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INSIDE



Kota delivery row: kin of five women write to President

KOTA
The families of five women in Rajasthan's Kota who developed complications after their C-section delivery have written to President Droupadi Murmu seeking permission for euthanasia if they do not receive kidney transplant. The women have refused dialysis, insisting on a kidney transplant. » PAGE 4

Wangchuk loses 8.9 kg as his fast enters 18th day

NEW DELHI
Activist Sonam Wangchuk's indefinite hunger strike demanding resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over exam paper leaks entered its 18th day on Wednesday. Mr. Wangchuk, 59, has lost 8.9 kg since he began fasting, according to reports published by the Cockroach Janta Party over the past week. » PAGE 5

Mitra too ditches Mamata after ED issues summons

KOLKATA
In yet another setback to Trinamool Congress chairperson Mamata Banerjee, senior leader and MLA Madan Mitra crossed over to the rebel camp led by the Leader of the Opposition Ritabrata Banerjee. This comes a day after the Enforcement Directorate issued summons to him and his family members in an alleged recruitment scam. » PAGE 5

Dip in number of workers enrolled for job scheme

NEW DELHI
In the fortnight following the transition from the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme to the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission Gramin, the number of registered workers fell from 27 crore to 26.33 crore, according to LibTech India, a group of academics and activists. » PAGE 6

Kerala seeks T.N. help to combat narcotics menace

CHENNAI
Kerala Home Minister Ramesh Chennithala met Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay on Wednesday and discussed establishing a coordinated mechanism among the five southern States to crack down on drug peddlers and combat the menace of narcotics. He said the two States would exchange intelligence to curb the menace. » PAGE 3

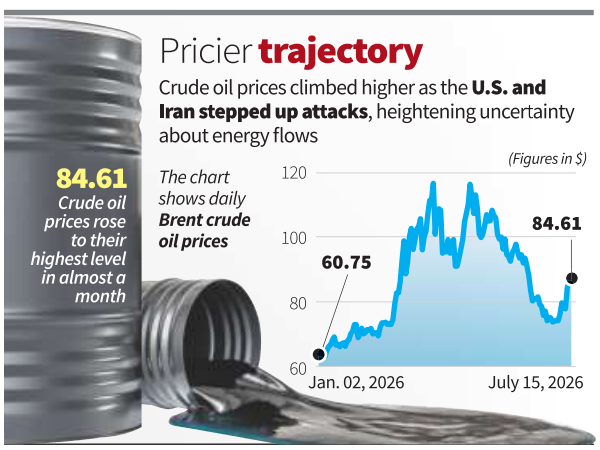
Iran threatens 'to halt all regional oil exports'

Oil and gas 'will either be for everyone or for no one', says Iran amid 'wave of strikes' by the U.S. Blockade by U.S. has 'dismantled' the peace MoU, says Tehran; Brent crude price nears \$85 a barrel Unless stocks are replenished, the world will be poorly equipped for the next shock, analysts say

Agence France-Presse
TEHRAN/WASHINGTON

Returning to war nearly a month after signing a memorandum of understanding towards peace in West Asia, the U.S. and Iran on Wednesday launched strikes on targets across the region. While the U.S. Central Command said it launched "a wave of strikes... designed to further degrade military capabilities Iranian forces have used to attack commercial shipping in the Strait of Hormuz", Iranian state media reported explosions near the port city of Bandar Abbas, on the island of Qeshm, and on Bandar Imam Khomeini. Iranian media later said new U.S. strikes hit the

southern port city of Bush-ehr, home to the country's only civilian nuclear plant. Iran's Revolutionary Guards said they targeted the U.S. Fifth Fleet in Bahrain, where the military said it had intercepted attacks against civilian targets, while Jordan's armed forces said they had downed three missiles from Tehran. Deputy Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic, Kazem Gharibabadi, said the renewed U.S. blockade on Iranian ports "has, in a way, dismantled the Islamabad memorandum", referring to the interim deal reached last month to halt hostilities and pursue peace talks. The Guards also threatened on Wednesday to halt all energy exports from West Asia over the



U.S. blockade. "The export of oil and gas from the region will be either for everyone or for no one," it said. The Brent crude oil, the international standard, traded close to \$85 a barrel on Wednesday – more than 15% higher than the price before the war, but still well below the nearly \$120 reached at the height of the conflict. Analysts with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have warned that while a surplus of oil had kept prices low, "much of that room has now been used up."

Worth their salt



White ore: Labourers at a saltpan in Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu, on Wednesday. Despite a good yield so far with salt production underway at full swing, a bleak future looms for the industry with reduced demand for salt. N. RAJESH

India-U.K. social security pact is not retrospective

Sriram Lakshman
LONDON

The India-U.K. Double Contributions Convention (DCC), allowing temporary Indian and British workers an exemption from paying social security contributions in their host countries for 60 months, is not retrospective, i.e., it will not apply to Indians already working in the U.K. and Britons working in India before July 15. The DCC came into effect on Wednesday. Normally, temporary foreign workers are exempt from U.K. social security contributions – National Insurance (NI) – for the first 12 months.

FULL REPORT ON
» PAGE 14



The reported data leak comes amid construction of four WER reactors at the plant. FILE PHOTO

Leak of Kudankulam nuclear plant data sparks 'commotion'

P. Sudhakar
TIRUNELVELI

The leak of highly sensitive files of Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant (KKNPP), reportedly accessed by a ransomware group from a contractor's server, has triggered "absolute commotion" in the plant, KKNPP sources said on Wednesday.

After commissioning two 1,000 Mwe VVER reactors, KKNPP is building four more such units with Russian collaboration. Sources said the top brass of the upcoming nuclear park is "completely clueless" about the development that poses security threat as it may let an adversary map the support system and identify vulnerabilities. According to Reuters, more than 19,000 files dating between 2016 and mid-2025, and linked to KKNPP's engineering blueprints on control, cooling and ventilation systems, list of vendors and suppliers, etc. had been accessed by World Leaks.

Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited said the information claimed to be available in public domain pertains to "conventional balance of plant common service facilities" and does not relate to any nuclear safety or nuclear security-related systems. The leak originated from a server hosted by third party provider Yotta. The plant's contractor, Anil Ambani's Reliance Group, has admitted that a "partial breach" had happened and the government had been informed. "Suspicious activity on Yotta's server was noted on May 29 last and it was reported in June-end. Investigations by Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL), the project proponent, and Computer Emergency Response Team are on," the sources said. When the KKNPP encountered a similar incident in 2019, wherein a North Korean malware infection on its administrative network exposed the plant's vulnerability, NPCIL had dismissed it saying their "unbreachable standalone network" was intact and no data could be accessed by any dark web. Neither KKNPP's site director Ashok Bhatiya nor V.P. Sunil, Station Director (1 and 2), could be reached for their comments on this sensitive issue. Senior manager of human resources and public relations Kannan, who usually keeps in touch with the media for occasional press statements, also did not pick up repeated calls.

Assam Rifles camp attacked, vehicles torched in Manipur

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

A mob threw stones, vandalised an Assam Rifles camp and damaged four vehicles of the security forces in Senapati town of Manipur around 9.30 p.m. on Tuesday. The attack occurred after the paramilitary forces launched an area domination patrol and search operation based on "credible intelligence inputs" regarding the presence of armed cadres in Makuilongdi, about 2 km west of a designated camp of the NSCN (I-M) at Oklong. The NSCN (I-M) refers to the Isak-Muiwah faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland. The outfit prefers to call itself the National Socialist Council of Nagalim. "The intelligence reports and social media posts indicated the pre-



Tensions boil over: Charred remains of a vehicle following a mob attack in Senapati district of Manipur on Wednesday. PTI

sence of armed cadres moving outside designated camps, carrying weapons and wearing uniforms, in violation of established Ceasefire Ground Rules," the Defence spokesperson said on Wednesday. The Ceasefire Monitoring Group, which observes, verifies, and reports on compliance with agreed pauses in fighting, was formally informed regarding the reported violations, highlighting the security concerns, he said. Entry stand-off "During the course of the operation, residents, including women, obstructed the Assam Rifles columns approaching

Makuilongdi and Oklong villages. The columns exercised maximum restraint and communicated with the local representatives, adding that the operations were aimed solely at ensuring security and maintaining peace in the area, and that the columns would not enter any village without the consent of the authorities," the spokesperson said. As tensions escalated, a large crowd gathered in Senapati town around 9 p.m. and prepared to march towards the Assam Rifles at Naga Taphou in the district. "Despite the withdrawal of the columns, a large mob reached the camp around 9.30 p.m., hurled stones, damaging property and attempting acts of arson," the spokesperson said. "The mob vandalised and damaged Assam Rifles vehicles. A light vehicle was set ablaze, while two trucks were overturned and damaged. A car of a civilian was also burnt during the violence," an Assam Rifles official said. Situation under control Minimum force was applied to disperse the violent crowd in coordination with the Manipur Police and the Central Reserve Police Force, he added. The situation in Senapati was under control, a district official said. "Neither the local people nor the security personnel sustained any injuries," he said. On July 6, unidentified gunmen ambushed an Assam Rifles patrol in Ukhrul district, killing two personnel and injuring several others. Ukhrul, adjoining Senapati, is considered the political heartland of the NSCN (I-M), which is in ceasefire mode since 1997.

INBRIEF



Ram Temple embezzlement has hurt devotees: U.P. CM

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said on Wednesday in Lucknow that the embezzlement of donations at the Ram Temple had hurt devotees but added that the “attempt by Opposition parties, primarily the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Congress, to defame Ayodhya and Ram Janmabhoomi was unjustified”. “The Ayodhya incident has certainly hurt the faith of all of us, of Ram devotees like us. The Ram Temple Trust is an independent body, and the government has no authority to interfere in its affairs. The trust requested a probe, and the State Government constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT). As soon as the SIT report came, action was initiated,” he said.

M.P. CM strips Minister of Animal Husbandry portfolio

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Wednesday divested Minister of State (Independent charge) Lakkan Patel of the Animal Husbandry and Dairy Department, according to an official notification. The reason for the sudden change was not specified. The Chief Minister kept the Animal Husbandry and Dairy Department with himself, as per a gazette notification issued by the General Administration Department in the morning. Mr. Patel will continue to hold charge of the Anand Department, sources said.

Setback for Kishor as three Jan Suraaj leaders join BJP ahead of Bihar’s Bankipur byelection

Amarnath Tewary
PATNA

In a setback to Prashant Kishor-led Jan Suraaj Party (JSP), three of its leaders joined the BJP on Wednesday, ahead of the Bankipur Assembly byelection. Those inducted into the BJP by the party’s State president Sanjay Saraogi included renowned academician K.C. Sinha, Ritesh Ranjan alias Bittu Singh, and Sandip Kumar Singh alias Gopal Singh. All three had contested the 2025 Assembly election as Jan Suraaj candidates and lost from Kumhrar, Digha and Maner constituencies respectively. Joining the BJP, Mr. Sinha - a famous educationist in Patna and author of several academic books - said he took the decision in “national interest”. The other two JSP leaders asserted



Bihar BJP president Sanjay Saraogi presenting party membership slip to Jan Suraaj leader K.C. Sinha in Patna on Wednesday. PTI

they would now remain in the BJP for life and would not go anywhere.

JSP chief in the ring
The Bankipur bypoll, scheduled for July 30, will witness a contest between Mr. Kishor and BJP nominee Neeraj Kumar Sinha. The BJP has fielded the small-time party worker, while Mr. Kishor, JSP founder and former poll-strategist, him-

self has thrown his hat in the poll ring this time. Earlier, the BJP had fielded Abhishek Kumar ‘Bunty’ on the seat. However, he withdrew his candidature a day after filing his nomination papers, citing “family reasons”. Party insiders told *The Hindu* that his withdrawal was a result of “bitter internal feud between party leaders”.

Now, road safety lessons await traffic violators in Delhi

Shrimansi Kaushik
NEW DELHI

When Chandan Kumar, a delivery agent in Delhi, was intercepted by the police on Sri Aurobindo Marg for riding his motorcycle without a helmet, he expected to be let off after paying a challan. Instead, he was made to sit through an impromptu session on road safety along with 15 to 20 other violators before being permitted to resume his journey. The exercise was part of ‘Traffic Path-shala’, a month-long awareness campaign being conducted by Delhi Traffic Police from July 1 to 31. Under the initiative, traffic personnel are holding 15-minute counselling sessions at selected hotspots using videos, charts, and interactive discussions to explain the consequences of traffic violations and the



Safety first: Police personnel conducting a 15-minute session on road safety for traffic violators in New Delhi. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

importance of adhering to road safety norms. Different districts are organising the sessions on different days during the campaign period. **‘Behavioural change’** “The idea is to encourage a change in behaviour rather than relying solely on monetary penalties,” said Sandeep Goyal, Deputy Com-

missioner of Police (Traffic), South. At the session attended by Mr. Chandan, Traffic Inspector Madhurendra Kumar urged participants to be mindful of vulnerable road users, including pedestrians, senior citizens, children, and animals. As a road safety video was screened from a police van, an official from the

Traffic Training Park at Baba Kharak Singh Marg reminded participants that safe driving was a shared responsibility. “While on roads, we are concerned about our own destination and travel. We need to be aware of those around us as well,” the official said. Among those present at the session was Gaurav, a student who was stopped for jumping a red light. “I was in a hurry as my mother was not well,” he said, adding that he was aware he had violated the rule. Traffic police personnel acknowledged that the additional delay was not welcomed by everyone. “It is understandable that many people do not want to delay their journey and stay back for a class, but lack of awareness is not the only reason why people break rules,” an officer said. According to the officer,

most violators are aware that they are breaking the law. “Many people have emergencies but several others also break rules for sheer thrill. As enforcers, we can only flag this behaviour. Real change comes when people cooperate.” **Badges awarded** As of July 13, Delhi Traffic Police has conducted 183 intersection drives, organised 226 sessions on road safety, and interacted with more than 5,600 violators. During the same period, it detected 696 cases of wrong-side driving, 246 instances of red-light jumping, and 319 cases of triple riding. Around 1,270 motorists were issued challans for riding without helmets. In a bid to encourage compliance, the traffic police have awarded badges to over 330 motorists for adhering to traffic rules.

‘Oil exploration only after resolving Assam-Nagaland border disputes’

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

The Konyak Union, the apex body of the Konyak Naga community, has asked the Nagaland government to proceed with the joint oil exploration with Assam only after the long-pending border disputes between the two States are resolved. The union insisted that territorial clarity, landowners’ consent, and stronger border security must precede the implementation of the bilateral agreement. The border dispute between the two States has claimed more than 150 lives since the 1960s, when Nagaland was carved out of Assam. The Konyak Union’s advisory board council and the union executive council recently reviewed the June

Konyak Nagas said territorial clarity, landowners’ consent must precede implementation of bilateral agreement

11 memorandum of understanding on oil exploration signed by the governments of Assam and Nagaland in New Delhi. The agreement was inked in the presence of Home Minister Amit Shah. In a statement on July 14, the Konyak Union said that the Nagaland government should first resolve disputed areas, particularly the Tizit-Naginimora belt and the boundary between Longwa in Nagaland’s Mon district and Pongchao in Arunachal Pradesh’s Longding district, before initiating oil exploration to

avoid future disputes. It also urged the government to ensure that the concerns, rights, and consent of landowners are taken into consideration before any final decision is made, maintaining that stakeholder participation is essential for a fair, transparent, and acceptable outcome. **Clarity sought** The Konyak Union also backed the recent stand of a Lotha Naga organisation, which sought clarity on the Disputed Area Belt and other border issues to safeguard Nagaland’s territorial integrity. Expressing concern over unresolved boundary issues in Mon district, the union alleged that Google Maps continues to inaccurately depict parts of Nagaland’s borders.

Bengal govt. forms judicial panel to probe corruption charges under Trinamool

Commission headed by retired HC judge to examine allegations of financial irregularities across govt. departments since 2011, recommend lodging of FIRs, submit periodic reports to State govt.

Senjuti Sengupta
KOLKATA

The West Bengal government on Wednesday notified the formation of a judicial commission to investigate allegations of institutional corruption and financial irregularities in various government departments during the 15-year rule of the Trinamool Congress (TMC) from 2011. According to the notification issued by the Home and Hill Affairs Department, the commission will be headed by retired Calcutta High Court judge Justice Biswajit Basu. It will also include a senior IPS officer, an IAS officer or a West Bengal Civil Service officer, and a West Bengal Revenue Service officer. The notification stated that the commission will examine allegations of corruption that took place from 2011 to May 2026 in several government departments, including Education, Food and Supplies, Relief and Disaster Man-



Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari had approved the formation of the judicial commission during a State Cabinet meeting on May 18. ANI

agement, Municipal Affairs, Panchayats, Housing, Fisheries, Industry, Land, and Public Works. “There has been widespread public concern about incidents of institutional corruption,” it read. The panel will look into allegations such as large-scale bribery, corruption in the distribution of Cyclone Amphan relief, misuse of funds under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme,

and irregularities in the midday meal scheme. **Governor apprised** “In view of the gravity of the situation, it has been conveyed to the Governor that it is necessary to appoint an independent judicial commission of inquiry to look into and examine such instances of institutional corruption and financial irregularities across all departments that occurred throughout the State during the said period,” it stated.

Eight inmates held in connection with death of prisoner

The Hindu Bureau
NAGERCOIL

On the heels of the arrest of three prison staff, the Kanniyakumari district police have taken into custody eight inmates of the Kanniyakumari district jail in Nagercoil in connection with the death of remand prisoner S. Sabari Varman in the early hours of Monday.

With the postmortem report revealing injuries on his body, the police have altered the case of suspicious death to that of murder. However, the motive is still being ascertained. According to the police, Sabari Varman, a differently-abled man from Ethankadu, was arrested on July 9 for selling banned tobacco products. A case was registered against him at the South Thamarakulam police station, following which he was remanded in judicial custody at the district jail in Nagercoil on the same day. He was found unconscious at his cell in the early hours of Monday, and was taken to Kanniyakumari Government Medical College and Hospital (KKGCMH) in Asiripallam,



MP Kanimozhi Karunanidhi consoling the victim’s family on Wednesday.

where doctors declared him dead on arrival. His family and relatives staged a demonstration in front of KKGCMH, demanding a probe into his death. They said they would receive the body only after the cause of death was established and action was taken against those responsible. The postmortem, conducted at KKGCMH on Tuesday, revealed 19 injuries, including abrasions in various parts of the body and a contusion on the back of the right hand. **MP meets victim’s kin** Meanwhile, DMK deputy general secretary and Thoothukudi MP Kanimozhi Karunanidhi visited the family of Sabari Varman and offered her condolences.

Gyanvapi dispute resolution set for the long haul with both sides saying no to mediation

Mayank Kumar
LUCKNOW

Lawyers familiar with the matter said on Wednesday that the resolution of the Gyanvapi dispute is likely to take longer after both the Hindu and Muslim sides in Varanasi declined mediation and asserted that the matter should be resolved by the courts. This followed a Supreme Court initiative to seek an amicable resolution in the case. Next steps would now entail a renewed process of formal court hearings, procedural requirements, frequent adjournments, and delays in evidence collection. The Hindu side asserts that the Gyanvapi mosque was constructed following the demolition of a temple during the Mughal period, while the Muslim side contends that it is a valid Waqf property and disputes the claims made by the Hindus.



The Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi. FILE PHOTO

“As both sides have rejected mediation, the dispute will not settle out of court. The case will now proceed to standard litigation or arbitration... it will be a time-consuming process,” said Adarsh Tiwari, a Lucknow-based advocate. Both the parties had appeared before the mediation centre at a Varanasi court on Tuesday as part of the apex court’s initiative titled ‘Supreme Court Action for Mediated Adjudication and Disputes Harmonisation Across Nation’,

which aims to promote the settlement of outstanding cases prior to a special Lok Adalat scheduled for August 21-23. The cases - *Rakhi Singh vs Anjuman Intezamia Masjid Committee*, *Anjuman Intezamia Masjid Committee vs Shailendra Pathak Vyas and others*, *Anjuman Intezamia Masjid Committee vs Lakshmi Devi and others*, were listed for mediation in the pre-Lok Adalat sitting. Rajesh Mishra, the special prosecutor for the Gyanvapi case represent-

ing the U.P. government, said the mediation panel included Additional District Judge Alok Kumar, civil judge (junior division) Nitin Singh, and senior advocate Mahendra Pandey. “Both parties appeared before the mediation panel during the hearing at the District Legal Services Authority and declined to settle the Gyanvapi case through mediation,” he told the local media. **Puja permitted** In January 2024, the Varanasi District Court had permitted puja in Vyas Tehkhana, the southern cellar of the Gyanvapi mosque. The Allahabad High Court then dismissed the Gyanvapi mosque committee’s appeal challenging the district court order, directing the Varanasi District Magistrate to make necessary arrangements for the Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple Trust to conduct worship rituals.

No plans to join TVK-led Tamil Nadu govt., says CPI

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

CPI State secretary M. Veerapandian on Wednesday clarified that there was no change in his party’s decision to extend outside support to the TVK-led government, and that it had no plans to join the Ministry. When asked about reports that the CPI was planning to join the government, Mr. Veerapandian told *The Hindu* that he had only said that the party would join the government when the time came for the Left to assume power in Indian politics. He said that the CPI had an alliance only with the Left parties, and that it entered into seat-sharing arrangements with other parties during elections. He also said the Left parties might contest the local body elections on their own if the situation warranted it.

High Court halts major functions of Kerala Waqf Board

The Hindu Bureau
KOCHI

The Kerala High Court has directed the Kerala State Waqf Board not to exercise any major functions, incur capital expenditure or make policy decisions without permission from the court. The judicial functions of the board must also be stopped.

The decision comes as the court found that the board had not been constituted according to the mandate of the Unified Waqf Management, Empowerment, Efficiency, and Development (UMEED) Act, 2025.

The Act requires the inclusion of two non-Muslim members and a Shia member on the board. Petitioners contended that at present there were nine members, without these

community members. Additionally, one of the petitions challenged the appointment of CPI(M) leader K.S. Hamsa as the chairperson of the board.

‘Follow mandate’
The Division Bench said the mandate of the UMEED Act must be followed.

The State government informed the court that it was prepared to reconstitute the board in compliance with the UMEED Act after considering the various allegations regarding the board’s composition raised in a batch of public interest litigation petitions before the court.

BJP leader Shone George had challenged the lack of non-Muslim members on the board. The Assembly of Christian Trust Services had challenged the board’s constitution.

Kerala seeks T.N. help to curb inter-State drug smuggling

Chennithala holds discussions with Vijay; Minister calls for coordinated efforts by southern States to eradicate drug menace; Kerala, T.N. to share information and intelligence on trafficking groups

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Kerala Home Minister Ramesh Chennithala met Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay on Wednesday and discussed the need to establish a coordinated mechanism among the five southern States to crack down on drug peddlers and combat the menace of narcotics.

Speaking to reporters at the Secretariat here, Mr. Chennithala said he apprised Mr. Vijay of the drug menace across the southern States and briefed him on ‘Operation Toofan’, the Kerala government’s anti-narcotics drive. He said the Kerala government had been successfully imple-



Joint fight: Kerala Home Minister Ramesh Chennithala with Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay in Chennai on Wednesday.

menting ‘Operation Toofan’ for the last 43 days, during which it had arrested more than 6,000 drug peddlers and registered nearly 5,500 cases.

He said the drug menace was one of the biggest issues facing not just one

State but the entire country. He said he had discussed various aspects of ‘Operation Toofan’ with Mr. Vijay and sought the Tamil Nadu government’s cooperation in nabbing those attempting to traffic drugs across the Tamil Na-

du-Kerala boundary. He said the Kerala and Tamil Nadu would work together to share information and intelligence between their police forces, and thanked Mr. Vijay for his commitment to combating drugs.

He said he had also recently met Karnataka Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar to seek Karnataka’s participation in the coordinated efforts against the menace.

Further, the Home Minister said he had invited Mr. Vijay to Kerala. “Our brand ambassador is Mohanlal. So, Mr. Mohanlal and Mr. Vijay, who is the brand ambassador for Tamil Nadu, will be together in Kerala for a big function in August. He assured us that he would come,” Mr. Chennithala said.

Madras HC nullifies registration of land owned by Palani math

The Hindu Bureau
MADURAI

The Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court on Wednesday allowed an appeal filed by Arulmigu Dhandapani Swamigal Madam (math) in Palani, and declared as “null and void” a controversial sale deed executed in favour of certain individuals with regard to 1.35 acres of land in Palani in Dindigul district.

A Division Bench of Justices C.V. Karthikeyan and R. Sakthivel allowed the appeal against a Single Bench order that had directed the Sub-Registrar to register the sale deed if the document was otherwise in order.

It said the appellant was not made a party before the Single Bench and the Sub-Registrar did not consider the objections raised before registering.

‘Contrary to law’

In the appeal, the math said the Single Bench order was contrary to law and facts of the case, and was liable to be interfered with. The Single Bench ought not to have allowed the writ petition at the admission stage without hearing all the necessary parties.

Without impleading the appellant as a party, filing the writ petition for the purpose of registering the property of the math was improper and illegal. The sale deed was executed between the parties as if private trust property was sold.

Allowing the writ peti-



Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court allowed the appeal filed by Palani math against a Single Bench order.

tion behind the back of the appellant was improper, the math said.

The math said the Single Bench ought to have considered that the petitioner suppressed the fact that the possession in respect of the property was in the hands of the Thakkar. Hence, permitting to register the sale deed would create unnecessary trouble.

Meanwhile, Justin Manikandan Subramanian, the Sub-Registrar (in-charge) who registered the document moved the High Court seeking anticipatory bail. He has been suspended.

Hearing tomorrow

He said on the basis of the order passed by the High Court he completed the process of registration. Justice K. Rajasekar sought the response of the CB-CID and posted the matter for hearing to July 17.

The court said the petitioner should not be arrested till then.

With poor rain, Cauvery panel decides to wait and watch

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The Cauvery Water Regulation Committee (CWRC), which met on Wednesday in New Delhi amid poor monsoon rains in Karnataka’s Cauvery catchment area, desisted from issuing any direction on water release to both the riparian States of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

The CWRC heard the arguments of both the States and decided to wait till July 28 to take stock of the situation with respect to storage, hoping that the catchment areas may receive rain by then, it is learnt.

No water: Karnataka
According to sources, Karnataka’s representatives argued that the State was not in a position to release the

required quantum of Cauvery water to Tamil Nadu as the Cauvery basin was facing water shortage.

However, the representatives from Tamil Nadu insisted that Karnataka immediately release the quantum of water as stipulated by the Supreme Court and the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal for the current period to help its farmers.

Concerns rise in border districts over low storage in Mullaperiyar

Sandeep Vellaram
IDUKKI

The Mullaperiyar Dam recorded alarmingly low water storage in July, dropping to 112.9 ft on Wednesday compared to 131.4 ft on the same day last year. This 18.5-ft deficit has been severely affecting farming activities in the bordering districts of Tamil Nadu.

It may also soon pose a threat to tourism in the Periyar Tiger Reserve (PTR) in Thekkady, as well as drinking water distribution in the Kumily and Chakkupallom panchayats.

PTR Assistant Field Director R. Lakshmi stated that boating and other tourism activities in Thekkady are currently running smoothly. “If this situation continues and the water le-

vel drops further, tourism will face disruptions,” Ms. Lakshmi said.

The low storage impacts not only Kerala but also the neighbouring districts in Tamil Nadu. Nearly 1.5 lakh acres of farmland rely on Mullaperiyar water, including 14,700 hectares in the Theni district alone. Due to the lack of water, these farmlands currently remain dry.

+ INBRIEF



New committee to study Bidadi township project

Even as farmers continued their protests against the proposed 9,600-acre Bidadi Township Project on the outskirts of Bengaluru, Karnataka’s Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar said the government would constitute a committee to examine the project’s merits and demerits. The government would take a decision on the project within three months after considering the committee’s recommendations, he said on Wednesday. He accused JD(S) leader and former Chief Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy of instigating the farmers to protest against the project.

Man from T.N. found dead in Kuppam; wife, child missing

A man from Tamil Nadu has been found dead near a hill shrine at Kuppam in Andhra Pradesh, while his wife and child who accompanied him, have gone missing, the police said. Ramesh, 24, a resident of Soolagiri village in Krishnagiri district, his wife, Hasini, and their one-year-old child were en route to the Mallappa Konda hill shrine, a Shiva temple in a forested area, on Tuesday, when they were allegedly intercepted by four youth. The police suspect that one of them was in a relationship with Hasini. The police said the group of youth could have murdered Ramesh.

Third COVID patient dies in A.P., 3 more test positive

Close on the heels of two COVID-19 deaths in Andhra Pradesh, a 66-year-old man died of the infection and comorbidities on Wednesday, while three others tested positive. According to the Health Department, the 66-year-old man tested positive for COVID-19 on July 3. He was also suffering from pneumonia, diabetes and hypertension and kidney problems. He was under treatment at RIMS, Kadapa, then SVIMS, Tirupati, and later at a private hospital. Of the three who tested positive, two are reportedly undergoing treatment at AIIMS, Mangalagiri.

Homestay owner’s arrest illegal, says Karnataka HC

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Observing that the fundamental rights of the citizens of India cannot be bartered away merely because the police received a complaint from an embassy of a country, the High Court of Karnataka has declared illegal the arrest of a Kodagu homestay owner after the alleged rape of a U.S. citizen by a housekeeper at the property in April this year.

The court also directed the State government to pay ₹5 lakh compensation to the owner for curtailing his personal liberty by arresting him illegally. Justice M. Nagaprasanna passed the order on a petition from the homestay owner.

Wait continues



Livelihood woes: Teaching job aspirants protesting on knees as part of their indefinite hunger strike in the Kerala capital on Wednesday. The candidates, who have cleared the lower primary school teacher test conducted by the Kerala Public Service Commission, have sought immediate posting, extension of the validity of the 2025 merit list, and announcement of vacancies within 24 hours. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Voters anxious about SIR: Telangana BJP

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

The Telangana BJP on Wednesday highlighted several concerns over the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, stating that the “strict requirement to link current details to the 2002 electoral rolls has created significant anxiety and barriers for genuine voters”.

In a memorandum submitted to Chief Electoral Officer C. Sudarshan Reddy, the party alleged that many households had not received enumeration forms as several booth-level officers had “bypassed” the mandatory door-to-door visits and instead op-

erated from static locations that were inconvenient for voters.

‘Names deleted’

Party leaders Marri Shashidhar Reddy and Ashok Venula, in the memorandum, said around 7,000 names had been removed from the electoral rolls in Karimnagar on grounds of similarities in names, even as SIR was still under way. This made a “mockery” of the Election Commission’s SIR process, they said.

The leaders alleged that many BLOs lacked a “basic, uniform understanding” of the SIR process and were unable to properly guide the public, leading to widespread confusion.

Karnataka govt. gears up to table much-awaited apartment Bill

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The Karnataka government has proposed a comprehensive overhaul of the legal framework governing apartments in the State by introducing the Karnataka Apartment (Ownership and Management) Bill, 2026, which seeks to repeal two five-decade-old laws and bring apartment ownership, management, and redevelopment under a single piece of legislation. The Bill will be tabled in the upcoming monsoon session of the Legislature starting August 6.

The major overhaul has been proposed in terms of fixing the competent auth-

A key provision is the transfer of ownership of project land, common areas to apartment owners

ority, the safety of older apartment complexes, dispute resolution, and accountability.

The proposed Bill will replace the Karnataka Apartment Ownership Act, 1972, and the Karnataka Ownership Flats (Regulation of the Promotion of Construction, Sale, Management, and Transfer) Act, 1972, which the government said no longer address the complexities of modern apartment

housing. “The existing laws have led to prolonged litigation, uncertainty for homebuyers, and disputes,” said Tushar Giri Nath, Additional Chief Secretary, Urban Development Department.

The legislation will apply to apartment projects with more than eight units. One of the key provisions of the Bill is the assignment of a competent authority to oversee the proposed Act. Another major inclusion is the transfer of ownership of project land and common areas to apartment owners.

The government has invited suggestions from the stakeholders on email at kaomabl@gmail.com.

Revanth seeks ₹1 lakh crore investment from IT major in Telangana

M. Rajeev
HYDERABAD

Inviting industry majors to invest in Telangana, Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy asserted that his government is firm on promoting the State as a model of development for the country as well as to the world in the coming days.

The government has launched the Telangana Rising 2047 policy along with exclusive policies for different sectors such as health and education in this direction.

‘Ease of investment’

“Policy paralysis and pick-and-choose method of granting permissions, incentives and others will not benefit the State. We have therefore come up with sector specific policies to ease the difficulties of investors,” he said.

The Chief Minister was speaking after laying the foundation stone for the data centre of global major Amazon Web Services in Bharat Future City, in Hyderabad periphery, on Wednesday. The development follows a framework agreement signed with Amazon Web Services during Telangana Rising Global Summit 2025 for an investment of ₹60,000 crore.

Recalling Amazon’s commitment of investing \$7 billion in the coming 14 years, he said it would not suffice the requirements of the State which was positioning itself as a \$1 trillion economy by 2034 and \$3 trillion by 2047. “I want Amazon to invest ₹1 lakh crore,” Mr. Reddy said, adding he would consider the requests of all investors for business expansion.

‘All talk’: SC pulls up court-mandated monitoring panel

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday questioned if any concrete work is being done by the court-mandated monitoring committee set up to address problems faced by people from the northeastern States living across the country, including racial discrimination and targeted violence.

Justice Sanjay Kumar asked if the committee’s meetings were only meant to “consume cups of tea”. “All talk, nothing seems to be done,” Justice Kumar said. The court’s oral observations were triggered when records submitted by the government referred to how the whereabouts of a woman who had sent a complaint to the committee remained a mystery. Justice Kumar asked how the woman could remain untraceable with no means of communication, given that she had emailed her grievance to the committee.

The committee is made up of a wide variety of senior government officials, including some from the Home Ministry and other departments and bodies. It also includes representatives from the northeastern States, including the



petitioner-advocate Alana Golmei.

The panel was formed to “monitor, oversee, pursue and review” the implementation of the M.P. Bezbaruah Committee report of July 2014 following the death of Nido Tania, a 19-year-old student from Arunachal Pradesh, in Delhi. Tania died from injuries suffered in an altercation after he was racially humiliated by a mob.

The monitoring committee was tasked to keep a watch over initiatives taken by the government to curb and deal with incidents of racial atrocities and violence, and to monitor the actions taken when such incidents occurred.

The panel was further empowered to receive, consider, and entertain complaints from victims of racial abuse, and forward them to National or State Human Rights Commissions or the jurisdictional police stations for enquiry and necessary action.

BSF initiates technical study to fence marshy Sundarbans

The Armed police force has been tasked to carry out the study to fence the challenging terrain along the land border with Bangladesh; exercise vital for national security, BSF chief tells locals

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

In a first, the Union Home Ministry is set to fence about 90 kilometres of the Sundarbans along the India-Bangladesh border in West Bengal, a challenging terrain characterised by mangrove forests, tidal swamps, embankments, and numerous creeks.

The Border Security Force (BSF), which is deployed along the Bangladesh border, has initiated a feasibility and technical study to erect the fence along the land border with Bangladesh, a senior government official told *The Hindu*.

At present, there are no barriers on the ground and the BSF has deployed Floating Border Outposts, or FBOPs, in the riverine areas to secure the border. Plans are afoot to augment marine patrolling, the official said.

Praveen Kumar, Director-General, BSF, had visited the Sundarbans from July 11 to 14 and reviewed the progress of the fencing work. “No fencing work has ever been done in the Sundarbans till now. The locals have been coun-



BSF Director-General Praveen Kumar interacts with local people in the Sundarbans. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

selling that fencing is a requirement and that it is vital for national security. The joint inspection by the BSF and Department of Irrigation will start soon,” said the official.

Protected area

As part of a public outreach, the BSF D-G met with local people and government officials in the area, a BSF statement said.

Almost 71 km of the border is contiguous with the Sundarbans Wildlife Sanctuary where no construction work is allowed as it is a protected area, the official said. “The three-day security review led by the D-G focused on time-

bound completion of fence-related work. The need for more searchlights and surveillance cameras to aid marine domination was discussed,” said the official.

Another official said that people were concerned about their land being acquired for construction of the fence, adding that the project gathered pace after the change of government in West Bengal.

“The previous government did not allow any joint survey of the land in the Sundarbans. Many people fear that they will lose their land and homes. Several mid-scale hotels and lodges which operate in

the area also raised concern as they might be asked to shift. They have been assured that the government will compensate and rehabilitate them,” said the official.

After the August 2024 ouster of the Sheikh Hasina government in neighbouring Bangladesh, the BSF enhanced patrolling and deployment along the border to prevent infiltration and other crimes.

“Though the Sundarbans is not a preferred route for infiltrators, it is used for trans-border crimes. After August 2024, additional security measures were taken up here,” said the official.

SIR schedule revised for Telangana, Delhi, Punjab, Karnataka

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Election Commission of India (EC) on Wednesday revised the schedule of the ongoing special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls for Karnataka, Delhi, Telangana, and Punjab, extending it by around 10-12 days.

These States are among the 16 States and Union Territories (U.T.s) where the third phase of the SIR is going on.

On Tuesday, the poll body rescheduled the SIR calendar for Andhra Pradesh and Haryana.

With the revised schedule, in Karnataka, the house-to-house enumeration phase, which started on June 30, will now end on August 8 instead of July 29. The rationalisation and re-arrangement of polling stations will also be held on August 8. The draft electoral rolls will be published on August 17 instead of August 8, and the final voter list will be published on September 18 instead of September 7.

In Telangana and Punjab, the enumeration phase has been extended to August 3 from July 24. The draft rolls will be published on August 10 as against July 31, and the fi-

The four States are among 16 States and Union Territories where the third phase of SIR is on

nal list will come out on October 12 instead of October 1.

In Delhi, the final voters’ list will now be published on October 19 and draft electoral rolls will come out on August 17 instead of August 5. The house-to-house visits which were scheduled till July 29 will now continue till August 8.

The EC has so far published draft electoral rolls for six States and Union Territories in this phase in which 7.09% names - 32.08 lakh out of 4.52 crore - have been deleted. Rolls for Odisha, Manipur, Mizoram, Sikkim, Uttarakhand, and Dadra and Nagar Haveli & Daman and Diu have been published.

With the third phase, the exercise will cover the entire country except Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, and Ladakh. Their SIR schedule will be announced after considering the completion of Phase 2 of the Census and the weather in the upper reaches or snow-bound areas.

SC refuses to entertain plea to curb social media content

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday refused to entertain a writ petition to curb podcasts and social media reels, saying the freedom allowed to citizens to approach the court under Article 32 of the Constitution for enforcement of their fundamental rights cannot be used as a ruse to politicise issues.

A Bench of Justices P.S. Narasimha and Alok Aradhe was hearing a petition filed by Mohd. Anas Chaudhary against the on-line circulation of allegedly derogatory comments posted by an influencer against Prophet Muhammad. The counsel for the petitioner highlighted the need to regulate content on social media. He said communally hurtful comments were being made online.

The Bench said the petitioner should ideally file a complaint in such cases. The petitioner’s counsel said that the plea was not about registration of FIRs, but was highlighting the need for curbs against abusive or hurtful social media posts. Justice Narasimha said the issue raised was not a case for an Article 32 petition and advised the counsel to take action permissible under the specific laws.

Justice Aradhe suggested the petitioner may approach the competent authority under the Information Technology (Procedure and Safeguards for Interception, Monitoring and Decryption of Information) Rules of 2009 with his grievances.

An oral mentioning was made in the top court in early July, about the comments made by an influencer against the Prophet during a podcast in June. The clip had gone viral on social media. The incident had been followed by the registration of multiple FIRs against the influencer.

Protest on wheels



Farmers take out a motorcycle rally to the Deputy Commissioner’s office in Amritsar, Punjab, on Wednesday to submit a memorandum against the proposed India-U.S. trade deal. They said the deal should not adversely impact the interests of farmers, workers and traders. PTI

ED files PMLA complaint in alleged U.S. visa fraud racket

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has filed a prosecution complaint against Red Leaf Immigration Private Limited and others in connection with an alleged organised immigration and visa fraud under various provisions of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

Among those named are Amandeep Singh, Poonam Rani, Ankur Kumar Kehar, Nitin Vij, Kamaljit Kansal, Overseas Partner, and Rudra Consultancy Services.

The ED initiated its probe based on multiple FIRs filed by police, following complaints by the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi. They allege conspiracy in-

volving preparation and submission of forged educational certificates, fabricated experience certificates, fake financial statements, and fraudulent proof of funds for securing U.S. student and visitor visas.

According to the agency, its investigation revealed that Red Leaf Immigration, managed by Amandeep Singh and Poonam Rani, operated a “systematic immigration fraud racket by targeting visa applicants who lacked the requisite academic qualifications or financial eligibility.”

“The accused persons charged substantial amounts from applicants for arranging forged educational credentials, fabricated work experience cer-

tificates, gap cover documents and temporary fund arrangements to falsely satisfy visa requirements. The entire visa application process, including communication with foreign universities and visa authorities, was controlled by the accused through email accounts operated by them,” it said.

“Overseas Partner, operated by Ankur Kumar Kehar, in conspiracy with Rudra Consultancy Services, operated by Nitin Vij, arranged temporary accommodation of funds in bank accounts of visa applicants to create a false impression of financial capability,” the agency said. The accused charged about ₹40,000 per applicant for providing such fund arrangements.

Congress asks Centre to clarify on U.S. Bill seeking 100% tariffs

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Wednesday asked Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal to clarify the Centre’s position after a bipartisan group of United States Senators introduced a Bill proposing 100% tariffs on imports from India and four other countries for continuing to purchase Russian oil.

The proposed legislation, initiated by Republican Senator late Lindsey Graham, seeks to impose punitive tariffs on India, China, Slovakia, Hungary and Azerbaijan.

European exemption

It exempts 15 European nations that continue to import Russian gas, arguing that such imports account for only a small share of their energy needs and that they are reducing their dependence on Moscow.

Congress media and publicity department chairman Pawan Khara questioned the Union government’s response to the new development, and said Mr. Goyal should explain its implications for India.

“These are not House Democrats. These are Republican Senators, backed by President Donald Trump, demanding 100% tariffs on India and four other countries for buying Russian oil,” Mr. Khara said in a post on X.

He added that India was being “humiliated” by the threat of punitive tariffs for pursuing its energy interests.

If enacted, the legislation would mark the first instance of the U.S. Congress explicitly authorising tariffs as a geopolitical instrument to penalise countries accused of allegedly financing another nation’s war efforts.

C-section complications row: kin of five Rajasthan women appeal to President for help

Press Trust of India
KOTA

The families of five women admitted to the New Medical College Hospital (NMCH), Kota, have written to the President of India seeking permission for euthanasia if they do not receive a kidney transplant. They sent a memorandum to Droupadi Murmu with the demand after the five refused dialysis and insisted on a kidney transplant or death.

The development comes after the five women underwent 32 rounds of dialysis in the past 68 days and continue to battle kidney infection suffered after their C-section delivery.

NMCH Principal Dr. Nishesh Jain said on Wednesday that the five new mothers with kidney complications were fully stable and fit to be dis-



Silent plight: One of the five women undergoing treatment at the New Medical College Hospital in Kota, Rajasthan, on Wednesday. PTI

charged. He said that the women were fit to go home and can receive dialysis on an outpatient basis.

Dr. Jain said if the patients refused dialysis, toxic waste would accumulate in the body, leading to severe health complications.

On transplants, the Principal said that a patient must be observed for three to six months for acute renal failure before being categorised as end-stage renal disease.

Mohan Lal, whose wife is undergoing treatment since May, said: “We cannot watch them suffer anymore. If they do not give us a written assurance for kidney transplants within 48 hours, we will stop bringing them for dialysis and let them die. We are living like walking corpses.”

The Rajasthan government has ordered a probe into the post-delivery complications at Kota hospitals.

Rath Yatra is Puri’s most spectacular festival: President

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

As Odisha prepares for the annual Rath Yatra, which begins in Puri on July 16, President Droupadi Murmu has shared a rare and deeply personal account of her lifelong devotion to Lord Jagannath, describing how her faith sustained her through personal hardships and continues to guide her in public life.

The President said that Lord Jagannath’s message of equality has always guided her own commitment to serving all sections of society. She said she silently prayed to Lord Jagannath while proceeding to Parliament to take the oath of office on July 25, 2022.

“I prayed to Mahaprabhu: ‘You are taking me to such lofty heights. I implore You to guide me at every step and always be with me. He listened to my prayer. He always res-



Droupadi Murmu

ponds to my prayers,” said the President.

Describing the Rath Yatra as the most spectacular among the many festivals celebrated in Puri, Ms. Murmu noted that it is the one occasion when Lord Jagannath, accompanied by Lord Balabhadra, Devi Subhadra and Sudarshana, leaves the sanctum of the temple to travel in majestic chariots along the Bada Danda to the Gundicha Temple, giving devotees an opportunity to have darshan outside the shrine.

(Full article is at [newsthlive/puri](https://www.newsthlive/puri))

INBRIEF



AI crash ‘draft final report’ will be ready by October: AAIB

More than a year after an Air India Boeing 787 Dreamliner crashed in Ahmedabad on June 12, 2025, killing 229 passengers and 12 crew members on board, the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau has informed the Supreme Court that it expects to complete its investigation within six weeks, with a “draft final report” likely to be ready by October. It informed the court that the investigation team has interviewed several witnesses, including Air India and Boeing 787 pilots, crew members who had previously flown with the pilots of the accident aircraft, air traffic control personnel, and specialists in human factors and crew resource management.

Two law students held for disrupting SC proceedings

A Delhi court sent two law students from Uttar Pradesh to 14-day judicial custody on Wednesday, in a case where they were charged with allegedly swearing during a Supreme Court hearing and assaulting security staff. The two spent two days in police custody before this ruling. The Delhi Police announced the arrest of Prabal Pratap Singh, 24, and Chander Bhan, 23, on Wednesday after a case was registered against them for disrupting court proceedings. According to the police, the incident took place on July 10, at the Supreme Court during a hearing involving *Prabal Pratap Singh & Another Vs State of U.P. (through Commissioner)*, in which Mr. Singh appealed for registration of an FIR against a police officer.

Marginal dip in number of rural job scheme workers

The analysis finds a dip in registered and active workers coinciding with shift from MGNREGS to VB-G RAM G; govt. counters the claim saying it does not reflect the continuous verification

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

In the fortnight following the transition from the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) to the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission Gramin (VB-G RAM G), the number of registered workers fell from 27 crore to 26.33 crore, a net reduction of 67.6 lakh workers, or 2.5% of the total workforce enrolled under the rural employment programme, according to an analysis by LibTech India, a consortium of academics and activists.

The number of active workers – those who have worked at least once in the last three years under the programme – also fell from 10.84 crore to 10.57 crore, a decline of about 26.3 lakh workers (2.43%).

The VB-G RAM G 2025 came into force on July 1, 2026.

‘Dynamic figure’ Rural Development Ministry officials, however, disputed the findings, saying the analysis covered only a short period and did not reflect the continuous veri-



An analysis notes that public data does not indicate the reason of removal or the gender, age or caste of the affected. ARUN KULKARNI

fication, updating and renewal of worker and job card records undertaken by States and Union Territories. The number of registered and active workers is a dynamic figure and changes as records are updated, the officials said.

The Ministry officials also put the onus on the States, arguing that they have to follow the Standard Operating Procedures prescribed by the Centre for any deletions. They added that no complaints had been received regarding denial of employment due to non-completion of e-KYC or face authentication and that about 84,000 Gramin Rozgar Guarantee Cards covering 1.91 lakh workers had already been

issued under the new law.

According to LibTech India, three States – Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and Telangana – accounted for a large portion of the net fall in registered workers and the decline in active workers. Bihar saw 5.98 lakh workers removed from the rolls, Uttar Pradesh 8.06 lakh and Telangana 7.2 lakh.

E-KYC in question

The group said that although transition guidelines provided that e-KYC-verified MGNREGA Job Cards would remain valid and workers should not be denied employment because of pending e-KYC, there was little clarity on how workers unable to com-

plete e-KYC or facial recognition-based verification would be protected from omission.

“The publicly available framework did not explain in comparable operational detail how workers unable to complete e-KYC or Face Recognition System (FRS) would be carried over, how omissions would be identified, or how prompt restoration would work,” said Venkateswarlu Kuruva, researcher at LibTech India.

LibTech described the latest decline as the fourth major reduction in worker numbers in recent years to coincide with a digital compliance measure, following Aadhaar-based payments in 2022-23, mandatory e-KYC in 2025 and facial recognition-based attendance verification in 2026.

The organisation noted that publicly available data do not indicate why workers were removed, whether they had pending e-KYC or facial recognition verification, whether prior notice was issued, whether Gram Sabha verification was conducted or whether an appeal mechanism was available. It also does not reveal the gender, age or caste of those affected.

SC seeks Centre’s status report on CBSE OSM glitches

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday asked the Union government to pay heed to the “frustration” children underwent due to the systemic failures and irregularities in the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE)’s On-Screen Marking (OSM) of Class 12 answer sheets in 2026.

The court sought a status report from the government detailing the progress made by a one-member probe committee of retired Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer and chairperson of the Capacity Building Commission, S. Radha Chauhan, tasked to unearth the reasons behind the technical defects.

“But what steps have been taken so far... look at the amount of frustration young children are having to face,” Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, heading a three-judge Bench, addressed Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, who appeared for the Centre.

The court was hearing a petition filed by Rakesh Binjola, represented by advocate Laxmikant Matadan Shukla, seeking a fair and reasonable inquiry into the “patent irregularities” found in the OSM evalua-

tion system. Mr. Shukla argued that over 17 lakh students had appeared for the Class 12 exams in May 2026, including his son, whose answer sheet could not be uploaded on the CBSE website.

OSM’s ‘anomalies’

The “general” prayer made about the faults in the OSM is being looked into by the Chauhan panel, which was appointed on June 2.

Justice Joyimala Bagchi, on the Bench, said the Centre was free to formulate the OSM policy, but the facts show, and the government had itself acknowledged, there were anomalies in implementation.

“You have a right to formulate the OSM policy, but the facts show there are some teething problems which you also acknowledge... we would like you to make improvements for seamless implementation,” Justice Bagchi addressed Mr. Mehta.

The top law officer said the government was not taking the court’s intervention on an adversarial note, and agreed to file the status report by July 24.

Mr. Binjola said the OSM system had been implemented for the first time without giving the evaluators any formal training.

In meeting with House panel, Ladakh villagers seek access to grazing lands along the LAC

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

Residents of villages along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh told a parliamentary panel visiting the Union Territory that they had lost access to their traditional grazing grounds following the border tensions with China in 2020.

The 15-member delegation, representing the border villages of Maan Pangong A and B, Leh, Ladakh, requested that nomadic pastoralists be permitted controlled access to India’s traditional grazing lands in coordination with security agencies, emphasising that the continued presence of local communities in these frontier regions contributes signifi-

India and China have concluded a series of agreements to maintain peace on the border

cantly to national security, Konchok Stanzin, former councillor, Chushul, said.

“The nomads of the border villages depend on these grazing grounds to rear their livestock. Whenever they go there, the Army stops them. We are not even allowed to bring loose earth from these no-go zones to build our huts, and collecting firewood is also not permitted. Before May 2020, we had free access to these areas,” Mr. Stanzin, who briefed the parliamentary panel, told *The Hindu*.

Govt. taking nation towards economic crisis, says Congress

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Wednesday accused the Narendra Modi government of steering the country towards an economic crisis, citing the latest wholesale inflation data that showed price pressures remaining elevated across several sectors.

The party demanded that Prime Minister Narendra Modi explain the government’s handling of the economy.

“In May, Modiji preached the entire country to save, and then his government imposed levies and burned up the public’s savings! West Asia War is just an excuse; the truth is that in the last 12 years, the BJP has built a dubious record of picking the public’s

pockets. Wholesale inflation has now reached 9.87%, the highest in 44 months. Retail inflation has climbed to 4.4%, the highest in 18 months,” Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said in a post on X, adding that food inflation too stood at 5.49%.

Higher input costs

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh noted that wholesale price inflation, which measures the rise in prices at the producer level, rose to 9.87% in June from 9.68% in May, marking its highest level in 44 months.

In a post on X, he said the increase reflected mounting economic stress, and claimed the Congress had repeatedly warned the government about the trend.

Govt. issues public consultation guidelines for highway projects after panel recommendations

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Taking cognisance of recommendations made by the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament, headed by senior Congress leader K.C. Venugopal, the Ministry for Road Transport and Highways has informed the panel that it has issued guidelines for structured public consultation in all future highway projects at the stage of preparing the Detailed Project Report (DPR).

Under the revised Request for Proposal (RFP) document for inviting bids from consultants to prepare DPRs, a mandatory provision for public consultation has been incorporated. For all brownfield projects, the Ministry in-



K. C. Venugopal

formed the panel that consultations will be held with the village sarpanch, the mayor or chairperson of the municipal body, the District Magistrate, and the State Public Works Department. For greenfield projects, consultations will additionally be held with the local MLA and MP.

The panel had, in earlier meetings, flagged concerns that highways were often being constructed by sub-contractors not listed

with the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), and who did not always comply with prescribed norms.

At the meeting on Wednesday, the NHAI informed the committee that it has introduced a requirement for all sub-contractors undertaking work worth 8% or more of the total project cost to register with it.

Reflecting on the deficiencies flagged by members regarding inadequate facilities at toll plazas, Mr. Venugopal pulled up both the NHAI and Ministry.

BJP MP Ravi Shankar Prasad pointed out that ambulances required to be stationed at toll plazas were often absent, leading to delays in emergency response on highways, sources said.



THE CROSSWORD+ 14847
(set by Afterdark)

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

SCAN TO PLAY

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16

17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24

25 26 27 28 29

16 Special wine (cold) altered muscle tone (7)

19 By deceit, cash given to sister's used to frame (7)

20 Gain a male animal (5)

21 Gladiator's role in South Africa's discussed centrally (9)

25 Explosive to primarily ruin someone like Epstein (7)

26 At the start, sudden noise baffled son entering a meeting (7)

28 Nurse corresponding with leading endocrinologist to join (7)

29 Son's team centre joins another team at beach (7)

Down

1 Touch actress badly to lose front tooth (6)

2 Goods arriving without name (6)

3 Limits excess centrally from rodents (4)

4 Spy's article creates rage (6)

5 Unruly trio can, at the border clandestinely get controlled substance (8)

6 Downer from French media worker (10)

7 Careful about one in car, say at America (8)

8 It's unique; spy replaces man with lady in difficulty (8)

14 Cooking device for breads used by South American (10)

16 I ate an egg of a marine creature (3,5)

17 Enthusiasm offers one clarity somehow (8)

18 Client of Atticus, Tom, Eric protected (8)

22 Leading an animal to the front provides benefit (6)

23 Judge's important to evict gangster (6)

24 Say, diva spotted in a bus in Germany (6)

27 Collect sample of son and wife to get blood group (4)

Across

9 Greed? It is not seen in female pilot (7)

10 For the most part, Tata Ace transports vitamin and salt (7)

11 Famous specialist follows eastern time (7)

12 Copper nabs snitch with soldier's attendant (7)

13 Agrees, but vacillates getting vegetable (5,4)

15 Drive to Marrakesh over partly (5)

SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

Solution to previous puzzle

P	U	T	S	M	G	A	N	A	C	T	E
A	O	B	O	N	O	U	A	T	A	R	
T	O	P	B	A	N	A	N	A	T	A	R
I	N	S	G	M	R	C	S	H	E		
E	N	T	H	U	S	E	T	O	R	I	S
N	E	I	L	O	N						S
G	A	T	E	T	G	T	I	L			
C	I	R	C	A		R	E	S	H	A	P
F	O	R	E	B	E	A	R				F
S	E	A	R								
O	A	T	E	T	O	N	E	N			
G	A	T	E	T	O	N	E	N			
H	I	N	G	S							
C	I	T	O								
H	E	C	A	T	I	O	N	E			

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

FAITH
Inner freedom, the Gita way

The Bhagavad Gita is a dialogue between two ambitious, high-performing individuals at the critical moment of their careers. One is a soldier who wants to reclaim everything he lost, the other is his adviser. The setting is the battlefield but the principles apply just as directly in a boardroom, a start-up or any place where the stakes are high, said Swami Mitranandaji.

Chapter XV, Verse 5 gives us Krishna's check list for people who want to win without being destroyed by the win. Krishna is not asking Arjuna to quit and become an ascetic. He is giving him the operating system for clarity under pressure. First, the words *nirmana moha* ask you to be free from pride and illusion. In business, that means your title, your last success or your ego cannot drive the decision. Check the data, not your image.

Next, the words *jita sanga dosha* is a call to conquer attachment. Be committed to the mission, not addicted to one outcome, one client or one quarter's result. Third, the words *adhyatma-nitya* means stay anchored in purpose. Understand why you are doing this, beyond money or applause. Fourth, the words *vinivrita-kamah* ask you to be free from compulsive craving. Ambition is fuel. Craving is noise. Leaders with craving chase every shiny object and burn out teams. Fifth, *dvandvair vimuktah sukha-dukha-samjnaih*: asks you to rise above the pairs of opposites – success and failure, praise and criticism. If a win makes you arrogant and a loss makes you collapse, you are not leading. You are reacting. Do the job. However, do not let the job own you. That is the eternal abode Krishna points to: inner freedom in the middle of the fight.

A new era of Indian ecology looks to its horizons, and to the ground

The second Indian Wildlife Ecology Conference in Haryana became a forum where researchers from universities, government agencies, NGOs, and field stations got together to figure out where the discipline is heading – using insights into evolutionary history, long-term monitoring, public policy

Ankita Rathore
SONEPAT

Wildlife ecology in India looks different today than it did a decade ago. Climate change, habitat fragmentation, invasive species, and rapid development are all reshaping ecosystems faster than scholars can document them. Thus, ecologists are interested in how biodiversity has changed as well as how it is likely to change next.

Just these questions shaped the second Indian Wildlife Ecology Conference (IWEC), at Ashoka University in Sonapat, Haryana, on July 10-12, where researchers from across India came together to discuss the future of wildlife ecology in the country. Conceived by the late wildlife biologist Ajith Kumar as a national platform for India's wildlife ecologists to exchange ideas, IWEC has grown into a forum where researchers from universities, government agencies, NGOs, and field stations together figure out where the discipline is heading – using insights into evolutionary history, long-term monitoring, public policy, technology, and public health.

The inaugural conference, held in 2024, demonstrated the breadth of this community. At the second conference, this year, the participants repeatedly returned to the same question: how can ecologists anticipate ecological change? As Indian ecology reaches towards prediction across biological scales, disciplines, and even the divide between science and policy, much of that ambition still depends on staying close to the ground, to fieldwork and local institutions.

Biodiversity at scale

The conference's three paired plenary sessions showed how wildlife ecology is expanding across biological scales, taking in evolutionary history, ecosystem change, bird conservation, citizen science, and animal physiology. The throughline was that predicting the future requires evidence spanning both the deep past and the decisions animals every day make to survive.

The opening plenary traced biodiversity through deep evolutionary time. Jahnavi Joshi (CSIR-Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, Hyderabad) spoke of how geological history and climate gradients shaped the diversity of woody plants in the Western Ghats. Using phylogenetic analyses, she examined whether different parts of the mountain range function as evolutionary 'cradles', where new species originate, or 'museums', where ancient lineages persist. She argued that both patterns can help predict how species will respond to future environmental change.

Maresh Sankaran (National Centre for Biological Sciences, Bengaluru) turned to the future of India's montane grasslands under climate change, drawing on projections from the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change to show how rising temperature, increasingly variable rainfall, and extreme weather will reshape these already vulnerable ecosystems, alongside other human-driven pressures such as altered nutrient cycles and land-use change.

Evolutionary history has set the stage and long-term monitoring is today tracking how biodiversity is changing. Ashwin Viswanathan (Nature Conservation Foundation, Mysuru) spoke of citizen-science platforms such as eBird India generating observations at scales impossible in conventional field studies, helping researchers track migration and species distributions. His example of choice was the rusty-tailed flycatcher, whose migration across Uttarakhand and eastern India researchers reconstructed using citizen-science data.

Asad Rahmani (Bombay Natural History Society) – who has been surveying the pressures on the country's birds such as habitat loss, infrastructure, and climate change – pointed to the drying of Kashmir's Shalabugh wetland and urged scientists and citizens alike to speak up for wildlife. Anusha Shankar (Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Hyderabad) described physiology as an underutilised lens connecting processes across biological scales, drawing on energy expenditure and body temperature measurements in hummingbirds.

Maria Thaker (Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru) likewise drew on studies of the spiny-tailed lizard to show how desert reptiles regulate body temperature and adjust their nutritional requirements across seasons. "Lizards, like other ectothermic vertebrates, can behaviourally thermoregulate, but will



A group photo of the attendees and organisers at IWEC 2026. ANKITA RATHORE

not be able to handle future climate warming," she said. Rather than just record where species occur, researchers are also increasingly trying to understand the mechanisms that determine how organisms and ecosystems respond to environmental change. The emphasis is moving from description towards prediction. Yet every one of these predictive tools, including from physiological measurements to citizen-science records, rests on long, even tedious periods of observation.

Understanding to action

However, scientific understanding alone cannot conserve biodiversity. A special session, called 'Leveraging Global Policies for Local Conservation in India', turned the focus to how ecological knowledge can inform decision-making in India while recognising that conservation everywhere is shaped by the interplay of science, governance, and society. The discussion, moderated by Asmita Kabra (Ashoka University), asked how international biodiversity commitments could be adapted to India's ecological and social realities. Its speakers agreed global frameworks succeed only where local institutions and evidence-based implementation back them up.

In particular, Jagdish Krishnaswamy (Indian Institute for Human Settlements, Bengaluru) called for experts to move beyond species-centred conservation to protect the ecological processes that sustain entire landscapes. Following the success of India's protected areas, he argued that the next frontier is conserving landscapes beyond their boundaries and integrating biodiversity, livelihoods, and climate resilience.

Vivek Menon (Wildlife Trust of India), in turn, said conservation centred on species remains indispensable because "the natural world sustains us, but we are losing the species that sustain it". He added that while conservation cannot

completely halt biodiversity loss, "it significantly reduces how fast it occurs". International agreements can provide a common framework, Menon and Krishnaswamy argued, but lasting conservation depends on effective local institutions and the communities that share these landscapes with wildlife. In other words, predictions and commitments are both only as effective as the institutions and communities that can act on it.

Across disciplines

While the plenary sessions highlighted what wildlife ecologists are studying, the conference's panel discussions noted how the discipline itself was changing. Advances in artificial intelligence, genomics, environmental DNA, and computational tools are transforming ecology research, allowing scientists to ask questions that would have been difficult, or even impossible, just a decade ago. Yet throughout the conference, speakers also cautioned against viewing technology as a replacement for ecological understanding.

In a discussion called 'Extinction of Experience: The Decline of Field-based Ecology', moderated by Robin Vijayan (Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Tirupati), panellists discussed how ecology is adapting to rapid advances in artificial intelligence and genetics. These tools have expanded the scope of ecological research, the panel noted, but could not substitute for the understanding that comes from directly engaging with nature. "Unless and until we have field logic, we won't be able to analyse our data well," Bilal Habib (Wildlife Institute of India) said.

Another panel examined the complex issue of free-ranging dogs through the intersecting lenses of ecology, public health, animal welfare, and urban governance. And rather than advocate a single approach, the discussion laid out

the scientific and policy challenges of managing free-ranging dog populations in Indian cities and their edges.

Panellists also reflected on how terminology shaped public discourse. Chandrima Home (Srishti Manipal Institute of Art, Design, and Technology, Bengaluru) argued that the label "free-ranging dogs" captured these populations more accurately than "stray" or "feral", since only a small fraction comes into conflict with wildlife or livestock. Other speakers discussed the role of Animal Birth Control programmes alongside the need to improve waste management and stronger municipal governance, arguing that dog populations track food availability as closely as any carnivore does in the wild. As Anindita Bhadra (IISER Kolkata) put it, "We want our cities to be smart, but we can't manage our garbage." Both, in fact, made the same case from opposite directions: that technology cannot replace field logic and that a problem like free-ranging dogs cannot be solved by ecology alone.

Spider silk on the breeze

The conference's parallel symposia carried this range of inquiry further as researchers also presented work on river ecosystems, disease ecology, bats, insects, behavioural ecology, environmental DNA, wildlife corridors, and conservation technologies, drawing ecology into the conversation through genetics, physiology, epidemiology, and the social sciences. Sara Kamat, a PhD scholar at Bharati Vidyapeeth (Deemed-to-be University), Pune, has used advanced molecular methods to map how seasonal changes in diet shape the gut microbiome of Indian grey wolves, offering insights into how carnivores persist in changing environments. Swapnil Kiran (CSIR-CMMB Hyderabad) spoke about her work on quantifying the economic burden of snakebite mortality and morbidity in rural India using a community-based ecological epidemiology approach. Sibasish Sahoo (Amity University, Noida) has documented how Asian elephants change the way they behave in the mining landscapes of Keonjhar, Odisha, to navigate increasingly fragmented habitats, utilising a mix of field-based, spatial, and analytical ecological methods. The three researchers' work was a reminder of how wide ecological methods range today.

Overall, over three days and 197 talks, the throughline described a discipline that has become ambitious – especially more integrative and more willing to speak to policy and public health – even as it remains, at its core, a science of the ground. In a special address, philanthropist and one of the conference's sponsors Rohini Nilekani likened wildlife ecologists to the breeze that carries a spider's silk, allowing it to cast a web that would otherwise be impossible to build. Likewise, individual strands of conservation become meaningful only when they connect.

(Ankita Rathore is a science communicator and writer whose work focuses on science and technology policy, research, and higher education. rathoreankita024@gmail.com)



Attendees at the conference read a poster. ANKITA RATHORE



A view of Taipusi in China's Inner Mongolia region, in 2007. It is the centre of the 'Green Wall' project, a buffer that slows the Gobi desert's expansion. AFP

China's 'Great Green Wall' tames desert growth, but fight not over

Associated Press

For half a century, millions of workers have repeated a task across the deserts in northern China: inserting forearm-length sticks into shifting sand, first in a row, then in an intersecting line, gradually forming a grid. Then saplings are planted at the centre of each small square.

The technique, known as "straw checkerboards", is a simple yet widely used method to stabilise sand dunes against the wind and help plants take root by using water supplied through an irrigation system.

The widespread lattice it created across the sand has become the iconic image of China's decades-long campaign against the spreading of desert conditions, known as the Three-North Protective Forest Program or the Green Great Wall.

The generations of work have yielded measurable progress, but scientists caution that preserving the gains will require decades of continued effort.

For a long time, drought, overgrazing and farming removed vegetation, harmed the soil and made areas vulnerable to wind and sandstorms. That kind of degradation of the land over time is known as desertification. The area of desertified land in northern China peaked in 2000, and it has been reduced by over 1,000 sq. km each year since then, according to data published by state media. The Chinese government said the initiative launched in 1978 has played a crucial role in transforming vast regions covering nearly half of China from "the desertification advancing and people retreating" to "greenery advancing and the desertification retreating." Forests planted by the program now cover a cumulative 500,000 sq. km.

"The broad significance of the Three-North Program is not only the scale of restoration, but the long-term political commitment behind it," said Barron Joseph Orr, chief scientist for the U.N. Convention to Combat Desertification. He added that reversing desertification is possible when it becomes part of long-term development strategies.

The progress is the result of the efforts of frontline sand-control workers, along with top-level planning and substantial state investment, said Zhu Jiaojun, a scientist at the Institute of Applied Ecology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, who has long been dedicated to the construction and management of the program. He added that increased rainfall in recent years in some areas has made vegetation restoration easier.

"The achievement of desertification combat is due to people's hard work and a bit of luck with climate," he said.

According to long-term monitoring data by Zhu's team, China's desertified land has shrunk by around 10% overall since 2000, and areas of severely or extremely desertified land have decreased by more than 40%. Forest cover in the program area has risen from around 5% in 1978 to 14% in 2022.

In a recent government-organised media tour to a corner of Kubuqi Desert, about 800 km to the west of Beijing, 60-year-old Yin Yuzhen recounted her early days of being a sand-control worker.

Four decades ago, she recalled, the sand often blew so thick that it made it hard to see a short distance. "But now we can see the sun. We can see the green in the distance. We can see the road," said Yin. Zhu, the scientist, estimated that over 300 million rural labourers have been involved in the program, mostly on a paid, part-time basis.

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Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Cost of energy relief package planned by Germany for 2027

13.3 € billion. The German government plans an energy cost relief package for businesses and consumers worth €13.3 billion (\$15.2 billion) in 2027, to be drawn from the Climate and Transformation Fund, the Finance Ministry said on Wednesday. REUTERS

Number of Ebola cases in Democratic Republic of the Congo

2,000 More than 2,000 Ebola cases, including 754 deaths, have been recorded in the DR Congo, where the World Health Organization warns the outbreak may be two to four times larger than official figures suggest. AFP

Persons affected due to flood situation in Arunachal Pradesh

1 lakh. The flood situation in Arunachal Pradesh worsened on Wednesday, with 26 of the State's 28 districts affected and the number of people hit by the deluge crossing one lakh, an official bulletin said. The floods and landslides have so far claimed seven lives and injured 29 people across the State. PTI

Value of goods exported on India-U.K. trade pact's first day

140 \$ million. India has exported goods worth \$140 million to the United Kingdom at zero duty under the comprehensive economic and trade agreement (CETA), which became operational on Wednesday, Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal said. PTI

Dementia risk that could be prevented or delayed

45 in per cent. Up to 45% of dementia risk could be prevented or delayed, the World Health Organization said on Wednesday, citing modifiable risk factors such as tobacco and air pollution. It is the seventh leading cause of death. AFP

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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The problem with China's 4.3% growth

It's the slowest growth since 2022, when China was still in the grips of the pandemic, and below the government's already-lowered annual target of 4.5-5%; the country is facing multiple challenges of a real estate slowdown, sluggish consumption, and serious challenges in the job market

WORLD INSIGHT

Ananth Krishnan

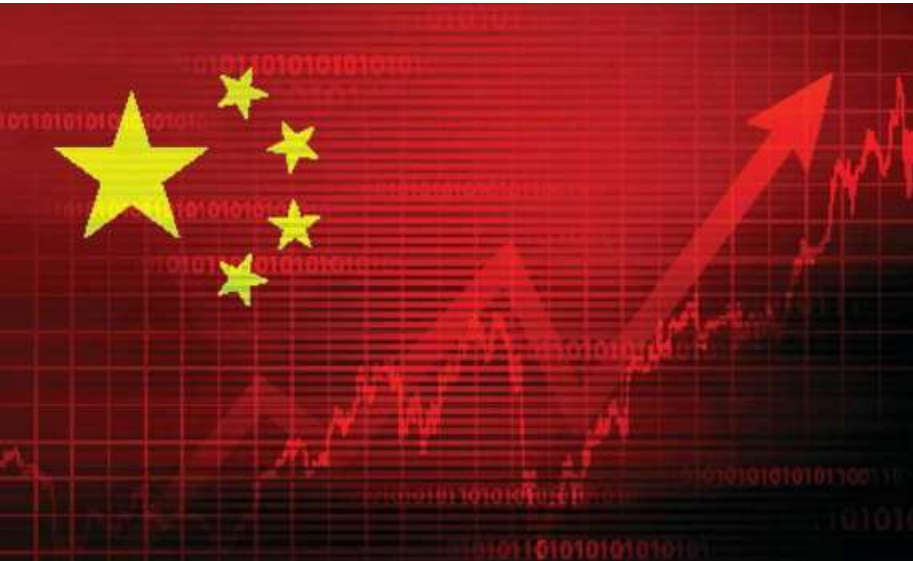
China's economy grew 4.3% in the second quarter of 2026, according to data released on Wednesday by China's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). With growth falling to the lowest in more than three years and below the government's already lowered annual target of 4.5-5%, attention has turned to how the Chinese government is likely to deal with multiple challenges of a real estate slowdown, sluggish consumption, and serious challenges in the job market.

A meeting of the ruling Communist Party's Politburo slated for July-end is likely to offer some clues. China's surging exports have emerged as a bright spot for Beijing, while raising questions for India and other trade partners that are grappling with ever-widening trade imbalances.

What does the latest data show? China's GDP expanded by 4.3% in the second quarter, down from 5% in the first quarter. This marked the slowest growth since 2022, when China was still in the grips of the pandemic. Significantly, growth fell below the annual target. In March 2026, China's National People's Congress (NPC), or Parliament, announced a 4.5-5% target for the year, which was the lowest since 1991.

Other economic indicators released on Wednesday showed a 5.7% drop in fixed-asset investment and sluggish retail sales — an important marker of consumption, which the government hopes will drive future growth for a historically investment-reliant economy.

In May, retail sales fell 0.6% from last year, another low since the pandemic. June showed a slight recovery to a 1.1% increase in retail sales of goods. Usual caveats apply about China's economic data, which China's former Premier Li Keqiang himself reportedly once advised were for “reference only” (and that other indicators, such as freight and power consumption, were arguably more revelatory about the state of the



China's GDP expanded by 4.3% in the second quarter. The numbers reveal how the government wants to portray the state of the economy and may signal potential policy changes. GETTY IMAGES

economy). At the same time, it is important to note that economists still closely study China's official data, as numbers reveal how the government wants to portray the state of the economy and may signal potential policy changes. Most economists have noted improvements in the reliability of statistics, with numbers becoming harder to fudge coinciding with the global integration of China's economy and more transparency into the performance of Chinese companies, many of which are publicly listed.

What is driving down growth? If real estate is about “location, location, location”, China's slowdown story is in many ways about “real estate, real estate and real estate”. In the first half of the year, property investment fell 18%, a remarkable statistic for an economy once driven by real estate growth. This isn't only about the property sector. The spillover effects are hard to overstate.

An entire swathe of the economy is in a slump, from construction to every related industry that has for decades relied on a booming property sector, from lighting to furniture. Then there is the psychological impact in a country where most people's savings are locked into real estate given

the low returns from regulated interest rates that make bank deposits unappealing. Investing abroad is also not an option given the tight capital controls, although the stock market has emerged as an alternative avenue despite its volatility.

This has further dampened the willingness of Chinese consumers to spend, along with other persisting anxieties such as rising healthcare and education costs. Still, there are bright spots for the Chinese economy such as the rapid growth in China's high-tech industries and the continuing expansion of Chinese exports, from electric vehicles to most recently, an extraordinary surge in the exports of air-conditioners to Europe amid a summer heat wave. Trade still remains robust for China, growing 17% in the first half of the year. Exports grew for 11 consecutive quarters to \$2.1 trillion in the first six months of the year.

How is the government likely to respond? All eyes are on an upcoming meeting of the Politburo, the top policy-making body of the Communist Party of China, set for late July. Mao Shengyong, deputy director of the NBS, said on Wednesday the government was likely to “introduce targeted, more proactive and effective

policies in response to changing circumstances”, without specifying. Boosting domestic consumption and minimising job losses are likely to top its concerns, especially with many graduates currently entering the workforce. Urban unemployment remained flat at 5% in June. Mr. Mao said “efforts will be stepped up to secure the steady development of employment”, with a target to create 12 million new urban jobs in 2026, despite the concerns about hiring impacted by AI. Earlier this week, China announced a first of its kind five-year plan for consumption, with a 2030 retail sales target of 60 trillion yuan (\$8.86 trillion), a 20% rise from 2025.

Addressing the property sector — the elephant in the room — is one major challenge. The government has walked a tightrope of avoiding what it calls “systemic risks” while trying to protect buyers (as it needs to, if consumption is to revive) while not bailing out many developers. This is part of an ongoing effort to reform the sector and curb speculation, after Chinese President Xi Jinping's declaration in 2016 that “houses were for living in and not speculation”.

The broader problem for Beijing is that it's not only property developers but local governments also have been hard hit by the slump, with real estate sales a major contributor of revenues. Many tier-two and tier-three cities have seen a major cash crunch, impacting spending on infrastructure and social services. The extent of the crunch remains unclear with some taking to fudging data to mask the state of their finances, as the Communist Party's own anti-corruption watchdog warned recently. It cited the example of one plot of land being sold “18 times” in the southern city of Nanning “without ever changing hands”, reported the *South China Morning Post*, with the fudge allowing “the city government to artificially shore up its fiscal revenue by 2.83 billion yuan (US\$416 million) in 2024”.

“Captivated by quick gains,” it warned, “some authorities engaged in accounting gimmicks to reflect substantial rises in fiscal revenue, masking actual budget strains.”

THE GIST

▼ Economic indicators released on Wednesday showed a 5.7% drop in fixed-asset investment and sluggish retail sales — an important marker of consumption, which the government hopes will drive future growth for a historically investment-reliant economy.

▼ The broader problem for Beijing is that it's not only property developers but local governments also have been hard hit by the slump, with real estate sales a major contributor of revenues.

Digitisation and efficiency in criminal justice system

The shift in approach to justice has contributed to making the criminal justice system more citizen-oriented

LETTER AND SPIRIT

C.B.P. Srivastava

Recently, the Centre has announced that India aims for full digital rollout of its criminal justice system from July 1, 2027 after which the procedures related to investigations and trials under the new criminal laws will be recorded digitally through the Interoperable Criminal Justice System. The efficiency of any criminal justice system largely depends on the procedural efficiency beginning from the registration of the first information report (FIR) to investigation, filing of chargesheet outlining specific charges levelled against the accused and presenting the evidence and witness testimonies gathered to substantiate them, trial and finally the disposal. In the

digital system the data is stored on the government's cloud platform, MeghRaj.

Understanding criminal justice system The criminal justice system comprises the police, courts, prisons, forensics, and prosecution services, and aims at ensuring that individuals who suffer injury or loss at the hand of others can present their cases and seek justice.

Justice cannot be delivered unless the rights of the accused and the interests of the victim and the society are balanced. This has been the fundamental principle of the criminal justice system, particularly in common law countries that follow the adversarial system. These countries base their legal systems primarily on judicial precedents and uncodified case law rather than strict statutory codes. This principle also gives the accused a fair chance to present his case in accordance with the tenets of natural justice, that is,

the rule of fair hearing (*Audi alteram partem*). In other words, no person should be condemned unheard. The system seeks to ensure procedural fairness. On the other hand, the inquisitorial system is practised in civil law countries, where rules are codified into comprehensive written statutes rather than shaped by judicial precedent. Under this system, the judge plays an active role in investigating the facts and determining the outcome of the case on the basis of inquiry and investigation. Thus, the precision of decision depends largely on the skills and prudence of the judge concerned.

Changed attitude The reforms in the criminal law have opened a new avenue for the delivery of justice. To be more appropriate, the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) have been replaced by the Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita

(BNS) and Bhartiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) with the idea of transformation. While the erstwhile penal code was implemented with an idea to punish the accused, the BNS believes in the delivery of justice through retribution. The new code has a democratic approach, placing greater emphasis on individual than on the state in matters relating to crimes. The criminal procedure code believed that trial of a 'criminal' was being conducted whereas the BNSS considers an accused as a citizen whose rights should be balanced with the interests of the victims without any prejudice. Thus, the shift in approach to justice has contributed to making the criminal justice system more democratic and citizen-oriented, while strengthening the protection of the principles of natural justice that are embedded constitutional framework of India.

Reforms in the system It is well established that every system requires periodic reform to remain responsive to changing needs and circumstances. The judiciary plays a vital role in this process by guiding the state through its directions and rulings. Against this backdrop, it is important to note that courts have laid down procedures governing several aspects of the criminal justice system. Through their decisions, courts often seek to fill legislative gaps in

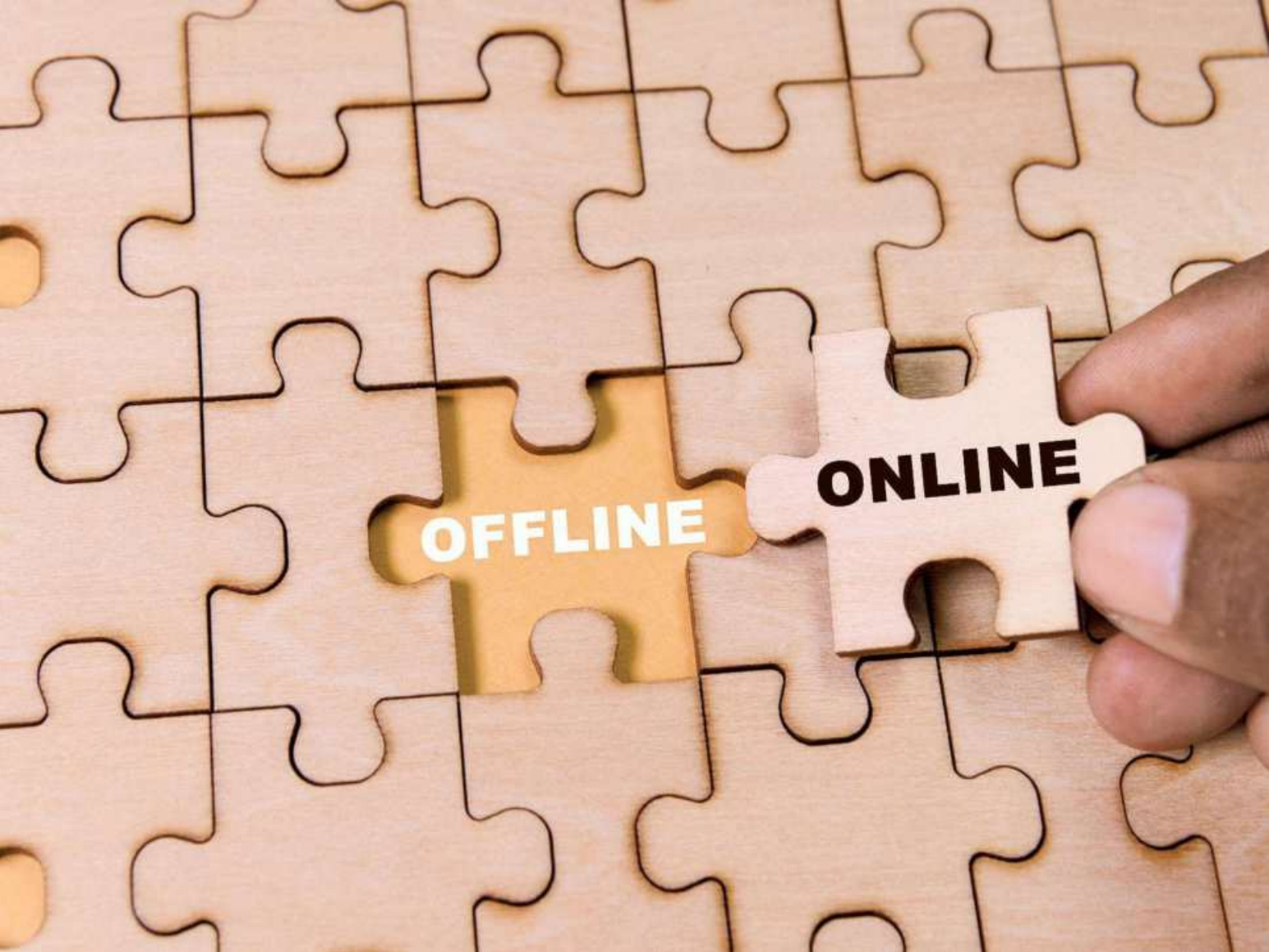
areas where the law is silent, thereby ensuring the effective administration of justice. For example, the Supreme Court in *Visakha v. State of Rajasthan (1997)* gave guidelines to prevent sexual harassment of women at workplace holding that such an act violates Articles 14,15 and 21 of the Constitution.

The recent announcement by the Centre to enhance the efficiency of the criminal justice system through digitisation assumes considerable significance. In the field of forensics, the new criminal laws have made forensic examination of crime scenes mandatory for offences punishable with imprisonment of seven years or more. In view of this requirement, the number of forensic laboratories has increased from 129 in 2023 to 154 in 2025. However, according to the National Crime Records Bureau, only 46% of FIRs were digitally transmitted to courts. Since this accounts for less than half of all registered cases, it suggests that the digital chain of the criminal justice system remains incomplete.

Although most states have implemented various components of the criminal justice digitisation system, progress remains uneven. In this context, full digital rollout by 2027 will fill this gap and make the system more efficient.

The author is President, Centre for Applied Research in Governance, Delhi.

BIBLIOGRAPHY



Online culture is no longer a subset of culture, but its very foundation, with the digital space now serving as the primary space where culture is being created. GETTY IMAGES

From creators to memes: how the Internet came to shape culture

As the boundary between the real and the virtual blurs, three books explore how the Internet has transformed everyday life, suggesting extremely online humans are no longer an aberration, but a product of the world where identity and meaning are increasingly shaped by screens and algorithms

Abhishek Baxi

For much of its early life, the Internet was an escape from the real world, a place one “went” to. In India, in the beginning of the digital revolution, many of us often visited booths to access the Internet – mostly to check our emails or search for information on Google. With the Internet now ubiquitous and available to all, that distinction has collapsed. Today, we live in a culture shaped by both the real and the virtual, often at the same time. The shift is so complete that it is almost invisible.

How do we understand this transformation? Three books – Taylor Lorenz’s *Extremely Online* (Simon and Schuster), Anurag Minus Verma’s *The Great Indian Brain Rot* (Bloomsbury Publishing India), and Santosh Desai’s *Memes for Mummyji* (HarperCollins India) – approach the subject from different angles, but together they show how the Internet has become our primary cultural habitat.

From a tool to a stage

Lorenz’s work provides the global scaffolding for this story. Drawing on years of reporting on Internet culture for *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and *The Atlantic*, she chronicles the rise of creators – the people who are online to make money – and how the Internet turned ordinary people into commentators and performers, in *Extremely Online*.

She provides a rosy picture of the Internet, as a place of endless opportunity and democratisation. She writes, “Blogs offered readers everything that legacy media couldn’t, revealing what writers really thought.” These blogs and forums, she argues, evolved into a culture where visibility slowly became a form of currency. As a result, the self is now curated; it is constantly fed into algorithms. The shaping and evolution of the self has become a public project. Lorenz tries to capture the moment when not just us, but the Internet itself transformed – from a tool to a stage, which then became the default mode of being for many of us.

The Indian story

Her book provides the global story. But when it comes to India, there is something far more chaotic taking place. Verma’s *The Great Indian Brain Rot* argues that India’s digital life cannot be understood through the western lens. His essays, written with a satirical edge, show how caste, class, aspiration, and misinformation shape the Internet. The “brain rot” he describes is not a lament about screen addiction or cringe content online; it is a commentary on how digital life amplifies the tensions in society.

According to Verma, the Indian Internet is a place where the earnest and the frivolous, the ordinary and the bizarre, coexist. As we scroll, we come across political propaganda right after an astrology reel. Or we see caste-based trolling thriving alongside self-care

content. For many creators, the Internet is a platform that fulfils their desire for upward mobility as well as virality; the latter often helps them achieve the former. Cheap data and inexpensive smartphones have ensured that everyone has access to the Internet, which in turn has created a cultural churn that is still unfolding.

The digital and the domestic

Desai has long been one of India’s most perceptive observers and interpreters of the everyday life. In *Memes for Mummyji*, he argues that the meme, the WhatsApp forward, the short video, and even the AI slop that we all consume are not trivial artefacts; they contain our humour, anxieties, and aspirations, and give us a sense of belonging.

His observations reveal how deeply the smartphone has embedded itself in the Indian household, just like the pressure cooker. It has changed how people think and express themselves. We see it around us: our parents, who once struggled with technology, now send us emojis. And family WhatsApp groups, like drawing rooms, are arenas for affection, conflict, and negotiation. In short, the digital and the domestic are no longer separate spheres.

What these three books show is that online culture is no longer a subset of culture, as it once was, but its building block. In other words, the online space is where culture is now being made. On platforms such as Instagram, strangers unknowingly shape our identity and how

we present ourselves. On YouTube or X, we post jokes and then watch nervously to see how quickly they travel, how viral they become. We share political statements through memes and hilarious videos.

Of course, this does not mean that the offline world has disappeared. For instance, when a protest begins online, it can gain momentum on the street, as we saw recently with the Cockroach Janata Party movement. We share memes online, but also discuss them in everyday conversation. If you happen to be a chronically offline person, taking part in daily conversations can be challenging if you are not up-to-date with the latest Internet lingo.

Lorenz reminds us that the Internet has given voice to people who were once excluded from public discourse. Verma warns us that the same systems can deepen inequalities and amplify prejudices. Desai shows us that our digital life is shaped by our everyday existence – our rituals, vulnerabilities, and negotiations.

Together, these three books suggest that “extremely online” humans are no longer an aberration. They are a product of the world we have built – a world where our identities, our sense of community, and the meaning of life itself are constantly mediated and determined by screens and algorithms.

Abhishek Baxi is an independent journalist covering the intersections and faultlines of technology, society, and culture.

THE DAILY QUIZ

The late great Sam Neill delivered versatile performances far beyond Jurassic Park. A quiz on his horror movie exploits

Mohammed Hidhayat

- QUESTION 1
- The actor portrayed the adult Damien Thorn, the Antichrist, in the third instalment of this famous film franchise, which centres on a child born to the Devil.
- QUESTION 2
- Shot in West Berlin, Neill acted opposite Isabelle Adjani in this psychological horror drama, which has attained cult status since its release.
- QUESTION 3
- Neil took a sinister turn in this sci-fi slasher set aboard a haunted spacecraft, delivering the famously chilling line: “Where we’re going, we won’t need eyes to see.”
- QUESTION 4
- He starred in genre master John Carpenter’s lovecraftian homage as an insurance investigator probing the disappearance of a horror writer.



Visual Question: Sam Neill plays a corporate criminal-cum-vampire who plans to profit from a company that sells blood. Name the film which stars Ethan Hawke in the lead role. LIONSGATE

- Answers to the previous day’s daily quiz:
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? **Ans: Twttr and Noah Glass**
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? **Ans: 2017 and so tweets fit into single SMS messages**
3. Which astronaut sent the first tweet live from outer orbit? Also mention the year the tweet was posted. **Ans: Timothy Creamer and 2010**
4. Which politician, who once used the platform to declare victory in the Presidential election [“four more years”], is among the most followed accounts on X? **Ans: Barack Obama**
5. Which user proposed the introduction of a popular feature of the platform used to categorise content on the platform? Identify the feature. **Ans: Chris Messina and Hashtag**
6. Visual: The iconic blue bird logo became synonymous with the platform. Who were the designers who designed it? **Ans: Philip Pascuzzo and Douglas Bowman**

Early Birds
Nobody answered all the questions correctly.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

S. Upendran

What is the meaning of ‘heist’? (V. V. Annapoorani, Bangalore)

First, let’s deal with the pronunciation. The “ei” is like the “y” in my and by. “Heist” can be used as a noun and a verb. When used as a noun, it means robbery or theft. Here are a few examples.

The heist didn’t go according to plan. Several people were killed.

Did you know that there was a jewellery heist this afternoon?

When you “heist” someone, you rob him of something. The word can also mean “to steal”. Here are a few examples.

Ranjit heisted a car and drove it all the way to Shillong.

After they had heisted the passengers they began to kill them.

Is it OK to say “parapet wall”? (P. V. Srinivasan, Chennai)

The dictionary defines “parapet” as a “low wall at the edge of a high roof, bridge, etc”. Since the word “parapet” means a wall of some kind, you needn’t say “parapet wall”. But you do hear a lot of people saying exactly that.

When someone says “Would you mind repeating what you just said?”, should the reply be “Not at all”? (S. S. Saravanan, Madurai)

Well, it depends on what you mean. If you don’t mind repeating what you have just said, then the reply “Not at all” is correct. If, on the other hand, you say “Yes”, it implies, “Yes, I do mind repeating what I just said”. Many non-native speakers of English have problems with such questions.

What is the difference between ‘expire’ and ‘die’? (M. Damodaran, Trivandrum)

The word “die” is the informal of the two. “Expire” is considered by many to be literary. When you “die” you cease to live; all signs of life cease to exist. The word can be used not only with people, but also with things; things which have the appearance of life – echo, topic, music, etc. Here are a few examples.

The smile that was splitting Hema’s face died when she saw Arun.

The firemen were waiting for the flames to die out.

The word “expire”, on the other hand, means “to breathe out air through the lungs”. When you say that someone has “expired”, what it means is, the person has expelled air for the last time! In other words, he has stopped breathing and is therefore dead.

Like the word “dead”, “expire” can be used with things as well. When you say that something has expired, it implies that it has reached its limit and cannot be further extended. When something “expires”, its ending is usually gradual and is expected; when something dies, its ending may be sudden and totally unexpected. For example, people usually die in an accident; they do not expire in one. When you cannot extend your lease, you say it has expired; you cannot say that it has died.

Farheen’s contract with the company expired last week.

The battery died the second week.

Published in *The Hindu* on April 17, 2001.

Word of the day

Convalescence:
gradual healing (through rest) after sickness or injury

Synonyms: recuperation, recovery

Usage: During my convalescence, I thought that others in the world must be suffering like me.

Pronunciation:
newsth.live/convalescence

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ˌkɒn.vəˈles.əns/

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

A IN-X

Business

SpaceX's slide risks turning blockbuster IPO into confidence test



Much hyped: A live feed shows SpaceX CEO Elon Musk on the day of SpaceX's IPO at Nasdaq MarketSite, U.S. REUTERS

Reuters
NEW YORK

SpaceX's slip close to its initial public offering (IPO) price risks turning a marquee stock-market debut into a confidence test, potentially unsettling retail investors and complicating decisions for other companies weighing high-profile listings. Elon Musk's company, spanning rockets to artificial intelligence (AI), debuted on June 12 and soared in the ensuing days, at one point valuing the company at well above \$2 trillion. Since then, trading has been rocky. The stock has slipped below its \$150 opening price, but remained above the \$135 offer price, with concerns about lofty tech stock valuations continuing to weigh on global indices. SpaceX shares are at risk of falling below that level. They ended on Tuesday down 2.2% at \$136.08, the lowest closing level since the IPO, a week after they started trading as part of the Nasdaq 100 index.

A break below the IPO price would be a psychological blow for SpaceX shares, said Matthew Maley, chief market strategist at Miller Tabak.

"It raises the narrative that the stock is up on fluff, on speculation, on froth, and not on real fundamentals," Maley said.

Investors may be disappointed

Investors who bought into the excitement around SpaceX's listing, "hoping to 'make a killing' will be disappointed," said Greg Halter, director of research at Carnegie Investment Counsel. He said weakness in SpaceX would put it more in line with 30 years of heavily hyped IPOs, where average and median returns over the first month are often negative.

SpaceX did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Price discovery, not panic

A drop below the IPO price would not be unusual for a newly listed company. Shares of Cerebras Systems, which went public in May, have dropped below the IPO price, and Meta, formerly known as Facebook, fell similarly after its debut.

Investors often fixate on IPO prices and early trading, said Ryan Lee, senior vice president of product and strategy at financial services firm Direxion.

"The reality is, (SpaceX) is still undergoing some of this price discovery process," Lee said.

A fall for SpaceX below \$135 would reflect "normal, albeit painful" market mechanics, especially as investors, venture capitalists and employees sell shares after lockups expire, said Gabriel Shahin, CEO at Falcon Wealth Planning.

"A near-term dip below the \$135 threshold would not fundamentally alter our current positioning or cause us to panic-sell," he said.

Some investors think SpaceX's stock performance could influence the market for future public listings. OpenAI and Anthropic are eyeing the public markets. Neither company responded to a request for comment.

Carnegie's Halter said companies and investment banks considering large IPOs this year are watching SpaceX closely. "No one wants an IPO to flop or have the initial price be ratcheted down," Halter said.

But Direxion's Lee said SpaceX's capital raise could encourage some companies with large funding needs to move faster.

"If I'm OpenAI or if I'm Anthropic and I'm in this true arms race to build the frontier AI model and I need capital, I'm going to try to beat the other one out the door," Lee said.

Risking retail scepticism

A drop below the IPO price could hit hard retail investors, who received about 20% of the allocation.

"Many novice investors have approached SpaceX with a 'meme stock' mentality, buying in with capital they cannot afford to lose," Shahin said, warning that losses could fuel perceptions that markets favor insiders. "The market needs to understand that post-IPO volatility is normal."

Underwriters typically support stocks in the first 30 days and may do more for SpaceX given the deal's size, the public attention and the fact other high-profile offerings are imminent, said Maria Llerena, director of financial research at Domini Impact Investments.



Inside South Korea's world-beating bear market with high volatility

KOSPI down about 25% from record high; leverage stokes volatility to unprecedented levels; SK Hynix shares ride rollercoaster after blockbuster U.S. listing; explosive earnings growth at semiconductor giants Samsung Electronics and SK Hynix continues to underpin the investment case

NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters
SEOUL

When South Korean President Lee Jae Myung set a 5,000-point target for the Korea Composite Stock Price Index (KOSPI) last year, it looked wildly ambitious and needed a market that was going sideways to nearly double.

Just barely a year later, the index blasted through 8,000 in a record run driven by an AI-fuelled surge, but Lee insisted South Korean stocks were still cheap.

Now that spectacular ascent has morphed into one of the market's most bewildering reversals. The KOSPI has plunged into a bear market, shedding a quarter of its value since late June, yet remains by far the world's best-performing major equity market this year.

The whipsaw highlights both the power and peril of South Korea's artificial intelligence (AI)-fuelled stock boom. Explosive earnings growth at semiconductor giants Samsung Electronics and SK Hynix continues to underpin the investment case. But a rally turbocharged by margin debt, concentrated in just two stocks and increasingly disconnected from the broader economy, has left regulators wary and investors exposed to violent swings.



Two-stock show: A currency dealer at the Korea Composite Stock Price Index (KOSPI). VIA REUTERS

lators wary and investors exposed to violent swings.

Wake-up call

"It's a wake-up call," said Francis Tan, chief strategist for Asia at Indosuez Wealth Management in Singapore.

"Both for those who are greedy and those who are fearful," he said. "For those who were fearful ... it's a great time to buy in, but if you are already overweight this gives you a reminder that exposure (to chips) can be a volatile game."

The KOSPI on Tuesday was trading below 7,000 points and has shed about 25% from its record closing high of 9,114.55 points, confirming that market has been on a bearish mode



KOSPI has plunged into bear market, shedding a quarter of its value since late June, yet remains by far the world's best-performing major equity market this year

since late June.

Even so, it remains up roughly 60% this year, trouncing the 10% gain for MSCI's broadest gauge of global equities.

"Just as it went up explosively, it went down explosively," said Lee Seung-ho, a 24-year-old college student. He took out margin loans to turn 10 to 20 million won into 300 million

won in the bull run, before seeing it evaporate.

"I think people like my mom and grandma, while saying Samsung is South Korea's No.1 company, do not fully understand the risks of leveraged investments (and) think about them rising twice as fast, without thinking of falling twice as fast."

Volatile ride

Few stocks showcase the market mania like SK Hynix, which rode a tidal wave of borrowed money to a tripling of its share price, helping it pull off a record \$26.5 billion U.S. listing by a foreign company. The stock debuted 14% above its offer price.

Yet the same stock is simultaneously experienc-

Semaglutide: inflection point for Indian generics?

Santosh V. Perumal
CHENNAI

More than a supply chain issue and missing first-mover advantage, Semaglutide episode exposed systemic chinks and could prove costly for India's pharmaceutical industry, which supplies about 20% of the world's generic medicines by volume.

With the expiry of Novo Nordisk's primary patent in India this March, Semaglutide – the active ingredient in the Danish firm's diabetes and anti-obesity drugs Ozempic and Wegovy – emerged as one of the most commercially significant pharmaceutical molecules in the world, potentially creating a multi-billion-dollar opportunity for the Indian drug-making industry, world's third largest by volume and 11th largest by value.

Reflecting significant interest from the domestic pharmaceuticals industry in developing own generic version, more than 40 Indian firms have reportedly announced plans to launch lower-cost products.

Sun Pharma, Mankind Pharma, Dr. Reddy's, Zydus, Lupin and Alkem are among the local manufacturers that outlined plans to introduce generic versions of Semaglutide in India with an estimated more-than 10 crore adults living with diabetes, the second-highest number globally after China.

Patent expiries

Indian drug manufacturers also hope to cash in on markets of Brazil, Canada, China, South Africa and Turkey where patent expiry is imminent.

These five countries, which together account for pharmaceutical spending exceeding \$350 billion annually, constitute a major



A shocker: Dr. Reddy's suspended supply of generic semaglutide after finding impurities in the API. GETTYIMAGES/ISTOCK

catalyst representing a significant new avenue for export-led growth for complex products such as semaglutide, biosimilars and specialty generics, according to IQVIA, which utilises big data and artificial intelligence to help biotech and pharmaceutical companies accelerate drug development.

Expiry of patents has historically fuelled the growth of India's pharmaceutical industry. Following patent expiry of atorvastatin (Lipitor), developed by Pfizer, in 2011; Indian firms rapidly entered the market with lower-cost generic versions to lower bad cholesterol and tryglycerides, enhancing foothold in regulated markets such as the U.S. and Europe.

The expiry of patents on clopidogrel (Plavix), an antiplatelet medicine marketed by Sanofi and Bristol Myers Squibb, in 2012 created a major opportunity for Indian firms to quickly unveil affordable alternatives that turned to be widely used in cardiovascular care.

When sildenafil (Viagra) lost patent protection in 2012, several Indian manufacturers entered the fray.

The patent dispute around imatinib, developed by Novartis, became a landmark case in India's

pharmaceutical history.

The Supreme Court's 2013 verdict allowed Indian firms to continue producing affordable generic versions for leukemia patients, reducing annual treatment costs from over \$25,000 to a small fraction of it.

The primary base patents for sofosbuvir expired in 2025, even as Gilead Sciences granted voluntary licences to several Indian companies to manufacture generic versions to treat chronic Hepatitis C virus infections.

Indian drug makers have converted the loss of patent exclusivity into opportunities for export expansion, lower medicine prices and greater access to healthcare.

Industry estimates suggest competition from generic makers could substantially cut the treatment costs by more than 65% over time due to zero patent premiums rather than cheaper manufacturing, while still leaving sustainable profit margins for efficient drug makers.

If Indian pharmaceutical companies can deliver high-quality peptide medicines, they can make greater inroads into emerging markets before the U.S. and Europe could see patent expiry in early 2030s.

The government's pro-

duction-linked incentive – a ₹15,000 crore outlay to boost domestic manufacturing of high-value medicines, complex generics, and active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) – has also been advantageous for the domestic firms.

Reputational risks

Quality failures carry an economic cost far exceeding the value of the affected product itself and India cannot afford to remain mute as stakes are high with the country contributing significantly to ensuring affordable medicines globally by supplying over 50% of Africa's requirement for generics, about 40% of generic demand in the U.S. and approximately 25% of all medicine in the U.K.

The latest incident, which, however, began as an internal issue, could have compounded India's reputation risks. The recent quality-related setbacks not only could attract global scrutiny but also make a dent in the optimism of the Indian generic drug makers, at least in the short run.

India's largest generic player in this segment, Dr. Reddy's Laboratories, recently suspended supplies of its generic semaglutide, a complex peptide concoction made through sophisticated biotechnological processes, after its internal inspection detected impurities in the API during production scale-up, amid New Delhi's mission of 'Make in India' in critical APIs.

Supply of new injectable batches could be expected by late October or early November. The pecuniary loss from delayed sales may be temporary but damage to investor sentiment and export credibility can persist for years.

ing the most wrenching volatility in its history, tumbling 14% in Seoul on Monday, while a twice-leveraged exchange traded fund (ETF) tracking the shares plunged more than 30% in Hong Kong. The selling fed on itself, amplifying declines and helping drag the KOSPI 8% lower.

Samsung Electronics and SK Hynix together now account for just over half of the KOSPI, meaning sharp moves in either stock can overwhelm the broader market.

"The impact of single-stock leveraged products on the index is higher than in other countries due to the high share of Samsung and SK Hynix in the KOSPI," said Park Woo-yeol, an analyst at Shinhan Securities. By comparison, a massive U.S. stock such as Nvidia represents only 7% of the S&P 500.

The KOSPI's volatility index stood at 82.07 on Tuesday, after hitting a record high of 97.99 on June 29, compared with 28.85 at end-2025.

South Korea's Financial Supervisory Service said it would monitor the products and investigate excessive marketing, if needed. The Bank of Korea told a lawmaker it was watching whether single-stock ETFs could distort markets and increase volatility.

Foreign selling

Foreign investors have

pulled a record of nearly \$110 billion from South Korean equities this year, largely to prevent the country's soaring market value from skewing portfolio allocations, leaving domestic retail investors carry much of the buying burden.

Retail investors bought 13.2 trillion won worth of KOSPI shares this month after purchasing 42.4 trillion won in June. Their borrowed investment in KOSPI shares stood at 28 trillion won on July 14, versus a record high of 29.8 trillion won on June 24.

"Korea is still the biggest portfolio overweight, but I started to reduce," said Alexander Redman, chief equity strategist at CLSA. "What worries me is that retailers are in the driving seat, because they use a lot of margin."

To be sure, forecast profits at Samsung and SK Hynix have risen so sharply that forward price-to-earnings ratios have actually fallen this year despite share prices more than doubling.

Yet some seasoned investors are staying away.

"I don't like to buy markets that have been going straight up, so I'm not doing anything," said Jim Rogers, co-founder with George Soros of the Quantum Fund.

"I like things to be depressed and to have lots of unhappiness and gloom around. That's not the case in South Korea yet."

could delay India's entry into one of the fastest-growing segments of the global generic pharmaceutical industry.

Global regulatory scrutiny is expected to intensify as agencies increasingly focus on manufacturing practices rather than simply bioequivalence.

The reputation risks (from semaglutide issues) had briefly translated into diminishing value of the pharmaceutical sector as brokerages axed earnings estimates and price targets, reflecting concerns over delayed revenue and lost competitive advantage.

Redefining landscape

More than a temporary production disruption, which according to reports could well extend until October 2026, it marks a transition in India's pharma industry from competing primarily on low-cost manufacturing to competing on technological sophistication, process reliability and quality compliance at global standards.

In what could redefine India's pharmaceutical industry, the semaglutide issue tests the country's ability to compete in the complex peptide therapeutics as the previous successes (from patent expiries) largely involved small-molecule drugs, whose manufacturing processes were comparatively straightforward.

Scaling up production of peptide-based drugs without compromising quality remains a major technical challenge.

Consequently, success in this market depends not merely on patent expiry but also on manufacturing excellence and regulatory compliance because regulatory credibility is a strategic asset.



WASHINGTON

U.S. military will be out of country by end of September, says Iraqi PM



The U.S. military will leave Iraq by the end of September, Iraqi Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi said on Tuesday, following a 23-year presence. Meanwhile, explosions were heard on Wednesday near the U.S. consulate in Iraq's Erbil, as air defences shot down drones. No group has claimed responsibility for any attacks. AP

WASHINGTON

U.S. Senators vie to levy 100% tariffs on countries buying oil from Russia



A bipartisan group of U.S. Senators unveiled a Bill that seeks to impose 100% tariffs on five countries, including India and China, for purchasing oil from Russia. The Bill, brokered by late Republican Senator Lindsey Graham, exempts 15 European nations that buy gas from Russia from the tariffs. PTI

MUZAFFARABAD

Nine killed and dozen wounded in protests in Pak.-occupied Kashmir



Nine persons were killed and a dozen wounded in renewed clashes between supporters of the banned Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC) and security forces in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, an official said on Wednesday. "Seven civilians, one paramilitary personnel and one police officer were killed," officials said. AFP

PHOENIX

Pat Oliphant, Pulitzer-winning political cartoonist, dies at 90



Pat Oliphant, an influential political cartoonist known for creating caricatures of U.S. and world leaders, died on Monday. He was 90. Oliphant died at his home from age-related issues, said his son, Grant Oliphant. During the 1980s, his political cartoons appeared in more than 500 publications in the country and around the world. AP

Trump threatens to hit Iran power plants, bridges next week if no deal

'We're going to knock out all their power plants. We're going to knock out all their bridges unless they get to the table and negotiate,' says U.S. President, adding that strikes will continue; U.S. says Iran had attacked seven ships over the past week

Agence France-Presse
WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump said on Tuesday he would expand U.S. strikes on Iran next week to target power plants and bridges if Tehran does not make a deal. "Next week it gets really bad for them because next week comes the power plants. Next week comes the bridges," Mr. Trump said in an interview with Fox News. "We're going to knock out all their power plants. We're going to knock out all their bridges unless

they get to the table and negotiate." Mr. Trump's comments came as U.S. forces carried out strikes against Iran for a fourth day in a row and reimposed a naval blockade on the country's ports. A fragile June 17 ceasefire between the two sides has effectively collapsed, with the focus on control of the crucial Strait of Hormuz. Asked how long the U.S. strikes would carry on, Mr. Trump replied: "They'll continue until I say it's enough." Meanwhile, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard



Energy targets: The reactor building of the nuclear power plant, just outside the southern city of Bushehr in Iran. AP

Corps threatened to close "all other export corridors that benefit the U.S. and its allies", Iranian media reported. "Regional energy exports are either shared by all, or denied to all," the IRGC said in a statement

carried by Iran's IRNA state news agency on Wednesday. A senior Houthi official warned on Monday that the group was prepared to close the Bab el-Mandeb Strait – a move he said could send oil prices soaring to \$200 a barrel – if Saudi Arabia continued to attack Yemen, according to a report on Iran's Press TV website. The United States said Iran had attacked seven commercial ships over the past week, leading to nearly a dozen crew members being killed, missing or injured.

India-U.K. social security pact is not retrospective

Sriram Lakshman
LONDON

The India-U.K. Double Contributions Convention (DCC), allowing temporary Indian and British workers an exemption from paying social security contributions in their host countries for 60 months, is not retrospective, i.e., it will not apply to Indians already working in the U.K. and Britons working in India before July 15. The DCC came into effect on Wednesday alongside the India-U.K. Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA). Normally, temporary foreign workers – called "detached workers" in the U.K. – are exempt from U.K. social security contributions known as National Insurance (NI) for the first 12 months. The India-U.K. DCC has increased this exemption from 12 to 60 months for detached workers. However, guidance issued by the U.K. clarifies that individuals already working in the U.K. immediately before Wednesday are not considered "detached workers" under the DCC and are hence subject to U.K. law on social security contributions. National Insurance contributions are paid by both the employee and employer, normally. The employee could pay up to 8% of gross salary generally and the employer up to 15% of gross salary as NI contributions. The DCC applies only to employees arriving in the U.K. on or after Wednesday and who are not expected to remain in the U.K. for more than 60 months. His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) adds that in these cases those seeking an exemption should get a "certificate of coverage" from India's Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) as evidence that they are making social security contributions in India and are exempt from U.K. NIC.

Double Contributions Convention applies only to employees arriving in U.K. on or after Wednesday

tribution is paid by both the employee and employer, normally. The employee could pay up to 8% of gross salary generally and the employer up to 15% of gross salary as NI contributions. The DCC applies only to employees arriving in the U.K. on or after Wednesday and who are not expected to remain in the U.K. for more than 60 months. His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) adds that in these cases those seeking an exemption should get a "certificate of coverage" from India's Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) as evidence that they are making social security contributions in India and are exempt from U.K. NIC.

Trump spy nominee will not say Biden won 2020 election

Reuters
WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump's nominee to be the top U.S. spy, Jay Clayton, refused on Wednesday to directly acknowledge that the Republican President lost the 2020 election despite repeated questioning by Democrats in his Senate confirmation hearing. Mr. Trump "isn't in the room today," Democratic Senator Mark Kelly of Arizona told Mr. Clayton. "If you can't disagree with him when he's not in the room, are you going to be able to disagree with him when you're sitting across from him?" Propelled by Mr. Trump's claims that U.S. elections are "rigged" and



Jay Clayton

his refusal to accept his 2020 electoral loss to Democrat Joe Biden, the administration has sought to increase federal oversight of U.S. elections. Legal experts say such an effort would take power away from states in violation of the U.S. Constitution. Mr. Clayton said only that Mr. Biden had been "certified" as President,

while saying, "I am not an election denier." Mr. Trump will deliver a national address on Thursday night about newly declassified intelligence on U.S. elections and what the White House calls voting machine vulnerabilities. Mr. Clayton's Senate Intelligence Committee hearing on his nomination to serve as director of national intelligence led to shouting when he repeatedly refused to acknowledge that Mr. Biden had been elected in 2020. Mr. Clayton lacks extensive traditional intelligence agency experience, but said he has worked on security matters while chairing the Securities and Exchange Commission and as Manhattan U.S. Attorney.

Impending doom



Most vulnerable: Ice statues depicting a farmer and a builder placed by Greenpeace activists, melt under the sun, during a demonstration to highlight the impacts of global warming as a heatwave grips Italy, near the Colosseum, in Rome, on Wednesday. REUTERS

France adopts landmark Bill on right to assisted-dying

Reuters
PARIS

French lawmakers on Wednesday adopted a Bill that will create a legal right to assisted dying for adults with incurable illnesses, capping an intense ethical and political debate. The legislation will, under strict conditions, allow a person who requests it to receive a lethal substance. Access to assisted dying will be restricted to adults who are French citizens or legal residents in France, and who suffer from a serious and incurable illness that is life-threatening. The lower house of Parliament, in a final vote, adopted the text by 291 votes to 241.

Sri Lanka is 'always willing' to host India-Pak. sporting events, says Minister

Meera Srinivasan
COLOMBO

Sri Lanka is "always willing" to host sporting events featuring India and Pakistan, Sports Minister Sunil Kumara Gamage said, pointing to the island's proximity and Colombo's strong ties with New Delhi and Islamabad as advantages. "Not just cricket, we are willing to extend our fullest cooperation and support to host any game between India and Pakistan if they make a request. Both countries are our close friends and partners," he said. Speaking to The Hindu at his office in Colombo, Mr. Gamage further said Sri Lanka is looking forward to welcoming cricket fans from India to watch the Test series next month. India is scheduled to tour Sri Lanka in August for a

Test series, with matches scheduled at the Sinhalese Sports Club (SSC) in Colombo and the Galle International Stadium in the southern coastal district. "We saw a large number of Indians travelling to Sri Lanka earlier this year for the [ICC Men's] T20 World Cup that we co-hosted with India. We hope that there is a similar interest in the Test series too. Sri Lanka offers a lovely environment for sporting events, and as we did last time, we will ensure that very good security arrangements are in place." Tourism revenue Still recovering from the economic crash of 2022, Sri Lanka is counting on revenue from the tourism sector, a key foreign exchange earner, to boost its reserves. India tops Sri Lanka's tourist arrival

charts, and authorities observed a spike in Indian tourists in February 2026, just ahead of the India-Pakistan match. Local media reported that hotels in Colombo were fully booked ahead of the much-anticipated game between the sporting rivals. While promoting the island as a feasible destination for international sporting events, Sri Lanka has also set out to reform cricket administration in the country. In April this year, the Sports Minister appointed a nine-member Transformation Committee for Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC). Its members, including cricketers, greats Kumar Sangakkara, Roshan Mahanama and Sidath Wettimuny, apart from business leaders and professionals, have been tasked with "transforming and restructuring" cricket administration, which has for long been marred by political interference, mismanagement, and financial irregularities. "Chart a path" "We want to chart a proper path forward for the game. A new constitution, a credible election, and stronger structures for cricket at the



Sports Minister Sunil Kumara Gamage has appointed a 9-member transformation panel for Sri Lanka Cricket. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

local level, be it in schools, at the district or provincial level, that is our focus," Minister Gamage said, adding that improvements in those areas will also lead to better player selection. Women's cricket is another "key area". "We have some great players, skills; we see that from time to time. The committee will come out with a comprehensive plan

to strengthen women's cricket too." Coinciding with the committee's early efforts to reform cricket administration, International Cricket Council Chairman Jay Shah visited Colombo last month and held high-level talks. Following a meeting with President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, Mr. Shah wrote on X that discussions focused on increasing opportunities for emerging players and supporting grassroots and youth development programmes. "We also exchanged views on the role Sri Lanka continues to play in hosting major international events," he said in the post. Describing Mr. Shah's visit as "very good", Minister Gamage said: "We want to make sure that the funds Sri Lanka receives from ICC are used efficiently and

in a transparent manner to develop the game." Sri Lanka is also gearing up for the sixth season of the Lanka Premier League (LPL), scheduled from July 17 to August 8, with five franchises participating. "We are looking forward to that," Mr. Gamage said. Courting athletes Meanwhile, Sri Lanka has also been urging its sportspeople living abroad to play for the country. "Already [Sri Lankan-American gymnast] Tiana Sumanasekera, who formerly represented the U.S. women's artistic gymnastics team, has agreed to play for Sri Lanka. We are hoping we can import more players to develop sports in our country and motivate aspiring players. Many countries do that already." While Sri Lanka is fo-

cused on strengthening cricket, the government is simultaneously working on enhancing opportunities for other sports as well. "In fact, we have sought assistance from India in areas of coaching and training. We are exploring the possibilities of bringing down chess grandmasters from India to train our players. We are in discussion with the Indian High Commission in Colombo, and the response so far has been very positive," the Minister said, adding that "shared histories and culture" made India and Sri Lanka close partners. "We hope and look forward to meeting India in the South Asian Games too," he said, referring to the multi-sport regional event scheduled to be held in Pakistan in March 2027. India is yet to officially confirm participation.



A file photo of a wild fire. The munitions buried in Mueritz National Park are from an abandoned training ground. AFP

Buried munitions hinder fight against German park fire

Agence France-Presse
BERLIN

Unexploded munitions are hampering efforts by firefighters to tackle a blaze in a national park in northern Germany, local officials said on Wednesday.

Old munitions buried in the soil from an abandoned military training ground have forced them to stay at least 1,000 metres from the flames, said officials from the Mecklenburg Seenplatte district.

“Emergency services cannot actively put out the fire - that’s the problem,” district spokesman Marten Schroeder told AFP of the fire in Mueritz National Park.

“This safety distance of 1,000 metres also means that you couldn’t drop water from a helicopter, for example, because it would have to fly so high up that the wind would blow the water off course,” he added.

Officials warned that the wildfire there was growing after a village had to be evacuated for a second time.

The fire has now stretched over about 1.5 square kilometres of the park, officials in the state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania said, adding that the flames were spreading.

About 200 people had been deployed to the fight the blaze, they added, while the village of Granzin with its approximately 400 inhabitants had been evacuated. Originally evacuated on Monday, villagers had returned after an all-clear was given, but that was revoked on Tuesday.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Shikha Kumari A.

Russia’s latest attempts to jam Starlink are about more than disrupting an internet service. They reflect a larger shift in the Ukraine war. Over the last three years, Starlink has become deeply embedded in how Ukraine fights. It sits behind drone operations, battlefield communications, and command networks that stretch across hundreds of kilometres of the front. That is why Russia is now trying to interfere with it.

When Russian forces launched their full-scale invasion in February 2022, one of the first casualties was Ukraine’s communications network. Mobile towers were damaged, fibre-optic lines were cut, and internet services became unreliable in many parts of the country. A cyberattack on the Viasat satellite network, carried out around the start of the invasion, only added to the disruption.

Ukraine needed a communications system that could survive the war. Within days, Digital Transformation Minister Mykhailo Fedorov appealed



Far-reaching applications: A file photo of an Ukrainian serviceman looking at an unmanned aerial vehicle. Ukraine’s growing drone campaign has only reinforced Starlink’s importance. REUTERS

publicly to Elon Musk for Starlink terminals. SpaceX responded by activating the service in Ukraine and shipping the first terminals. They were initially used to restore connectivity for government offices, hospitals, and emergency responders. At that stage, Starlink was solving a civilian problem.

Civilian-military use

The military found uses for it almost immediately. Russian missile strikes repeatedly knocked down telecom infrastructure. Units moving along different parts of the front struggled to stay connected. Starlink offered something conven-

tional networks could not. As long as a terminal had power and a clear view of the sky, it could remain online even when nearby communications infrastructure had been destroyed.

By the second half of 2022, Starlink terminals had become common behind Ukrainian positions. Drone crews carried them. Command posts depended on them. Logistics units moving ammunition and supplies used them as well. It was not planned that way in the beginning. The network simply kept finding new roles as the war evolved.

That process has conti-

nued ever since. The most clear example is Ukraine’s expanding use of drones. In the early months of the invasion, drones were largely used to watch Russian troop movements and adjust artillery fire. They still do that, but the scale has changed. Ukraine now deploys thousands of drones every month. Small first-person-view drones attack trenches, armoured vehicles, and infantry positions. Larger drones strike fuel depots, ammunition dumps, and command centres well behind the front. Maritime drones have pushed much of Russia’s Black Sea Fleet away from Crimea. Long-range

drones are increasingly reaching military targets inside Russia.

The drones are only one part of the story. Every operation begins with information. A reconnaissance drone identifies a target. A video of the target is sent to a command post. Coordinates are verified and passed to an artillery battery or another drone team. Another drone may remain overhead to assess the strike or direct follow-up fire. That exchange of information happens constantly across the front. It has to be fast. A target that is visible now may disappear a few minutes later.

Information flow

Starlink has become one of the systems keeping that flow of information moving. Ukraine does not rely on Starlink alone. Military radios, encrypted communications systems, and, increasingly, fibre-optic drones all have their role in this. But Starlink connects many of those layers. It allows commanders, drone operators, and frontline units to share information even in areas where conventional communications have broken down.

Its role extends well beyond combat units. Medical evacuation teams working close to the front

have used Starlink when mobile networks failed. Repair crews restoring electricity after missile strikes have relied on it. Local administrations in frontline towns have used the terminals to coordinate emergency services after repeated attacks on civilian infrastructure. In many places, the same technology has supported both civilian recovery and military operations.

That overlap is one of the defining features of this war. Civilian technology is constantly being adapted for military use, while military requirements increasingly shape civilian infrastructure.

Ukraine’s growing drone campaign has only reinforced Starlink’s importance. Drone production has expanded rapidly over the last two years, partly because drones offer a cheaper way of striking Russian positions than expensive guided missiles. But producing drones is only part of the challenge. They still need a network that can move live video, relay coordinates, and connect units operating across a long and contested front.

That is where Starlink fits into Ukraine’s war effort. It is not the weapon, It is the network behind many of the weapons.

Flying baby



Putting on a show: Drones light up the night sky during the K-Drone Festival at a park in Incheon, South Korea, on Wednesday. AP

Myanmar leader to visit Thailand as Bangkok seeks to normalise ties

Agence France-Presse
BANGKOK

Myanmar’s leader Min Aung Hlaing will make an official visit to Thailand next month as Bangkok seeks to bring the once pariah state back into the diplomatic fold, the Thai Foreign Minister told AFP on Wednesday.

Mr. Hlaing, the ex-junta chief who led a 2021 coup that deposed democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi, triggering a civil war, was installed as civilian president in April following highly restricted elections.

Neighbouring Thailand has been leading an effort to begin normalising relations, both bilaterally and through the 11-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

“It’s best to bring Myan-



The August visit will be Hlaing’s first to the neighbouring nation, and follows his recent visits to India, China, and Laos. REUTERS

mar back into the fold,” Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuanketkeow told a news conference in Bangkok. “We believe that after five years we need to talk, we need to listen, and they need to explain,” he added.

Afterwards, the Foreign Minister told AFP that Mr.

Hlaing “will make an official visit” to Thailand “very soon, in August”.

This will be his first trip to the neighbouring nation since his change of position, and follows visits to India, China, and ASEAN member Laos in the past few weeks.

It was not clear who Mr.

Hlaing would meet in Thailand, with Mr. Sihasak saying: “We are working on an official programme.”

News of the visit comes after Thailand hosted on Sunday an informal meeting of ASEAN Foreign Ministers that included Myanmar, a member state.

It was the first such gathering since the coup, after which ASEAN blocked Myanmar’s leadership from high-level summits.

ASEAN has made little progress with its five-point plan to end the civil war in Myanmar through national dialogue with all sides.

Analysts say consensus within the bloc is now fraying between those open to seizing on small concessions by Myanmar and others who want more substantive progress before restoring ties.

Russia accused of spreading disinformation for the German far-right

Agence France-Presse
BERLIN

Some German lawmakers and anti-Kremlin activists suspect Russia of inflaming sensitive regional divisions, smearing mainstream political parties, and spreading disinformation to help the far-right ahead of hotly contested regional elections in Germany.

In the former communist eastern states of Saxony-Anhalt and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) is topping the polls ahead of votes scheduled for September 6 and 20.

The anti-immigrant, pro-Russian party is aiming to take control of a regional government - which would be a first in Germa-

ny for the far-right since 1945 - and deal a blow to Chancellor Friedrich Merz’s unpopular ruling coalition.

In recent months, posts spreading misinformation have been appearing in ever greater numbers across X, TikTok, and Bluesky.

For lawmakers focused on security issues, the prime suspect is Moscow, which - in its efforts to destabilise Germany - is accused of relying on the AfD. The party denies this, claiming instead that it is the victim of “political” manipulation.

‘Bid to fan divisions’

Antibot4Navalny, a group of anonymous anti-Kremlin activists named after the late Russian opposition figure, detected a first campaign in June.

This involved mocked-up versions of well-known media outlets, including AFP, popping up online that focused on fanning divisions between eastern and western Germany.

After being reported, the accounts sharing the posts were blocked.

The group detected a second campaign in July, which saw politicians accused of corruption and sex offences in posts purporting to come from leading German media such as public broadcasters ARD and Deutsche Welle.

Two parties were not targeted - the AfD and the BSW, a small, pro-Russian, far-left outfit.

Antibot4Navalny believes the campaigns were linked to Matryoshka (Russian doll), a Kremlin influence operation, which



Ulrich Siegmund, the far-right AfD’s top candidate for the regional elections in Saxony-Anhalt, speaks at a meeting on July 11. AFP

has been linked to spreading fake content for political purposes before.

While there is no irrefutable proof of Russian involvement, said one activist from the group, interviewed by AFP via a messaging app, said, “There is no other plausible explanation.”

“We have been monitoring Matryoshka on a daily basis for about two and a half years,” the activist said, noting that the German campaigns employ similar methods.

Konstantin von Notz, a Green party MP and vice-chair of parliament’s intelligence oversight commit-

tee, says it is obvious that Russia and the far-right “are sharing the work”.

“The narrative being spread from Russia into Germany, with a budget running into the millions, is then deliberately re-broadcast by the AfD in a targeted way,” he told AFP, adding such efforts were common during elections nowadays.

‘Take it seriously’

The opposition lawmaker also accused the government of inaction, urging it to “finally take these dangers seriously”.

The Russian embassy, in a statement to AFP, called such accusations “ridiculous” and said Germany and Europe were on an “extremely dangerous path” that did not serve their citizens’ interests.

The ruling coalition, comprised of Mr. Merz’s centre-right CDU/CSU bloc and the centre-left SPD party, frequently accuses Moscow of waging a “hybrid” war, combining disinformation, espionage, and sabotage.

Asked by AFP, the government did not comment directly on “Matryoshka” but said that “information manipulation operations... have long constituted a daily threat”.

The BfV domestic spy agency said it was aware of the campaign on social networks and had noted similarities with the Russian group.

No counter-measures have yet been announced, however.

The chairman of the intelligence oversight com-

mittee, CDU lawmaker Marc Henrichmann, said that Germany had to be careful when responding to such campaigns to avoid attracting unnecessary attention.

“If, by targeting a campaign, we end up giving it even more publicity, then, obviously, we will have made a mistake,” he said.

Antibot4Navalny told AFP that while the volume of content is “impressive”, the campaign’s reach so far is limited.

Mr. Henrichmann believes Russia is waging “cognitive war” aimed at spreading fear and dividing Germany, which has launched a massive overhaul of its armed forces and become Ukraine’s leading donor as it seeks to keep Russia’s military ambitions in check.

INBRIEF



Chuah and Othman take the honours in PSA Challenger

Malaysia’s Joachim Chuah and Egypt’s Rouquaia Othman triumphed at the HCL-SRFI PSA Challenger squash tournament at the Indian Squash Academy in Chennai on Wednesday. The five-day tournament featured 48 players from 14 countries with a prize purse of \$9,000 in each section. Six Indian players reached the quarterfinals.

The results (final): Men: Joachim Chuah (Mas) bt Adham Roshdy (Egy) 11-6, 10-6, 19-21, 11-7, 11-8. **Women:** Rouquaia Othman (Egy) bt Hwayeong Eum (Kor) 12-10, 11-7, 11-8.

Lakshya, Sagar in big stand as India makes a strong reply

Lakshya Raichandani’s unbeaten 196 powered India under-19 to 378 for three in reply to Sri Lanka’s first-innings total of 424 for nine declared on the third day of the Youth ‘Test’ in Galle on Wednesday. Fellow opener Sagar Virk also struck a century (134), the duo forging a 295-run alliance.

The scores: Sri Lanka u-19 424/9 decl. in 106.4 overs vs. India u-19 378/3 in 117 overs (Lakshya Raichandani 196 batting, Sagar Virk 134).

Mixed results for jr. women’s hockey team in Europe

The Indian junior women’s hockey team logged three wins and four losses in an exposure-cum-competition tour of the UK as it geared up for the Under-21 Asia Cup in China later this year. During the exposure tour, India lost two matches against Scotland senior women, beat and lost one match against USA U-21, beat England U-21 twice and rounded off with a loss to Belgium U-21.



Waerenskjold wins fastest ever Tour de France stage

Norwegian Soren Waerenskjold launched a long-range sprint to claim victory at the Tour de France on Wednesday in the fastest stage in the race’s history. Dutchman Olav Kooij took second ahead of Belgian Jasper Philipsen at the end of the 161km 11th stage from Vichy to Nevers. At an average speed of 50.91kph, it was the fastest ever road stage in the 113 editions of the Tour.

Dismal day for India at Japan Open badminton

Ayush Shetty and Unnati Hooda put up gallant fights before bowing out, while Lakshya Sen went down in straight games as India endured a disappointing second day at the Japan Open Super 750 badminton tournament in Tokyo on Wednesday. Ayush showed grit to recover after losing the opening game but ran out of steam in the end, going down 19-21, 25-23, 15-21 to second seed and former world champion Kunlavut Vitidsarn of Thailand in an 82-minute clash. World No. 24 Unnati once again lost to Huang Yu-Hsun, going down 21-16, 16-21, 15-21 to the Taiwan shuttler for her second defeat in as many meetings. Lakshya, a runner-up at the All England Championships, was no match for local favourite Koki Watanabe, losing 16-21, 14-21 in just 38 minutes as the Japanese improved his head-to-head record against the Indian to 4-3.

The results (first round): Men: Kunlavut Vitidsarn bt Ayush Shetty 21-191, 23-25, 21-15; Koki Watanabe bt Lakshya Sen 21-16, 21-14.

Women: Huang Yu-Hsun bt Unnati Hooda 16-21, 21-16, 21-15.

Atiqa outqualifies two Mercedes F1 juniors for pole

India’s 11-year-old racing prodigy Atiqa Mir out-qualified two Mercedes Formula One junior drivers for pole position in the Champions of the Future Academy Program Round 3 at Viterbo (Italy). Atiqa set sizzling pace in qualifying of the karting series and beat established Mercedes F1 Junior drivers like Niccolo Perico of Italy and Devin Titz of Germany for pole position besides setting an event record.

Lord’s Test shows how well women cricketers can adapt to the demands

The attendance set a new record for a women’s Test match and the MCC pulling out all stops to market the historic contest reflected the stunning evolution of the game

P.K. Ajith Kumar
LONDON

There is cricket. Then there is Test cricket. It is the greatest theatre in sport. It will be injustice if Women’s Tests are reduced to tokenism. The first ever Women’s Test at Lord’s was a resounding success, not just from the Indian point of view. Harmanpreet Kaur’s women dominated England in no uncertain terms and won by 270 runs. There was much to cheer about for India, apart from the handsome victory. The brilliant hundred by a returning Yastika Bhatia and superb spells from the young Kranti Gaud and the seasoned Sneh Rana.

Contributions Even in the one-sided encounter, there was much to savour for the crowd, for the English supporters, too. Like the two fighting fifties by wicketkeeper Amy Jones, a five-wicket haul and half-century by Sophie Eccelstone. Apart from Yastika, Kranti and Sneh, there were a few other Indian performances that delighted the spectators. If Smriti Mandhana gets going twice during a Test, that alone should be worth the money paid for the ticket. There was a decent at-



Showing their mettle: The Indian players will hope to feature in more matches in the longest format. GETTY IMAGES

tendance even for the final day, though it promised very little cricket, India needing just four more wickets. And there were a lot of Indian fans in blue shirts, who were, in fact, one of the features at the Women’s T20 World Cup that preceded the Lord’s Test. So the Indian women could celebrate one of their greatest moments on a cricket field in front of the people that adored them. The attendance at Lord’s actually set a new record for a Women’s Test. And the MCC had put in a

There were a lot of Indian fans in blue shirts, who were, in fact, one of the features at the Women’ T20 World Cup

serious effort to market the match. That is a reflection of the stunning evolution of the women’s game. The MCC had for long resisted female membership. It had taken 239 years for Lord’s to host a Women’s Test. Hopefully it may not take as long for cricket’s most iconic venue to have the next one. This Test was another example of how wonder-

fully well women cricketers could adapt to the demands of the longest format, though they get very few opportunities. India’s cricketers are luckier with the BCCI organising red-ball matches. Mithali Raj, remember, ended her career with just 12 Tests, though she played 232 ODIs. Heather Knight, who played her last match for England, appeared only in 15 Tests. Sophie Devine didn’t get even one, because New Zealand no longer plays Tests. Women in white deserve more Tests.

Good show by India in Asian age-group boxing

ANI
JAKARTA

India capped off a stellar campaign in the Asian U-19 & U-23 boxing championships, securing a total of five gold, 10 silver, and four bronze medals. In the U-19 women’s category, India secured two gold and six silver medals, according to a press release. Chandrika Bhoresh Pujari (51kg) delivered a dominant performance to clinch gold with a 5-0 win over Uzbekistan’s Nazokat Mardonova, while Prachi also secured gold with a convincing victory over Indonesia’s Dira Artika. India’s other finalists in the U-19 category put up strong fights but settled for silver, contributing to the team’s overall tally. In the U-23 women’s category, India registered an equally impressive showing with one gold, four silver, and four bronze medals. Nisha (54kg) led the

charge with a commanding 5-0 victory over Japan’s Koiin Kokufu in the final. Meanwhile, Nikita Chand (60kg), Kajal (65kg), and Muskan (75kg) fought hard in their finals but finished with silver after facing strong opponents from Uzbekistan. **The results (finals): U-23: 54kg:** Nisha bt Koiin Kokufu (Jpn) 5-0; **60kg:** Mushtariybonu Ibromkhimjon (Uzb) bt Nikita Chand 5-0; **65kg:** Sevinch Khurramova (Uzb) bt Kajal 4-1; **75kg:** Shugyula Nalibay (Kaz) bt Muskan 5-0. **81+kg:** Sobirakhon Shakhobidinova (Uzb) bt Priyanka 4-1. **U-19: 45-48kg:** Anggie Intania Chalik (Ina) bt Gunjan 3-2; **51kg:** Chandrika Bhoreshi Pujari bt Nazokat Mardonova (Uzb) 5-0; **54kg:** Sabrina Chakomanova (Uzb) bt Joyshree Devi Chirom 5-0; **57kg:** Prachi bt Dira Artika (Ina) 5-0. **60kg:** Sevara Mamatova (Uzb) bt Chahat 5-0; **75kg:** Samira Turgunova (Uzb) bt Anshika 5-0; **80kg:** Aidana Ubaidullakzy (Kaz) bt Megha Sheokand 3-2; **81+kg:** Zarina Tolybay (Kaz) bt Prachi Tokas 3-2.



Overjoyed: Under-19 boxers Chandrika (51kg) and Prachi (57kg) celebrate.

ICC tweaks ODI and T20 WC formats

Press Trust of India
EDINBURGH

The ICC on Wednesday made changes to the formats of the 2027 ODI World Cup and 2028 T20 World Cup, aimed at “enhancing consequences” in both competitions. The 2027 ODI World Cup in South Africa would have 14 teams as planned before, up from the 10 in the previous edition, but the governing body has added a Super Series and Super 7 stage in its bid to spice up the competition. The Super Series will be played among three teams and one of them will progress to round two of the competition that will see six teams divided into two groups. The top three teams from each group plus the next highest placed team across both groups qualify for the Super 7 (instead of the Super 6 planned earlier). Four teams from the Super 7 progress to the semifinals.

Super 8 in T20 WC For the T20 showpiece in Australia and New Zealand in 2028, the ICC has brought in Super 10 instead of the Super 8 after the Group stage. Five groups of four teams will be created and the top two from each will enter the Super 10 phase. Instead of the top two teams from each Super 8 group making the semifinals in the last edition, only the one that tops the table in each group will enter the last four. Teams placed second in groups play in the Eliminator against the teams placed third in the opposite group, adding another layer to the competition.

U Mumba beats Dabang Delhi for season’s first win

UTT
PANAJI

The odds were firmly stacked against Dabang Delhi’s Maria Xiao when she walked out to face U Mumba TT’s Anusha Kumbale in the fifth and deciding match of the Ultimate Table Tennis Season 7 at the Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Indoor Stadium on Wednesday. **Fiercely contested** Moments earlier, Mumba’s Lilian Bardet had edged past G. Sathiyam 2-1 in a fiercely contested singles match to hand the defending champion a 7-5 lead. With just one game

needed from the final match to secure the tie, the advantage lay squarely on Anusha. Though Anusha lost the first two games, she came up with an excellent counter-attacking effort in the third to win the game that mattered to give U Mumba its first win of the season 8-7. **Not at his best** Mumba’s Manush Shah has not been at his best in this edition. If there has been one glaring weakness in his game, it has been a lack of consistency. Against Youssef Abdelaziz in the opening match, Manush seldom displayed the patience or discipline needed to build points. Particularly in the opening game, he appeared eager



Decisive win: Bardet edged Sathiyam to give U Mumba the lead. BUTTERFLYUT

to end rallies too quickly, going for ambitious winners before constructing the point.

The resulting unforced errors prevented him from finding any rhythm and he lost 1-2.

Arnav causes a flutter in the tennis world

Tarun Shastry



Talent and substance: Arnav impressed one and all en route his historic run to the Wimbledon quarterfinals. GETTY IMAGES

Three dozen years is a long time in any sphere of life, not just sport. Yet, on a scorching Wednesday morning last week, on the most famous lawns in the world, it took just 52 minutes for Arnav Paparkar to script a chapter in Indian tennis history. With a clinical 6-2, 6-1 demolition of Japan’s Ryo Tabata in the boys’ round of 16, the 18-year-old stormed into the Wimbledon quarterfinals and became the first Indian since the legendary Leander Paes in 1990 to achieve the feat. For Indian tennis, the long wait was finally over. In a virtual interaction with *The Hindu*, Arnav revealed that meticulous preparation did the trick. “I trained on grass in Spain for two weeks before Wimbledon and also played a

tournament in Roehampton. I was comfortable with the way I moved, served and returned... I didn’t miss too many returns,” Arnav said. The confidence also stemmed from the lessons learnt during the course of the year. “I was a bit nervous because the Australian Open was my first Grand Slam. There were so

many people watching. By the time French Open arrived, I wasn’t thinking about the crowd anymore. I just played my natural game,” said the Pune teenager, who idolises Roger Federer and football icon Cristiano Ronaldo. Arnav’s self-belief came to the fore at The Championships. He brushed aside British wildcard Josh

ua Craze before causing a flutter by taking out third seed Keaton Hance. He then went on to avenge the two losses against Tabata in their earlier meetings. “I knew playing the third seed was going to be tough, but wasn’t impossible. My serve clicked, and I handled the pressure well. Only after the match did it sink in that I had beaten a higher-ranked player,” Arnav recalled. Behind the teenager’s rise lies the unwavering support of his family. “My mother is a doctor, but she closed her clinic as she had to travel with me regularly. My elder brother sacrificed a lot because he often stayed home alone while my parents travelled for tournaments. Everyone in my family has sacrificed in some way or the other. I want to do something special for them one day”.

McIlroy seeks to end British Open drought

Agence France-Presse
SOUTHPORT

Rory McIlroy has his sights set on a first British Open win since 2014 as World No. 1 Scottie Scheffler tries to get his game back on track to defend the Claret Jug at Royal Birkdale. McIlroy ended a long wait for his fifth Major by winning the Masters last year to complete the Grand Slam and backed up that victory by securing another green jacket in April. Yet, his drought at his home Major goes on since his only British Open win at Royal Liverpool. McIlroy has limited his appearances on the PGA Tour to prioritise the Majors this year.

Sarvesh Kushare adopts well-prepared training methods to better Tejaswin's eight-year-old National record; coach Jithin feels the tweaks made in the run-up make the difference



Sarvesh and his coach Jithin are bubbling with confidence while eyeing higher marks and glorious medals in the upcoming Commonwealth Games and Asian Games