



'EXPLOSIVES USED'
LeT members' houses demolished in J&K

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Jaishankar stresses dialogue, diplomacy

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Collapse of an education system

Student protests stem from the Modi govt.'s policies: Sonia Gandhi

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India makes short work of Zimbabwe

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INSIDE



IndiGo and AI are opposed to entry of 'Adani airline'

NEW DELHI
IndiGo and Air India have opposed Adani Group's reported interest in entering the airline business. The conglomerate is learnt to have approached the government to remove cross-ownership restrictions that currently limit airline ownership in airports and vice versa. » PAGE 12

Disputed shoal: China 'drives off' Phillipine vessels

BEIJING
China said on Thursday it tracked and drove away two Philippine vessels it accused of having "intruded into" waters near the disputed Scarborough Shoal despite warnings, the week's second incident in the South China Sea to involve both nations. A flashpoint, Scarborough Shoal is claimed by both the Philippines and China, which calls it "Huangyan Dao". » PAGE 14

Ex-TDB chief held in Sabarimala missing gold case

KOLLAM
An SIT probing the Sabarimala gold theft case arrested former Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) president P.S. Prasanth and former Board member A. Ajikumar on Thursday. Officers took Mr. Prasanth into custody from his residence, while Mr. Ajikumar was intercepted en route to the capital. » PAGE 3

PM reaches out to students; Wangchuk ends fast

Activist, on hunger strike demanding Pradhan's resignation, ends fast in presence of 2 Ministers

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Activist Sonam Wangchuk, who was on a hunger strike demanding the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over the NEET irregularities, ended his fast late on Thursday night. The move came even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in a late-night video message posted on his X and Instagram accounts, promised that the government would discuss NEET paper leaks in Friday's Cabinet meeting and will bring a Bill in Parliament next week. "More strict actions against paper leaks to come in tomorrow's Cabi-

net [meeting]." Mr. Modi said in his post. Mr. Wangchuk broke his fast in the presence of two Union Ministers, said Cherring Dorjay Lakruk, co-convenor, Leh Apex Body. He broke the fast on certain conditions with the government giving written assurance that cases against students will be taken back, if they are not violent, said Mr. Dorjay. The government also said that it would consider compensation for families of suicide victims, he said. The developments came shortly after the Centre shifted Higher Education Secretary Vineet Joshi to the Ministry of Panchayati Raj. Meanwhile, government sources told *The*



First sip: Sonam Wangchuk breaks his fast in the presence of Union Ministers J.P. Nadda and Jitendra Singh. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Hindu that CJP leaders may meet Ministers J.P. Nadda and Jitendra Singh on Friday. A response from the CJP on the meeting was awaited. The CJP had earlier asked the Ministers to meet

the delegation at Jantar Mantar or any other neutral venue. Among the changes in the Education Department, Naresh Pal Gangwar, who was serving as the secretary in the Ministry of Animal Husbandry,

No debate while Pradhan stays in office: Opposition

NEW DELHI
The Opposition on Thursday refused the government's offer of a debate in Parliament on the NEET paper leaks and other irregularities, saying that any discussion must be preceded by the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan. » PAGE 5

which was held by Mr. Joshi. Earlier in the day, in his first outreach to the protesters three days after the CJP-led march to Parliament, Mr. Modi announced the setting up of fast-track courts to swiftly handle cases of paper leaks. He said the welfare of the youth was the top priority of his government and asserted anyone trying to harm their future will not be spared. But the CJP said the proposal did not address the issue of accountability or the resignation of Mr. Pradhan. Following the PM's announcement, the Delhi High Court notified a designated court to deal with criminal cases arising from

paper leaks as well as the use of other unfair means in public examinations. The special court will function from the Rouse Avenue Court Complex. Earlier on Thursday, Mr. Singh said that the Centre had approached the CJP for talks four times in the past 24 hours. He said a meeting can be held either at Mr. Nadda's official residence or office, adding that Mr. Modi was "sensitive" to the issue of the paper leak and that "the government was not sitting on prestige". The CJP has also called for a nationwide agitation on Friday. (With PTI inputs)

MORE REPORTS ON
» PAGES 4 & 5

Seeking shelter



Rowing on: People retrieve their belongings in flood-hit Sivasagar in Assam on Thursday. More than 9 lakh people have been affected by floods of 'an unimaginable scale', Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said. PTI (REPORT: PAGE 6)

Houthi attacks on shipping drive Brent crude past \$100

M. Kalyanaraman
CHENNAI

In an escalation of the conflict in West Asia, the Houthis, Iran's allies in Yemen, said they attacked two Saudi Arabia-flagged tankers in the Red Sea on Thursday, as part of a blockade of Saudi Arabian shipping.

According to Al Masirah, the Houthis' official television channel, the attacks on the *Encelia* and the *Layla* took place early on July 23. Saudi Arabia's official *Saudi Press Agency* has confirmed the projectile attack on the *Encelia*, adding that the crew is safe and the vessel secured. The attack on the *Layla*, a three lakh-tonne Saudi-flagged Very Large Crude Carrier (VLCC), remains unconfirmed. Soon after the attacks were reported, Brent crude rates surged past \$100 a barrel, a 7% jump over the previous day's close of around \$94.

Escalating global crises

The escalation off the Bab el-Mandeb Strait – the Red Sea's exit to the Arabian Sea – comes with attacks erupting in regions crucial to India's oil imports. After constraints on the Strait of Hormuz, Saudi Arabia had been piping some 4 million barrels of crude across the country to be shipped out through Yanbu – port city on the Red Sea coast – largely to Asian markets, including India. Thursday's attacks comes close on the heels of Ukraine targeting Russian merchant ships, including oil tankers, off the port of Novorossiysk, a Russian city on the Black Sea coast. Ukraine has claimed more than 180 hits on Russian ships in the Black Sea in July. On July 17 and 19, Russia attacked two ships off Odesa, a Ukrainian port on the Black Sea, killing four Indian seafarers. These attacks are erupt-



On the boil: The Bab el-Mandeb escalation has added to the crisis in the Strait of Hormuz. FILE PHOTO

Attacks erupting in regions crucial to India's oil imports, which are a little less than 5 mbpd per day

ing in regions crucial to India's oil imports. Saudi Arabia currently supplies around 0.4 million barrels per day (mbpd) to India, via Yanbu and Bab al-Mandab. India's crude oil imports are a little less than 5 mbpd. "A disruption may mean cargoes may need to be re-routed via the Suez Canal, into the Mediterranean and around Africa, but that will take much longer and come with higher freight costs," says Pankaj Srivastava, a senior vice president at Rystad Energy. Mr. Srivastava says India imported 2.25 mbpd of Russian crude in June, with nearly 0.7 mbpd originating from Novorossiysk. "If the disruption persists or infrastructure damage is more extensive, India could face additional pressure in securing replacement crude volumes," he says, adding that the immediate impact is likely to remain manageable. Since the Houthi hijacking of the car carrier *Galaxy Leader* in November 2023, ship traffic across the Suez Canal had plummeted. It picked up in January this year, however, and surged in March, as Yanbu became an alternative to the Strait of Hormuz.

The Houthis have cited Saudi Arabia's "blockade of supplies" and the attack on Sanaa international airport in Yemen on July 13 as reasons for their blockade. *Reuters* has, however, reported that Iran is inspiring the Houthi blockade of Saudi oil-carrying ships. Shipping industry sources say insurance rates climbed 10 to 15 times as soon as the Houthis announced their blockade on July 20, nearly matching rates for the Strait of Hormuz. "India more resilient" Meanwhile, the U.S.-based think tank, Institute for the Study of War, said that at least seven vessels have already diverted their routes to avoid the Bab al-Mandab Strait as a consequence of the tanker attacks. Erik Grundt, Rystad Energy's senior market analyst, says: "In sailing-time terms, the detour through the Suez Canal and around Africa stretches the Yanbu-to-India (west coast) voyage from about eight days to nearly 39 days." Compounding this, VLCCs are too large to transit the Suez Canal fully loaded, so they must partially offload at Ain Sukhna and reload at Sidi Kerir on the Mediterranean side, adding time and complexity. Mr. Srivastava says India, is now more resilient, having diversified its crude sources, which now include African nations, Brazil, Guyana, and the U.S..

U.S. announces civilian nuclear deal with Saudi

Agence France-Presse
RIYADH

The United States and Saudi Arabia on Wednesday announced a landmark deal that would establish a civilian nuclear programme in the kingdom, which U.S. President Donald Trump said was contingent on Riyadh normalising relations with Israel. The move comes as the U.S. fights a war with Iran that began in large part over concerns about Tehran's nuclear programme – still a key point of contention in now-stalled peace talks. The deal is set to generate billions of dollars for American companies and is seen as a major win for Iran's long-time regional rival, but critics fear it also carries risks. Washington has sought in recent years to tie any nuclear agreement and defence pact to Saudi normalisation with Israel, and just hours after the deal was announced, Mr. Trump took to social media to say Riyadh must first meet that

condition. The nuclear deal "will be approved, but is totally subject to Saudi Arabia joining the very respected and successful Abraham Accords", he wrote. **Concern of enrichment** Critics have insisted the deal – the text of which was not immediately made public – could precipitate a nuclear race in a region already battered by war. One provision would potentially see U.S. companies build a uranium enrichment facility in Saudi Arabia, the Wall Street Journal reported. The U.S. Energy Department made no mention of such a provision and did not offer comment when asked about it by *AFP*, while Mr. Trump added in his Truth Social post that: "There will be no enrichment of material!" The deal will be submitted to Congress for review, but the Republican-controlled legislature is unlikely to block its implementation.



Close allies: President Trump with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Washington, in November last year. AP

U.S. lawmakers from both parties and Israeli officials have previously voiced opposition to such a project over fears Saudi Arabia could eventually convert it to develop nuclear weapons. "Trump claims his war on Iran is about stopping an authoritarian country from enriching nuclear fuel," left-wing U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders wrote on X. "Now he's letting his best friends in Saudi Arabia – one of the most brutal dictatorships in the world – do exactly that.

This is absurd." **'Pact with safeguards'** U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said that "any agreement that we're going to make with any country in the world on civil nuclear energy is going to be one that will have safeguards in place to ensure that it can't be turned into a weapons programme". Riyadh, like Tehran, has long been adamant about its right to pursue a civilian nuclear programme. Last year it signed a mutual defence pact with nuclear-

armed Pakistan. Policymakers have long feared that if Iran produced a nuclear weapon, the move would set off an arms race across the Gulf. U.S. Energy Secretary Chris Wright dismissed concerns about proliferation, insisting the deal was in Washington's economic and strategic interest. The U.S. has agreements governing nuclear cooperation with more than 50 countries. Experts said such a deal had been in the works for a while, but some raised concerns about the potential for uranium enrichment on Saudi soil. "It would be a mistake to allow Saudi Arabia the capability for enrichment," said Matthew Kroenig of the Atlantic Council in comments made before the deal was formally announced. "Washington is right to strengthen its relationship with Riyadh, but it should not do so at the expense of its effective nuclear weapons nonproliferation standards."

INBRIEF



Activist ends fast against Ken, Betwa linking after 18 days

Activist Amit Bhatnagar, who had been on a hunger strike against the Ken-Betwa river linking project for 18 days, suspended his fast on Thursday after the government’s assurance to include the people left out from the rehabilitation process. After breaking his fast, Mr. Bhatnagar said that he took the decision as several tribal women who had been part of the protest had also stopped eating since July 19 when the police forcibly took him to a hospital and dismantled the demonstration site on the banks of Barana river in Kupi village of Madhya Pradesh’s Chhatarpur district.

Man arrested for sending hoax bomb threat to Ajmer court

A 40-year-old man has been arrested from Gujarat for allegedly sending a hoax bomb threat email to the District and Sessions Court in Rajasthan’s Ajmer, police said on Thursday. The accused allegedly sent the threat to the court’s official email ID through a fake email account, claiming that the court premises would be blown up. Ajmer SP Harsh Vardhan Agarwala said the email was received on the court’s official email address on July 17. Based on technical analysis, the cyber cell identified and arrested the accused, Hardik Patel (40), a resident of Prabhas Patan in Gir Somnath, Mr. Agarwala said.

Topping the charts, Odisha govt. plans new policy to curb trafficking of women and girls

Satyasundar Barik
BHUBANESWAR

Having recorded the highest number of human trafficking victims in India for four consecutive years, Odisha has now proposed a new State policy, *Nutana Sakala* (New Dawn), to curb the practice through measures ranging from community-based prevention to confiscation of assets linked to trafficking networks.

Draft copy circulated
The draft copy of the policy being prepared by Women and Child Development Department has been circulated among top police brass, including Director General of Police, DG (Crime Branch) and Addition DG (Crime Against Women and Child Wing), for their opinion. The policy has adopted best prac-

The State recorded zero convictions in 2021 despite 707 survivors identified and 65 traffickers arrested

tices from other States and abroad.
“*Nutana Sakala* is Odisha’s unified policy framework for addressing all forms of trafficking relating to women and girls. The framework is built on four pillars such as prevention, protection, prosecution, and partnership to ensure a comprehensive and coordinated response,” says the draft policy.

Grave statistics
The radical measures come against grave statistics. The total number of humans trafficked from Odisha as per National Crime Records Bureau

(NCRB) was 1,475 (2021), 1,120 (2022), 1,305 (2023) and 1,039 (2024) as against an annual national average of 6,158 during this period. Vulnerable factors leading to trafficking include 83.3% rural population with limited access to formal markets and social protection (Census 2011), 22.85% Scheduled Tribe population, disproportionately represented among trafficking victims due to poverty, social exclusion, limited legal literacy, female literacy at 64% vs 82% male and over 20 lakh seasonal migrant workers annually who are particularly vulnerable.
The State recorded zero convictions in 2021 despite 707 survivors identified and 65 traffickers arrested while only 182 of 298 arrested persons were chargesheeted in 2023 with 61% chargesheeting rate.

Himachal farmers pioneer sustainable cultivation of endangered herb

Vikas Vasudeva
CHANDIGARH

In the higher reaches of the Himalayas, an agricultural initiative is helping bring one of the region’s most prized medicinal plants back from the brink of extinction. Decades of destructive wild harvesting pushed *Picrorhiza kurroa*, known locally as Kutki, a herb used in medicinal formulations, onto the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List. Now, a sustainable cultivation model adopted by farmers in Himachal Pradesh’s Mandi district is showing promising signs of conserving the species while boosting the rural mountain economy.
For years, harvesting Kutki, the high-value medicinal herb native to the alpine and sub-alpine regions (2,700-4,500 metres)

of the Himalayas, meant uprooting the plant entirely. Researchers at the Himalayan Research Group (HRG), a Department of Science and Technology Core Support Group under the Programme of Science for Equity Empowerment and Development (SEED) Division, spent more than a decade developing and demonstrating an alternative method. Farmers now harvest only the plant’s side “stolons”, leaving the mother plant intact to continue producing for years, making the practice sustainable.

From wild to fields
What started as a research project under the Department of Biotechnology’s Himalayan Bioresource Mission in 2022 has grown into the largest private-land cultivation cluster of this endangered species, now



Farmers busy in a ‘Kutki’ field in Mandi district. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

spanning nearly 180 farmers across Mandi district.
“Our initiative is aimed at promoting sustainable cultivation of this high-value medicinal plant. This species was collected from the natural habitat in a destructive way of uprooting the plant. There was myth that still exists that the root of this plant is a drug and is sold in the market. But technically, it is a side

branch which creeps on the soil and possesses nodes and is a type of stem and technically called a ‘stolon’. Roots are fibrous and possess no medicinal contents and after drying, only these stolons are collected for marketing. HRG worked extensively to develop sustainable harvesting techniques and has demonstrated successfully in the field that Kutki planta-

tion can be a perennial plantation for life,” said Lal Singh, Director, HRG, based in Shimla.
Kutki is currently categorised as an Endangered species on the IUCN Red List, with several regional conservation assessments identifying it among the most threatened medicinal plants in the Himalayan region. Recognising the threat posed by international trade, it was included in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).
This listing permits international trade only under regulated conditions and requires export permits to ensure that trade does not adversely affect wild populations.
For 70-year-old Narad Ram, a horticulturist from Manjha village in Mandi

district, scientific cultivation has become a welcome source of additional income.
‘Beneficial method’
“I started planting Kutki in my farmland about 4-5 years ago. Before that, I used to collect it from the wild for self consumption. It is disappearing from the forests due to multiple reasons. Now I grow and harvest it in my field scientifically. Earlier, I used to pluck the whole plant, but now I harvest it with the ‘stolon’ method. They grow further from there, they keep expanding forward and roots sprout from them. This method is beneficial. I have been selling it through HRG and earning around ₹15,000-₹16,000 annually by producing about 5-6 kilograms of dried herb,” Mr. Ram told *The Hindu*.

Forest fires: SC sets aside HC’s 2016 order to revisit directions

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday set aside a 2016 order of the Uttarakhand High Court, which passed a slew of directions, including on controlling and preventing forest fires, and remitted the matter back for consideration.
Observing that issues related to forest fires require “constant monitoring”, the apex court said the jurisdictional High Court was better equipped to deal with it.
A Bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joy-malya Bagchi and V. Mohana noted that the apex court in March 2017 stayed the operation of the High

Court’s order passed in December 2016. The directions issued in the 2016 order ought to be revisited by the High Court, especially when nearly a decade has passed and, apparently, there have been substantial changes at the ground level with the passage of time, the Bench noted.
‘Constant monitoring’
“It further appears to us that forest fires require constant monitoring by the jurisdictional High Court, which is better equipped as compared to us,” it said.
The top court passed the order while hearing two petitions, including an appeal by the Uttarakhand government against the High Court order.

INBRIEF



Kerala suspends ADGP Ajith Kumar over probe tampering

The Kerala government on Thursday decided to suspend Additional Director General of Police (ADGP) M.R. Ajith Kumar over allegations that he interfered in the investigation into the assault on Youth Congress workers by former Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's security detail in Alappuzha in 2023. The suspension move follows the submission of a detailed inquiry report which indicated Mr. Kumar's involvement in attempts to influence the course of the investigation.

Cases booked against 249 guest lecturers in Bengaluru

The Department of Collegiate Education in Bengaluru has ordered the registration of criminal cases against 249 teachers who got placed as guest faculty in government first grade colleges by submitting fake/invalid PhD certificates in the year 2025-26. The State government recruited about 10,000 guest faculty through an online counselling process in 2025-26. The order blacklists these candidates permanently for the years to come as well.

Police constable dies by suicide in Telangana

A police constable posted at the Telangana Director General of Police (DGP)'s Office in Lakdikapul died after allegedly shooting himself of Thursday. Upon receiving the information, the Saifabad police shifted the body for post-mortem examination. A case was booked and further investigation is under way to ascertain the circumstances that led to the incident. (People in distress can call Tele MANAS helpline 14416 or 1800-891-4416)

Detailed probe needed into Wayanad debris slip, says expert

The Hindu Bureau
KOZHIKODE

C.P. Rajendran, geoscientist, has said that a comprehensive probe is required to find out the causes of the debris slip at Kalladi near the Anakkampoyil-Kalladi-Meppadi tunnel road entrance in Wayanad, Kerala, earlier this month. Mr. Rajendran, one of the members of the expert team appointed by the State government to look into the various circumstances that led to the disaster on July 7, was addressing the presspersons after visiting the site on Thursday afternoon. He was accompanied by other members of the team. Mr. Rajendran added that the team would examine in detail if unscientific construction works had been taken up at Kalladi. The team would visit the Anakkampoyil entrance of the tunnel road in Kozhikode on Friday.

Causes of the tragedy
The team's mandate includes finding the causes of the tragedy, evaluating the environmental approvals given for the tunnel road project by the Union and State governments, examining the approvals by the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change, and also checking if the company engaged in construction had followed all the guidelines. P. Pugazhendhi, Chief Wildlife Warden; Vishnu-das, environmental scientist; Sarmistha Singh, hydrologist; Sreevalsa Kolathayar, civil engineering expert are other members of the panel.

Safety shift



Code change: A mechanised boat, featuring a blue hull, docked at the Visakhapatnam harbour on Thursday. The government has initiated an effort to transition the hull colour code from blue to orange to enhance the easy identification of vessels during emergencies. V. RAJU

Kerala dental student death case: prime accused surrenders

The Hindu Bureau
KANNUR

M.K. Ram, prime accused in the death of Kannur Dental College student Nitin Raj, surrendered before the Crime Branch on Thursday after the Thalaserry SC/ST special court permitted his re-arrest on Wednesday. He was questioned and subjected to medical examination at Kannur District Hospital and produced before the Principal Sessions Court, Thalaserry, which remanded him in judicial custody for 14 days in Kannur Sub Jail.

Ex-TDB chief Prasanth held in Sabarimala gold theft case

He and former Board member A. Ajikumar remanded in judicial custody for 13 days; Prasanth, six others implicated in illegally transporting gold-plated panels from the temple to Chennai in 2025

The Hindu Bureau
KOLLAM

A Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing the Sabarimala gold theft case arrested former Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) president P.S. Prasanth and former Board member A. Ajikumar on Thursday. Officers took Mr. Prasanth into custody from his residence in Enikkara, Thiruvananthapuram, while Mr. Ajikumar, a native of Kayamkulam, was intercepted en route to the capital. The two accused were remanded in judicial custody for 13 days at the Poojappura Central Jail.



Former TDB president P.S. Prashanth (right) and former member A. Ajikumar being taken for medical tests on Thursday. C. SURESHKUMAR

Mr. Prasanth, a former Congress leader who later joined the CPI(M), was appointed devaswom board president following his party switch, while Mr. Ajikumar represented the CPI on the board. The arrests follow a recent ultimatum from the Kerala High Court directing the SIT to submit its final chargesheet by the end of this month.

Centre asks Telangana to return ₹54.22 crore

B. Chandrashekhara
HYDERABAD

The Directorate of Monitoring and Appraisal under the Ministry of Jal Shakti (MoJS) has asked the Telangana government (Irrigation Department) to return the Central Assistance of ₹36.34 crore along with interest released, under the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY) for nine ongoing projects. The amount including interest totals ₹54.22 crore. In a letter, Director of

M&A noted that the Telangana government had written to it in July 2023 for dropping the proposals submitted for 11 projects in the past and adjust the central assistance release to nine other projects.

Converted to loan
The M&A Director pointed out that in case the State government fails to complete the projects as per timeline mentioned, the funds released be converted to loan to the State government.

KPSC recruitment exam under scanner

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Amidst allegations of nepotism and malpractice by the Karnataka Public Service Commission (KPSC) chairman, who has been suspended by the Governor for the same, the Commission is in the eye of the storm again over alleged corruption in recruitment exam. Hundreds of candidates who appeared for the recruitment of Veterinary Officer posts gathered in

front of the Vidhana Soudha Police Station in Bengaluru on Thursday and submitted a complaint. In the complaint submitted to the police, aspirants have made allegations against the now-suspended KPSC chairman illegally benefiting his daughters, a candidate related to a top official of KPSC figures in the final list. The candidate who failed in the veterinary course and is a repeater secured a high score in the KPSC exam, they alleged.



Transport Minister C.P. John during the launch ceremony of the 'pink bus' in Thiruvananthapuram on Thursday. JAYAMOHAAN A.

Kerala govt. launches women-only 'pink bus' in Capital city

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The State government launched the women-only 'pink bus' service introduced by the Kerala State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC), at the Thiruvananthapuram Central depot on Thursday, as part of the government's 100-day action plan. Speaking after inaugurating the State-level rollout of the initiative, Transport Minister C.P. John said the project is being implemented with the aim of ensuring safe and comfortable travel for working women. The government's goal is to create an environment where women can travel freely. Pink bus services will operate at 8 p.m. and 10 p.m. to ensure safety during night travel for women working in places including Technopark. The project will be extended to other districts soon, and the routes and timings will be determined after assessing the requirements of the passengers,

said the Minister. In addition to night services, the pink buses will ply during the day as well. The Minister said that pink bus services have been arranged in the morning to ensure safe travel to the medical college for women arriving by train, mothers travelling with small children, and patients. **'No basis for fear'** Stating that the KSRTC is doing exemplary work in promoting the use of public transport, the Minister said it has gained strong trust and acceptance among the people, which has increased the confidence and pride of the employees. Mr. John added that there is no basis for the fear that the salaries of the employees would be affected in the name of implementing the free travel scheme. To ensure the punctuality of services and increase revenue, an online reservation facility and the use of electric buses in the future are also being considered.

A.P. Cabinet clears security plan for Pushkaram festival

G.V.R. Subba Rao
VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh Cabinet on Thursday approved a series of proposals aimed at strengthening security arrangements for the Godavari Pushkaralu-2027, supporting handloom workers, promoting industrial development and advancing infrastructure projects across the State. Information and Public Relations (I&PR) Minister Kolu Parthasarathy said that the Cabinet cleared a proposal to extend the government guarantee for a ₹300-crore term loan to the Andhra Pradesh State Cooperative Marketing Federation (AP MARKFED). The Cabinet approved ₹50 crore for security and crowd management arrangements for the Godavari Pushkaralu scheduled to be held in June-July 2027. The Cabinet also approved the implementation of the Nethannala Sevalo scheme to provide financial assistance to handloom workers. Under the scheme, eligible handloom worker families below the poverty line will receive



Naidu chairs a Cabinet meeting at the Secretariat on Thursday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

₹25,000 annually. As part of efforts to attract investments and promote clean energy, the Cabinet cleared several proposals relating to renewable energy projects and infrastructure development. Land-related approvals were given for energy, tourism and industrial projects. The Cabinet approved the framework for implementing the Centre's Bharat Audyogik Vikas Yojana (BHAVYA) in Andhra Pradesh. The Cabinet also approved measures to facilitate aerospace and aviation infrastructure development, healthcare expansion and revival of a closed engineering institution through Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University-Anantapur, the Minister said.

Aadhaar verification for Tatkal not violative of privacy rights: Kerala HC

The Hindu Bureau
KOCHI

Aadhaar authentication required for Tatkal train ticketing system does not violate the Right to Privacy of a user, said Kerala High Court on Thursday. The Division Bench of Chief Justice Soumen Sen and Justice V.M. Syam Kumar was considering a public interest litigation petition challenging the requirement of Aadhaar-based OTP authentication in the Tatkal ticketing system introduced by the Ministry of Railways. The court observed that the authentication is optional and there is no com-



As per the Ministry, rationale behind the policy is to ensure that only genuine individual users can access the Tatkal booking system.

pulsion to share the Aadhaar details for ticket purchases online through the Indian Railways Catering and Tourism Corporation website. It noted that the requirement for authentication for Tatkal tickets

was justified based on experiences of alleged deceit, manipulation and bulk booking, which denied access to the ticketing system for genuine users.

The Ministry of Railways, Centre for Railway Information System, and IRCTC filed their statements, which explained that the rationale behind the policy is to ensure that only genuine individual users can access the Tatkal booking system. The provision is intended to prevent the bulk booking of tickets by touts, syndicates, and automated software. The court suggested that the PAN card could be alternatively used for such verification, since there is OTP generation linked to PAN details and it would produce similar results to Aadhaar verification.



“The NTA is responsible for conducting high-stakes

“Despite this enormous scale, the agency has faced intense criticism over paper leaks and test cancellations, including the high-profile mismanagement seen in exams like NEET and UG-NET,” Mr. Sivadasan said.

Across Kerala, the SFI took out protest marches that turned confrontational in several districts as police used water cannon and tear gas to disperse the crowds. Marches were

In Uttar Pradesh's Lucknow, Bhim Army activists tried to march towards the Governor's residence,

Besides, the student agitation in Madhya Pradesh's Indore gathered momentum as more students, teachers and parents joined in solidarity with the Delhi protests, leading

Students, activists, and political leaders sought education reforms in Guwahati, where the protest was organised under the

Security personnel resorted to baton charge against stone-pelters in Katihar and Begusarai. Prot-

Various students' wings, such as AISA and SFI, organised rallies in several localities of Kolkata.

Delhi Police, Centre silent on use of force on protesters

Though Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Thursday that “a series of steps for safeguarding the interests of students” were being taken, there was no assurance from the Centre on probing the “police excesses” against the protesters. The Delhi High Court has sought responses from the Centre and Delhi Police on PIL pleas alleging excessive use of force against the demonstrators.

Over two decades on, two CBI cases in 2003 CAT leak still pending in courts

Further investigation led them to an examina-

The 2003 CAT paper leak led to the cancellation of the examination. This was the case which brought Ranjit, who be-

candidates, alleging that ₹2 lakh to ₹4 lakh were de-

The next date of hearing is on July 28.

Mumbai policeman threatens protesters; investigation begins

“If I see you around here

Soon after the video went viral on Thursday, the police ordered an inquiry. "Mumbai Police has ordered an inquiry and action will be taken after verifying the facts. The driver has been removed from the place of his present posting..." an official of Mumbai Police said.

Mr. Aggarwal's counsel said, "They have made the entire Delhi hostage. Roads have been blocked. Citizens of Delhi are suffering." The court posted the plea for hearing on Friday.

FIR filed over Mamata's Martyrs' Day rally for 'violation' of High Court order

A woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a white shirt and a light blue shawl, is speaking into a microphone. She is gesturing with her right hand raised and her left hand holding the microphone. She is wearing a yellow wristband and a silver watch. The background is a blurred green landscape.

According to sources,

The Calcutta High Court on Thursday also deferred

Earlier, on May 21, the same court granted protection to Mr. Banerjee in a case in which an FIR was registered against him over alleged inflammatory remarks made during the Assembly election. The protection remains in force until July 31.

Vijay's *Jana Nayagan* hits the screens across T.N.; cinemas see good footfall

For Friday, most cinemas in Chennai said occupancy levels were hovering around 70%-75%. The big multiplexes reported a full house. However, cinemas in Tier 2 and Tier 3 towns

A large crowd of people, mostly young men, is gathered in front of a movie theater. The theater's facade is covered with large posters for the movie 'Gully Boy', featuring the lead actor Ranbir Kapoor. The posters are in various colors, including yellow and red, and display the movie's title in Hindi. The crowd is dense, filling the foreground and middle ground of the image.

“On day one, we had TVK cadre booking tickets. A large number of women cadre also came in. In gen-

M. Manoj Kumar, Managing Director of Ganesh Cinemas in Melur, Madurai, said: "We have four

Social media was abuzz with posts claiming that tickets were being sold at inflated prices. However, two cinema owners pointed out that the majority of tickets are sold online at fixed prices. They said people who purchase tickets online may later resell them in the black market.

6.17 lakh Waqf properties approved on portal, says Ministry

Ishita Mishra
NEW DELHI

The Minority Affairs Ministry informed the Lok Sabha on Wednesday that more than 6.17 lakh Waqf properties have been successfully validated and approved on the UMEED Central Portal-2025, as part of the government’s ongoing initiative to digitise and streamline Waqf property records.

Responding to an unstarred question raised by Trinamool Congress MP Sajida Ahmed, Union Minority Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju stated that 7,99,978 Waqf properties had been initiated for uploading to the UMEED portal as of July 17.

According to the Ministry, 6,17,102 properties have been validated and approved, while 91,623 properties remain at various stages of the uploading process. Another 91,253 properties were rejected during the verification process. State and Union Territory-wise details of the registration status are available on the portal.

Complete lifecycle

The Minister said the UMEED Central Portal-2025 was a statutory portal developed under the provisions of the UMEED Act, 1995. The platform was designed to manage the complete lifecycle of Waqf properties, including registration, verification, survey by the Collector, mutation, annual account audits, and related administrative processes.

No debate before ouster of Minister: Opposition

INDIA bloc closes ranks on paper leaks; Rahul leads march to Gandhi Smriti, says they stand behind agitating students; leaders also slam Modi’s X post, say it failed to address concerns of the students

Sandeep Phukan
Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

Maintaining pressure on the government both inside and outside Parliament, the Opposition on Thursday refused the government’s offer of a debate on paper leaks, arguing that any discussion must be preceded by the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan.

Later in the evening, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi-led Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) bloc MPs in a symbolic march to Gandhi Smriti on Tees January Marg, where Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated, to pay homage to all those students who took their lives due to paper leaks and said they stood strongly behind the agitating students and their demands.

“Our leader Mahatma Gandhiji was assassinated here. Today, the Modi government is assassinating democracy in India, brutalising students, and beating them,” Mr. Gandhi told presspersons at Gandhi Smriti after paying tribute to Mahatma Gandhi.

He said the Opposition parties would not accept such treatment of students and demanded that Prime Minister Narendra Modi apologise and sack Mr. Pradhan. The Opposition’s symbolic march in the



Hitting the streets: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and others paying tribute at Gandhi Smriti in New Delhi. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

evening was not without its share of drama, as the Delhi Police had blocked access points to Sunehri Bagh Road, where Mr. Gandhi’s official residence is located.

After Mr. Gandhi had taken the unprecedented step of sitting on a dharna outside the Prime Minister’s residence on Tuesday, the government deployed two busloads of CRPF and Rapid Action Force (RAF) personnel close to his residence. Additionally, a bus was placed outside the road blocking the bus carrying Opposition MPs.

Change in venue

The Opposition parties also had to change the venue of an evening vigil after they were not allowed to gather at India Gate. Top Opposition leaders, including Congress leaders Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and P. Chidambaram, CPI(M) MP John Brittas, NCP(SP) lead-

er Supriya Sule, and RJD leader Manoj Jha, were part of the solidarity march.

The evening march was a result of what was decided at the morning meeting of the INDIA bloc, and more such joint campaigns are being planned.

According to sources, at the meeting on Thursday morning, there were a few stray voices advocating that the Opposition should participate in the debate to present its point of view. However, this opinion was immediately rejected by others who felt that Mr. Pradhan’s resignation had to take precedence over everything else, in keeping with public sentiment.

Mr. Gandhi and Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav both argued strongly that no concession could be given on this demand. Mr. Gandhi said that the mood of the nation was “combative” and that

the Opposition had to reflect this. He reiterated his comments from Wednesday’s meeting that there should be synchronisation between what the Opposition does inside Parliament and what it does outside it. Mr. Gandhi also argued that the Opposition’s actions needed to be democratised.

Unanimous decision

Moreover, it was felt that a debate would give the government an opportunity to grandstand and filibuster its way through by leaning on its numerical strength in Parliament. There was a unanimous decision that, as “public representatives”, the Opposition had to reflect public sentiment without giving the government any leeway.

The Opposition, meanwhile, reacted sharply to Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s post on X.

Mr. Brittas said accountability must begin at the top, arguing that fast-track courts cannot address the systemic failures behind paper leaks. CPI general secretary D. Raja accused the government of systematically weakening the education system through policies that promote the “commercialisation, centralisation and communalisation” of education, and said the Prime Minister’s remarks failed to address students’ concerns.

Mr. Jha called the remarks an attempt to “fool the nation”.

Women’s quota should be implemented without delimitation: ex-HC judge

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

The freeze on delimitation of Lok Sabha constituencies should continue and women’s reservation should be implemented immediately after being delinked from delimitation and the Census, the former Madras High Court judge D. Hariparanthaman (retd) said on Thursday.

Releasing the book *The Delimitation Debate: The Union and its Units*, published by The Hindu Group here, the former judge cautioned that an increase in the number of Lok Sabha seats would hamper meaningful deliberations in the House. “The problem of raising the numbers is that deliberations cannot take place,” he said.

Besides, if the increase is based on population, southern States will stand to lose adequate representation in the Lok Sabha, he said. This will amount to penalising the southern States for having implemented the national population policy well. “Taking into consideration other democracies, 543 [the current strength of the Lok Sabha] itself is a good number,” he said.

The former judge batted for equitable representation of all States in the Rajya Sabha, much like the U.S. Senate model.

K. Ashok Vardhan Shetty, retired IAS officer and member of the High-level Committee on Centre-State Relations constituted by the Tamil Nadu govern-



Nirmala Lakshman, Publisher, The Hindu Group; Justice D. Hariparanthaman, former judge of the Madras High Court; K. Ashok Vardhan Shetty, former IAS officer; and N. Ram, Director, The Hindu Group, at a book launch on Thursday. R. RAGU

ment, said Article 329(a) of the Constitution placed the Delimitation Commission’s proposals inside a constitutional “black box”, insulating it from executive, parliamentary, and judicial scrutiny.

The commission comprises a retired Supreme Court judge as chairperson, the Chief Election Commissioner or a nominee, and the State Election Commissioner of the State concerned. “This is dangerous and has to be corrected. In Japan and Germany, the delimitation commission advises but the legislatures pass the delimitation legislation,” he said.

Mr. Shetty suggested the introduction of the “dialogue model” implemented in Canada where the delimitation commission’s proposals are deliberated by a parliamentary subcommittee and the remarks are sent back to the commission for clarification. To improve representation in both Houses, the Rajya Sabha, or the House of States, may be recast on the lines of the U.S. Senate,

while for the Lok Sabha, a digressive proportionality system, as in practice in Brazil, may be implemented to reduce the gap between the more populous States and the smaller ones. Delimitation should be frozen until all States fell within a narrow band of the National Total Fertility Rate, he said.

N. Ram, Director, The Hindu Group Publishing Pvt. Ltd., suggested that the ideas discussed in the book be distilled to make them accessible for all, which then may be translated to other languages.

Nirmala Lakshman, Publisher, The Hindu Group, and Suresh Nambath, Editor, *The Hindu*, were present. R. Srinivasan, head, Magazines and Special Publications, THG Publishing, said the title was the Group’s 219th publication since the formation of a Special Publications vertical in 2017.

The book is a collection of 17 essays – preceded by an introduction – on delimitation, federalism, representation, and Census.

Parliament stalled again as Opposition continues to seek Pradhan’s resignation

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Opposition’s demand for Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan’s resignation continued to stall proceedings of the Monsoon Session of Parliament for the fourth consecutive day on Thursday.

In the Rajya Sabha, Leader of the Opposition and Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said the Education Minister had to resign, while Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju reiterated the government’s commitment to hold a comprehensive discussion on the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) paper leak issue. The Minister said the Opposition can decide the date and duration of the debate.

Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, accompanied by Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav and Trinamool Congress leaders Saugata Roy and Mahua Moitra, met Speaker Om Birla to resolve the deadlock.

The Rajya Sabha functioned for less than 10 minutes in the morning before being adjourned twice. Soon after the House assembled, Mr. Rijiju said the government was ready to discuss the NEET issue “today itself”, and urged the Opposition not to attach conditions to the debate.

Mr. Kharge, however, insisted that Mr. Pradhan must resign before any discussion could begin. Referring to the police action



No let up: Lok Sabha proceedings under way during the Monsoon Session of Parliament, in New Delhi on Thursday. SANSAD TV

against student protesters, he said many students were in hospital and their parents were deeply disturbed. Amid sloganeering by both sides, Chairman C.P. Radhakrishnan adjourned the House till noon and later till 2 p.m. Leader of the House J.P. Nadda termed the Opposition’s conduct “highly irresponsible”. “First, they wanted us to discuss the paper leak, and the government said we would discuss NEET and all other issues,” he said.

Disruption continues

The disruption continued when the House reassembled at 2 p.m. Deputy Chairman Harivansh appealed to members to at least take up the listed Bills, but adjourned the House till 3 p.m. after barely two minutes. When proceedings resumed, he invited Mr. Kharge to speak in an effort to break the impasse. As the Congress president began reading from a written note, Mr. Rijiju objected, saying the government was willing to hold a discussion but the Opposition was not. The House was then adjourned

for the day.

The Lok Sabha too witnessed repeated disruptions over the demand for a discussion on the NEET paper leak issue and Mr. Pradhan’s resignation. The Speaker appealed to members to return to their seats, saying it was not right to disrupt proceedings.

Mr. Rijiju accused the Opposition of attaching preconditions and trying to avoid a debate on the issue. But as protests continued, the House was adjourned again within minutes. When the House met again at 2 p.m., the protests resumed, prompting Mr. Saikia to adjourn it for the day.

NDA, INDIA bloc MPs face off with opposing protests

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Parliamentarians from the Opposition Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) bloc and the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) faced off at the Makar Dwar in the Parliament complex on Thursday, even before the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha convened.

A large number of MPs belonging to both camps stood outside the entrance to the Parliament building and shouted slogans at each other.

The Opposition MPs raised slogans like “*Isteefa do* [resign]”, “*gaddi chhodo* [leave the chair]”, and “*sharam karo* [have some shame]”, while the ruling party MPs criticised the Opposition for politicising the paper leak issue and raised slogans of “*Vande Mataram*”.

The INDIA bloc MPs were demanding the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over the NEET paper leak and CBSE examination irregularities. Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi, Wayanad MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, and several other INDIA bloc MPs also carried banners demanding Mr. Pradhan’s ouster. Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi and Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav also joined the protest later.

The NDA MPs demanded that the NEET issue be discussed in Parliament, accusing the Opposition of running away from debate.

BJP leaders, allies urge Centre to treat youth protests with empathy

Nistula Hebbar
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s announcement of setting up fast-track courts to deal with paper leak cases, in the first such outreach to young protesters at Jantar Mantar, may be an attempt to focus on what first triggered the protests, but sections of the BJP and its allies in the National Democratic Alliance feel the issue has become a lightning rod for a host of grievances of the younger generation.

Murli Manohar Joshi, who was Human Resource Development Minister in the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government, on Thursday said on X that protesting students should be dealt with sensitively and with empathy. “It is painful to see young students from



Murli Manohar Joshi

different parts of the country assembled for days on the streets of New Delhi. Their anxieties and concerns regarding the examination system are genuine and must be handled with empathy and a desire to find a lasting solution,” he posted. He added it was “very painful to see that even young girls were brutally mishandled”, a

course of action that would only alienate a large section of the population from the “national goal of Viksit Bharat”.

“I fervently hope that this is not treated merely as a law-and-order issue to be tackled through the use of force,” he said.

‘Not just about NEET’

Mr. Joshi’s sentiments found an echo among BJP leaders. Asking not to be named, they said the issue was no longer just about the NEET paper leak, and that the heavy-handed manner in which the protesters were handled when they marched to Parliament was reactive.

“From what I have heard at the protest site [Jantar Mantar], the place has become a meeting ground for anyone who has a grievance against the

government,” said a BJP MP. He admitted that the BJP will have to renegotiate its relationship with the younger generation in the long term.

The NDA allies also shared concerns over the way Congress leader Rahul Gandhi was physically removed from the protest site outside Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s residence, and the pictures that poured out in the national and international press thereafter.

“Unfortunately, things were not handled well at all, but the more worrying thing is that the protests appear to be leaderless as well, now that Sonam Wangchuk has been hospitalised. The moral authority of guiding a protest movement is essential for any resolution,” said a senior NDA MP.

IIT-M students support Delhi protests, ‘ordered’ to remove posts on social media

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

IIT-Madras students organised a spontaneous gathering in support of the student protests in New Delhi’s Jantar Mantar on Wednesday, even as the institute’s management asked them to take down posts that supported the protests earlier in the week.

A student of IIT-Madras, on condition of anonymity, said Chintabar – a registered, independent students’ body in IIT-Madras

A call-for-action video that was put up on Chintabar’s Instagram handle has been taken down

– had sought permission to conduct an event on Monday evening, in support of the students’ protests at Jantar Mantar and the fast undertaken by activist Sonam Wangchuk and the demand for the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan among other things.

The student alleged that the Dean of Students called the student organisers and the faculty adviser, and threatened them of consequences if they did not take down a call-for-action video that was put up on Chintabar’s Instagram handle.

The animated video showing Sonam Wangchuk on a fast has since been taken down, although it is still up on a few other social media handles.

However, the students took the help of other social media pages to call for

another gathering on Wednesday. It was attended by a few hundred students, who gathered within a two-hour notice. Since the event did not have an organiser, the students brought their own materials and created posters.

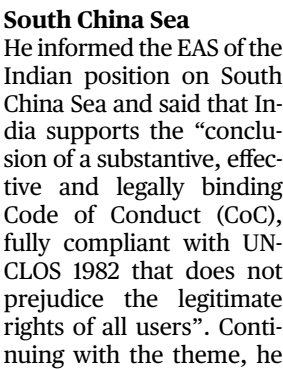
The student said that they were trying to mobilise funds, materials, and medicines to be sent to New Delhi in aid of the students protesting there.

They added that the management was yet to respond to the spontaneous gathering.

Multiple agencies concluded their search and rescue operation after the bodies of all 25 workers trapped inside an under-construction tunnel of a hydropower project in Sikkim's Namchi district were recovered by Thursday evening, District Magistrate Anupa Tamling told *The Hindu*. According to the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation, 25 workers were about 1.5 km inside the tunnel when "sudden explosive release of suspected methane gas" caused an explosion at 1.04 p.m. on July 20. However, the Central PSU and the Sikkim government announced separate investigations into the cause of the accident.

The CBI said that during its investigation, each person involved in the theft and onward distribution of the stolen NEET-UG 2024 question paper was identified, as also each candidate who benefited from its use. “Multiple chargesheets have accordingly been filed by the CBI against 45 persons before the jurisdictional court in Patna,” said the agency.

He said India will be



He reiterated India's policy on "zero tolerance for terrorism", and said there should not "be any doubt that acts of terrorism will have consequenc-

He further said that upholding the treaty is a “cornerstone of regional peace and stability”.

The State government informed the court that the chargesheet had already been filed and that the trial was yet to reach the stage of framing of charges.

against the directions put in place by Supreme Court. "Terrorism cannot be defeated through bulldozers or mass arrests alone. People are essential for restoring lasting peace. People are angry over the brutal killing of the police head constable. But when thousands of people are detained, that anger gets redirected. We must take our people along in this fight; only then will we succeed," he said.

FAITH

True devotee of Lord Siva

Great philosophers are always driven to seek answers to questions that have a way of benefiting future generations. Appayya Dikshita was one such. An exceptional debater, philosophical expounder and equally famed for encouraging pandits, an ardent devotee of Siva, he was once assailed by a great doubt: was His Siva bhakti indeed true, all pervading or was it a superficial one?

He decided to test himself; to which end, he drank the juice of datura seeds (*oomathangai* in Tamil). Before drinking it, he instructed his sishyas to meticulously record all that he said in that state (of intoxication). His students diligently compiled his utterings, and the compilation is the 50-verse devotional work, *Atmarpana Stuti*. The essence of the work is to surrender to Parameswaran, said Girdhar Sharma.

One often asks what one should do to attain one's spiritual goal. Our minds should become pure and shun the impermanent things in life. In the first verse of *Atmarpana Stuti*, Dikshita says, "I worship this Lord of Lords.. who can know [the extent] of His characteristics? We can only mention His glories but to even to do so, we need Parameswaran's grace. Who can know about Him? Even the faculty of perception that we possess works due to Him and we should salute Him." He alone is the Creator, therefore, surrender to Him.

Puranas and other scriptural works instruct devotees to develop bhakti towards the Lord; they also enjoin upon the devotees to follow the instructions of the spiritual guru. Devotion is the root of gnana. One should always think of Him. If one sneaks at all, it should be about Siva.

HEALTH

Building resilience to protect elderly from climate stressors

There are many other factors including financial capacity, living alone, gender, age that intersect to render senior citizens particularly vulnerable during extreme climate events and slow-onset climate hazards; a recent study calls for a points to a layered response to grow resilience both at the household and community level

Ramya Kannan

In its sweep, climate change is not an equitable overlord, and while it does create havoc, it is true that this impacts some people more than others. There are, now, studies to show that vulnerable groups of people are affected far more than others and the factors that determine how badly you are affected include economic ability, age and gender. A recent study by HelpAge India further highlights the fact that senior citizens form a vulnerable group and are right in the pathway of harm left in the trail of climate change.

There are two ways in which climate change affects older adults – sudden shocks and slow-onset stresses. The report says rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, drought, flooding, coastal erosion, water scarcity, poor ventilation, indoor heat stress, dampness, and environmental degradation can worsen chronic illness, raise mortality risk, reduce mobility, and increase care needs for senior citizens.

For them it could manifest as a number of things – heat-related stress, respiratory problems, reduced mobility, mental distress, sleep disruption, and disruption in access to medicines and healthcare during climatic events.

In addition changing socio-cultural norms and migration patterns indicate that older people can become isolated, leading to an impact on their mental health as well. As the country learns to become more heat resilient, it should also focus on protecting older people’s health, dignity, mobility, income, housing and social support structures, without which they will be rendered further vulnerable.

This is particularly relevant to India, where the portion of senior citizens as a part of the overall population is constantly growing. As the nation is steadily moving towards the greys, the older population is projected to rise to about 347 million by 2050 (from 149 million in 2022). Naturally climate stress will make a larger share of the country vulnerable to physical and mental health challenges.

Several factors

The report identifies several factors that sharply reduce resilience: living alone, poor physical or mental health, impairment, advanced age, poverty, financial dependence, weak institutional support, insecure housing, and residence in hazard-prone locations. These disadvantages often overlap, which is why the study uses an “Intersectional Place Perspective” to show that risk is shaped by the interaction of age, gender, widowhood, disability, poverty, social isolation, and local environmental conditions. For example, an uneducated, unskilled older widow with no pension, was at a relatively greater risk from a



Shades of grey: The population of elderly persons is projected to rise from 149 million in 2022 to about 347 million by 2050 in the country. Naturally climate stress will make a larger share of the country vulnerable to physical and mental health challenges. T. APPALA NAIDU

cyclone, that an able-bodied older man who lived with his family.

Anupama Datta, Head, Policy Research & Advocacy, HelpAge India, who led this research study, said the focus was on districts impacted by slow onset climate hazards. “Older persons bring unique strengths as well as vulnerabilities that shape how they experience and respond to climate hazards. Repeated episodes of climate hazards weaken their ability to recover and build resilience.

Caring for elderly

There are a number of environmental stressors that will impact the life of the elderly, says Soumya Swaminathan, chairperson, M.S.Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai. The institution has launched a two-State study to evaluate the impact of increase in temperature on the health of the residents.

What can be urgently done here, she says, is to establish special care facilities for the elderly, such as those in Thailand, where a community space is created for elders, in both rural and urban areas, where they can come together, engage in activities and receive comprehensive primary health care as well. Handling the loneliness and bringing the community around the senior citizens will have an impact on mitigating their vulnerabilities. “We must first think of establishing this basic level of care for the elders and then address issues like heat with particular reference to the elderly,” she says, adding that a fresh vulnerability that is emerging through studies indicates that heat could also be a stressor to accelerate ageing itself.

The Helpage report points to a layered

response to grow resilience: at the household level, storing food and water, improving shelter, saving money, planning ahead for disasters, and diversifying livelihoods. However useful they are, they may not be enough for persons with multiple disadvantages. At the community level, family support, neighbour check-ins, volunteer networks, and community shelter or relocation support are recommended coping strategies. It also recommends age-inclusive early warning systems, community monitoring, and stronger local care networks, especially for those living alone or with impairments.

In terms of policy recommendations, it calls for climate-resilient healthcare for elders, expanded social protection and livelihood support, and targeted support for the groups at highest risk of being affected.

The strongest policy priorities in the document are: climate-resilient healthcare for older persons, expanded social protection and livelihood support, better disaster preparedness and early warning systems, climate-resilient housing, environmental health interventions, and stronger community-based care networks. It also calls for targeted support for the highest-risk groups: those living alone, widows, persons with impairments, the oldest-old, and financially insecure households.

Ms. Datta explains that while government schemes serve as lifeline for older persons, and provide a critical safety net, they follow general rules. The schemes are not currently designed keeping in mind the vulnerabilities of the

older persons, especially those who are uneducated, physically weak or impaired, oldest old, living alone. She explains that “access is particularly challenging for older persons with poor health (30%), those severely affected by climate-related shocks (30%), with no formal education (22%), and from lower socio-economic groups (22%). Additional challenges include, long waiting times and delays (25%), digital access difficulties (15%), and lack of support during the application process (10%), highlighting the need for more age-friendly service delivery.”

Examples of interventions

The report also highlights certain examples of interventions that worked, in order that they might be scaled up or adapted for implementation in other contexts. In Odisha, it says, older persons received early warnings for storms and cyclones from the village panchayat and were evacuated to safe community shelters in time. It also points to organised grass roots volunteer-ism where organisations or a band of individuals co-ordinate with the official systems to organise relief, evacuations and post-facto care during disasters.

For India, the report’s conclusions are very clear: shift from ‘hazard-centred’ responses to ‘people-centred’ systems to connect climate adaptation, healthy ageing, social protection, and disaster risk reduction. That involves harnessing One Health, generating and using better data, establishing stronger institutional coordination, and services that are designed by factoring in older persons’ actual barriers to access.

(ramya.kannan@thehindu.co.in)

THE GIST

A recent study by HelpAge India further highlights the fact that senior citizens form a vulnerable group and are right in the pathway of harm left in the trail of climate change. This is particularly relevant to India, where the portion of senior citizens as a part of the overall population is constantly growing

The report identifies several factors that sharply reduce resilience: living alone, poor physical or mental health, impairment, advanced age, poverty, financial dependence, weak institutional support, insecure housing, and residence in hazard-prone locations. These disadvantages often overlap, which is why the study uses an “Intersectional Place Perspective” to show that risk is shaped by the interaction of age, gender, widowhood, disability, poverty, social isolation, and local environmental conditions

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BIG SHOT



Medical supplies donated by India arriving in Kenya, which has stepped up Ebola surveillance following an outbreak in the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo. REUTERS

Can time outdoors become part of healthcare?

Athira Elssa Johnson

Healthcare systems in several countries are exploring whether structured time in natural environments can complement conventional care amid rising rates of stress, anxiety and chronic disease.

Green prescriptions, blue prescriptions and other forms of nature-based social prescribing involve healthcare professionals recommending activities in parks, gardens or near water bodies alongside standard treatment.

The premise is not that nature replaces medicine, but that spending time in natural settings may support mental well-being, encourage physical activity and promote social interaction. While research suggests mental health benefits, evidence for long-term physical health outcomes remains limited. Experts also stress that the effectiveness of these interventions depends on urban planning, environmental protection and equitable access to safe public spaces.

Green and blue prescriptions are forms of nature-based social prescribing. Green prescriptions encourage activities in parks, gardens or other green spaces, while blue prescriptions involve



Time spent in forests and gardens is increasingly being seen as an addition to medication-based care. PTI

spending time near rivers, lakes, wetlands or the coast.

Forest bathing, or *shinrin-yoku*, originated in Japan in the 1980s. Unlike exercise-focused activities, it involves spending quiet time in a forest while engaging with the surrounding environment. “Forest bathing is less about physical activity and more about being fully present in a natural environment,” says Vinod Prem Anand, senior consultant in internal medicine at MGM Healthcare, Chennai. “Green and blue prescriptions, meanwhile, are recommendations made by healthcare professionals as part of

nature-based social prescribing.”

Other approaches include horticultural therapy and care farming, typically delivered in more structured settings.

Research suggests nature-based interventions may reduce stress, anxiety and depressive symptoms while improving mood and psychological well-being. Some studies have also reported modest improvements in blood pressure, sleep quality and stress-related physiological markers.

Good evidence

“There is reasonably good evidence for reduced anxiety, lower depressive symptoms and improved mood, particularly among people experiencing stress-related conditions,” says Nithya M., consultant psychiatrist, Apollo Speciality Hospitals, Vanagaram. Evidence also points to improved attention and reduced cognitive fatigue, although it remains unclear how much exposure is needed or how long benefits persist.

Dr. Vinod cites a systematic review in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* that found associations between nature-based social prescribing and improved mental and physical health outcomes. The

United Kingdom’s National Health Service has incorporated green and blue prescribing into parts of its social prescribing programme.

However, experts caution against overstating the evidence. “Many available studies involve relatively small numbers of participants,” says R. Sundararaman, senior consultant in internal medicine at SIMS Hospital, Chennai. “The findings are encouraging, but larger, well-designed studies are still needed.”

Researchers believe several factors contribute to the observed benefits. Nature-based activities often combine physical activity, social interaction and a break from stressful environments. Morning daylight may also support healthy sleep-wake cycles.

Doctors stress these interventions complement rather than replace evidence-based care.

“The biggest misconception is that these approaches can replace conventional therapy. They cannot,” says Dr. Nithya.

Experts say wider adoption in India will also depend on multiple factors as rapid urbanisation, air pollution, traffic, safety concerns and unequal access to green spaces already limit opportunities. (athira.elsa@thehindu.co.in)



Escalation trap

Donald Trump should change course if he wants to end the war with Iran

The decision by Yemen's Ansar Allah, better known as the Houthis, to impose a blockade on Saudi Arabia signals that the war on Iran has entered its most dangerous phase. The Houthis, a close Iranian ally, had avoided direct involvement due to a fragile but functional ceasefire with Saudi Arabia, despite their controlling most of Yemen's population centres, including capital Sana'a. That ceasefire effectively fell apart on July 13 when an airport in Sanaa was attacked by forces of "Yemen's internationally recognised government". Based in Saudi Arabia, this government maintains loyal forces inside Yemen, though the Houthis remain the country's most powerful and influential political and military force. Blaming Riyadh for the attack, the Houthis announced on July 20 a blockade on ships using Saudi ports on the Red Sea. Saudi Arabia, whose crude and other exports through the Strait of Hormuz have been severely constrained by Iran's blockade, has increased its reliance on Red Sea ports, especially Yanbu. Tankers from Yanbu to Asian markets must pass through the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, which links the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea. The Houthis control much of Yemen's Red Sea coastline overlooking the Bab el-Mandeb and can enforce a blockade of the chokepoint.

When Iran closed the Strait of Hormuz after the U.S.-Israel war began on February 28, all Persian Gulf states struggled to sustain their exports. Saudi Arabia, however, cushioned the impact by using its East-West Pipeline, which links its eastern oilfields to the Red Sea export terminals. If the Houthis enforce a total blockade on the kingdom, Riyadh could face far deeper economic disruption. This, coupled with Iran's attacks on Kuwait's desalination plants and power grid – after U.S. strikes on Iranian civilian infrastructure – paints a grim picture of the war and its regional consequences. If the first phase of Iran's counter-attack targeted the Persian Gulf monarchies, the second has expanded to include Jordan, which hosts two major U.S. military bases. Now, with the Houthi blockade, the war's economic pain is set to deepen further. U.S. President Donald Trump had an opportunity to extricate himself from the conflict when he signed a memorandum of understanding with Iran on June 17. But by returning to war over disputes surrounding control of the Strait of Hormuz, Mr. Trump has not only squandered the opportunity but has also raised the risk of dragging the U.S. into yet another forever, unwinnable war. At this point, he is pursuing the same military tactics against Iran repeatedly, expecting different results. If Mr. Trump wants a way out, he should change course, push for an immediate ceasefire and return to diplomacy.

Core upgrade

The updated Index of Core Industries rounds out economic data upgrades

The Index of Core Industries (ICI) has finally joined the country's other economic metrics in becoming up-to-date and representative of the economy. The other metrics such as the national accounts, Consumer Price Index (CPI), Wholesale Price Index (WPI), and the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) were updated earlier this year, although even those were after considerable delays. The ICI has now joined their ranks with the June data being based on a new series with an updated base year, an additional sector being covered, and revised weights and methodologies. This is a welcome upgrade. The performance of these core industries is a vital barometer of the state of the economy. In the new series, the previous eight sectors have become nine, with the vital inclusion of the iron ore sector. Improvements have also been made to how the steel and coal sectors are measured in order to remove the previous double-counting that was taking place. The addition of a sector would naturally change the distribution of weights of the sectors in the index, but the final weights also reflect a broader shift in economic activity. The coal and natural gas sectors have seen their weights nearly halve to about 5.6% and 3.8%, respectively. On the other hand, the electricity sector now makes up more than 30% of the index from less than 20% in the previous series. All of this perhaps reflects the rising share of renewables in electricity generation, even as demand for electricity itself surges.

The performance of the index in June 2026, with a five-month-high growth of 5%, would suggest that Indian industry is shrugging off the slump induced by the West Asia crisis. However, two of the strong growth numbers – iron ore by 43.9% and electricity by 9.8% – were due to a statistical base effect since both sectors had contracted in June last year. It remains to be seen whether the numbers will remain this positive once that base effect wears off in the months ahead. The new series highlights some of the systemic issues that the old series did, such as the persistent contraction of the crude oil and natural gas sectors. They have contracted continuously for 18 and 24 months, respectively. If India does not have these resources, that is one thing. But if it has them and still is not able to extract them economically, then that is a serious shortcoming. The update of the ICI and the recent upgrade of the WPI would have been a good time for a broader statistical reorganisation. With the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation handling the CPI and the IIP, it only makes sense for the WPI and ICI to move to it from their current home in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. That change can still be made.

For the last few weeks, peaceful protests by young students all over India against examination paper leaks and the general decay in the education system have been gathering momentum. Their demands have been straightforward and to the point: accountability from the Government of India and education reform. The Narendra Modi government has responded to their courage with cowardice and wanton cruelty, treating them not as inheritors of the future but as enemies of the nation. On July 20, 2026, a day of infamy, the Delhi Police and the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) sought to suppress them with uncalled-for violence, using brutal lathicharges and tear gas. Scores of peaceful protesters have been injured. Even students heading back home were not spared, as lathis rained down on their backs and heads. The nation has seen some of the most depressing visuals of youth whose bodies have been scarred by pellets, the use of which would undoubtedly have been approved by the Union Home Minister himself. The videos from that day are seared into our memories and have stirred our collective conscience. Only the government and its captive media are spinning stories around this spontaneous rising tide of protest. It is time to say loud and clear: Stop. These are our sons and daughters, our young men and women.

The Modi government routinely uses violence in preference to dialogue. The pattern is clear, from farmers to activists. But this week, even a government as insensitive as the one that has set new standards of authoritarian governance, sank to a new low. Instead of reaching out with understanding to our future doctors and engineers, teachers and civil servants, entrepreneurs and nation builders, it unleashed the repressive power of the state on them. This can neither be forgiven or forgotten.

The old toolkit of labelling any and every dissent as anti-national has been repurposed to tar the student agitation. The Modi government has reached deep into its bag of tricks to cast aspersions and peddle conspiracies when what it should have done is to introspect on its policies that have motivated the protests.

The decline of public education

The first fundamental issue is the Modi government's retreat from public education. It has reduced the proportion of its total Budget spent on school education by 50% and on higher education by 33%. Can anyone see the sense in such an absurd retreat? Over the last 12 years, the Modi government has shut down nearly one lakh public schools while overseeing the opening of 43,000 private schools – a large chunk of which are run by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, which, along with its affiliate organisations, incidentally presides over the largest private



Sonia Gandhi

Chairperson of the Congress Parliamentary Party

The student protests are the consequence of the Narendra Modi government's policies

school network in India. In higher education, the University Grants Commission has cut its grants to universities and pushed them to take loans at high rates of interest. To repay them, public universities have resorted to raising their fees.

With high-quality, affordable public education inaccessible, families in India have been forced to spend out of pocket to educate their children. The total amount spent by families on the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) examination coaching alone is as much as the Modi government invests on public education in total. The cost of pursuing a private education deters lakhs of talented students, who come from humble backgrounds but have immense potential. Equally critical, however, is that these expenses also put a crushing burden of impossibly high expectations on our students. India's youth are keenly aware of how much their families have invested in the dream of their academic and professional success. The acute desperation of our students is a direct consequence of the privatisation and commercialisation of education.

Broken testing system, issue of success

The second issue is the gutting of India's public examination system, which has undergone the processes of centralisation, privatisation, and politicisation. The traditional practice of universities and States setting their own examinations to cater to their unique needs was replaced by a centralised, National Testing Agency (NTA)-conducted examinations such as the Common University Entrance Test (CUET). The NTA itself is a hapless, chronically-understaffed body which relies entirely on an army of private contractors to conduct its examinations. It is also well known that the paper-setters, translators, and experts engaged by the NTA are not renowned academics from India's premier institutions but are, for the most part, mediocre individuals with political affiliations. The end result of this process has had stark consequences – 152 paper leaks occurring across the country in the past 12 years, including nine by the NTA itself since it was formed in 2017. Even the most talented and hardworking students find themselves failing simply because the authorities are choosing to reap profits from the examination system without facing any significant consequences for their criminality.

The third issue is the difficulty of succeeding in India's education system. High-quality, well-paid job opportunities after graduation are a rarity today, partly due to the growing monopolisation of the economy. Unemployment rates for our young graduates have been consistently high, averaging about 40% in the last few years. Competition for the remaining few jobs is intense, and our students have never been more ill-equipped to compete for them. The

appointment of feckless Vice-Chancellors chosen for their partisan loyalty, and the consequent recruitment of politically connected but unqualified faculty, has created a crisis in teaching in our public universities. At a time when skill requirements in the workplace have become far more challenging, India's higher education system has remained bound to obsolete systems and politically motivated curricular changes, dangerously out of touch with evolving methods and standards, and particularly unable to keep pace with the Artificial Intelligence-enabled world. Students are confronted with trying to succeed in an increasingly demanding system for which they are far from adequately resourced.

The education system is therefore increasingly expensive, prone to corruption, and difficult to succeed in. But the last nail in the coffin has been the Modi government's consistent and conscious policy of evading accountability and avoiding good-faith conversations on education. It deliberately cleared the National Education Policy 2020 without seeking consensus or subjecting it to parliamentary deliberations. The NTA itself was never brought to Parliament and remains a society that was set up by the Union Cabinet without any accountability mechanisms. The Education Minister infamously displayed his own contempt for accountability by publicly dismissing the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education's recommendations to strengthen the NTA, simply because it had members of the Opposition in it. His unwillingness to resign from office despite these monumental failures has only further inflamed public opinion.

The roots of protest

The student protests are a natural consequence of these interrelated forces: today's bleak education landscape, which evokes only hopelessness, and the Modi government's trademark arrogance and unwillingness to be accountable or constructive. The brutality perpetrated by the police personnel functioning under the direct authority of the Union Home Minister on student protesters is hardly unprecedented for this regime. We all remember vividly how armed policemen and paramilitary forces savaged university campuses during the Citizenship (Amendment) Act-National Register of Citizens protests in 2020. The unacceptable excesses against India's women wrestlers can never be erased from our memories.

The Modi government has not just degraded India's education landscape but has also made a habit of acting with utter impunity, supreme self-delusion, and abject insensitivity. India's students have called the Modi regime's bluff. It is our moral, political, and constitutional duty to stand with them and safeguard their future.

Warning signals for India from NATO's Ankara summit

The heads of state or government of the 32 countries that are politico-military allies under the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) met in Ankara, Türkiye, on July 7-8, 2026 for what is called the Ankara Summit. Their stated objective was to review progress made since the 2025 Summit in The Hague and to set out a roadmap for continuing delivery on NATO's key objectives.

The gathering in Ankara is being regarded as one of NATO's more successful summits, despite the abrasive presence of United States President Donald Trump, who devoted most of his speaking time to extolling the putative success of U.S. strategy and talking up the superiority of American weapons systems.

A strategic road map

Four substantive commitments came out of Ankara. First, the 32 NATO allies – too often divided by divergent objectives and capacities – agreed on their "ironclad commitment to (their) collective defence under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, and to the transatlantic bond"; second, the unanimous endorsement of "The Hague defence commitment", in which all NATO members undertook last year to allocate at least five per cent of their respective Gross Domestic Products (GDPs) on defence by 2035 – an unprecedented hike over the two per cent spending pledge that existed earlier. Third, NATO declared its "unwavering support for Ukraine in defending its freedom, sovereignty and territorial integrity", and fourth, the alliance partners vowed to build a high technology, high capacity, Europewide defence industrial base (DIB) – the term for the network of firms, factories, laboratories and skilled workers needed to build and sustain a country's military power.

The focus in Ankara was overwhelmingly on implementation – turning political commitments into military capability through investment, industrial capacity and innovation.



Ajai Shukla

Former Indian Army officer (colonel), who now analyses issues and events relating to defence

Europe's defence revival and commitments may create new challenges for India's defence needs

Russia accuses the U.S. and European democracies of unbridled expansionism, through NATO's progressive incorporation of East and Central European countries. These include Poland, Romania, the Baltic states, and former Soviet republics that Moscow has historically regarded as lying within its sphere of influence. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 was driven in part by the fear that Kyiv was inching towards joining the Atlantic alliance, a step that would have increased NATO's numbers from just 12 countries at its founding in 1949 to 31 now. The Russian invasion effectively blocked Ukraine, but spooked historically neutral Finland and Sweden into abandoning nonalignment and becoming NATO's 31st and 32nd members.

NATO's transformations

NATO, however, sees itself not as expansionist, but as merely adapting to Europe's changing strategic landscape. In 1990-91, with the relatively peaceful ending of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, NATO shifted its focus to out of area operations in theatres such as the Balkans. After the 9/11 strikes in 2001 on the World Trade Center towers, NATO made another strategic shift, joining the Global War on Terror. Now, with Russia and China joining hands in a new era of superpower confrontation, NATO is adapting once again.

It was evident from the discussions at the Ankara Summit that Europe has prioritised the revitalisation of its DIB. The European defence industry was struggling to scale up production even before the five per cent defence spending pledge at The Hague. European defence industry giants, MBDA and Rheinmetall, have warned of shortages in ammunition production.

Operation Epic Fury, the U.S.-Israel bombing campaign against Iran, illustrates the inevitability of weapons and ammunition shortages when Asian allies' demands for U.S. weaponry compete with ongoing European needs. The U.S. has fired

more than 850 Tomahawk cruise missiles at Iran during this campaign. At the current production rate of 85 per year, replacing these would take a decade.

Many NATO members have capable defence industrial bases, but there is little coordination of alliance-wide priorities. The resulting strategic mismatch has been found during the Ukraine war to cluster in the critical categories of air defence missiles and interceptors, precision guided munitions, and artillery rockets. While the U.S. decision to allow Ukraine to produce Patriot air defence systems under licence is a strong signal of support to Ukraine, more needs to be done.

Without a major revitalisation of Europe's defence industry, NATO's five per cent pledge will only deepen its dependency on the U.S. Half of Europe's defence spending between 2022-2024, came from the U.S., up from 28% in 2019-2021. Foreign Military Sales notifications to the U.S. Congress for European customers have quadrupled since 2008 to \$76 billion in 2024.

Need for self-reliance

For the world's big arms buyers and especially for India, this spike in European demand is bad news. As NATO spends more, the international arms bazaar is shifting inexorably from a buyers' market to a sellers' market. The first sign of this was the delay by U.S. firm General Electric Aerospace in supplying India with F-404 fighter jet engines, which are critically needed for the Indian Air Force's Tejas light combat aircraft programme.

Looking ahead, as India's defence increasingly relies on new-age defence technologies and weaponry, such as drones, artificial intelligence, cyber and electronic warfare and resilient networks, it will become critical for its defence industry to achieve self-reliance in these technology realms, rather than relying on overstretched suppliers who have their own battles to fight.

rather than ministerial accountability. When youth-led grievances are met with tear gas and political deflections instead of genuine dialogue, youth distrust with our democratic system is inevitable.

Shobana Ravi,
Bengaluru

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

constitutional duty by examining the claims of alleged state excesses.

R. Sivakumar,
Chennai

The immense stress and anxiety inflicted on millions of students and parents seem to have been met with bureaucratic deflection

Corrections & Clarifications

Following a clarification from the Registrar of IIT-Mandi, a sentence, "Doctoral students were required to attend the 'special session'" has been removed from the article, "A Trojan horse has breached the IITs" (Opinion page, June 23, 2026).

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Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Death toll in Sikkim hydropower tunnel disaster

25 The death toll in the Sikkim hydropower tunnel disaster has risen to 25 after authorities recovered the bodies of the remaining trapped workers, bringing the four-day rescue operation to an end. Officials said a methane gas explosion triggered the tunnel collapse. AP

Amount sanctioned by Punjab govt. for various schemes

2,150 in ₹ crore. The Punjab government has released over ₹2,150 crore under various social security schemes during the current financial year up to June, Women and Child Development Minister Baljit Kaur said on Thursday. PTI

Estimated cost of Phase-II strategic oil reserves to be built

14,527 in ₹ crore. India plans to develop the second phase of its strategic petroleum reserve programme under a public-private partnership (PPP) model, with government viability gap funding capped at 60% of the total project cost, the government said. PTI

Number of road accident deaths in India in 2025

1.83 lakh. A total of 1.83 lakh people lost their lives in road accidents in India in 2025, when 5.13 lakh road accidents were reported across the country, Parliament was informed. On average, 59 road accidents took place every hour, resulting in 21 deaths every hour. PTI

Amount sanctioned by Kerala govt. for social security pensions

1,095 in ₹ crore. The Kerala government has sanctioned over ₹1,095 crore for the distribution of social security and welfare board pensions for July, benefiting more than 65 lakh people across the State. PTI
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How should cities reclaim footpaths?

Why was the Street Vendors Act enacted? What does the Act require before vendors can be removed? What is the role of the Town Vending Committee? Can street vendors be evicted before a survey is completed? Why has Bengaluru’s footpath drive come under scrutiny?

EXPLAINER

Rishita Khanna

The story so far:

Following the Supreme Court’s recognition of the right to walk on safe, obstruction-free footpaths as a fundamental right, Bengaluru Development Minister Krishna Byre Gowda directed the five city corporations under the Greater Bengaluru Authority to launch a 10-day ‘Safe Footpath’ drive. The drive removed thousands of street vendors from pavements and cleared encroachments. While many welcomed the initiative, it also raised questions over whether the removals complied with the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, which seeks to balance pedestrians’ right to walk with street vendors’ right to livelihood.

Why was the Street Vendors Act enacted?

The Supreme Court’s recognition of the right to walk does not mean street vending has no place on public streets. Long before the latest ruling, the court had repeatedly held that street vending is a ‘legitimate’ occupation protected under Article 19 of the Constitution, while making it clear that it can be regulated in the public interest.

Those judgments were born out of a recurring pattern – municipal bodies and police evicting vendors, mostly without notice, reducing years of livelihoods to rubble overnight.

The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, was enacted to end such arbitrary removals by laying down the process for regulating street vending.

Contrary to popular perception, the Act is neither an anti-encroachment law nor one that gives vendors an unrestricted right over public spaces.



In Bengaluru, corporations started removing vendors before putting in place the mechanism through which the Act is meant to work. K. MURALI KUMAR

Instead, it seeks to balance two competing rights – the public’s right to safe, obstruction-free footpaths and a street vendor’s right to earn a livelihood. It lays down a step-by-step process that every city is expected to follow before deciding who can vend, where they can vend and when they can be removed or relocated.

What process does the Act prescribe before vendors can be removed?

The first step is the constitution of a Town Vending Committee (TVC), the backbone of the law.

The committee includes officials, police, planning authorities, resident representatives and street vendors themselves, who must make up at least 40% of its members, with representation for women and other marginalised communities. The idea is that decisions affecting vendors should not be taken without vendors having a seat at the table. Every subsequent step is expected to flow

through this committee.

Once the committee is constituted, the Act requires it to survey all street vendors. The survey is meant to identify existing vendors before the authorities decide who can continue vending and under what conditions.

Moreover, the Act protects existing vendors during this process. It states that no street vendor should be evicted or relocated until the survey has been completed and Certificates of Vending have been issued. The protection was built into the law to prevent exactly the kind of arbitrary removals that had prompted its enactment.

Once the survey is completed, eligible vendors are issued a Certificate of Vending. It is official permission to vend at a specified location and under specified conditions. The certificate does not give a vendor ownership over public land. It only recognises the right to vend in accordance with the Act.

The Act does not prohibit the removal

of street vendors. It only requires that such action follow the process laid down under the law.

Why has Bengaluru’s footpath drive come under scrutiny?

In Bengaluru, corporations started removing vendors before putting in place the mechanism through which the Act is meant to work.

Although Karnataka Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar later promised relocation, the Act requires a TVC to identify vending and no-vending zones. Bengaluru does not have one.

While the Karnataka government acted on the Supreme Court’s recognition of pedestrians’ right to safe footpaths, the Street Vendors Act makes it equally clear that reclaiming those footpaths cannot become a justification for bypassing the safeguards enacted to protect street vendors’ livelihoods. That balance, not the primacy of one right over the other, is the very foundation of the law.

THE GIST

The Street Vendors Act, 2014, was enacted to regulate street vending by balancing pedestrians’ right to safe, obstruction-free footpaths with street vendors’ right to livelihood, while preventing arbitrary evictions.

The Act requires authorities to constitute a Town Vending Committee, conduct surveys, issue Certificates of Vending and identify vending and no-vending zones before vendors are removed or relocated.

The right to protest and the limits of police power

What the Constitution, the BNSS and court rulings say about regulating demonstrations and the use of force

Devyanshi Bihani

The story so far:

People from across the country gathered at Jantar Mantar in central Delhi on July 20 for the Cockroach Janta Party’s (CJP) “Chalo Sansad” march, carrying placards demanding reforms in the National Testing Agency (NTA) and the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan. Within hours, the demonstration descended into clashes. Police used tear gas and *lathi* charges to disperse protesters attempting to march towards Parliament. Tear gas enveloped parts of the protest route as demonstrators ran to escape the crackdown. Several nearby Metro stations were temporarily closed, and many demonstrators reported losing mobile connectivity during the march, making communication and coordination difficult.

The incident has again brought an old question into focus: how should a democracy police public protest?

Is the right to protest absolute?

The Constitution guarantees citizens the right to assemble peacefully under Article 19(1)(b). But that right is subject to “reasonable restrictions” under Article 19(3) in the interests of public order, the sovereignty and integrity of India, and other constitutionally recognised grounds. In practice, these restrictions are implemented through laws governing public order and policing.

The legal authority to regulate protests, however, comes from a range of statutes.

Was the CJP march unlawful?

Whether a protest is “unlawful” is a legal question that depends on the facts and circumstances of each case. Under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), an assembly of five or more persons becomes an unlawful assembly only if its common object falls within specific categories, such as using criminal force, resisting the execution of law, committing an offence, or compelling another person by force or threat. A gathering that begins lawfully may also become unlawful if its

conduct changes over the course of the event.

Ahead of the march, Delhi Police said the CJP had not sought permission for a procession to Parliament. It also pointed to prohibitory orders issued under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), which barred protests, marches and demonstrations in the New Delhi district, except at the designated Jantar Mantar protest site with prior permission. As demonstrators attempted to march towards Parliament, officers stopped the procession and eventually used tear gas and *lathi* charges to disperse the crowd. The authorities’ response has since come under judicial scrutiny, with the Delhi High Court seeking responses from the Centre and the Delhi Police on petitions alleging police brutality and excessive use of force.

What standards govern police action?

The National Human Rights Commission’s Manual on Human Rights for Police Officers emphasises that effective policing and respect for human rights are

complementary rather than conflicting objectives.

It states that “A democratic country like India needs democratic policing, which is based on the idea of the police as protectors of the rights of citizens and the rule of law, while ensuring the safety and security of all equally.” The manual also notes that human rights violations by police can have “a multi-dimensional impact” by eroding public confidence, bringing institutions into disrepute and “even escalating civil unrest at times.”

The principles are consistent with the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms, which require force to be lawful, necessary and proportionate.

When can police use force?

Under the BNSS, an Executive Magistrate or an authorised police officer may order an unlawful assembly, or an assembly likely to disturb public peace, to disperse. If the assembly does not comply, the law permits it to be dispersed by force.

The Code of Conduct for the Police in India states that police should, as far as practicable, “use the methods of persuasion, advice and warning. When the application of force becomes inevitable, only the irreducible minimum force required in the circumstances should be used.” Beyond the use of force itself, the protests also raised questions about police accountability after videos appeared to show some police personnel without visible name tags or with their faces covered. While the BNSS requires every police officer arresting to bear an

accurate, visible and clear identification of his or her name, it contains no corresponding requirement for police personnel engaged in crowd-control or the dispersal of assemblies.

How has the Supreme Court viewed protests?

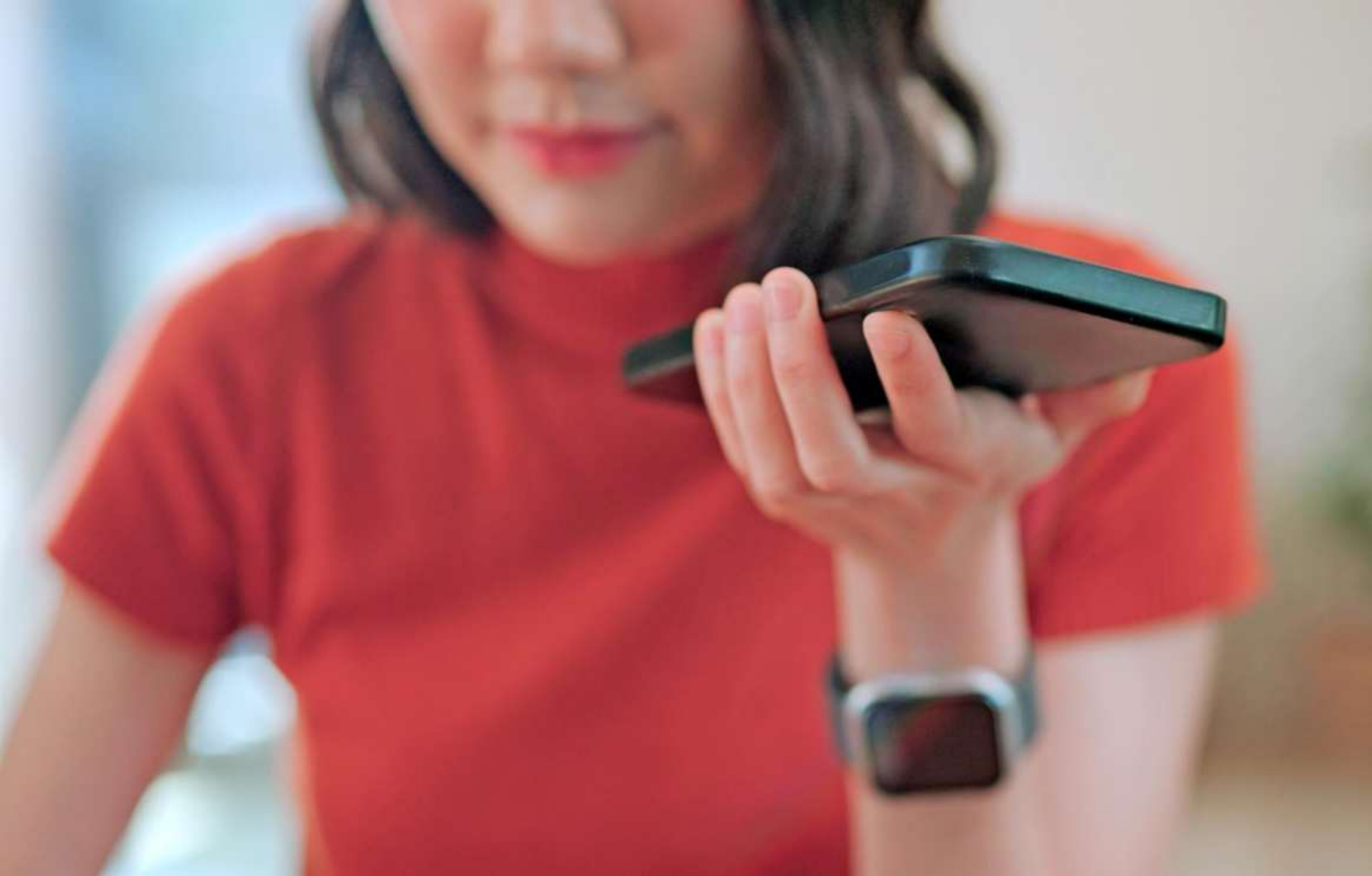
A day after the clashes, a lawyer urged the Supreme Court to take *suo motu* cognisance of the alleged police excesses, citing videos circulating online. Chief Justice of India Surya Kant orally declined the request, saying, “We are not interested in videos... Don’t waste our [court’s] time, and don’t waste your time.”

Over the years, however, the Supreme Court has repeatedly laid down principles governing both the right to protest and the limits of police action.

In *Anita Thakur v. State of Jammu & Kashmir* (2016), the court held that the use of excessive force violates fundamental rights and awarded compensation to the injured protesters, emphasising that police action must remain reasonable and accountable.

More recently, in *Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan v. Union of India* (2018), the court reiterated that while authorities may regulate demonstrations to maintain public order, they cannot extinguish the right to protest altogether. In *Amit Sahni v. Commissioner of Police* (2020), arising from the Shaheen Bagh protests, it affirmed that dissent is a constitutional right but cannot result in the indefinite occupation of public spaces.

CACHE



GETTY IMAGES

Are smartphones becoming smarter with the rise of on-device AI?

On-device AI processes machine learning algorithms and generative AI models directly on a smartphone's local hardware; while physical constraints prevent it from matching the scale of cloud-based large language models, the industry is converging on a hybrid application model

Haider Ali Khan

The transition of Artificial Intelligence (AI) from the cloud to the local device, often called on-device AI, is arguably the most significant shift in the smartphone industry since the inception of the app ecosystem. For over a decade, consumer AI has been synonymous with the cloud: when you asked a question to an assistant, your data travelled across the globe to a massive data centre, was processed, and then sent back to your device. Now, users are witnessing a seismic shift. Intelligence is moving from remote servers to the silicon residing in their handheld devices.

What is on-device AI? On-device AI refers to the processing of machine learning algorithms and generative AI models directly on the smartphone's local hardware. Instead of relying on a constant connection to a remote server, the device performs the computation using dedicated silicon, primarily Neural Processing Units (NPUs). In 2026, this is no longer a fringe feature; it is becoming the foundation of how premium smartphones function. Whether it is real-time language translation, advanced computational photography, or proactive system optimisation, on-device AI handles these tasks locally. The implications for the user experience are profound with faster response times, privacy and crucially, the

ability to function without an internet connection.

How has the hardware changed? The shift to on-device AI has been fuelled by rapid advances in specialised hardware, particularly the NPU. Unlike general-purpose CPUs or graphics-heavy GPUs, NPUs are purpose-built to handle the mathematical heavy lifting required by neural networks. In recent years, breakthroughs in semiconductor technology have allowed for the integration of these powerful chips into mainstream consumer hardware. As a result, generative AI features that were previously thought to be impossible to run on a mobile phone such as live voice-to-voice translation or generative photo editing, are now running natively. This has made the smartphone an intelligent, proactive companion as the device is now capable of system-wide integration, where the AI can understand the user's workflow, analyse intent and act on their behalf across different applications.

What is the most important benefit from on-device AI? Perhaps the greatest advances of on-device AI are the easing of tension between personalisation and privacy. To provide a customised experience, AI needs massive amounts of personal data, including financial and health metrics, calendar schedules and behavioural patterns.

Under a cloud-only model, users are understandably hesitant to share their most intimate details that will be processed on remote servers. On-device AI solves this by turning the smartphone into a black box of personal intelligence. Because data never leaves the hardware, user confidence grows. The device learns from the user locally, creating a bespoke experience that improves with every interaction, without ever compromising the individual's digital footprint. This is the holy grail of user experience: having a phone that understands you intimately while keeping that understanding entirely to yourself.

What are some of the challenges in adopting on-device AI? Despite the rapid infusion of powerful hardware, a significant gap remains between a device's capabilities and a user's adoption. Industry analysts suggest that while flagship smartphones offer an impressive suite of tools like proactive writing assistance, intelligent summarisation and real-time call translation, these features have yet to trigger a super-cycle of upgrades. For most consumers, current AI features are perceived as nice-to-have enhancements rather than essential utilities. This reveals a critical challenge for manufacturers as they must move beyond marketing standalone AI features and integrate the technology so deeply into the system's workflow that the smartphone becomes truly indispensable.

Furthermore, there is a technical limitation. While on-device AI is incredibly efficient, it has physical constraints. It cannot yet match the sheer scale and raw power of cloud-based large language models. The industry is therefore converging on a hybrid application model. In this ecosystem, the heavy lifting, such as processing massive, multi-modal datasets, remains in the cloud, while sensitive and time-critical tasks migrate to the edge.

What is the future of on-device AI? The smartphone industry is undergoing an identity shift. The focus has shifted from physical specifications, like the thinness of a bezel or the pixel count of a camera, to the sophistication of the AI models powering the device. The game is now in smartphones that are powered by AI with deep, system-wide integration, that allows agents to navigate multiple applications, understand context and achieve goals on behalf of the user. As hardware becomes increasingly homogenised across brands, the soul of the smartphone will be defined by its intelligence. The bridge to that future is on-device AI, transforming a generic piece of glass and silicon into a truly personal, private, and proactive companion. The challenge for the coming year will be to see if these devices can move from being impressive technical demonstrators to essential assistants that the average user relies on every single day.

THE DAILY QUIZ

Here is a quiz on protest movements in recent times in India:

Radhika Santhanam

QUESTION 1 This controversial law offering a path to Indian citizenship to six religious minority communities from neighbouring countries led to nationwide protests in 2019 and 2020. Name the law.

QUESTION 2 In 2015, students of this education centre went on strike protesting the government's appointment of a television actor-turned-politician as chairperson. What is the name of the education centre whose alumni include Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Naseeruddin Shah, and Jaya Bachchan and

the name of the appointee?

QUESTION 3 A global pop star and a prominent climate activist posted on X in support of protests that captured global headlines for days in India in 2021. Their posts sparked a reaction from the Indian government. Name them.

QUESTION 4 The 2016 death by suicide of this student drew attention to the fight against institutional caste discrimination. Name him.

QUESTION 5 A horrific incident in Delhi in 2012 sparked nationwide protests, which came to be known as the Nirbhaya movement. What is the name of the judicial committee formed to recommend amendments to India's criminal laws in the incident's aftermath?



Visual Question: This movement was named as one of the "Top 10 News Stories of 2011" by Time magazine. Name the man and woman in the photo.

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. Which country has hosted the most Games? **Ans: Australia (five times)** 2. Which city was confirmed in 2022 as the host but pulled out because of cost factors and which Asian country also backed out? **Ans: Victoria (Australia) and Malaysia** 3. How many core sports and medals are on offer? **Ans: 215 gold medals across 10 core sports** 4. Who was the first Indian to win a Gold medal at the Games and how many medals has India won since its debut in 1934? **Ans: Milkha Singh (men's 440 yards at Cardiff 1958) and 564 (including 22 gold)** 5. This Indian won 15 medals at the Games. **Ans: Jaspal Rana and shooting** 6. Which Olympic medallists will carry the Indian tricolour and bear the ceremonial baton at the Glasgow 2026 opening ceremony? **Ans: Mirabai Chanu and Lovlina Borgohain respectively** 7. In which sports are Nayan Moni Saikia, Pranati Nayak, and Ronaldo Singh Laitonjam expected to shine? **Ans: Lawn bowls, artistic gymnastics, and track cycling** Visual: Name this mascot. **Ans: Finnie the unicorn** Early Birds: Siddhartha Viswanathan | Piyali Tuli | Neil Lall | Prodosh Mitra | Prem Nath Tiwari



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

S. Upendran

What is the meaning of the idiom "to bite the dust"? (M. C. Subhash, Patna) This is an expression that was made popular by old cowboy movies. When you say that someone has bitten the dust, it implies that he/she is dead. It is an expression that is normally used in informal contexts. Do not walk into someone's house and say, "I understand that your father bit the dust yesterday. I am so sorry." Here are a few examples. When referring to things, "to bite the dust" means "to break or to fail". This is the sense in which the expression is used most often these days. Another one of Promod's plans bit the dust.

How do you pronounce the word "hooch"? (R. Ganesan, Madurai) The "oo" is like the "oo" in "fool", "cool", and "pool". The final "ch" is like the "ch" in "chips", "chap", and "chin". Any idea what the word means? This is a word used in very informal contexts in American English to refer to any alcoholic beverage that has been made illegally. He offered me some hooch, but I turned it down.

What is the meaning of "snail mail"? (N. Mukunda Kumar, Chennai) Are you into computers? Do you access the Internet frequently? Do you send e-mail every day? If you do, then like me, you too are probably amazed at the speed at which communication takes place these days. You can send mail to someone in America and get a reply in a matter of hours/minutes. Earlier, it used to take at least a couple of weeks to get a reply. The word "snail mail" refers to the regular mail - letters that we write to our friends and relations and put in a letterbox. Letters that normally take a couple of days to reach their destination - sometimes never reach at all! As you may have probably guessed, this word was coined by some computer buff.

What is the difference between "flats" and "apartments"? (S. Harish, Davangere, Karnataka) There is no difference; these are merely two words that are used on different sides of the Atlantic to refer to the same thing. Americans tend to use the word "apartment", while those in England prefer "flat".

What is the meaning of "ad nauseam"? (N. K. Rayaguru, Chennai) First let's deal with the pronunciation. The word "ad" rhymes with the words "pad", "bad", and "sad". The "au" is like the "ore" in "tore", "pore" and "core". The following "s" is like the "z" in "zip" and "zoo". The "e" is like the "i" in "pit", "bit", and "hit", while the final "a" is like the "a" in "China". Some people pronounce the final "a" like the "a" in "act", "pact" and "fact". The main stress is on the first syllable of "nauseam". When someone does something ad nauseam they do it repeatedly over a long period of time. He/she does it so often that you become sick and tired of it; very often you become irritated by it. Here are a few examples. For the next hour the child played the same song ad nauseam. Sashi went on ad nauseam about what a wonderful wife he has. Published in The Hindu on May 22, 2001

Word of the day

Platitude: a trite or obvious remark

Synonyms: cliché, stereotype, truism

Usage: Instead of offering solutions, he repeated platitudes.

Pronunciation: newsth.live/platitude

International Phonetic Alphabet: /plætɪtʃuːd/

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

Business

How the hunt for value sparked a U.S. private-label revolution



New fad: Signage on display in an Aldi grocery store in New York City, U.S. REUTERS

Reuters
NEW YORK

Bill Peterson used to go to Whole Foods or Kroger for fruits, vegetables and milk. Now he swears by private-label chain Aldi, which sells those items at a fraction of the price.

The Chicago home remodeler is gainfully employed, but says the economy feels fragile. “There’s no job security ... everything has gotten stupid expensive,” said Peterson, 61. Inflation has remained high for several years, and U.S. consumers have become more focused on value. But the shift transcends income class, and experts increasingly see it as the start of a deeper retrenchment in how Americans shop, eliminating a long-held stigma among some for private-label goods.

Fundamental shifts

Inflation is just “an accelerant to fundamental shifts already set to unfold,” said Sarah Henry, managing partner at Logan Capital Management. Retailers are adjusting by targeting the “trade-down” consumer – a category that includes cash-strapped shoppers opting for lower-priced essentials, and wealthier consumers looking to save on discretionary items.

From January through May of this year, value retailers grew sales 11.6% year-on-year, against just 2.3% for conventional retailers, according to researchers at NielsenIQ.

Shopping smart

“Shopping smart has become a mindset, not a customer segment,” Julie Barber, Walmart’s chief merchandising officer, told *Reuters*. Walmart, the nation’s largest retailer, is increasing the number of items under its “better goods” food label to nearly 1,000. David Guggina, the retailer’s U.S. CEO, said on an earnings call in May that the label has helped it attract new customers, particularly those with higher incomes. RBC analyst Nik Modi in June wrote that private brands are being elevated “from a defensive tactic to a core growth strategy,” saying the trend is a “structural commitment rather than cyclical opportunism.”

The German chain, which has around 2,700 U.S. stores, is on track to open 180 more this year, and another 400 through 2028.

“High inflation or low inflation, high unemployment or low unemployment, there are always consumers who are looking to save more money,” Scott Patton, chief commercial officer of Aldi’s U.S. arm, told *Reuters*. “I think consumers have figured out they don’t need national brands.”

Amy Fox, a Cincinnati-area business owner, has enough disposable income. Even so, as grocery bills rise – especially with three boys in college – life has started to feel like “death by a thousand cuts,” she said. She has shifted to using Midwestern supermarket chain Meijer for its private-label beef and chicken, which sell at much lower prices than at Whole Foods.

“It just doesn’t make sense anymore” to pay top dollar for such items, she said.

Fundamental shift

High inflation and sticker shock from rising energy and grocery bills are driving the hunt for value, said Dana Peterson, chief economist at research group The Conference Board.

But industry experts see more fundamental factors at work – ones that could make trading down the new normal.

Consumers’ sense of the future has been clouded by existential concerns like job loss due to the proliferation of AI, while AI itself has made bargain-hunting easier than ever, said Logan Capital’s Henry.

Growing faster

NielsenIQ researchers wrote that value retailers and premium retailers were both growing faster than mid-market stores, indicating consumers are still splurging on specific items, which they called “a more intentional approach to spending.” That trend was the same among low, middle and high-income households, they found.

Kroger executives said private-label sales are growing faster than national brands. Target’s owned brands, which account for around 30% of sales, will add 600 private-label food and beverage items over the next two years, it said.

Dollar General said consumers across income levels are prioritizing value as it rolls out new private-brand products and more than 70 back-to-school items priced at \$1 or less.

India’s solar push idles factories unable to shake reliance on China

India’s solar cell shortage may take three or four years to resolve; China’s technology export restrictions complicate India’s manufacturing effort; cell shortage threatens jobs, raises costs, delays projects; India relies on China for about 95% of solar cell imports, industry estimates show

NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters
NEW DELHI/BEIJING

Indian makers of solar panels are being forced to shut factories as they face waits stretching up to eight months for domestic components to replace Chinese imports as the government pushes to beef up local manufacturing, industry sources say.

The disruptions, triggered by rules that took effect on June 1, threaten thousands of jobs and investment of nearly \$4 billion, while imperilling India’s 2030 target to boost solar energy capacity, manufacturers and analysts said.

“We have suffered a lot due to the domestic cell unavailability for the past three months,” said Shailendra Shukla, chairman of Icon Solar, a module maker, who expects production to shrink sharply to about 1 gigawatt (GW) from 3.2 GW.

Nearly a third of India’s 140 small- and medium-sized solar panel makers, which make up 60% of manufacturing capacity, have halted output and the rest cut cycles to three to four days, the All India Solar Module Manufacturers Association told *Reuters*.

Manufacturers lacking facilities to make their own



Casting shadow: Solar panels at Fiotext Cotspin cotton yarn manufacturing unit in Gujarat. REUTERS

cells said they face waiting periods of up to six to eight months for domestic cells, making the cost of domestically made solar panels almost double than that use Chinese cells.

Watch on prices

India’s clean energy ministry said it had not received formal reports about production halts by standalone makers of solar modules but was keeping watch on prices, while expecting adequate cell manufacturing capacity within six months.

But India is struggling to boost supply as building technology-intensive solar cell factories needs time and China has curbed exports of solar manufacturing technology, equipment and support, sources said.

India relies on China for about 95% of solar cell imports, industry estimates show; such imports rose 37% in the last fiscal year to about \$1.86 billion on the year

use of fossil fuel-based generation, primarily coal, delaying the switch to cleaner energy.

Solar accounts for about 29% of India’s non-fossil fuel power capacity and is expected to expand to more than 292 GW by 2030 from the current 162 GW, the Central Electricity Authority says.

While Indian firms have built up solar panel manufacturing capacity of about 200 GW, they can produce only 27 GW of solar cells, the government estimates.

2030 goal out of reach?

The shortages stand to delay solar projects and boost costs, possibly slowing India’s push to establish 500 GW of non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030 from 288 GW now, they said.

Growing electricity demand means a slowdown in solar deployment will have to be offset by greater

Wider gap

The gap yawns wider in practice, with effective operating cell manufacturing capacity of only around 16 GW to 18 GW, said German-based EUPD Research and the industry sources.

Is FCNR(B) a litmus test for diaspora deposits?

EXPLAINER

Santosh V. Perumal

Foreign currency non-resident (Bank) or FCNR (B) deposits, which were introduced in 1993, will prove to be a litmus test for the country’s ability to mobilise long-term foreign currency resources from its vast global diaspora.

At a time of geopolitical fragmentation, volatile capital flows and uncertain interest-rate cycles (as inflation risks persist) that are redefining international finance, these instruments have become a strategic macroeconomic rupee stabilisation tool, but at the risk of increasing external liabilities.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) revived the FCNR (B) concessional swap window, last used when Dr. Raghuram Rajan was the Governor, to strengthen foreign exchange (forex) reserves, helping defend the rupee, which has depreciated 12% year-on-year (July 22) vis-a-vis the U.S. Greenback, reflecting the elevated geopolitical risks, stronger dollar, higher import dependence and recently negative foreign direct investments (FDI).

Design features

The FCNR(B) deposits – designed to pre-empt external vulnerabilities – provide relatively stable, medium-term foreign currency resources compared to volatile foreign portfolio investors, whose total withdrawals from Indian equities stood at ₹2.87 lakh crore between January and first week of June 2026, surpassing the ₹1.66 lakh crore pulled out in entire 2025.

The RBI launched a special FCNR(B) deposit framework for fresh deposits



In focus: One hundred dollar US currency paper note with ₹500 Indian currency. GETTY IMAGES

mobilised until September 30, 2026, to attract foreign currency inflows from NRIs/PIOs/OICs, making it one of the central pillars of India’s external financing strategy.

The new scheme, which allows banks to offer higher interest rates by bearing hedging costs, aims to attract \$50-70 billion. It comes at a time when FCNR(B) deposit inflows have weakened sharply, with net inflows dropping to just \$946 million in FY26 from \$7.1 billion in FY25, a decline of nearly 86%.

Under the new arrangement, the RBI is offering a concessional foreign exchange swap facility to banks for FCNR(B) deposits with maturities ranging from three to five years, significantly reducing the cost of hedging foreign currency exposure.

This implies around a 3% discount to prevailing FX swap rates of 2.8% to 3.3% for the 3-5 year tenor.

For NRIs and other eligible investors looking to park foreign currency deposits in India without taking rupee exchange-rate risk, the RBI measures could translate into higher

returns and more attractive deposit offerings.

Most large banks offer around 6% and some smaller/private banks offer up to 7.1% under the RBI swap window compared to virtually risk-free, highly liquid U.S. Treasury carrying 4-4.4%.

Normally, banks cannot sustainably offer dollar deposit rates substantially above U.S. Treasury yields because of hedging costs. The RBI’s swap window has effectively removed much of that cost, enabling banks to offer higher returns on U.S. dollar deposits than U.S. government securities yield. This temporary interest-rate premium explains the surge in NRI interest and the strong inflows witnessed since the scheme’s launch.

So far, going by the data, the response from the Indian diaspora has been phenomenal as total foreign currency mobilisation reached \$20.72 billion, of which \$17.4 billion (at the time of writing) or 84% came through FCNR(B) deposits alone; making it the dominant source of inflows. Under the scheme, which represent a signifi-

The government’s figures reflect installed, or nameplate, capacity, much of which is not yet operational or is running well below rated levels, they said.

“India faces a steep cell supply deficit and closing that gap will likely take three to five years,” said Rajan Kalsotra, senior consultant at EUPD Research.

That time would be needed to build new cell facilities, which requires significant capital, technology partnerships and lengthy commissioning periods, he added.

“With China controlling much of the global solar manufacturing equipment and technology ecosystem, rapidly scaling local cell production will remain challenging.”

Hinder expansion

India relies on China for about 95% of solar cell imports, industry estimates show. Such imports rose 37% in the last fiscal year to about \$1.86 billion. But China monitors technology exports to India and curbs equipment sales, said the industry sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity as the matter is sensitive one.

China’s export curbs would delay setting up cell manufacturing plants, six manufacturers told *Reuters*.

Over the long term, China is likely to seek to pre-

serve its dominance of the solar industry, where it already has a strong grip on most manufacturing segments,” said Cosimo Ries, analyst at policy consultancy Trivium China.

China’s commerce ministry did not respond.

Cell deficit ups cost

At least three solar module makers *Reuters* spoke to have temporarily halted production for lack of domestically made cells, while four more have cut capacity to about a third. Bringing new cell manufacturing capacity online takes far longer than the government expects, the manufacturers said.

“It is impossible to start producing cells with 18 months’ notice due to complicated technology, manufacturing needs like land and sourcing raw materials,” said Chetan Shah, chairman of solar panel producer Solex Energy.

He was referring to the government’s June deadline for the use of domestically made solar cells, set in December 2024. India extended the date to December 2026 for some projects, citing industry concerns over shortages and the need to protect manufacturers’ investments.

The makers’ association said the waiver would bring limited relief, unless extended to the entire industry.

2000 and FCNR(B) deposits in 2013, each of which had a common mandate of raising forex reserves but were fundamentally different in character and structure.

RIBs – issued by State Bank of India (SBI) with sovereign/RBI backing – were a one-time emergency fundraising after India conducted the Pokhran-II nuclear tests, triggering economic sanctions by the U.S. and several Western nations.

IMDs were a series of foreign currency deposits introduced in 2000 by SBI to bolster India’s forex reserves and stabilise the rupee in the wake of post-Pokhran sanctions and dotcom bust.

In 2013, during the “tap-er tantrum”, banks raised about \$34 billion from Indian diaspora to help stabilise the currency through the first edition of FCNR(B).

Current phase

Unlike earlier stress episodes, the current phase is unfolding against a backdrop of significantly stronger macroeconomic fundamentals and FCNR(B) deposits are now being deployed amid elevated global uncertainty, volatile capital flows, persistent geopolitical conflicts and an evolving global interest-rate cycle.

With forex reserves of more than \$650 billion, no balance-of-payments crisis, and investment-grade macroeconomic fundamentals, the RBI aims to build additional buffers against geopolitical uncertainty and volatile capital flows.

While the RBI’s swap facility has greatly boosted FCNR(B) mobilisation, sustaining inflows – notably from West Asia, which accounts for nearly 50% of

India’s inward remittances – will become increasingly challenging if geopolitical tensions persist, labour market conditions weaken and remittance growth slows. Although India continues to receive the world’s largest remittance inflows (about \$129 billion in 2024, according to the World Bank), growth from Gulf countries has moderated as governments pursue labour nationalisation policies, oil-price volatility affects fiscal spending and infrastructure projects, and hiring of expatriate workers slows in certain sectors.

With West Asia on a turmoil, banks, especially in the Gulf countries are offering competitive dollar deposit rates, making it difficult for the Indian lenders to compete.

Reuters had reported that the UAE banks are stepping up generous deposit offers as they face digital rivals and war risks.

There have been reports that the RBI and the UAE Central Bank have had parleys on reported concerns of crowding out due to Indian banks’ dollar deposits.

Small and mid-sized private sector banks, which neither have overseas branches nor a GIFT City presence, are now exploring tie-ups with large Indian banks that have a presence in GIFT City so that their NRI customers can get the benefit from leverage FCNR(B) deposits.

Although FCNR(B) deposits eliminate exchange-rate risk for depositors, NRIs may still compare returns with the U.S. treasury securities, global money market funds, and dollar bonds.

If global interest rates stay elevated, the relative attractiveness of FCNR(B) deposits diminishes.

Hundreds hospitalised over the past week as heatwave grips Japan



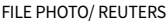
Over 1,000 declared dead in Ebola outbreak in DRC, Uganda: WHO



US teen withdraws lawsuit against Meta over children's mental health



China begins drills off Taiwan Strait a day after talks with Rubio



Houthi claim to have struck two Saudi oil tankers in the Red Sea; U.S. President threatens Iran and the Yemeni rebels with 'major military punishment'; Iran's Revolutionary Guards say they stopped three tankers from transiting Strait of Hormuz



Border region hit

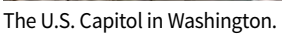
The Houthis said they had carried out missile and drone strikes on two Saudi tankers in the Red Sea, the

In recent weeks, Iran has hit tankers using a route hugging the Omani coast to traverse the strait, in a bid to strong-arm vessels into using its own waters along its coast and pay for safe passage.

The Philippine Coast Guard and the Philippine



The remarks came after protests by both sides this week following a clash bet-



Trump’s bunker buster gamble on Pickaxe Mountain

U.S. faces a complex challenge at Iran’s Pickaxe Mountain, where powerful bunker buster bombs meet hardy geological formations; success is also limited by a critical minerals crunch, and could force Trump to shift from destruction to disabling surface infra and subterranean access tunnels, with the deep, rugged mountain potentially placing Tehran’s underground facility beyond the bombs’ reach

NEWS ANALYSIS
Vasudevan Mukunth

Conventional bombs explode on or near a target surface, with the explosion and fragments, e.g. shrapnel, rendering the bomb’s damage. But when a target is buried deep under a mountain, the soil and rock mass surrounding it can absorb enough of the blast’s energy to keep the target from being damaged too much.

This is the situation facing the Donald Trump administration as it mulls plans to bomb Pickaxe Mountain in Iran, where *The Wall Street Journal* has reported Israel believes Tehran has moved several centrifuges – the machines that purify uranium to make an a-bomb.

The need to bomb targets under a thick layer of earth led scientists to invent bunker buster bombs. Instead of exploding when they come in contact with the earth, these bombs are designed to penetrate soil, rock, and even reinforced concrete before detonating.

The U.S.’s most powerful conventional bunker buster is the GBU-57A/B Massive Ordnance Penetrator, shortened to MOP. The world’s largest non-nuclear bomb, a single MOP weighs around 13.6 tonnes and is currently delivered only by the U.S. Air Force’s B2 Spirit stealth bomber. The

MOP entered combat for the first time during the U.S.’s June 2025 strikes against Iran in the 12-Day War.

The MOP does not drill through rock. Instead, it uses an enormous amount of kinetic energy to punch its way through. The B2 Spirit can cruise at an altitude of 50,000 ft. When a 13.6-tonne object is dropped from that height, it will have a theoretical maximum kinetic energy of 2 gigajoules (GJ) when it reaches the ground – about as much energy with which American Airlines Flight 11 smashed into North Tower on 9/11 – and at a speed of nearly 2,000 km/hr.

In reality, the MOP will face significant atmospheric drag and, from that altitude, will reach the ground at 1,000-1,300 km/hr, with a kinetic energy of 0.6-0.8 GJ. This is still equivalent to the energy released by detonating around 170 kg of TNT. And to ensure this helps the MOP get as close to the target as possible, it features a hardened steel casing, a nose only a few tens of centimetres across, and a delayed fuse that kicks off only after the bomb has burrowed underground.

If the MOP has a kinetic energy of 0.7 GJ, a nose 20 cm wide will exert a pressure 2.1-lakh-times the atmospheric pressure, and if it’s able to penetrate 1 m of rock, a force equivalent to 71,000 tonnes under earth’s gravity. If multiple



Tough terrain: A composite image showing the area around Pickaxe Mountain, visible near the centre of this image (from April 2024), with access roads spread like tendrils around it. The Natanz nuclear site is visible to the top-right (from September 2023). GOOGLE EARTH

MOPs are dropped in sequence over the same point, each one can penetrate deeper than the last.

Cost of making an MOP
The unit cost of an MOP is not available in the public domain but estimates in the media suggest \$15-20 million per bomb. The need for multiple bombs may also weigh heavily on the U.S. government’s mind in terms of their demand for critical minerals.

As researchers from the Payne Institute of Public Policy wrote in March this year, “The biggest issue for the [American] defense industrial base will be sourcing the 77.3 kg of gallium needed” to rebuild the advanced radars in Bahrain and Qatar damaged by Iranian missiles, “a material for which China controls

98% of the global supply... As the long conflict in Ukraine has already illustrated, war is being costed in the wrong units.

The relevant metric is not merely how many launchers there are at the start of the war, but how many precision weapons and interceptors can be fired on days two, 20, and 200, and how quickly industry can replace them.”

Again, while a bill of materials isn’t available for the MOP, a survey of other precision-guided penetrators suggests each bomb may include up to a quintal of tungsten, tens to hundreds of grams of rare-earth elements, and several other critical minerals of varying quantities in between.

For all the impressive forces the MOP is capable

of, a mountain can be much more formidable.

Iran hasn’t released geological surveys of Pickaxe Mountain – which locals know as Kuh-e Kolang Gaz La. But the Karkas Range that it is part of is predominantly volcanic in origin, with surveys indicating it consists mainly of volcanic rocks from the Eocene period. Volcanic rocks like andesites and rhyolites are generally hard and difficult to excavate. The mountain itself is also steep and rugged, a topology that lends itself to subterranean facilities as the valleys can host access roads while the ridges provide rock cover.

Based on satellite images provided by Vantor, the Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS), a U.S.-based think-tank, has suggested that

the main access tunnels enter horizontally through the mountainside. Pickaxe Mountain rises 1,600 m above sea level and the nuclear complex is expected (but not confirmed) to be at least 100 m underground.

Bunker buster bombs like the MOP are generally most effective against facilities whose location and layout are well-understood and when the target doesn’t lie beyond the bomb’s penetrative capability. A facility buried under tens of metres of soil or rock can be vulnerable if an MOP gets close enough for the explosion – of the bomb’s 2-2.5 tonnes of explosive charge – and shock waves to damage or destabilise the structure.

The bombs also fare better against targets that don’t move, such as underground buildings, centrifuge halls, command centres, and aircraft shelters.

On the flip side, the MOPs become less effective the more deeply a facility is buried, since every additional layer of rock or reinforced concrete can absorb some of the bomb’s energy before the facility itself becomes vulnerable.

Simply increasing the bomb’s speed at the moment of impact is also not an option. Beyond a threshold, the impact can deform the bomb’s casing, rendering it less effective.

Different rocks also transmit shock waves differently. Andesite and rhy-

lite are both stiff rocks and thus transmit shock waves well, but the rocks themselves can withstand high compressive stresses before fracturing.

Rhyolite is also more brittle and can develop multiple cracks. Note, however, that Pickaxe Mountain’s actual response to multiple MOP strikes will depend on existing fractures as well as on the properties of the many other rock types present, plus the effects of any reinforcing structures.

Since the Trump administration is mulling bombing Pickaxe Mountain vis-à-vis Iran’s nuclear programme, to which the U.S. is opposed, military planners will be considering destroying the underground facility as much as rendering enough damage to delay the programme, and perhaps even disrupting operations by collapsing the access tunnels.

Lessons from Fordow
In fact, the June 2025 attack by the U.S. illustrates the possibilities at hand at present. Iran built its Fordow nuclear site inside a mountain so that it could survive air attacks. During Operation Midnight Hammer, seven B2 bombers dropped 12 MOPs on Fordow (and two on the Natanz site). According to the Pentagon, the bombers delivered the bombs in sequence aiming for a pair of ventilation shafts. The first MOPs damaged the reinforced concrete over each

shaft and the subsequent ones punched deeper.

However, in the aftermath, U.S. officials said the facility had suffered severe damage while independent assessments said the attack delayed the nuclear programme rather than eliminating it. On-ground inspection has of course been impossible.

The Wall Street Journal recently reported that Israeli intelligence believes Tehran moved several tonnes of centrifuges into the facility under Pickaxe Mountain after Operation Midnight Hammer. However, the facility is also believed to be even deeper than that at Fordow, potentially deliberately beyond the reach of MOPs.

In a July 14 assessment, ISIS experts wrote, “The site, in its present condition, would be more suitable for ground forces to attack or sabotage like the destruction of the advanced centrifuge assembly centre”. But as *The Guardian* put it, “The deployment of ground operations has so far been a red line for Trump and there has been no suggestion that he is any closer to considering such a move, even after the recent escalation”.

Given these constraints, future military operations could focus less on destroying the chambers housing the facility and more on collapsing the access points or damaging supporting infra, such as power lines aboveground.

Deadly wildfires force thousands of people from their homes in Europe

Agence France Presse
LE PORGE

Wildfires continued to sweep across swathes of Italy, France and Spain on Thursday, forcing thousands to flee blazes fanned by scorching temperatures and strong winds. Three firefighters have been killed fighting the flames as southern Europe endures another spell of severe heat, with temperatures topping 40C in some areas.

Although the summer of 2026 is only halfway through, it already ranks as the second largest EU area burned by wildfires over the last 20 years, according to European satellite data from the Effis system analysed by AFP.

In Sicily, around 6,000 firefighters, forest guards



Grim scene: Wildfire spreading over the Burgohondo mountains, in Avila, Spain on Thursday. REUTERS

and civil protection officials battled dozens of fires raging for days across the Italian Mediterranean island despite the deployment of water-bombing aircraft.

A spokesperson for Italy’s Civil Protection Agency told AFP the situation in Si-

cily was “serious” and that the fires were “being fuelled by very high temperatures and very dry soil”. More than 160 fires have also been recorded in the Calabria region.

In France, more than 10,000 tourists evacuated camping sites and other holiday accommodation near Bordeaux in the southwest on Thursday, as a wildfire ravaged a seaside pine forest. The blaze in Le Porge had ripped through 2,400 hectares (5,900 acres) since Wednesday, officials said.

Skies over Le Porge turned orange as smoke rose from charred and still-crackling pine trees, AFP journalists reported, while helicopters made repeated runs over evacuated neighbourhoods.

Fires are breaking out faster because climate change, caused by the burning of oil, coal and gas, is making a European drought more severe, climatologists from the World Weather Attribution group said in a study published on Thursday.

A dry Danube



At rock bottom: Boats lie on the dried-up bed of the Danube River near the Calafat-Vidin Bridge, which connects Bulgaria and Romania, in southeastern Bulgaria. Prolonged drought and hot weather across Europe have pushed water levels in the river to record seasonal lows. AFP

Tehran’s strikes on CIA facilities prompt questions about possible Russian role

Reuters
WASHINGTON/RIYADH

Iranian drone attacks on CIA facilities in the Gulf have prompted U.S. intelligence analysts to investigate whether Russia assisted by providing targeting information or advanced drone technology, said four people familiar with U.S. intelligence.

These people, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss national security matters, said U.S. intelligence officials have not yet reached firm conclusions about the possible Russian involvement in the attacks on CIA facilities. But they cited the strikes’ effectiveness and apparent precision, as well as Russia’s broader technical support for Iran, as possible evidence.

Reuters and other media

have reported – and U.S. officials have acknowledged – that Russia has provided targeting and other support for Iran in its strikes on U.S. targets in the Gulf region generally, but the intelligence community’s investigation of possible Russian involvement in supporting the CIA facility attacks has not been previously disclosed.

At least two CIA sites were struck in March, *Reuters* and other outlets have reported.

One of the facilities was the CIA station in Saudi Arabia, which is located in the U.S. embassy in Riyadh, and a separate site was located in eastern Iraq.

Some of the sources said additional CIA sites had been hit, but they did not disclose details.

One internal memo

from a Western intelligence agency, described by an official in the region with access to the document, concluded Russia has likely played a role in targeting regional CIA facilities. The official discussed the memo on condition that its precise authorship not be disclosed.

Two Western officials in the Gulf who were briefed on intelligence reports said analysts thought the Saudi attack involved a pair of Russian-enhanced versions of Iran’s Shahed drones. One of the aircraft blew a hole through a vulnerable part of the embassy’s exterior and the second flew through the opening and detonated, they said. No deaths or injuries were reported.

While Russian assistance for Iran is longstanding, given the countries’



Escalating tensions: As per reports, Iranian drones struck at least two CIA sites in the Gulf in March. REUTERS

close ties, specific targeting of sensitive CIA sites would indicate Moscow is willing to go further in disrupting U.S. operations as Washington struggles to bring the Iran war to an end.

Concerns that Russia could be providing targeting data to Iran intensified

the Russian Defence Ministry and the Saudi government did not respond to requests for comment.

The two Western officials in the region said Russia has helped Iran improve its Shahed drones’ ability to reach targets, and said analysts suspected that Iran used these versions in its strike in Riyadh.

Secretive sites
Russia, said a separate source, has helped Tehran improve the accuracy of its Shahed-136s by supplying a satellite navigation system – the Kometa-M – that experts say is far more accurate and harder to jam than the one produced by Iran.

The Wall Street Journal first reported in March that Russia has provided the Kometa-M to Iran. The Kremlin denied the report,

calling it “fake news.”

CIA facilities overseas include the agency’s main offices in individual countries that traditionally are housed in embassies and are called stations. Additionally, the CIA maintains offices, safe houses, logistics hubs and sites involved in surveillance or other operations.

The locations of those sites are closely guarded secrets.

The sources declined to disclose the exact number or locations of CIA facilities hit by Iranian drones. One source put the number at “more than one and fewer than a dozen.” A second source said several facilities were hit. U.S. intelligence analysts have been looking into whether Iran relied on Russian targeting data for the embassy attack, said the sources.

Doubts remain, however. Some of the sources warned that Iran could have been aiming for the U.S. embassy generally and by chance struck the CIA station.

Some analysts have concluded that few nations beyond Russia would have the means to acquire and the interest in weaponising such sensitive targeting intelligence against the U.S., according to the sources.

Daniel Hoffman, a former CIA station chief and undercover operations officer, said it would not be surprising for Moscow to help Tehran target CIA facilities given their close strategic partnership.

“They share an interest in trying to reduce or eliminate U.S. influence altogether in their self-designated spheres of influence,” he said.

OPENING THE ACCOUNT
Lovlina assures India's first medal at the Glasgow Games



PTI
Lovlina Borgohain assured India of its first medal at the Glasgow Commonwealth Games after the boxer received a direct entry into the semifinals of the women's 75kg event, which guarantees her a bronze. Lovlina, who was handed a first-round bye in the five-boxer draw, will take on Tuvalu's TKBP Taafaki in the semifinals.

SETBACK
Judoka Arun Kumar withdrawn from CWG after failing dope test



IJF
Indian judoka Arun Kumar has been withdrawn from the Glasgow Commonwealth Games after failing an out of competition dope test. Arun, who competes in the 73kg category, had participated in the Qingdao Grand Prix last month. He has been handed a provisional suspension by the National Anti-Doping Agency.

BOY WONDER
15-year-old Sooryavanshi becomes youngest to hit T20I half-century



BCCI
India batter Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, at 15 years and 118 days, became the youngest player to hit his maiden T20I half-century, breaking Louis Bruce's record (16y 56d, Gibraltar) which was set in 2021. Sooryavanshi achieved the feat in the first match against Zimbabwe in Harare on Thursday.

MIXED LUCK
Anahat enters World junior squash quarterfinals; Aryaveer bows out



SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT
Top-seeded Indian Anahat Singh eased past Malaysian Doyce Ye San Lee 11-4, 11-8, 11-3 to advance to the women's quarterfinals of the World junior squash individual championships in Ontario, Canada. Aryaveer Dewan bowed out in men's round of 16, losing 4-11, 1-11, 5-11 to American Yaseen Shalaby.

Rajpal realistic about India's medal chances

The Chef de Mission expects a good show in athletics, weightlifting, boxing and lawn bowls; he believes the Glasgow edition carries added significance as Ahmedabad is set to host the next one

C'WEALTH GAMES
K. Keerthivasan
GLASGOW

As Chef de Mission of the Indian contingent at the Commonwealth Games here, Rohit Rajpal has his hands full. But the 55-year-old, who is also the vice-president of the All India Tennis Association, has assembled a team to ensure everything runs smoothly. In fact, he has set up a dedicated office to make things easier for both athletes and the media. "Weather reports are predicting rain. It's windy as well, which could affect the performance of athletes in certain disciplines. We are trying to understand the local conditions so that we can prepare accordingly," Rajpal told *The Hindu* here on Wednesday night. On expectations from the Indian contingent, Raj-



Immediate task: Rajpal says the Indian athletes are trying to acclimatise to the conditions in Glasgow. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

pal said it was important to keep them realistic, given that this was not a "normal" edition of the Games. "These Games were originally supposed to be held in Victoria (Australia), but they got cancelled. Glasgow had stepped in and is hosting them in a limited format. We have only 10 sports. We can expect medals in athletics, weightlifting, boxing and lawn bowls and a few events. Our para athletes are also looking to contribute," he said. Rajpal believes the Glas-

gow Games carry added significance as Ahmedabad is set to host the 2030 edition and will officially receive the baton during the closing ceremony. **Crucial** "Symbolically, these Games are very important because India is going to be the next host. The Gujarat government team is here, and there is knowledge transfer happening during the Games as well," he said. At the closing ceremony, Rajpal said, India will showcase its culture to the world. "We will have a dance and cultural presentation that will offer a glimpse of what India and Gujarat have in store for the 2030 Games in Ahmedabad. Gujarat government has set up an Ahmedabad Experience Centre here. Members of the Indian diaspora from across the world have been invited," Rajpal added.

Asian Games the bigger goal for Mirabai and coach



Challenge: Mirabai will be competing in 48kg. FILE PHOTO: SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

K. Keerthivasan
GLASGOW
Changing weight categories is never easy for an elite weightlifter. The real challenge is to reduce the weight while maintaining the same strength or even better it. Mirabai Chanu has seamlessly and tactfully shifted between 48kg and 49kg and gone on to win a host of major medals in both weight categories. The 31-year-old will be competing in 48kg in the Glasgow Commonwealth Games. Mirabai had competed in 49kg and won a gold in the 2022 CWG after clinching a silver in the To-

kyo Olympics in 2021. She also bagged the CWG gold in 2018 and a silver in the 2025 World Championships in Forde, Norway, in 48kg. "Yes, I have been in the weight category (49 kg) for many years. It is very tough to maintain my weight," Mirabai told *The Hindu* here on Thursday. In fact, her coach Vijay Sharma asked her to take it easy here and not put too much pressure on herself in pursuit of a third consecutive CWG gold. A smiling Mirabai said: "My focus is on the forthcoming Asian Games (49kg) in Japan. However, I will give my best here as there are good weightlifters from Nigeria and Canada." Vijay, who is also the chief national coach, said since Mirabai hadn't won a medal at the Asian Games it was better to go all out in Japan. "We have a plan for her. We are focusing on the Asian Games. We don't want her to push herself here too much lest she ends up with an injury. She is fit though," he said. Vijay further said the Indian team has a lot of promising youngsters and he expects the medals tally to go up to as high as 10. The weightlifting competition begins at the Scottish Event Campus here on Sunday.

Injured heptathlon champion pulls out

Agence France-Presse
GLASGOW
Katarina Johnson-Thompson said on Thursday she was "gutted" after withdrawing from the England team for the Commonwealth Games due to an unspecified injury. The 33-year-old double defending heptathlon champion – also a silver medallist at the 2024 Olympics in Paris – was one of nine withdrawals from the England athletics squad on Thursday. **Withdrawal** Teammates who also pulled out just hours before the opening ceremony included Johnson-Thompson's fellow Olympic medallists Dina Asher-Smith, Daryll Neita, Matthew Hudson-Smith and Amber Anning. Leading international competitors who had previously pulled out of the Games include Olympic women's 100m champion Julien Alfred, 800m runner Mary Moraa and Olympic swimming medalists Summer McIntosh and Kaylee McKeown.

Sooryavanshi helps Shreyas' India end winless streak

INDIA IN ZIMBABWE
Press Trust of India
HARARE

Wunderkind Vaibhav Sooryavanshi smashed an 18-ball half-century in his first innings of substance in international cricket as an all-round India outplayed Zimbabwe by seven wickets in the first T20I of the three-match series here on Thursday. Pacer Mayank Yadav (two for 18) made a successful return, helping the Men in Blue restrict the home team to 125 for seven. The visitor gunned down the target in 13.2 overs after a typical knock from Sooryavanshi (50 off 19) that included four fours and as many sixes. It was India's first win under new captain Shreyas Iyer, who endured a run of six losses in his assignment in Ireland and England. While Abhishek Sharma (one off eight) struggled at one end, Sooryavanshi took down the Zimbabwe attack bit by bit. He began with a couple of breathtaking sixes off Richard Ngarava in the second over of the chase. The southpaw brought up his fifty right after the PowerPlay, and was caught at third-man a ball after reaching the milestone. Earlier, Mayank cranked up serious pace from the get-go in his first game for



Stars of the day: Mayank made a successful return to international cricket while Sooryavanshi did what he does best. BCCI

SCOREBOARD	
ZIMBABWE Brian Bennett c Kishan b Mayank 0 (1b), Ben Curran c Sooryavanshi b Prince 10 (8b, 2x4), Dion Myers c Dube b Mayank 6 (14b, 1x4), Sikandar Raza c sub (Shedge) b Dube 4 (7b, 1x4), Ryan Burl c Tilak b Bishnoi 26 (35b, 1x4, 1x6), Westly Madhevere run out 39 (34b, 3x4, 1x6), Tadiwanashe Marumani (not out) 27 (20b, 2x4, 1x6), Brad Evans c Shreyas b Prince 0 (1b), Newman Nyamhuri (not out) 1 (1b); Extras (lb-3, nb-1, w-8): 12; Total (for seven wkts. in 20 overs): 125.	INDIA Abhishek Sharma c Evans b Muzarabani 1 (8b), Vaibhav Sooryavanshi c Curran b Ngarava 50 (19b, 4x4, 4x6), Ishan Kishan c Myers b Muzarabani 35 (24b, 3x4, 2x6), Shreyas Iyer (not out) 28 (24b, 3x4), Tilak Varma (not out) 6 (5b, 1x4); Extras (w-6): 6; Total (for three wkts. in 13.2 overs): 126.
FALL OF WICKETS 1-0 (Bennett, 0.1 over), 2-19 (Curran, 3.2), 3-20 (Myers, 4.2), 4-32 (Sikandar, 7.2), 5-64 (Burl, 13.1), 6-122 (Madhevere, 19.2), 7-122 (Evans, 19.3).	FALL OF WICKETS 1-23 (Abhishek, 2.5), 2-68 (Sooryavanshi, 6.2), 3-114 (Kishan, 11.3).
INDIA BOWLING Mayank 4-0-18-2, Ashok 4-0-29-0, Prince 4-0-19-2, Dube 4-0-32-1, Bishnoi 4-0-24-1.	ZIMBABWE BOWLING Muzarabani 4-0-26-2, Ngarava 2.2-0-30-1, Evans 2-0-26-0, Nyamhuri 2-0-30-0, Sikandar 3-0-14-0.
Toss: India; PoM: Mayank. India won by seven wickets with 40 balls remaining to lead three-match series 1-0.	Toss: India; PoM: Mayank. India won by seven wickets with 40 balls remaining to lead three-match series 1-0.
Second T20I: July 25, Harare, 4.30 p.m. IST.	

India since October 2024. He had opener Brian Bennett (zero) caught behind off a peach in the very first ball of the match. The on-field umpire did not hear the nick but a con-

Dabang Delhi storms into the semifinals

UTT
Amol Karhadkar
PANAJI

With qualification in its own hands, Dabang Delhi TTC rose to the occasion, dismantling PBG Pune Jaguars 10-5 to storm into the semifinals of Ultimate Table Tennis (UTT) Season-7 at Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Indoor Stadium on Thursday. Delhi began its final league tie knowing it needed at least nine points to advance. The task briefly looked tricky when Omar Assar gave Pune a dream start, winning the opening two games of the all-Egyptian contest against Youssef Abdulaziz. But from that point onwards, the contest belonged almost entirely to Delhi. Abdulaziz responded impressively, overpowering his more experienced compatriot in the third game to get Delhi on the board, before Maria Xiao blanked Prithika Pavade. The Spaniard controlled the rallies from the outset and never allowed Prithika to settle into the contest. Captain G. Sathiyam combined with Maria to continue Delhi's impressive run in mixed doubles, outplaying Anirban Ghosh and Diya Chitale to stretch the lead to 7-2. That left Sathiyam with a familiar responsibility. With Delhi requiring two



Xiao. BUTTERFLY UTT

more games to guarantee a semifinal place, the veteran once again delivered under pressure. The only player to have represented the same franchise in all seven editions of UTT held his nerve to clinch the decisive golden point, ensuring Dabang Delhi maintained its record of reaching the semifinals in every season of the league. **The result: Dabang Delhi TTC bt PBG Pune Jaguars 10-5** (Youssef Abdulaziz lost to Omar Assar 8-11, 8-11, 11-8; Maria Xiao bt Prithika Pavade 11-7, 11-10, 11-7; G. Sathiyam & Maria bt Anirban Ghosh & Diya Chitale 11-8, 11-4, 11-4; Sathiyam bt S.F.R. Snehit 11-8, 11-10, 6-11; Sutirtha Mukherjee lost to Diya Chitale 11-10, 10-11, 8-11). **The standings:** Dempo Goa Challengers 56 points (6 ties); HVR Kolkata Thunder Blades 49 (6); U Mumba TT 48 (6); Dabang Delhi TTC 46 (6); Ahmedabad APL Pipers 45 (6); PBG Pune Jaguars 39 (6); UP Prometheans 32 (6). **Semifinal line-up:** Dempo Goa Challengers vs Dabang Delhi TTC (Friday); HVR Kolkata Thunder Blades vs U Mumba TT (Saturday).

Justice Mittal rebukes AITA interim EC's decision to appoint observer for EGM

EXCLUSIVE
N. Sudarshan

The decision of the interim Executive Committee (EC) of the All India Tennis Association (AITA) to appoint an observer for Sunday's Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) has been rebuked by the Delhi High Court-appointed administrator Justice (Retd.) Gita Mittal. The EGM is expected to discuss – and ratify – the amendments proposed by the administrator-led committee to bring AITA's Constitution in line with the National Sports Governance Act, 2025 and National Sports Governance Rules, 2026. In a sharply worded letter (dated July 22) to president Chintan N. Parikh, Justice Mittal stated that when the High Court had appointed her as an independent person, voluntarily engaging another was a "direct affront to the High Court". The AITA's move to appoint Justice Ashish J. Desai (Retd.) – former judge of Gujarat High Court, who retired as the Chief Justice of the Kerala High Court – as part of "good governance and transparency" came after the administrator had chosen four observers with a remuneration



Justice (Retd.) Gita Mittal. FILE PHOTO: S.R. RAGHUNATHAN

of ₹1.5 lakh per person per session. The AITA said that this expenditure, totalling ₹12 lakh, was "extravagant and unrealistic" for an EGM that will "not have more than 60 members". It even suggested an alternative where an observer each from both sides can be invited at ₹1 lakh per person. But the administrator has asked the AITA to not "bypass the orders of the High Court" and stated that her nominees were "qualified and widely experienced in the conduct of such contentious meetings". In fact, the AITA was earlier unhappy with the fee for Justice Mittal too, claiming that ₹10 lakh per month was "excessive, arbitrary and unaffordable". The administrator has also disapproved AITA's decision to prepare a chart

Justice Mittal stated that when the Delhi HC had appointed her as an independent person, voluntarily engaging another was a "direct affront to the High Court". The AITA was earlier unhappy with the fee for Justice Mittal, claiming that ₹10 lakh per month was "excessive, arbitrary and unaffordable". which will tabulate amendments to each clause, and give members the option to choose either the suggestion of the administrator or that of the interim EC or propose any other modification. "There are different groups/factions within the association, and each group and member has the right to put across his opinion on the Constitution/Bye-laws. Opinion/suggestions of the EC cannot be accorded priority of opinion," Justice Mittal wrote. The administrator pointed out that the consolidated draft of all amendments – as finalised and circulated on July 13 – had incorporated suggestions, comments and objections from everyone, and reasons for disagreements, if any, have been recorded. "Please remember that this is not an adversarial engagement. The entire effort is to serve the best interests of tennis and its players," Justice Mittal said.

INBRIEF



Rohit, Venkata shine as India u-19 wins series against SL

Leg-spinner Rohit Yadav and pacer C. Venkata shared seven wickets among them as India u-19 thrashed Sri Lanka u-19 by 211 runs on the fourth day of the second Youth ‘Test’ in Colombo on Thursday. India won the two-match series 1-0 after the first game ended in a draw. It was a spirited comeback from the Indians after the team lost the preceding Youth ODI series 1-2. Starting the day at 155 for four, chasing a huge target of 472, the home side folded for 260 in 76.5 overs, shortly into the post-lunch session.

The scores: India u-19 411 & 208/3 decl. bt Sri Lanka u-19 148 & 260 in 76.5 overs (Senuja Wekunagoda 64, Vimath Dinsara 64, C. Venkata 3/27, Rohit Yadav 4/49).

ICC confirms the Oval as venue for 2027 WTC final

The Oval in London has been confirmed as the venue for next year’s ICC World Test Championship (WTC) Final, which will be held from June 9 to 13. This will be the second time that the Oval hosts the final, having previously staged the showpiece in 2023, when Australia defeated India to lift the mace.



Ecuador’s Carapaz wins Tour de France 18th stage

Ecuador’s Richard Carapaz emerged from a six-man group to climb to victory on the Alpine 18th stage of the Tour de France on Thursday. The former Giro d’Italia winner attacked his breakaway companions with just over three kilometres to ride and cruised to his second Tour stage victory, with Swiss Mauro Schmid beating American Matteo Jorgenson to second place.

Sindhu, Ayush, Lakshya bow out of China Open badminton

P.V. Sindhu, Ayush Shetty and Lakshya Sen crashed out of the China Open in the second round in Changzhou on Thursday.

The results (second round): Men: Victor Lai bt Lakshya Sen 21-19, 21-11; Nhat Nguyen bt Ayush Shetty 15-21, 21-13, 22-20. **Women:** Chen Yufei bt P.V. Sindhu 16-21, 22-20, 21-18.

Klopp expected to be named Germany coach today

Jurgen Klopp is widely expected to formally take over as the new head coach of the German men’s national football team, with the German Football Association calling a press conference for Friday. Klopp, famed for his success during stints as coach at Borussia Dortmund and Liverpool, has been in talks with the DFB about trying to lead Germany – long a football powerhouse – back to prominence. Klopp, 59, is expected to sign a contract with Germany that runs until 2030, the date of the next World Cup. Since 2025, Klopp has been under contract with Austrian energy drink maker Red Bull as “Head of Global Soccer”.

Norway to complain to FIFA over Balogun red-card saga

Norwegian Football Federation (NFF) president Lise Klaveness said that the association is set to make a formal complaint to FIFA over the suspension of USA forward Folarin Balogun’s World Cup ban. Speaking to *The Times*, Klaveness said that she will seek the backing of her board to lodge the complaint with FIFA’s ethics committee over an incident that put “the whole game at risk” and “should not have happened”. The NFF has already formally complained over FIFA president Gianni Infantino awarding the football’s governing body’s inaugural Peace Prize to USA President Donald Trump.

LIVE TELECAST

Commonwealth Games: Day 1, Sony Sports Ten 2 & LIV, 1.30 p.m.

‘Finding balance between intensity and rest is key’

The women’s hockey coach Marijne is focusing on fitness as it could be the difference in a game of small margins; the Dutchman believes the outcome will be better if the process is followed

HOCKEY

Uthra Ganesan
NEW DELHI

With the Indian team entering its final stage of preparations for the World Cup, women’s hockey coach Sjoerd Marijne is focussing on fitness, aware it could be the difference in a game of small margins.

“That is our main focus now, improving the fitness, because we know they understand the tactics and we have enough matches to practice that. But these are the moments we really have to make the next step in our fitness.

“I think we’re doing really well, we are pushing the girls hard. It’s always a combination of high intensity and good rest and also finding the quality you want on the pitch. And the better the fitness is, the better the outcome will be,” he told *The Hindu* in an interaction on Thursday.

The team would be leaving for Germany on July 29 to play two matches before



Showing the way: The women’s team that won the FIH Nations Cup recently under Marijne. X@SJOERDMARIJNE

travelling to Netherlands on August 2. It will play four practice matches against Chile, Japan, Netherlands and Australia before the World Cup starts on August 15 with India’s opening game against China.

Two months mater, the team will have a chance to book an Olympic ticket at the Asian Games but Marijne understands the two are very different competitions.

“I think both tournaments are really different, there are different things at stake. Playing Asian teams is completely different than playing European or South American teams.

Chaotic playing style “The playing style at the Asian Games is more chaotic, so we have to stay away from that. I don’t see one tournament impacting the other in a negative way. It has been a while since

we played China so we will see what is our level against them.

“I think Netherlands is by far the best team in the world. But, I think they all can win against each other.

“We will always create opportunities and that will be more difficult against higher ranked teams, so if you get three chances, you have to make at least one or two count. We’re working really hard on that,” he insisted.

‘It takes only one game or critical moment to regain confidence’

CHESS

C. Shyam Sundar
CHENNAI

Becoming the World champion is probably easier than being one. This might be running through the mind of D. Gukesh, who is set to defend his title in a few months’ time.

The 20-year-old Grandmaster has been going through a prolonged lean spell as the championship clash against Uzbek Javokhir Sindarov looms.

Gukesh hasn’t won a tournament since his stunning triumph in Singapore, and the performances have been below-par to say the least. At the just-concluded Chennai Grand Masters here, he lost three games and couldn’t buy a win while finishing last in a field of eight. He now has



Gukesh. B. VELANKANNI RAJ

only the Olympiad in September to regain form and be ready to face Sindarov.

Five-time World champion Viswanathan Anand said Gukesh still had time to get out of the rut, ad-

ding: “He must be disappointed with the results, but he will anyway play some more games. He’s had a bad streak for a while, but he can snap out of it.”

N. Srinath, the captain of the Open team in the upcoming Olympiad, isn’t concerned about the form of Gukesh, who was on the top board during the victorious campaign in Budapest two years ago. In this regard, he pointed out that R. Vaishali had a similarly difficult time in the Chennai Grand Masters’ Challengers event last year.

“Vaishali won the Grand Swiss title a few months later and then the Candidates. Slumps in form can happen, but class is permanent. It takes only one game, one critical moment to regain confidence,” Srinath said, batting for Gukesh.

India has an ‘excellent chance’ of retaining Olympiad title: Srinath

S. Shrivathsan
CHENNAI

If the India team is to replicate its near-perfect Chess Olympiad 2024 campaign in the Open event, it will take some doing.

India will have the ‘defending champion’ tag attached to it throughout the global competition in Samarkand in September and will be expected to deliver another strong show.

No baggage

But captain N. Srinath stressed that his squad will not carry any “baggage”, saying that it will begin from square one just like any other team.

“We will not do that (put ourselves under pressure for being the reigning champ); we are all professionals. We start from zero this time.

“But we will definitely

Indian shooters endure another medal-less day

Press Trust of India
HANGZHOU

Indian shooters endured a second successive medal-less day at the ISSF World Cup (rifle / pistol / shotgun) even as nations like Qatar, Sweden and Norway opened their accounts here on Thursday.

Vidarsa Vinod was the lone bright spot, reaching the women’s 50m rifle three positions final before finishing sixth. Vidarsa had qualified seventh with a score of 587 to make the eight-shooter final.

There was some fight-back in the men’s skeet event Gurjoat Khangura produced two flawless rounds of 25 to finish qualification with 121/125. He

won a shoot-off against Kuwait’s Mohammad Alawaad to grab the eighth and last place in the final, eventually finishing sixth.

Abhay Singh Sekhon ended 20th with 119/125.

Among women skeet shooters, Ganemat Sekhon was the best-placed Indian in 23rd with 113/125, followed by Yashasvi Rathore (110) in 28th and Darsha Rathore (109) in 34th.

In men’s 25m rapid fire pistol, Bhavesh Shekhawat kept India’s hopes alive by ending Stage 1 in ninth place with 292.

World Championship silver medallist Anish Bhanwala was 21st with 288, while Omkar Singh was tied for 23rd on the same score.

Saliba to be sidelined for ‘extended period’

Associated Press
LONDON

Arsenal centre-back William Saliba will avoid back surgery but faces an “extended period” in rehabilitation, the defending Premier League champion confirmed on Wednesday.

The 25-year-old defen-

der was taken off during the first half of France’s 0-2 World Cup semifinal loss to Spain.

“Extensive assessments have concluded that surgery is not recommended, but William should now commence a managed recovery program,” Arsenal said in a statement.



Srinath. FILE PHOTO: M. VEDHAN

make up the playing contingent.

“I am pretty confident that we will do excellently. Before the last Olympiad, we never thought that we would win the way we did. We will have the same approach, but we will know about the form of our players only after the first few rounds.

Top challengers

“So, it is hard to say which team will set the standard. Host Uzbekistan, the USA and China will be among the top challengers, but we have an excellent chance,” Srinath added. Will his players walk the talk?

The Indian squads: Open: D. Gukesh, R. Praggnanandhaa, Arjun Erigaisi, Vidit Gujrathi and Nihal Sarin; captain: N. Srinath.

Women: Koneru Humpy, R. Vaishali, Divya Deshmukh, Vantika Agrawal and B. Savitha Shri; captain: Swayams Mishra.

SNAPSHOTS

Aswath wins Serbia Open title

Indian Grandmaster Aswath S. emerged champion in the Serbia Open chess tournament in Belgrade, scoring 7.5 points from nine rounds. He remained unbeaten in the event and posted six wins with the one over compatriot Mitrabha Guha in the penultimate round proving to be crucial. India’s Ethan Vaz finished third while Mitrabha took the fourth spot.

No 2027 Ashes Tests in north of England

There will be no Ashes matches in the north of England when Australia arrives for the 2027 edition of Test cricket’s oldest rivalry. Headingley in Leeds and Manchester’s Old Trafford have been left off the schedule for the 2027 Ashes. The England and Wales Cricket Board confirmed on Thursday the exact fixture list for next year’s Ashes, with all five matches restricted to the Midlands and south of



Aswath.

England. Hampshire’s Rose Bowl, near Southampton, will stage its first Ashes Test from July 21 – the fourth of the series. It will become the 10th ground in the United Kingdom to stage a men’s Ashes Test. The series will start at Trent Bridge in Nottingham on June 18, with Lord’s – as is traditional – staging the second Test on June 30 and Edgbaston in Birmingham the third on July 8. The Ashes will conclude at the Oval in south London from July 29. Old Trafford and Headingley are both set to stage Ashes Tests in 2031.

