against Little Scholars.

Experts, however, feel that the question of accountability extends beyond the immediate perpetrator or the daycare operator.

"Vicarious liability cannot be ruled out, particularly when the safety of a child is involved. To curb this menace, even the provider of the space shall be made liable," says Anjali Ramanna, lawyer, juvenile and women rights advocate, and former chairperson of Child Welfare Committee.

Citing the Code on Social Security, 2020 and the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020, B.C. Prabhakar, labour law expert and managing committee member, Bangalore Chamber of Industry and Commerce (BCIC), remarks that companies cannot wash their hands off by simply outsourcing crèche operations.

"Due diligence must include verification of physical facilities, safety, background verification records of staff and a periodic check on these. Simply negotiating contracts and terms to indemnify themselves will not be enough, and organisations need to prioritise accountability.

While agreeing that the staff at the daycare centres and the operators of the facility must be held responsible for the safety and well-being of children, Purvesh Sharma, co-founder and COO at Footprints Childcare, a pre-school and daycare chain, believes the corporates who provide the space for the facilities as well as parents play a role in ensuring accountability.

"Children are not always easy to handle. Hence an adequate number of trained adults are important. But operators may compromise on the number or qualifications of the staff. Sometimes this happens due to cost pressures when corporates negotiate aggressively on pricing. Parents who are sending their children to these facilities must demand greater accountability from the employers, understand the kind of operators they are getting to run the facility, and the terms under which it is being run," he says.

Entrenched misogyny

What the incident also brought to the fore is the deeply entrenched misogyny in sections of society, which were quick to blame working mothers, accusing them of prioritising their careers over their children and risking the safety of children for financial gain.

Deepa Boopesh Reddy, FICCI FLO chairperson, Bengaluru, questions this misplaced criticism. "Going by that logic, instead of sending children to school, mothers should simply teach them at home, as such incidents could happen at schools also," she quips sarcastically.

"It is as much a man's responsibility to care for a child as it is a woman's. When both a man and woman step out to work, it is to give themselves, their children and their families a better life."

Extra mile on safety

Reddy feels it is important for everyone involved to go the extra mile on safety by knowing who is being hired, putting robust HR policies in place and ensuring regular audits are conducted.

Anjali Ramanna adds that creating awareness, training the public mentality to be more empathetic and issue-focused, and encouraging public involvement in monitory bodies is important to change the discourse away from blaming the parents.

Prabhakar points out that the transition from maternity leave to full-time work is historically the single largest career drop-off point for female professionals in corporate India.

"A well-maintained, reliable on-site or nearby daycare facility bridges this gap seamlessly. It provides an essential safety net for mothers returning to work, especially in modern urban environments where nuclear families are common and external family support systems are unavailable. By offering a secure space for their children, organisations actively prevent the loss of experienced female leaders, lower recruitment replacement costs, and build a culture of genuine inclusion and support," he says.

According to him, to make these facilities successful, corporate daycares must move beyond just providing basic childcare and focus heavily on maintaining high operating standards.

Best practices

In Bengaluru, as mandated by the law, several companies provide on-site or nearby daycare centres through tie-ups with third parties. However, the quality of crèches, be it corporate daycare centres or independent facilities, is not always top notch.

Medha (name changed), an IT professional at an MNC in the city, notes that many of her acquaintances with children have gone for alternative arrangements like seeking the help of family members over choosing company-provided crèches, due to quality concerns.

Neelima recollects how most of the crèches she visited near her home while looking for childcare were cramped, poorly ventilated, raised safety concerns or lacked adequately trained staff. Such experiences underscore the need for stronger regulation and stricter enforcement of internationally recognised best practices.

Among the suggestions provided by Thippeswamy to the government are training the staff working in crèches on child psychology, child rights, first aid, emergency response, behavioural management, and a separate helpline number for people to raise grievances regarding crèches, surprise inspections, and a district care monitoring committee in each district.

Prabhakar, who also stresses stricter licensing of crèches, lists childproofing across touchpoints, a healthy staff-to-child ratio, child-friendly sanitation spaces and thorough vetting, certification and ongoing training for employees as some of the essential requirements for daycare centres.

Echoing these principles, Sharma points to measures such as cushioned walls, floors and finger protectors on doors, strict staff screening and hygiene protocols, a dress code for staff, CCTV surveillance with live access for parents and freshly prepared food that is tasted by adults before being served to children.

"Such simple practices and processes, which are implemented all over the world, make a big difference to safeguard our children. We are talking about very young children here, aged from six months to five years. They are vulnerable and cannot speak up for themselves. Their safety and security are of topmost concern," he says.

Downward slide: Unnikrishnan, owner of Kumar Stores at Neyyattinkara, Thiruvananthapuram, says they used to have sales of over ₹50,000 on the first of every month and average sales of ₹25,000. Now, these have come down to ₹10,000 and ₹5,000 respectively. NIRMAL HARINDRAN

Dwindling fortunes

Neighbourhood shops and small retailers across the country are finding the going tough with e-commerce platforms and corporate-backed large retail stores rapidly establishing their business even in rural areas. **S.R. Praveen** meets some of the stakeholders in Kerala to understand the changing retail business scenario in the State

A faint hint of the twilight sun is visible on Mohanan's face as he sits staring at his mobile screen in front of his shop located a stone's throw away from the Thamalam level crossing in Thiruvananthapuram. Residents walk by, but there is no anticipation in his eyes that one of them would turn to his shop to pick something essential for home.

"You can see for yourself. It's all gone," says the 62-year-old man, pointing at the shelves with various items arranged haphazardly around, when asked about how his sales have been going.

He has sat at this shop for over 50 years now, from the time his father opened it in the neighbourhood in which Mohanan has lived all his life.

"It's all the more sad because I have seen better days in the past. Even five or six years ago, I used to have sales of ₹3,000-₹5,000 daily. Now I hardly manage to have sales of even ₹300 on most days. I stocked a sack of rice about a month ago, but I haven't sold even half a kilogram of it. Why would anyone come here when they can have it all delivered home? I just come and sit here every morning because it has become a habit. Before long, I will need to shut shop and find some other job, maybe as a security staff somewhere. That will pay more," rues Mohanan.

A common pattern now

Mohanan's plight is not an aberration, but part of a pattern that has been playing out across neighbourhoods in the State as well as across the country as quick-commerce platforms and corporate-backed large retail stores spread their wings and penetrate into smaller urban centres and even rural areas.

Though early players in the quick-commerce scene began their operations in Kerala in a limited, experimental manner in cities like Kochi about five years ago, the major expansion happened over the past two years. Currently, Swiggy, Instamart, Blinkit, Big Basket, JioMart and Zepto all have operations in the State. With the promise of quick doorstep delivery and attractive prices, these platforms are an appealing proposition for consumers, while many youths have also found employment as delivery partners. Parallelly, major retail chains, including Reliance, have expanded rapidly across towns and rural centres in the State.

From a consumer's perspective, all this makes for a rosy picture, but a walk along the commercial areas as well as neighbourhoods reveals the plight of those who have been struggling to cope in the digital era. The effect has been felt even by relatively large traders who have had flourishing businesses for decades, like the 59-year-old K. Unnikrishnan, whose family has been running Kumar Store in Neyyattinkara for 70 years.

"Earlier, on the first of every month, we used to have sales of over ₹50,000 and average sales of ₹25,000 during the rest of the month. Now, the first-of-the-month sale has come down to ₹10,000 and the average sales to ₹5,000," says Unnikrishnan.

> Corporate players, who dictate the competition, are present in every field. Since they fix the prices, the margins for small-scale traders drop drastically
>
> **BABU KOTTAYIL**
> Vice-president, Kerala Vyapari Vyavasayi Ekopana Samiti

"We used to have five sales staff and one cashier. Now there is just me and another person. Both quick-commerce firms and big supermarkets have affected us, as we cannot afford to give the kind of deep discounts they provide. I don't plan to take any more risks or loans to improve the business as I don't have much hope of beating this downturn," he says.

Predatory pricing mechanisms

The change happening now is not something which any of them could have foreseen even a decade ago. The Kerala Vyapari Vyavasayi Ekopana Samiti (KVVES), the traders' body which has for some time been voicing concerns over the predatory pricing mechanisms of quick-commerce as well as big retail chains, has been sensing this shift in its dwindling membership numbers.

According to Babu Kottayil, vice-president, KVVES, on an average 20-30% of various trade businesses get closed down every year across Kerala in recent years, while 10-15% new ones get opened annually, with a net drop of 10-15% in the number of such businesses. A good number of the new businesses are restaurants or cafes.

"A lot of factors are at play, including quick-commerce platforms and big supermarket chains. Both of these have penetrated even the smallest towns. Smaller traders are now moving away from business at a much faster rate. Big corporate players, who dictate the competition, are now present in every field, be it provisions, electronics or garments. Since they fix the prices, the margins for small-scale traders drop drastically, pushing them into a debt trap," observes Babu.

Large "dark stores," the name given to the godowns used by quick-commerce applications in various neighbourhoods to ensure superfast delivery, have now popped up even in rural areas. With no display boards outside, the only clue about their presence is the large number of delivery agents on two-wheelers milling about in the vicinity. Since their stocks are hardly ever from the local markets and are sourced through large supply chains, the local producers or traders do not stand to benefit from their massive growth.

High expenses, low returns

An 84-year-old Gopi, who runs Sree Panchami Variety Stores at Chiramukku in Thiruvananthapuram, says that the dwindling sales, the high rentals, trade licence fee, power bills and food safety licence fees for even selling snack packets have made the whole business unsustainable. "There are a few who order online or shop from supermarkets in the early half of the month and come to me to get things on credit towards the end of the month," he says ruefully.

The KVVES has in the past tried to overcome the challenges posed by larger chains and online commerce by various experiments, including a unified purchasing model for all shops in a particular area, but these attempts have failed.

"During the initial days of the proliferation of the online platforms, the samiti had thought of initiatives, but we realised that these need huge investment and are mostly impractical. The unified purchase model was tried out in some districts, but many traders did not cooperate with it. Home appliances traders have a collective for bulk purchase," observes Peringamala Ramachandran, a former office-bearer of the KVVES.

"Strategic discussions are under way among traders on how the prices can be reduced. Since all of them procure from wholesalers, they cannot sell without taking a minimum profit unlike the bigger chains or supermarkets that buy directly from the companies at a lower rate," says Ramachandran.

Smaller traders who have shifted to new businesses in recent years are also feeling the pinch, for instance, the owners of smaller mobile shops.

"Online sales as well as bigger chain outlets have cut into our business. Now customers approach us mostly for accessories or for service and not to purchase new mobiles," says Mohammed Shafi, who runs a mobile shop at Valanchery in Malappuram district.

Local fish vendors are another category whose businesses have dropped due to the online shift. Added to the challenges posed by online fresh fish delivery services as well as supermarkets are the restrictions on their entry to many flat complexes. "Many of the long-time vendors are either jobless or shifting to other jobs," says Pulluvila Stanley, general secretary of the All India Fishers and Fisheries Workers' Federation.

A complaint unheard

The All India Consumer Products Distributors Federation had two years ago lodged a complaint against quick-commerce platforms with the Competition Commission of India. According to Dhairyashil Patil, national president of the federation, nothing much has happened over the complaint which highlighted some of the major issues due to quick commerce.

"We had made substantial points regarding the deep discounting and predatory pricing in the market by the quick-commerce platforms. Supportive documents and bills were given, especially on how they were manipulating prices. The products available in the general market and those provided through these platforms often have different weights. So the discounts that the customers get are mostly perceived and not actual. The commission did not take any action on it. Right now, it is an alarming situation and could get worse," cautions Patil.

A rare survival story

Amid all the gloomy tales of struggle for survival in a digital age, the story of how the local cable operators in Kerala managed to stay afloat may have lessons for other sectors too.

Back in 2007, around the time the winds of digitisation began to blow across the cable television sector, local cable TV operators across Kerala under the aegis of the Cable TV Operators Association formed Kerala Communicators Cable Limited. The company had the structure of a cooperative with the local cable TV operators as shareholders with shares in profits. The company launched digital cable TV services under the brand name of Kerala Vision. In 2015, it launched broadband services and in the post-COVID years, Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms as a bundled service. Currently, over 6,000 local cable operators across Kerala are part of the initiative.

This model is particularly interesting because the local cable operators have been slowly shutting shop across the country amid the launch of operations by corporates as well as the proliferation of the OTT platforms.

A study conducted by the All India Digital Cable Federation in 2025 estimated job losses in the sector at 5.77 lakh since 2018, owing to the closure of 72,000 local cable operators and 900 Multiple System Operators.

"We couldn't have survived in the digital era if we had not stood united. Since all the local operators are shareholders, they get a share of the profits. We now have an understanding with major streaming platforms such as Hotstar to provide their services bundled with ours. In the past two years, around 10% of the subscribers have given up their set-top box cable connection for broadband. But we are well set to meet the challenge," says K. Vijayakrishnan, executive committee member of the association.

Bleak prospects: Padmakumar, proprietor of an old grocery shop at Poovachal village in Thiruvananthapuram, checking the store which he has gradually converted into a fertilizer depot. NIRMAL HARINDRAN

INBRIEF

NMDC slashes iron ore lump prices by ₹250 a tonne

NMDC has reduced iron ore prices by ₹250 a tonne for Baila Lump and by ₹150 for the same quantity of Baila Fines effective July 10. The new, per tonne prices have been set at ₹5,450 for Baila Lump and ₹4,700 for Baila Fines and are freight on road/rail (FOR) prices exclusive of royalty, DMF, NMEDT, cess, forest permit fee, transit fee, GST, environmental cess and other taxes, the company said on Friday. The latest revision is the fourth in as many months this fiscal.

Aurobindo sets up arm in Indonesia for manufacturing

Drugmaker Aurobindo Pharma on Friday announced the incorporation of a new subsidiary in Indonesia with plans to undertake manufacturing operations there. Wholly owned stepdown subsidiary PT Aurogen Pharma Indonesia has incorporated the new company PT Auro Pharm Indonesia and the authorities have approved the same on July 9. The objective is to undertake manufacturing operations in Indonesia, Aurobindo Pharma said in a filing.

Apollo Micro Systems to buy 41.33% in Premier Explosives

Defence technology company Apollo Micro Systems has signed a definitive share purchase agreement to acquire 41.33% stake for about ₹1,550 crore in Hyderabad-based Premier Explosives that manufactures high energy materials for defence, aerospace and mining. Apollo Micro Systems is also making a mandatory open offer to eligible public shareholders of Premier Explosives for acquisition of up to 26% fully diluted voting equity share capital.

Equity MF inflows see 26.5% surge in June

Net inflows of ₹28,973 crore in June come after easing geopolitical tensions, expectations of supportive domestic macroeconomic conditions, strong retail participation; outstanding SIP accounts increase to 10.5 crore for the first time after four months of staying around the territory of 10.4 crore

Ashokamithran T.
MUMBAI

Equity-oriented mutual fund schemes attracted ₹28,973 crore in June, a sharp surge of 26.5% from the previous month, driven by easing geopolitical tensions, expectations of supportive domestic macroeconomic conditions, and strong retail participation, data from the Association of Mutual Funds of India (AMFI) showed.

The net inflows in June came after a 40.4% decline in the previous month. Investors had contributed more than the median investment of ₹27,476 crore in 2026 so far.

The number of outstanding systematic investment plan (SIP) accounts increased to 10.5 crore for the first time after four months of staying around the territory of 10.4 crore accounts. The increase came in a fall in discontinued accounts to 50.6 lakh, from over 51 lakh accounts in May 2026.

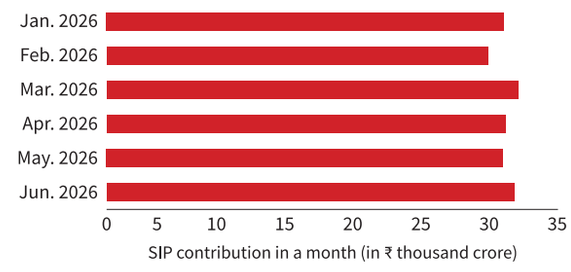
The contributing SIPs increased to 9.7 crore, constituting 93% of the outstanding SIP accounts in June. In May 2026, just about 9.6 crore accounts contributed for their SIPs, making them a slightly lower share of 92% of all outstanding accounts. Investors contributed ₹31,781 crore into SIPs in June 2026, up from ₹30,954 crore in the month earlier. Within the equity category, mid-cap funds attracted the highest inflows at ₹6,090 crore, followed by small-cap funds at ₹5,602 crore and flexi cap funds at ₹5,231 crore. Large cap funds received an inflow of ₹2,067 crore.

On the other hand, dividend yield funds and equity-linked savings schemes saw net outflows during the month. Also, gold ETFs recorded a net inflow of ₹3,443 crore in June against a net outflow of ₹725 crore in May. The renewed enthusiasm in mutual funds comes in the backdrop of increasing campaigns by fund managers and personal finance experts. "The rebound indicates that investor confidence remains resilient despite ongoing global uncertainties and periodic market volatility. Improved market sentiment, expectations of supportive domestic macroeconomic conditions, and continued strength in retail participation helped support flows during the month," said Nehal Meshram, senior analyst, Morningstar Investment Research India.

(With PTI inputs)

Slow and steady

Indians invested ₹28,973 crore into equity based mutual fund schemes in June 2026, a 26.5% increase from ₹22,907 crore in the previous month



Source: Association of Mutual Funds of India (AMFI)

India lays out tariffs and quotas for U.K. vehicles under trade deal

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Indian government has released the list of quotas and tariffs for automobile imports from the United Kingdom under the trade deal between the two countries.

The India-U.K. Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) will come into force on July 15. As per the Directorate General of Foreign Trade's notification, a total of 20,000 completely built units (CBUs) of petrol and diesel passenger vehicles will be allowed for import from the U.K. at concessional rates of 30-50%, depending on the size of the car, down from the normal import duty of between 66-110%.

A total of 20,000 CBUs of petrol, diesel PVs will be allowed at concessional rates of 30-50%

This quota will increase to 37,000 cars by year five of the deal, which is also when the concessional tariff will settle at 10% and remain there.

However, after this, the size of the quota will gradually decrease, settling at 15,000 passenger vehicles in year 15.

Similarly, the notification also lays out the quotas and tariffs for electric vehicles (EVs), hybrids, and hydrogen-based passenger vehicles.

Basis for gradations

While the gradations for the conventional fuel passenger vehicles are made on the basis of engine size, the gradations for these alternate fuel vehicles are on the basis of cost.

The concessions for these vehicles will kick in only from year six of the deal, providing domestic manufacturers a buffer before they will have to start competing with U.K. brands.

AEL, Dioxycle tie up for low carbon chemical manufacturing

Lalatendu Mishra
MUMBAI

Foraying into the chemicals sector Adani Enterprises Ltd. (AEL), the holding company of the Adani Group, has entered into a long-term agreement with Dioxycle, a French clean-technology company specialising in chemical manufacturing, to develop and scale low-carbon chemical production in India.

The initiative will begin with a pilot facility at an Adani Group site to produce formic acid using captured carbon dioxide and renewable electricity. Following validation, the plan is to scale the technology for commercial manufacturing.

Formic acid and its derivatives are widely used across industries including textiles, agriculture and manufacturing.

The tie-up combines Dioxycle's electrically driven chemical-manufacturing technology with Adani Group's clean-energy capabilities, infrastructure platform and project execution expertise to create a new model for sustainable and cost-competitive chemical production, AEL said.

"We are proud to pilot India's first formic acid production facility powered entirely by renewable electricity and captured carbon. This partnership with Dioxycle is a testament to how strategic industrial synergies can turn carbon liabilities into sustainable, cost-effective economic assets," said Jeet Adani, Director, Adani Group. "Together with Adani, we aim to build a competitive and scalable model for low-carbon chemical production," said Sarah Lamaison, CEO and co-founder of Dioxycle.

"For the Adani Group, the initiative marks a strategic entry into the chemicals sector, building on its strengths in renewable energy and infrastructure while expanding its portfolio of future-ready businesses," AEL said.

For the Adani Group, the initiative marks a strategic entry into the chemicals sector

SBI sells 1.42% stake in asset management arm SBIFM

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

State Bank of India (SBI) has sold 1.42% stake in its asset management arm, SBI Funds Management Ltd. (SBIFM), to 30 investors for ₹1,655 crore in a pre-IPO placement round, the bank said.

The lender sold the stake at ₹574 per share, which is also the higher end of the IPO price band, according to an exchange filing. SBI Funds Management's ₹11,600-crore maiden public equity offering will open on July 14 and conclude on July 16.

The entire IPO is an Offer for Sale (OFS) by promoters SBI and Amundi India Holding.

SBI sold the shares to investors including 360 ONE funds, Tata AIG General Insurance Company, Go Digit General Insurance, Bennett Coleman, Anand Rathi Global Finance, Capri Global Ventures and Carnelian Bharat Amritkaal Fund.

The sale is part of the pre-IPO placement ahead of the proposed IPO of SBIFM. One of the largest IPOs in recent times, it is set to be succeeded by mega issuances from largest stock exchange NSE and telco Jio Platforms.

Industry players hail revival of Black Pepper Futures

G. Ragesh
KOCHI

Industry stakeholders have welcomed National Commodity & Derivatives Exchange (NCDEX) Ltd.'s decision to revive Black Pepper Futures through which it expects to create an India-centric reference price.

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) regulated NCDEX recently announced that the Black Pepper Futures contract will start trading from July 15, with Kochi designated as the delivery and pricing centre. Initially, four contracts expiring in August, September, October, and November will be available for trading.

The relaunch comes after NCDEX suspended the Black Pepper Futures contract in 2010 following severe quality disputes.

S.V. Prabhakar, a spices grower from Idukki, said it ensured a hedging mechanism that shielded traders against unfavourable price fluctuations, even as he suggested the trading unit be reduced to 200-250 kg from 1 metric tonne as fixed by NCDEX.

Anil Kuruvila, professor and head, Department of Agricultural Economics, College of Agriculture, Vellayani, said it would help domestic players in price discovery without depending on external markets, such as Vietnam, the global leader in pepper production.

Anand Kishor, president, India Pepper and Spice Trade Association, cautioned that the relaunch of pepper futures should factor in lessons from the past as he highlighted instances where multi commodity exchanges allowed speculators to go rampant to sustain heavy volumes. "The foundation of a commodity exchange market is a price discovery mechanism, not a price disruption,' he added.

Arun Raste, Managing Director and CEO, NCDEX, said the relaunch is an effort to create a transparent, credible and India-centric reference price for the trade.

Microsoft layoffs: Top Xbox employee in India exits

Aroon Deep
NEW DELHI

Microsoft Corp. gaming division Xbox's senior-most employee in India is departing as a part of the parent company's global layoffs, *The Hindu* learned from two people familiar with the development.

The exit of Arjun Varma, India Lead at Xbox's Strategic Markets division, comes following weeks of Xbox hardware being unavailable in India. The development also marks a significant retreat from India by the Microsoft subsidiary, which has also limited the quantities of Xbox consoles available in the country.

Earlier this week, Microsoft announced a 2% headcount reduction around the world, and news reports indicated that the Xbox team was globally impacted. The firm faces multiple headwinds globally, but also specifically in India, where at least on the gaming console front, Sony's PlayStation enjoys a considerably larger market share.

A Microsoft spokesperson did not respond to a request for comment. Mr. Varma did not respond to a text message.

Last year, Xbox launched its cloud gaming service with servers in Mumbai and Chennai, allowing users to access their game libraries from multiple devices. It is unclear if that service has taken off in a significant way. In a company-wide email on July 6, Xbox's global head Asha Sharma said that while its cloud gaming business and other moves "have created meaningful value, they did not grow at the pace we expected," and pointed to low margins and losses on game investments.

Mobile gaming reigns supreme in India, with console sales of PlayStation and Xbox devices in the current generation of hardware being well under 10 lakh. According to data reviewed by *The Hindu*, it is likely that there are fewer PlayStation 5 devices sold in India than there are gram panchayats.

Adoption is unlikely to grow in the medium term, as both PC and console gaming have become much more expensive. This has been the result of a memory component crisis that has led to sharply increasing prices for RAM, hard disks and solid state drives, pushing up the cost of personal computing considerably.

The exit of Arjun Varma, India Lead at Xbox's Strategic Markets, comes following weeks of Xbox hardware being unavailable in India.

Indian Bank June quarter net rises 10% to ₹3,273 cr.

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Indian Bank posted a 10% increase in net profit to ₹3,273 crore in the June quarter of FY27. Net profit stood at ₹2,973 crore in the same quarter of the previous fiscal.

The public sector lender's net interest income (NII) rose 16.92% to ₹7,435 crore during the quarter from ₹6,359 crore a year earlier. Gross advances increased 13.89% year on year to ₹6,84,623 crore in June 2026 from ₹6,01,147 crore in June 2025. Total deposits rose 13.47% to ₹8,44,578 crore from ₹7,44,289 crore a year ago. Domestic CASA ratio increased to 39.73% from 38.97%. Retail, Agriculture and MSME (RAM) advances grew by 14.80% YoY to ₹4,16,992 crore in June 2026 from ₹3,63,221 crore in June 2025.

"We aim to become the preferred financial partner for customers by catering to their full spectrum of banking needs," the lender said.

Is India prepared to handle an Internet blackout?

Mini Tejaswi
BENGALURU

What is India's preparedness to handle a Internet blackout? Well, in a list of top 10 countries least likely to be badly hit by a digital breakdown, India stands at the ninth position globally with a vulnerability score of 23.4 just ahead of Sweden at 10th place with a vulnerability score of 24.3, reported TRG Datacenters, a U.S.-based colocation and digital infrastructure provider backed by venture firm Tallvine Partners.

United States tops the list with 0 (zero) vulnerability, followed by Indonesia at 10.3 and United Kingdom in the third position with a vulnerability score of 16.2. The study also noted that India had the lowest number of submarine cables at 22, while the U.S. has the highest at 115.

The number of submarine cables indicates the strength of a nation's digital infrastructure and connections it has across the globe via Internet. On the population front, 70% of India's population use Internet, standing slightly behind Indonesia at 72.8%, while Australia has the highest at 96.1%, pushing U.K. and U.S. slightly behind at 95.5% and 94.7%, respectively.

India has 40 Internet exchange points, while the U.S. has the highest at 209, Indonesia has 70 and the U.K. has 30.

A country with the largest number of Internet Exchange Points (IXPs) possesses a highly developed, decentralised, and efficient digital infrastructure and that means domestic networks can exchange data directly rather than routing traffic internationally, resulting in lower costs, much faster internet speeds, and resilient network ecosystems. So, if the Internet ever goes down, the U.S. would bounce back fastest, thanks to 115 undersea cables and 209 hubs (Internet exchange points) linking it to the world.

With 30 Internet exchange points and 65 cables, the United Kingdom is the best-prepared country for any Europe-wide network breakdown, while Indonesia relies on 72 submarine Internet cables and 77 exchange points, as per information released by TRG Datacenters.

The research examined nearly 100 countries to find which ones could handle the Internet blackout the best.

India stands at the ninth position globally with a vulnerability score of 23.4, reported U.S.-based TRG Datacenters. GETTYIMAGES

World Bank commits $890 mn for solar rooftops in India

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The World Bank Group has committed $890 million funding support to accelerate India's national programme for solar rooftops to bring clean energy to millions of homes and create 1.7 million job opportunities across the renewable energy manufacturing, installation, and services value chain.

The financing package for the programme includes an $820 million loan from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), a $60 million concessional loan from the Clean Technology Fund, and a $10 million grant from IBRD's Livable Planet Fund.

In addition, the World Bank will mobilise $ 4.2 billion in private financing in the form of commercial loans enabling them to install solar rooftops for households, it said.

India has committed to achieving net zero by 2070.

WASHINGTON

Israel shared intel about 'new' Iran plot to assassinate Trump: reports

REUTERS

Israel shared intelligence with the U.S. this week about a new plan by Iran to assassinate President Donald Trump, U.S. media reported on Thursday. The U.S. tracked "a steady drumbeat" of intel on such plans, "but Israel's warning concerned a specific plot," *CNN* said. *The Wall Street Journal* said the intel described a "fresh" plot. AFP

WASHINGTON

Over 22 kg India-bound cocaine seized by U.S. officials in Miami

REUTERS

U.S. officials seized over 22 kg of cocaine hydrochloride worth $1.5 million from an air cargo warehouse near the Miami International Airport, which was being shipped to India from Dominican Republic. U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials seized the drugs, which were hidden in speakers and amplifiers. PTI

WASHINGTON

U.S. agrees to continue Iran talks but ceasefire is 'over', says Trump

REUTERS

President Donald Trump said on Friday the United States has agreed to continue negotiations with Iran but reiterated that the ceasefire between the two countries is finished. "Iran has asked us to continue 'talks.' We have agreed to do so, but the United States has stated to them that the Cease Fire is OVER!" AFP

BEDAR

12 dead, several missing as wildfire spreads through southern Spain

REUTERS

Twelve people were killed and 23 were missing after a wildfire in southern Spain, authorities said on Friday. Authorities said many of the victims may be foreign tourists visiting Bedar, a small village in Los Gallardos district. They described victims trying to flee the blaze, in one of Spain's deadliest wildfires in recent years. AFP

Ukrainian drones hit southern Russian refineries and Azov port

Firefighters working to extinguish burning petroleum products at the seaport, say Russian officials; Moscow's Defence Ministry says it downed more than 370 Ukrainian drones; Kyiv's army chief says war not yet at decisive 'turning point'

Agence France-Presse
MOSCOW

Ukrainian drone strikes on Friday hit southern Russian oil refineries and the port of Taganrog on the Azov Sea, where authorities declared an emergency and evacuated some residents, officials said.

Kyiv has beefed up its efforts in recent months to hinder Moscow's financial capabilities in its war against Ukraine, targeting energy infrastructure in retaliatory strikes and causing a nationwide fuel shortage.

Russia's Defence Ministry said its forces downed over 370 Ukrainian drones, including over the Moscow region.

In the port of Taganrog, near occupied Ukraine, social media videos showed plumes of smoke rising over the city. Local governor Yuri Slyusar said he visited the port after "massive" night-time strikes. "Efforts to extinguish the fire of petroleum products at the seaport are ongoing."

In the neighbouring Krasnodar region, authorities said drones caused a fire at the Ilsky oil refinery. Authorities reported no casualties.

Russian leader Vladimir Putin has acknowledged that the Ukrainian strikes are causing a fuel shortage and said they are aimed at dividing Russians.

People queue to refuel their cars at a petrol station in Moscow on Friday as Ukrainian strikes on refineries crimp domestic supply. AFP

Meanwhile, Ukraine's commander-in-chief Oleksandr Syrsky said that a turning point in the war with Russia was "still a long way off", despite hailing a string of recent successes for his troops.

Kyiv's army has halted the Russian advance across much of the front line in recent months, and delivered a string of major long-range attacks on Russian oil refineries. Many in Ukraine and among their backers abroad are saying Kyiv's troops are on the front foot in the more than four-year war.

In a social media post summarising the first half of the year, Mr. Syrsky noted a decrease in the number of "active offensive fronts", and said Russia's assaults had dropped by half.

"At the same time, we are still far from a turning point in the war," he added.

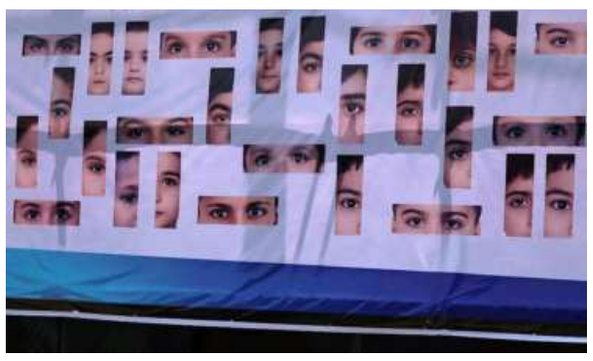
Mysterious strikes target Iran after U.S. air attacks

Associated Press
DUBAI

A series of mysterious, unclaimed air strikes that hit Iran after the U.S. said it finished its attacks have again raised questions of who else may be targeting the Islamic Republic.

The strikes on Thursday, just as Iran prepared to bury the late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, hit areas across southern Iran. The country's theocracy hasn't directly blamed anyone for the strikes, though one lawmaker issued a warning to the United Arab Emirates over allegedly providing support to the United States in its campaign against Iran.

Gulf Arab states, which repeatedly have been targeted by Iran since the war began February 28, did not immediately respond to requests for comment on Friday over the strikes. The attacks come as they and the U.S. insist the Strait of Hormuz must be open and free to ships to transit.



A makeshift memorial in Tehran to the schoolchildren who were killed in a strike on a girls' primary school in Minab, Iran. REUTERS

Israel, which under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has engaged in an intense campaign against Iran, has not attacked the Islamic Republic since June. Israel also broadly immediately claims its attacks on Iran.

On Friday, Iranian state media quoted Esmail Kousari, a former commander in IRGC, as warning the UAE would "pay the price for its cooperation with the United States".

Rough tides

Fishing boats moored as fishermen refrain from going out into sea on Friday ahead of Typhoon Bavi, which is predicted to hit Lianyungang in China's Jiangsu province on the weekend. AFP

Burnham on the verge of becoming U.K. PM

Sriram Lakshman
LONDON

Former Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham is all but certain to be U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer's successor after he secured the support of 322 of 403 Labour MPs to become the next occupant of No. 10 Downing Street and Labour Party leader.

The support of 81 MPs is needed to contest any internal election; Mr. Burnham was officially one MP short, as of Friday afternoon, of ensuring that he would be the only candidate in the fray. Four other MPs had declared support for the former Mayor but had not officially nominated him, as per Labour List, a website that tracks news from the party. Mr. Burnham is expected to be appointed Labour leader by the end of next week and Prime Minister on July 20.

Andy Burnham being greeted as he arrives to deliver a speech at the People's History Museum in Manchester, Britain. REUTERS

Mr. Burnham, who is from Labour's 'soft left' and was elected three times to run Manchester, won a byelection in Makerfield on June 18 in order to return to Westminster, as support for Mr. Starmer within his party continued to evaporate. Mr. Burnham thanked MPs for their support, saying it was indicative of a desire for a new approach to politics.

"That is the circuit breaker I am offering: power out of Westminster, an economy rewired for ordinary people, and good growth in every postcode," he said in a statement on Thursday. Mr. Burnham also released a video message on Gaza on the same day. "The unbearable suffering in Gaza is a scar on our collective conscience," Mr. Burnham said, noting there was still a humanitarian crisis under way. He condemned Israel's military for expanding the area it controls in Gaza. He also "strongly" condemned Hamas for the attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, as well as condemning the increase in antisemitic attacks in the U.K.

"Labour's initial response to the treatment of Gaza caused huge hurt. We got it wrong and I am sorry for that," he said.

Mr. Burnham acknowledged that the Labour government had taken important steps such as recognising the Palestinian state, sanctioning some Israeli ministers and violent Israeli settlers, and had placed restrictions on arms exports. However, the U.K. was too slow to call for a ceasefire, he said.

The government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was "clearly attempting to make a 'two-state solution' impossible", Mr. Burnham said, calling for further responses from the U.K.

There is increasing evidence that war crimes were committed in Gaza, he said, adding that the international courts – and not politicians – should make a determination on this. "There is no contradiction between a zero tolerance approach to antisemitism and holding the Netanyahu government to account."

Indian mission in touch with Sri Lanka prison riot victim's family; investigation under way

Meera Srinivasan
COLOMBO

The High Commission of India in Colombo is in touch with Sri Lankan authorities and the family of the Indian inmate who was among those killed in the recent prison riots, sources told *The Hindu* on Friday. However, neither the Sri Lankan nor Indian authorities have officially commented on the development.

The victim, Sarathchandran U., 73, was killed in the deadly clashes that broke out in a prison in Negombo, located about 35 km north of Colombo and adjoining the Bandaranaike International Airport, on July 6. A total of 28 persons, including eight prison officers, were killed in the riots, one of the most violent episodes witnessed in Sri Lankan prisons. Over 100 inmates were injured. Soon after the riots, authorities moved over 1,000 prisoners, including some Indian nationals in custody, from Negombo to other prisons across the island.

Security personnel escort prisoners to a bus at Negombo Prison on the outskirts of Colombo following clashes between inmates. AFP

While the Indian inmate is said to have hailed from Kerala, relatives in his native village earlier told *The Hindu* that he had moved to Chennai over four decades ago, maintaining no contact with his village. "His family prefers to keep details of imprisonment and the circumstances of his death private," an official source said. Sources confirmed that the Indian mission had sent a note verbale to Sri Lanka's Ministry of Foreign Affairs on learning about the Indian prisoner's death.

According to initial investigations, the riots were triggered after rival gangs clashed over some members tipping off prison authorities about a drug operation on the premises.

Rights defenders have long flagged chronic overcrowding in Sri Lankan prisons.

Amid long-standing concerns about severe overcrowding in prisons, the Anura Kumara Dissanayake administration has decided to expand its prison capacity, including at an old hospital facility, to manage the crisis. Official data show that Sri Lanka houses around 42,000 inmates across its 22 prisons, with drug-related offences accounting for about two-thirds of the prison population.

Meanwhile, the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka has launched an investigation into the violence at Negombo Prison. The government has appointed a committee headed by a retired judge of the Supreme Court to carry out an investigation into the incident, while the Police Criminal Investigation Department, too, is pursuing a probe.

Change 'addictive design' of Facebook, Instagram, says EU

Agence France-Presse
BRUSSELS

Meta must change Facebook's and Instagram's "addictive design" or face a heavy fine, the EU warned on Friday.

Brussels accused the U.S. tech giant of failing to limit the risks the platforms posed to users, especially children and vulnerable adults, because of features designed to keep them on Facebook and Instagram.

Of particular concern are those like endless scroll, highly personalised feeds and the automatic playback of videos.

"Protecting the physical and mental health of Europeans must be a priority for social media platforms," EU tech chief Henna Virkkunen said in a statement.

Of particular concern are those like endless scroll, and highly personalised feeds. REUTERS

The European Union has in recent months stepped up its efforts to force Big Tech to better protect users online, especially children.

In a preliminary view on Friday, the European Commission said it "considers that Meta needs to implement design changes to both Instagram and Facebook" after concluding the platforms broke EU content rules.

Changes could include "disabling key addictive features such as 'autoplay' and 'infinite scroll' by default, implementing effective 'screen time breaks', and adapting its recommender system to make it less engagement-oriented", it added.

Meta said it disagreed with findings but would continue to "engage constructively" with the EU.

If the regulator's views on Meta are confirmed, the EU can slap a fine of up to 6% of the company's total worldwide annual turnover.

The unfulfilled solar promise of India and Germany

Three years after both countries signed a landmark agreement to facilitate the migration of Indian solar technicians to Germany, not a single such technician has made the journey; the experience exposes a wider disconnect between ambitious labour mobility agreements and the realities of skill development, labour market demand and the aspirations of India's emerging green workforce

Nimish Sawant
Safina Nabi
BERLIN

Mehreen Amin is studying in the fourth semester at the Government Degree College for Women in Zakura, Srinagar. Ms. Amin recently completed an intensive solar technical programme through a Kashmir-based training institute registered with the Skill Council for Green Jobs (SCGJ). When the institute was initially mobilising students in her community, she felt an instinctive urge to enrol.

"I wasn't thinking about career benefits or the future of solar energy back then; my only interest was a hands-on desire to learn how to install the panels," Ms. Amin recalls. "But now, I realise we will all need these skills in the future. I want to know exactly how to handle and operate this equipment myself."

Ms. Amin's training is part of the training of thousands of students and professionals to become "Suryamitras," or certified solar photovoltaic (PV) technicians. This is a three-month long programme from the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, conducted by the National Institute of Solar Energy, to promote job creation in India's solar industry.

Back in 2023, some of the Suryamitras were also considered potential candidates for working in the German solar industry.

Within a month of former German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's visit to India in February 2023, the Bundesverband Solarwirtschaft (BSW), or the German Solar Industry Association, and the SCGJ signed a Memorandum of Understanding to promote skilled worker migration in the solar sector between India and Germany.

BSW is a trade body representing over 1,000 companies in the solar energy and battery storage sector in Germany. The SCGJ is a non-profit, autonomous, industry-led organisation associated with the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship.

As per the MoU, the promise was to place at least 20 Indian Suryamitra electricians in Germany's solar sector. Another objective was to promote skilled workers exchange to help address and accelerate skilled worker migration in solar between the two countries. By conservative estimates, Germany is facing a shortage of over 1,00,000 workers in the solar sector.

Three years since that MoU was signed, not a single Indian Suryamitra has migrated to Germany.

This is not the first time an official Indo-German agreement promising the transfer of skilled labour has failed to materialise. Two years earlier, the State of Maharashtra and the German State of Baden-Württemberg had signed an agreement on the transfer of skilled labour, promising to send 10,000 skilled workers in 34 trades from the Indian State to Germany. By December 2025, reports confirmed that not a single professional had migrated under the agreement.

In limbo: The agreement promised to place at least 20 Indian Suryamitra electricians in Germany's solar sector, but no technician has migrated under the partnership. REUTERS

Big promises

The BSW-Solar and SCGJ agreement repeats a pattern where not a single skilled professional migrated from India to Germany. It was during Chancellor Scholz's 2023 visit to India that Germany increased its cap on professional visas for Indian professionals from 20,000 to 90,000.

According to a 2025 study by the German Economic Institute (IW), around 32,800 Indian professionals work in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) fields, a nine-fold increase since 2012.

A third of full-time Indian workers aged 25 to 44 are employed in the STEM sector. But the picture isn't as rosy for non-STEM sectors, especially in areas where vocational training is a must – such as the solar industry.

"Our understanding is that the primary objective of this initiative was to support domestic workforce training and skills development within India to meet the needs of its booming local market, rather than facilitating international placements," noted David Wedepohl, managing director of International Affairs at BSW Solar and also a signatory of the MoU.

As per BSW Solar, they were not operationally involved in the training programme.

The signatory from the SCGJ, Arpit Sharma, noted that the Suryamitras were already trained under the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy scheme, and that the idea of the partnership was to upskill them in German technical standards and provide German-language courses.

"Unfortunately, no candidates were upskilled during the tenure, and no funds were provided to the SCGJ for any task," noted Mr. Sharma.

According to Mr. Wedepohl, throughout the entire solar value chain, there is a particular demand for skilled workers in building electrical systems, such as DC assembly, AC installation, PV planning and construction management for the PV sector.

According to a 2024 study by the Bertelsmann Foundation, only 18% of companies were actively recruiting workers from abroad, even though 70% were facing a worker shortage.

The reason – language and bureaucratic hurdles such as recognition of professional qualifications. In vocational fields, German companies are strict about on-the-job practical knowledge.

As per Mr. Wedepohl, "The aim was to identify the already trained Suryamitras, which were supported by the National Institute of Solar Energy and if needed, upskill them to German standards."

Jana Fingerhut, Senior Project Manager (Sustainable Social Market Economy) at Bertelsmann Foundation, notes that German companies are strict about the accreditation of certain professions in addition to language proficiency.

"The accreditation process can cause delays. The government is also cutting down on language and integration courses, which makes it even harder for many qualified people to enter the German job market. We hope that changes in the future," noted Ms. Fingerhut.

Mr. Sharma noted that a list of 30 Suryamitras was shared with BSW Solar. "The candidates couldn't make it through the upskilling programme as the German migration laws changed," said Mr. Sharma.

Speaking to various other students, such as Ms. Amin, it also emerged that many trainees are not enrolling with the objective of building careers in the solar sector. Some trainees said they enrolled for the stipend associated with the programme, while others did it while being engaged in a different occupation.

It emerged that institutes are assigned enrolment targets but receive little guidance on how to identify or recruit candidates genuinely interested in green-sector jobs. As a result, the emphasis often shifts from attracting motivated trainees to simply filling seats.

Structural roadblocks

One thing both sides agree on is the changes to migration frameworks on the German side that further complicated matters.

"When the partnership was originally formed, labour shortages and market conditions in Germany differed from today. The German market grew by roughly 100% between 2022 and 2023. The cooperation provided a valuable opportunity to better understand the Indian solar sector and to explore whether labour mobility between the two countries could be feasible in the future," said Mr. Wedepohl.

According to a 2026 report from the Bertelsmann Foundation, the number of people employed in Germany's renewable energy sector reached a record high of 4,36,000 in 2025, a sub-4% increase over 2023. The report notes that the current federal government's energy policy changes could put thousands of jobs in the sector at risk.

"The previous government placed a strong emphasis on expanding renewable energy and implemented this through new, ambitious expansion targets and faster approval procedures for renewable energy installations. Under the current federal government, a political shift appears to be emerging that could slow down the expansion of renewable energy. However, this is not yet 100% certain, as four energy-sector laws are currently being developed. The initial draft laws, however, suggest that they could lead to lower investment in renewable energy and, as a result, a reduction in jobs," said Ms. Fingerhut.

In March 2026, Germany's Economy Minister, Katherina Reiche, discontinued state subsidies for rooftop solar installations up to 25 kW, citing a drop in photovoltaic prices.

"This cut would mean that fewer people have an incentive to install solar panels, which could have a negative impact on investment and, in turn, on employment in the solar industry," noted Ms. Fingerhut.

At the moment, the BSW and SCGJ partnership focuses on ongoing discussions around skill development for manufacturing and industrial workers across the solar value chain.

"Continued cooperation between governments, industry stakeholders, and training institutions remains important to align qualifications with actual labour market needs," said Mr. Wedepohl.

(This article is part of the India-Germany Climate and Energy Journalism Programme organised by Clean Energy Wire, supported by Heinrich Böll Stiftung)

Facing the past

Poland's Chief Rabbi Michael Schudrich places a stone at the monument commemorating the Jedwabne massacre, honouring the town's Jewish residents murdered by their Polish neighbours on July 10, 1941, in Jedwabne, north-eastern Poland, on Friday. AFP

One million women and girls lose access to support amid aid cuts: UN

Agence France Presse
GENEVA

The United Nations (UN) warned Friday that at least one million women and girls had lost access to vital support due to dramatic cuts to foreign aid spending since January 2025.

The UN Women agency decried a collapse of women's organisations at a time when needs are soaring.

U.S. President Donald Trump slashed foreign aid after taking office last year, while other key donor countries have also tightened their belts.

As a result, "at least one million women and girls affected by conflict and crisis have lost access to critical services and support", Sofia Calltorp, UN Women's head of humanitarian action, told reporters in Geneva.

Displaced Palestinian women and children gather to receive meals distributed by a charity kitchen in the Nuseirat camp in Gaza. AFP

"We know that this number... is just the tip of the iceberg," she said, describing the findings in a new report as "deeply disturbing".

Speaking from Stockholm, she highlighted that the women's organisations at risk of being shut down "work on the frontlines of the world's most complex and dangerous crises", in places like Afghanistan, Gaza, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan and Yemen.

"Every dollar withdrawn from women's organisations is a dollar withdrawn from survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, displaced mothers, girls forced from school, and communities struggling to survive," she said.

With armed conflicts at their highest levels since World War II, around 120 million women and girls require humanitarian assistance and protection, UN Women said.

Its report, based on responses from 855 women-led and women's rights organisations across 52 crisis-affected countries, found that 84% of the groups had seen demand for their services increase since January 2025.

Netanyahu races to keep promises to allies ahead of coming national elections

Agence France Presse
JERUSALEM

With the Israeli Parliament set to dissolve in the coming days, just four months before national elections, the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is racing to pass a series of Bills, drawing fierce criticism from the Opposition.

Seven pieces of legislation are currently on the agenda of the Knesset, Israel's 120-seat Parliament, each a priority for one or more parties in Mr. Netanyahu's ruling coalition.

By striking these political bargains, Mr. Netanyahu hopes to shore up his alliances and head into the late October election from a position of strength, despite opinion polls suggesting he might struggle to return to office.

The veteran Prime Minister, who has held office for nearly two decades across multiple terms, is facing public anger over a series of failures – particularly those that led to Hamas's unprecedented October 7, 2023 attack, which triggered the war in Gaza.

"While they're busy with their coalition's survival, we're fighting for the country and for the interests of Israel's citizens," Opposition leader Yair Lapid wrote on X.

The Bill that has generated the most controversy concerns exemptions from military service for students engaged in religious studies – a longstanding demand of the ultra-Orthodox parties, which have repeatedly threatened in the past to bring down the government if their constituents were not granted such exemptions.

The Bill, approved in a preliminary reading in June, states that "the State of Israel shall recognise individuals who commit themselves to long-term Torah study as performing meaningful service for the benefit of the State and the Jewish people."

For months, the proposed "Basic Law: Torah Study" has brought thousands of Israelis onto the streets and inflamed debate on political television programmes.

"The government is exploiting the final days of the Knesset's session to pass laws against the Army," Gadi Eisenkot, former military chief who has emerged as Mr. Netanyahu's main rival in the upcoming election, wrote in an X post.

Pre-poll pressure: Seven pieces of legislation are currently on the agenda of the Knesset, Israel's 120-seat Parliament. REUTERS

He argued that only his newly formed party, Yashar (Straight) party, would be capable of forming the next government.

Legislative 'marathon'

According to Mr. Eisenkot, the legislative "marathon" is aimed solely at passing laws that would no longer be possible once he comes to power.

In exchange for supporting the military exemption Bill, lawmakers from the two ultra-Orthodox parties are expected to back legislation proposed by Mr. Netanyahu's Likud party, including a reform of the broadcasting sector aimed at overhauling the entire regulatory framework governing television, radio and streaming platforms.

Presented by its supporters as a measure designed to open the market to competition, the reform has been condemned by critics as an attempt to exert political control over the media, undermine the independence of news organisations and provide economic benefits to outlets considered close to the government.

Another Bill under consideration aims to reform the status of the state Attorney General, who currently also serves as the government's legal adviser.

Mr. Netanyahu's Likud party seeks to weaken the position, currently held by his vocal critic Gali Baharav-Miara, by stipulating that the legal adviser's opinions would no longer be binding on the government.

Here too, the Opposition accuses the government of trying to eliminate an independent check on its power and to politicise criminal prosecutions.

Finally, at the urging of the religious parties, the government is seeking to repeal a reform introduced by the previous administration that ended the religious authority's monopoly over issuing kosher certification by opening the sector to competition.

Once again, critics say the Bill appears tailored to the demands of the ultra-Orthodox parties, particularly Shas, which has pushed for it in order to protect the religious institution's interests at the expense of consumers.

The original kosher reform was expected to reduce costs for restaurant owners.

Additional Bills are still being debated in parliamentary committees, but heated disagreements – including within the governing coalition itself – make it difficult for all of the measures to pass before the end of the legislative term.

The Knesset is due to dissolve automatically on July 15, marking the end of its summer session, with parliamentary elections scheduled for no later than October 27.

However, in order to complete ongoing legislative proceedings, lawmakers can extend the session by up to 12 days, giving Mr. Netanyahu and his allies additional time to secure passage of the Bills.

AIMING HIGHER

Happy with my performances, but I can do better: Dembele

REUTERS

I feel very good; I am picking up momentum during the competition. I am happy with my performances even though I feel that I can do a little better. We are focused on the goal, and we are going to try to go all the way — France forward Ousmane Dembele to *DAZN* after the 2-0 World Cup last-eight win over Morocco.

FRESH START

Jorge Jesus unveiled as the new Portugal head coach

AP

Portugal announced Jorge Jesus as its new head coach following the disappointing run at the World Cup. He will replace Roberto Martinez, who could not prevent Portugal from losing 0-1 to Spain in round of 16. The 71-year-old has coached several Portuguese clubs, including Benfica and Sporting Lisbon.

BATTLE MODE

Argentina and Switzerland reprise WC rivalry, fight for last-four spot

AP

Argentina and Switzerland will meet again in the World Cup knockout stage in Kansas City on Saturday, carrying memories of a tense match held 12 years ago when Angel Di Maria's extra-time strike finally broke Swiss resistance and sent Lionel Messi's side through. A place in the semifinals is up for grabs.

TESTING TIMES

Team in transition phase: Shreyas after India's series loss to England

AFP

This is a transition phase and we will be making mistakes. But I am sure that there are quick learners in the team and they will assess it themselves — India captain Shreyas Iyer after the series defeat to England in the fourth T20I in Bristol. The fifth and final match will take place in Southampton on Saturday.

Style and substance: Smriti hit 11 fours and a six in her 83. AP

Smriti shows her class but India finishes with a below-par total

INDIA IN ENGLAND

P.K. Ajith Kumar
LONDON

Lauren Bell came steaming in, with cricket's most famous pavilion, featuring the facade of brick and terracotta, providing a lovely backdrop. She beat Smriti Mandhana, the ball going past the outside edge.

It was a dot ball. It was also a ball into history: the first in a Women's Test match at Lord's, the history of which goes back to 239 years.

Before that, some 50 former England women cricketers, who may not have imagined that such a day would come, rang the five-minute bell.

Soon, it was the turn of Bell - pun unintended - to start the proceedings, her captain Nat Sciver-Brunt having won the toss and decided to put India in.

And the day's cricket matched the occasion. At the end of it, England was 21 for one, after bowling India out for 285.

Early strike

In the day's second over, England's other seaming Lauren, the Filer variety, got Shafali Verma to square up awkwardly with a ball that angled in at good pace from a neat length.

The Indian opener, who had made a stunning Test debut in this country five years ago, was caught behind by a diving Amy Jones.

Shafali was out for a duck, so a little less than what she made in her maiden Test appearance (96 and 63).

Her partner, however, got into her elegant act soon. Smriti was at her fluent best.

She, however, soon lost her new partner Yastika Bhatia, whose off stump was pegged back by Bell's delivery that nipped off down the slope.

Smriti and Jemimah Rodrigues looked in absolute command under the bright sun and a clear blue sky. When the stand was worth 64 off just 72 balls, Jemimah (35, 38b, 5x4) reached out to a wide ball from Issy Wong and dragged it on to her stumps.

Captain Harmanpreet Kaur now joined her vice-captain and they put on 89 for the fourth wicket.

Smriti (83, 108b, 11x4, 1x6) looked well on her way to what would have been her third Test hundred, until she poked at a wide ball from Wong and was caught smartly by Jones, standing up.

Deepti steps up

Then at the stroke of tea, Harmanpreet Kaur (58, 121b, 7x4) was bowled through the gate by debutant off-spinner Maddy Villiers. The gritty Deepti Sharma (57, 87b, 7x4) then helped India reach a respectable total.

First blow

Kranti Gaud gave India an early breakthrough when she had Tammy Beaumont, in her last match for England, lbw. Maia Bouchier and Heather Knight ensured there was no further damage.

SCOREBOARD

INDIA — 1ST INNINGS
Smriti Mandhana c Jones b Wong 83 *(108b, 11x4, 1x6)*, Shafali Verma c Jones b Filer 0 *(4b)*, Yastika Bhatia b Bell 12 *(17b, 2x4)*, Jemimah Rodrigues b Wong 35 *(38b, 5x4)*, Harmanpreet Kaur b Villiers 58 *(121b, 7x4)*, Deepti Sharma c Knight b Ecclestone 57 *(87b, 7x4)*, Richa Ghosh c Wong b Filer 13 *(12b, 2x4)*, Sneh Rana lbw b Villiers 13 *(36b)*, Sayali Satghare lbw b Ecclestone 1 *(23b)*, Kranti Gaud b Ecclestone 1 *(3b)*, Shree Charani (not out) 3 *(1b)*; Extras (b-5, lb-2, nb-1, w-1): 9; Total (in 74.5 overs): 285.

FALL OF WICKETS
1-4 (Shafali, 1.2 overs), 2-37 (Yastika, 6.6), 3-101 (Jemimah, 18.6), 4-190 (Smriti, 44.5), 5-202 (Harmanpreet, 51.2), 6-229 (Richa, 56.6), 7-274 (Sneh, 67.5), 8-279 (Sayali, 72.6), 9-282 (Deepti, 74.3).

ENGLAND BOWLING
Bell 9-0-50-1, Filer 13-1-40-2, Ecclestone 21.5-2-68-3, Wong 12-0-41-2, Villiers 19-1-79-2.

ENGLAND —1ST INNINGS
Maia Bouchier (batting) 17 *(40b, 2x4)*, Tammy Beaumont lbw b Kranti 2 *(7b)*, Heather Knight (batting) 1 *(20b)*; Extras (nb-1): 1; Total (for one wkt. in 11 overs): 21.

FALL OF WICKET
1-9 (Beaumont, 3.6).

INDIA BOWLING
Sayali 5-1-13-0, Kranti 5-2-8-1, Sneh 1-1-0-0.

Toss: England.

Sublime France snuffs out Morocco's resistance

Goalkeeper Bounou makes multiple saves, including an Mbappe penalty, before the *Les Bleus* skipper breaches the defence; Dembele, too, gets into the scoring act to book a semifinal spot

Marksmen: Morocco's defensive duo of Mazraoui and Diop is beaten on both occasions, first by Mbappe's curler and then by Dembele's sweetly taken shot. GETTY IMAGES & REUTERS

FIFA WORLD CUP

Ayon Sengupta
BOSTON

THE RESULT

Quarterfinal: France 2 (Mbappe 60, Dembele 66) bt Morocco 0.

Four years after France ended Morocco's World Cup dream in Qatar, the two met again with the stakes still high.

One side was chasing a third straight semifinal, the other trying to return to the stage where its greatest run had once been cut short.

Around them sat all the other layers this fixture now carries – Kylian Mbappe and Achraf Hakimi as friends turned opponents for a night, two squads shaped by overlapping histories, and the sense that Morocco had arrived not to relive 2022 but to challenge its ending.

For a while, it felt as if Yassine Bounou might bend the night in its favour. He parried, pushed away, stretched, delayed and, for long spells, left France's superiority unrewarded.

But there are some World Cup nights that eventually tilt towards their inevitable figure. Mbappe, after seeing a penalty saved and chance after chance denied, found the intervention that no resistance could survive.

And once the breakthrough came, Ousmane Dembele followed, sealing a 2-0 win that carried France into another semifinal and left Morocco confronting the same old scar.

Les Bleus came at Morocco immediately, as if determined to settle the quarterfinal before it had properly settled down. Within the opening five minutes, Bounou had already been called into sharp action twice – first to push away Mbappe's snapshot, then to parry a bouncing Dayot Upamecano header. The opening exchange had the feel of a siege before the gates had been properly shut.

Morocco took time to carry the game into the French half. Hakimi, usually its most dangerous attacking outlet, was kept away from advanced areas and barely had a meaningful touch in the opposition half.

But as the Morocco captain began to venture forward, France promptly found the space it wanted to attack. It targeted the gap left behind and Desire Doue moved the ball quickly into Mbappe's path. As the forward took a touch to set himself, Noussair Mazraoui brought him down. The referee pointed to the spot but VAR confirmation took time.

Bounou won this duel as well, waiting for Mbappe to roll his effort before diving low to his left to keep the scoreline untouched.

Perhaps the idle wait – three minutes and 11 seconds between the initial call and the shot – played a trick even on the most resolute.

The chances kept coming, but Bounou kept swatting them away, his limbs stretching in every direction like one of those inflatable tube men outside a roadside stall.

But just at the hour mark, Bounou's vigil was finally pierced by Mbappe.

For all of Bounou's resistance, Mbappe ensured the night ended as these World Cup nights so often do. With *Les Bleus* still moving forward.

Stat attack

1 Mbappe (8) and Dembele (5) are the first pair of teammates with five or more goals each in an edition since Brazil's Ronaldo (8) and Rivaldo (5) in 2002

1 Mbappe is the first to have 10 or more goal contributions in two separate World Cups (10 in 2022, 11 in 2026)

2 Morocco's Bounou has been beaten in only two out of nine penalties (including shootouts) in the marquee event

2 There have been four instances of a player scoring, assisting and missing a penalty in the same World Cup game. Two have been in the last three days: Lionel Messi (vs. Egypt) and Kylian Mbappe (vs. Morocco). The others were Eusebio (Portugal vs. North Korea, 1966) and Diego Maradona (Argentina vs. South Korea, 1986)

3 Mbappe has scored and assisted in a World Cup match for the third time, second only to Messi (5)

65 Only 39 of the 60 penalties taken (including in shootouts) have been scored in the ongoing tournament, the lowest conversion percentage in an edition

COMPILED BY ANIRUDH VELAMURI

England needs to nullify threat of red-hot Haaland

Ayon Sengupta
MIAMI

For a country that had not seen the World Cup for 28 years, Norway has arrived in the quarterfinals as if it has always belonged here. Brazil was the latest to discover how thin the margin is when Erling Haaland is on the pitch.

Two goals in the final 11 minutes in New Jersey – one a towering header, the other a finish of startling violence – carried Norway into the last-eight stage for the first time in its history. Haaland has seven goals from just 12 shots on target, with only six efforts off target all tournament.

Norway's route to Haaland usually runs through midfield, where Martin Odegaard remains the creative hinge and Sander Berge is the calm distributor – the two have exchanged a team-high 128 passes so far.

England, though, comes with its own conviction.

A menace for rivals: Haaland heads into the encounter on the back of a match-winning brace against Brazil. AP

Harry Kane has six goals, including two from the penalty spot, and Jude Bellingham's four goals have made him the side's second great source of menace.

Jarell Quansah's suspension and Marc Guehi's hamstring issue leave Thomas Tuchel with questions at the back, particularly on the right side, where Norway will look to probe. England may have the broader squad, but Norway has Haaland.

Sunday's matches

QUARTERFINAL

Norway vs. England — 2.30 A.M.

Argentina vs. Switzerland — 6.30 A.M.

THE DAY AND TIME PERTAIN TO INDIA

Awesome display: Djokovic is full of admiration after losing to Sinner in straight sets. GETTY IMAGES

Sinner bulldozes Djokovic; Zverev blows Fery away

WIMBLEDON

N. Sudarshan
LONDON

All good things must come to an end. For Arthur Fery and the British public, and Novak Djokovic and his Serbian fanbase, it ended earlier than desired.

With a power-packed performance, second seed Alexander Zverev ousted wildcard Fery 7-6(0), 6-2, 6-4 on Friday to enter his first Wimbledon final.

On Sunday, he will meet World No. 1 and defending champion Jannik Sinner, who thrashed seven-time winner Djokovic for a second straight edition here, 6-4, 6-4, 6-4 in two hours and 20 minutes.

Accepting defeat

The 39-year-old Serb termed the defeat "a good old blow out" and said that he "was half a step late" for every shot. The evidence for that was all too stark, for Sinner played his best match of the competition and came up with a serving masterclass – 16 aces, 88% first-serve points won and 61% on the second.

Djokovic was allowed just one break-point all afternoon, which came as late as the third set. The fact that Sinner erased it with an ace, and followed that up with an imperious smash and another ace told the story.

"I was feeling physically fine," Djokovic insisted.

"Maybe not the freshest, like at the beginning of the tournament, but I was alright. He (Sinner) was much better and the dominant force. You just have to hand it to him and say, 'congrats, well done.'"

Though the Zverev-Fery fixture lasted six minutes less, it featured the most competitive set of the day. Zverev was the favourite, but playing to expectations is not always easy, especially on the biggest stages and in front of a partisan crowd. Flavio Cobolli experienced this first-hand in his dispiriting quarterfinal loss to Fery.

The 23-year-old Brit was fairly successful in keeping the burly German under check for much of the first set, and admirably dragged him to a tie-break.

Zverev... on the charge. REUTERS

Fery blocked many a return, and generously used the slice to get the ball low and deep to deny Zverev the high contact point he very much desires.

But in the tie-break, Zverev lifted his level and raced through without conceding a point.

There were thunderous serves and meaty drives, and he finished it off with a neat cross-court return winner.

When Zverev went 5-1 up in the second, the match was as good as over. Cloudy skies had given way to some glorious – but no so harsh – summer sunshine but light did not fall on Fery's game.

At 30-30, the crowd tried to pump Fery up and he repaid the backing with a fine inside-out winner. A few minutes later, he even won the game, but the set was destined to be Zverev's.

In the third stanza, the Roland-Garros titlist broke to love at 2-2, and went on a hot run by claiming the next seven points. Fery stemmed the rot by holding from 0-40 down, with the highlight being two pin-point aces for which he received loud applause.

Finishing touch

But the 29-year-old silenced the audience and shut the door on Fery in no time with two nerveless holds. Following the victory, Zverev, who is set to leapfrog the injured Carlos Alcaraz into second position in Monday's ATP rankings, ensured that for the fourth straight year a men's player would have made the singles final at both the French Open and Wimbledon.

Unbreakable: how Jyothi and coach Hillier rebuilt India's best 100m hurdler

The 26-year-old athlete's world came crashing down last June when she tore her ACL. After chasing speed all her life, she had to endure a period of painful, stationary monotony. But thanks to a steady supply of blueberries, strawberries and chocolates from her coach, rigorous rehab and unwavering focus, Jyothi is back to winning ways

Anirudh Velamuri

When Jyothi Yarraji saw '12.99 seconds' flash across the giant screen after the women's 100m hurdles final at the National inter-State championships at Kalinga Stadium, she crumpled onto the track.

For the first time in over a year, the tears weren't born of pain. They were of relief, joy and vindication. This was the finish she had dreamed of long before her world came crashing down.

The unravelling of a season

The season prior had begun spectacularly for Jyothi. She swept the 100m hurdles and 200m at the National Games in February, followed by another hurdles gold at the Federation Cup. She defended her continental crown at the 2025 Asian Athletics Championships in May and added the Taiwan Athletics Open title to her cabinet soon after.

All great signs of a great season to come, especially with major events right around the corner.

Then, in a single training session in June, it all unravelled. An anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injury mercilessly cut her season short.

A year later, she was back.

It took 383 days for Jyothi to return to competitive athletics. In Bhubaneswar, she stormed to the national title, comfortably dipping under the Asian Games qualification mark. It looked like the perfect comeback.

The timeline, however, was anything but. The blueprint set by her team mandated a gradual return through smaller competitions before the National Championships. This was while the window to secure a place at the Asiad was shrinking with each passing day.

If this wasn't jeopardy enough, Jyothi's body decided to throw new curveballs.

"She had a couple of setbacks; she sort of injured other areas, and that was very frustrating for her. That's why she had to start her season at the Inter-State. What would've been nice is if we'd been able to have a couple of low-key competitions first. But that's how it is sometimes," her coach James Hillier tells *The Hindu*.

It is never easy for a coach to watch their athlete buckle under the weight of uncertainty. Hillier, a man who prefers the comfort of control, was powerless through most of it.

"He was in the US [when I got injured], and I called him before he called me," Jyothi tells this publication. "He knew about the nature of my injury, but didn't want to disturb me. He was with his family. I asked him to enjoy his time and come back. I told him that I was good and that I would come back soon."

Hillier still marvels at how their roles reversed. "I blamed myself for not being there, but she immediately said, 'Coach, shut up. It's not your fault'. She was the strong person, and I was the vulnerable one. She was coaching me at that point. It was quite amazing, really."

Five days after the surgery, the actual challenge – rehabilitation – began.

Jyothi was condemned to a painful monotony. While her fellow athletes trained on the track, she spent hours doing the simplest of exercises – holding her knee in place for 10 seconds, relaxing, and repeating, slowly increasing the duration over time. She remembers days when she would hesitate to take even a step.

Hillier, meanwhile, enforced his recovery protocol: complete rest to the injury site, no off days for the rest. Jyothi, therefore, channelled all her energy into building upper-body strength.

The confidence game

Building confidence was just as important, but not at the cost of denying reality.

"My coach told me it was my time to feel sad, to cry and feel the pain. He said, 'I don't know what you are going to do in the future, but you will 100% do good,'" Jyothi says.

Hillier also understood the value of small comforts. For more than two weeks before her surgery, despite being on the other side of the world, he made sure her favourite blueberries, strawberries and chocolates kept arriving at her doorstep.

"I had to call him and ask, 'What are you trying to do? You're making me fat.' And he would tell me, 'It's ok, now is your time to eat and sleep, do that.'"

After chasing speed all her life, Jyothi was forced to stop and smell the flowers. She learnt to, eventually, of course, appreciate it. Along with it came hobbies like crocheting, learned entirely off YouTube. There's a knitted bag in her room that she has made from scratch.

> I had to call [Hillier] and ask, 'What are you trying to do? You're making me fat.' And he would tell me, 'It's ok, now is your time to eat and sleep, do that'
>
> **JYOTHI YARRAJI**

Hillier, meanwhile, sought every possible edge, like bringing strength and conditioning coach Wayne Lombard into the team.

"There was nothing that Wayne discovered that we didn't already know, but it's just that reinforcement. That reinforcement is extremely powerful. It's often more powerful than finding something new. He played a hugely important part, I would argue, more on the mental side than the physical, in a weird way, even though he is obviously a strength coach," Hillier says.

Perhaps it was he who gained the most by having Lombard's experience on hand.

"We have to remember the human being that stands behind the hurdle. That then became the starting point of this journey: to make sure she's okay first before dealing with anything else. If she wasn't, this injury would take twice as long to put behind us."

By January, Jyothi was finally back on the track. But other 'hurdles' followed. First came a quad injury, then another knee issue, and a hamstring problem.

> I blamed myself for not being there, but she immediately said, 'Coach, shut up. It's not your fault'. She was the strong person, and I was the vulnerable one. She was coaching me at that point
>
> **JAMES HILLIER**
> Coach

The finish line faded into the distance. But Jyothi had blinkers on. The anxiety about a premature end to her career went away, but the fear of injury lingered. So much so that she placed cushions atop the hurdles in training to soften the impact if she clipped them.

Those nerves settled only after she clocked 13.14 seconds in the heats in Bhubaneswar. Slowly, belief pushed out fear.

Hillier knew this comeback was about far more than winning another national title. The night before the race, he handed Jyothi a letter reflecting on everything they had endured over the previous year. Alongside it was another box of blueberries, though she ignored his instructions not to open the letter immediately.

"Sometimes you've got to be a coach, sometimes a friend, a father or a brother. You have to be a chameleon as a coach. Maybe the letter came from a coach and the blueberries from a friend," he says.

New beginning

With brown kinesiology tape wrapped around her right knee, Jyothi walked back into competition, a year after she smacked a hurdle foam in training and tore her ligament. She walked away as a national champion.

"I don't know if we're happy or relieved. It's a weird one, actually. It's been such an emotional journey that there's not a huge amount of emotion left. But it's a new beginning. We can crack on now with the rest of her career, the next chapter in her athletics journey," Hillier says.

After her triumph, an emotional Jyothi, with plenty of cameras fervently clicking away, appeared to don an imaginary crown. Until the bigger golds she wants come along, this will do.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

STACKING UP

ATP Men's Top 15

#	Player	Age	Points	Events
1	Jannik Sinner	24	13,450	18
2	Carlos Alcaraz	23	9,460	17
3	Alexander Zverev	29	7,190	20
4	Felix Auger-Aliassime	25	4,390	23
5	Ben Shelton	23	4,160	22
6	Alex de Minaur	27	4,110	24
7	Taylor Fritz	28	3,765	22
8	Novak Djokovic	39	3,760	16
9	Daniil Medvedev	30	3,580	24
10	Flavio Cobolli	24	3,460	26
11	Alexander Bublik	29	2,620	26
12	Casper Ruud	27	2,425	22
13	Andrey Rublev	28	2,420	23
14	Jiri Lehecka	24	2,360	21
15	Lorenzo Musetti	24	2,325	22

Top Indians ▶

Sumit Nagal
Rank 219 ▲ 66 spots

Manas Dhamne
Rank 386 ▼ 4 spots

WTA Women's Top 15

#	Player	Age	Points	Events
1	Aryna Sabalenka	28	9,090	18
2	Elena Rybakina	27	8,143	22
3	Iga Swiatek	25	6,409	19
4	Jessica Pegula	32	5,881	19
5	Mirra Andreeva	19	5,653	20
6	Amanda Anisimova	24	5,523	15
7	Coco Gauff	22	4,879	18
8	Elina Svitolina	31	4,471	16
9	Karolina Muchova	29	3,878	20
10	Victoria Mboko	19	3,670	22
11	Belinda Bencic	29	3,385	18
12	Linda Noskova	21	3,359	22
13	Marta Kostyuk	24	3,156	17
14	Naomi Osaka	28	2,846	18
15	Diana Shnaider	22	2,458	24

Top Indians ▶

Sahaja Yamalapalli
Rank 339 ▼ 11 spots

Vaishnavi Adkar
Rank 395 ▲ 4 spots

F1 Drivers' standings

#	Driver	Team	Points	Wins
1	A.K. Antonelli	Mercedes	179	5
2	G. Russell	Mercedes	154	2
3	L. Hamilton	Ferrari	147	1
4	C. Leclerc	Ferrari	108	1
5	L. Norris	McLaren	97	0
6	O. Piastri	McLaren	82	0
7	M. Verstappen	Red Bull	76	0
8	I. Hadjar	Red Bull	52	0
9	P. Gasly	Alpine	42	0
10	L. Lawson	RB	39	0
11	A. Lindblad	RB	20	0
12	O. Bearman	Haas	18	0
13	F. Colapinto	Alpine	18	0
14	G. Bortoleto	Audi	6	0
15	C. Sainz	Williams	6	0
16	A. Albon	Williams	5	0
17	E. Ocon	Haas	3	0
18	F. Alonso	Aston Martin	1	0
19	N. Hulkenberg	Audi	0	0
20	V. Bottas	Cadillac	0	0
21	S. Perez	Cadillac	0	0
22	L. Stroll	Aston Martin	0	0

A.K. Antonelli

G. Russell

F1 Constructors' standings

Pos	Team	Points	Wins
1	Mercedes	333	7
2	Ferrari	255	2
3	McLaren	179	0
4	Red Bull	128	0
5	Alpine	60	0
6	RB	59	0
7	Haas	21	0
8	Williams	11	0
9	Audi	6	0
10	Aston Martin	1	0
11	Cadillac	0	0

Badminton Men's ranking

#	Player	Points	Events
1	Shi Yu Qi	1,05,305	12
2	Kunlavut Vitidsarn	92,565	16
3	Anders Antonsen	91,155	17
4	Jonatan Christie	88,431	17
5	Christo Popov	84,682	20
6	Chou Tien Chen	80,280	27
7	Alex Lanier	74,525	17
8	Li Shi Feng	73,083	16
9	Victor Lai	72,915	20
10	Alwi Farhan	68,409	19
11	Kodai Naraoka	68,020	21
12	Lin Chun-Yi	66,594	18
13	Loh Kean Yew	65,700	18
14	Lakshya Sen	65,213	21
15	Weng Hong Yang	59,341	17

Top Indians ▶

Lakshya Sen
Rank 14

Ayush Shetty
Rank 24

Badminton Women's ranking

#	Player	Points	Events
1	An Se Young	1,17,787	16
2	Wang Zhi Yi	1,06,839	16
3	Akane Yamaguchi	1,00,426	18
4	Chen Yu Fei	87,651	15
5	Han Yue	82,288	14
6	Putri Kusuma Wardani	73,473	18
7	Ratchanok Intanon	72,246	20
8	Pornpawee Chochuwong	67,977	16
9	Tomoka Miyazaki	63,646	22
10	P.V. Sindhu	61,401	14
11	Nozomi Okuhara	59,060	17
12	Chiu Pin-Chian	57,498	24
13	Michelle Li	55,227	21
14	Kim Ga Eun	54,921	16
15	Line Christophersen	54,060	21

Top Indians ▶

P.V. Sindhu
Rank 10

Unnati Hooda
Rank 24

Test Batting

#	Player	Rating	Career best
1	Travis Head	853	884
2	Harry Brook	852	898
3	Joe Root	840	932
4	Steve Smith	831	947
5	Temba Bavuma	775	806
6	Kamindu Mendis	744	784
7	Shubman Gill	743	807
8	Rachin Ravindra	740	740
9	Yashasvi Jaiswal	733	858
10	Dinesh Chandimal	713	755

Test Bowling

#	Player	Rating	Career best
1	Jasprit Bumrah	870	908
2	Matt Henry	861	870
3	Mitchell Starc	838	852
4	Pat Cummins	832	914
5	Marco Jansen	825	825
6	Scott Boland	820	820
7	Noman Ali	817	853
8	Kagiso Rabada	807	902
9	Josh Hazlewood	775	864
10	Nathan Lyon	753	812

ODI Batting

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

ODI Bowling

#	Player	Rating	Career best
1	Rashid Khan	682	775
2	Abrar Ahmed	675	675
3	Jofra Archer	649	682
4	Keshav Maharaj	645	737
5	Maheesh Theekshana	641	680
6	Adil Rashid	629	671
7	Kuldeep Yadav	614	757
8	Shaheen Afridi	604	691
9	Mehidy Hasan	600	722
10	Mitchell Santner	599	656

T20I Batting

#	Player	Rating	Career best
1	Ishan Kishan	897	904
2	Abhishek Sharma	881	931
3	Sahibzada Farhan	848	848
4	Phil Salt	798	881
5	Pathum Nissanka	751	796
6	Tilak Varma	721	845
7	Jos Buttler	709	794
8	Jacob Bethell	708	718
9	Mitchell Marsh	706	706
10	Dewald Brevis	702	738

T20I Bowling

#	Player	Rating	Career best
1	Rashid Khan	753	828
2	Abrar Ahmed	736	757
3	Adil Rashid	712	747
4	Adam Zampa	700	746
5	Varun Chakaravarthy	697	818
6	Nathan Ellis	675	678
7	Corbin Bosch	669	745
8	Jasprit Bumrah	668	783
8	Wanindu Hasaranga	668	809
10	Mujeeb Ur Rahman	663	757

With hammer and pole, Anushka and Sindhushree break barriers

The two unheralded athletes have had to conquer adversity at several stages of their young lives. At the recent inter-State meet, they overcame significant odds to record unexpected National marks and earn the right to make their Asian Games debuts

ANUSHKA YADAV

BISWARANJAN ROUT

SINDHUSHREE G

> As I am a girl, my family had apprehensions when I began athletics. But my father fought with everybody. He used to wake me up every morning, make me train
>
> **SINDHUSHREE G.**

Y.B. Sarangi

Ace long jumper M. Sreeshankar recently said that the Asian Games was 'bigger than the Olympics' for Indians because the country collects a lot of medals at the continental event and the athletes receive handsome cash awards for the medals they win.

Understandably, the push from athletes to book their spots in the Aichi-Nagoya Asiad-bound squad through the only selection-trials event – the National inter-State athletics championships in Bhubaneswar last month – was nothing less than spectacular.

Staging a surprise

Amid the fall of long-standing National records, the breaking of psychological barriers, and scores of personal bests, two unheralded women – 18-year-old hammer thrower Anushka Yadav and 25-year-old pole vaulter Sindhushree G. – surprised many by recording unexpected National marks and earning the right to make their Asian Games debuts.

Their journeys are different, yet interesting.

Influenced by her father Sushil, a local-level hammer thrower and farmer from Baleni village in the Baghpat district of Uttar Pradesh, Anushka took to athletics at the age of 12.

> My father used to train my younger brother with a hammer. My first choice was the 100m. I did it for six-seven months. Hammer was my father's choice, which is why I began throwing
>
> **ANUSHKA YADAV**

"My father used to train my younger brother with a hammer. My first choice was the 100m. I did it for six-seven months. Hammer was my father's choice, which is why I began throwing," says Anushka, who learnt her first lessons at the Sri Krishna Inter-College ground.

Apart from her father's guidance, Anushka prospered while working alongside other hammer throwers under the tutelage of coaches Chirag Yadav and Gagan Yadav.

Anushka, who had a throw of 56.63m at the Junior Federation Meet in 2024, made her mark at the junior level before showing significant improvement to achieve a personal best of 62.89m at the National Games in Dehradun and create an under-20 National record in February last year.

She injured her knee in a freak accident earlier this year when her brother playfully pushed her while she was attaching the tiller to the tractor to help her father in the field. She made a comeback with a performance of 58.02m at the Junior Federation meet in April and registered 62.50m with only two athletes in the field in the under-20 section at the Indian Athletics Series in Ludhiana in June. Her 67.02m in Bhubaneswar was stunning. She bettered Sarita Singh's nine-year-old National record twice that evening and ensured an Asiad berth by improving her personal best by more than four metres.

In a highly competitive field monopolised by Chinese throwers, Anushka's performance stands 12th in Asia this season. Considering that every country can field two athletes in an event, Anushka's mark places her sixth, behind Chinese, Japanese and Taipei throwers.

Sushil, who quit athletics due to family compulsions, has bigger expectations from his daughter.

"Anushka used to throw up to 71m in training prior to her injury. Now she does 70m. We had a target of 70m here. I knew when she would be fine, she would do a big one," says Sushil.

"The best thing about Anushka is that she competes with a calm mind. She is not far away from 70m."

Sushil will keenly follow his daughter's progress as Anushka has another important test – the World Under-20 Championships, for which she also achieved qualification in Bhubaneswar – in Eugene, Oregon, USA, from August 5 to 9, ahead of the Asian Games from September 19 to October 4.

Like Anushka, Sindhushree, a quarter-miler turned pole vaulter, also stepped into the athletics arena because of her father's strong backing. But she tragically lost her electrician father, R. Ganesh, six years ago, even before she could wear the India jersey.

A father's dream

"As I am a girl, my family had apprehensions when I began athletics. But my father fought with everybody. He used to wake me up every morning, make me train. I progressed to get inducted into the Sports Authority of India (SAI) centre in Bengaluru in 2016. His dream was to see me wear India colours, but he left us before that – even before I got selected for the World University Games in 2022," says the 25-year-old Sindhushree.

She proudly held a passport-sized photograph of her father after rewriting the National mark with 4.25m by surpassing the accomplished Baranica Elangovan's mark by two cm.

It was because of the support of her grandfather Krishnappa that Sindhushree could pursue athletics without having to shoulder the responsibility of providing for her mother and younger sister.

But Sindhushree could not purchase a pole of her own due to a lack of funds. For the Bhubaneswar event, she borrowed a pole from a male trainee who had bought a shorter pole meant for women by mistake, and trained for two weeks before surprising everyone.

After recording a noticeable improvement on her previous personal best of 4.00m achieved at May's Indian Open Series in Chennai, she was overwhelmed with emotion and fell at the feet of her coach Vijeesh M.M. to express her gratitude.

Vijeesh had to keep Sindhushree's short stature (156cm), hamstring injury last year, and financial condition in mind while training her, after she could not make it to SAI's National Centre of Excellence (NCOE) scheme due to her below-par performances.

"We didn't expect this kind of height. We are constantly trying to perfect her technique as we don't have a pole... Now her run-up and jump are almost perfect. Maybe she can do 4.30-4.35m with the right kind of support, including diet and nutrition," says Vijeesh, adding that 'patience, hard work and dedication' were the biggest positives of his trainee.

Her new mark has put Sindhushree in joint-sixth position in Asia this season, also joint-sixth if you consider the quota of two athletes per country in an event at the Asian Games.

As these two new champions nurture hopes of raising their performances in the continental extravaganza in a few months' time, athletics lovers in the country would do well to be realistic while setting the bar for their expectations.

From an overall perspective, the powers that be in the Athletics Federation of India (AFI), Sports Ministry, and SAI must be cautious while anticipating podium finishes at the Asian Games and Commonwealth Games.

Scores of athletes across different sports, with athletics leading the chart, testing positive for banned substances has brought India the dubious distinction of being number one in this field for three consecutive years.

Besides, India continued to lead the Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) charts for June 2026 with 162 globally ineligible athletes and coaches.

Needed: constant vigilance

The National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) is understood to have been focusing on athletics as far as testing is concerned in the run-up to mega events this year.

It would do well to stay vigilant and hunt down erring athletes and support staff in order to deter them from taking short-cuts to success.

Even as the temptation of winning medals and cash awards will continue to test athletes' honesty prior to big events, stricter anti-doping measures will save the country further embarrassment and help create a much-needed environment for clean competition.

GAME THEORY

Tharp's 12.75-second statement

Ja'Kobe Tharp experienced a rare loss at the Prefontaine Classic last weekend, but it did little to sour a defining four weeks for the 20-year-old American athlete. Tharp shattered the 110m hurdles world record in a blistering run at the NCAA outdoor championships last month, bettering a 14-year-old mark. He chopped 0.05s off the record Aries Merritt had set in 2012 a month after winning Olympic gold. It has been a good period for the event, with Jamal Britt clocking the joint-fifth fastest time in history with his defeat of Tharp last Saturday. A look at the quickest 110m hurdles runs of all time

Ja'Kobe Tharp

Aries Merritt

FASTEST TIMES: MEN'S 110m HURDLES

Mark	Competitor	Venue	Date
12.75	Ja'Kobe Tharp	Eugene	10 Jun 2026
12.80	Aries Merritt	Bruxelles	07 Sep 2012
12.81	Grant Holloway	Eugene	26 Jun 2021
12.84	Devon Allen	New York	12 Jun 2022
12.86	Grant Holloway	Eugene	28 Jun 2024
12.86	Jamal Britt	Eugene	4 Jul 2026
12.87	Dayron Robles	Ostrava	12 Jun 2008
12.87	Cordell Tinch	Shaoxing/Keqiao	03 May 2025
12.88	Xiang Liu	Lausanne	11 Jul 2006
12.88	Dayron Robles	Paris-St-Denis	18 Jul 2008
12.89	David Oliver	Paris-St-Denis	16 Jul 2010
12.89	Jamal Britt	Paris	28 Jun 2026
12.90	Dominique Arnold	Lausanne	11 Jul 2006
12.90	David Oliver	Eugene	03 Jul 2010
12.90	Omar Mcleod	Kingston	24 Jun 2017
12.90	Ja'Kobe Tharp	Eugene	12 Jun 2026
12.91	Colin Jackson	Stuttgart	20 Aug 1993
12.91	Xiang Liu	Athina	27 Aug 2004
12.91	Dayron Robles	Stockholm	22 Jul 2008
12.91	Ja'Kobe Tharp	Eugene	04 Jul 2026

Grant Holloway

Devon Allen

SOURCE: WORLD ATHLETICS

PICTURE THIS

GETTY IMAGES

Free fall

Cliff diving is regarded as the world's oldest extreme sport, with an origin story dating back to the 1700s.

King Kahekili, a venerated Hawaiian chief, is thought to have first leapt from the cliffs of Kaunolo. The Red Bull Cliff Diving World Series is more recent — first staged in 2009 — but the champion's trophies are named after Kahekili in a nod to the sport's past.

The series, currently underway, features elite cliff divers — 12 men and 12 women — competing at some of the world's most picturesque locations. Their dives, which feature complex acrobatics, are scored by a panel of judges, based on skill and artistry.

Divers enter the water feet-first from heights of over 20 metres at estimated speeds of up to 85kmph and experience an impact deceleration of 10Gs (a force equivalent to 10 times the force of gravity). Clearly, it's not an activity for the weak of flesh.

Given the sport's inherent dangers and risk of serious injury, divers undergo very specific and intense training, perfecting their skills at much lower heights before working their way up.