



‘GOLD STANDARD’

India-U.K. trade deal to come into effect today

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India bans import of forced labour products

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RISING TRADE

India's imports from China soar to \$80 bn

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INDIA-U.S. TIES

Big ambitions, little delivery

Meaningful defence tech collaboration continues to elude India and U.S.

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INTRIGUING BATTLE

Messi's Argentina meets Kane's England

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INSIDE



Staines' murder convict will be released early

BHUBANESWAR

Dara Singh, the prime convict of the murder of Australian missionary Graham Staines and his minor sons in 1999, is likely to be set free soon after the Odisha State Sentence Review Board recommended his release on ground of "good behaviour". » Page 4

PoK stir a result of Pakistan govt's abuses, says Delhi

NEW DELHI

As protests continued across Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, India on Tuesday said the protests are a "direct consequence of Pakistan's decades-long systemic exploitation and denial of fundamental rights in areas under its illegal and forcible occupation". » PAGE 4

Leaders appeal to Wangchuk to end his hunger strike

NEW DELHI

The 17th day of protests at Jantar Mantar demanding the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan saw larger crowds than the day before, following an increase in the number of voices urging activist Sonam Wangchuk, who has now lost 8.5kg, to end his hunger strike. » PAGE 5

SC agrees to hear plea to postpone Bengaluru polls

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday agreed to an oral plea by the Greater Bengaluru Authority to urgently list its application seeking an extension of the deadline for civic polls citing the ongoing special intensive revision (SIR) in Karnataka. » PAGE 3

SC weighs SOP for urgent cases affecting citizens' life and liberty

Constitutional remedies must be accessible at all time, says petition in top court; Bench headed by CJI Kant says an SOP could be put in place to reduce 'response time' in cases such as illegal detentions, demolition drives or other state actions

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday agreed to consider framing a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to allow citizens to knock on the doors of the courts any time, day or night, in cases affecting life and liberty, including illegal detentions, imminent demolition of homes, deportations, custodial violence, or other state actions.

Beyond court schedules
A three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant was hearing a petition filed by a top court advocate, Maheravish Rein, who said the courts cannot afford to close especially against the background of credible reports of late-night arrests, early-morning demolition drives, and deportation or executive actions undertaken during weekends or holidays.

"The absence of a structured and institutionalised



The absence of a structured and institutionalised mechanism ensuring continuous judicial accessibility may result in irreversible consequences

MAHERAVISH REIN
Petitioner



Preparation of an SOP should be undertaken by the Supreme Court on its administrative rather than judicial side

TUSHAR MEHTA
Solicitor-General



Maybe the response from the court should come within an hour of an urgent mention

SURYA KANT
Chief Justice of India

mechanism ensuring continuous judicial accessibility may result in irreversible consequences before affected persons are able to approach constitutional courts... The protection of liberty cannot remain dependent upon the temporal boundaries of court schedules. In a constitutional democracy governed by the rule of law, the Constitution cannot fall silent at night, nor can the protection of liberty await the morning bell of the courts," Ms. Rein submitted.

Access to justice cannot exist merely in theory. Constitutional remedies must be practically accessible at all times, she said.

The Bench noted that an SOP could be put in place to reduce the "response time" to urgent requests in cases of life and liberty. "Maybe the response from the court should come within an hour of such an urgent mention," Chief Justice Kant noted.

Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta said the prepara-

tion of an SOP should be undertaken by the top court on its administrative rather than judicial side.

In response to the law officer, the Chief Justice noted that High Courts did not come within the administrative ambit of the top court in a federal set-up, indicating that the petition may have to be heard and orders passed on the judicial side.

Justice Joymalya Bagchi, a part of the Bench, said there was a difference in approach in accessing justice during office hours and after office hours. The judge said a "graded approach" to access to justice after court hours cannot be interpreted as a denial of justice.

Digital access
The judge pointed out that courts never "close-up" when there was digital access to justice through e-filing. "A letter, an email or a phone call would be enough to activate the justers system," Justice Bagchi said.

Ms. Rein agreed with Justice Bagchi that technological advancements, including digital filing, electronic court records and virtual hearing infrastructure had significantly enhanced the capacity of courts to provide remote access to justice.

"The present institutional framework of courts largely restricts access to judicial remedies to designated court hours, working days and limited vacation benches. As a result, individuals facing urgent violations of liberty and fundamental rights often encounter significant practical difficulty in obtaining immediate judicial protection during nights, weekends, public holidays and court recesses," Ms. Rein submitted.

"However, these technological capabilities have not yet been integrated into a uniform institutional framework enabling emergency judicial access for urgent constitutional matters outside regular court hours," she submitted.

Govt. summons Iran envoy after missile hit kills Indian sailor



We lost a precious Indian life and there are several Indian nationals who have been injured, a couple of them are also seriously injured – so we conveyed our strongest protest with the Iranian side

RANDHIR JAISWAL
Spokesperson, External Affairs Ministry



Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

India on Tuesday summoned the Iranian Deputy Chief of Mission and registered a "strong protest" after one Indian sailor died and several were seriously injured when two UAE-flagged energy tankers carrying Indian seafarers were hit by Iranian cruise missiles earlier in the day.

The official spokesperson of the External Affairs Ministry, Randhir Jaiswal, said the Indian side had conveyed "deepest concerns" about the incident in the Strait of Hormuz and urged for "de-escalation".

"We strongly condemn these attacks and acts of violence targeting seafarers and disrupting free and safe navigation through international waters like the Strait of Hormuz. We also reiterate our deep concern on account of resumption of attacks and escalation of hostilities in the West Asian region and call for immediate cessation of violence and a return to dialogue and diplomacy in the interests of peace, security and stability in the region," said the Ministry.

Call for de-escalation
"We lost a precious Indian life and there are several Indian nationals who have been injured, a couple of them are also seriously injured – so we conveyed our strongest protest with the Iranian side on this particular matter. These attacks must stop at the earliest – at the same time there should be de-escalation and the two sides should come to the negotiating table and take the path of dialogue and diplomacy so that peace and stability can

Cosmic diaspora



Launch ready: Indian-origin NASA astronaut Anil Menon (middle) alongside Roscosmos cosmonauts Pyotr Dubrov (bottom) and Anna Kikina (top) as they board the Soyuz MS-29 spacecraft for launch from Baikonur, Kazakhstan, on Tuesday. REUTERS

SC calls for temporary namaz site at Bhojshala

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday refrained from restoring *status quo ante* after the Madhya Pradesh High Court declared the Bhojshala-Kamal Maula mosque complex a temple.

A Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, asked the Madhya Pradesh government to identify a space near the disputed site for the Muslim community to offer namaz on Fridays.

FULL REPORT ON
» PAGE 4

Indian seafarer recalls fear and chaos during transit through Strait of Hormuz

Vighnesh P. Venkitesh
CHENNAI

Chaos, uncertainty, numbness, and conflicting orders marked the ordeal of an Indian seafarer aboard a tanker that transited the Strait of Hormuz on Monday.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, the seafarer, who requested anonymity, explained how the fully-loaded Very Large Crude Carrier (VLCC), carrying more than two million barrels of crude oil, and its crew were caught between the threats from the Iranian Navy to turn back and encouragement to move forward from the U.S., while

transiting the strait through the southern route close to the Oman coast.

The situation was relatively normal when they went into the Persian Gulf to load at Basrah in Iraq, but it deteriorated rapidly as they finished loading and started to return, with ships coming under attack near Oman and warnings from the Joint Maritime Information Centre moving from medium to substantial and severe threat levels. The sailor said the company instructed them to halt, and they drifted along Abu Dhabi out of port limits (OPL) for around four days.

While the company respected the consent of the seafarers to make the risky return journey, there was also "immense pressure" from it to make the transit, the sailor said. The incentive offered was "too good to pass up", and the crew decided to take the risk.

The transit was planned to begin on the morning of July 12, and he described the scene as "absolute chaos" following an attack on *GFS Galaxy*, whose crew, Indians among them, were forced to abandon ship.

The initial call was to halt their transit and turn back, but the company offered to "double its incen-



tives" to move on, he said. Things were normal till the entry of Hormuz, a 12-hour journey from Abu Dhabi OPL, and regions such as the periphery of Abu Musa Island, where ships usually begin to hear Iranian warnings, were silent, he said.

The entry to Hormuz, abeam of Mina al Sagr hub, was different. There were

around six smaller vessels in front of their tanker at this point, and warnings began flooding in through the very high-frequency radio system, with Iran ordering vessels not to enter as the strait was "closed".

In a dilemma
"We were not just scared, we were numb. We had reached the entrance and now had no idea what to do," the sailor said. The dilemma was whether to abort the transit or not. The smaller vessels replied that they were on their way to the port hub and altered course, he said. However, the U.S. Navy began broadcasting messages in reply

to Iran, asking ships to move forward, reiterating that they were in "international waters and would be protected". But this was not reassuring to the crew with Iran asking them "not to trust" the U.S. side.

"It was psychological warfare, and the conflicting authority at play, not knowing whom to trust, was the most jarring aspect of the journey," he said.

There were two other ships along with the tanker on the strait, and he could hear choppers and jets flying past. He said the transit could not have been possible without the support of the U.S. Navy. The ship was in contact with the U.S.

forces throughout the journey, updating its position every 10 minutes and looking out for signs of threat and reporting in detail every 10 miles.

Acknowledging that the U.S. support was "crucial" for the transit, the sailor said that he felt there was support from Iran as well.

Now miles off the dangerous territory and en route to entering the international waters in the Arabian Sea, the sailor recalled the moment the warnings started flooding the radio at the entrance to Hormuz and conceded that he would settle for just "getting to safety alive instead of the insane incentives".

INBRIEF



Sessions court grants bail to accused in doctor assault case

The Kalyan district and sessions court on Tuesday granted bail to Shiv Sena (Shinde) corporator Ramesh Sukanya Mhatre, who was arrested for assaulting doctors at the Shastrinagar municipal hospital in Domvibli. Judge K.S. Katkade passed the order after hearing the defence, the police prosecutor, and the investigating officer. The court set the bail amount at ₹50,000 with a surety bond. Mr. Mhatre, who represents the Kopar Prabhag, had been in police custody for two days. His remand ended on Monday, following which his lawyer moved an application for bail. The court considered the submissions from both sides before allowing the release.

Bodies of 2 missing Navodaya Vidyalaya students retrieved

The bodies of two students of government-run Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya were recovered on Tuesday from a pond near the school campus in Ujjain district of Madhya Pradesh, hours after they went missing, a police officer said. He said the duo, Pragyan Vimal (15) and Roshan Baretha (14), students of Class 10 and 9, respectively, went missing on Monday evening, prompting a police search. Ghattiya Police Station in-charge Karan Khawal said preliminary investigations suggest the two had gone to bathe in the pond around 6 p.m. on Monday and failed to return home.

Rajasthan maternal deaths: CM failed to respond, says Cong.

Press Trust of India
JAIPUR

Senior Congress leader and former Rajasthan Minister Pratap Singh Khachariya was on Tuesday accused the BJP government of evading responsibility for the maternal deaths in government hospitals across the State and demanded a compensation of ₹1-crore each for the families of the deceased.

Mr. Khachariyawas also accused Chief Minister Bhanjanlal Sharma and Health Minister Gajendra Singh Khimsar of failing to respond adequately to the situation.

Claiming that 19 women had died and that two others had lost their eyesight while six suffered kidney failure, Mr. Khachariyawas alleged that the deaths were caused by “substan-

dard” or “spurious” medicines procured by the government.

“The government cannot escape its responsibility. If fake medicines have been purchased, those responsible must be held accountable,” he said.

Compensation sought

The Congress leader demanded that the families of those who died be paid ₹1 crore each as compensation and sought long-term support for women who allegedly suffered permanent disabilities. Mr. Khachariya also accused the BJP government of corruption in the procurement of medicines.

Five maternal deaths were reported in Bhlwara and four in Banswara. Earlier, similar deaths were reported from Bikaner and Kota.

Bengal withdraws plea in SC against HC’s removal of OBC status for 77 castes

State Cabinet decision to take back appeal filed by the previous govt., says Solicitor General; court clarifies it will not preclude any other aggrieved party from pursuing appeal against ruling

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The West Bengal government and the State Backward Classes Commission on Tuesday withdrew their separate pleas from the Supreme Court against a Calcutta High Court judgment striking down the inclusion of 77 castes, including 75 Muslim communities, in the State’s OBC list. The pleas were filed during the previous Trinamool Congress (TMC) government led by Mamata Banerjee.

A Bench comprising Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V. Mohana was informed by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the State, that the State Cabinet had taken a decision to withdraw the appeal. The Bench also permitted the State Backward Classes Commission to withdraw its separate appeal on the matter.

Senior advocate Shadan Farasat, appearing for



The BJP government led by Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari recently discontinued religion-based categorisation schemes. FILE PHOTO

some aggrieved persons, sought liberty to pursue separate petitions on the issue. While allowing the withdrawals, the Bench clarified that its order would not preclude any other aggrieved party from pursuing an appeal against the High Court judgment.

On November 6 last year, the top court had directed that no further proceedings will take place before the High Court in the matter concerning the striking down of the OBC status of several castes.

The apex court was hearing as many as 10 petitions, including one filed by the State government, challenging the High Court’s May 22, 2024 verdict. The High Court, in total, struck down 77 classes of reservation given between April and September 2010. It also struck down 37 classes of reservation given under the West Bengal Backward Classes (Other than Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) (Reservation of Vacancies in Services and Posts) Act, 2012.

‘Bangladeshi nationals’ issue needs bilateral solution, not ‘pushback drama’, says Akhil Gogoi

Rahul Karmakar
GUWAHATI

A day after the Supreme Court set aside a batch of Gauhati High Court’s judgments on people declared as foreigners, Assam MLA Akhil Gogoi said the ‘Bangladeshi issue’ needs a bilateral solution, not any “pushback drama”.

Mr. Gogoi, who heads the Rajjor Dal party and represents the Sibsagar constituency, slammed Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma for using the pushback of alleged illegal Bangladeshi nationals to keep the “illegal immigration” issue alive without establishing any legal mechanism to deport them.

‘No bilateral talks’

“Himanta Biswa Sarma turns a non-issue into an issue. The issue of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants can only be resolved through talks with Bangla-



desh. The Assam government has neither held any bilateral talks with Bangladesh nor created any legal mechanism to push undocumented Bangladeshi nationals back into the neighbouring country,” he told journalists on Tuesday.

Mr. Gogoi said “pushback drama” was nothing but optics that the Bharatiya Janata Party thrives on. “Illegal immigration remains a major issue in Assam, but this government’s pushback strategy is meaningless without any legal validity,” he said.

He hoped that New Delhi would hold discussions with Dhaka and reach an agreement on the sensitive issue. “Given India’s stature, we should ensure that Bangladesh takes back its people detained for illegally entering the country,” he said.

Judgments set aside

On Monday, the Supreme Court set aside a batch of judgments passed by the Gauhati High Court, which upheld the orders of various Foreigners’ Tribunals declaring 27 appellants as

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma is keeping the illegal immigration issue alive without establishing any legal mechanism

AKHIL GOGOI
Rajjor Dal president

foreigners. The apex court remanded the cases to the quasi-judicial tribunals concerned for fresh adjudication.

In January, the Chief Minister said a repatriation treaty with Bangladesh was not necessary to intensify the pushback of “illegal immigrants” under a new policy framework. He said more than 2,000 foreigners who stayed illegally in Assam were pushed back over the past few months.

He attributed the pushback drive to the revitalisa-

AIADMK continues to regard DMK as an evil force: Palaniswami

The Hindu Bureau
SALEM

Amid allegations that the DMK and the AIADMK had attempted to join hands to prevent the TVK from forming a government after the recent election threw up a hung Assembly, AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami on Tuesday asserted that, to his party, the DMK remained an “evil force”, and that the AIADMK’s stand had not changed.

Speaking to reporters at the AIADMK office in Omalur after a meeting with party functionaries, Mr. Palaniswami referred to Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay’s recent speech in Karur, in which he had accused the DMK and the AIADMK of being “partners in crime”.

‘Unbecoming of CM’

“Such remarks are unbecoming of the office he holds,” Mr. Palaniswami said. He alleged that the Chief Minister was poaching AIADMK MLAs by persuading them to resign their Assembly membership and join the TVK. “What has the TVK government achieved in the last 60 days? Mr. Vijay only delivers punch dialogues,” he said.



AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami addressing the media on Tuesday. E. LAKSHMI NARAYANAN

When asked whether the TVK government would complete its five-year term, Mr. Palaniswami said it was surviving with the support of its alliance partners.

“Before the elections, Mr. Vijay criticised both the Dravidian parties. After the elections, however, the TVK formed the government with the support of the DMK’s allies. Before the elections, the DMK had described its alliance as an ideological one. But after the elections, its allies have aligned with the TVK. Where, then, is the ideology,” he asked.

Recalling the stand taken by AIADMK founder M.G. Ramachandran, Mr. Palaniswami said the party continued to regard the DMK as an “evil force”. He said the AIADMK had consistently highlighted the shortcomings of the erstwhile DMK government.

Bengal govt. allocates over 1,000 acres for border fencing

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

The West Bengal government has allocated over 1000 acres of land for erecting border fences spanning over 172-km border with Bangladesh, West Bengal Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari said on Tuesday.

“Ensuring national security and strengthening our borders is a top priority for our government. In our commitment to securing the India-Bangladesh Border, we have expedited the land transfer process to the Border Security Force (BSF) for the construction of essential fencing,” the Chief Minister said on social media.

Mr. Adhikari added that as on July 14 a “total of 1,024.75 acres of land spanning across 172.6 kms (of international border) has been formally handed over for this purpose”.

District-wise details

The district-wise details of land allocated and the length of border fencing likely to indicate that about 337 acres was allocated in Murshidabad, where fencing was erected at 45.4 km, followed North 24 Parganas where the land allocated was 241.03 acres and fence likely to be erected was 42.07 km.

In the Cooch Behar district of North Bengal, border fences will be erected for about 39.39 kms and land allocated for the purpose was 135.33 acres. Similarly, in Malda, another district located in north Bengal, land allocated was about 176.78 acres and fencing will be erected for 20.15 kms.

The land has been allocated for setting up border fencing across nine bordering districts in the State and Mr. Adhikari said that his government will remain steadfast in its resolve to complete these projects to ensure a safer and more secure environment for citizens.

Uttarakhand draft rollout; voters down to 71.33 lakh

Press Trust of India
DEHRADUN

Additional Chief Electoral Officer Vijay Kumar Jogdande on Tuesday said that more than 71.33 lakh voters were included in the draft voter list, while 8.26 lakh may face deletion following the completion of the special intensiverevision (SIR) in Uttarakhand.

Mr. Jogdande said that out of 71,33,785 voters in the draft list, 52% are male, 47% female.

The SIR exercise was conducted in the State on July 1. Under this, the distribution and digitisation of enumeration forms were completed between June 7 and July 8. Before the SIR process, Uttarakhand had 79,60,762 registered voters.

Grey hornbills thrive again in Gir as four years of successful breeding revive a lost species

Abhinav Deshpande
AHMEDABAD

More than 60 years after the Indian Grey Hornbill disappeared from Gujarat’s Gir forests, the species has recorded four consecutive years of successful breeding following its reintroduction, according to a scientific study published in the international peer-reviewed journal *Birds*.

The findings come as Gujarat recently reported another wildlife conservation milestone, with the second Great Indian Bustard chick hatched through the “jump-start” technique surviving beyond the critical 40-day period.

The study, *Reintroduction of Indian Grey Hornbills in Gir, India: Insights into Ranging, Habitat Use, Nesting and Behavioural*



Indian Grey Hornbill

Patterns, presents the first comprehensive assessment of the reintroduction programme undertaken by the Gujarat Forest Department and its conservation partners after the species disappeared from Gir.

‘Significant success’

“Wildlife conservation in Gujarat has entered a new phase, particularly in spe-

cies recovery and the protection of rare and endangered wildlife. Grey Hornbills reintroduced into the Gir landscape in 2021 have successfully established territories, adapted to their new habitat, and produced offspring, marking a major milestone in restoring a species that had disappeared from the region between the 1950s and 1960s. The research conducted following the reintroduction of the Grey Hornbill into the Gir forests is a significant success for us,” Forest and Environment Minister Arjun Modhwadia said.

According to Vinod Rao, Principal Secretary, Forests and Environment, “One pair successfully bred during the first year after release, while three additional breeding pairs nested in

the second year, demonstrating that the restored population is beginning to establish itself naturally. The Grey Hornbill plays a crucial ecological role as a long-distance seed disperser, helping regenerate forests by transporting seeds of fruit-bearing trees across large areas.”

The project involved the release of 40 Indian Grey Hornbills in two phases. Twenty-eight birds were released between 2021 and 2022, followed by another 12 in 2023.

“Eleven males were fitted with satellite transmitters, allowing scientists to track their movements, habitat use, and breeding behaviour over several years,” Mohan Ram, Conservator of Forests, Junagadh Circle, and one of the authors of the study, said.

Remember victims of violence in *ardas*, Bittu tells Akal Takht chief

Press Trust of India
LUDHIANA

Union Minister Ravneet Singh Bittu appealed to Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Kuldeep Singh Gargaj to remember all the victims of the violence witnessed in Punjab during the 1990s in his *ardas* (Sikh prayer) on Tuesday, ahead of his prayers for the youths who allegedly fell victim to extrajudicial killings. “The blood that was shed then did not belong to terrorists alone, nor to the police, nor only to innocent civilians. It was Punjab’s blood. It was the blood of Punjabis,” the Minister wrote on X.

The BJP leader had on Sunday questioned why the Diljit Dosanjh-starrer film *Satluj* had underplayed “the massacres of innocent



Union Minister Ravneet Singh Bittu. FILE PHOTO

Hindus” and the “immense sacrifice of Punjab Police personnel, security forces and countless brave citizens who fought terrorism.”

Amid the row over the movie, the Akal Takht Jathedar had called a special religious gathering on the banks of the Satluj river at Harike Pattan on Tuesday evening to perform *ardas* for Sikh youths whose alleged extrajudicial killings were brought to light by activist Jaswant Singh Khalsa.

Veteran Kapu leader Mudragada Padmanabham, 73, passed away following a prolonged illness, in Hyderabad on Tuesday. Padmanabham had led Andhra Pradesh's longest social movement against the successive governments to restore the Backward Class status for Kapus. Starting off in TDP, he later joined the BJP and then the Congress. In 2024, he joined the YSRCP. He is survived by two sons and a daughter.

A four-year-old boy sustained critical injuries after accidentally falling from the first floor of a shopping complex in Chickballapur in Karnataka. The incident was captured on CCTV camera. The child, identified as Gagan Sindhu, had accompanied his parents to a clothing store in Pillappa Complex. According to preliminary information, when the parents were shopping, the child was playing near the first-floor corridor, from where he lost his balance and fell.

The Andhra Pradesh police seized about 1,373 kg ganja in Alluri Sitharama Raju district, late on Monday night. Acting on credible intelligence, the police intercepted a vehicle and found the ganja concealed inside, an officer said. They arrested a 32-year-old man from Koraput district in Odisha. A preliminary probe revealed that the ganja was meant to be supplied to the northern States. Police said it could be worth ₹6.83 lakh in Odisha. However, its market value in the north could be as high as ₹1.3 crore, they said.

A Congress delegation led by Hyderabad In-charge Minister Ponnampet Prabhakar met Telangana Chief Electoral Officer C. Sudharshan Reddy, urging the Election Commission to extend the deadline for the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, citing slow progress, particularly in Hyderabad.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Mr. Prabhakar said the voter verification and correction process was moving at a snail's pace across the State, especially in Hyderabad's 15 Assembly constituencies.

The Minister also appealed to Congress workers to actively participate in the voter enrolment and verification drive over the remaining days.

Speaking after releasing the 'White Paper of Facts' prepared by the AKG Centre for Research and Studies, and handing over its first copy to CPI(M) State secretary M.V. Govindan,

The Governor had suspended Mr. Sahukar fol-



ice of India Surya Kant, senior advocate Kapil Sibal, in an oral mentioning, said the polls were due on August 31, and it would be “seemingly impossible” to prepare for the polls while the massive SIR exercise was on.

The case may be listed on July 17 for a detailed hearing and orders.

The court had made stringent observations in a May 20 hearing, accusing the GBA of even employing

The notice by the Union Ministry of Agriculture comes on the back of bans by various States, including most recently by Andhra Pradesh, and earlier by Telangana and Kerala.

August 5 is the date of publication of the draft electoral roll. The final roll is scheduled to come out on October 7.

"This is a welcome development. Had the decision been taken a decade earlier, we would not have lost so many farmers and young people to self-harm," said Marri Mahesh Reddy, a doctor from Telangana who campaigned for a ban under Doctors Against Paraquat. The chemical has no antidote.

When the judges found
force in the submission



Orders have been placed with a private firm for the supply of two vending machines.

The second AVM would be installed at an open space allotted by the Nilgiris Collector adjacent to the Uzhavar Sandhai at Charing Cross.

accident, Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, HRD and IT Minister Nara Lokesh, Minister for MSME, SERP and NRI Empowerment and Relations Kondapalli Srinivas and officials of the AP Non-Resident Telugus Society (APNRTS) had been in touch with the Indian and Vietnamese authorities to facilitate the return of the survivors and the deceased.

Mr. Kondapalli Srinivas supervised the transportation of bodies and consoled the bereaved families. He assured them of the government's full support.



Family members of Sridhar, who died in Vietnam. ANI

The Andhra Pradesh government extended immediate support to the victims' families. Since the

Leader of the Opposition Pinarayi Vijayan on Tuesday rejected the United Democratic Front (UDF) government's claim that Kerala is facing a debt crisis. Contrary to the UDF's allegations, he also asserted that public debt grew at a slower pace during the Left Democratic Front (LDF)'s decade-long tenure than during the previous UDF government's rule.

Speaking after releasing the 'White Paper of Facts' prepared by the AKG Centre for Research and Studies, and handing over its first copy to CPI(M) State secretary M.V. Govindan,

He also rejected allegations of financial mismanagement and poor tax administration during the LDF regime.

Handloom weaver Nalla Vijay Kumar, a recipient of the Kalaratna award, handed over the saree to the temple Trust Board chairman, Pothugunta Ramesh Naidu, in the presence of Trust Board member Kode Kanthivardhini.

Mr. Vijay Kumar said he and his family members



took a week to weave the silk saree. The saree measures 5.5 metres in length and 48 inches in width and weighs about 200 gram. Woven in the traditional Ikkat pattern, it can be fold-

Receiving the saree on behalf of the temple, Mr.

The temple authorities made special darshan arrangements for Mr. Vijay Kumar and his team.

The case relates to the kickbacks involved in the awarding of the construction contract for the Kerala government's housing project under Life Mission at Wadakkanchery in Thrissur, for rehabilitating flood victims.

‘Gold standard’ India-U.K. trade deal is coming into effect today

Commerce Secretary describes pact as one of the ‘most ambitious and aspirational free trade agreements’ signed by the country; he adds that it will benefit farmers, fisherfolk; officials in U.K. welcome deal and highlight its multi-sectoral impact

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

The India-U.K. Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and Double Contribution Convention (DCC) that will come into force on Wednesday are a “gold standard” and one of the “most ambitious and aspirational free trade agreements” signed by India, Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal said on Tuesday.

He added that the deals benefit India’s farmers, fisherfolk, workers and women entrepreneurs. The India-U.K. CETA and the DCC were signed in July last year.

“This is one of the first free trade agreements (FTAs) of its kind, which establishes a future-oriented economic architecture between two major economies of the world,” Mr. Agrawal said at a press briefing. “This is also one of the most ambitious and aspirational FTAs of India, which we are operationalising as till date.”

“It is a gold standard and the first of its kind be-

Terms of trade

The India-U.K. Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and Double Contribution Convention (DCC) are set to come into force on Wednesday

- Under the CETA, the U.K will immediately eliminate tariffs on **96.8%** of its tariff lines, accounting for **97.7%** of the trade value
- India will immediately eliminate tariffs on **30.3%** of the trade value, with **47%** more seeing tariffs eliminated in a phased manner
- The DCC will exempt Indian workers and their employers from paying social security contributions in the U.K. for **5 years** if contributions are being made in India

- India has protected **sensitive sectors** such as dairy, cereals, pulses, vegetables, gold and jewellery, smartphones, and critical polymers



cause of its wide sectoral coverage and deep reduction in both tariff and non tariff barriers,” he added.

Under the deal, the U.K. will immediately eliminate tariffs on 96.8% of its tariff lines, accounting for 97.7% of the trade value. An additional 2% of tariff lines, amounting to 1.8% of trade value, will see reduced tariffs based on quotas. In total, this covers 98.8% of tariff lines and 99.5% of trade value.

India, on the other hand, will immediately eliminate tariffs on 30.3% of the trade value, with 47% more seeing tariffs eliminated in a phased manner. It will also provide reduced quota-based tariffs on 12.1% of the trade value. In total, this would cover 89.5% of tariff lines and 89.4% of trade value.

Officials in the U.K. have also welcomed the deal, highlighting a multi-sectoral impact. “For the City of

London, the agreement provides a strong platform to unlock even greater collaboration in financial and professional services, insurance, fintech, sustainable finance and infrastructure investment,” Chris Hayward, Policy Chairman of the City of London Corporation, told *The Hindu*.

“As India continues its remarkable economic growth story, London stands ready to support the mobilisation of global capital and expertise needed to help deliver those goals,” he added.

Mr. Agrawal said that the 30 chapters across which negotiations have taken place under this pact extend beyond conventional tariff liberalisation to cover digital trade, government procurement, SMEs, innovation, labour, environment, and gender.

He added that the deal addresses non-tariff barriers as well, so that issues like Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) “do not become unjustified trade restrictions for our businesses in the future”.

He further explained that the deal protects India’s sensitive sectors such as dairy, cereals, pulses, vegetables, gold and jewellery, smartphones, and critical polymers.

“**Game changer**”

On the DCC, he said that the agreement was a “game changer” for India’s services sector and skilled workforce. “Indian employees and their employers contribute around 25% of their salary to the U.K.’s national insurance system,” he said. “Their contribution is like a tax of 25% as employees are unable to draw benefits. These are like sunk costs.”

He said that the DCC will ensure that workers will not need to pay double contributions towards their social security. That is, if they are paying social security in India, then they will not have to pay it in the U.K. as well for a period of five years.

According to Mr. Agrawal, this will benefit over 75,000 Indian workers and over 900 employers. *(With inputs from Sriram Lakshman in London)*

India bans import of goods made using forced labour amid pending U.S. probe

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

The Government of India has issued a notification banning the import of goods manufactured using forced labour, a significant step towards clearing the path towards the signing of an interim trade agreement with the U.S.

The U.S. is currently in the process of releasing its final decision on the tariffs it plans to levy on countries that it says have not done enough to stop the import of goods made using forced labour.

“The import of goods produced or manufactured, wholly or in part, through the use of forced labour is prohibited,” the Ministry of Commerce and Industry said in its notification. It added that the Union government may, from time to time, specify the goods whose import shall be prohibited under this paragraph.

“The procedure for conducting an enquiry by the Director General of Foreign Trade into the use of forced labour in the production of such goods shall be as prescribed in the Handbook of Procedures,

The govt. said it may, from time to time, specify the goods whose import shall be prohibited

2023,” it added. Under its draft proposal following an investigation, the U.S. found that India and 53 other countries “failed to impose and effectively enforce” prohibitions on the import of goods produced using forced labour. As such, it proposed a tariff of 12.5% on imports from these countries.

Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal confirmed on Monday that India had made its submissions to the U.S. on the matter and protested the tariffs.

This pending decision has led to significant uncertainty surrounding the India-U.S. trade deal, with Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal and Mr. Agrawal separately saying India would sign a deal only once it is established that it will receive a comparative advantage over its competitors.

One key factor in establishing this comparative advantage is to see what tariffs the U.S. plans to levy

under its various investigations. The second investigation is into whether the U.S.’s trade partners are using excess capacity to export to the U.S. to the detriment of the American economy.

According to the notification by the Commerce Ministry, “forced labour” means “all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily, as defined under the ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29)”.

According to Manoj Mishra, Partner and Tax Controversy Management Leader, Grant Thornton Bharat, the introduction of a prohibition on imports of goods produced through forced labour marks a significant policy shift in India’s trade framework. “While India has so far relied largely on labour and criminal laws to address forced labour domestically, the Foreign Trade Policy now incorporates a dedicated trade measure aligned with international standards under the ILO Forced Labour Convention,” Mr. Mishra said.

EC extends SIR schedule for A.P. and Haryana

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Election Commission (EC) on Tuesday extended the schedule of the ongoing special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Andhra Pradesh and Haryana. The two States are part of the Phase 3 of the SIR rolled out on May 14, which is covering 16 States and Union Territories.

In separate letters to the Chief Electoral Officers of both States, the poll body extended the deadline for various activities under the SIR. In both Haryana and Andhra Pradesh, the house-to-house visits by booth-level officers, known as the enumeration phase, will continue till July 24. The earlier deadline was July 14. The draft rolls were earlier scheduled to be published on July 21. Now, they will be published on July 31. The final list in these two States will now be published on October 3, a week later than originally scheduled.

With this phase, the exercise will cover the entire country, except Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh.

CPI(M) says Kerala govt. is showing ‘soft Hindutva’ tendencies

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) on Tuesday accused the Congress government in Kerala of displaying “soft Hindutva” tendencies and said that it was increasingly working in the interests of corporates rather than people.

Addressing a press conference at the end of a three-day meeting of the party’s Central Committee, CPI(M) general secretary M.A. Baby said sections of the Congress were becoming accommodative of the Hindutva ideology. Referring to Chief Minister V.D. Satheesan, he alleged that symptoms of the Congress’s growing proximity to Hindutva politics were visible in Kerala as well.

Mr. Baby cited instances such as a Congress leader paying tributes to RSS ideologue M.S. Golwalkar at a public event, and accused the State government of remaining silent while the Governor appointed Vice-Chancellors allegedly aligned with the BJP and the RSS. “Like in North India, many top Congress leaders have become soft



M.A. Baby

towards Hindutva and *Manuvada* ideology. We see certain symptoms of this in V.D. Satheesan,” he said.

Review of poll defeat

The remarks came as the Central Committee reviewed the CPI(M)’s defeat in the Kerala Assembly election and its continued marginalisation in West Bengal. According to Mr. Baby, the party’s “in-depth and detailed review” identified shortcomings in the conduct of the election campaign, the issues highlighted by the party and candidate selection.

The party said corrective measures would be announced at extended meetings of its State committees in West Bengal in August and in Kerala in September.

As Wangchuk’s condition deteriorates, leaders urge him to end hunger strike

Aroon Deep
NEW DELHI

The 17th day of protests at Jantar Mantar demanding the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan saw larger crowds than Monday, following an increase in the number of voices urging activist Sonam Wangchuk to end his hunger strike.

Mr. Wangchuk has lost 8.5 kg, the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) said on Tuesday.

A growing chorus of Opposition voices urged Mr. Wangchuk, 59, to end his fast. Actors Naseeruddin Shah and Ratna Pathak Shah; economist Jayati Ghosh; writer Arundhati Roy; and multiple Professors from Jawaharlal Nehru University, either sent in a written petition or showed up in person to appeal to Mr. Wangchuk.

In separate posts on social media platform X, Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav and Trinamool Congress MP Mahua Moitra too appealed to Mr. Wangchuk to end his fast.



Life in peril: Doctors attending to activist Sonam Wangchuk on Tuesday. He has been on an indefinite hunger strike for 17 days. PTI

Former West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee spoke with Mr. Wangchuk over telephone and “urged him to stay strong”, CJP founder Abhijeet Dipke said.

Mr. Dipke said that on Tuesday morning Mr. Wangchuk rebuffed calls to end his fast. “Don’t ask me to end my fast,” he quoted the activist as saying. “Ask the govt. why they won’t even have a dialogue.”

Three student members of the All India Students’ Association (AISA), affiliated to the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation, ended their fast, with one being hospitalised on Monday. Three

other students, however, are still fasting.

Call to political leaders

The CJP invited the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, to the protest, along with 19 other leaders, including Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay. Most of them have not spoken on the protest.

“We again sincerely appeal to the leaders to keep aside their politics and lend to lend their voice to the voice of the young,” CJP spokesperson Saurav Das said.

The CJP is planning a march to Parliament on July 20.

Deeply concerned over hostilities in West Asia: Congress

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Tuesday expressed concern over the conflict in West Asia, accusing the Narendra Modi government of failing to safeguard India’s strategic interests, and allowing Pakistan to expand its regional footprint.

In a statement, the Congress’s Foreign Affairs Department chairperson Salman Khurshid said the party was deeply concerned over the resumption of hostilities and attacks on commercial shipping. The free movement of vessels and trade should not be “weaponised” by the warring sides, he said, urging all sides to pursue resolution through dialogue.

The Congress also expressed concern over attacks on Iran’s Chabahar Port, which Mr. Khurshid described as a strategic asset developed by successive Indian governments to provide India access to Central Asia. He urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to take urgent steps to protect India’s geopolitical and geo-economic in-

terests, and brief Parliament on the government’s response during the coming Parliament session.

Pakistan’s footprint

“The BJP government’s inexplicable silence and lethargy in stridently defending Indian interests in West Asia is unacceptable. This inertia is severely circumscribing India’s strategic autonomy and ceding space to other actors, including Pakistan, to expand their regional footprint,” Mr. Khurshid said.

Although the recently announced Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding between the U.S. and Iran had “all but collapsed”, the growing bonhomie between Washington and Islamabad continued, signalling Pakistan’s rising influence in the region, Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said earlier. “That this new position of influence held by Pakistan in West Asia and indeed in the world is a severe setback to India and a question mark on the substance and style of the self-proclaimed Vishwaguru is now beyond any doubt,” he said.

Rajnath flags off ‘Shaurya Vijay Yatra’ motorcycle rally for Kargil heroes



Journey begins: Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh flagging off the ‘Shaurya Vijay Yatra’, a 13-day motorcycle expedition, in New Delhi on Tuesday. ANI

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday flagged off the 13-day ‘Shaurya Vijay Yatra’, a commemorative motorcycle expedition from the National War Memorial in New Delhi to the Kargil War Memorial in Drass.

The 1999 Kargil conflict was not just a military victory, but a chapter of courage, fortitude, discipline, and unwavering patriotism, Mr. Singh said.

The expedition, with the theme of ‘One Ride, One Nation, One Salute’, has been organised as part of the nationwide obser-

vance of Kargil Vijay Diwas. It will see 28 riders – including serving and retired armed forces personnel and their family members – cover nearly 1,900 km through Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh before reaching Drass on July 26.

The occasion was not merely about flagging off a motorcycle expedition but about “paying tribute to the indomitable spirit and supreme sacrifice of the soldiers who had laid down their lives defending the nation’s honour”, Mr. Singh said, addressing the participants.

Recalling Operation Vijay, the Minister said In-

dian soldiers achieved the impossible by fighting in extreme conditions at altitudes of nearly 20,000 ft., where oxygen was scarce and temperatures plunged to minus 40 degrees Celsius. Despite the enemy occupying dominating heights, Indian troops reclaimed every peak and bunker with exceptional courage, he said.

Paid tributes

Describing the victory as one achieved at a tremendous cost, Mr. Singh said that “more than 500 soldiers made the supreme sacrifice” during the conflict. He paid tribute to the Kargil heroes, including

Captain Vikram Batra, Lieutenant Manoj Kumar Pandey, and Rifleman Sanjay Kumar. Their courage would continue to inspire generations of Indians, he said.

The Defence Minister said the Kargil victory was not merely a historical event but a lasting reminder of India’s resolve to respond decisively to any threat against its sovereignty, identity and honour.

During the ceremony, an urn containing soil from the National War Memorial was handed over to the expedition members. It will be carried to the Kargil War Memorial in Drass, and ceremonially offered

in memory of the fallen soldiers.

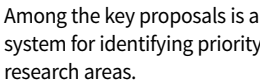
Calling the expedition a symbol of national unity, Mr. Singh said it brought together serving personnel, veterans and civilians from different parts of the country, reflecting India’s diversity under the Tricolour. He expressed confidence that the yatra would inspire patriotism among the youth and ensure that the legacy of the Kargil martyrs remains alive for future generations.

The expedition is scheduled to culminate at the Kargil War Memorial on July 26, commemorating the 27th anniversary of India’s victory in the Kargil War.

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Tuesday stated that it had arrested Vikas Garg, chairman of Ebix group, in a multi-crore-rupee money laundering case linked to the Mahadev online betting app. It is alleged that the 53-year-old businessman routed ill-gotten money from the betting app into the entities owned and controlled by him. "Vikas Garg was arrested by ED from his house at Delhi and being taken to Raipur after obtaining transit remand from the court. He will be produced before PMLA [Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002] Court, Raipur tomorrow [Wednesday]," a press release issued by the agency read.

A Bench comprising Justices Sanjay Karol and Prashanna B. Varale upheld the acquittal of Monika Suryawanshi, declining to revive the charges of murder and criminal conspiracy against her. She had been accused of orchestrating the murder of her husband, Kiran Suryawanshi, in February 2007 over an alleged extramarital affair.

The Ministry has invited stakeholder feedback be-



While India has built considerable scientific capability through institutions such as the Indian Council of Medical Research

Among the key proposals is a system for periodically identifying priority research areas, based on disease burden, scientific opportunity, equity, pandemic preparedness and strategic national interest – an agenda to be drawn up in consultation with States, Union Territories, researchers, health profes-

Ethics, research integrity, data governance, cybersecurity and community participation have been placed at the core of this framework. Long-term national targets have also been proposed for research investment, medical science Ph.D., publications, and patents.

Appearing before a three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, for the Centre, said a notification was issued on May 22 by which the Act's schedule was amended to define an "acid attack victim" as anyone "disfigured externally or internally due to violent assault, self-infliction, accident by throwing, administering, or spilling

remained unchanged although the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), which replaced the Indian Penal Code, accepted both the act of acid-throwing and administration of acid as offences punishable from

In previous hearings, the court had even gone to the extent of indicating to the Centre to change the penal and bail laws to punish the perpetrators of this “most ruthless, most heinous” of crimes.

FAITH

Lord Rama and Ramanuja

The Acharya is the divine bridge who leads the soul to God, said Damal Perundeivi in a discourse. The lives of Lord Rama and Jagadacharya Ramanuja reveal many profound similarities that reflect their divine mission. Both incarnated during the Tamil month of Chithirai. Lord Rama willingly entered the forest in obedience to His father Dasaratha, enduring immense hardships. Likewise, Ramanuja journeyed through the Vindhya forests, facing many dangers while spreading the path of devotion. The purpose of both incarnations was the welfare of humanity and the liberation of countless souls.

In the Ramavataram, Lakshmana, the younger brother (*Anuja*) of Lord Rama, considered the manifestation of Adishesha, rendered unwavering service to Lord Rama. In the Kali Yuga, the same Adishesha incarnated as Ramanuja, dedicated his life to guiding souls towards moksha through devotion, surrender, and the teachings of scriptures. Another beautiful similarity is that Lord Rama listened to His own divine history through Lava and Kusa's recitation of the Ramayana. Likewise, Ramanuja heard his own glories through the Ramanuja Nootrandadhi, composed by Thiruvarangathamudanar. Tradition also states that Ramanuja expounded the inner meanings of the Ramayana before Lord Varadaraja and Perundeivi Thayar. Both Lord Rama and Ramanuja were born after their parents performed the sacred Putrakameshti Yaga. Ramanuja received Pancha Samskara from Periya Nambi at Madurantakam, the abode of Lord Eri Katha Ramar. Thus, both remain eternal guides, exemplifying righteousnes, compassion, dharma and path to liberation.

Why scientists watched a gene hop from a predator into its prey

Jumping genes are involved in the spread of antibiotic resistance and in the development of many cancers; scientists are also studying circular RNA molecules, like the one derived from the jumping intron, as next generation vaccine platforms; understanding jumping genes can thus have profound implications for medicine

Swaminathan S

Since scientists discovered jumping genes in maize in 1950, they have known that bits of DNA can move around the genome, mostly within the cell nucleus. Scientists have also found evidence of genes having jumped across species.

Now, researchers at the Max Planck Institute for Marine Microbiology in Germany have reported a remarkable observation: they have visually tracked an RNA molecule, called an intron, as it jumped from one organism into another.

This is remarkable because the scientists literally caught the gene as it jumped across species, without the help of any courier.

Jumping genes – technically now called transposable elements – are responsible for the spread of antibiotic resistance and in the development of several cancers. Scientists are also studying circular RNA molecules, like the one derived from the jumping intron, as next generation vaccine platforms. Understanding the lives of jumping genes can thus have profound implications for evolution and ultimately to medicine and biotechnology.

A tiny predator

Microbial communities that occur naturally are very difficult to nurture in large numbers in a lab because they will be isolated from their surroundings. So the team at Jens Harder's laboratory seeded a lab culture with a small amount of wastewater from a local sewage treatment plant.

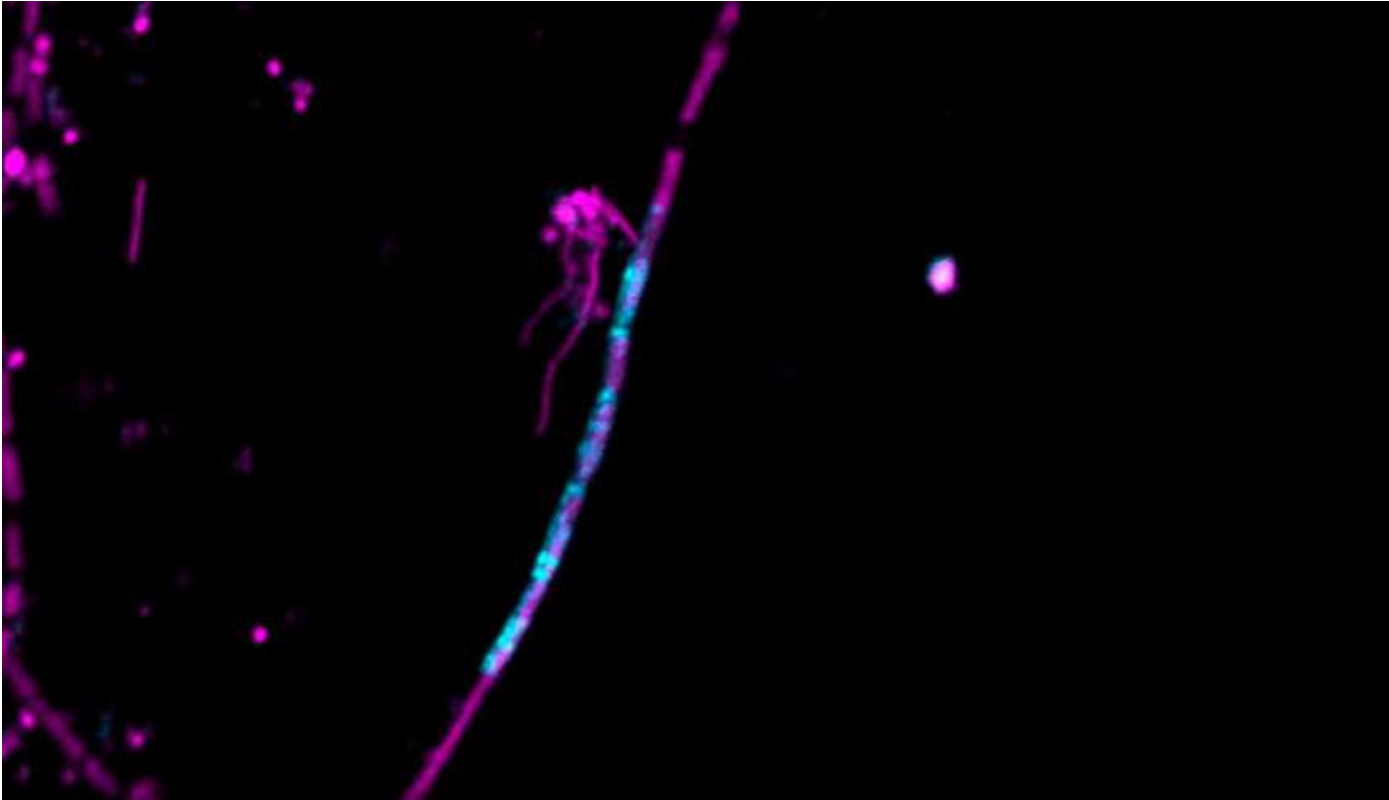
Over time, this culture of microbes came to consist of several members of archaea and bacteria. Like bacteria, archaea are another domain of life, and are also microscopic.

Microbes of both these domains lack a true nucleus. Instead, their nucleus lies in the cytoplasm itself.

The team focused on two members of this community. One member is the methane-producing archaeon, *Methanotherix soehngeni*. The other is a bacterium so small that it is called an ultramicrobacterium. The team named it *Velamenicoccus archaeovor*. It is a predator: it attaches to the surface of the archaeon, breaks apart its cell membrane, and kills it.

The rough draft

It is impractical to investigate each member of a highly diverse microbial community separately, so scientists study them *en masse*. In the study, the researchers identified the RNA molecules in the members' ribosomes. The ribosome is each cell's protein-making factory.



A confocal microscope image of *Methanotherix soehngeni*. It forms long filaments of connected cells (magenta). The bright blue patch shows where researchers detected an intron RNA inside the cells using fluorescent probes. Scale bar: 5 μm SCI REP 16, 14654 (2026).

The ribosomes in all cells of all life forms have RNAs called ribosomal RNAs (rRNA). All life forms have rRNA that perform the same function. However, each species has a unique sequence of bases that can be used to identify the species. This way, the scientists determined the composition of their lab culture.

In the ultramicrobacterium, one type of rRNA called 23S is initially made as a precursor – like a rough draft, something the cell has to edit further. This editing takes the form of losing a particular sequence of bases called the intron. Essentially, the intron is cut out of the precursor.

The intron itself is a special kind of RNA molecule with two unique roles: it cuts itself out of the precursor rRNA and joins its own ends up to acquire a circular structure. And it contains information that can allow it to 'jump'.

The team also analysed the rRNA sequences of the ultramicrobacterium from a previous study. This revealed that the introns were highly efficient at their tasks: they rarely failed.

Tracking by eye

Finally, the team decided to check visually whether the intron of the 23S rRNA of the predator jumped to the prey as the two interacted.

Other scientists at the same Max Planck Institute had already found, and

perfected, a way to track RNA visually. It consisted of tracking the RNA using a probe with a pair of special features. One, it was designed to home in on the intron (based on its sequence) and latch on to it. Two, the probe was attached to a fluorescent label – a chemical compound that glows when seen through a fluorescence microscope.

The team modified the probe so that its label would glow green in live cells but yellow in dead cells – either way only if the intron was present.

The team also could tell which cells the intron was by using the difference in appearance of the microbes. *V. archaeovor* appears as small spots while *Methanotherix soehngeni* appears as filaments.

This way, the team detected the intron in *Methanotherix soehngeni* cells. Specifically, there was a faint yellow glow in the filamentous structures. This meant the cells in which the intron was present were dead.

Clearly, the intron RNA had exited the predator cells and entered the prey cells.

Truly remarkable

RNA molecules are famously unstable, so how did the introns survive this jump? The researchers proposed that the intron's self-circularisation could be the reason. The circular shape of the RNA molecule allows it to resist being degraded by a cell's enzymes. The

ultramicrobacterium's genome also encodes an enzyme that could have helped the intron insert itself into foreign DNA.

There are still some unanswered questions. For example, does evolution intend for introns to be integrated into prey DNA? In the experiment, the intron actually jumped into dead cells. Why? Or, alternatively, did the intron kill the cells?

Visual confirmation that an intron can jump across two different domains of life is truly remarkable.

Still, let us remember that it happened in a laboratory culture (even if there is indirect evidence that introns do jump in the real world as well).

Living beings sometimes swap genes with viruses, which are the essential couriers of gene transfer. This is known as horizontal gene transfer. The new study, however, has reported the first direct visual evidence of horizontal gene transfer across species without a courier.

Studying this phenomenon helps scientists understand how organisms rapidly acquire new traits, such as antibiotic resistance or new metabolic abilities. It also reveals how genes move across species, potentially reshaping ecosystems and driving the rise of new disease-causing microbes.

S. Swaminathan is a retired professor of biology (BITS-Pilani, Hyderabad) and a former scientist (ICGEB, New Delhi).ssn225@gmail.com

THE GIST

Living beings sometimes swap genes with viruses, which are the essential couriers of gene transfer, known as horizontal gene transfer

The new study has reported the first direct visual evidence of horizontal gene transfer across species without a courier

Studying this phenomenon helps scientists understand how organisms rapidly acquire new traits, such as antibiotic resistance or new metabolic abilities

BIG SHOT



QUESTION CORNER

Cosmic sugar

Vasudevan Mukunth

Q Could the sugar in our bodies have first come from space?

A: It is possible, though we don't yet know for sure.

In fact, astronomers recently found a complex sugar in deep space for the first time. Using powerful radio telescopes, a team affiliated with institutes in Spain and five other countries spotted a complex sugar called erythrulose in a giant interstellar molecular cloud near the centre of the Milky Way galaxy. Their findings were published in *Nature Astronomy* on July 13.

While scientists have previously found molecules that can give rise to sugars in space, erythrulose is itself a sugar. Sugars are essential building blocks of life: they provide metabolic energy and form the structural backbone of RNA and DNA. Scientists have found sugar molecules on meteorites and asteroids but this is the first time such a molecule has been found in the vastness between stars. And it proves the complex chemical ingredients necessary for life can form in the extreme conditions of space, and don't need planets.

The researchers used advanced computer models to show that the erythrulose likely formed on the icy surfaces of dust grains. When simpler molecules, such as glycolaldehyde and



Astronomers have spotted a complex sugar called erythrulose in an interstellar molecular cloud near the centre of the Milky Way. JOHN FOWLER/UNSPLASH

ethylene glycol, collide on these frozen particles, they can react to form larger, more complex sugars. Eventually, these molecules can be incorporated into comets and asteroids, which may have seeded the early earth with the necessary ingredients for biological life.

Erythrulose is also a chiral molecule, meaning it has separate right-handed and left-handed versions. Because life on the earth only uses one specific handedness for its molecules, finding chiral sugars in space could help scientists understand why our biology evolved the way it did.

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



Steady in turbulence

India must build partnerships in this age of global turmoil

Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s recent visits to Australia and New Zealand marked yet another step in India’s efforts to consolidate partnerships across the Indo-Pacific. India’s relations with both countries have traditionally been largely economic and people-centric, but the visits underscored an increased emphasis on strategic aspects, a fresh turn. Geopolitical competition, manifested in supply-chain disruptions and the realignment of global economic networks, is keeping the world on tenterhooks, and India has to manage the uncertainties and volatility well to be able to protect its vital interests. The visits reflected New Delhi’s attempt to strengthen the southern arc of the Indo-Pacific under its Act East Policy, MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions) vision, and commitment to a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific. India and Australia adopted a new Joint Declaration on Defence and Security Cooperation, significantly upgrading the existing security framework. They agreed to enhance interoperability between their armed forces, expand military exercises, establish an Annual Defence Ministers’ Dialogue, and strengthen cooperation in cybersecurity, maritime security and emerging technologies. An India-Australia Maritime Security Collaboration Roadmap was unveiled to deepen information sharing and operational coordination in the Indo-Pacific. An immediate and consequential outcome was Australia’s decision to allow uranium exports for India’s civilian nuclear programme, removing a lingering obstacle in ties and boosting India’s clean-energy ambitions. Both countries will also find new avenues of cooperation on critical minerals, a specific field of global uncertainty.

India-New Zealand relations are now a formal strategic partnership, with a road map for cooperation over the next four years. Key agreements announced by the countries include maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and mutual logistics support between the Indian Navy and the New Zealand Defence Force. Building upon the recently concluded India-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement, both sides agreed to aim for a substantial expansion of bilateral trade by 2030. Avenues for agricultural cooperation are also being explored. India shares with Australia and New Zealand a concern about maintaining stability and predictability in the Indo-Pacific. Supply-chain diversification, energy security, and access to critical minerals and emerging technology are key priorities for India, which is trying to protect its strategic autonomy in a world of great volatility. The Modi government has been trying to achieve this objective through building a network of partnerships. These visits fit into that pattern. India’s challenge is in keeping itself steady in an era of global turmoil, and untangled from rivalries that can do it no good. Mr. Modi’s visits build on this awareness.

Two sets

Consistency marked the men’s draw, and shocks and surprises the women’s

When Jannik Sinner arrived at Wimbledon, there were questions aplenty. They hinged on the defeat he suffered at the French Open, where he wilted in the second round under the extreme Paris heat despite being two sets and 5-1 up. When he needed five sets to get past the first round at the All England Club, the intrigue about his physical health and state of tennis deepened. None of his achievements in the 52 weeks preceding Wimbledon – 76 wins against just six losses, and 10 titles – seemed to matter. But with two superlative performances, against Novak Djokovic in the semifinal and Alexander Zverev in the final, the World No. 1 silenced the doubters in the best possible fashion. Djokovic and Zverev were his two biggest threats, with the former a seven-time winner at SW19 and the latter the reigning Roland-Garros champion. But the Italian’s top-notch serving and baseline consistency fetched him his second straight Wimbledon and fifth Major title. The success was also Sinner’s tenth consecutive victory over Zverev. But even in defeat, the German can hold his head high. Since the start of 2024, men’s tennis has largely been a cat-and-mouse game between Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz. Zverev’s potential entry as the distinguished third will make the sport healthier.

The women’s game has had a more even spread of champions, and Wimbledon has been at the forefront of producing them. It was no different this year as Linda Noskova became the tenth different women’s singles winner at SW19 in as many years. The fact that Noskova, Iga Swiatek and Elena Rybakina are the only ones in this list to also feature in the current WTA top-10 is indicative of the depth in quality. The player from Czechia was spoken of but was never considered the favourite to win, for she had reached the quarterfinal stage at a Slam only once before. Yet, the 21-year-old put together a remarkable streak that culminated in the pulsating three-set triumph over compatriot Karolina Muchova (2023 French Open finalist). The most impressive bit was Noskova’s resilience in roaring back after missing out on five championship points in the second set. At the start of the tournament, there was concern that such elite performances would be dulled by protests from players demanding a better revenue-sharing model from the organisers. For a second straight Major, a temporary truce was called, allowing tennis to be solely in the limelight.

India’s political establishment has long spoken of youth in the future tense – young people as tomorrow’s leaders, democracy’s inheritors, and the next generation of voters. Beneath this language of hope, however, is a political reality, which is that power has remained concentrated among ageing leaders who rarely entrusted young people with real influence. That political fiction is now rapidly fading.

India’s youth are no longer “citizens in waiting”. They are already shaping elections, influencing political discourse, forcing parties to recalibrate, and redefining how politics itself is practised in a unique way. This transformation is not simply demographic. India has long been a young country. What is different today is the emergence of youth as an independent political force with its own language, expectations, methods, and centres of influence. Political leaders who fail to recognise this shift increasingly risk irrelevance.

A new political language
The shift is most visible in political communication. For much of the post-Independence years, Indian politics operated through hierarchy and distance: leaders spoke from elevated stages while citizens listened. Communication flowed through party structures, newspapers, television, and carefully managed public events, depending on spectacle, organisational control, and ideological certainty. That model is weakening rapidly.

Today’s youth inhabit a radically different political landscape shaped by short-form videos, memes, podcasts, livestreams, online commentary, and decentralised digital communities. While attention spans may be shorter, political awareness has not declined. Young voters are not necessarily anti-political; they are anti-performance. They respond to accessibility, authenticity, responsiveness, humour, emotional intelligence and transparency over scripted rhetoric. Tamil Nadu offers one of the clearest examples of this shift.

The rise of actor-turned-politician C. Joseph Vijay cannot be explained through celebrity appeal alone. What makes Mr. Vijay’s emergence politically significant is his intuitive understanding of a transformed communication ecosystem. More importantly, even leaders within established parties have publicly acknowledged his growing influence among younger voters.



Amal Chandra
Political analyst, columnist and the author of the book, ‘The Essential’ (2023)



Ajay Karuvally
Senior Research Associate at the International Institute of Migration and Development

For decades, India’s political establishment spoke of youth as the future, but that future has arrived sooner than expected

This transformation is also visible in the rise of meme-driven political commentary and satire collectives that increasingly shape public perception among younger audiences. On Instagram, YouTube, and X, informal digital ecosystems now influence political narratives far more rapidly than traditional party communication machinery. The “Cockroach Janta Party” phenomenon – alongside a broader ecosystem of meme creators, satirical commentators, and independent digital voices – reflects a generation engaging with politics through humour, irony, cultural references, and decentralised online participation. Once dismissed as frivolous Internet culture, these spaces increasingly function as parallel arenas of political socialisation and opinion formation.

A similar recalibration is visible elsewhere in India. In Kerala, Congress leader and the “pookie CM” V.D. Satheesan has consciously cultivated an image distinct from the confrontational and centralised styles that increasingly characterised the State’s recent political culture. His emphasis on accessibility, dialogue, and participatory communication reflects a recognition that younger citizens no longer respond automatically to ideological inheritance or party loyalty. A political leader unable to communicate within this evolving ecosystem risks irrelevance, regardless of organisational strength.

From protest to participation
India’s youth politics is no longer confined to party youth wings or campus elections. The 2017 pro-Jallikattu protests in Tamil Nadu marked a turning point in understanding how digitally connected youth could sustain mass mobilisation without centralised party leadership. What began as a cultural movement evolved into a wider demonstration of youth-led political coordination powered by social media networks, online narratives, and decentralised participation. Since then, online political culture – from meme creators and independent digital commentators to podcast ecosystems and Instagram-based political analysis – has become a major force shaping public discourse. Political parties now obsessively monitor online sentiment, adapt campaign messaging to digital reactions, and respond rapidly to narratives emerging far outside traditional institutions. The distinction between “online politics” and “real politics” is steadily disappearing. This broader shift mirrors developments elsewhere in

India-U.S. defence tech ties — big ambitions, little delivery

India-United States defence cooperation has acquired an unenviable reputation in strategic circles for generating ambitious political announcements that fail to translate into industrial outcomes. Over the past two decades, successive administrations in New Delhi and Washington have unveiled defence technology partnerships and industrial collaborations promising to transform bilateral military ties, only for them to become bogged down in protracted negotiations, export-control restrictions, technology-transfer disputes and differing commercial expectations.

The irony is that the relationship itself has expanded considerably. Since 2002, India has acquired over \$22 billion worth of U.S. defence equipment, including Apache and Chinook helicopters, C-17 and C-130J transport aircraft, P-8I maritime patrol aircraft, and M777 howitzers. While the US has become a major defence supplier, meaningful co-production and technology transfer remain elusive.

The case of the GE engine
The recent impasse over General Electric’s (GE) F414 fighter engine, once hailed as the centrepiece of bilateral defence cooperation, is merely the latest – and arguably the most significant – illustration of the gap between political declarations and industrial outcomes. The estimated cost of each F414 engine has reportedly nearly tripled, rising from around ₹70 crore-80 crore to over ₹200 crore. GE has also sought an Indian investment of around \$800 million (₹7,576 crore) to establish a dedicated production line.

Disagreements over technology transfer, intellectual property and export controls have further complicated negotiations. Hindustan Aeronautics Limited is negotiating procurement and licensed manufacture of the F414 for the Tejas Mk-II, while the Defence Research and Development Organisation and Aeronautical Development Agency are separately engaging GE over the same engine for the proposed Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) and the Indian Navy’s Twin-Engine Deck-Based Fighter. The result is a web of interlinked negotiations proving difficult to resolve.

The F414 programme was unveiled during Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s 2023 Washington



Rahul Bedi
Defence reporter and analyst based in New Delhi and Chandigarh

Meaningful defence technology collaboration continues to elude the United States and India

visit as the flagship achievement of the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET), intended to symbolise a shift from a buyer-seller relationship towards genuine defence-industrial collaboration. Instead, it has become another illustration of the enduring gap between political ambition and industrial reality. Nor is this an isolated instance.

Vision to stagnation
The first serious attempt to institutionalise defence cooperation came in 2012 with the Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI). Conceived to promote co-development and co-production, it generated years of meetings but delivered no significant military capability before fading into irrelevance.

Its successor, iCET (2022), expanded the agenda to semiconductors, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, telecommunications, space, biotechnology, drones and resilient supply chains. Among its principal defence initiatives was the GE F414 programme, whose unresolved negotiations have become emblematic of the wider difficulty in translating political ambition into industrial outcomes.

The India-United States Defence Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS-X), launched in 2023 to link defence start-ups, academia and industry, likewise generated enthusiasm but has yet to produce noteworthy co-development outcomes. Other prospective collaborations have fared little better. Discussions on co-producing the Javelin anti-tank guided missile have remained unresolved for more than a decade, while the proposed collaboration on the General Dynamics Stryker infantry combat vehicle has suffered a similar fate. Both now appear increasingly likely to be shelved quietly.

Even India’s 2024 acquisition of 31 MQ-9B SkyGuardian and SeaGuardian remotely piloted aircraft from General Atomics through the U.S. government’s Foreign Military Sales route for around \$3.5 billion has resembled a purchase rather than the industrial collaboration originally envisaged. Its promised package – including local assembly, partial manufacture and a domestic maintenance, repair and overhaul ecosystem – has yet to materialise.

Taken together, these outcomes reveal a pattern that is difficult to ignore. Successive

South Asia. Sri Lanka’s 2022 Aragalaya protests demonstrated how digitally connected youth could convert public frustration into sustained political pressure against corruption, dynastic entitlement, and elite detachment. Nepal too has witnessed growing youth-led mobilisations around governance failures, unemployment, and democratic accountability.

India has so far remained relatively insulated from such large-scale upheaval. But recent political developments suggest that a quieter transformation is underway – not necessarily through street uprisings, but through changing patterns of political communication, participation, and voter behaviour.

This also calls into question the assumption that youth mobilisation is inherently anti-establishment or anti-democratic. The rise of Mr. Vijay in Tamil Nadu suggests that where democratic institutions remain credible and electoral participation feels meaningful, young citizens are willing to work within existing democratic structures rather than reject them outright.

The problem is not apathy – it is institutional distrust. Increasingly, younger citizens recognise that much of what passes as “youth engagement” is little more than managed participation without genuine power-sharing. Political parties often speak about bringing youth into politics, but resist the logical consequences of doing so: redistributing authority, opening leadership pathways, decentralising candidate selection, and allowing younger voices to shape policy priorities.

Adapt or become irrelevant
The challenge before political parties is no longer simply attracting young voters through social media content, campaigns or symbolic outreach. The real question is whether entrenched political structures are willing to meaningfully share power and adapt to a new democratic culture shaped by honesty, participation, transparency, responsiveness, and decentralised influence over scripted authority. Young citizens are no longer waiting quietly at the edges of democracy. They are already reshaping it. The street protest and the polling booth are no longer separate democratic spaces; they are increasingly interconnected. Political parties that continue to underestimate this transformation risk finding themselves stranded in a political culture that no longer exists.

India-U.S. defence initiatives have been heralded as “historic”, “transformational” or “game-changing”, yet implementation has repeatedly fallen well short of the rhetoric.

The technology transfer divide
At the heart of this disconnect lie fundamentally different philosophies underpinning the two countries’ defence sectors. India views defence partnerships as a means of acquiring advanced technologies, strengthening indigenous manufacturing and reducing dependence on imported matériel. The U.S., by contrast, regards advanced defence technologies as strategic assets governed by stringent export-control regulations, particularly the International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR), under which the release of technical data and manufacturing know-how remains subordinate to broader security considerations.

The unresolved F414 negotiations illustrate this divide. India has sought manufacturing expertise and intellectual property to build long-term domestic capability, while the U.S. remains constrained by export-control regimes regardless of Washington’s broader strategic objectives. The consequence is a defence relationship that has matured as a procurement partnership but far less as a mechanism for transferring capability and strengthening India’s atmanirbharta.

Despite the undeniable expansion of India-U.S. strategic ties – marked by increasingly sophisticated military exercises, logistics agreements and enhanced interoperability – the industrial dimension of the relationship has yet to keep pace. The alphabet soup of DTTI, iCET and INDUS-X has largely disappointed, leaving officials in both countries looking to the proposed Reciprocal Defence Procurement Agreement (RDPA) as the next test of industrial cooperation.

The U.S. believes that the RDPA could reshape bilateral defence trade by granting reciprocal access to each other’s procurement markets. Yet, that reciprocity could expose India’s still-nascent defence manufacturers to direct competition with America’s larger, wealthier and technologically more advanced defence giants. Whether this creates genuine balance or simply institutionalises unequal competition is another matter altogether.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Fair hearings

The Supreme Court’s ruling that citizenship determination cannot be mechanical or one-sided is a necessary reaffirmation of constitutional principles, because being declared a foreigner carries grave consequences that demand a procedure genuinely fair, not merely dressed in statutory form. However,

the deeper issue remains. Foreigners’ tribunals across the northeast are overburdened, under-resourced, and often lack legal expertise, making fair hearings more an aspiration than a routine. Without systemic reform, mechanical decisions will recur regardless of judicial reminders. The Court has spoken, but the executive

must now ensure that tribunals have the capacity, training, and independence to deliver reasoned justice.

K. Chidanand Kumar,
Bengaluru

S. Janaki
S. Janaki was also hailed as the ‘Queen of Expressions’. Her improvisations, vocables, and variations in the course of singing were

unmatched. Her hit songs were numerous and the fact is that the Ilaiyaraaja-Janaki dyad ensured musical magic. She dominated the female singer slot, maintaining the numero uno position for decades.

R. Sampath,
Chennai

I was scrolling through Instagram when I came

across a song with an Afrobeat. At first I thought it was another remix. Then I found the original. Suddenly I understood why people spoke about this voice with such reverence. The melody felt timeless, and the voice carried an emotion that no beat could replace. A song recorded decades ago had found its way into my headphones — a song that

a new generation has given a different rhythm. Sometimes the newest discoveries are the oldest songs — S. Janaki and her *Kiliye Kiliye* from the Malayalam film *Aa Raathri* (1983).

Karthik Menon,
Kozhikode, Kerala

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

The dangers of being a ‘cool teacher’

Today, there is a particular kind of teacher that parents and students celebrate. She explains quadratic equations through trending audio. He goes live on Instagram at eleven at night to give a “real talk” on board exams. They reply to student DMs (direct messages), post staffroom videos, and caption it all with something like “school doesn’t have to be boring.” The intent is warm but the consequences are serious. In 2026, being a “cool teacher” increasingly means being a content creator. That shift from educator to influencer is quietly dismantling a crucial structure in a child’s life: the boundary between adult and child.

The legal architecture around teacher-student relationships is not accidental. The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, imposes specific statutory duties on teachers; *loco parentis* imposes a judicially recognised duty of care; the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015, imposes general duties on persons in charge of a child, which can extend to teachers in some circumstances, but does not target them as a distinct category. That duty does not come with a digital off-switch. When a teacher follows a 15-year-old on Instagram, sends memes at midnight, or comments on a student’s personal reel, the adult-child boundary carefully maintained in physical spaces dissolves in digital ones.

Grooming rarely begins with explicit harm – it exploits access, trust, and eroding distance. A teacher sliding into a student’s DM with no ill intent can still create such conditions, which is why the boundary matters regardless of motives. Such informal chats do not stay private forever; their screenshots can easily end up as evidence in a POCSO complaint.

Teaching as performance
There is also a subtler problem: when teaching becomes content, it begins obeying the logic of content. That logic - shaped by



Nabeela Siddiqui

Assistant Professor,
Vinayaka Mission’s
Law School,
VMRF-DU, Chennai

When the classroom meets the algorithm, it is children who pay the price

Meta’s recommendation engine - rewards outrage, oversimplification, and para-social intimacy. The semiotics of the classroom shift. The teacher is no longer a symbol of institutional knowledge and fair authority. She becomes an influencer: a personal brand whose value depends on likeability scores. Here, enforcing discipline, giving a student a poor grade, or delivering hard feedback become threats to the brand. Recent research (Ljungblad, 2022; Roy et al., 2024) separates genuine relational teaching from transactional or performative approaches driven by institutional pressure. This is a conceptual distinction, though not one backed by data linking it to grade inflation or student entitlement. The teacher who runs emotional candid sessions with adolescents on YouTube Live is not building connections. She is monetising the vulnerability of her students and, eventually, of her own.

India’s Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, provides that a child below the age of 18 cannot provide valid consent for the processing of their personal data. Yet, classroom reels featuring identifiable voices, contexts, and reactions are published daily by teacher-influencers. Even with faces blurred, a student’s laugh, a wrong answer, or a moment of embarrassment become raw material for a stranger’s algorithm. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, in its General Comment 25, affirms children’s right to privacy in digital spaces. Indian law is catching up. But the ethical gap between what is legal and what is right has already widened considerably.

Also, the social approval that “coolness” promises is not available to every such teacher equally. Discrimination creeps in there too based on gender, caste, and religion. And, schools increasingly and informally expect teachers to build the institution’s brand online.

The regulatory framework is clearer than its enforcement

suggests. CBSE Affiliation Bye-Laws also require teachers to maintain professional dignity and avoid conduct unbecoming of their role. Teachers who collect or publish students’ personal data without appropriate consent or lawful authority may incur liability under applicable privacy, data protection, institutional, or information technology laws. Tamil Nadu educational authorities have issued guidelines regulating digital communication between teachers and students and emphasizing professional boundaries. The POCSO Act criminalises sexual harassment, sexual solicitation, grooming, and other sexual communications directed at children. Collectively, these legal frameworks underscore that teacher-student interactions whether offline or online—must remain professional, transparent, and centred on students’ welfare and safety.

Understanding of algorithm
None of this is an argument for returning to fear-based, authoritarian pedagogy. But the answer to a rigid classroom is not a boundary-less one. Schools need enforceable guidelines for teachers: no personal following of students, no DMs, no late-night Lives, and no classroom reels on personal accounts. Teachers need the understanding that the algorithm of a digital platform built to maximise engagement is not a neutral medium for education. And, schools must extend legal protection to teachers when students screen-record, misrepresent, or harass them online. The vulnerability in this relationship runs both ways.

The job of a teacher has never been to be liked. It has been to be trusted. Before the next reel is filmed and the caption typed, it is worth asking one question honestly: who is this for? The child in front of you, or the count at the bottom of the screen? Those two answers are not the same. And the gap between them is exactly where harm begins.

Telangana’s political lingo needs a reset

Abuses and personal attacks have replaced reasoned speeches and discussions

STATE OF PLAY

R. Ravikanth Reddy

Political rivalry has always been noisy in Telangana, even when it was part of Andhra Pradesh. Sharp criticism, sarcasm, and ideological clashes were intrinsic in its politics. However, now political communication appears to have crossed the line. Increasingly, abuse has replaced argument, personal attacks have overshadowed policy debates, and social media virality has become more valuable than political substance.

Exchanges between the ruling party and the Opposition over several issues, starting from the Kaleshwaram project, phone tapping, water sharing with neighbouring States, and even regular government schemes, demonstrate this trend. Rather than limiting the debate to failures, financial, political, and administrative accountability, leaders use provocative remarks and symbolic counter-events designed to dominate news cycles. Sometimes, even families are dragged into the abuse.

This has not happened overnight. Even in the undivided Andhra Pradesh, politics was intensely confrontational. However, personal abuse largely remained outside the mainstream.

Telangana movement
The Telangana Statehood movement altered that equation. The movement was rooted in genuine grievances over water, employment, resources, and regional identity. It mobilised millions of people through powerful emotional appeals. In that emotionally charged



environment, ridicule of political opponents gradually became acceptable. Fringe voices using unacceptable language were justified it as an expression of the emotional intensity.

K. Chandrasekhar Rao, then leading the Telangana Rashtra Samithi, used the inherent wit and ridicule in the Telangana dialect in his political language to energise supporters. His speeches became central to the movement’s mobilisation. Over time, however, ridicule slowly gave way to outright abuse.

The emergence of social media accelerated the shift. Political workers, digital volunteers, and party-affiliated YouTubers soon recognised that insults generated far greater engagement than reasoned speeches and nuanced discussions. The result has been ‘YouTubeisation’ of politics.

The abuse culture survived the formation of Telangana in 2014.

Mr. Rao, as Chief Minister, often extended the movement’s confrontational style into governance. His press conferences featured objectionable content while criticising political opponents. While several senior politicians hesitated, the younger generation, even those highly educated, increasingly adopted the style, believing that it was politically necessary.

The change of government in December 2023 has not

moderated the discourse. Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy has made personal criticism of the previous Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) government a central feature of his political strategy.

Questions surrounding the Kaleshwaram project, public debt, and governance decisions deserve rigorous scrutiny. But his policy criticism has frequently been accompanied by highly personalised attacks directed at Mr. Rao and other BRS leaders such as K.T. Rama Rao and T. Harish Rao. The BRS, which popularised this culture, is responding with equal intensity.

The consequence is predictable. The debate is shifting from facts to personalities, and provocative headlines rather than core issues are occupying media reports. Television debates revolve around who insulted whom rather than whether a public policy is succeeding, as seen in the ongoing debate on tapping floodwaters from the Godavari.

This has vitiated the atmosphere at the lower level of politics, with even grassroots cadre getting poisonously divided. Political speeches now abuse the Constitutional guarantee of freedom of speech under Article 19(1)(a). People forget that Article 19(2) acknowledges that speech carries responsibilities and permits reasonable restrictions. The result is that complaints, FIRs, and defamation notices are increasing.

Telangana’s politics has matured in many ways over the past decade. Its public discourse now needs similar maturity. Personal abuse cannot be the norm. History seldom remembers insults but only the strongest ideas.

ravikanth.ramasayam@thehindu.co.in

And then there were four...

The semifinalists in the FIFA World Cup Finals arrived through different styles and routes, but they were clearly the best in the tournament

DATA POINT

Srinivasan Ramani
Devyanshi Bihani

By making it to the semifinals of the FIFA World Cup, the teams of France, Spain, Argentina, and England have justified their billing as the top four in the Elo ratings and the FIFA rankings before the tournament commenced.

However, the routes they took to reach the semifinals have been markedly different, with the differences in their strengths getting only thinner.

The Elo system, similar to the method used in chess, rates teams by looking at their relative performance against other teams. In the latest rating, the above four teams have retained their pre-tournament Elo rankings.

Though Spain has retained its top spot and improved its Elo rating to 2,190, by adding 33 points, it is France that has produced the strongest results against quality opposition. They saw their Elo rating jump by 100 points (**Table 1**).

France has been the tournament’s most prolific side after Argentina. Didier Deschamps’ side have scored 16 goals while conceding just two, giving them the best average goal difference among the semifinalists at 2.33 goals per game (**Table 2**).

Argentina found the net most often with 17 goals, but conceded six. Spain remains the tournament’s defensive benchmark, allowing only one goal across six matches. England progressed with 13 goals but, by conceding six goals, possesses the lowest average goal difference of 1.17.

While Elo ratings reveal their relative strengths and outcomes, to look at how well a team played, analysis based on parameters such as the quality of the chances created or denied and how clinically those chances were converted into goals can be more insightful.

Here, the expected goals or xG helps. This metric assigns every scoring chance a value between 0 and 1—the probability that a shot from a particular position and situation would, on average, be converted to a goal.

A look at xG reveals how the four semifinalists traversed different paths. It also shows how France and Spain have been a cut above the rest. Their net goal difference is +1.7 and +1.69 respectively, with France ahead by a hair’s breadth (**Table 2**). Spain’s difference in average goals and the xG is just 0.02, indicating the team’s efficiency. England’s xG difference of 0.84 makes it the underdog against defending champions Argentina (+1.57).

Among individuals, Kylian Mbappe leads with an xG of 5.4, narrowly ahead of Lionel Messi (5.3). Both outperformed their xG figures by scoring eight goals each. Bellingham has been England’s biggest overperformer, turning chances worth just 2.6 xG into six goals(**Table 3**).

Playmaking is as crucial as goal-scoring in football. Here, Messi continues to dominate, creating a tournament-high 21 chances (**Table 4**).

The semifinalists are equally distinct stylistically. Spain continued to dominate possession, averaging 66.2%, second only to Turkey in the tournament (**Table 5**).

Among the semifinalists, in one-versus-one situations, Spain’s teenage sensation Lamine Yamal has been unmatched with the most number of dribbles, averaging 4.7 successful dribbles every 90 minutes (**Table 6**).

French midfielder Aurelien Tchouameni leads the semifinalists in the number of tackles per 90 minutes, while England’s Djed Spence and Bukayo Saka also rank highly (**Table 7**). In recovering possession, England’s Elliot Anderson leads all semifinalists, highlighting the importance of mid-field pressing in the latter stages of the tournament (**Table 8**).



Table 1: The Elo ratings (ELOR) of the semifinalists at the start of the tournament (A) and after the quarterfinals (B). Their rankings have remained the same.

Teams	ELOR (A)	ELOR (B)	Change (B) - (A)	Elo ranking
France	2,063	2,163	100	3
England	2,024	2,097	73	4
Argentina	2,115	2,177	62	2
Spain	2,157	2,190	33	1

Table 3: Highest goalscorers from the four teams and their xG

Player	Actual goals (xG)
Kylian Mbappé (France)	8 (5.4)
Lionel Messi (Argentina)	8 (5.3)
Harry Kane (England)	6 (3.5)
Mikel Oyarzabal (Spain)	4 (3.1)
Jude Bellingham (England)	6 (2.6)

Table 6: Players from the semifinalists with the most successful dribbles

Player	Most dribbles*
Lamine Yamal (Spain)	1903.5 (4.7)
Michael Olise (France)	1366.4 (2.8)
Lionel Messi (Argentina)	1325 (2.5)
Jude Bellingham (England)	1081.5 (2.1)
Bradley Barcola (France)	987 (3.5)

*(Successful Dribbles per 90 mins)

Table 4: Players from the four semifinalists with who created most number of chances

Player	Total chances created*
Lionel Messi (Argentina)	21 (3.6)
Kylian Mbappé (France)	16 (2.8)
Ousmane Dembélé (France)	15 (2.9)
Declan Rice (England)	13 (3)
Michael Olise (France)	12 (2.2)

Table 7: Players from the semifinalists with the most tackles

Player	Tackles*
Aurélien Tchouaméni (France)	13 (4.3)
Djed Spence (England)	9 (3.6)
Bukayo Saka (England)	10 (3.4)
Alexis Mac Allister (Argentina)	18 (3)
Rodri (Spain)	18 (3)

Source: The data for the charts were sourced from FIFA, FotMob, RealGM, and Fbref

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO JULY 15, 1976

IT survey of posh flats: second phase in Bombay

Bombay, July 14: Five squads of income tax officials swung into action early this morning in the second phase of the survey of posh flats in the city in an effort to unearth black-money transactions.

The teams started their survey in the highly sophisticated localities of Cuffe Parade in South Bombay, Napean Sea Road and Malabar Hill and also Pali Hill in Bandra in North Bombay and the Juhu-Vile Parle development scheme area.

The IT officials have all been issued identity cards and flat owners have been advised to insist on the production of the cards before allowing them to enter their premises.

The first phase of survey of such flats was undertaken on July 28 last year, but was suspended on October 8 following the announcement of the voluntary disclosure scheme. It had covered about 2,400 flats.

This time the scope of the survey has been enlarged to include independent buildings (bungalows). The present survey will also enable the authorities to detect investment in furniture and furnishings apart from the investment in the apartment itself.

According to IT Department sources tenants of about 83 buildings had taken advantage of the voluntary disclosure scheme.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JULY 15, 1926

Metal business livelier

Business on the German metal market has been considerably livelier lately, and, as is usual with rising prices, large purchases have been made by consumers. The cable industry has naturally played the greatest part in these purchases, but other industries also have shown more interest. Consumers’ stocks are very small.

Owing to the development of conditions on the German artificial silk market, the increasingly keen competition of foreign firms especially of those in countries with depreciated currencies, and the lack of customs protection, the German artificial silk industry has been faced with a number of problems, the solution of which could only be found in the formation of a combine. The first task of the combine will be to establish and put into execution classification principles at all the works and then to fix selling, delivery and payment terms.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Number of resolution plans cleared in June quarter

78 The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) approved 78 resolution plans worth ₹5,517.66 crore in the quarter ended June, marking its “highest-ever first quarter performance” since the enactment of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 (IBC), the tribunal said in a report. PTI

Percentage decline in India’s vegetable oil imports in June

29 in per cent. India’s vegetable oil imports fell 29% year-on-year in June to 11.46 lakh tonne, the lowest since the start of the current oil year, as palm oil was available on less discount as compared to others, the Solvent Extractors’ Association of India (SEA) said on Tuesday. PTI

Current capacity of reservoirs in Maharashtra

632.89 In TMC (thousand million cubic feet), Maharashtra’s reservoirs are currently filled to 44% of their storage capacity, the State water resources department said. As of July 13, 3,029 dams were holding 632.89 TMC of water. PTI

Number of villages in Arunachal Pradesh cut off due to flash floods

8 Flash floods triggered by incessant rains have washed away an 84-metre bridge over the Kumey river, isolating eight villages in Kra Daadi district from the rest of Arunachal Pradesh since Monday. The floods and landslides has so far claimed seven lives and left 29 people injured across the State. PTI

Net direct tax collection so far in fiscal year 2026-27

6.51 ₹ lakh crore. Net direct tax collection grew 16.40% to over ₹6.51 lakh crore till July 13 this fiscal, driven by higher corporate tax mop-up, data showed on Tuesday. Net corporate tax collection rose 22% to ₹2.40 lakh crore. PTI

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What is meant by ‘trial in absentia’?

Who can be tried in absentia under BNSS? What changed under the new criminal law? How does the law protect the accused’s right to fair trial? What happens if the accused later appears before the court? Why was trial in absentia introduced?

EXPLAINER

Rizmi Lia M.

The story so far:

A Special NIA Court in Jammu has issued a non-bailable warrant against Hafiz Saeed, the Pakistan-based chief of the proscribed terror outfit Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), in connection with the investigation into the Pahalgam terror attack. The warrant was issued at the request of the National Investigation Agency (NIA). The order was passed by the Special Judge of the NIA Court on July 8, two days after a supplementary chargesheet was filed against Saeed in the Pahalgam terror attack case.

Since Saeed is unlikely to appear before an Indian court, the agency is expected to seek a trial in absentia under Section 356 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), which replaced the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC). In its supplementary chargesheet, the NIA has charged Hafiz Saeed both in his individual capacity and as the chief of the banned Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and its proxy outfit, The Resistance Front (TRF).

“The accused has been charged under various provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023, and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967. The NIA has also invoked provisions relating to waging war against India and hatching a conspiracy from across the border,” the agency said.

What is trial in absentia?

A trial in absentia refers to a criminal trial conducted in the absence of the accused.

Section 356 of the BNSS provides that if a person declared a proclaimed offender has absconded to evade trial and there is no immediate prospect of arrest, the court may treat the accused’s absence as a



The law does not permit courts to try every accused person in their absence. It applies only to a “proclaimed offender”, as defined under Section 84 of the BNSS. GETTY IMAGES

waiver of the right to be present during the proceedings. After recording its reasons in writing, the court may proceed with the inquiry, trial and pronouncement of judgment as if the accused were present.

Under the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (CrPC), the predecessor of BNSS, Section 82(4) of CrPC allows proclamation and attachment of the property of an absconding accused, and Section 317 of CrPC allows the Judge or Magistrate to conduct trial of an accused in his absence in certain specific cases. Section 299 CrPC allows the Judge or Magistrate to record the evidence in absence of absconded accused if there is no prospect of arresting him soon.

Those provisions provide a discretion to a presiding officer to conduct an in-absentia trial only when it feels that, firstly, the personal attendance of the

accused before the court is not necessary in the interests of justice, and secondly, the accused persistently disturbs the proceedings in court. But none of those provisions allowed full-fledged trials in absentia. As a result, trials often remained pending for years until the accused was apprehended.

Whom does it apply to?

The law does not permit courts to try every accused person in their absence. It applies only to a “proclaimed offender”, as defined under Section 84 of the BNSS.

Under Section 84(4), where a proclamation has been issued against a person accused of an offence punishable with imprisonment of 10 years or more, life imprisonment, or death under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, or any other law, and the person fails to appear at the specified place and time, the court

may, after making such inquiry as it considers necessary, declare the person a proclaimed offender.

Thus, trial in absentia is available only in cases involving serious offences punishable with imprisonment of at least 10 years, life imprisonment, or death, where the accused has been declared a proclaimed offender.

What are the procedural safeguards under Section 356?

Section 356 lays down several procedural safeguards before a trial can commence in the absence of the accused. These include the issuance of two consecutive warrants of arrest within an interval of at least 30 days. A notice must also be published in a local or national newspaper, giving the accused 30 days to appear before the court. In addition, the notice must be displayed at the accused’s last known place of residence, and a relative or friend of the accused must be informed about the trial.

The trial cannot commence until 90 days have elapsed from the date of framing of charges, giving the accused sufficient opportunity to appear before the court. If the absconding accused does not have legal representation, the court must appoint a defence lawyer at the State’s expense to safeguard the accused’s right to a fair trial.

Statements of prosecution witnesses recorded before the commencement of the trial may be used as evidence against the absconding accused. However, if the accused later appears or is apprehended, the court may permit cross-examination of witnesses in the interest of justice.

The deposition and examination of witnesses may, as far as practicable, be recorded through audiovisual electronic means. Such recordings must be preserved to ensure transparency, accuracy and the integrity of the trial process, and to facilitate review if the accused is subsequently apprehended.

THE GIST

Section 356 of the BNSS provides that if a person declared a proclaimed offender has absconded to evade trial and there is no immediate prospect of arrest, the court may treat the accused’s absence as a waiver of the right to be present during the proceedings.

If the accused later appears or is apprehended, the court may allow cross-examination of witnesses in the interest of justice. Witness testimony can also be recorded through audiovisual means and preserved for future review.

How the Gaganyaan crew module is built to survive

What happens to the crew and service modules during descent?

Unnikrishnan Nair S.

The story so far:

Gaganyaan is India’s maiden crewed space mission, designed to carry Indian astronauts to space and safely return them back to earth. Here, the rocket – Human-rated Launch Vehicle Mark (HLVM) 3 – will inject the orbital module (OM) into the desired orbit. The Gaganyaan astronauts will be onboard the OM.

What does the OM contain?

The OM consists of two sections, the crew module and the service module, connected by a joint. The crew module serves as the crew habitat while the service module provides on-orbit support to the OM.

After the orbital phase, the propulsion system in the service module will fire its thrusters to de-orbit the OM, then the service module will separate from the crew module by severing the joint with a redundant mechanism.

While both modules descend to the

earth, the crew module – which is designed to survive the intense thermo-structural loads of re-entry – will decelerate by aero-braking and safely splash down in sea. Meanwhile, the service module will burn up.

Some crewed spacecraft, such as Russia’s Soyuz and China’s Shenzhou, use a three-module configuration. The third module provides extra living and working space for the crew while in orbit. It also houses the docking mechanism, cargo, and basic life-support facilities, including the toilet. Like the service module, this third module will also separate during descent and will be destroyed during re-entry.

Which configuration is best for re-entry?

The crew module design must balance several critical objectives, including maximise the internal volume, manage the aerodynamic lift and drag generated during atmospheric flight, be as easy as possible to fabricate, maintain aerodynamic and hydrodynamic stability, and stabilise the module dynamically at

low speeds.

Because no single configuration can satisfy all these requirements simultaneously, the final shape of the crew module will depend on which design attributes are prioritised. To minimise launch and re-entry mass, engineers strip the crew module down to essential landing systems, directly reducing the required size and mass of both the heatshield and the parachutes.

A spherical configuration offers the highest possible internal volume with the lowest structural mass. This is because a sphere has minimum surface area required to enclose a given volume. The design closest to a sphere was the Soviet Union’s Vostok module, in which Yuri Gagarin made the historic first trip to space.

However, because a perfect sphere creates no aerodynamic lift, it falls straight down through the atmosphere, like a dropped stone. This subjects the crew to painfully high g-forces.

Consequently, a sphere-cone combination is the preferred configuration for a re-entering body. Its

blunt base generates a detached shockwave that pushes intense frictional heat away from the spacecraft, while its conical body provides the aerodynamic stability and lift necessary for a controlled, survivable descent.

The Gaganyaan crew module has a sphere-cone configuration.

Why aren’t all re-entry modules mono-stable?

Aerodynamic and hydrodynamic mono-stabilities are highly preferred features for a re-entering body.

A module is aerodynamically monostable if it maintains only one stable attitude while flying through the atmosphere – like a shuttle cock. Similarly, hydrodynamic mono-stability ensures the module will self-right itself and float in a single, stable orientation after splashdown.

Mono-stability is controlled by the module’s aerodynamic shape and the location of its centre of gravity. As the centre of gravity is dictated by the packaging of internal subsystems, system engineers often lack the flexibility to achieve the required location of the centre of gravity.

As a result, in practice, modules frequently have more than one stable orientation. The Gaganyaan crew module, for instance, has two distinct stable aerodynamic positions as well as two stable hydrodynamic positions.

The undesired attitude is managed by firing control thrusters during flight through the atmosphere and by deploying a gas-based up-righting system upon

splashdown in sea.

What is dynamic instability during re-entry?

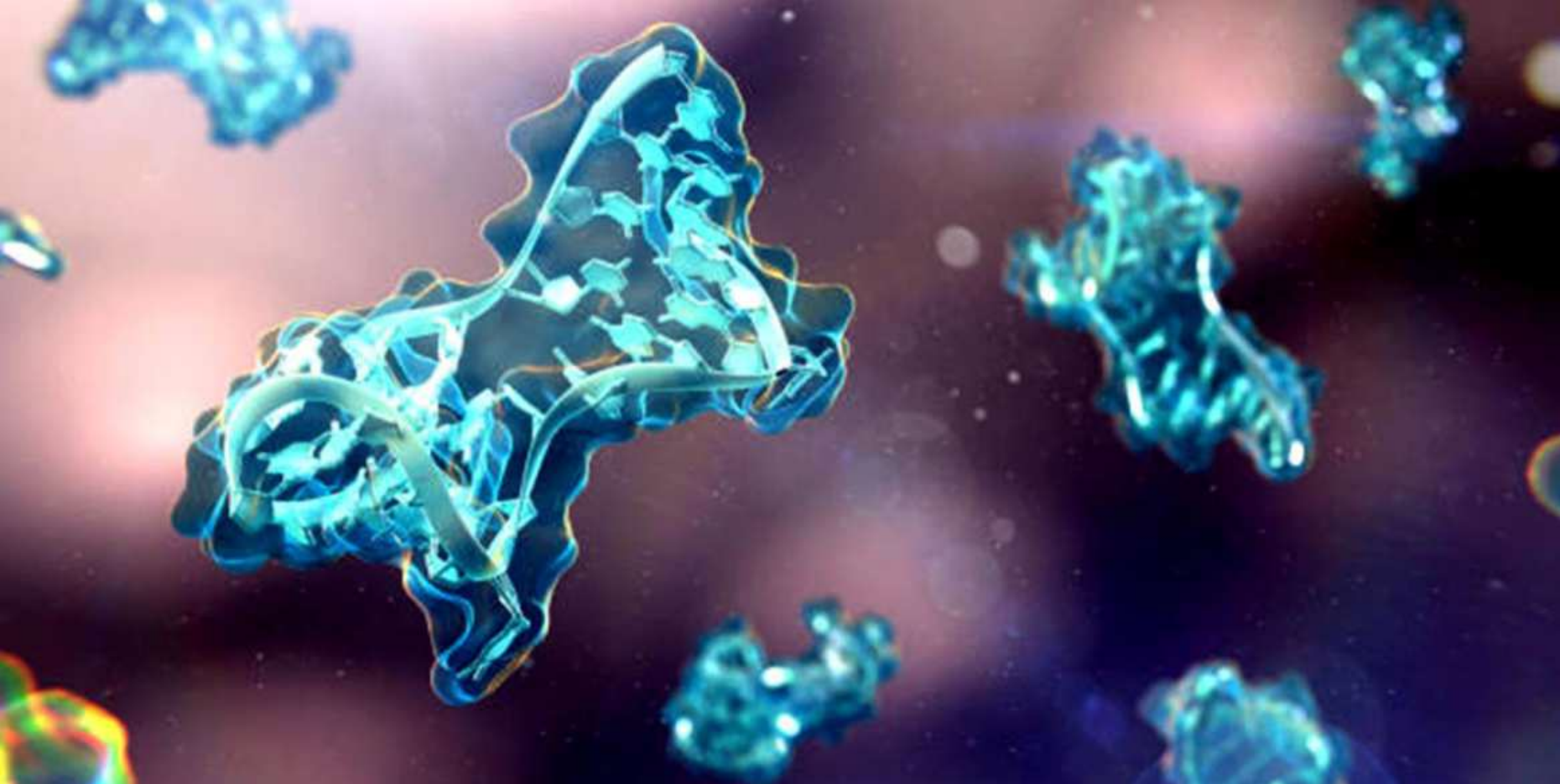
Dynamic instability is a critical condition experienced by a re-entry module, resulting in rapidly growing and uncontrolled oscillations as it decelerates through the atmosphere. Just like a traditional kite without a tail wobbles and spins wildly out of control because it lacks stability, the crew module can experience dangerous, self-growing swings that make it tumble if it is not controlled.

How smoothly the crew module falls through the atmosphere depends strongly on its shape, mass, and the way air flows around it. The module shakes and wobbles the most as it approaches the speed of sound, where bouncing shockwaves and swirling air violently whip it around. To stop the module from spinning dangerously out of control, it must either use small control thrusters to steady itself or deploy parachutes before this instability grows too large.

Ultimately, balancing all of these competing traits, from its blunt aerodynamic shape and mass to its fight against dynamic instability, is what transforms the module design into a masterfully engineered lifeboat capable of bringing astronauts safely back to the earth.

Unnikrishnan Nair S. is Former Director, VSSC and IIST; Founding Director, HSFC; and an expert in launch vehicle systems, orbital re-entry and human spaceflight technologies. Currently Dr Sarabhai Professor at VSSC.

KEYWORD



Researchers increasingly turned to aptamers — synthetic DNA or RNA strands that bind selectively to target proteins — because they are cheaper, more stable and easier to manufacture than antibodies. GETTY IMAGES

How protein biosensors can shrink the timeline of medical emergencies

Proteins are important diagnostic targets because they are involved in almost every biological process; over the last two decades, scientists have developed aptamers for hundreds of disease-relevant proteins and have become the recognition element of choice in advanced biosensor designs

Manjeera Gowravaram

A patient arrives at a hospital showing signs of sepsis, a deadly condition where the immune system attacks its own body after an infection. Sepsis kills 11 million people every year. Doctors must treat it within hours to save lives, but standard blood tests take up to 48 hours for results.

Last year, researchers reported a sensor platform capable of detecting multiple immune proteins linked to sepsis from a blood sample in real time. It was also compact enough for bedside use. The device was a protein biosensor – and it was based on six decades of research and technological development to read the body’s molecular signals at a speed compatible with acute medical needs.

Early-warning system

Proteins are important diagnostic targets because they are involved in almost every biological process. At any given moment, thousands of them are circulating in the blood: they regulate inflammation, carry oxygen, signal between cells, and fight infection.

When something goes wrong, proteins often change first. Troponin levels in the blood rise within hours of a heart attack. Procalcitonin levels increase during bacterial infections. Certain cancer-associated proteins appear in blood long before a tumour is visible on any scan. If these protein levels are measured accurately and quickly, clinicians can gain time to optimise treatment before the disease becomes too severe.

Scientists conceived of protein biosensors when they were studying ways to monitor glucose. In 1962, the American biochemist Leland C. Clark, Jr. and microbiologist Champ Lyons described the first functional biosensor in the form

of an electrode coated with an enzyme that reacted with glucose to produce a measurable electrical current.

Modern biosensor researchers continue to use this basic design, pairing a biological recognition element with a signal-converting transducer. However, glucose is a comparatively simpler target than proteins. Blood contains thousands of structurally diverse proteins at the same time. Identifying a single target requires a way to recognise molecules with extraordinary precision.

Antibodies provided the first viable solution to detect proteins in a targeted way. Since they are produced naturally by the immune system, they can be attached to sensor surfaces to capture and identify specific proteins. The flip side was that antibodies are expensive to produce and even small amounts of heat, movement or improper storage can render them useless. This pushed researchers towards aptamers – short, synthetic strands of DNA or RNA that bind to target proteins with high selectivity. They are also cheaper, more stable, and, unlike antibodies, can be produced entirely within a laboratory, sidestepping the biological systems that make antibody manufacturing difficult.

Over the last two decades, scientists have developed aptamers for hundreds of disease-relevant proteins and have become the recognition element of choice in advanced biosensor designs.

Current landscape

Today, protein biosensing lies at the intersection of chemistry, materials science, and electronics.

Nanotechnology significantly enhanced the sensitivity of biosensors by incorporating gold nanoparticles, carbon nanotubes, graphene, and materials called MXenes to build sensor surfaces. The high surface area of these nanomaterials gives more protein binding

sites while their electrical properties generate stronger signals. Thus biosensors have become able to detect proteins even at low concentrations, when a disease is just setting in.

This nanotechnology infrastructure has more recently converged with biotechnological tools like Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats (CRISPR). Although best known for gene editing, when CRISPR enzymes are coupled with aptamers on a sensor’s surface, a target protein’s binding can be made to trigger a large and distinct signal. This approach has already been demonstrated to detect malaria, SARS-CoV-2, and many biomarkers of cancer. Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic allowed these technologies’ developers to accelerate scaling, as the pandemic presented a strong demand for rapid, portable diagnostics.

The sepsis platform mentioned earlier paired a gold-silver alloy nanostructure with a machine-learning system trained to analyse complex signals. This setup could confirm an infection and also distinguish between disease stages to guide treatment decisions.

Healthcare workers are also applying multi-marker detection to pancreatic cancer, a disease with high mortality because it is currently usually detected only when it has become advanced. In a June 2025 review, University of Science and Technology Beijing researchers said several protein markers can now be simultaneously directed using a single platform, offering the best chance of improving early diagnosis.

Researchers are also exploring wearable monitoring. For example, in December 2025, a (separate) team from China reported an aptamer-coated microneedle array that could sample proteins through the skin of animals it was tested with. Their goal was to make a patch that could stick on the skin and

monitor inflammatory or cardiac issues continuously and send data to a phone.

Scientists and engineers are also adapting this technology for environmental and industrial uses in the form of cell-free biosensors. Here, using isolated biological machinery like enzymes and regulatory molecules without maintaining live cells, these platforms can detect heavy metal contamination in water, trace antibiotic residues, identify foodborne pathogens in supply chains, and screen for biological threat agents.

Different future

The next step involves closed-loop systems – devices that can use artificial intelligence to interpret multi-protein sensor outputs and feed that information directly to automated therapeutic responses. This model could, in principle, trigger a drug delivery mechanism or adjust an ongoing infusion in response to real-time protein data. To this end, in November 2025, Turkish researchers published a proof-of-concept implantable sensor that used genetically engineered bacteria to detect target molecules in surrounding tissue and transmit data wirelessly from inside the body.

Several logistical hurdles remain before widespread clinical implementation. Biological recognition elements degrade over time, particularly due to heat. Baseline protein levels vary between individuals, complicating universal calibration. Many performant sensors are only laboratory prototypes, with no indications as to their scalability. Regulatory approval also requires extensive clinical validation, demanding substantial investments.

However, the field seems set to address them over time.

Manjeera Gowravaram has a PhD in RNA biochemistry and works as a freelance science writer.

THE DAILY QUIZ

X (formerly Twitter) was publicly launched on July 15, 2006. Here is a quiz on the popular social networking site

K. Abhinava

QUESTION 1

The original name of the platform followed the then popular trend of dropping vowels from the domain name. What was the original name and who coined it?

QUESTION 2

Twitter originally had a 140-character limit for tweets but it was later increased to 280 characters. When was the change introduced and what was the reason for the original limit?

QUESTION 3

Which astronaut sent the first tweet live from outer orbit? Also mention the year the tweet was posted.

QUESTION 4

Which politician, among the most-followed accounts on X, once used the platform to declare victory in the U.S. presidential election with the message “Four more years”?

QUESTION 5

Which user proposed the introduction of a popular feature of the platform used to categorise content on the platform? Identify the feature.



Visual Question: The iconic blue bird logo became synonymous with the platform. Who were the designers who designed it? AP

Answers to the previous day’s daily quiz:

- Before becoming a full-time writer, Carson worked for which U.S. government agency? **Ans: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (originally the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries)**
- Which insecticide became the principal symbol of the environmental concerns raised in Carson’s 1962 *Silent Spring*? **Ans: DDT (Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane).**
- Carson warned that pesticide concentrations increase at successive trophic levels. What ecological process describes this phenomenon? **Ans: Biomagnification**
- Carson’s first book, published in 1941, focused on the sea. What was its title? **Ans: Under the Sea-Wind**
- Complete this famous Rachel Carson quotation: “In nature nothing exists ____.” **Ans: “alone.”**
- Visual: Identify this bridge spanning the Allegheny River in Downtown Pittsburgh. **Ans: Rachel Carson Bridge (Ninth Street Bridge)**

Early Birds

K.N. Viswanathan | Siddhartha Viswanathan | Jha Akshay Amarendra | Varghese Joseph | Pankaj Gharde



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

S. Upendran

“Hey, guess what? Sujatha’s sister is getting married.”

“I know that. Sujatha introduced me to the guy a couple of days ago.”

“She did? I wonder why I wasn’t introduced to him? Anyway, it doesn’t matter. What does he look like?”

“His name is Laxman. He seems to be a nice person. He is no Greek god, mind you, but he is definitely...”

“...Greek god! What are you talking about?”

“Well, when you say that someone looks like a Greek god, it implies that he is extremely good looking. In other words, he is very handsome.”

“I see. How about this example? When I walked into the restaurant – I found a Greek god sitting next to Sujatha.”

“That couldn’t have been Laxman. Here’s another example. Rajeev is no Greek god, but there is something about him...”

“...who cares about Rajeev. What do you think my chances are of looking like some Greek god when I grow up?”

“Pretty good, I’d say.”

“You really mean that?”

“Of course I mean it. Nothing is impossible, you know.”

“Anyway, the fact that Sujatha’s sister didn’t find someone who looks like a Greek god is not surprising. She is no Greek goddess, is she?”

“No, she isn’t.”

“Do you feel peckish at strange hours?”

“What a strange question! Why do you...”

“...I am not asking a question. I’m merely reading a line from this ad.”

“I see. Do you know what ‘peckish’ means?”

“Doesn’t it mean ‘hungry’?”

“Excellent! The word ‘peckish’ is used in informal contexts in British English to mean ‘slightly hungry’. Here’s an example. After playing two sets, Devi began to feel peckish.”

“Your friend Devi always feels peckish.”

“You have a point there.”

“My neighbour Banu says she usually feels peckish around 11 o’clock at night.”

“Many people feel peckish around that time. Yesterday, while waiting at the bus stop, I began to feel peckish.”

“That happens to me whenever the bus is late. I told my mother about it and she suggested to take a snack to...”

“...not ‘suggested to take’, but ‘suggested taking’.”

“But I have heard many people say, ‘He suggested to meet after lunch.’”

“It’s true that many people say it, but it’s wrong. What you need to say is, ‘He suggested meeting after lunch.’”

“I see. How about this sentence? The students suggested going to the zoo.”

“Why go to the zoo when they can look at you?”

“I suggest that you stop making fun of me.”

“Sorry about that. I just couldn’t...”

“Let’s talk about something else.”

Published in *The Hindu* on April 4, 2001.

Word of the day

Gaffer

An elderly man, a person who exercises control over workers

Synonyms: boss, supervisor

Usage: *We need to ask the gaffer if we can leave early today.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/gaffer

International Phonetic Alphabet: /gæfə/

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

INBRIEF



IBM warns AI boom is squeezing software budgets

IBM said it had “faltered” in keeping pace with a shift in corporate spending toward data-center infrastructure from software and forecast second-quarter revenue below estimates, the clearest sign yet of AI’s growing toll on the sector. The warning triggered a 22% slump in IBM’s shares and a selloff in the broader software sector. It also dragged Dow futures lower, while the iShares Expanded Tech-Software Sector ETF fell more than 4%. **REUTERS**

Bharat Tex expected to attract investments, increase exports

Bharat Tex 2026 will help the Indian textile and apparel sector increase exports and attract investments, said Union Textiles Minister Giriraj Singh, inaugurating the four-day event in New Delhi on Tuesday. Spread across nearly 1.6 million sq ft, Bharat Tex 2026 has over 1,600 exhibitors, more than 7,000 international buyers from 14 countries, and 64,000 registered trade visitors. The event will also see the signing of over 30 MoUs. The expo has eight sponsor States, including T.N. and Karnataka.

Texprocil, Amazon ink MoU to accelerate e-com exports

Amazon India signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Cotton Textiles Export Promotion Council (Texprocil) at Bharat Tex on Tuesday to accelerate e-commerce exports from India’s cotton textile sector. The collaboration aims to help cotton textile manufacturers, exporters, and the council members to build global businesses through Amazon Global Selling by strengthening exporter readiness and expanding access to international markets.

India’s imports from China soar to \$80 bn in first half of 2026

Two-way bilateral trade was up to \$91.72 bn after six months, a 23.6% rise from last year, on track to surpass record \$155.62 bn figure from 2025

Ananth Krishnan

India’s imports from China rose 21.8% in the first half of 2026 to a record \$79.41 billion, according to data released by China’s General Administration of Customs on Tuesday.

Two-way bilateral trade was up to \$91.72 billion after six months, a 23.6% rise from last year, and on track to surpass the record \$155.62 billion trade figure from 2025, when China was again India’s biggest trade partner in goods.

While the trade deficit reached \$67.1 billion after the first half of the year – also on track to exceed last year’s record \$116.12 billion figure – India’s exports to China have also registered strong growth, up by 37.2% to \$12.31 billion.

Trade deficit

India’s official data on Monday showed the overall trade deficit in the month of June 2026 rose over fourfold year-on-year to \$15.3 billion in June 2026, on the back of high growth in merchandise imports and a rise in the value of crude oil, electronics and gold imports.

Indian officials are less concerned by the quantum of the trade deficit with China than by the nature of the basket of goods. India imports not only large quantities of finished electronics and other equip-



Chinese checkers: India is less concerned by the quantum of trade deficit with China than by the nature of the basket of goods. **REUTERS**



Obviously, we would like to be able to export more to China. This is nothing unreasonable about suggesting that

VIKRAM DORAISWAMI, India’s Ambassador to China

ment from China, but also intermediates that are needed for Indian manufacturing and fuel India’s own exports. A particular concern is the nature of India’s exports to China, which in the past have been dominated by low value-added products such as organic chemicals, ores and seafood.

Earlier this month, India’s Ambassador to China Vikram Doraiswami pitched for greater Indian exports to China, especially in areas where India is globally competitive such as pharmaceuticals. “Obviously, we would like to be

able to export more to China. This is nothing unreasonable about suggesting that,” he said, speaking at the World Peace Forum, an annual foreign policy forum in Beijing.

“How do we find ways in which India and China can be connected, with a widening basket of goods that both sides can provide each other, but also a sense that reasonable mechanisms to protect consumers can be applied in a way that enables India also to export more of the goods that it can export elsewhere in the world also to China?” he said. “In other words, it would be easier to consider that the trade wouldn’t be exactly 50-50 balanced, but one side would have more exports, provided that exports consist of goods that we can also add value. If it is pure consumption goods, that becomes a little harder to sell as a reasonable mechanism for the deficit.”

Inaugural Index of Services Production shows 14 sectors grew in double digits in April

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

As many as 14 of the 19 sub-sectors in the trial and inaugural release of the government’s new Index of Services Production (ISP) witnessed double-digit growth in April 2026, with the best-performing sectors including accommodation and food, retail trade, administrative and support services, and real estate.

The 19 sub-sectors measured account for about 60% of India’s services sector.

The ISP is meant to be the services sector counterpart to the Index of Industrial Production (IIP). While the IIP is released on the 28th of every month unless it is a weekend or holiday, the ISP will be re-



Accommodation and food was among best performing sectors.

leased on the 29th henceforth.

“The ISP represents an important milestone in strengthening India’s statistical system and improving the measurement of the services sector, which accounts for more than half of the country’s economic activity,” the Ministry of Statistics and Pro-

gramme Implementation said in a release.

While the inaugural release does not provide a composite growth rate for the entire index, this growth rate can be calculated using the sector-wise growth rates and weightages, said D.K. Srivastava, chief policy advisor at EY India.

“Considering the year-on-year growth in April 2026 over that in April 2025, the 19-services sector growth is at 20.8%,” Mr. Srivastava said.

The base year of the trial ISPs has been set as 2024-25, and the index sources its data from several areas, including administrative data, Goods and Services Tax data, and the Annual Survey of Incorporated Services Sector Enterprises (ASISSE) data.

WPI inflation rises to 9.87% in June

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Wholesale price inflation rose to 9.87% in June, from 9.68% in May, led by a sharp spike in prices of non-food and food products.

The latest wholesale price index (WPI) inflation data is based on the 2022-23 base year.

As per the data, food inflation rose to 5.49% in June, from 3.60% in May, as food prices rose during

the month following a rainfall deficit due to the El Niño impact.

Non-food articles WPI inflation was also higher at 11.07%, while in minerals it was 9.45% in June.

“Mineral Oils (containing Petroleum Products), Food Articles, Manufacture of Basic Metals, and Manufacture of Chemicals and Chemical Products have been major drivers of WPI inflation in June 2026,” the Commerce and Industry Ministry said.

Sensex falls by 561 points on oil surge, West Asia flare-up

Press Trust of India
MUMBAI

Sensex and Nifty tumbled on Tuesday as a sharp surge in crude oil prices due to the renewed flare-up in West Asia dented investors’ sentiment.

After three days of gains, Sensex dropped 561.46 points, or 0.72%, to settle at 77,054.94. Nifty dropped 158.95 points, or 0.66%, to end at 24,052.05.

Railway reforms to cut red tape, boost freight: Vaishnaw

Maitri Porecha
NEW DELHI

Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw announced policy reforms to modernise railway infrastructure, streamline freight logistics and transition to eco-friendly operations,

To curb pollution and simplify logistics, railways is shifting the movement of major bulk commodities from open wagons to closed containers.

Of the 340 million metric tonne (MT) fly ash generated every year in India, only 13 million MT is transported by rail in open wagons. “Under the new reforms, fly ash will be transported in closed, leak-proof containers,” he said. The railway transports



Ashwini Vaishnaw

about 85% of India’s fertilizers. Under the new policy, fertilizers and foodgrains can be transported in containers to remove storage bottlenecks. Complex, multi-slab freight structures for fertilizers and foodgrains are replaced by per-tonne-per-kilometre rate structure.

Earlier, container train operators had four route

categories. Now, there would be a single unified licence to run container trains on all routes with a non-refundable registration fee of ₹25 crore.

Wagon designs were strictly controlled by the Research Designs and Standards Organisation, limiting specialised designs. “Under the new policy, the private industry is empowered to design and make custom wagons.”

Project delivery

To accelerate project delivery and protect contractors from financial delays, contractors would deposit 10% performance security at the start of the contract to ensure only those serious about railway work would enter the field.

Natco Pharma raises stake in South Africa’s Adcock to 49%

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

Generic drugmaker Natco Pharma completed the acquisition of an additional 13.25% stake in South African pharmaceutical and healthcare company Adcock Ingram Holdings Proprietary.

Consequently to the acquisition for about ZAR 1.81 billion (about ₹1,060 crore), its stake in Adcock Ingram increased to 49%, Natco Pharma said on the acquisition it completed through South African subsidiary Natco Pharma South Africa Proprietary.

The additional stake acquisition is part of Natco’s long-term Africa strategy.

People factor is a critical boardroom priority, says Nasscomm president

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The people (human resources) agenda has emerged as a critical boardroom priority today, driven by the need to combine artificial intelligence (AI) with human ingenuity rather than relying on traditional, linear planning, said Nasscom president Rajesh Nambiar.

Speaking on the future of work at Nasscom People Summit in Bengaluru on Tuesday, he said that human resource strategies have officially shifted from a back-office function directly into a critical boardroom priority. Mr. Nambiar emphasised that future business success de-



Rajesh Nambiar

pended on the adaptability of the workforce and nurturing a ‘learn-it-all’ culture, departing from the traditional know-it-all’ culture, as rapid, non-linear disruptions make long-term predictions obsolete and causes traditional entry-level jobs to disappear.

According to him, the traditional corporate talent model is obsolete because

the quick adoption of AI and the subsequent disruptions are now forcing a massive restructuring of business operations.

Future organisational survival depended on cultivating a workforce of agile learners who could quickly pivot to entirely new, undefined job requirements, he told a large audience of chief human resources officers.

This structural shift may effectively eliminate the historic campus-to-corporate pipelines that previously served as the primary training grounds for fresh graduates, he said.

However, Mr. Nambiar added that true competitive advantage no longer stemmed from simply de-

ploying AI tools; rather, maximum economic leverage would come from successfully blending AI intelligence with raw human ingenuity and potential.

“The future market winners will not be the companies with the best predictive models, but those with the greatest organisational adaptability,” he said, adding businesses must quickly embed structural flexibility into their core operating units to respond to ongoing geopolitical and technological market shocks.

Nearly 70% of India’s early-career technology talent is AI-proficient, while around 23% qualifies as AI-native, Nasscom said in a study at the summit.

Mini Ratna WAPCOS a ‘sinking ship’, firm’s counsel tells Delhi High Court

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

WAPCOS Ltd., a ‘Mini Ratna-I’ public sector undertaking under the Union Jal Shakti Ministry, is reportedly a “sinking ship” that lacks the financial capacity to retain staff and on occasions, had to borrow money to comply with court orders.

This was the position advanced by counsel representing WAPCOS during proceedings before the Delhi High Court on July 6, as per an order by Justice Sanjeev Narula. The assertions were not themselves made as an affidavit filed

by WAPCOS but recorded by the judge in his order.

The order added: “Mr. Tushar Sannu, SC, assisting Mr. Sharma, further submitted the company has, in fact, on occasions, been compelled to resort to borrowings for the purpose of complying with court orders.”

The remarks came during proceedings concerning staff demanding regularisation of employment. The firm argued it would place a financial burden jeopardising viability. Incorporated in 1969, WAPCOS provided engineering consultancy services for water, power and infrastructure

in more than 75 countries.

The court, however, noted neither the original counter-affidavit nor two subsequent affidavits contained documentary evidence showing WAPCOS’s financial position was so precarious. It directed the respondents to produce the firm’s audited balance sheets for the past five financial years, records relating to the surrender of 682 of WAPCOS’ 1,541 sanctioned posts and steps taken following an internal panel’s findings of irregularities in previous regularisation exercises.

A company official who declined to be identified

told *The Hindu* they didn’t direct the counsel to describe WAPCOS “as a sinking ship.” While the balance sheets hadn’t fully accounted for ‘bad debts’ in previous years (in the aftermath of corruption scandals) the firm was not in a dire financial position.

“The last few years had seen several positions and jobs granted as favours and contrary to WAPCOS prescribed recruitment norms. The contractual posts need to be rationalised as part of an organisational clean-up and this is in line with Ministry norms. However some staff have gone to court.”

‘Deep-Tech, AI, Innovation will shape India’s future’

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

Deep-tech innovation, artificial intelligence (AI) and inclusive technologies will be the defining pillars of developed India, provided the country focuses on creating affordable, globally competitive solutions that benefit millions rather than a privileged few, said Dr. Raghunath A. Mashelkar, Fellow of the Royal Society and Former Director General of Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR).

Dr. Mashelkar said India must transition from being a consumer of global technologies to becoming a



Dr. Raghunath A. Mashelkar addressing a FICCI Legends Series. BY ARRANGEMENT

creator of world-leading innovations through deep science, artificial intelligence (AI), bold public-private collaboration and the Gandhian philosophy of “More for Less for More” He was giving a lecture at the Federation Of Indian

Chambers Of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) Legends Series on “Winning Through Innovation: Lessons for Industry and Society”.

India’s existing government procurement policy, which overwhelmingly favours the lowest bidder over innovation, has emerged as one of the biggest barriers to technological advancement and indigenous innovation, Dr. Mashelkar pointed out.

He called for a complete shift in India’s innovation ecosystem, urging the government to become a risk-sharing partner rather than merely a “purchaser of the cheapest products.”

‘MRF most valuable and strongest tyre brand in India’

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Chennai headquartered MRF Tyres has been ranked as India’s ‘Most Valuable and Strongest Tyre Brand’ and features among the world’s top three strongest tyre brands. The company, which began its journey in 1946, is also among the top 50 most valuable brands in India across all industries in the ‘Brand Finance India 100- 2026’ report.

The industries include automobiles, hospitality, banking, food and oil and gas.

PepsiCo's
turnaround
falters on
snacking



Tectonic shift: PepsiCo's Doritos and Cheetos NKD (no dyes) at a Walmart store in California, U.S. REUTERS

Reuters

Americans built one of the world's great snacking cultures. Now PepsiCo is discovering just how fast that can shift.

With one in five American households using GLP-1 weight-loss drugs, surging living costs and a broader shift toward healthier eating, it is getting harder for the company to reignite growth. The pressure showed up in its quarterly results last week. Sales in the Frito-Lay and Pepsi soda maker's North American food business slipped 2%, while volume was flat in the second quarter ended June 13, even after earlier price cuts of up to 15% on some of its biggest products including Lay's, Doritos,Cheetos and Tostitos.

That marked a reversal from the modest recovery investors thought they were seeing at the start of the year, when volume growth improved to around 2% in the first quarter, with the North America food business returning to growth. Volumes at its food business have fallen four times in the last six quarters.

The contrast with Coca-Cola is particularly sharp.

PepsiCo's North America beverage volume fell 4% in the latest quarter, while Coca-Cola reported a 4% growth in the region three months earlier, underscoring the challenges facing PepsiCo's snack-heavy portfolio as consumers become more selective about what they eat and drink.

BMW races to catch up in a Chinese
EV market that won't slow down

BMW faces third straight year of sales decline in China; debut model in line-up revamp set to enter market in November; top investor says management 'underestimated' China market; newcomers NIO, Xiaomi race ahead with rapid product cycles; Chinese customers prefer local brands

NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters

SHANGHAI/BERLIN

BMW is betting on its long-awaited Neue Klasse electric cars to revive its fortunes in China after two years of declining sales. The problem for the German automaker is that China's EV race may have already moved on without it.

BMW, under new CEO Milan Nedeljkovic, issued a shock profit warning last month that it partly blamed on China - its third in less than three years. On Friday, it said China sales plunged 30% in the second quarter.

'Moved too slowly'

Some shareholders and analysts say BMW has moved too slowly to bring its long-trailed Neue Klasse, or "new class," EVs to a market where Chinese rivals are developing increasingly sophisticated electric cars in as little as 18 months - roughly twice as fast as traditional automakers.

"If this had launched two years ago it could have been a game-changer," said Yale Zhang, managing director at Shanghai-based research firm Automotive Foresight. "In today's Chinese auto market ... it is hard to stand out."

Chinese buyers increas-



Tough market: BMW iX3 model at Beijing International Automotive Exhibition, China. REUTERS

ingly expect the latest technology from home-grown carmakers such as Nio, which has driven its flagship ET9 sedan over speed bumps with a tower of champagne glasses balanced on the bonnet - without spilling a drop - to showcase the vehicle's advanced suspension system.

BMW's first Neue Klasse model for China, the iX3 SUV, is due to go on sale in November.

Combustion engines

BMW's challenge reflects the broader struggle facing German premium auto makers in China, where the engineering pedigree and combustion-engine heritage that help sell high-margin models in Europe and the U.S. carry less



Only about 5% of BMW's sales in China are fully electric, according to Global Mobility data, in a market where EVs account for 46% of vehicle sales

weight with many buyers. "Chinese consumers no longer buy into that," said Wang Xianbin, vice president of the Gasgoo Research Institute.

Instead, they favour local brands such as Nio, Geely'sZeekr and Xiaomi, which offer intelligent EV features tailored to Chinese tastes.

Chinese premium

brands are openly targeting customers of BMW, Audi, Porsche and Mercedes.

Only about 5% of BMW's sales in China are fully electric, according to Global Mobility data, in a market where EVs account for 46% of vehicle sales. BMW's China sales fell in both 2024 and 2025. Sales at Mercedes and Volkswagen's Audi brand are also down, dropping 28% and 19%, respectively, in the first half of this year.

Hendrik Schmidt of DWS, a top-10 BMW investor, said direct China experience was limited among the company's top executives and supervisory board, adding that the scale of the challenge had not been fully appreciated.

"From our perspective,

Pollution via Musk's unpermitted xAI units hits black communities

INSIGHT

Reuters

Elon Musk's artificial intelligence company xAI has installed 59 natural gas turbines for its Colossus 2 data centre project in Tennessee without securing federal clean air permits, according to communications between regulators and xAI representatives.

Potential emissions from the turbines are far beyond the threshold that would require a federal permit and would be released near predominantly Black communities already estimated to be suffering disproportionately high rates of lung disease, according to a *Reuters* analysis based on government data and information in the correspondence with regulators.

Risk to public health

The findings, which have not been previously reported, reflect how exploding electricity demand from AI data centres is driving firms to build off-grid power plants at a pace outstripping environmental oversight, with potentially big risks to public health.

The number of unpermitted turbines identified by *Reuters* is about double what xAI has publicly acknowledged. The company previously said it was running 27 unpermitted turbines for Colossus 2 as of January and has argued the permits are not required.

At least 57 of the 59 turbines are located in Mississippi, just over the state line from Tennessee where the data centre is located.

The xAI turbines are among scores of off-grid power plants for data centres proposed or under

construction around the country. Local authorities often fast-track approvals in just weeks or months, without the years of environmental studies and public hearings typically required for such power generation projects that connect to the grid, *Reuters* has reported.

Mississippi regulators in March issued a permit for permanent turbines for Colossus 2, allowing construction of 41 gas-fired turbines. The approval came three weeks after the state's only public hearing on the project.

The xAI cluster of temporary turbines in Mississippi is already among the biggest off-grid data centre power projects,according to Ben King, an analyst with think tank Rhodium Group, who reviewed the *Reuters* analysis.

'Unprecedented level'

"This looks to be an unprecedented level of behind-the-meter gas being installed in one place," he said, referring to off-grid natural gas plants serving just one customer.

The communications reviewed by *Reuters* show xAI, now owned by billionaire Musk's SpaceX, has installed 57 off-grid turbines in Southaven, Mississippi, just across the state line from its Colossus 2 data centre in Memphis, a facility supporting the Grok chatbot and other AI systems. The records show the company has also installed two other unpermitted turbines for the project on a different site. *Reuters* could not determine the location.

The communications, obtained through a *Reuters* public records request, included emails between Trinity Consultants, representing xAI and subsidiary MZX Tech, and the Missis-



Health at risk: A drone view of xAI Colossus 2 'Macrohard' data centre in Mississippi, U.S. REUTERS

sippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ).

xAI did not respond to *Reuters'* request for comment. xAI's turbines are part of a widening environmental justice battle over whether the AI boom is adding disproportionate pollution burdens to communities of colour.

Civil rights groups including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Southern Environmental Law Center sued xAI in April to halt their operations, arguing the turbines produce emissions subject to the federal Clean Air Act and shouldn't be operated without permits. They contend the turbines are polluting homes, schools and churches in historically black communities.

"The scale of it is astonishing," said Patrick Anderson, an attorney with the Southern Environmental Law Center. "This is an absolutely huge Clean Air Act violation that threatens public health."

'Mobile' turbines

Securing a Clean Air Act permit would have exposed xAI's project to extensive review and public comment, potentially tak-

ing years. Mississippi environmental regulators and xAI have argued in court filings that the turbines are exempt because they are "mobile" and intended to operate onsite for less than a year.

"MDEQ has determined that portable/temporary turbines do not require an air permit," the agency said in a statement to *Reuters*.

No exemption

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) said in January 2026 that even temporary turbines exceeding emissions thresholds must obtain permits. The agency, however, told *Reuters* it's considering changes allowing "regulatory flexibilities" for portable units while continuing to protect public health.

xAI, the MDEQ and the EPA did not answer questions from *Reuters* about pollution impacts on communities of colour from power generation to serve data centers.

The U.S. Justice Department weighed in on the lawsuit in a June 15 filing, saying that restricting the turbines could threaten national security interests because xAI's systems support U.S. military

operations, including operations involving Iran.

The outcome of the lawsuit filed by civil rights groups could help define how environmental laws apply to the fast-growing AI sector, where companies are scrambling to bring power supplies online to support energy-intensive computing.

"This sets up scenarios where the government can create sacrifice zones and tell communities they have to breathe illegal air pollution," said Mary Rock, a senior attorney for Earthjustice, which is representing the NAACP and SELC.

The dispute echoes the findings of a 2022 study by researchers from UCLA and Columbia University and published in the *Nature Energy* journal that found that previously redlined communities - where banks historically discriminated against Black mortgage applicants - now face disproportionately high exposure to pollutants from fossil fuel facilities.

"Air pollution from these and other sources contributes to systemic racial disparities in chronic disease and ultimately shorter lives," Lara Cushing, a UCLA public health professor who co-authored

the study, told *Reuters*.

The emails reviewed by *Reuters* included the manufacturer emissions profiles for 32 of the 59 turbines, including 30 at the Southaven site.

Huge pollution

A *Reuters* analysis based on that information found that those 30 turbines alone could emit nearly 2,500 short tons of nitrogen oxide, 4,000 short tons of carbon monoxide and 22 short tons of formaldehyde annually, assuming they operate continuously at 80% of capacity. According to the EPA, gas turbines are typically operated at loads of 80% or more to achieve efficiency.

Nitrogen oxides contribute to smog and respiratory inflammation, according to the American Lung Association. Carbon monoxide deprives the body of oxygen, and formaldehyde is a carcinogen.

The xAI site's potential emissions far exceed a Clean Air Act threshold that requires permitting for facilities capable of more than 100 short tons annually of pollutants such as nitrogenoxide.

"This is a massive amount of turbines and an unfathomable amount of air pollution," Southaven resident Shannon Samsa said in an interview.

"It's not a hypothetical," she said, "that air pollution is bad for you."

The nitrogen oxide emissions calculated by *Reuters* for about half the plant's turbines would put the facility "up there with some of the heaviest polluting natural gas power plants across the entire country," said Nicholas Mailloux, a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Wisconsin-Madison who studies air quality and

health benefits of the clean-energy transition. He said the facility would be on par with the top 25 U.S. gasplants for nitrogen oxide emissions, citing EPA data for actual emissions.

In the Colonial Hills neighborhood of Southaven, the turbines serving Colossus 2 can be heard around the clock, often firing off noisy bursts that residents compare with jet engines.

Noisy turbines

Ervin Laws, a Colonial Hills resident in his 20s, said the noise wakes him up at night. "I can't do anything about it, because he's got more money than me," he said, referring to Musk.

The turbines were installed in communities already estimated to be facing relatively high respiratory disease burdens, according to a *Reuters* analysis of CDC data.

Higher asthma rates

In 27 of 28 census tracts within five miles of the site -spanning both Mississippi and Tennessee - the estimated asthma rates were higher than their respective countywide figures. In 24 tracts, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease rates were also higher.

Five miles is a distance used in environmental health research to capture populations likely to be exposed to air pollution from a stationary source.

A separate *Reuters* analysis of Census Bureau data found residents living near the facility are disproportionately Black. Because the five-mile radius crosses state lines, *Reuters* compared each side against its own county baseline. Within five miles of the facility in DeSoto county, Mississippi - where the turbines are located - about 46% of residents are Black,

compared with 33% countywide, as per census data.

Across the state line in Tennessee, where residents have no say in Mississippi's permitting process, about 94% of residents within five miles of the facility are Black, compared to 52% in surrounding Shelby County.

Jayajit Chakraborty, a professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara, said the *Reuters* analysis was consistent with research that shows communities of colour face higher exposure to fossil fuel pollution.

Shelby County and portions of DeSoto County have also previously failed to meet federal ozone standards and remain subject to EPA-approved plans to ensure they do not slip back into violation, according to regulatory documents. Nitrogen oxide is a key precursor to ozone formation, which the EPA says can harm respiratory health.

"Given this community struggles with high asthma rates, additional NOx exposure at such high rates could exacerbate public health issues in a community that is already seeing more than its fair share of exposure to toxic air pollution," said Victoria Nelson, an independent environmental engineer, formerly at EPA.

Sarah Gladney, 72, has watched the rapid expansion of xAI's Memphis-area presence from her home in the historically Black neighborhood of Boxtown, a few miles from where the company built its Colossus 1 data centre in 2024. "Once they got their foot in the door in Memphis, I feel like it's going to be a continuous movement of xAI into these other communities. It is all about the money," she said.

ROME

Israel ready to move forward on pilot zones amid Lebanon talks



Israel said it was ready to move forward with plans to withdraw troops from two areas of south Lebanon, as the two countries held a new round of talks in Rome on Tuesday. Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar said on Tuesday that his country was “ready to move forward implementing these two pilot zones”. AFP

CAIRO

Israeli fire kills 10 Palestinians in Gaza, including a 10-year-old boy



An Israeli strike and gunfire killed at least 10 Palestinians, including a 10-year-old boy, and a senior Hamas police officer, in the Gaza Strip on Tuesday, Gaza health and police officials said. The deaths add to a toll of more than 1,100 Palestinians killed by Israeli attacks since an October ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. REUTERS

TEHRAN

Iran slams U.K. plan to ban support for the Revolutionary Guard Corps



Iran slammed on Tuesday a British plan to ban support for the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, alongside an Iran-linked group accused of a series of attacks against the Jewish community. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer had said that “anyone found supporting these groups will now face up to 14 years in prison”. AFP

PESHAWAR

11 killed in northwest Pakistan as roof collapses amid heavy rain



Eleven people were killed overnight when heavy rain caused the roof of a mud-brick house to collapse in northwest Pakistan, police and rescue officials said on Tuesday. The accident occurred in Kohat district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, according to Bilal Faizi of the provincial emergency service. AP

U.S. hits Iran and Tehran retaliates across West Asia; 3 tankers struck

The U.S. Central Command says it hit several areas in Iran, targeting ‘coastal defence systems, missile and drone sites and maritime capabilities’; Tehran responded with attacks on Bahrain, Jordan and three tankers that travelled through Hormuz

Associated Press
DUBAI

The U.S. launched strikes on Iran early on Tuesday, hours after President Donald Trump vowed to reinstate an American blockade of Iranian ports and charge ships for safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz. Iran responded with attacks on West Asia allies of the U.S.

The focus of the conflict now is the Strait of Hormuz. Iran effectively shut the passage during the war by attacking and threatening ships. It sent the price of oil, fertilizer and other goods soaring at a time when world leaders were



An explosion at Bandar Abbas Naval Base in Iran, as three Corsair unmanned surface vessels fired by the U.S. military, hit the port. AP

already struggling to address rising costs.

An interim deal signed by the U.S. and Iran was supposed to reopen the waterway, but Iran has attacked ships moving

through the strait on a route overseen by the U.S. military. The U.S. has now threatened to reopen the strait by force.

The U.S. military’s Central Command said it

struck several areas in Iran, targeting “coastal defence systems, missile and drone sites and maritime capabilities.”

Heavy cost
“These strikes will continue imposing a heavy cost on Iranian forces and degrade their ability to attack innocent civilians and commercial shipping in the Strait of Hormuz,” the U.S. military said.

Iran responded with attacks targeting Bahrain, Jordan and three tankers that travelled through the strait.

Two of the ships were associated with the UAE and were set ablaze for a time. The Emirati Defence

Ministry said the attack on the tankers *Mombasa* and *Al Bahiyah* killed one mariner and wounded eight others. The Emirates threatened to retaliate.

Dutch shipping firm Stolt Tankers said that one of its ships came under attack. The attack on the Stolt *Magnesium* off Oman sparked a fire in the engine room, but the company said all the mariners were safe.

Iran’s paramilitary Revolutionary Guard said the *Mombasa* and *Al Bahiyah* “ignored repeated warnings.” Iran has targeted ships that use a route through the strait that passes near Oman outside of its territorial waters.

Trump backs down over 20% levy on Hormuz ships

Agence France-Presse
WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Tuesday he was scrapping a planned levy on ships transiting the Strait of Hormuz a day after he announced it, and replacing the fee with trade deals with Gulf allies.

Mr. Trump said his sudden decision to withdraw the toll – which he imposed amid fresh clashes with Iran over the vital waterway – was “based on highly productive conversations with Middle East leadership”.

“I have decided to replace the 20% United States Reimbursement Fee with Trade and Investment Deals that the various Gulf States will be making into the United States,” Mr. Trump said on his Truth Social network.



Donald Trump

Mr. Trump did not mention any commitments by Gulf states, saying “Investments will be MASSIVE but, at the same time, extraordinarily good for them, and their future”.

The U.S. leader said he would continue with a “FULL Blockade” on ships coming to and from Iranian ports, or carrying anything have to do with Iranian cargo.

Mr. Trump had declared on Monday that Washington was now the “THE GUARDIAN OF THE HORMUZ STRAIT” and would impose hefty fees on shipping to reimburse the United States for protecting the key conduit for oil and gas.

Shortly after Mr. Trump made the 20% fee proposal on Monday, the UN’s shipping agency said it opposed fees on ships passing through maritime waterways but added it would await more details of what Mr. Trump had in mind.

Iran’s military command had insisted it would not allow the United States to “interfere” in the strait, while also warning its Gulf neighbours – who have borne the brunt of its retaliatory attacks – against cooperating with Washington.

Cuba faces third nationwide blackout in less than 10 days

Agence France-Presse
HAVANA

Cuba’s power grid failed for the third time in less than 10 days, sparking another nationwide blackout, the national electricity company said on Tuesday.

The national power grid completely went offline at about 11.05 a.m., according to the state-run UNE electricity company.

It was the third complete blackout on the Caribbean island since early July and the fifth since the start of 2026. Authorities did not immediately reveal the cause.

Cuba is reeling from its worst economic crisis in decades – one made worse by the fuel blockade imposed by U.S. President Donald Trump in January as part of a pressure campaign aimed at ending six decades of communist

UNE says the fuel shortages have made the national grid more susceptible to power outages

rule. In both of last week’s blackouts, it took more than 24 hours to restore power across the island of 9.6 million people, a process made slower and more complex by fuel shortages.

In the capital Havana, power outages totalled more than 30 hours at a time, while in the outlying provinces, it was several days before electricity was restored.

Residents in the worst affected areas have vented their frustrations by setting piles on trash on fire or banging on pots and pans.

UNE says the fuel shortages have made the na-

tional grid more susceptible to outages, and made the use of emergency generators all but impossible.

Relations between Washington and Havana have been tense since the start of the year, especially since U.S. forces snatched Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro from his home in early January and brought him to the U.S. to face federal charges. Mr. Maduro had long been a staunch ally of Cuba.

Washington has authorised the arrival of only one Russian tanker which came in March. Those reserves have since been exhausted.

In addition to its oil blockade, the Trump administration has ramped up sanctions against Cuban state-owned businesses, prompting many foreign businesses to suspend operations in the country.

Under control



A firefighter sprays water to extinguish flames in the Fontainebleau forest during a wildfire, in Le Vaudoué. Two fires that have burned just over 2,000 hectares since Sunday have been ‘contained’, but not extinguished, the local prefect said on Tuesday evening. REUTERS

Outgoing U.K. PM Starmer gets France’s highest award

Agence France-Presse
PARIS

Britain’s outgoing Prime Minister Keir Starmer has been awarded France’s highest honour, in recognition of his work on the security of Europe and Ukraine.

President Emmanuel Macron’s office said he presented Mr. Starmer with the Legion d’honneur on Monday in Paris, where he was attending a summit of Ukraine’s allies.

Mr. Starmer is due to leave office within days of losing the confidence of his governing Labour party over a slew of domestic policy U-turns that hit his popularity. In contrast, he is held in high regard by many foreign leaders on issues from Ukraine to forging closer European ties.

China expels former Xinjiang official from party over corruption

Agence France-Presse
BEIJING

China expelled a former top Xinjiang official from the ruling Communist Party and removed him from all his posts over corruption allegations, including nepotism, bribery, and paying for sex, state media said on Tuesday.

Ma Xingrui, 66, was a member of the Communist Party’s Politburo, a top decision-making body headed by President Xi Jinping that effectively runs the

country. The Politburo approved a report by the party’s anti-corruption watchdog that set out a long list of allegations against Mr. Ma, who has been under investigation since April, news agency *Xinhua* said.

The investigation found that Mr. Ma had “helped family members purchase homes at below-market prices, engaged in power-for-sex transactions, and allowed family members to exploit the influence of his position to seek huge benefits”, *Xinhua* reported.

NASA astronaut Anil Menon embarks on 8-month stint to International Space Station

Press Trust of India
WASHINGTON

NASA astronaut Anil Menon and two Russian cosmonauts on Tuesday lifted off onboard a *Soyuz MS-29* spacecraft from Kazakhstan on an eight-month mission to the International Space Station.

The Roscosmos spacecraft carrying Mr. Menon and Russian cosmonauts Pyotr Dubrov and Anna Kikina lifted off from the Baikonur cosmodrome.

After a two-orbit, three-hour trip to the station, the spacecraft will automati-



A Soyuz 2.1a booster rocket with the Soyuz MS-29 spacecraft blasts off to the ISS from Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan. AFP

cally dock to the Prichal module. This marks Mr. Menon’s first spaceflight and the second flight for the Russian cosmonauts,

according to NASA.

Once aboard, the trio will join NASA astronauts Jessica Meir, Jack Hathaway, and Chris Williams,

European Space Agency astronaut Sophie Adenot, and Roscosmos cosmonauts Sergey Kud-Sverchkov, Sergei Mikaev, and Andrey Fedyaev.

Mr. Menon, Mr. Dubrov and Ms. Kikina’s mission will last about eight months, and they are scheduled to return to Earth in April 2027.

Mr. Menon’s father, K.P. Shankaran Menon, hails from Ottapalam in Kerala’s Palakkad district.

He is the great-grandson of former Indian National Congress chief Sir C. Shankaran Nair.

Ukraine PM resigns in Zelenskyy-ordered government reshuffle

Agence France-Presse
KYIV

Ukraine’s Prime Minister Yulia Svyrydenko resigned on Tuesday as part of a government reshuffle ordered by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. The Ukrainian leader has yet to name a replacement and has said only that Kyiv is “changing its political strategy” amid “new challenges and new tasks”.

Ukraine’s Parliament formally approved Ms. Svyrydenko’s resignation in a

vote on Tuesday. She was appointed in July 2025.

Meanwhile, Ukraine’s Air Force said it intercepted five ballistic missiles launched by Russia in a raft of overnight attacks, although other missiles and drones got through and hit warehouses and a school in the capital of Kyiv.

It was the first time in almost two weeks that Ukraine said it had downed Russian ballistic missiles, which are harder to stop than drones or cruise missiles.



Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood initiated the change to enable Shabir Ahmed's deportation to Pakistan. AFP

U.K. amends law to deport leader of grooming gang

Press Trust of India
LONDON

Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood has set a law change in motion in the U.K. Parliament that will remove the legal hurdle blocking the deportation of a grooming gang ringleader to Pakistan. The case of Shabir Ahmed, jailed in 2012 on multiple charges of rape and sexual offences against young girls and recently released from prison, triggered an outcry when it emerged that the Pakistani man is protected under a 1971 law forbidding the removal of Commonwealth citizens who arrived in the U.K. over 50 years ago.

The convicted rapist was the ringleader of a group of nine men who groomed and sexually abused teenage girls.

Ms. Mahmood told the House of Commons on Monday evening that she was taking action in response to the widely reported case of the “vile grooming gang leader Shabir Ahmed”. “Our amendment will provide the Home Secretary with a new power to disapply Section 7 of the Immigration Act 1971 for serious criminals,” Ms. Mahmood told MPs. “This provides protections for long-term U.K. residents but, clearly, should not be acting as a bar against removal in cases like that of Ahmed.

The Labour MP admitted that the legal measures alone would not guarantee Ahmed's removal from the country.

According to reports, Pakistan has declined to accept the criminal back into its country, and some back-channel negotiations have allegedly focussed on his return being tied with the extradition of so-called Pakistani dissidents based in Britain.

The Opposition Tories have demanded speedier action for Ahmed's deportation.

Administrative lapses, shrinking civic space put Nepal govt. under pressure

As the Balendra Shah administration marks 100 days in office, a driver's death following an altercation with police and flooding at a holding centre for landless people fuelled public anger; Shah remains silent on both issues while activists and Opposition allege suppression of dissent

NEWS ANALYSIS

Sanjeev Satgainya
KATHMANDU

As Nepal's new government, led by Balendra Shah, a 35-year-old former Mayor of Kathmandu, completed its first 100 days in office, two incidents within 48 hours laid bare the widening gap between its promises of reform and the realities of governance.

On July 9, a ride-hailing driver self-immolated following an altercation with the city police over a parking dispute. The 25-year-old died the following day while undergoing treatment. A day later, a holding centre sheltering squatters and landless people after their eviction from Kathmandu's riversides was inundated by monsoon rains.

The incidents have fuelled public anger against the majority government, with protests flaring up in Kathmandu and elsewhere. Critics say they expose administrative failures, poor planning and an increasingly high-handed style of governance.

Lingering concerns

The Shah administration now finds itself confronting many of the same questions that dogged its predecessor before last year's Gen Z protests, which swept Mr. Shah into office.



Low-profile: Nepal's Prime Minister Balendra Shah has made just one public address and delivered only one speech in Parliament during his first 100 days in office. AFP

Formed on March 27 after the Rastriya Swatantra Party's landslide victory in the March 5 elections, the government came to power promising reform, accountability and good governance. But analysts say it has failed to deliver on those promises.

Anurag Acharya, a political commentator, said the administration is increasingly mirroring the erstwhile K.P. Sharma Oli government, arguing that Prime Minister Shah has exhibited similar authoritarian tendencies.

“This government's disconnect with the public is stark,” Mr. Acharya said. “While its performance on all fronts has been dismal, it is targeting critics, the media and civil society. Early signs are not good.”

The criticism has been amplified by Mr. Shah's pu-

blic silence. Known for his one-way communication style since his days as Kathmandu mayor – largely through social media – he has made just one public address and delivered only one speech in Parliament during his first 100 days in office.

Mr. Shah has remained silent on both issues that have triggered public anger – the death of the ride-hailing driver and the plight of evicted squatters.

On Tuesday, Opposition lawmakers accused the government of failing in its fundamental responsibility to protect the vulnerable and the excluded. Niscal Rai, whip of the main Opposition Nepali Congress, referred to Prime Minister Shah as “Shri 8” – an allusion to the honorific “Shri 5”, once reserved for Nepal's monarchs before the

country became a federal republic – suggesting a growing intolerance towards criticism, dissent and scrutiny.

What began as criticism of the government's handling of two recent crises has widened into concerns over shrinking civic space, with activists, Opposition leaders and the media alleging intimidation and suppression of dissent.

Shrinking civic space

On July 11, police arrested youth activists after they called attention to the government's mishandling of evicted landless families. Majid Ansari, a lawyer and Gen Z activist, was injured during the police action and is undergoing treatment.

In a Facebook post from his hospital bed, he wrote: “I have not been informed

about the reason for my arrest so far, nor have I been shown any arrest warrant. There is no clarity about the legal status of my arrest either.”

Amnesty International has called for his immediate and unconditional release.

“This arbitrary detention of activists simply for expressing solidarity with victims of forced eviction has raised serious concerns over violations of the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, liberty and security of person...,” said Nirajan Thapaliya, Director of Amnesty International Nepal.

“The majority of the Ministers in the current government came to power on the back of Gen Z protests in September 2025. They vehemently advocated for the right to protest and freedom of expression, and against police repression while pledging to hold law enforcement accountable for the crack-down during the September protests. It's deplorable that within four months of taking office, the government is now forgetting its commitment and is using the same repressive tactics as its predecessor to unlawfully target young activists.”

Concerns over shrinking civic space deepened further on July 13 after unattended vehicles were left outside the gates of three leading media houses in Kathmandu. One of the

vehicles was parked outside the gates of Kantipur Media Group, the country's largest media company, blocking the entry and exit of other vehicles. It was later found to belong to a member of the ruling Rastriya Swatantra Party.

Parliamentarians on Tuesday took up the issue, describing the incidents as an attempt to silence criticism.

Ramesh Malla of the Nepali Communist Party alleged that such acts were carried out by people backed by the state.

“If those in positions of power have understood that they can govern by creating an environment of fear, they are completely wrong,” he said in Parliament on Tuesday. “Those who gave the mandate to govern could launch a big movement to take the mandate back.”

Concerns over the government's commitment to democratic norms were evident from the early days. Yet, it continued to get the benefit of the doubt because the public, frustrated with years of misgovernance and corruption, had placed its trust in the new administration.

For a government that rode a wave of public anger against the old political order and promised a decisive break from it, the first 100 days have instead been marked by allegations of administrative failures, and a confrontational approach to criticism.

Aerial salute



Flying colours: The French Air Force's elite aerobatic flying team Patrouille de France paints the sky in the national colours during the annual Bastille Day military parade on the Champs-Elysees in Paris on Tuesday. The Arc de Triomphe is in the background. AFP

EU attempts to break deadlock on Russia sanctions as deadline looms

Agence France Presse
BRUSSELS

European Union countries were scrambling on Tuesday to agree on a new round of sanctions against Russia, on the eve of a deadline that could weaken a key measure to tamp down Moscow's oil revenues.

Ambassadors from the 27 member states were due to hold last-minute talks in Brussels to thrash out a deal on the new package after a raft of objections delayed an accord.

If no agreement is reached by Wednesday, the EU could be forced to hike its price cap aimed at curbing the amount that Russia can make from its global oil exports.

Under current regulations the level of the cap



European Union Foreign Policy chief Kaja Kallas at a round table meeting of EU foreign ministers in Brussels on Monday. AP

should shoot up from \$44 to tally more closely with international oil prices after a surge due to the West Asia conflict.

Brussels had wanted to change those rules in the new sanctions package to maintain the current level for several more months.

But the new round of

sanctions -- the 21st the EU wants to impose on Russia since its 2022 invasion of Ukraine -- has faced a rocky ride since it was proposed last month. Various countries have objected to different parts and sought to water them down.

Bulgaria resisted placing Russian Orthodox Pa-

triarch Kirill on the blacklist. Diplomats said Germany objected to a ban on imports of Alaskan Pollock -- a fish widely used in children's meals -- from Russia.

There was also a push to tone down a plan to impose a sweeping visa ban on any Russians who took part in the war in Ukraine.

Diplomats say that with other sticking points still remaining to be ironed out, it was unclear if a deal could be struck before the oil price deadline.

EU top diplomat Kaja Kallas said countries were “quite close” to a deal after a meeting of the bloc's foreign ministers on Monday.

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen is set to visit Kyiv Wednesday for talks with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky.

How an unwitting cadet became a victim of Turkiye's anti-coup crackdown

Agence France Presse
ANKARA

On July 15, 2016, officer cadet Alper Kalin was about to leave his base in Ankara for a friend's wedding when he was told to stay behind for an anti-terrorism exercise.

A few hours later, the efforts of a rogue military faction to overthrow the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan would fail, and Mr. Kalin would find himself facing life behind bars.

Ten years on, inside a flat in Ankara, his parents look through an album of photos of their last holiday together with their son, who is now 34.

For Mr. Kalin, a trainee

air force pilot who had been selected for F-16 training at Akinci base near Ankara, the past decade has been spent in a prison 1,000 kilometres (600 miles) away.

Officials say he was deeply involved in the plan to oust Mr. Erdogan, hatched at Akinci, where the plotters gave orders to bomb the Parliament and the Presidential palace that night.

“There were 60 F-16 pilot candidates and they divided them into four groups. Because they didn't have the capacity to train all 60 at once, they staggered them,” his brother Ilker Kalin, 35, told AFP. By a twist of ill fate, his brother was in the first

group of 14 sent to Akinci after basic training -- the only ones of the 60 to be snarled up in the chaos of the coup.

Telling the cadets they were to take part in an anti-terror exercise, their superiors collected all their phones, leaving them completely clueless about events that would unfold overnight, claiming some 250 lives and leaving another 2,000 wounded.

Cut off from outside communication, they were the last to hear about the attempted coup -- with Kalin's parents desperately trying to reach him as they anxiously watched the drama playing out on TV.

He finally came home around 7:00 am, his face



Kerban Kalin (left) and Ali Kalin hold a photograph of their son, Cadet Officer Alper Kalin, who is serving a life sentence. AFP

“ashen, terrified”, recalls his mother Kerban Kalin.

Eleven days after the coup, Mr. Kalin was called back to Akinci to testify.

His father, Ali -- who had only retired from a career

in the military -- was not worried, thinking his son would only stay back on base for one night.

At this point in the story, his wife breaks down in tears: her son was hand-

cuffed on arrival and has never returned home.

After a four-year trial, Alper Kalin and 12 others on his training programme were sentenced to life on November 26, 2020, for attempting to “overthrow the constitutional order”.

Statements by their commanding officers that the youngsters knew nothing did not help.

484 sentenced

“The air force was the most actively involved. That was very unfortunate for us because Akinci base was depicted as the mastermind of the coup,” said Ilker Kalin.

“They punished everybody who was at the base at that moment, no matter

their rank nor what knowledge they had.”

Nearly 500 people were involved in the Akinci trial, of which 484 were handed life sentences, among them 114 trainee officers.

“Hundreds of cadets went into the streets on orders of their commanders. They had absolutely no idea why,” Paris-based political scientist Ahmet Insel told AFP.

At the end of 2023, Turkiye's highest appeals court upheld a sentence of aggravated life imprisonment: that is, solitary confinement with two visits a month from parents and siblings.

Each convict was sent as far away from home as possible. Mr. Kalin ended up in

the southeastern Kurdish-majority city of Diyarbakir, some 1,000 kilometres away from Ankara by road.

“He's not allowed to have more than five T-shirts, or to wear blue or green” -- the colours of the police and the army, his brother explained.

With Turkiye poised to mark 10 years since the coup, which has allowed Mr. Erdogan to dramatically tighten his grip on power, the family has no expectations.

“We want this government to change. For it to correct the injustices that have torn us apart. They decided my child's fate, solving this problem is their responsibility,” said his mother.

MASTER OF ALL FORMATS

Bumrah first Indian with 200 Test, 100 T20I, and 150 ODI wickets



REUTERS

Pacer Jasprit Bumrah became the first Indian cricketer to complete the rare treble of 200 Test wickets, 100 T20I wickets, and 150 ODI wickets. He etched his name into the record books during the first ODI against England at Edgbaston on Tuesday. The others in the list are Bangladesh's Shakib Al Hasan and New Zealand's Tim Southee.

DAZZLING DUO

Root-Dawson partnership eclipses Collingwood-Jones' record



ANI

Top-order batter Joe Root and all-rounder Liam Dawson's 121-run partnership in the first ODI against India is the highest partnership for the seventh wicket or lower for England against the Men in Blue, bettering Paul Collingwood and Geraint Jones' 105-run effort in Margao in 2006.

EXUDING CONFIDENCE

Everyone will talk about Messi but don't look past our ability: Pickford



AP

Everyone will talk about Messi because he's one of the GOATs of the game. But you can't look past the ability and the talent we've got in the squad. We've got it all there, and that's what we need to put on a show in the semifinal — England goalkeeper Jordan Pickford ahead of the last-four match against Argentina.

ROYAL AFFAIR

Rousing reception for Norway's World Cup heroes back home



AFF

Around 90,000 people welcomed back Norway's players in Oslo on Monday after they returned home from the World Cup. The crowd packed the square in front of the royal palace and performed the now famous "Viking Row". Haakon, Crown Prince of Norway, led the celebration with a drum.

Axar and Gill do the star turn as India goes one up

The all-rounder follows up his four-wicket haul with a match-winning partnership in the company of Washington; the skipper lays the platform in the chase with a classy 80 before retiring hurt

INDIA IN ENGLAND

N. Sudarshan
BIRMINGHAM

Shubman Gill had promised that there would be a marked difference in the "atmosphere and feelings" as India transitioned from a bruising T20I experience in the British Isles to the ODIs.

On Tuesday at Edgbaston, under pleasant summer skies and consistent breeze, deeds matched words as India notched up a morale-boosting six-wicket victory over England to lead the three-match series 1-0.

Chasing 259, a target neither too daunting nor too easy, the visitors got home with nearly five overs to spare.

Gill top-scored with 80 (75b, 11x4, 1x6), but retired hurt owing to cramps. But the Indian captain didn't leave without charming the crowd as he came up with an array of arresting drives and sublime short-arm jabs.

It was the 26-year-old's fourth successive score of 80 and above in international cricket, and adequately compensated for the cheap dismissals of fan favourites Rohit Sharma (11, 21b, 1x4) and Virat Kohli (5, 6b, 1x4).

The former was snapped up at mid-off while the latter was out leg-before playing across the line.

Gill's exit at 149 for two in the 26th over caused a mini stutter as Shreyas Iyer (35, 53b, 2x4) was run out by a direct hit from skipper Harry Brook and K.L. Rahul — not for the first time — chopped one on.

But Washington Sundar (52 n.o., 63b, 4x4, 1x6) and Axar Patel (57 n.o., 52b, 5x4, 1x6) came together for a 102-run association, the last shot of which was a clean six from Washington off Adil Rashid.

After opting to bat, England progressed like a sine wave. It reached 61 for no loss, collapsed to 107 for six, rose up to 228 without any further loss, and then fell flat on its face to finish



Stealing the show: Axar took the Men in Blue home after Gill put them on course. ANI



SCOREBOARD

ENGLAND
Ben Duckett c Bumrah b Gurnoor 43 (45b, 6x4, 2x6), Jacob Bethell c Washington b Gurnoor 14 (31b, 1x4), Joe Root (not out) 76 (76b, 6x4, 1x6), Harry Brook c Rohit b Bumrah 1 (3b), Jos Buttler c Gurnoor b Prasidh 5 (14b), Sam Curran c Rahul b Prasidh 0 (3b), Will Jacks c Rahul b Dube 20 (19b, 3x4), Liam Dawson c Rohit b Axar 68 (83b, 6x4, 1x6), Jofra Archer c Washington b Axar 12 (6b, 1x4, 1x6), Adil Rashid st. Rahul b Axar 1 (5b), Josh Tongue b Axar 0 (2b); Extras (b-12, lb-2, w-4): 18; Total (in 47.5 overs): 258.

FALL OF WICKETS
1-61 (Bethell, 12.2 overs), 2-63 (Duckett, 12.4), 3-64 (Brook, 13.1), 4-80 (Buttler, 16.1), 5-80 (Curran, 16.4), 6-107 (Jacks, 21.4), 7-228 (Dawson, 43.6), 8-250 (Archer, 45.6), 9-258 (Rashid, 47.3).

INDIA BOWLING
Bumrah 9-0-31-1, Prasidh 10-2-50-2, Gurnoor 9-0-61-2, Dube 6-0-27-1, Washington 4-0-13-0, Axar 9.5-0-62-4.

at 258. There was moderate help at the beginning for the Indian pacers, and up-and-down bounce for a considerable while.

But Ben Duckett (43, 45b, 6x4, 2x6) and Jacob Bethell (14, 31b, 1x4) batted with poise.

There was some drama when Duckett scooped

INDIA
Rohit Sharma c Brook b Curran 11 (21b, 1x4), Shubman Gill retired hurt 80 (75b, 11x4, 1x6), Virat Kohli lbw b Archer 5 (6b, 1x4), Shreyas Iyer run out 35 (53b, 2x4), Washington Sundar (not out) 52 (63b, 4x4, 1x6), K.L. Rahul b Tongue 1 (3b), Axar Patel (not out) 57 (52b, 5x4, 1x6); Extras (nb-1, w-20): 21; Total (for four wkts. in 45.2 overs): 262.

FALL OF WICKETS
1-43 (Rohit, 7.3), 2-48 (Kohli, 8.3), 3-157 (Shreyas, 26.6), 4-160 (Rahul, 27.5).

ENGLAND BOWLING
Archer 10-0-60-1, Tongue 10-0-50-1, Curran 10-0-55-1, Rashid 5.2-0-34-0, Bethell 1-0-10-0, Dawson 2-0-10-0, Jacks 7-0-43-0.

Toss: England.
PoM: Axar.
India won by six wickets with 28 balls remaining to lead three-match series 1-0.
Second ODI: July 16, Cardiff, 5.30 p.m. IST.

Gurnoor Brar for a six, and moments later the pacer responded by collecting the ball on his follow through and throwing it straight at the southpaw. The batter didn't flinch, and hooked Gurnoor for another maximum.

What an act of aggression couldn't do, two

short-length deliveries did as Gurnoor removed the openers in the 13th over. Brook was caught by Rohit at first slip off Jasprit Bumrah after being in two minds.

Prasidh Krishna's dismissal of Jos Buttler was tragicomic as Gill and Gurnoor went for the catch and collided shoulder to shoulder. But the close pals they are, they clashed without apparent violence, and the sequence ended with the ball in Gurnoor's palms and all round smiles.

Rahul's great one-handed effort to excise Will Jacks reduced England to 107 for six. However, talisman Joe Root (76 n.o., 76b, 6x4, 1x6) and the experienced Hampshire batter Liam Dawson (68, 83b, 6x4, 1x6) combined for 121 steady and sedate runs to stop the near-capacity crowd from making alternative plans.

But when Dawson perished to Axar (four for 62), England's late-overs flourish faced a setback. Axar then cleaned up the tail, leaving Root stranded. It ended up being a point of no return.

FIFA WORLD CUP

Ayon Sengupta
ATLANTA

For most of football's great rivalries, geography often sets the background. Cities divided by a river or a road spend generations fighting over territory, identity and belonging. Others draw their bitterness from politics or borders, where history leaves wounds that sports never really allows to heal. But few international fixtures carry the emotional weight of England against Argentina, a rivalry forged not simply by memorable matches but by war, controversy and some of the World Cup's defining moments.

From Antonio Rattin's contentious dismissal in 1966 to Diego Maradona's Hand of God and Goal of the Century in Mexico 20 years later, from David Beckham's red card at Saint-Etienne to his penalty redemption at Sapporo, every meeting has added another chapter to a story that extends well beyond the 90 minutes. The ghosts of those afternoons will return to Atlanta on Wednesday when England and Argentina meet for a place in the World Cup final.

The present offers enough intrigue even without the history. Lionel Messi, astonishingly, will face



In full cry: England captain Kane and his Argentine counterpart Messi have been inspirational. AFP

England at the senior international level for the first time in a career that has already rewritten almost every World Cup record worth owning. At 39, he has again been Argentina's guiding force, dragging the defending champion through moments of adversity with eight goals and a series of decisive performances. Lionel Scaloni's side has not always convinced, needing a comeback against Egypt and extra-time against Cape Verde and Switzerland, but it has repeatedly found a way.

Argentina's attack, however, no longer depends only on Messi. Julian Alvarez, who has started ahead of Lautaro Martinez in the last two games, provided the extra-time breakthrough against Switzerland, and his energy gives

Thursday's match

SEMIFINAL

England vs. Argentina,
00.30 a.m.

The day and time pertain to India

the side a different edge. England has been equally resilient. Thomas Tuchel's team has recovered from difficult moments against Mexico and Norway, where Jude Bellingham's extra-time heroics carried it into the semifinals. Harry Kane and Bellingham have combined for 12 goals, giving England two match-winners capable of matching Argentina's firepower. The tactical battle promises to revolve around the midfield. Declan Rice and Elliot Anderson must prevent Messi from finding space between the lines

while also containing the passing rhythm of Alexis Mac Allister and Enzo Fernandez. At the other end, Cristian Romero and Lisandro Martinez will have to cope with Kane and Bellingham's movement and England's threat from wide areas.

England against Argentina has never been just another game. Every generation inherits its own version of this rivalry, adding fresh heroes while carrying echoes of those who came before them. On Wednesday, the Mercedes-Benz Stadium becomes the latest stage for one of the World Cup's richest and most emotionally charged contests, with a place in the final only bringing another dimension to a fixture that has rarely needed extra significance.

England falls in love with Bellingham

Ayon Sengupta

England had its back against the wall.

Norway had taken the lead through Andreas Schjelderup, and the humidity rolling in from the Atlantic had drained Thomas Tuchel's side of its usual fluency. Erling Haaland, Martin Odegaard and Alexander Sorloth were turning every transition into danger, and England looked unusually uncertain.

Then the ball came to Jude Bellingham.

There will always be debate over the television camera cable that FIFA insists did not interfere with play. History rarely lingers over such details. As half-time approached, Bellingham met Anthony Gordon's pass with the certainty that has come to define his World Cup, dragging England back into a quarter-final that had begun to slip away.

And then came the celebration. Not towards the bench. Not into a pile of teammates.

He sprinted towards the centre circle, leaped into the Miami night, clenched his raised fist, and roared into the stadium. For a brief moment, it was just him and the England supporters who were already

Stat attack

1 BELLINGHAM is the first to score two or more goals in consecutive knockout games since Maradona in 1986

1 He is now the top-scoring midfielder (6), the joint-most (James Rodriguez, 2014) by a midfielder in an edition in history

6 Bellingham has the joint-most non-penalty goals by an England player in a major tournament since Lineker in the 1986 World Cup

7 The 23-year-old has been directly involved in seven strikes in this World Cup (6 goals, 1 assist), level with Kane

168 Bellingham has scored a goal every 168 minutes under Tuchel (6 goals in 1,005 minutes), his best under any manager

92 Out of England's 13 goals, 12 have come from Kane (6) and Bellingham (6), the highest ratio (92%) for two players of a country in World Cup history (minimum 10 goals in an edition)

Compiled by K.B. SRI KRISH

singing *Hey Jude*, each acknowledging what the other had slowly realised over the past month.

England had found its player.

It was Bellingham who reacted first to Orjan Nyland's spill, stabbing home the winner. Four decisive knockout goals in a single World Cup have done more than propel England into the semifinals. They have elevated Bellingham from England's brightest young footballer into the player the nation now turns towards in difficult moments.

This World Cup has revealed how naturally he inhabits responsibility.

That confidence was evident after the final whistle in Miami.

Tuchel initially described England's performance as "sloppy" and admitted his side had been fortunate, later clarifying that while he loved his players' resilience and refusal to lose, he expected much higher standards from them.

But it was Bellingham, rather than one of the team's senior members, who politely disagreed.

Future uncertain for three support staff

Amol Karhadkar
MUMBAI

Three members of India's men's cricket team's support staff are facing an uncertain future, with their contracts set to expire at the end of the ongoing limited-overs tour of England. The continuation of assistant coach Ryan ten Doeschate, bowling coach

Morne Morkel and fielding coach T. Dilip remains under consideration as the BCCI weighs its options ahead of a crucial phase in the team's build-up to next year's ODI World Cup.

It is learnt that ten Doeschate and Morkel — both hand-picked by head coach Gautam Gambhir while taking charge in July 2024 — have been reluctant to

commit to fresh contracts owing to a combination of personal and professional factors.

The BCCI and Gambhir are understood to be evaluating whether to persuade the duo to continue until the World Cup in South Africa. While no final decision has been taken, the matter is expected to be resolved soon after the En-

gland tour. Dilip, the only member retained from the coaching set-up led by Rahul Dravid, has completed his tenure and is awaiting clarity on whether he will be offered an extension.

The timing of the decision is significant, with the BCCI's review committee scheduled to meet later this month to chart the way forward.

INBRIEF



Three Indian pairs in top-10 of ITTF world rankings

Indian table tennis reached a milestone on Tuesday as the country had for the first time three doubles pairs in the top 10 of the latest ITTF World Rankings. Leading the charge were Manav Thakkar and Manush Shah (*in pic.*), who climbed to No. 2 in men's doubles – the highest-ever ranking by an Indian pair in any doubles discipline. In women's doubles, Diya Chitale and Yashaswini Ghorpade reached No. 10, while Diya Chitale and Manush Shah rose to World No. 5 in mixed doubles.

Lakshya, Sagar power India colts to a strong start

Opens Lakshya Raichandani (93) and Sagar Virk (87) powered India under-19 to 186 for no loss in reply to Sri Lanka's 424 for nine declared on the second day of the Youth 'Test' in Galle on Tuesday. Senuja Wekunagoda scored 233 for the hosts.

The scores: Sri Lanka u-19 424/9 decl. in 106.4 overs (Senuja Wekunagoda 233, Vimath Dinsara 52, Kavija Gamage 49, Chamika Heenatigala 45, J. Hemchudesan 3/107) vs. India u-19 186/0 in 58 overs (Lakshya Raichandani 93 batting, Sagar Virk 87 batting).

Pogacar wins 10th stage on Bastille Day, retains Yellow

Tadej Pogacar stormed to victory on Tuesday's mountainous 10th stage to extend his overall lead at the Tour de France.



Lennox sets up Kiwis' victory over Windies in second ODI

Left-arm spinner Jayden Lennox took five for 19 as West Indies collapsed from 63 for no loss to be all out for 138 as New Zealand went on to win the second ODI by five wickets in Guyana on Monday.

The scores: West Indies 138 in 36 overs (Campbell 43; Lennox 5/19) lost to New Zealand 141/5 in 32.4 overs (Latham 37 n.o.). **Toss:** New Zealand. **PoM:** Lennox.

India's karting sensation Atiqa blazing a trail in Europe

S. Dipak Ragav
CHENNAI

The foundation for success in single-seater racing, or for that matter, most categories of motorsports, starts from karting.

It is the first step on the ladder and one of the most competitive environments.

As India searches for its third F1 driver, one of the most promising karters out there is Atiqa Mir of Jammu & Kashmir.

The 11-year-old girl based in the UAE is a chip off the old block with her father, Asif Nazir Mir, a former National karting champion.

Atiqa is blazing a trail in Europe, competing in various karting series. Recently, she dominated the second round of the Champions of the Future Academy race in Greece, topping qualifying, both heats and the final.

"The most memorable part of the weekend was crossing the line and raising my hand, telling P1 and then listening to the national anthem," said Atiqa, who is currently fifth in the championship after three rounds.

What started as a fun activity turned serious when she finished second in her



Buckle up: Atiqa, whose ultimate goal is to reach F1, is focused on taking it one step at a time. [INSTAGRAM@ATIQA.ASIFMIR](#)

maiden competitive race in the UAE National championship.

"Later, I came in as vice-champion in the rookie category of the mini category in the UAE championship. That gave me a little bit more confidence racing against the boys," she adds.

Atiqa says one of the challenges she faced was bullying by the boys on the track, but she has learned to stand up to them.

"They don't like to lose to a girl and try to push me off the track, but then I do



Hip, hip, hooray! Indian players celebrate on the Lord's balcony. [X@BCCIWOMEN](#)

A special win on a special occasion, says Muzumdar

India's victory over England in the historic Test at Lord's pleases the coach who attributes the triumph to teamwork; the Mumbaikar praises pacer Kranti and centurion Yastika in particular

EXCLUSIVE

P.K. Ajith Kumar
LONDON

For all his talent and the mountain of runs he scored in First Class cricket, Amol Muzumdar never got to play a Test, or any other international. He, however, had the honour of guiding India to a comprehensive victory in the first ever women's Test at Lord's.

And he is delighted that India could win the historic Test against England in the most convincing of fashions, by 270 runs. "I think it was a special win on a special occasion," Muzumdar said in an exclusive interview to *The Hindu* shortly after the game, another highlight of his career as the Indian coach. "This team has been a special one and I keep saying that this is something that we pride ourselves in."

He is proud of the way the Indian batters played in a format that they are not familiar with. "We have always had this talk within the batting group that we need to adjust to the formats," said the man who



Great rapport: Muzumdar and Harmanpreet have formed a successful partnership. [X@BCCIWOMEN](#)

also oversaw India's epochal triumph in the ODI World Cup last year. "Whether it is T20, ODI or Test, we need to adjust to the formats. Sooner we do it, the better it is. I am really proud of each and every member of this team."

He is glad that everyone contributed. "They batted beautifully," he said. "Richa Ghosh got a fifty, as did Deepti Sharma. And Harmanpreet Kaur got a magnificent fifty. Smriti Mandhana played two big knocks, and even Shafali

applied herself really well in the second innings."

He particularly liked the control with which they all batted. "The control that they showed, not just technically, but also mentally, and the adjustment that they did was really remarkable," he said. "And we saw controlled aggression from Yastika Bhatia. And just her composure at the crease was really good. The smoothness with which batted was lovely to watch."

He feels it was a remar-

kable feat by Yastika, who was coming back from a difficult injury. "She has always been a part of the unit," Muzumdar said. "She has had to miss out on a lot of stuff, a lot of things. And yeah, she has come back really strongly. That's why I use the word resilience for Yastika."

The coach is also happy that Kranti Gaud is bowling with a maturity beyond her years. "Look, it has only been 13 months since Kranti has come into international cricket, but if you have watched her spell at Lord's, I don't think anybody would have believed that she is so inexperienced," he said. "So that's the depth of Indian cricket, I feel. Her performance shows the system is in place, and that is great on the part of the BCCI. And she is also a product of the WPL and domestic cricket."

He is also impressed by Kranti's mature outlook. "You know, she has really got a sense of occasion, and I really appreciate that," said Muzumdar.

"It is not overwhelming for her to play a Test match at Lord's or anywhere else".

Sayali stuns Manika in UP's thrilling victory

UTT

K. Keerthivasan
PANAJI

Sayali Wani may be a distant World No. 151 compared to Manika Batra's 51, but rankings matter little when the pressure is at its peak. The 20-year-old displayed composure beyond her years, producing one of the biggest upsets of Ultimate Table Tennis Season-7 by outwitting the 31-year-old veteran, a three-time Olympian and a multiple Commonwealth Games medallist, in a gripping three-game decider.

With the tie hanging in the balance (6-6), Sayali held her nerve to clinch a memorable 2-1 victory. The 8-7 verdict sealed UP Prometheans' maiden win in the league over Ahmedabad APL Pipers at the Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Indoor Stadium here on Tuesday.

Sayali saved three match points in the third and final game to script one of her memorable victories, making it a hat-tricks of defeats for Manika.

Ahmedabad looked to be in control after pocket-

ing the opening two matches. Payas Jain defeated Sudhanshu Grover by two games to one before Sofia Polcanova overcame Yangzi Liu 2-1, giving Ahmedabad a 4-2 lead heading into the mixed doubles.

But the momentum shifted dramatically in the third match as UP's Swastika Ghosh and Ricardo Walther and produced one of the biggest upsets of the season. The Indo-German pair stunned the previously unbeaten combination of Polcanova and Payas, cruising to a 3-0 victory, putting UP back in contention as it took a 5-4 lead.

Ahmedabad's Adrien Rassenfoss rose to the occasion, winning his first match of the season, by overcoming a tough challenge from Walther to make it 6-6. Sayali then produced a nerveless display.

The result: UP Prometheans bt Ahmedabad APL Pipers 8-7 (Sudhanshu Grover lost to Payas Jain 11-5, 9-11, 5-11; Yangzi Liu lost to Sofia Polcanova 11-3, 10-11, 6-11; Ricardo Walther & Swastika Ghosh bt Polcanova & Payas 11-9, 11-10, 11-10; Walther lost to Adrien Rassenfoss 6-11, 9-11, 11-9; Sayali Wani bt Manika Batra 5-11, 11-8, 11-10).



Rising to the challenge: Sayali produced a nerveless display against Manika. [BUTTERFLYUTT](#)

Lindblad has first driving lesson as Spa looms

Reuters
BIRMINGHAM

Formula One rookie Arvid Lindblad has had his first driving lesson, days before he races around the Belgian GP circuit in one of the fastest cars in the world.

The 18-year-old Briton addressed the subject when

he turned up in the *Sky Sports* commentary box at the England-India ODI in Edgbaston on Tuesday.

"It's a bit sad that I haven't got my licence," the Racing Bulls driver said when the subject was raised. "It was funny for a bit and now it's just getting a bit silly," he said.

Rivaan makes a sweep in Junior Max category



All smiles: The winners Rivaan, Arshi, Zidaan and Krish.

Sports Bureau
CHENNAI

Defending champion Rivaan Dev Preetham continued his impressive form by winning the Junior Max title in the second round of the MECO-FMSCI Indian National Karting Championship (RMC India) 2026 at the Madras International Karting Arena on Sunday.

Provisional results: Senior Max, finals (18 laps): 1. Krish Gupta (Leapfrog Racing) 15:31.039s; 2. Kiaan Shah (Rayo Racing) 15:33.430; 3. Laksh Manish Bafna (Leapfrog Racing) 15:34.227; **Best Rookie:** Kairav Roberson (MSPORT). **Pre-finals (14 laps):** 1. Arafath Sheikh (Crest Motorsports) 11:55.927; 2. Laksh Manish Bafna 11:56.234; 3. Arjun Chheda (Crest Motorsports) 11:56.790. **Junior Max, finals (16 laps):** 1. Rivaan Dev Preetham (MSPORT) 13:37.426; 2. Swarnav Das (Crest Motorsports) 13:43.916; 3.

Hridaan Sanadhya (Crest Motorsports) 13:44.795; **Best Rookie:** Rivaan Dev Preetham (MSPORT). **Pre-finals (14 laps):** 1. Rivaan Dev Preetham 11:52.991; 2. Hridaan Sanadhya 11:58.096; 3. Swarnav Das 11:59.479. **Mini Max, finals (14 laps):** 1. Arshi Gupta (Leapfrog Racing) 12:20.548; 2. Jishnu Seralathan (Peregrine Racing) 12:30.136; 3. Rudrapratap Singh Shekhawat (Leapfrog Racing) 12:32.191; **Best Rookie:** Arshi Gupta (Leapfrog Racing). **Pre-finals (12 laps):** 1. Arshi Gupta 10:33.095; 2. Shiv Tummala (Peregrine Racing) 10:36.393; 3. Ridhaan Anil Kumar (Red Rabbit Racing) 10:40.227. **Micro Max, finals (11 laps):** 1. Zidaan Arshaan Anees (Peregrine Racing) 10:14.386; 2. Rudrapratap Singh Shekhawat 10:21.935; 3. Ayansh Patil (MSPORT) 10:21.970; **Best Rookie:** Nirthik Veera Karthi (Birel Art India). **Pre-finals (11 laps):** 1. Ayansh Patil 10:12.904; 2. Rudrapratap Singh Shekhawat 10:15.038; 3. Zidaan Arshaan Anees 10:17.588.

Sindhu into second round; Satwik-Chirag duo pulls out

JAPAN OPEN

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TOKYO

Satwiksairaj Rankireddy's recurring shoulder problem forced him and Chirag Shetty to retire from their Japan Open opener even as P.V. Sindhu eased into the women's singles second round with a 2-14, 21-11 win over Malaysia's Wong Ling Ching on Tuesday.

The world No. 4 Indian pair retired after losing the opening game 19-21 to Den-

mark's Daniel Lundgaard and Mads Vestergaard.

Chief doubles coach Tan Kim Her said the duo will skip the China Open next week and focus on rehabilitation to get back to shape for the home World Championships in August.

In another match, Hariharan Amsakarunan and M.R. Arjun lost to Taiwan's Lee Jhe-Huei and Yang Po-Hsuan 13-21, 21-17, 7-21.

Dhruv Kapila and Tanisha Crasto too advanced to the second round after defeating Scotland's Alexander Dunn and Julie Macpherson 21-16, 21-14 in their

mixed doubles opener. Rohan Kapoor and Ruthvika Shivani Gadde bowed out in the opening round.

The results: Women: P.V. Sindhu bt Wong Ling Ching (Mas) 21-14, 21-11. **Men: Doubles:** Daniel Lundgaard & Mads Vestergaard (Den) bt Satwiksairaj Rankireddy & Chirag Shetty 21-19, ret'd.; Lee Jhe-Huei & Yang Po-Hsuan (Tpe) bt Hariharan Amsakarunan & M.R. Arjun 21-13, 17-21, 21-7. **Mixed doubles:** Dhruv Kapila & Tanisha Crasto bt Alexander Dunn & Julie Macpherson (Sco) 21-16, 21-14; Feng Yan Zhe & Huang Dong Ping (Chn) bt Rohan Kapoor & Ruthvika Shivani Gadde 21-11, 21-10.

Indian under-19 pugilists continue to dominate at the Asian c'ships

Press Trust of India
JAKARTA

India continued its dominant run at the Asian u-19 boxing championships following the semifinal bouts on Monday.

In the women's category, Chahat (60kg) secured a commanding 5-0 win over Taiwan's Pei-Chun Tsai (Tpe), while Anshika (75kg) registered an RSC win in

the first round against An-Chi Tseng of Taiwan.

Megha Sheokand (80kg) advanced after her Vietnamese opponent Thi Mai Anh Dam was unable to continue and Prachi Tokas (+81kg) sealed her place in the final with an RSC victory in the first round against Shu-Shian Wang of Taiwan.

Along with earlier winners, India confirmed all eight finalists in the u-19

women's category.

In the men's category, Aditya (55kg) delivered a strong performance, defeating Korea's Hyeonmin Lee via RSC in the second round, while Shubham Rajput (90kg) secured a hard-fought 3-2 victory over Kyrgyzstan's Aitbek Berdimuratov.

Six pugilists signed off with bronze medals after losing the semifinals.



A forgettable World Cup blip in Ronaldo’s unforgettable career

For two decades, he has been among the greatest footballers to have graced the game. While the Portuguese superstar will walk away without the distinction of having won the marquee event in six attempts, it shouldn’t affect the legacy of a forward who won many titles for the biggest clubs in the world

GETTY IMAGES

Vivek Krishnan

Even in his final moments in a Portugal shirt at the 2026 FIFA World Cup, Cristiano Ronaldo was the cynosure of all eyes. The footballer from Madeira has lived his life in the spotlight for two decades, and would have it no other way in his swansong at the international stage. But for the entirety of the marquee event in the United States, Canada and Mexico, a discomfiting question was at the core of the gaze trained on him: was the forward, now 41 years old and playing his club football for Al-Nassr in Saudi Arabia, impeding Portugal’s chances by leading the line?

He may tend to think such a query stemmed from a position of prejudice towards a certain Argentine, but his critics stood vindicated as Portugal crashed out at the round-of-16 stage after a 1-0 defeat to Spain. Appearing in his sixth World Cup, he netted two goals against a fragile Uzbekistan defence in the group stage and converted a penalty against Croatia in the round of 32. But beyond that, even as other big names like Lionel Messi, Kylian Mbappe, Erling Haaland, Harry Kane and Jude Bellingham set the tournament ablaze with their attacking exploits, Ronaldo’s contributions on the pitch were minimal and deserving of critique.

In the do-or-die game against the Iberian rival, Ronaldo was a bystander for the most part, touching the ball just 19

times across the two halves without ever testing the Spanish back-line. It is true that Ronaldo had long ceased to be the explosive winger who could dribble past opponents with fleet-footed manoeuvres, but even his movement in the 18-yard box lacked the sharpness desired of a goal-poaching striker in a team harbouring ambitions of going the distance.

This is where coach Roberto Martinez, who has left his post since the nation’s early exit, must shoulder much of the blame for Portugal’s disheartening campaign. It would have been a difficult conversation to initiate considering the deity-like reverence that Ronaldo enjoys in his homeland, but Martinez ought to have overlooked sentimental compulsions and examined the wisdom of placing unequivocal trust in a 41-year-old plying his trade in a footballing outpost. Never mind that nobody has scored more goals in international football than Ronaldo’s 146 in 233 appearances.

The former Manchester United and Real Madrid talisman, whose speed and agility were characteristics of the past, could have still had a role to play off the bench given his expertise in front of goal. By starting him in every game when his link-up play with Portugal’s midfield maestros was pedestrian, however, Martinez did not show enough audacity. A damning revelation from the data available is that Ronaldo took 17 shots during the tournament without creating a single chance for a teammate.

It would be disingenuous to suggest the lack of a viable alternative up front when there was Goncalo Ramos, who came on late in the round of 32 against Croatia and promptly produced a stoppage-time winner to send Portugal through. The 52-year-old manager may argue that his predecessor in the hot seat, Fernando Santos, also endured an early exit despite being bolder at the previous World Cup in Qatar. Having witnessed Ronaldo score just one goal in the first three group games – a spot-kick against Ghana – four years ago, Santos decided to start with Ramos, much to Ronaldo’s seeming discontent, for the round-of-16 duel against Switzerland. The youngster, then 21, responded with a sensational hat-trick, but a 1-0 defeat to Morocco in the quarterfinals brought an unsatisfactory halt to Santos’ stint as Portugal manager soon after.

When Martinez took charge in the build-up to the European Championship in 2024, he steered away from the risk of further alienating the veteran forward. Ronaldo played all five games in Portugal’s run to the quarterfinals at the continental competition, but had no more than a solitary assist to show for his efforts as his team bowed out with a loss to France in a penalty shootout.

Yet, Ronaldo did not pave the way for a transition and soldiered on, refusing to give up on his long-standing pursuit of winning the World Cup. Once he scored five goals from as many appearances in the qualification phase for this year’s showpiece, Ronaldo wasn’t going to be dissuaded from landing in North America for one final shot at the crown jewel. As was to be anticipated, the cacophony over his spot in the starting XI grew as soon as Ronaldo put up a subdued show in Portugal’s dour 1-1 draw against the Democratic Republic of Congo in their opening joust. While a brace against Uzbekistan in the second game of the group stage relieved the pressure to an extent as he rejoiced with his signature ‘Siuuu’ celebration and yelled to the television cameras that ‘I’m back’, it turned out to be a false dawn.

In the end, Ronaldo racked up 27 appearances and 11 goals in World Cups. His brace against Uzbekistan made him the first to find the net in six different editions. At the same time, he had just one goal in 10 knockout games and never reached a final.

Clear conscience

“I am sad to leave like this but I have given everything, always given my best,” Ronaldo told the media afterwards. “I go with a clear conscience. This is football, it

is the life of a footballer. Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose. You have to carry on. It was my last World Cup, yes, but as far as the rest of it is concerned: there will be time to think, to be with my family, [I will] not make decisions in the heat of the moment.

“I won three titles with Portugal. Before Cristiano, Portugal had never won a big trophy. The best trophy I won with the national team was (in) 2016, which for me has the same dimension as the World Cup. So I repeat: I leave here with a clear conscience. Tomorrow will be another day and life goes on,” he asserted.

As much as he tries to ascribe equal importance to winning the Euros in 2016, the absence of the World Cup in his trophy cabinet will rankle. Particularly with Messi – the two have been spurred on an individual level by each other’s extraordinary feats – hoisting the holy grail in 2022 and cementing his place in Argentine folklore, Ronaldo would have been fiercely keen for the grand prize not to elude his grasp.

Where the two greats diverged in recent years was in their style of play and what they symbolised to their national teams. Even as Messi remains the twinkle-toed wizard at the heart of every attacking move for the Albiceleste, Ronaldo’s output was increasingly confined to the number of goals next to his name. For Messi’s teammates in

Argentina’s iconic sky and blue, the man from Rosario is a hero and father-figure whom they fight tooth and nail for. The equation between Ronaldo and his peers didn’t appear as symbiotic.

Ruthless goalscorer

Once the dust settles, nevertheless, Ronaldo’s World Cup disappointments shouldn’t affect his rich legacy. In his pomp, lest we forget, he could really do it all. He had the pace and power of a sprinter, and jumped vertically for headers in the box like a basketball player would for a slam dunk. Having started out on the wing, he was able to fine-tune his skills to such a degree that he eventually turned into a ruthless goalscorer. At Manchester United in the 2000s and Real Madrid in the 2010s, both of which had A-listers galore, Ronaldo was a match-winner and entertainer par excellence. He was at the forefront of multiple Premier League, LaLiga and Champions League titles for these iconic clubs. The final stretch of his career may have clouded some of those champagne-popping memories. But as and when he decides to retire altogether – his contract with Saudi club Al-Nassr runs till next year – nothing less than the highest praise will do justice to one of the greatest to have graced the beautiful game. No World Cup setback can alter that.

THE GIST

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▼ The disappointments in the football extravaganza shouldn’t affect his legacy

▼ The final stretch of Ronaldo’s career may have clouded some of the champagne-popping memories, but nothing less than high praise will do justice to one of the game’s greatest



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