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Bank of Baroda starts probe into ‘data breach’
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15-year-old held after three are shot dead
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Why youth fight for govt. jobs
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Gyaneshwari and Raja clinch silver medals
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INSIDE



BSE gains ₹5 lakh crore in market cap as crude dips

MUMBAI
A sharp fall in crude oil prices amid easing tensions in West Asia and appreciation of rupee, propped up India’s equity markets, with the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) gaining more than 1%, adding ₹5.10 lakh crore in capitalisation. » **PAGE 12**



Gadkari can sue Meta, Google, X on ethanol posts

MUMBAI
The Bombay High Court has allowed Union Minister Nitin Gadkari to initiate legal proceedings against Meta, Google, X, and other entities over social media content that “falsely” links him to the Centre’s ethanol blending programme. » **PAGE 6**

HC rejects order granting jobs to stampede victims

CHENNAI
The Madras High Court on Monday struck down the government orders granting government jobs to the family members of the victims of the Karur stampede that occurred in September 2025, during a Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) roadshow addressed by Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay. » **PAGE 2**

Four drown in reservoir; two others rescued

HYDERABAD
Four youngsters drowned in the Sri Ram Sagar Project backwaters in Nizamabad district of Telangana on Sunday. They drowned while trying to rescue their friend who had slipped into the water. The group had come to the area for sightseeing. Local residents rescued two others. » **PAGE 3**

SC seeks Centre’s reply to plea on defection clause

NEW DELHI
The Supreme Court on Monday sought the Union government’s response on a plea filed by senior advocate Kapil Sibal challenging the interpretation of the “merger” exception under the anti-defection law contained in the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution. » **PAGE 6**

CJP warns of fresh protests over government’s ‘breach of promise’

Centre violating assurance of not taking action against protesters, says Cockroach Janta Party; hundreds of students held while many are under surveillance, says spokesperson; Bihar withdraws FIRs; Bengal and Assam follow suit, says the CJP

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) on Monday warned of fresh protests, accusing the Centre of violating its assurance that no punitive action would be taken against protesters.

“We are observing a complete breach of the agreement regarding no police action against the protesters. Hundreds of students have been arrested in Bihar and Bengal, and hundreds are being surveilled/harassed in Delhi and other States,” CJP spokesperson Ashutosh Ranka said in a post on X.

The statement came following reports of crackdown on volunteers assisting protesters with logistics in various States.

The Bihar government announced later in the evening that it was withdrawing all FIRs against protesters registered before 6 p.m. on July 26. FIRs in West Bengal and Assam have also been withdrawn, the CJP said on Monday night.

However, Mr. Ranka, in a late-night post, said volunteers from Rajasthan were being harassed and demanded coordination between the Centre and State governments to withdraw FIRs. The CJP was awaiting a written agreement from the Centre by Tuesday, he added.

In Uttar Pradesh, Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav alleged that many students in Prayagraj have



CJP leaders Saurav Das, centre, and Ashutosh Ranka, right, with Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal and others in New Delhi. R. V. MOORTHY

been abducted by a special team of police in a vehicle without number plates.

Continued crackdown
“Under the guise of the Prayagraj protest, many students have been picked up by the U.P. Police’s special team in an unmarked vehicle. When the Union government had promised that no action would be taken against any student, then on whose orders is such deceit taking place,” Mr. Yadav wrote in a post on X, also posting a video news report in support of his claims. The Prayagraj police have registered two FIRs at the Civil Lines police station in connection with the alleged vandalism of two SUVs and attack during Saturday’s student protest.

Rajya Sabha MP and senior advocate Kapil Sibal, who addressed a press conference with CJP leaders on Monday, said if go-

vernments file FIRs against people who peacefully protested in different parts of the country, the CJP will create a framework to track the affected people. “They (CJP) will create a website where lawyers who are willing to provide help can register their names, location and the kind of help they can offer. I will personally contribute ₹1 crore... our lawyers will support them across India,” he said.

In NDA-ruled Bihar, the police issued a statement saying a total of 694 individuals were taken into custody across the State following a protest on July 25. Among those detained, 339 minors and students were released following verification, and 355 individuals involved in violent incidents have been produced before the court.

In BJP-ruled West Bengal, Kolkata Police on Monday arrested two more per-

sons in connection with the violence that erupted at Esplanade area following a police crackdown on protesters demanding the resignation of Mr. Pradhan.

With this, the total number of arrests after the violence rose to 16.

Addressing the press conference, Mr. Ranka reiterated the Centre’s assurances given during the third round of talks on July 25.

“We had submitted a written draft of this agreement to J.P. Naddaji and Jitendra Singhji, and it was agreed that the government would share its written copy of the agreement with us by Tuesday. If the government does not share the written agreement by tomorrow, and if students, youth, and protesters who have been arrested or detained in different States are not released, the Cockroach Janta Party will once again be forced to protest,”

he said, adding that multiple reports have emerged in Delhi about the detention of volunteers who supported the protesters with logistics.

On Saturday, the CJP called off a 36-day protest at Jantar Mantar in Delhi after the Union government agreed to its three main demands, including the resignation of Dharmendra Pradhan as Education Minister. “We demand that all the FIRs against the protesters be immediately withdrawn, students be released and no future FIRs be filed (in line with our agreement) by Delhi police/Central investigative agencies/police in BJP-allied States, failing which we will be forced to sit on protest again,” Mr. Ranka said. Congress-affiliated National Students’ Union of India also accused the Centre of going back on its promise.

Congress MP Deepender Singh Hooda said in a post on X, “Multiple platforms are reporting that Jantar Mantar protesters and also protesters elsewhere are being targeted by authorities. This contradicts the promise made by the government. If anyone needs legal aid/ support, contact my team by tagging @TeamDeepender.” (With inputs from Nikhil M. Babu in Delhi, Senjuti Sengupta in Kolkata, Mayank Kumar in Lucknow, Amit Bhelari and Amarnath Tewary in Patna)

RELATED REPORTS ON
» **PAGES 4 & 5**

SC mulls guidelines for police conduct during mass protests

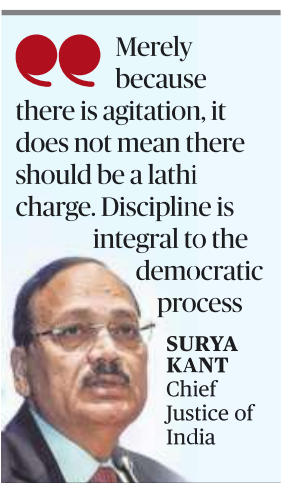
Aaratrika Bhaumik
NEW DELHI

Observing that the constitutional right to peaceful protest must be protected, the Supreme Court on Monday indicated that it may consider framing uniform guidelines to regulate police conduct during large-scale demonstrations.

“The right to peaceful protest is absolutely guaranteed under the Constitution. So long as it is a peaceful agitation, merely because there is agitation, there cannot be [police excesses]... If there is police excess committed, it should be independently examined. Merely because there is agitation, it does not mean there should be a lathi charge. Discipline is integral to the democratic process,” Chief Justice of India Surya Kant orally remarked. The observations came as multiple petitions concerning protests over examination issues, including pleas alleging police excesses during the July 20 march to Parliament as well as those concerning the alleged “aerial firing” by police in Bihar, were mentioned before the Bench.

The top court agreed to hear all pending petitions together on Tuesday.

The CJI-led Bench, which also comprised Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V. Mohana, said it was equally concerned about injuries suffered by both protesters and police personnel during such protests, and stressed that “self-imposed discipline” on the part of both citizens and law enforcement was



essential to the functioning of a democracy.

Senior advocate Vikas Singh urged the court to frame uniform guidelines governing police action during protests, pointing out that allegations of police excesses were not confined to Delhi but had surfaced across the country.

The Chief Justice agreed that a standard operating protocol appeared necessary: “...if some anti-social elements have done anything, that can also be looked into.”

Meanwhile, retired Intelligence Bureau Special Director Yashovardhan Azad, along with two other victims of alleged pellet-gun injuries, moved the Supreme Court on Monday seeking a ban on the use of wholly or partly metallic kinetic projectiles fired from pump-action or projectile-action guns (PAG), or pellet guns, for crowd control by law enforcement agencies. The petition also sought exemplary compensation for all those allegedly injured by pellet firing during the July 20 protests.

Include independent auditor in temple SIT: SC

Aaratrika Bhaumik
NEW DELHI

Calling for a “qualitative and impartial” investigation, the Supreme Court on Monday directed the Uttar Pradesh government to include an independent forensic auditor in the reconstituted Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing the alleged theft of donations at the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Temple in Ayodhya.

Hearing a batch of petitions seeking an independent probe into the alleged financial irregularities in the affairs of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, a three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant also directed the SIT to submit a status report on the progress of the investigation within two weeks.

“Since the nature of the investigation involves the alleged misappropriation of trust funds, the learned Solicitor-General, representing the State of Uttar Pradesh, has fairly agreed that an auditor with expe-

rience in forensic auditing shall also be associated as a member of the SIT,” the Bench, including Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V. Mohana, said.

Appearing for the Uttar Pradesh government, Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta informed the Bench that a four-member SIT headed by Inspector-General of Police (IGP) Kiran S. had been constituted to investigate the alleged embezzlement of donations at the temple. He said the panel had been reconstituted in compliance with the top court’s earlier directions.

Earlier, the Bench had cautioned all parties against “politicising” the investigation and asked the State government to consider placing the ongoing police probe under the supervision of the three-member SIT that had first uncovered *prima facie* evidence of the alleged fraud.

“We would like you to take instructions whether the same SIT that examined the issue earlier can supervise the investigation. Those senior officials have first-hand experience



Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta had apprised the court that IGP Kiran S. would head the probe into Ram Temple donation theft. AFP

of the matter,” the Bench had told Mr. Mehta, referring to the committee comprising Lucknow Divisional Commissioner Vijay Vishwas Pant, Mr. Kiran, and Special Secretary (Finance) Neel Ratan.

On Monday, Mr. Mehta apprised the court that Mr. Kiran would head the investigation. The State government has included Inspector-General of Police (Ayodhya Range) Somen Barma and Senior Superintendent of Police (Ayodhya) Gaurav Grover as members in the reconstituted SIT.

The Chief Justice then said that an “eminent, independent” chartered accountant with expertise in forensic auditing be included in the investigation team. Mr. Mehta agreed to the suggestion.

‘Let SIT do its job’

Senior advocate Devdatt Kamat, appearing for one of the petitioners, submitted that there were “large-scale reports” raising doubts over whether donations made by devotees from across the country had actually reached the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi

Teerth Kshetra Trust. He urged the Bench to direct the Trust to upload details of all donation receipts on its website to ensure transparency.

“Receipts were collected for the Trust from all over the country. People have donated ₹100, ₹500 and other amounts. There are large-scale reports that ultimately the money has not reached the Trust. Whatever receipts the Trust has received should be put on the website. That way, people will know whether their money has reached the Trust or not,” Mr. Kamat submitted. He added that the proceedings were not adversarial in nature and that there should be “nothing to hide.”

The Bench, however, declined to issue such a direction at this stage, observing that the SIT should first be allowed to complete its probe. It instead asked Mr. Kamat to place his suggestions on record so that appropriate directions could be considered at a later stage, if necessary.

The matter has been

posted for further hearing after two weeks. The Bench directed the SIT to place its status report on record and indicated that it would continue to monitor the progress of the investigation.

Several petitions

One of the petitions has been filed by petitioner-in-person Narendra Kumar Goswami, who has sought a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probe into the alleged scam along with an audit of the Trust’s finances by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG).

Another petition, moved by Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) MP Sudhakar Singh, seeks a court-supervised CBI probe along with a comprehensive forensic audit of the finances of the temple Trust. Mr. Singh has also urged the top court to ensure the preservation of all financial records, including physical documents, digital ledgers, UPI transaction logs and bank statements, so that the integrity of the evidence is maintained during the investigation.

Tehran says it still controls Hormuz, not talking to U.S.

Reuters
DUBAI

Iran said on Monday it was still in control of the Strait of Hormuz and not seeking to resume peace talks with the U.S., after President Donald Trump halted a two-week bombing campaign his top brass told him had run its course.

Following 13 successive nights of bombing that provoked Tehran to fire on U.S. bases, Mr. Trump halted the campaign over the weekend. Iran said it would pause its own attacks for as long as the U.S. pause in bombing endures.

On Monday, Mr. Trump said that diplomacy with Iran could produce a deal to end the war. Mr. Trump’s had suspended the campaign following advice from top brass that the bombing, had reached the limits of what it could achieve, a U.S. official said.

FULL REPORT ON
» **PAGE 14**

INBRIEF



Raj Thackeray visits cousin Uddhav on his 66th birthday

Maharashtra Navnirman Sena chief Raj Thackeray on Monday met his cousin and Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray to greet him on his 66th birthday. Raj Thackeray visited Uddhav Thackeray's residence in Mumbai to extend birthday greetings to him. Uddhav, the former chief minister of Maharashtra, had also visited Raj at his residence on his birthday in June. On Sunday, they organised a celebration march from Shivaji Park to Siddhivinayak Temple following the resignation of Dharmendra Pradhan as the Union education minister after protests over the NEET paper leak. PTI

Commissioner stays Jauhar university demolition order

Mohammad Ali Jauhar University received interim relief on Monday after the Divisional Commissioner of Moradabad stayed the proposed demolition of 38 structures on the campus until the next hearing. Divisional Commissioner Aunjaneya Kumar Singh put on hold the order issued by the Rampur District Magistrate, who is also the Vice-Chairman of the Rampur Development Authority (RDA). The demolition notice was issued on July 15 after the RDA alleged that 38 of the 40 structures on the campus had been constructed without approved building plans.

Probe Lekhpal exam 'lapses', reform recruitments: students at rally in U.P.

Mayank Kumar
LUCKNOW

Students and job seekers from Uttar Pradesh staged a protest rally in Prayagraj on Monday, seeking an investigation into alleged irregularities in the recently held Lekhpal recruitment examination.

The protesters, gathered under the banner of 'Pratiyogi Chhatra Hunkar Manch', a platform for competitive recruitment examination aspirants, also demanded a lower cut-off for the Preliminary Eligibility Test (PET), timely completion of pending recruitments, transparency in recruitment commissions, including the Uttar Pradesh Subordinate Services Selection Commission (UPSSSC), regular dialogue and comprehensive administrative reforms.

"The demand for comprehensive reforms in the examination and recruitment system will intensify across the country. Our de-



A protester handing over a memorandum to the Prayagraj SDM. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

mands include fair investigation into the Lekhpal paper leak case, implementation of the principle of 'minimum cut-off, maximum opportunity' by reducing the cut-off for PET," the outfit stated in a release.

'Probe July 20 excesses' It also called for an impartial investigation into the alleged excesses by law enforcement agencies against the participants of the July 20 'Chalo Sansad' march in



We demand accountability in exam irregularities and paper leak cases. The students' movement is not against any individual, but in support of a transparent, fair and accountable exam and recruitment system

PRATIYOGI CHHATRA HUNKAR MANCH

the national capital. "We demand legal action against the culprits, protection of the democratic rights of students staging peaceful protests and ensuring accountability in exam irregularities and paper leak cases at the national level. The students' movement is not against any individual, but in support of a transparent, fair and accountable exam and recruitment system," said the Pratiyogi Chhatra Hunkar Manch.

Despite resignation, Dharmendra Pradhan remains BJP's strongman in Odisha

NEWS ANALYSIS

Satyasundar Barik
BHUBANESWAR

Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation as Union Education Minister on July 25 following protests against the alleged NEET paper leak has dented the image of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Though he is unlikely to return to the Union Cabinet in the near future, his stature as a party strongman in Odisha remains largely intact.

Mr. Pradhan is the longest-serving Union Minister from Odisha. As a key figure in the BJP's inner circle, he has arguably wielded more power at the Centre than any politician from the State since the late Biju Patnaik.

"The resignation may be a temporary setback, forc-

ing him to stay away from political activities or governance for a couple of months. He, however, continues to be the quintessential power centre in Odisha politics," veteran political commentator Rabi Das said.

Meanwhile, detractors argue that as a mere Member of Parliament, he won't command the same pull he had as a Union Minister. In politics, power often dictates loyalty and leaders in Odisha who once aligned with him may now reconsider their allegiance in light of his resignation.

The true test of his influence in Odisha will come with the next rejig in the Mohan Majhi Cabinet, which is long overdue. With multiple Cabinet Ministers professing their loyalty to the former Union Minister and a large section of BJP MLAs in his

camp, any drop, reshuffle, or new induction will reveal how much sway Mr. Pradhan still holds.

Deep roots in party Since his early days in the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, Mr. Pradhan has been an active member of the Sangh Parivar and the BJP. He is one of the most recognisable figures in Odisha, owing in part to the legacy of his late father, Debendra Pradhan, who served as a Union Minister. Mr. Pradhan rose to national prominence after the BJP came to power under Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014. Even before that, he had been working quietly in the party alongside leaders like the late Arun Jaitley and later in close coordination with Mr. Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah. Over the past 12 years,



Dharmendra Pradhan being welcomed by NDA MPs at Parliament on Monday. PTI

he has remained deeply embedded in both the Central government and the party organisation.

Mr. Pradhan was the BJP's undeclared chief ministerial face in the last Assembly election. Under his leadership, the party fought the 2017 local body polls and the 2019 general and State elections, making electoral gains against the then powerful Biju Ja-

nata Dal (BJD) government under former Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik.

However, the 2024 Lok Sabha election did not yield the desired results for the BJP, forcing Mr. Pradhan to remain committed to national politics.

Since Mr. Majhi took over as Chief Minister, Mr. Pradhan has kept himself away from the State government's affairs. However, his grip over the government is an open secret, with loyalists holding important positions.

Although his resignation came amid massive student protests, visits by senior BJP leaders, including Mr. Shah, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal, signalled that he continues to hold importance within the party.

When Mr. Pradhan arrived at Parliament on

Monday, National Democratic Alliance MPs welcomed him with chants of "Dharmendra Pradhan Zindabad". The show of support suggests that the BJP views him as a 'victim' of the paper leak row rather than a 'liability'.

State of affairs

The rousing welcome also sent a clear message to the State BJP leadership: Mr. Pradhan cannot be sidelined in party affairs.

BJP national president Nitin Nabin's social media post praising Mr. Pradhan's performance as a Minister, followed by similar posts from Mr. Majhi, State Ministers and MLAs, underlined that this message had been effectively delivered.

His exit now leaves Odisha's berth in the Union Cabinet open. Top contenders include BJP vice-president and Kendrapara MP

Cong. chief questions Shah over 'flood-free Assam' poll promise

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Monday targeted Union Home Minister Amit Shah over the recurring floods in Assam, accusing the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government of failing to fulfil its promise of making the State "flood-free".

In a post on X, Mr. Kharge recalled that the BJP's 2016 'Assam Vision Document' had promised a permanent solution to the State's recurring floods.

The Congress chief also cited Mr. Shah's assurance during the 2021 Assam Assembly election campaign that Assam would be made "flood-free" within five years. "Ten years of BJP rule have now passed. What happened to those solemn promises? Why has Assam's so-called 'double-engine government' failed to build a comprehensive flood-control, erosion management and rehabilitation system?" Mr. Kharge asked.

Expressing concern over the devastation caused by the floods, Mr. Kharge said that at least 68 people had lost their lives and nearly 10 lakh people across 25 districts had



Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge has urged the Union and State governments to mobilise all resources. ANI

been affected.

Condolences to families He conveyed his condolences to the bereaved families, expressed anguish over people losing their homes, livelihoods, crops and livestock, and appealed to his party colleagues to extend all possible assistance to those affected.

The Congress president urged the Union and Assam governments to mobilise all available resources for rescue, relief and rehabilitation. He also demanded that substantial assistance be released immediately from the PM CARES Fund for affected families and sought adequate compensation for every life lost and for damage to homes, livelihoods, crops and livestock.

Madras HC strikes down order granting govt. jobs to kin of Karur stampede victims

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

The Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court on Monday struck down the government orders granting government jobs to the family members of the victims of the Karur stampede that occurred in September 2025 during a Tamilaga Vетtri Kazhagam (TVK) roadshow addressed by its president and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay this month.

A Division Bench of Justices C.V. Karthikeyan and R. Sakthivel allowed a batch of public interest litigations challenging the Chief Minister Vijay-led government's decision to grant jobs to the family members of the stampede victims.

Earlier, the court had permitted the State government to conduct an event in Karur in July to distribute the appointment orders. It had, however,



Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay handing over an appointment order to a family member of a stampede victim during an event in Karur on July 10. ANI

clarified that the appointments would be temporary and subject to judicial review.

'Governed by norms'

The court observed that compassionate appointments are governed by specific guidelines. The State government submitted that it was merely extending a humanitarian gesture and that such employment, granted on humanitarian grounds,

should not be challenged.

"However, it is the cause of the public that overrides every other factor. We are conscious of the fact that there are waiting lists in every department for compassionate appointments. It is not that employment is granted immediately upon receipt of an application. Employment is granted only in accordance with seniority and not with reference to the immediate nature of the relief sought,"

the court noted.

The Bench observed that, when there was a waiting list, it would not be appropriate to overlook the claims of those awaiting compassionate appointments and extend what was described as succour to the family members of those who died in the Karur stampede. It held that the appointments were in direct violation of the principles guaranteed under Articles 14 and 16 of the Constitution.

The State submitted that it had granted the appointments in exercise of its executive powers under Article 162 of the Constitution.

However, the court held that any exercise of executive power must remain within the confines of the Constitution. It observed that if the executive powers of the State were allowed to remain unfettered, chaos would prevail, and it was the duty of the courts to ensure fairness.

Tribal groups up ante over customary laws in Tripura

Syed Sajjad Ali
AGARTALA

A joint delegation of 19 tribal forums and organisations in Tripura met Chief Minister Manik Saha here on Monday and submitted a memorandum seeking the introduction of customary laws for all major indigenous communities in the State.

A tribal leader said the State government should implement the 2022 recommendations of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council on the introduction of customary laws.

He said the laws on civil matters were linked to the cultural development and preservation of indigenous identity.



Woman says she was shot in the ear during July 20 Delhi protest

Ashok Kumar
GURUGRAM

A 32-year-old woman has alleged that she sustained “gunshot” injuries during the students’ protest at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on July 20.

Nutan, working with a private firm here, has since returned to her home town, Ranchi in Jharkhand. She told *The Hindu* over phone that she was injured “quite severely” and “needed stitches”, adding that “my ear had practically been torn off”. According to her discharge summary from Ram Manohar Lohia (RML) Hospital, she suffered “trauma to right ear by gunshot”.

Recounting the incident, Ms. Nutan said she was standing with other protesters in the upper section of the park near Jantar Mantar, away from the main protest site.

“I can describe the spot – there is a fountain and a steel statue of a lion. I was standing right next to that, up in the higher part of the park. I was fired at from below. I can’t say for certain if I was the specific target, but the gun was aimed in our direction,” she said.

“Seeing that, we all got scared and started running. There were quite a few of us up there. We were all fleeing together



A photo of Nutan's injured ear.

when the shot was fired, and it grazed right past my ear,” she said.

She realised the seriousness of the injury only after her hearing was affected, Ms. Nutan said.

“Two people had their guns aimed right at us. They were wearing blue uniforms. The person involved wasn’t wearing a name plate,” she said.

Delhi Police’s Public Relations Officer, Deputy Commissioner of Police Ranjeev Ranjan said that according to Ms. Nutan’s medical legal report, the injuries were caused by a “blunt weapon” and not a firearm.

“I had undergone a two-hour surgery. But the doctors discharged me within 15 minutes after the surgery and told me to leave,” she said. She also alleged that she saw police personnel with minor injuries being given stretchers inside the hospital.

Policeman suspended for firing AK-47 at protesters

Bihar policeman’s action sparks political row, with Rahul Gandhi criticising Modi over students being subjected to ‘deadly attacks and brutality’; other Congress leaders too condemn use of force

The Hindu Bureau
PATNA/DELHI

The viral video of a Bihar policeman firing an AK-47 rifle during protests in Bihar’s Siwan triggered a political storm in Parliament on Monday, with Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi demanding an apology from Prime Minister Narendra Modi and action against those who “attacked” students.

The policeman has been suspended and a departmental inquiry ordered, Superintendent of Police (SP) of Siwan district Puran Kumar Jha said.

At least three protesters sustained gunshot injuries and were admitted to a private hospital in Patna, where their condition is stated to be stable. One of them was discharged on July 27.

Opposition hits out

In a post on X, Mr. Gandhi said “the entire system is downright murderous against students”.

“Reports are coming in that AK-47s have been fired at protesting students in Bihar, and hundreds have been arrested and booked



Screengrab from a video, posted by Tejashwi Yadav on X, of a policeman firing an AK-47 during protests in Siwan, Bihar.

under FIRs. Modiji, what happened to your promise that no FIRs would be filed against students and that they would be released? Instead, they are being subjected to deadly attacks and brutality,” he said.

“Pellet guns were used against students in Delhi, and AK-47s in Bihar. Whether it is Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar, or Delhi – the pattern is the same everywhere. Reform is beyond its capability. It will renege on its promises and use every tactic to suppress the students’ voices,” Mr. Gandhi added.

Several Congress leaders also condemned the reported use of force. Congress general secretary

(organisation) K.C. Venugopal demanded an explanation from Union Home Minister Amit Shah, asking who had ordered the use of AK-47s in Bihar and pellet guns in Delhi. Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra questioned the deployment of such weapons against protesters.

Posting the video on social media, Leader of the Opposition in the Bihar Assembly and Rashtriya Janata Dal leader Tejashwi Yadav demanded action against the officials responsible.

He warned that if the arrested students and his brother, Tej Pratap Yadav, were not released within 24 hours, the party would

launch a massive Statewide agitation.

The video of the policeman firing the AK-47 has circulated widely on social media since July 26. “The video surfaced late because Internet services remained suspended for 24 hours after the protest,” a journalist in Siwan told *The Hindu*.

Departmental probe

The policeman has been identified as Abhishek Kumar, attached to the District Intelligence Unit. “The policeman has been suspended and a departmental inquiry ordered,” Siwan SP Mr. Jha said.

Asked who had authorised the firing, Mr. Jha said the matter would be examined in the departmental probe. According to a police statement, the officer fired four rounds in the air near J.P. Chowk to protect government property and lives, and no one was injured in that firing. The three injured protesters sustained gunshot wounds at locations away from J.P. Chowk. They were shifted from Siwan Sadar Hospital to a private hospital in Patna after initial treatment. The police have registered an FIR against the three.

CBI counsel absent, fast-track court defers hearing in NEET case

Ishita Mishra
NEW DELHI

The first hearing of the specially designated fast-track court handling the NEET-UG examination paper leak case was postponed on Monday after counsel for the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), which is investigating the case, failed to appear.

Special Judge Anu Grover Baliga was scheduled to hear the bail applications of accused Dinesh Biwal and Vikas Biwal.

“None appears on behalf of State till 10.45 a.m. to argue on the bail application,” the court order read.

The court also noted that counsel appearing for the accused, advocate A.P. Singh, too informed it that he had other engagements in Rohini Courts and hence could not wait for more time for the CBI’s counsel.

“In view of the above, the present bail application will now be taken up on 03.08.2026 at 10.00AM,” the court said, further directing the Director of Prosecution to ensure that a public prosecutor is deputed to appear before it in future proceedings.

Congress targets govt.

Criticising the adjournment of a matter by the

Congress questions govt. for ‘proclaiming fast-track courts as the solution’ to the paper leak crisis

fast-track court over the absence of a CBI lawyer, Congress general secretary (communications) Jairam Ramesh, in a post on X, said, “In such a situation, with what face is the Modi government beating the drum, proclaiming fast-track courts as the solution to the paper leak crisis? Its own CBI does not appear to show any seriousness or initiative in investigating these cases or conducting the trials.”

Judge Baliga assumed charge of the designated fast-track court on Saturday. The Delhi High Court, through a notification issued on July 23, had declared her court a Specially Designated Fast Track Court to hear cases under the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, along with related offences.

The adjournment of hearing by the fast-track court comes just a few days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that dedicated fast-track courts would be established to expedite trials in paper leak cases.

Trust biggest challenge in tackling leaks: IIT-M Director

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The biggest challenge facing the high-powered task force as it recommends reforms to prevent exam leaks is “trust” V. Kamakoti, Director of IIT-Madras, said on Monday.

Professor Kamakoti is one of six domain experts on a multidisciplinary panel tasked with revamping the National Testing Agency (NTA) following the NEET-UG examination paper leak controversy.

“The only challenge is trust. We need teachers who we can trust, who will set the question paper and keep quiet,” he said.

The NEET-UG paper leak controversy arose from allegations that question papers were leaked by paper setters and translators.



V. Kamakoti

Professor Kamakoti emphasised that every individual and process in the exam hierarchy – from question generation to exam centre administration – must be held directly accountable through a clear organisational structure.

Limits of AI

“The second NEET exam happened without any issues. That means the sys-

tem has worked. However, trust is important for an entrance exam at this scale. We need to bring out clear processes. It is not that they don’t exist, but we have to relook at it and fine tune,” he added.

Addressing the role of AI in exam reform, Professor Kamakoti said: “AI may be able to generate questions, but someone still has to look at them and review them.

“NEET is very inclusive. The exam is conducted in 12 languages. Somebody has to translate it and also verify the translations. AI can certainly assist with translation, but someone must carefully examine them,” he said.

The high-level panel will release a report recommending measures to strengthen the NTA. (With agency inputs)

Maharashtra teenager ends life over NEET re-test result

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

A case of death related to the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) emerged in Maharashtra with a 19-year-old medical aspirant allegedly ending her life over disappointment with her NEET re-test results.

She was found dead at her home on July 25 in Jalapur village in Karjat taluka of Ahilyanagar district. According to the police, she left behind a note saying she was disappointed as she couldn’t qualify in the NEET-UG test.

Her uncle said, “In the NEET re-exam, she scored 166, falling short of cut-off of 177 in her category.” (People in distress can contact Tele-MANAS 14416)

Police identify over 2,800 criminals present at protest through face ID

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Delhi Police has identified as many as 2,873 people with previous criminal records who were present at the Jantar Mantar protests, official sources said on Monday.

According to the sources, the police exercise relied on facial recognition systems installed at and around the protest venue. The AI-enabled system compares live CCTV footage with existing criminal databases and dossier records maintained by different district police units and law enforcement agencies.

At least 989 individuals have been previously involved in heinous crimes, 101 in murder, 62 in attempt to murder and 284



Police personnel move past Ikshana, a mobile surveillance van, parked at the Jantar Mantar protest site last week. REUTERS

in robbery, police sources said, adding that at least 61 people were earlier involved in cases of rape, six were booked under provisions of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, and 25 others for molestation. They said the initiative was aimed at identifying people with previous criminal involve-

ment and assessing the nature of individuals participating in or moving around the protest site.

The police, however, have not given any clarification on queries related to protesters being harassed at the site allegedly by their personnel, including those in plain clothes and not wearing name tags

and some who allegedly harassed women during the march to Parliament on July 20.

“The analysis showed that among the 101 people linked to murder cases, 42 were involved in two or more criminal cases, while 12 have criminal histories involving 10 or more cases, suggesting repeated involvement in serious offences,” a senior officer said.

The findings would form part of the overall investigation into the violence witnessed during the protest and would be used to identify individuals requiring further verification.

“The criminal history indicates that they are habitual offenders, having been involved in multiple criminal cases,” the officer added.

Sri Lankan groups voice support for Indian youth

Meera Srinivasan
COLOMBO

Nearly 200 activists, social movements, civil society organisations, and trade unions in Sri Lanka have expressed solidarity with students in India who were protesting and voicing serious concern over the NEET examination paper leak and broader issues facing the education sector.

“The voice of India’s youth has been unstoppable, despite ridicule from the highest authorities and brutal police violence,” the statement, issued on Monday, said.

A group of activists gathered outside the Indian High Commission in Colombo on Monday to condemn police violence during the protest.

Delhi Police step up drive to take down posts on protests

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police are in the process of sending take-down notices to Instagram, in an attempt to remove several reels and posts that emerged during the youth protests at Jantar Mantar and elsewhere, officials said. A senior police officer said they regularly flag offensive social media posts with the authorities for removal.

Without specifying the time frame or the nature of the content, the officer admitted that a large number of such posts had recently been flagged and taken down. He also said that more than 400 social media accounts operating from outside the country and posting offensive content had been blocked.

“We do not maintain the number of offensive posts



A protester at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi last week. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

because they are too many. It is an ongoing process. There is a dedicated social media team that continuously monitors such posts, and sometimes they are also flagged by other agencies. We do not keep a count,” the officer said.

Several users posted details of posts that were taken down by Meta in response to a legal demand by the government.

Of the removed posts re-

viewed by *The Hindu*, many featured police violence against the students, or criticism thereof, on July 20, when police and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF)’s Rapid Action Force in and around Jantar Mantar used batons, tear gas rounds, and pellet guns on protesters.

“The Internet Freedom Foundation condemns this takedown drive and calls for the notices to be withdrawn,” the Delhi-based digital rights advocacy group said in a statement. “On the reports available, the content being removed is political expression. The movement at Jantar Mantar has been conducted as much through reels, and digital artwork as through assembly on the ground. This is how a digital native generation raised online speaks about accountability.”

Mumbai activist Rhiya Ahir alleges cyberbullying

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

Rhiya Yadav, also known as Rhiya Ahir, approached the MIDC Police station in Mumbai on Monday regarding alleged cyberbullying and trolling. Last week, Ms. Rhiya had stopped a police van during a CJP protest in the city.

“I had earlier registered an online complaint on the cyber police department’s portal. Today, I sat with the police to get the complaint registered,” she told *The Hindu*. She alleged that she was being bullied and stalked. She also complained of receiving obscene messages. “There is an effort to spread hate against me online. This is abuse,” she said.

The police are probing the complaint.

SC to seek guidance of task force on holding computer-based NEET

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday indicated that it would seek suggestions from the high-powered task force, to be headed by former UIDAI chairman Nandan Nilekani, on transitioning the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test for Undergraduate (NEET-UG) to a computer-based test (CBT).

A Bench of Justices P.S. Narasimha and Alok Aradhe was hearing a petition filed by Rashtriya Janata Dal MP Sudhakar Singh seeking sweeping reforms in the conduct of the examination, including a direction to examine a transition from the existing pen-and-paper format to CBT. The petition was filed after the Union govern-

ment and the National Testing Agency (NTA) cancelled the NEET-UG 2026 examination held on May 3 following a paper leak.

During the hearing, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, informed the Bench that the Union government had taken a “very serious view” of the matter and had constituted a high-powered task force.

Justice Narasimha said the court would hear the matter on August 3 along with the other pending petitions on NEET reforms.

The top court had directed the Centre to file an additional affidavit outlining its road map for implementing the reforms, detailing the proposed cybersecurity framework, and the safeguards to prevent data breaches.

Rahul praises youth for his recital of the Preamble

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, on Monday met Mohammad Irfan, the youth who went viral for reciting the Preamble to the Constitution during the protest at Jantar Mantar.

Mr. Gandhi said Mr. Irfan’s outlook reflected the strength and promise of India’s youth. Coming from a slum settlement in Delhi, Mr. Irfan spoke about the hardships faced by workers in the unorganised sector and the need for accessible education, healthcare, and democratic rights.

Mr. Gandhi described him as “a young man from a Delhi neighbourhood whose mindset transcends his circumstances”.

Govt. introduces paper leak Bill in Lok Sabha; debate likely today

Six hours allocated for discussion; 91 amendments moved by members, says Speaker as he brokers truce between govt. and Opposition, which demanded a discussion on police action on protesting students; Ram Temple, E20 issues may be raised

Sreeparna Chakrabarty
Sandeep Phukan
NEW DELHI

The Union government on Monday introduced in the Lok Sabha a Bill providing for harsher penalties and time-bound investigations into examination paper leaks amid a huge uproar by the Opposition members, who demanded a discussion on the police action on protesting students in the country.

The stalemate is likely to end on Tuesday, with Speaker Om Birla brokering a truce between the Treasury and the Opposition benches on Monday afternoon, sources said. The floor leaders of both National Democratic Alliance and Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) had been in touch since the morning.

Six hours have been allocated for the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026, and 91 amendments have been moved by Lok Sabha members cutting across party lines, Mr.



Presiding officer Dilip Saikia arriving to conduct the proceedings of the Lok Sabha during the Monsoon Session on Monday. ANI

Birla announced in the House earlier.

The Bill seeks to amend the anti-paper leak law with stricter punishment of up to 10 years in jail and ₹50 lakh fine.

The proposed legislation, which seeks to amend an existing law, was first promised by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a midnight Instagram post last week in a bid to quell the students' protest at Jantar Mantar.

The Bill was introduced by Union Minister of State for PMO and Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions Jitendra Singh even

as the Opposition protested and sloganeered over the police crackdown on students during the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP)-led July 20 protest march to Parliament as well as in some States like West Bengal and Bihar.

No let-up in protests

The Opposition, which had been protesting since 11 a.m., when the House was convened, was unrelenting and did not let the Bill be taken up for discussion and passage despite repeated appeals from Mr. Birla as well as Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren

Rijiju. He said several members, including those from the Opposition, were prepared to participate in the debate but the Congress and "some of its friends" were causing disruptions and not allowing a debate. At 2 p.m., however, the Speaker said both ruling and Opposition sides should try and arrive at a decision by 5 p.m. till when the House was adjourned.

Senior Congress leaders are understood to have met the Speaker after this and agreed to the discussion being taken up on Tuesday.

"All political parties have agreed to discuss the anti-paper leak Bill on Tuesday. Following Om Birla's initiative and sustained dialogue, floor leaders of political parties have agreed to commence discussion on the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill 2026," sources said.

Opposition sources said they were now looking to widen the offensive by targeting the government over the alleged Ram Temple donation embezzlement

case and ethanol-blended fuel.

With the Uttar Pradesh Assembly election due in early 2027, the Samajwadi Party is seeking to use the Ram Temple issue to make inroads among the BJP's core support base of Ram devotees, while the Congress has held over 50 press conferences demanding Prime Minister Narendra Modi's statement on the alleged donation theft.

"We shouldn't allow the BJP to hijack our religion. We are all very proud Hindus and not political Hindus like them," a senior Congress leader told *The Hindu*.

The Opposition plans to highlight concerns over ethanol-blended fuel, which it believes resonate with the middle class, another key BJP constituency.

And with the CJP taking limelight for spearheading the Gen-Z protests and the government appearing intent on sidelining Opposition parties, these parties do not want to give much elbow room to the government.

Opposition set to maintain pressure on Shah, take part in debate on paper leak Bill

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

On the first day of Parliament after the students' protests were called off, the Opposition signalled that it would continue to target Home Minister Amit Shah over the use of pellet guns and excessive force by security personnel against protesting students.

At the meeting of the Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance on Monday, there were differences on whether to disrupt or participate in the debate on the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026, though it was later resolved that the parties should present their point of view.

Samajwadi Party sources said the Opposition should demand a debate on the Ram Temple donation theft case. According to sources, Dharmendra Yadav, the SP's chief whip, said during the meeting that this issue should not be allowed to be buried. However, a significant section of Opposition leaders was of the opinion that they should continue to fo-



Action plan: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi speaking at an INDIA bloc meeting in New Delhi. FILE PHOTO

cus on policy issues such as education. Wading into the Ram Temple issue would communalise the narrative. "The students have done their job. We must not fail them," a top Opposition leader said.

The Opposition leaders shared the details of the instances of "police brutalities" in their respective States. It was decided that during the debate on the Bill, these instances must be highlighted. The Opposition has also resolved that its strategy should include coordination on agitations beyond Parliament.

Among those who pushed for participation in the debate on the Bill, known in common parlance as the "paper leak Bill", was Revolutionary

Socialist Party MP N.K. Premachandran. Speaking to *The Hindu*, he said, "This Bill is an eyewash. Beyond increasing the fine and the jail term, it introduces no substantive changes. In fact, the Centre has inserted provisions that effectively reduce States to spectators, including a clause enabling the creation of a task force to investigate paper leaks that reports exclusively to the Union government."

The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, which has been skipping INDIA bloc meetings, has also expressed a similar opinion. "I would like to know what action has been taken so far under the existing Act," DMK Rajya Sabha floor leader Tiruchi Siva said.

How BJP, RSS are framing the protest and its aftermath

NEWS ANALYSIS

Nistula Hebbar
NEW DELHI

There is both a doubling down and a softening in the approach being taken by the government and the larger Sangh Parivar in its messaging after young protesters concluded their protest against the NEET exam paper leak.

Going by the statements made publicly, a few things spring immediately to the mind on how the BJP and the Sangh Parivar are framing the protest and its aftermath.

Former Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan's letter announcing his resignation on X, addressed to "young friends" rather than the President, states that he takes responsibility for what happened under his watch, that he initiated action when informed of the leak, handed the case to the Central Bureau of Investigation, and conducted a re-test successfully. The reason he specifically provided for his resignation was: "However, even during this time, individuals in responsible positions attempted to create obstacles and mislead students, which caused me deep distress."

"Considering the situation at Jantar Mantar and across the country – with the aim of preventing anti-national forces from exploiting it, preserving national unity, ensuring that not a single Indian student's future gets entangled in legal complexities, and allowing our children to devote their time to studies and focus on building their careers – I have submitted my resignation to the Honourable Prime Minister," he said.

This frames the protest as something that could have hurt the security of India, and the government, by asking for the Minister's resignation, had sought to end the protest

Modi's reels, RSS chief's speech on role of mothers offer clues on the party's approach on matter

in the larger interests. Moreover, the Centre maintains it has administratively carried off all the required measures for the NEET paper leak. The letter and the government's statements thus try to make it seem the NEET exam paper leak was more an act of omission than commission, a matter on which the intent of the government should not be interrogated.

The support offered to Mr. Pradhan, both online and offline, by his party and government colleagues, demonstrate that he is likely to make a political comeback soon, possibly in the BJP's party organisation.

For the long run, one may look to the reels posted by Mr. Modi on Instagram, and the speech on the role of mothers, at the height of the protests in Delhi, by Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh chief Mohan Bhagwat.

'A social issue'

He appeared to suggest that he viewed the protests as a social issue pertaining to young Indians and education. "There is a need to give the new generation a sense of belonging. We need to communicate. Not dictation, but discussion. Not orders but consensus," he said.

Mr. Modi's posts on Instagram can also be seen as a way of reaching young people, via the platform they seem to prefer. Whether these two simultaneously offered approaches, one aimed internally at the political class and the other a societal position, will hit the mark in the conundrum now facing the government and the Sangh Parivar remains to be seen.

'Gen Z' protests test the Sangh, raise uncomfortable questions

Nistula Hebbar
Ishta Mishra
NEW DELHI

Protests by students over the alleged NEET paper leak appear to have hit closer to home for the BJP and the larger Sangh Parivar than previous agitations against the NDA government at the Centre.

After reports emerged that the daughter of Assam Minister Keshab Mahanta, Dibisa Mahanta, had joined the protests by students, other instances of disquiet among BJP members and those associated with the Sangh Parivar have also come to the fore.

News about Manika Rana, former president of the BJP's youth wing in Uttarakhand's Tehri Garhwal, also went viral on social media. Reports claimed that she had been expelled from the party after participating in the Cockroach Janta Party-led student protest at Jantar Mantar.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Ms. Rana confirmed that she had been to the protest and that she supported the students' demands. She, however, denied reports



CJP supporters celebrating after Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation at Jantar Mantar. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

that she had been expelled because of her participation.

"I was removed from the post of youth wing president in April as I was busy due to certain personal engagements. Yes, I support all demands made by students, including the resignation of Dharmendra Pradhan but I am still with the party," she added.

Other concerns

Former Union Minister Murlu Manohar Joshi had expressed concerns over the police action against protesters on July 20, and after Mr. Pradhan's resignation, he posted, "Better late than never".

RSS member Ratan

Sharda, who is also a contributor to the RSS mouthpiece *Organiser*, has publicly argued that the BJP's communication machinery and IT Cell failed to effectively counter the narrative around the "Cockroach Protests", calling it a "spectacular failure".

In a post on X, which he clarified as "his own view" and had "nothing to do with the RSS", Mr. Sharda said the BJP's media team relied on memes and "whataboutery" instead of building a counter-narrative, and failed to gauge growing youth anger over issues such as NEET, lacking a feedback mechanism from the ground.

RS adjourned again; Opposition MPs seek apology from Shah

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Rajya Sabha adjourned for the day on Monday for the sixth day in the Monsoon Session without taking up any business.

The Prevention of In-sults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026 was listed for consideration and passing. But it could not be taken up as the Opposition demanded an apology from Union Minister Amit Shah for the police action against protesting students.

In the afternoon, when the House met at 2 p.m., Deputy Speaker Harivansh invited Minister of State for Home Nitayanand Rai to move the Bill. Opposition members Pramod Tiwari, John Brittas and Tiruchi Siva raised objections. While Mr. Tiwari and Mr. Brittas demanded a discussion on police atrocities, Mr. Siva said the Bill was against the Constitution.

The Deputy Chairman, however, denied the "point of order" raised by the members and Mr. Rai

moved the Bill for consideration of the House amid din. Opposition MPs were heard shouting slogans demanding that Mr. Shah must come to the House.

At 5.15 p.m., the Deputy Chairman invited Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju. He said the government was ready for discussions on the issue of paper leaks and requested the Congress to take up the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026, for discussion. "Such an important Bill has been brought forward. We appealed to the Congress yesterday, we have been appealing to them since this morning, but they are not agreeing," he said.

Countering this, Congress leader Mallikarjun Kharge said the Opposition did not shy away from discussion. "But before discussion, the Home Minister should come and make a statement," he said. When he was speaking, BJP MPs raised their voice and soon after the House was adjourned for the day.

BJP to mark Guru Ravidas' 650th birth anniversary

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The BJP on Monday said it would launch a nationwide "*Samrasta Sankalp Abhiyan*" (campaign for social harmony and resolve) from July 29, 2026, to February 20, 2027, to mark the 650th birth anniversary of the mystic poet-saint Guru Ravidas.

At a press conference held by BJP national general secretaries Tarun Chugh and Dushyant Kumar Gautam, it said 131 sacred urns would be sent across the country from Varanasi, the birthplace of Ravidas.

Initiatives for social harmony would be organised at 21,000 locations and processions, including a month-long yatra from Jalandhar to Varanasi, would be taken out, they said.

The government had undertaken several initiatives to preserve the saint's legacy, including the development of airports, special trains, his birthplace, pilgrim routes, and the restoration of sites linked to Ravidas, they said.

BJP MPs face criticism from Opposition leaders for 'Pradhan Zindabad' slogan

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

BJP leader Dharmendra Pradhan, who stepped down as Union Education Minister over the NEET controversy, was greeted by BJP MPs with slogans of "Pradhan Zindabad" in the Parliament complex on Monday.

This prompted some of the Opposition MPs, who too were protesting outside the main entrance to Parliament against the police crackdown on protesters, to counter their BJP counterparts with chants of "*Chor Chor, Paper Chor* [thief, thief, paper thief]". The Congress termed

The Congress terms the felicitation of the ex-Union Minister a 'grave insult' to the country's youth

the felicitation "grave insult" to the youth.

Calling Mr. Pradhan a symbol of "corruption and India's ruined education system", Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi said the system "claimed the lives of 26 children and forced millions of youth onto the streets".

"And today, the BJP is garlanding that same person in Parliament. This

isn't any honour—it's a celebration of the destruction of millions of children's futures," Mr. Gandhi said in a post on X.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said the BJP was honouring Mr. Pradhan "as if he had achieved some great feat", despite the paper leak crisis, the collapse of the examination system and the police action against protesting students.

Questions on his tenure

He questioned whether the BJP believed Mr. Pradhan's tenure was "commendable" despite the paper leaks, the crumbling education system, lathi-

charge on students and the use of pellet guns.

Congress leader Pawan Kherra alleged Mr. Pradhan was being celebrated because he had implemented the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's agenda through the Education Ministry.

"Pradhan is an RSS hero because he implemented the RSS agenda through the Education Ministry. That's why he's their hero," Mr. Kherra said, adding that the public now knew Mr. Pradhan's "true self".

Congress MP Renuka Chowdhury likened the welcome to the BJP's felicitation for the convicts in the Bilkis Bano rape case.

AAP to hold a national town hall against E20 in Delhi on August 1

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Monday stepped up its campaign against E20-blended petrol by announcing a national town hall against E20 at the Constitution Club in New Delhi on August 1.

The event will bring together experts, vehicle owners and concerned citizens to discuss the impact of E20 petrol and chart the future course of the campaign, the party said.

AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal said, "The youth of the country has

forced an arrogant government to bow, and Dharmendra Pradhan had to resign before the people. I now urge the PM to resolve the E20-blended petrol issue also. People are facing serious problems. Their vehicles are getting damaged, and fuel mileage is declining. Before this issue also grows bigger, I request the PM to take the initiative and resolve it."

He alleged that another exam paper leak had now happened in Gujarat, and claimed that such incidents would continue unless the BJP was voted out of power.

INBRIEF



Delhi HC grants Sonia, Rahul 3 weeks to respond to ED plea

The Delhi High Court on Monday granted three weeks to Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, and others to reply to the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) plea challenging a trial court order that refused to take cognisance of its chargesheet against them in the *National Herald*-linked money laundering case. Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the ED, said the trial court had "gone terribly wrong" in the case, and the respondents had filed no reply despite the High Court giving them time to do so two months ago. The High Court has also issued notices to Suman Dubey, Sam Pitroda, Young Indian, Dotex Merchandise Private Limited, and Sunil Bhandari on ED's plea.

Maharashtra TET leak: close aide of 'kingpin' arrested

The Special Task Force of the Maharashtra Police on Monday arrested the 15th accused in the Maharashtra Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) paper leak case. The suspect has been identified as Sonu Kumar Kisanlal Diwakar, 34. He is a former employee of Mahim Patran Private Limited and a close aide of the prime accused, Bijendra Kumar Gupta. According to the police, although Mr. Diwakar left his job at the Agra-based press two years ago, he remained in constant touch with his co-accused, Sanjay. The police had been chasing Mr. Diwakar for over 20 days.

Court seeks Centre's reply on plea over anti-defection law

Rajya Sabha member Kapil Sibal has challenged the interpretation of the 'merger' exception under Paragraph 4 of Tenth Schedule, contends issue is unlikely to be resolved through legislative process

Aaratrika Bhaumik
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday sought the Union government's response on a petition filed by senior advocate Kapil Sibal challenging the interpretation of the "merger" exception under the anti-defection law contained in the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution.

The Independent Rajya Sabha member has questioned the interpretation of the "merger" exception under Paragraph 4 of the Tenth Schedule, whereby a political party is deemed to have "merged" with another political party solely on the basis that two-thirds of the members of its legislature party have claimed such a merger even "if there is no other indication" that the original political party has actually merged. Mr. Sibal, appearing as petitioner-in-person, submitted before a Bench of Justices P.S. Narasimha and Alok Aradhe that such an interpretation of Paragraph 4 would have "huge repercussions" for the polity as an electoral majority



This has huge repercussions... The electoral verdict can be changed. A minority can become a majority and a majority can become a minority

KAPIL SIBAL
Rajya Sabha member

can be turned into a minority by resorting to mergers.

He argued that the Constitution does not permit a situation where a legislature party can, by itself, bring about a deemed merger of the original political party without any formal merger process or approval of party leadership.

"This has huge repercussions for our polity... The electoral verdict can be changed. A minority can become a majority and a majority can become a minority," Mr. Sibal submitted.

'Issues for Parliament'

While acknowledging the concerns raised about the operation of the Tenth Schedule, the Bench expressed its disinclination to entertain the plea, observing that any shortcom-

ings in the anti-defection law were matters for Parliament to take a call on.

"These are issues typically to be raised before the floor of the House.. If not, then at least before political parties. The Tenth Schedule is intended to regulate the mechanism between the legislators... What transpired in the working of the Tenth Schedule, we have been seeing enormous issues", Justice Narasimha remarked.

Mr. Sibal submitted that the issue was unlikely to be resolved through the legislative process because the prevailing interpretation benefited those in power. He also referred to the 2022 Goa defection matter which is pending before the top court. In 2022, eight of 10 Congress MLAs in Goa, claiming to form

two-thirds of the Congress legislature party, had declared a "merger" with the BJP and sought protection under the Tenth Schedule. The separate plea filed by Congress leader Girish Chodankar, pending before the Supreme Court, argues that "mergers of State legislature parties in Opposition led by the Leader of the Opposition are not only a constitutional sin but also amount to a direct attack on the democratic setup of an Assembly". The petition challenges the Bombay High Court's January 16, 2025, judgment, which upheld the legislators' move to the BJP as a valid "merger".

The Bench ultimately agreed to issue notice on the plea and examine the competing interpretations of the merger exception under the anti-defection law. The petition argues that, more than two decades after the Tenth Schedule was amended, political actors have increasingly sought to exploit the presumption contained in Paragraph 4(2) as a means of circumventing the anti-defection law.

HC allows Gadkari to sue Meta, Google, X over ethanol posts

Chinmay Gaikwad
MUMBAI



Nitin Gadkari

The Bombay High Court on Monday allowed Union Minister Nitin Gadkari to initiate legal proceedings against Meta, Google, X, and other unnamed entities over social media content that he alleged falsely links him to the Centre's Ethanol Blending Programme (EBP).

Justice Abhay Ahuja, presiding over a single-judge Bench, granted Mr. Gadkari leave to file a substantive civil suit, seeking relief that includes the removal of the content in question from the Internet.

The petition was moved under Clause XII of the Letters Patent. This procedural requirement necessitates the High Court's permission when a part of the cause of action arises outside the High Court's territorial jurisdiction. Mr. Gadkari also indicated his intention to approach the Supreme Court in the matter. A detailed order is awaited.

In the proposed suit, Mr. Gadkari outlined the background of the Ethanol Blending Programme (EBP), introduced by the Centre in 2003 as a nation-

al policy initiative for blending ethanol with petrol in phases. The implementation of 20% ethanol blending with petrol (E20) was achieved during the 2025-26 period.

Mr. Gadkari stated that though he had served as the Union Minister for Road Transport since 2014, he had no role in the E20 policy decisions. However, the Minister alleged that several social media posts, created, and circulated by unknown users, falsely portray him as responsible for the EBP's implementation.

Mr. Gadkari identified at least 24 posts that he claims are defamatory and has sought directions for their removal. The suit which seeks damages of ₹1 crore, is likely to be listed before Justice Arif Doctor.

'Cut list' on CBFC website remains inaccessible for days

Aroon Deep
NEW DELHI

The Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) has removed public access to details of cuts introduced to films and information that it is legally required to publish on its website. The section mentioning the "cut list" has been displaying "under maintenance" for several days.

As a result, there is no way to find out the cuts made to films currently showing in theatres or scheduled to release soon. This comes months after the censor board made it impossible to automatically fetch cut lists from its website as and when films were certified.

The move comes at a time when the CBFC's institutional norms have weakened significantly. It has recently been accused of delaying certification for films like Kangana Ranaut-starrer *Emergency* and C.

The section of the cut lists has been displaying "under maintenance" for several days now

Joseph Vijay-starrer *Jana Nayagan*, while withholding certification for Honey Trehan directorial *Sathuj*, which was released online before being pulled down by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. The Bombay and Madras High Courts have criticised the CBFC's actions.

The cut lists have long served as a record of changes ordered to films, making it possible to track the growing politicisation of film censorship, particularly when films contain anti-establishment themes, and a tendency to suppress films depicting casteism, religious prejudice, and could have a bearing on India's foreign relations. In 2023, *The Hindu*

reported how the CBFC's cuts reflected these trends based on a review of hundreds of cut lists retrieved through a piece of code.

Although cut lists are accessible on the CBFC's e-Cinepramaan portal by scanning the QR code on a film's certificate, on or prior to July 15, the censor board took down the tabulated cut lists for all films from its website. The censor board inserted a message in its place, saying "Part II of the certificate [the cut list] is currently under maintenance."

"Various portions of the CBFC e-Cinepramaan system are currently undergoing long-overdue technical maintenance to improve citizen centricity, user experience, and to consistently implement various mandatory rules and compliances within the online workflow," CBFC chairperson Shashi Shekhar Vempati's office told *The Hindu*.

Centre summons Ukraine Ambassador over attack on ship

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

The External Affairs Ministry on Monday summoned Ukraine's Ambassador to India, Oleksandr Polishchuk, and expressed "serious concerns" over the July 18 attack on a ship that led to the death of an Indian seafarer.

The Ukraine Embassy, in a response, said Foreign Minister of Ukraine Andrii Sybiha had sent a letter of condolence to External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar over the incident. It added that "immediate response to any preventive warnings" on the situation in the Black Sea region can help in minimising security risks "from Russia's military operations".

"The Ministry conveyed its serious concerns over the incident and condemned such attacks on commercial shipping in

the strongest terms, underscoring their adverse impact on the safety of maritime navigation, freedom of navigation, and international commerce," the External Affairs Ministry said in a press note.

"The Ambassador was requested to convey to the Ukrainian authorities India's strong concerns over the targeting of commercial vessels and reiterated that such actions, which endanger the lives of innocent civilian seafarers, are unacceptable and must be avoided," it said about the attack on *MV OMORFI*.

In a statement later, the Ukraine Embassy said "Ukraine has consistently warned its international partners" about the growing threats in the Black Sea. It expressed hope that the two Foreign Ministers will hold talks in "the nearest future" over the security situation in the Black Sea.

Former Chhattisgarh official arrested by ED in PMLA case

The Hindu Bureau
RAIPUR

The Directorate of Enforcement has arrested Taman Singh Sonwani, the former Chairman of the Chhattisgarh Public Service Commission (CGPSC), in a money laundering case related to an alleged scam in CGPSC recruitments.

"The ED Raipur Zonal Office, has arrested Taman Singh Sonwani, the then Chairman of the CGPSC, in the case relating to the corruption, question-paper leak and manipulation of the CGPSC State Service Examinations, under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002. Taman Singh Sonwani was arrested on July 25 under Section 19 of the PMLA and produced before the Hon'ble Special Court (PMLA), Raipur, which has remanded him to the custody of the ED for a period of seven days, up to July 30," said an



The alleged scam was reported when Congress was in power.

ED official.

The CGPSC case pertains to alleged irregularities in the selection of candidates in the CGPSC recruitment examinations conducted in the years 2021 and 2022 when Mr. Sonwani was the Chairman. The Central Bureau of Investigation, which is probing the predicate offence, had earlier arrested him and he was in judicial custody. It is also alleged that the relatives of Mr. Sonwani as well as other influential persons were selected as the examina-

tion process was compromised.

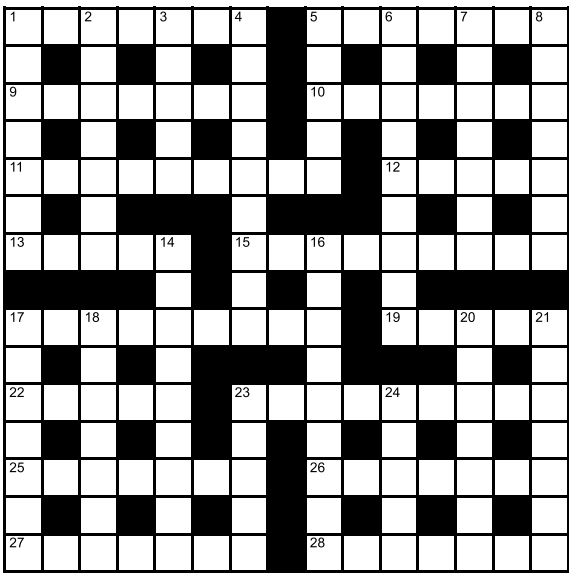
The proceeds of crime were collected partly in cash and partly routed through layered banking transactions and hence the ED entered the probe, the agency said in a statement.

"Investigation further revealed that the recruitment rules of the CGPSC were amended in 2021 so as to remove the word "nephew" from the definition of "family", thereby facilitating the selection of the relatives of Taman Singh Sonwani. The proceeds of crime were collected partly in cash and partly routed through layered banking transactions. In his statement recorded under Section 50 of the PMLA, 2002, he gave evasive and non-cooperative replies and suppressed material facts," the ED official said.

The alleged scam was reported when the Congress was in power in the State.

THE CROSSWORD+ 14857
(set by Avtaar)

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

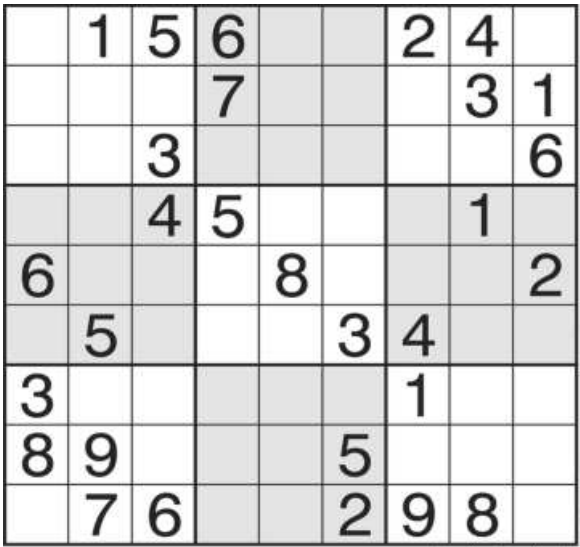


Across

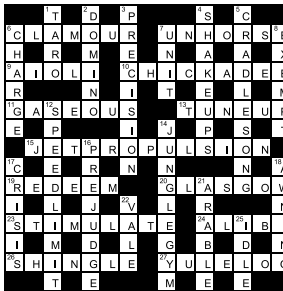
- 1 Relatives rejected incentives to accept work (7)
- 5 Cataract patient stabbed by rogue (7)
- 9 Bottega in Florence had couch in front of reception (7)
- 10 Bond's race to arrest KGB's head free of violence, ultimately (7)
- 11 Possibly informal document reflecting on media losing power in Delaware (5,4)

- 12 Hassle to get rid of phosphorus compound found in perfumes (5)
- 13 Civilian lawyer in Saudi? (5)
- 15 Body in the open - alarming murder? (9)
- 17 What removes moisture from soiled soft rinsed clothing rapidly after draining? (4,5)
- 19 Swimmers going back to get a bit of practice and rest (5)
- 22 Perhaps Indian sent back from China economising (5)
- 23 Fabric 's restyling cut most of return (9)
- 25 Sustained energy of revolutionary instigates killing spree at the end (7)
- 26 Take rook with rook conceding lead (7)
- 27 Company backs probing fellow escaping from spare suite (7)
- 28 Prepare to visit old East European religious scholar (7)
- Down
- 1 Cool sneakers boosted hero's state (7)
- 2 Feel son evolved without help (7)
- 3 Big shot turned up aboard in loafers (5)
- 4 Extremely old is surely exotic (9)
- 5 Split iceberg left in pit (5)
- 6 They cut below in sequence avoiding edges of icicle (9)
- 7 Electrical accessory in a mobile device mounted behind avoiding poles (7)
- 8 I caught crook hiding rupees in frontal arch close to temple? (7)
- 14 Space at the beginning I intend to change before working (9)
- 16 Flight link from peak in adjacent island to hill spanning British river (3,6)
- 17 Surety's bankrupt charged by completely heartless nieces (7)
- 18 Muddled divorced spouse stopping in front (7)
- 20 Unique cross and clubs going missing - difficult to spot (7)
- 21 Introduce promotion covering start of exciting race on the radio (7)
- 23 Small step above room (5)
- 24 Suspicion of theft dismissed by corner drug store (5)

SUDOKU



Solution to previous puzzle



Solution to yesterday's Sudoku



FAITH

Enslavement of Vinatha

Garuda's story is narrated in the Astika Parva of the Mahabharata, said Thenthirupperai Aravindalochanan in a discourse. Sage Kashyapa had 13 wives, of whom Kadru and Vinatha were sisters. Kadru's children were 1,000 snakes. Vinatha had two eggs, but they took a long time to hatch. Impatiently, she broke one, and out came a bird that had no legs. This bird was named Aruna. Aruna was very angry with his mother. Because he was hatched prematurely, he was devoid of legs. Aruna cursed Vinatha and said she would be a slave to her sister Kadru. She would, however, be released from her curse, if she waited patiently for the other egg to hatch. Garuda, who would emerge from the egg, would liberate her. Surya then asked Aruna to be his charioteer.

One day Kadru and Vinatha went to the Ganga for a bath, where they saw the divine horse Uchchaisravas. It was completely white, but Kadru saw an opportunity to enslave Vinatha. She said the horse had a black tail. Vinatha said it was an all-white horse. Kadru said that the next day they should get a closer look and whoever was wrong should be the slave of the other. Kadru then sent for her sons – the snakes – and told them to wrap themselves around the horse's tail, to give it a black appearance. Some of her sons opposed such deception. Some of the snakes decided to obey their mother and draped themselves around the horse's tail. When Vinatha saw the horse, she could see a black tail. Assuming she had been wrong, she became Kadru's slave. Later when Vinatha's other egg hatched, Garuda who came from it, liberated both himself and his mother from Kadru's clutches.

How a political term can majorly fix urban India’s water woes

Over the past few decades, Indian cities have depended more and more on distant rivers and groundwater; this has rendered higher energy bills, political disputes, greater vulnerability to drought and contamination; a focused agenda for one political cycle can stabilise urban water services

Manish Dubey
K.V. Santhosh Ragavan

How much can realistically change within the span of a single political term? The answer matters because India’s wider growth and development ambitions now hinge on how its cities handle water.

Urban India is expected to drive the bulk of GDP growth this decade – yet many city water systems remain fragile. Utilities lose more than 30% of the water they produce before it reaches consumers or is billed, a measure known as non-revenue water.

Only around 27% of sewage is treated, leaving significant potential for reuse untapped.

Many utilities also recover less than 55% of their operation and maintenance costs through user charges, limiting their ability to maintain networks and improve services.

In effect, India is trying to build a ‘Viksit Bharat’ on top of a leaky and crumbling urban water system.

Fortunately, a focused agenda for one political cycle can stabilise urban water services, especially for those who are currently worst-served. Such an agenda comes to light by answering four questions: Where does the water come from? How efficiently is it moved and used? Who receives what? And how is it paid for?

Where does the water come from?

Over the last few decades, Indian cities have steadily depended more and more on distant rivers and groundwater. This has rendered higher energy bills, political disputes over allocations, and greater vulnerability to drought and contamination. Within one political term, cities are unlikely to abandon these sources altogether but they can reduce their dependence.

This starts with a simple change in mindset: treating rainwater and treated wastewater as mainstream sources rather than as fringe add-ons. Most large cities receive enough rain on their roofs, roads, and open spaces to make a meaningful contribution to local demand if it is captured.

Similarly, a significant volume of wastewater can be treated to a standard suitable for non-drinking uses, such as industrial cooling, construction, landscaping, and flushing.

Practically, this means three kinds of policies over the next few years: stricter enforcement and incentivising of rainwater harvesting in large buildings and layouts; a clear plan to route treated wastewater to high-demand users who do not need drinking-quality water; and realistic targets to meet part of the city’s non-potable demand from these sources.

A city that meets even a quarter of these needs through rain and reuse will be less at the mercy of reservoirs and over-stressed aquifers.

How efficiently is water moved?

Many urban water providers are public utilities or departments that face familiar political, regulatory, and capacity constraints. They often operate with high non-revenue water, limited wastewater



Utilities lose more than 30% of the water they produce before it reaches consumers or is billed, a measure known as non-revenue water. GETTY IMAGES

treatment and reuse, and weak revenue collection. These are important reasons why supply is intermittent, pressure is low, and expansion into poorer neighbourhoods is delayed so often.

Over a single term, then, three steps are achievable to good effect. First, clarify responsibility. A clear mandate and support from the State government and formal coordination mechanisms with shared standards and joint planning can significantly improve service delivery.

Second, get serious about measuring and managing losses. In most Indian cities, a large share of water is lost before it ever reaches a tap, due to leaks or unbilled consumption. Over a four- or five-year horizon, utilities can map their networks into district metered areas, install bulk meters at key points, and run sustained leak reduction programmes in the worst-performing districts.

Third, modernise basic customer-facing services. This includes universal metering for larger consumers, better billing and collection systems, and accessible grievance redress mechanisms.

When people know how much they use, what they pay for, and where they can raise complaints, honest conversations about tariffs, service levels, and equity are easier to have. Better information also helps utilities manage operations and plan investments.

Who receives what?

Current approaches for coverage, delivery and affordability have not closed the equity gap. Free standposts and *ad-hoc* tankers are important safety nets but they often coexist with tariffs and subsidies that benefit those already connected to the network. The result is a pattern where poorer households may pay more per litre – through time, health and informal payments – than those receiving piped water at low, flat rates.

Most water providers operate with high non-revenue water, limited wastewater treatment and reuse, and weak revenue collection; these are important reasons why supply is intermittent, pressure is low, and expansion into poorer neighbourhoods is delayed

A one-term reform agenda can start to change this by making it smarter.

One strand is to rethink service benchmarks. National per-capita norms have their place but cities can use local data to prioritise a guaranteed minimum amount of safe water for every resident – regardless of neighbourhood or tenure. This may mean investing in last-mile connections, shared infrastructure, and better pressure management in low-income and informal areas, rather than only in network extensions to new real estate.

Another strand is to redesign tariffs and subsidies so that they protect basic needs while discouraging waste. This is often framed as a technical exercise but at heart it is a political choice: should scarce public support be spread thinly across all users or focused more on those who need it most?

Over a term, cities can pilot and refine tariff structures that combine lifeline blocks, cross-subsidies from higher consumption, and targeted support for the poor, backed by transparent communication about why these changes are being made.

Who pays for it?

A one-term agenda can also change how water investments are chosen and evaluated. Too often, decisions focus on

construction costs while neglecting long-term operation, maintenance, and the broader benefits of good water management, including lower health costs and less flood damage.

Before approving major projects, cities should ask three questions. (i) Have all reasonable options for reducing demand or losses before adding new supply? (ii) Have the full lifetime costs, including energy, maintenance, and adaptation to climate risks been considered? (iii) Have environmental and social impacts of choices such as protecting wetlands versus piping water from afar valued?

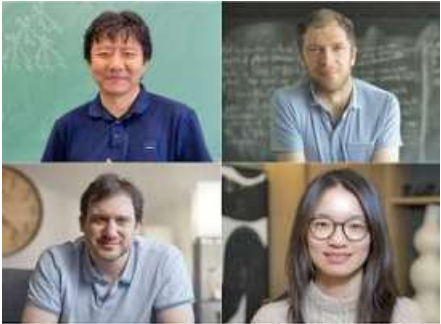
Answering these questions does not require new laws. It requires better guidance, capacity-building, and a willingness to learn from successful examples. Over a term, States and cities can build these habits into appraisal processes, perhaps starting with a few ‘lighthouse’ projects that explicitly test and demonstrate better ways of planning and financing.

Towards a single system

None of these changes will be simple. There will be entrenched interests, capacity gaps, and the ever-present temptation to announce something big and visible rather than fix what already exists. Yet these reforms are not utopian. They fall squarely within what an aligned city-State combination can start and significantly advance within a single political cycle.

Overall, India must shift from counting connections to managing performance and resilience, treating water, energy, finance and institutions as a single system, and investing equally in operations and local capacity.

Manish Dubey is Dean & Rahul Bajaj Chair, School of Governance, Indian Institute for Human Settlements (IIHS). K.V. Santhosh Ragavan is Adjunct Faculty, IIHS.



(Clockwise from top-left) Yu Deng, John Pardon, Hong Wang, Jacob Tsimerman, winners of 2026 Fields Medals. INTERNATIONAL MATHEMATICAL UNION

Hong Wang makes history by winning Fields Medal

Vasudevan Mukunth

The Fields Medal – one of the top honours in mathematics – for 2026 was awarded to Yu Deng, John Pardon, Jacob Tsimerman, and Hong Wang. The Medal is awarded every four years and recognises important contributions to mathematics research by people who are younger than 40 at the time they receive it.

Of this year’s laureates, Wang has become the third woman to win the Medal in its 90-year history, after Maryam Mirzakhani (2014) and Maryna Viazovska (2022). Wang and Deng are also the first Chinese nationals to win since Shing-Tung Yau in 1982.

Deng, currently a professor of mathematics at the University of Chicago, solved one part of a problem that the German mathematician David Hilbert had in a list of problems that will define the 20th century. In the course of this work, together with Zaher Hani and Xiao Ma, Deng also built some of the strongest

Wang is the third woman to win the Medal in its 90-year history; the first was won by Maryam Mirzakhani in 2014; Wang and Deng are also the first Chinese nationals to win since 1982

bridges to date between the physics we can observe – like water flowing down a stream – and the mathematics that is supposed to explain it, like the rules governing how individuals particles bounce off each other.

Pardon solved a 30-year-old problem – on the distortion of knots– while still an undergraduate student at Princeton, winning the Morgan Prize for it in 2012, and got his Ph.D. from Stanford in 2015 under Yakov Eliashberg. Like Eliashberg, Pardon works in symplectic geometry: mathematics used to describe how physical systems move, e.g. how a rock rolls down a hill or how planets orbit stars. He won the Fields Medal for solving the 20-year-old MNOP conjecture, about counting the number of curves on complicated geometric shapes called Calabi-Yau 3-folds.

Born in 1991 in Guangxi, Wang entered Peking University to study earth and space sciences at 16 years and switched to mathematics a year later. Currently a professor at the Courant Institute, Wang has been feted for solving the three-dimensional Kakeya conjecture with Joshua Zahl. Say a needle is lying on a flat surface. What’s the least amount of area you’d need to be able to rotate it so that, at some point, it points in every possible direction? Mathematicians figured out the answer on a flat surface but the 3D problem was so hard that it lacked a full solution for half a century. Wang and Zahl published their 127-page solution in 2025.

Born in 1988 in Russia, Tsimerman moved along with his family to Israel in 1990 and to Toronto in 1996. Tsimerman’s work lies at the intersection of number theory (the study of whole numbers and their properties) and algebraic geometry (using geometric shapes to understand equations). Early in his career, he helped prove the André-Oort conjecture with Jonathan Pila and Ananth Shankar, winning the SASTRA Ramanujan Prize in 2015.

In his Fields Medal-winning work, Tsimerman found ways to apply a tool called o-minimality from the field of mathematical logic in algebraic geometry and number theory, and proved Griffith’s conjecture.

On the day his Fields Medal was announced, Tsimerman announced he would be joining the Safety Research group at OpenAI.

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

THE SCIENCE QUIZ

Work that won the Fields Medal

Vasudevan Mukunth

QUESTION 1

Name the 2006 laureate who won for the theorem named for him and Ben Green. The theorem says that prime numbers can contain arithmetic progressions of any length one likes – i.e. equally spaced sequences like 5, 11, 17, 23 – even though the numbers get more sparse further down the number line.

QUESTION 2

In 2022, _____ won the Medal for showing that there are infinitely many pairs of primes that stay within some fixed, bounded distance of each other forever, no matter how far out you went on the number line. Fill in the blanks.

QUESTION 3

Name another 2006 laureate who won for proving the Poincaré conjecture: that any shape without holes that is also closed and three-dimensional is secretly a sphere, just possibly stretched or dented. The laureate proved this using Ricci flow, a process that smooths out a shape’s geometry the way heat diffusion smooths out temperature differences.

QUESTION 4

In 2018, Alessio Figalli won a Medal for a theory of _____. Specifically, Figalli showed that given a pile of dirt and a hole to fill with it, there is a mathematically ‘best way’ to move the dirt while minimising the total effort required. Fill in the blank.

QUESTION 5

Klaus Roth won the Medal in 1958 for his work on the _____ approximation. Fill in the blanks with a term named for the ancient Greek mathematician considered by many to be the inventor of algebra. Fill in the blank.

Answers to July 21 quiz:

- Element whose gas form with trifluoride is highly reactive – **Ans: Chlorine**
 - Gaseous uranium compound used during centrifuge enrichment – **Ans: Uranium hexafluoride**
 - Free-radical gas whose formula spells an English word – **Ans: NO (nitric oxide)**
 - First that the helium hydride ion marked – **Ans: Universe’s first molecule**
 - Noble element whose difluoride form is highly radioactive – **Ans: Radon**
- Visual: Osmium**
- First contact: K.N. Viswanathan | Prem Nath Tiwari | Anmol Agrawal | Pankaj Gharde | Tamal Biswas



VISUAL: Name her. She became the second woman to win the Fields Medal, for finding the densest possible way to pack identical spheres in 8-dimensional space and proving no arrangement can do better. EPFL SWITZERLAND



Forced labour farce

India should not let the U.S.'s new tariffs push it towards a trade deal

The 10% tariff that the United States has imposed on India and several other countries over their imports of goods supposedly made using forced labour is merely an attempt to restore permanent tariffs and, once again, highlight the benefits of a trade deal with the U.S. The U.S. Supreme Court's February 2026 decision dealt a body blow to the U.S.'s attempts to secure trade deals. The main threat, of high reciprocal tariffs, had been removed. U.S. President Donald Trump's solution, of a temporary 10% tariff on all countries, suffered from two weaknesses: it would expire in 150 days, and was levied on all countries equally, regardless of whether they had a deal with the U.S. or not. Those tariffs have now expired. The Section 301 'forced labour' tariffs announced last week were more permanent, and have carved out benefits for those with trade deals with the U.S. For example, while U.S. imports from India will face a 10% tariff over and above the base tariff the U.S. charges everybody, the European Union and Taiwan will face a total tariff of 10%. Similar benefits have been accorded to Japan, South Korea and Switzerland, all of which also have trade deals with the U.S. at various stages of formalisation. If stopping forced labour was the primary focus, tariffs would have been applied equally across all offenders, regardless of trade deal status. The tariffs would also not have had as many product-wise exemptions and country-wise quotas as the final version has.

There is also the question of whether the U.S. should be penalising other countries for their trade with third parties. India has not been accused of using forced labour, yet faces tariffs because others have been. This, soon after the U.S. government told a court that it did not want to act as the "world police". India has done well to reduce the proposed 12.5% tariffs to a final 10%, the same as or better than most of its competitors. All it took was a notification banning the import of goods made using forced labour. The action itself will be difficult to enforce, since it will require countries such as China and Malaysia to allow Indian government officials to visit and investigate their labour conditions. But simply issuing the notification won India a tariff reduction. However, uncertainty persists since the other Section 301 investigation, on excess capacity, is yet to play out and could result in further tariffs. It is highly unlikely that India will accept a trade deal until those tariffs become clear. That said, the tariffs should not push India towards a deal. Experience has shown that the U.S. tariff landscape can change radically even after a deal is signed.

All art, no deal

Donald Trump miscalculated timing and substance of Saudi nuclear deal

The announcement of a United States-Saudi Arabia civil nuclear deal, in the midst of a U.S.-Iran war that began over Tehran's nuclear programme, could hardly have come at a worse time. Matters became more complicated when U.S. President Donald Trump, after the agreement had been signed, added a new condition: that Saudi Arabia should join the Abraham Accords. Saudi Arabia has long sought to develop a civilian nuclear programme. Crown Prime Mohammad bin Salman, or MBS, wants to end the kingdom's "addiction" to oil. His Vision 2030 aims to diversify the economy through finance, megaprojects, tourism and power-hungry artificial intelligence (AI) data centres. The kingdom currently relies heavily on oil and gas for electricity generation. Saudi officials believe that nuclear power would help meet rising domestic energy demand, while freeing more oil and gas for export. MBS first took up his nuclear ambitions with Mr. Trump during the latter's first presidential term. His successor Joe Biden offered a deal but made it contingent on Riyadh joining the Abraham Accords. At that time, Saudi Arabia appeared open to normalising ties with Israel, but Hamas's October 2023 attack on Israel and Israel's genocidal war on Gaza prompted the Saudis to shelve the idea. The July 22 deal suggested that Riyadh and Washington continued talks and remained keen on nuclear cooperation.

As a signatory to the NPT, Saudi Arabia has every right to pursue a peaceful nuclear programme. But the agreement announced by U.S. Energy Secretary Chris Wright leaves open the possibility of nuclear enrichment on Saudi soil. This flies in the face of the U.S. opposition to any Iranian enrichment on its soil. The agreement, according to U.S. media reports, does not require Saudi Arabia to adopt the IAEA's Additional Protocol, which grants inspectors broad powers to conduct short-notice inspections. The omission has fuelled concerns that the kingdom could eventually acquire the technical capability to weaponise its nuclear programme. Facing domestic criticism, Mr. Trump declared that the deal would proceed only if Saudi Arabia joined the Abraham Accords – a condition which was conspicuously absent when the agreement was signed. This apparent reversal is unlikely to reassure Riyadh, which is already questioning the reliability of U.S. security guarantees. If the deal eventually goes ahead, Tehran is likely to harden its position on enrichment in any future nuclear talks with the U.S. If Mr. Trump's objective was to reassure a long-standing ally while signalling strategic leverage over a regional rival, the execution of the deal has had the opposite effect. Ill-timed diplomacy, ambiguous provisions and shifting conditions have deepened Saudi concerns and strengthened Iran's resolve. That is the result of Mr. Trump's version of the "art of the deal".

The debate over India's proposed Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency (CAFE) III norms comes at a crucial time for the global automobile industry as it transitions from internal combustion engines (ICE) to electrified powertrains. It also highlights India's vulnerability to imported crude oil amid renewed geopolitical tensions. The framework India adopts today will influence investment, technology choices and energy security for decades.

CAFE III, compliance or transformation
The Power Ministry's July 16 draft notification marks the third iteration of CAFE III after months of industry lobbying. While some manufacturers pushed for stricter norms, others sought flexibility. The proposal attempts a compromise, but the question remains whether it prioritises compliance over transformation.

CAFE norms set annual sales-weighted average fuel-efficiency targets for manufacturers' passenger vehicle fleets rather than individual models. Introduced in the United States in 1975 after the 1973 Arab oil embargo, they aimed to reduce oil dependence and protect consumers from high fuel costs. The rules caused automakers to adopt smaller, more efficient vehicles. This also helped accelerate the rise of Japanese manufacturers.

From the 1990s, fuel-efficiency regulations gained a second purpose: reducing greenhouse-gas emissions. In the United States, the EPA's Endangerment Finding brought greenhouse gases under the Clean Air Act, with later emissions standards aligned closely with CAFE rules. While technology-neutral, the rules encouraged innovation in hybrids and electric vehicles (EV). Ironically, the Obama administration's \$465 million Department of Energy loan to Tesla in 2010 helped accelerate an EV industry now dominated by China.

China's experience is even more instructive. It introduced mandatory fuel-consumption standards in 2004, initially regulating individual vehicle models by weight rather than fleet averages. As car ownership surged, concerns over oil imports and urban air pollution grew. The standards tightened over time before China changed direction in 2018 with the introduction of its Dual Credit System.

Under this framework, manufacturers must meet both Corporate Average Fuel Consumption (CAFC) standards and New Energy Vehicle (NEV) credit requirements. Fuel-efficiency compliance alone is insufficient. Companies that fail to earn enough NEV credits through EV or plug-in hybrid production must purchase credits from those with surplus EV production, creating a market that rewards innovation and penalises delayed electrification. For example, in India, Maruti Suzuki could remain NEV credit-deficient by 18%



Kunal Shankar

Weak fuel efficiency norms risk keeping the country dependent on imported oil

despite having highly fuel-efficient ICE models if it had no EVs in its portfolio. It would need to buy credits from companies such as Tata Motors or Mahindra, which generate NEV credits through their EV portfolios. While CAFC credits can be banked, carried forward or transferred within corporate groups, NEV credits cannot be offset in the same way. The results are evident. According to the International Energy Agency's Global EV Outlook 2026, China sold more than 13 million electric cars in 2025, accounting for almost 55% of new passenger vehicle sales. Comparable figures were about 27% in the European Union, nearly 10% in the U.S. and around 4% in India.

India's own debate has centred on differences between Maruti Suzuki, Tata Motors and Mahindra & Mahindra. An earlier proposal effectively carved out lighter small cars from the full stringency of CAFE III. That exemption has since been removed. The current proposal seeks to reduce average emissions from around 113 gCO₂/km to 77 gCO₂/km by FY2031-32. On paper, that appears ambitious. Yet, the headline target tells only part of the story.

The cost of flexibility
The revised framework introduces several flexibility mechanisms that, taken together, substantially reduce its effective stringency.

The first is the Carbon Neutrality Factor, which awards compliance benefits for vehicles compatible with higher ethanol blends and other fuels. Yet, the government has informed Parliament that no decision has been taken to move beyond E20 blending (20% plant-based ethanol with 80% regular petrol). Manufacturers therefore receive compliance advantages for technologies whose long-term policy trajectory remains uncertain. Ethanol is also more expensive than petrol, and has lower energy density, and therefore delivers lower mileage – a fact belatedly acknowledged by the Centre after it drew severe criticism.

The second is the use of super credits. Battery EVs, plug-in hybrids, strong hybrids and flex-fuel vehicles receive additional weight in fleet calculations. While this encourages cleaner technologies, it also means that fewer actual low-emission vehicle sales are required to offset higher-emission models. Strong hybrids, which generally rely primarily on the ICE while using electric propulsion over relatively short distances and at lower speeds, also receive super-credit benefits despite offering only partial electrification.

The third mechanism is banking and trading of compliance credits. Manufacturers outperforming their targets can accumulate credits and sell them to others. In addition, the draft allows companies to buy credits directly from the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) at administratively fixed prices if deficits remain

after trading. The BEE is therefore not a market exchange but effectively a seller of last resort.

In theory, this introduces efficiency into the system. In practice, it allows companies that are lagging to meet compliance requirements without upgrading their own technology. Moreover, the draft notification allows manufacturers to buy compliance credits from the BEE at ₹2,500 per gram of CO₂/km in FY2028, rising to ₹4,500 by FY2032. By comparison, the Energy Conservation Act prescribes additional penalties of ₹25,000 or ₹50,000 per vehicle depending on the extent of non-compliance. Expressed in CAFE terms, the lower penalty threshold is broadly equivalent to a little over ₹5,000 per gram of CO₂/km, implying that the proposed buyout price begins at less than half that level.

Finally, compliance is assessed over three-year blocks before shifting to two-year blocks, allowing manufacturers to average performance across multiple years rather than meeting targets annually. Therefore, delays in one year can be compensated in another.

The case of CNG

Taken together, these mechanisms significantly alter the stringency of these regulations. Which raises a fundamental question: What is the purpose of a regulation?

Regulation should shape markets rather than simply accommodate prevailing market preferences. India's own experience with compressed natural gas (CNG) illustrates the point. Once policy support aligned with regulatory certainty, manufacturers rapidly introduced CNG variants. Regulation can create markets as much as respond to them.

To put this in perspective: manufacturers' voluntary commitments already average nearly 20% EV share by 2030, with several original equipment manufacturers aiming for 30% or higher. In effect, the revised regulation attempts only half of what the industry itself has committed to. The timing also matters. India remains heavily dependent on imported crude, exposing the economy to geopolitical shocks, imported inflation and currency pressures. Strengthening fuel-efficiency standards is therefore not merely an environmental objective. It is an energy-security strategy, an industrial policy and a macroeconomic imperative.

These developments highlight the urgency and significance of revising India's CAFE norms, as they offer an opportunity to address a macroeconomic vulnerability while helping meet India's Glasgow commitment on energy efficiency.

India should seize this opportunity to position itself alongside the world's leading automotive markets in the transition to low-carbon mobility.

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AI's next test — reaching India's informal women worker

India's journey towards Viksit Bharat by 2047 rests on whether the productivity gains unlocked by artificial intelligence (AI) are broadly shared or concentrated among those already well-served. AI is reshaping value chains across agriculture, logistics, health care and financial services. The design choices in these systems, who they are built for, whose data they train on, and whose languages they speak, will determine whether this transformation amplifies India's inclusive growth story or adds a dimension to structural inequalities.

About 82% of working women in India are in informal employment according to a 2018 ILO report, spanning agriculture, home-based production, domestic services and micro-enterprises. The gender implications of AI adoption are, above all, a question of economic inclusion. India's AI Governance Guidelines, released in November 2025, set out seven guiding principles, including fairness and equity; translating these into gender-responsive outcomes is both a governance priority and a development opportunity. As UN Women has warned, AI is already reimagining reality for billions, but it is still getting women wrong; without gender-responsive design, testing and oversight, it risks amplifying stereotypes, discrimination and digital violence instead of expanding opportunity.

In agriculture and informal work
AI holds considerable promise for Indian farmers through precision agriculture applications, real-time advisory on crop health, input optimisation and market access. With 76.9% of rural women engaged in agriculture as in Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2023-24 reporting, women are a primary constituency. Early evidence is telling: a 2024 study of Farmer.Chat, deployed across 12 States, found that 61% of women users reported improved quality of life within 45 days, with engagement levels two to three times those of male users. While the specific design features driving this outcome



S. Krishnan

Secretary, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), Government of India



Shoko Ishikawa,

Country Representative, UN Women India and part of Team UN in India

Artificial Intelligence (AI) must empower informal women workers for truly inclusive economic growth

require further documentation, the results suggest that when AI agricultural tools reach women, keeping in mind language, land access patterns, mobility constraints, and relevance, meaningful engagement follows. Building on this foundation, three areas merit focused attention as India scales its AI deployment.

Governance priorities
First, gender impact assessments. The India AI Governance Guidelines' principles of fairness and equity require operationalisation through proportionate gender impact assessments for AI systems affecting economic opportunity, welfare access or safety for women and girls. These should examine whether outcomes vary by sex, location, caste, disability and work status, and whether redressal mechanisms are accessible in regional languages. Where AI decisions on credit, employment or welfare cannot be explained, trust suffers disproportionately among marginalised groups. Similarly, Gender Responsive Budgeting offers a practical test for decisions on AI spend. For any significant AI investment, four questions can be applied: which women will benefit; which specific barrier (access, language, safety or capability) is being addressed; how outcomes will be measured; and which budget line will finance corrective action if results fall short.

Second, AI literacy as public infrastructure. Access to tools is a necessary but not sufficient condition for inclusion. Training programmes for women in informal work must be designed around their time constraints, literacy levels and livelihood contexts. Embedding AI literacy within Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM), Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) and Skill India, with linkages to Mission Shakti's Sakhi network, would allow trusted community infrastructure to carry new digital capability. The measure of success should be outcome-based: did this help a woman access an entitlement, navigate a platform, or move to

better-paid work? Third, digital safety as a condition for economic participation. Technology-facilitated gender-based violence, including deepfakes, online harassment and non-consensual imagery, creates a measurable "chilling effect", discouraging women from participating fully in digital economic spaces. The IT (Amendment) Rules, 2021 require grievance mechanisms for harmful content; the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)'s proposed mandatory labelling of AI-generated synthetic content adds further protection. Effective implementation, with accessible survivor-facing remedies in regional languages, is a prerequisite for women's sustained digital participation.

The National Commission for Women's review of cyber laws provides evidence-based recommendations warranting timely inter-ministerial action.

AI prosperity for all

India has built substantial AI infrastructure in a short period: the IndiaAI Mission, the BHASHa Interface for India (BASHINI) multilingual platform, the AI Governance Guidelines and targeted cross-sector partnerships. The India AI Impact Summit 2026 showed that these ambitions are matched by a growing ecosystem of practitioners, innovators and civil society.

The opportunity is to ensure that the productivity gains from this infrastructure reach those at the base of the economic pyramid, viz., women farmers, home-based workers, self-help group members, platform participants. This requires deliberate design: in procurement standards, training programmes, safety frameworks and the measurement of success.

By 2047, the measure of India's AI success should not be aggregate indicators alone, but whether women in informal work have gained meaningful, productive access to the tools and opportunities that AI enables. That is the standard consistent with Viksit Bharat, and it is within India's reach.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Beyond sympathy

It is amusing that the Prime Minister and the Home Minister have expressed deep concern for the students and youth of the nation, particularly after the government faced sustained protests under the banner of the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP). If they truly

believe that students are important, should they not accept overall responsibility for unfortunate actions against students?

Tharcius S. Fernando,
Chennai

Now that the protest is over and a committee has been formed to recommend a

robust mechanism for conducting examinations, I presume the issue will gradually be pushed into the background. However, to ensure effectiveness and improve the quality of students we prepare, the government must focus on strengthening the foundation of education,

which begins at the school level. Instead of playing around with language and

historical facts, the emphasis should be on building a strong value

Corrections & Clarifications

Neha Bora is the All India President of the All India Students' Association (AISA), and not the "Delhi secretary of AISA" (Inside pages, "Hunger strike was challenge to govt., the movement is still on, says AISA secretary" (July 27, 2026).

The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28576347/28576300; E-mail: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in

system and providing sound, science-based learning at all levels. The evaluation system, starting from the school level, also requires strengthening.

K. Soundararajan,
Chennai

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

To fix unemployment, fix the economy first

The Cockroach Janta Party’s movement has highlighted the political urgency for reforming the economy to create more employment for India’s youth. Fixing the education system alone will not solve the unemployment problem. The basic structure of the economy must be reformed.

China and India, the only two countries in the world with populations exceeding one billion, have the greatest need for meaningful employment. If citizens are not fully employed, and incomes of masses do not rise, their economies cannot grow. China has done much better than India in this regard; the per capita income of Chinese citizens has risen roughly eight times faster than Indians’ in the last 30 years.

India’s leaders find themselves in the middle of conflicting trends. First, they are pushing ahead with reforms for ‘ease of doing business’; diluting the rights of workers to organise; and weakening environmental protection. Second, they are promoting the wide-spread application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to improve ‘productivity’ (and other benefits) in agriculture, industry, health and education, with productivity defined, purely in economic terms, as more output with less human input. Third, they also see the need to change the pattern of growth and increase employment elasticity. Employment elasticity is the amount of meaningful employment created with each unit of GDP growth, in which India has been a laggard since the liberal market economic reforms of the 1990s.

Since India has the largest population of youth in the world, its economic growth should have the highest employment elasticity. However, the increased adoption of AI will only make it worse.

The China model

China has invested billions to become an AI superpower and has raced to integrate the technology



Arun Maira

Author of ‘Reimagining India’s Economy: The Road to a More Equitable Society’

across a range of industries. By 2024, more than two million robots were already working in Chinese factories. And in Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen, Meituan, the nation’s largest food delivery service, has experimented with using small autonomous robots to deliver food. But China’s advances in AI have run headlong into a growing problem: anxiety over the workers who could be displaced.

China’s political and economic history reveals that, despite being an authoritarian country, the Chinese government is very attentive to what people are thinking and saying on the Internet. History has taught them that another revolution will form if disenchanted and educated youth rise along with the disgruntled workers and peasants. They know they must respond.

Unemployment has been increasing in China. The unemployment rate for migrant workers rose to 5.7% in March this year, which has been the highest in nearly three years for China, while youth unemployment stood at 16.3% in April. Moreover, 70% of unemployed young people are university graduates, with older laid-off workers facing prolonged periods of joblessness.

However, Chinese courts have been swift to act. A court ruled in May that a tech company had illegally laid-off a worker after replacing him with AI software. Another ruled that, “the development of artificial intelligence technology should be applied to liberating labour, promoting employment and improving people’s livelihood”. And yet another ruled that “companies that benefit from technology must, at the same time, adopt social responsibilities and protect worker rights”.

China’s Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security announced in January that it would roll out policies to address the impact of AI on jobs, including targeted support for key industries. In June, the State Council issued a plan on

implementing an “employment-first” strategy for the 2026-2030 period. Party officials have proposed sweeping government interventions such as requiring employers to offer training to help workers adapt to an AI-centric job market.

The Chinese government’s ‘people-first’ ideology has served China’s economy and its people well. China’s leaders have remained socialists; they have always put the needs of common citizens, and the stability of China’s society, above economists’ demands for deregulation of markets and prices, especially with respect to labour, food, education, health, and housing.

The road ahead for India

Indian income levels must rise rapidly – in agriculture, manufacturing, and services. The government has added ‘ease of living’ to ‘ease of doing business’ as the purpose of the reforms required for India to become ‘Viksit Bharat’ by 2047. To make it a reality, it will have to put more teeth into its policies to increase employment and incomes, and stave off the negative impacts that AI will have on employment. Policies must require that employers take more responsibility for training their own workers; they must be restrained from laying them off.

New policies must put workers’ rights ahead of capitalists’ rights, as China has done. India’s labour market reforms, with the four labour codes, are directed to improve ‘ease of doing business’, which is undoubtedly necessary. However, the ‘ease of doing business’ must now become subordinate to the ease of living and earning for all citizens.

India’s leaders would do well to learn from China’s leaders on how to navigate this moment in history. The rights of all workers must be firmly protected. While the views of financial investors must be heard, the views of workers and small-time entrepreneurs must be heard much more.

Rayalaseema: India’s new industrial hub

The TDP government has transformed the arid region into an economic hub

STATE OF PLAY

V. Raghavendra

Chronic drought and resultant famines have been an integral part of Rayalaseema, with the region having some of the driest places in India.

However, the economic landscape here has undergone a perceptible transformation in the last decade and a half, as some mega manufacturing industries have started moving in with huge investments. Except agriculture and horticulture, which flourished in isolated pockets, Rayalaseema never had any major industrial activity to boast of, but this is rapidly changing and in no small measure.

Numerous cotton ginning and pressing, textile mills, and mineral-based units were the earliest industries to come to the region in the mid-20th century. Multiple large-scale industries, including the State-owned Rayalaseema Thermal Power Plant, the cement plants of Dalmia Bharat and Zuari in the Kadapa-Kurnool belt, and a clutch of renewable energy projects such as the ultra-mega solar parks in the Kadapa and Kurnool districts, were established subsequently.

After a big gap thereafter, the stage has been set for yet another tranche of massive investments, the most prominent being the integrated steel plant being built by the JSW Group in Kadapa district; a string of defence sector projects namely the DRDO’s Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft integration and flight testing centre at Puttaparthi, Bharat Forge’s defence energetics facility in Madakasira, and a high-precision ammunition making unit of HFCL in



Sri Sathya Sai district; and the Royal Enfield manufacturing plant near Tirupati. Then there is the Space City poised to take shape close to the country’s only rocket launchpad at Sriharikota.

These are only a few projects turning parts of the Rayalaseema region into a manufacturing hub.

A gradual boom

Due to its location in the rain shadow area of the Deccan plateau and the consequent inability to fully capture the bountiful rains which the southwest and northeast monsoons normally bring, the Rayalaseema region had for centuries been starved.

However, over the years, the same vast tracts of barren lands, which entrepreneurs would not even look at, became beehives of industrial activity as the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) government of 2014-19 and the present TDP-led ruling coalition offered attractive incentives and created the necessary infrastructure that brought about an industrial revolution of sorts in this resource-rich yet parched region.

The establishment of India’s only KIA Motors’ car manufacturing plant in Anantapur (the site is now in Sri Sathya Sai district) in 2019 was a trigger for the steady flow of big-ticket investments into this region. Royal Enfield’s entry into Tirupati from Tamil Na-

du, which is the only State where Eicher Motors is currently making the iconic motorcycles, complements the existing automotive ecosystem in Anantapur, positioning the region as a growing hub for vehicle manufacturing.

What clearly clinched all these projects is the government’s focus on ‘ease of doing business’, and its subsequent evolution into the ‘speed of doing business’, and the untiring efforts made by the government through the State Investment Promotion Board to promote Rayalaseema as an investment destination.

While going the whole hog in rolling out the red carpet to investors across the industrial manufacturing spectrum, the government now has its sights fixed on consolidating the region’s leadership in the production of horticulture crops. Accordingly, the food processing sector is being aggressively promoted.

Looking back, it was the JSW Group’s Rayalaseema Steel Plant, for which the foundation was laid on July 3, which gave a fillip to the industrialisation of this region; its investment roll-out for Phase-I is ₹4,500 crore (1 MTPA capacity) out of the overall proposed investment of ₹16,350 crore.

From then on, several new major industries started taking tangible shape in Sri City, adding up to the ‘core manufacturing sector’ in Rayalaseema that gained momentum.

The present government has essentially gone all out to woo investors to this region that was jinxed for decades and the positive outcome of its efforts can be seen in the fact that these projects which were once only on paper have started translating into reality.

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Why India’s youth compete fiercely for government jobs

While the student protests achieved accountability, India must work on reshaping investment and growth to build health, education, and employment

DATA POINT

Shipra Nigam

What began with a single leaked entrance exam paper became, in the student protesters’ own telling, a movement about unemployment, shrinking opportunity, and how much a young person’s future hinges on a handful of competitive examinations.

India has dramatically expanded school and higher education; today’s young Indian is far more educated than her parents. Governments across party lines have invested heavily in skilling, apprenticeships, and vocational training.

However, these investments have collided with a labour market incapable of absorbing the aspirations they helped create. Of about 307 million people aged 15 to 29, some 141 million are in the labour force and 127 million are employed. Yet only about 15 million, fewer than one in eight, hold a regular salaried job with a contract and social security – what most would regard as a ‘good job’ with fair pay, social protection, decent working conditions, and career progression. This scarcity creates two forms of distress, often mistaken as separate problems.

At one end are young people who leave school early. Among Indians aged 15-29, whose education is largely complete, about 39% have not finished secondary school and over half hold no qualification beyond Class 10. Most are employed; joblessness among the middle-educated is below 5%. However, they work in informal, low-paid, and often subsistence jobs as casual labourers; are self-employed; or are unpaid workers in family farms and businesses (Chart 3).

A worker who completed only Class 8 earns roughly ₹12,300 a month, and finishing secondary school adds barely another

₹1,000. For many young women, this arithmetic ends in withdrawal: with wages this low, marriage and unpaid care win. Over two in five are neither working nor studying, against fewer than one in 10 men.

At the other end are graduates. While conventional analyses often state that educated youth are rejecting work by holding out for comfortable jobs, the data says otherwise. Graduates face the highest unemployment rate of any group at 22.7%, more than three times that of those who never completed school (Chart 1). They are only 17% of India’s youth population, but 56% of all unemployed young people. While expectations matter, it is far lesser than what the “choosy graduate” narrative suggests. Only about 22% of the labour force earns more than ₹15,000 a month, with nearly 55% earning below ₹9,000. Only about 17 out of 100 graduates secure the salaried employment a degree promises (Chart 2).

India, then, has roughly 15 million meaningful jobs and 300 million young people.

The appeal of government jobs

Hence, the extraordinary importance of government recruitment examinations. They are among the few routes to secure work for first-generation graduates who do not have the money for elite or foreign degrees, and the networks of class, caste, and family that shape private-sector hiring networks which are far less open to marginalised households, regardless of talent. These exams promise to judge candidates by performance alone. In 2024, roughly 30 lakh candidates competed for about 17,700 government posts; about 170 candidates for every vacancy.

Part of the problem is that the transition from school to work is itself broken. Fieldwork by JustJobs Network particularly highlights the wage-expectation mismatch. Young people express clear ambitions but cannot name the course or occupation that would get them

there; and when a job appears, the entry-level pay of ₹10,000-15,000 a month falls well below the ₹20,000-25,000 graduates say they need even locally. Moreover, a job requiring migration is worth taking only at a pay of ₹30,000-₹40,000. Faced with no visible path, many rationally default to a general degree and the examination queue.

These failures are symptoms of a deeper structural problem. India’s economy has become efficient at generating output, but less so at generating meaningful employment. Through much of the 2010s, growth remained strong while employment stagnated; since 2019, much of the increase has reflected workers returning to low-productivity agriculture rather than moving into better-paying jobs. Investment has favoured capital- and technology-intensive sectors, with rising automation creating relatively fewer jobs.

Public investment has risen significantly, but it has flowed more into physical infrastructure than into health and education systems. India spends about 2.7% of its GDP on education, well below the national target of 6%, and about 1.9% on health, short of the 2.5% its National Health Policy set for 2025.

None of this is the fault of the young people who took to the streets. The school-leaver in unpaid family work and the graduate on her fifth attempt face the same shortage from opposite ends. Neither lacks effort. What is scarce is not determination but good quality jobs.

The students achieved what a protest can: accountability for an immediate failure, and national attention for a larger crisis. But no recruitment reform can change the arithmetic of 170 applicants for every vacancy. The deeper challenge is to reshape growth itself.

Until growth generates opportunity as fast as education generates aspiration, India’s young will keep waiting for the economy to catch up with their ambitions.

Chasing opportunity

Data were sourced from the Periodic Labour Force Survey, the Economic Survey and national accounts; and field research by JustJobs Network. Dr. Shipra Nigam is a Research Director at JustJobs Network



CHART 1: Graduates in the age group of 15-29 face the highest unemployment rate at 22.7%, more than three times that of those who never completed school

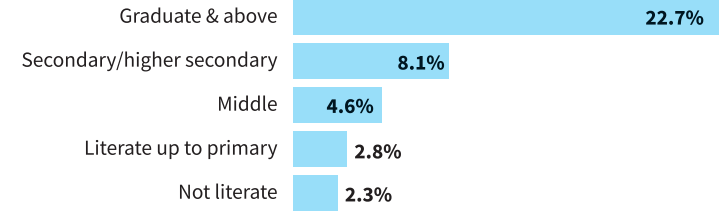


CHART 2: Education barely pays until one gets a degree, as the average monthly earnings of young workers by highest-level of education shows (In ₹)

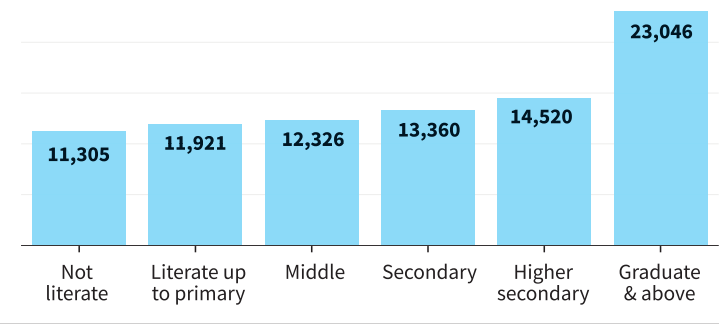


CHART 3: Only one in eight workers hold a ‘good job’. The share of employed youth (aged 15-29) by status of employment

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO JULY 28, 1976

Concordance of Indus script to be published

Madras, July 27: The Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Bombay, will publish the Concordance of the Indus script by a new process, incorporating additional study material.

More than 9,000 “seals”, with signs and symbols of the Indus script have been found at the sites of Mohenjo Daro and Harappa (now in Pakistan) and in Kalibanga in Rajasthan. These valuable finds throw significant light on the Indus valley civilisation dating back to 4,000 years. Recently, Finnish scholars studied them and prepared a concordance, with the help of a computer.

The Russians have also brought out a publication in their own language.

An Indian scholar, Mr. I. Mahadevan is now trying to publish the same, using the computer technique, but adopting a new method. Under this “computerised photo composition printing” process, being attempted for the first time in India, all the basic symbols in the Indus script will be drawn by an artist and the same will be microfilmed. The text, the positions, the statistical analysis of signs and other relevant information, will be typed and recorded on electronic tapes. The entire matter will then be fed into the press.

Each sign will have a code number. The computer will select the appropriate signs from the micro-film and feed them into the press by the photo composition method. By this, the entire text of the concordance, brought upto date, running to about 700 pages, will be printed in a short time and made available at a comparatively cheap price.

The Finnish scholars adopted the computer plotting method in which the electronic gadget itself drew each and every sign. Under the new technique, one symbol in the micro-film can be used for several impressions.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JULY 28, 1926

£6,800 for “Pilgrim’s progress”

London, July 27: The first edition of the Pilgrim’s Progress was auctioned at Sotheby’s for £6,800. The purchaser was Mr. Quaritch. Only four other perfect copies are known.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Income tax returns filed for assessment year 2026-27

4 in crores. More than four crore income tax returns have been filed so far for the 2026-27 assessment year, the Income Tax Department said. The department urged taxpayers to file ITR-1 (Sahaj) and ITR-2 before the July 31 deadline. ITR-1 is meant for eligible resident individuals with an annual income of up to ₹50 lakh from specified sources. PTI

Death toll in attack by armed assailants on Nigerian village

30 At least 30 people were killed when armed men attacked the Naridon village in Nigeria's Kaduna state, according to residents. The assailants reportedly opened fire and set houses ablaze during the overnight raid. Eight children were among those killed, while four others were injured. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack. REUTERS

People charged alongside Hasina by Bangladesh tribunal

40 Prosecutors at Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal filed charges against former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and 40 others in a crimes against humanity case linked to the 2013 police crackdown on a Hefazat-e-Islam rally in Dhaka. The tribunal also issued arrest warrants for the fugitives, while nine accused are already in custody awaiting trial. PTI

Pending consumer cases threshold for forum rationalisation

1000 disputes. The Supreme Court has allowed States with fewer than 1,000 pending consumer cases to abolish some district consumer forums and transfer those cases to serving judicial officers, subject to prior approval from the jurisdictional high courts. The direction aims to improve the dispute redressal mechanisms. PTI

Death toll from Ukrainian drone strikes on Russia

5 Ukrainian drone strikes on Russia killed five people, including a child, in the Rostov region, according to Russian officials. Moscow said that it intercepted 276 drones overnight, while Ukraine said it struck an export terminal in Rostov and oil facilities in the Yaroslavl and Udmurtia regions as part of its long-range attacks. AFP
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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The next chapter for Education Ministry

As Pralhad Joshi takes charge of the Education Ministry, several key 'reforms' remain under way, including the National Curriculum Framework, the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, the three-language formula, and new teacher-training initiatives in school education

EXPLAINER

M. Kalyanaraman

The story so far:

Pralhad Joshi, the new Union Minister for Education, inherits a range of structural changes to Indian education initiated by Dharmendra Pradhan.

Mr. Pradhan's exit as Education Minister has been under a cloud, but his five-year tenure was marked by a ramping up of efforts to implement the National Education Policy 2020, which the Union Cabinet had accepted a year before he took charge. Earlier, at the Petroleum Ministry, he had made his mark on programme implementation by delivering eight crore LPG connections to poor households in three years against a four-year target.

From the National Curriculum Framework, flexible learning and multidisciplinary, and the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill (VBSA), to PM SHRI, the three-language formula and new teacher-training initiatives in school education, his Ministry was constantly in the news for introducing "reforms." Common threads ran through them: performance evaluation and accountability, skilling-education convergence, promotion of a certain vision of Indianness, ambition undercut by implementation challenges, and a push for uniformity that critics called centralisation and a disregard for diversity. Almost all remain works-in-progress that the new Education Minister will have to carry forward.

NEP's recommendations on foundational literacy

Through Nipun Bharat, formally launched by Mr. Pradhan's predecessor on the heels of pandemic-era learning losses, the government was finally acting on decades of evidence from surveys by voluntary organisations that India's schoolchildren



Union Minister Pralhad Joshi took additional charge of the Ministry of Education on July 26. ANI

were lagging far behind in reading and math, despite formally graduating year after year. It seeks to ensure every child attains foundational literacy and numeracy – a concept advocated by NEP – by the end of Grade 3, by 2026-27. ASER 2024 showed a seven-percentage-point gain in numeracy since 2018, and PARAKH 2024 found Grade 3 students who benefited from the mission's first three years, outperforming Grades 6 and 9 in language and math. Yet fewer than a quarter of students nationally could read a Grade 2 text, and Grade 5 levels remained roughly where they were pre-pandemic – a sign of implementation gaps that may well necessitate a Nipun Bharat 2.0.

The push to boost teaching quality

Though standards for teachers are common in advanced nations, the National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) is India's first initiative to assess and classify teachers – as proficient, expert or advanced – against uniform national standards, with career

progression tied to this ladder. The National Mentoring Mission, meant to identify mentor teachers to guide others up this ladder through nomination and volunteering, is being rolled out with online sessions, but awareness among the country's one crore teachers remains low and impact assessments are yet to be formalised. NPST itself has not been rolled out, leaving teachers little incentive to engage with the mentoring sessions.

Key changes attempted in higher education

Some initiatives drew sharper controversy. The 2025 draft UGC regulations on appointing teachers, Vice-Chancellors and staff faced strong opposition – notably for giving governors a decisive say in Vice-Chancellor appointments and for removing the cap on contractual professorships. Separately, the UGC's new undergraduate and postgraduate degree rules, built around flexibility and multidisciplinary to create a skilled workforce, have been formally in force since the 2025 academic year – but

institutions across States are still barely grasping radical concepts such as a commerce student studying science, or transferring credits across colleges via the National Credit Framework.

An example of education-skilling convergence is the Swayam Plus platform, which offers over 500 industry-developed courses across 15 sectors, including emerging technologies. Some 6.5 lakh have registered for these courses. The new modules under "AI for All" have reportedly drawn one lakh registrations. Courses such as AI for Physics, AI for Chemistry, AI in Accounting, AI for Educators, and AI/ML using Python are intended to be skilling courses for professionals that are supposed to make them job ready. The key gap is that most colleges that come under State universities are often resistant to changing the idea of giving a package deal and accept flexibility in accepting credits. There is an awareness gap, too.

While the higher education initiatives appear aspirational and sound grand on paper, there is little or no funding allocation to State universities to accomplish such flexibility. The VBSA in fact has no grant giving function – a key element of the University Grants Commission that it seeks to replace.

The controversy over language policy

Mr. Pradhan also pushed to steamroll NEP adoption – particularly the three-language policy – by tying central funding for primary education schemes to compliance by States. Tamil Nadu remains a holdout, though West Bengal's new government has accepted it. In CBSE schools, Mr. Pradhan directly mandated the learning of two *Bharatiya* languages from Classes 6 to 12, prioritising Indian languages over English. Some relief has been granted to current students, but the government has held firm on this as the norm going forward – even though NEP, in the same breath as it champions Indian languages, also emphasises the learning of English and other foreign languages.

THE GIST

▼ Dharmendra Pradhan's exit as Education Minister has been under a cloud, but his five-year tenure was marked by a ramping up of efforts to implement the National Education Policy 2020.

▼ Pradhan pushed to steamroll NEP adoption – particularly the three-language policy – by tying central funding for primary education schemes to compliance by States.

What is India's policy on urea production?

What are the key changes in the National Investment Policy for Urea 2026?

A. M. Jigeesh

Amid concerns of fertilizer shortage during the ongoing kharif season due to the situation in West Asia, greater demand because of *El Niño* and complaints of over-use of chemical fertilizers such as urea, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs recently approved the National Investment Policy for Urea (NIPU)-2026.

The new policy is aimed at self-reliance in urea production, a sector which is dependent on imports. According to the Government, the policy will encourage new investments in the urea sector for setting up the gas-based urea manufacturing units in the country.

The key changes in the policy, compared to the existing policy, include the separation of fixed and variable costs for greater transparency, introduction of a viable Return on Equity (RoE) band with a floor at 12% and a ceiling at 16%, and

mitigation of foreign exchange risk through conversion of fixed cost into Indian rupees after four years based on prevailing exchange rates.

How has the urea policy evolved?

The Union Government had announced such a policy for urea sector in 2012, 2013 and it was amended in October 2014 to facilitate fresh investment.

Six new urea units have been set up under the 2012 policy, which includes four set up through Joint Venture Companies (JVC) of nominated PSUs and two set up by the private companies. At present, there are 33 operational urea manufacturing units with total reassessed/installed capacity of 269.42 Lakh Metric Tonnes (LMT), according to the Union Fertilizers Ministry.

"There is a need to increase the indigenous production of Urea. There is a gap in the indigenous production and demand of urea in the country which is filled by the import of urea," the

Government had said.

The Government amended the policy further in May 2015 for the existing 25 gas-based urea units and it led to additional production of urea by 20-25 LMT as compared to the production during 2014-15 annually.

From 225 LMT per annum during 2014-15, the current production from all these units has reached 314.07 LMT during 2023-24. "During 2025-26, 293.30 LMT of Urea was produced in the country," the Government says.

What is India's fertilizer subsidy bill?

The total fertilizers subsidy in 2025-26 is ₹ 2,17,281.10 crore. In 2024-25, it was ₹1,77,162.06 crore. Out of this, the urea subsidy alone for 2025-26 was ₹1,42,175.74 crore and for 2024-25 it was ₹1,24,319.50 crore. For phosphorus, and potassium, the subsidy component is ₹74,999.99 crore and ₹52,810 crore respectively. For promotion of organic fertilizers, the Government provided a subsidy of

₹105.37 crore and ₹32.56 crore in the last two financial years.

How is urea made available?

According to the data provided by the Government in Parliament, as on March 3, 2026, the country has the requirement of 370.84 LMT of urea for the kharif season. The availability is 432.44 LMT, out of which 381.59 LMT will be for sale under Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) system where all subsidised fertilizers will be sold to buyers is made through Point of Sale (PoS) devices "installed at each retailer shop and the beneficiaries are identified through Aadhaar Card, KCC, Voter Identity Card etc". In 2024-25, the requirement was 364.01 LMT and availability was 443.83 LMT.

The Government claims that it has taken steps to promote the balanced and efficient use of fertilizers. "The Government is promoting Integrated Nutrient Management (INM), which advocates the judicious and scientific integration of organic sources, chemical fertilizers, and biological inputs for efficient and sustainable nutrient management," the Ministry said adding that the INM aims to meet the nutrient requirements of crops in an economical and environmentally sustainable manner while maintaining long-term soil fertility. It had also experimented with Nano Urea, which is yet to get popularity among farmers, apparently after controversies over its scientific efficacy and result.

THE GIST

▼ The Centre recently approved the National Investment Policy for Urea (NIPU)-2026, which is aimed at self-reliance in urea production, a sector which is dependent on imports.

▼ The Union Government had announced such a policy for urea sector in 2012, 2013 and it was amended in October 2014 to facilitate fresh investment.

CACHE

What can be done to address the CBSE evaluation controversy?

The Supreme Court’s concern over ‘frustrated young minds’ has renewed focus on the unresolved CBSE On-Screen Marking (OSM) controversy. A simple SOP could still restore fairness, accountability, and public trust in digital evaluation.

Rajeev Kumar

India witnessed two major examination-related controversies in the summer of 2026–NEET and the Central Board of Secondary Education’s (CBSE) On-Screen Marking (OSM) crisis. Both predominantly affected Class XII students. In both cases, the then Union Education Minister assured the nation that no student would suffer injustice. However, the national response to the two controversies differed sharply.

Alleged irregularities in NEET, involving admissions to about 1.4 lakh medical seats, rightly led to Re-NEET 2026, nationwide debate, judicial scrutiny, organisational restructuring, and policy reforms on an unprecedented scale. In contrast, the unresolved CBSE-OSM controversy, which affected nearly 18 lakh Class XII students, received comparatively little public attention despite its much wider academic impact.

Around 98 lakh answer scripts had already been digitised under OSM system. Yet only about 4 lakh students could access nearly 11 lakh evaluated scripts, leaving around 14 lakh students without a meaningful opportunity to verify their evaluation or seek correction of genuine errors. Complaints about portal glitches, payment failures, blurred scans, missing pages, mismatches in answer sheets, and other procedural deficiencies remained largely unaddressed. Even the limited scrutiny that followed revealed substantial mark revisions after re-evaluation, raising serious questions about the robustness of the review process.

The issue eventually reached the Supreme Court through a public interest litigation (PIL). Referring to the “frustration of young children” and the “creeping problems” in the OSM process, the Court highlighted concerns that went beyond individual grievances to the integrity of the evaluation system itself.

The central issue is no longer whether mistakes occurred. It is whether every student was given an equal opportunity to verify the evaluation, identify genuine errors, and have them corrected. This transparency gap can still be bridged through a simple, practical, and time-bound reform.

Why was re-evaluation uptake so low?

The limited number of students who reached the re-evaluation stage reflected structural flaws in the OSM review process. Unlike the earlier pen-and-paper system, where answer scripts had to be retrieved and digitised on request, every OSM answer script had already been digitised during evaluation. In principle, every student could therefore have been given immediate access to an authenticated digital copy of the evaluated answer script.

Instead, the OSM review process required students to apply, pay the prescribed fee, and rely on an online portal to access records that were already in digital form. They also had to verify the completeness and authenticity of their answer scripts before seeking re-evaluation. However, portal glitches, payment failures, delayed access, and overlapping verification and re-evaluation timelines left little time to detect and



Sparse attention: The CBSE-OSM crisis, which affected nearly 18 lakh Class XII students, received comparatively little public attention. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

report deficiencies before the review window closed.

As a result, access to re-evaluation depended more on overcoming procedural and technical barriers than on the merit of a student’s grievance. While a small fraction of students completed the process, the overwhelming majority never had the opportunity to determine whether genuine evaluation errors had affected their results. In a digital evaluation system, transparency should begin with universal access to evaluated answer scripts, not with procedural hurdles that deny students an equal opportunity to seek redressal.

What remains unresolved in the OSM crisis?

The answer scripts that underwent independent scrutiny revealed serious concerns, including blurred scans, missing pages, mismatches in answer sheets, and substantial mark revisions after re-evaluation. In one widely reported case, a student’s History marks increased from 74 to 97, and in another, a student was elevated to the position of a CBSE topper. Such outcomes demonstrate that the review process could correct significant evaluation errors – but only for those who managed to access it. If serious deficiencies emerged from this limited scrutiny, it is reasonable to ask what a universal review might have revealed, leaving open the possibility of a much larger Pandora’s box.

The unresolved issue is the absence of equal opportunity. Students who could not access their evaluated answer scripts were denied the chance to verify whether similar errors had affected their own

results. In a digital evaluation system, transparency cannot remain selective. Unless every student has a fair opportunity to verify the accuracy of the evaluation, public confidence in the OSM system will remain incomplete.

Can the crisis still be resolved?

Since every answer script already exists in digital form, CBSE can still restore transparency through a simple ‘seven-day framework’. On the first day, authenticated digital copies of evaluated answer scripts should be made available to all students. The next three days should be devoted to verifying the completeness and authenticity of the scripts, including identifying blurred scans, missing pages, omitted supplementary sheets, and mismatches in the answer sheets. After rectifying any verified deficiencies, the remaining four days should be reserved for re-evaluation of genuine grievances.

At the end of the process, CBSE should publish anonymised statistics on verification requests, deficiencies detected, re-evaluations conducted, and mark revisions made. This framework requires no new technology or major expenditure. It simply ensures that every student has an equal opportunity to verify the fairness of the evaluation, thereby strengthening transparency, accountability, and public confidence in the OSM system.

Who is accountable?

The OSM controversy is no longer merely a technical issue; it is a question of governance and accountability. Responsibility rests with the CBSE, which was expected to design, monitor, and

continuously improve the evaluation process, as well as with the Ministry of Education for effective oversight. The inability to address systemic deficiencies and restore students’ confidence points to shortcomings in institutional governance.

The Central Information Commission (CIC), exercising its powers under Section 25(5) of the RTI Act, had already advised CBSE to frame comprehensive SOPs, describing them as “the dire need of today’s scenario”. Yet these SOPs remain unpublished. The priority now is to implement a transparent and robust framework that ensures every student has an equal opportunity to verify the fairness and accuracy of the evaluation.

What can be the way forward?

The new Union Minister for Education now has an opportunity to bridge the transparency gap in the OSM system. The proposed ‘seven-day transparency framework’ offers a practical, low-cost roadmap to ensure universal access to evaluated answer scripts, timely verification, and transparent grievance redressal.

The credibility of the OSM system will ultimately be judged by its ability to deliver transparency, fairness, and equal opportunity to every student. If these reforms are implemented with urgency, the Supreme Court’s “frustrated young minds” can become millions of smiling faces, confident that their performance has been evaluated fairly, transparently, and justly.

(Prof. Rajeev Kumar is a former Computer Science Professor at IIT Kharagpur, IIT Kanpur, BITS Pilani, and JNU, and a former scientist at DRDO and DST.)



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

S. Upendran

What is the meaning and origin of “not be up to scratch”? (M. Ganesh, Mysore)

When you say that something is “not up to scratch” it means that it is not up to the mark. It is not of an acceptable standard or quality. Here are some examples.

I find that Alok’s designs aren’t up to scratch. The tests showed that the new recruits were not up to scratch.

This is an idiom that comes from the world of boxing. In the old days when boxing was still a primitive sport, a line was drawn in the centre of the ring. The line was called a “scratch”. Nowadays whenever a boxer is knocked down during the bout, all he/she has to do is to stand up before the referee counts to ten. During the early days of boxing, the contestant who had been knocked down had to demonstrate that he was in control of his faculties by walking to the line (‘scratch’) within 38 seconds. If the boxer was unable to come up to the ‘scratch’ within the allotted time, then he was considered unfit to continue the fight.

What is the question tag to be used for “I am a boy”? (K. Sathis Kumar, Kasargod)

The question tag that is normally used is “aren’t I?”. This would be considered standard. In informal contexts one could also say “ain’t I?”. The word “ain’t” however is considered non-standard. It is also possible to say “am I not?”

What is the meaning of “carte blanche”? (B. Balaji, Pondicherry)

The first word “carte” is pronounced like the word “cart”. The “a” in “blanche” is pronounced like the “o” in “hot” and “cot”. The final “che” sounds like the “sh” in words like “should”, “shut”, and “ship”. As you have probably guessed, the expression comes from French.

When you give someone “carte blanche”, you give them total freedom to do whatever they want. The literal French meaning of carte blanche is “blank document”. Therefore when you are given “carte blanche” you are given complete freedom or authority to do whatever you think is right. For example: The new Director was given carte blanche to do what he wanted.

Is it OK to say, “Australia’s Northern Territory passed an euthanasia law”? (C. Selvamani, Bangalore)

We generally use the article “an” before words that begin with a vowel sound. Do not get confused between “sound” and “letter”. The words “university” and “unique” begin with a vowel – at least in spelling. But when you pronounce these two words they begin with a consonant sound. Therefore one has to use the indefinite article “a” and not “an” before these two words. We have to say “a unique person” and “a university”. Similarly, the word “euthanasia”, though it begins with a vowel letter, when the word is pronounced, the first sound is a consonant one. Therefore the article that will precede it is “a”. It should be “a euthanasia law”. Euthanasia as you know is sometimes referred to as “mercy killing”. It is the act of painlessly killing an individual who has no hope of recovering from the disease that is slowly killing him. Euthanasia is illegal in most countries. Published in The Hindu on May 29, 2001

THE DAILY QUIZ

With Sarnath becoming India’s 45th UNESCO World Heritage Site, here’s a quiz on the other sites in the country

V.V. Ramanan

QUESTION 1

Apart from the Taj Mahal, which other properties from India were the first to be given UNESCO World Heritage Site status in 1983?

QUESTION 2

What is unique about the Khangchendzonga National Park inscribed to the list in 2014?

QUESTION 3

Name the inscribed property that is spread across Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and

Himachal Pradesh?

QUESTION 4

Name the two sites that were at different times part of ‘World Heritage in Danger’ list?

QUESTION 5

Which site is transnational, being shared with six other countries?

QUESTION 6

Inscribed in 2003, which site exhibits the earliest traces of human life in India?

QUESTION 7

Which Indian currency notes feature the Konark Sun Temple and the Sanchi Stupa?



Visual question: Name this World Heritage Site and the State in which it is located. GETTY IMAGES

Questions and answers to the previous day’s daily quiz: 1. Vincent van Gogh’s painting ‘The Starry Night’ depicts the view from the window of this institution where he was staying. **Ans: The Saint-Paul-de-Mausole asylum in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, France**

2. This fellow artist was invited by Van Gogh to live and work with him in the “Yellow House” at Arles. **Ans: Paul Gauguin**

3. Van Gogh was deeply influenced by Japanese woodblock prints, a style collectively known by this Japanese term. **Ans: Ukiyo-e**

4. Van Gogh’s profession before he decided to become an artist. **Ans: He worked as an art dealer (and later also served as a teacher, bookseller’s assistant and lay preacher)**

5. Van Gogh died in July 1890 in this French village. **Ans: Auvers-sur-Oise**

Visual: This is generally believed to be the only painting Vincent van Gogh sold during his lifetime. Identify it. **Ans: The Red Vineyard (The Red Vineyard at Arles)**

Early birds: Tamal Biswas| K.N. Viswanathan| Erfanally Oosmany| Piyali Tuli| Arun Kumar Singh

Word of the day

Corroborate:

to confirm or support something

Synonyms: endorse, verify

Usage: The findings corroborate earlier research on climate change.

Pronunciation: newsth.live/corroborate

International Phonetic Alphabet: /keɪˈbɒrəreɪt/

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

INBRIEF



Merck inks pact with 4 Indian drugmakers for HIV drug

Pharma major Merck has signed non-exclusive voluntary licensing agreements with Aurobindo Pharma, Cipla, Emcure and Viatris in India to enable supply of its investigational, once-monthly oral HIV pill Alimatravir. The royalty-free agreements with the companies will enable supply of generic alimatravir in 129 low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) that account for a substantial majority of new HIV diagnoses globally, Merck said recently.

Thai FDA approves new treatment for gonorrhoea

Thailand’s Food and Drug Administration has approved Nuzolvence (zolidnadacin), a first-in-class oral antibiotic for the treatment of uncomplicated urogenital gonorrhoea for which Dr. Reddy’s Laboratories with support from The GARDP Foundation had led the priority review submission. Thailand is the second country to approve the new chemical entity. Six months ago the U.S. Food and Drug Administration had approved the drug.

Bondada acquires 60% in Maharashtra solar project SPV

Bondada Engineering has acquired 60% stake in Onix IPP, a special purpose vehicle implementing a 225 MW (AC) solar photovoltaic power project in Maharashtra under a government scheme. The acquisition aligns with Bondada Group’s plans to diversify beyond EPC execution into renewable energy asset ownership and creation, thus generating predictable annuity-based revenues and complementing its annuity income from Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) assets.

Dual immunotherapy from Bristol Myers to treat cancer

Bristol Myers Squibb (BMS) unveiled RELOPDUO, a fixed-dose combination of nivolumab and relatlimab) in India following approval from the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO). According to the company the therapy is India’s first LAG-3-based dual immunotherapy and is indicated for adults and children aged 12 years and above with unresectable or metastatic melanoma.

Allana Consumer to boost frozen food business in India

Allana Consumer Products Ltd., a part of the 161-year-old Allana Group, one of India’s largest processed food products and agri-commodity exporters, said it will boost domestic frozen food business to cater to rising demand from households and hotels, restaurants and cafes by unveiling new products, a company official said. “Our objective is to make high-quality frozen food more accessible while building a reliable farm-to-freezer value chain,” said Parag Vishnu Gadre, business head, fruits, vegetables and ice cream division, Allana Consumer Products Ltd.

CIL’s Q1 net almost flat on costs, to pay ₹5.5 dividend

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

State-owned miner Coal India’s Ltd. (CIL) net profit in the June-end quarter stayed almost flat year-on-year (YoY) as cost of explosives and industrial diesel, among other essentials required for mining, cumulatively rose in double digits amid the West Asia conflict even as it sought to absorb the impact of the elevated pricing. Net profit stood at ₹8,850 crore, increasing by a marginal 0.7% YoY. Expenses climbed 27% YoY to ₹3,260 crore. The miner declared an interim dividend of ₹5.50 per equity share.

HDFC fines CEO and CFO ₹1 lakh each for ‘business overreach’

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

HDFC Bank imposed a fine of ₹1 lakh each on MD-CEO, CFO and group head, retail assets for ‘business overreach’ after an internal review into deposit arrangements with MSRDC. “The bank announces the conclusion of an internal review process pertaining to the arrangement with Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation (MSRDC) for garnering deposits in 2017 and 2021. Based on the findings and recommendation of the Special Disciplinary Committee of Independent Directors, the board concluded the conduct of the

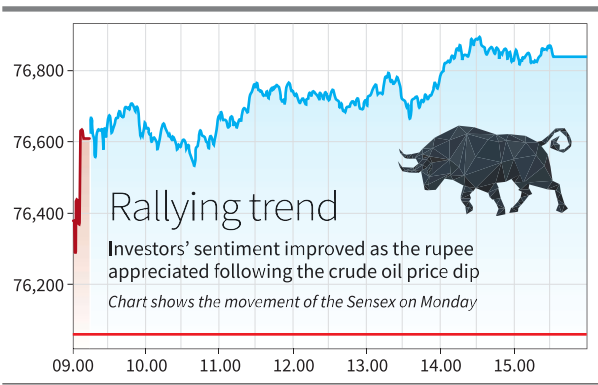
BSE adds ₹5.1 lakh crore as rupee appreciates, crude dips

Broad-based buying and improving global sentiment lead the rally; market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms surges ₹5.1 lakh crore to ₹480.8 lakh crore, following the rebound in equities

Ashokamithran T.
MUMBAI

A sharp fall in crude oil prices amid easing tensions in West Asia and appreciation of rupee, propped up India’s equity markets with Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) gaining more than 1%, adding ₹5.10 lakh crore in capitalisation. The 30-share BSE Sensex closed 1.02% higher at 76,835.78 points and the 50-share National Stock Exchange (NSE) Nifty surged 228.50 points, or 0.96% to 23,995.95 points.

Broad-based rally More than 2,250 stocks increased of the 3,446 that traded on Monday and all the sectoral indices improved, suggesting a broad-based rally. The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies surged ₹5.1 lakh crore to ₹480.8 lakh crore, following the rebound in equities. “The market has bounced back sharply from near the cluster support of around 23,600 (previous opening upside gap of June 15 and ascending trend line) and is now on the verge of breaking above the immediate resistance of 24,000-24,100 levels,” said Nagaraj Shetti, Senior Technical Research Analyst at HDFC Securities. The optimism can be attributed to the 61 paise ap-



preciation in the value of the Indian rupee, pushing it to ₹95.96 a dollar as crude oil dipped to \$86.5 a barrel, 6% below the previous session. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 96.18 and touched the low of 96.27 and high of 95.78 against the greenback during the session, finally settling at 95.92 (provisional) against the dollar, up 61 paise against its previous closing

level. According to forex traders, the local currency also support from a firm trend in domestic equities and weakness in the US dollar against major currencies. Further, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) governor said that Indian banks had drawn FCNR(B) deposits worth \$32 billion so far, which is at least half of \$50 billion to \$70 billion that the monetary authority plans to garner from NRIs, in a bid to reign in the rupee depreciation. “Despite continued vulnerability to oil related volatility arising from geopolitical tensions, technical indicators have shifted materially. Spot USDINR has slipped below its ascending channel support, signalling potential continuation toward 95.60 and 95.40 in the sessions ahead,” said Dilip Parmar, Senior Research Analyst at HDFC Securities. (With inputs from PTI)

‘Data centre capacity to jump to 12 GW as AI fuels demand’

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

India’s operational data centre capacity is projected to jump more than five-fold to 12 GW by 2030 from 2.2 GW in 2025, driven by rapid adoption of artificial intelligence (AI), hyperscale cloud investments and the expanding digital

economy, according to a Wood Mackenzie. AI-dedicated capacity is expected to rise multifold to 6,546 MW by 2030 from 275 MW in 2025, while data centre electricity demand is forecast to grow to 191 terawatt-hours (TWh) by 2040 from 10 TWh in 2025, its report said. “India’s data centre mar-

ket becomes a structural investment thesis,” said Souhardya Pal, Research Associate at Wood Mackenzie. “The convergence of hyperscale capital, AI workload growth and a decade of policy support have created the conditions for India to rival any market in Asia-Pacific. The question for developers and inves-

tors is no longer whether to enter India, but where and how.” **Digital economy** India’s digital economy, valued at ₹32 lakh crore in 2025 and accounting for about 12% of GDP, together with more than 1.03 billion active internet users and around 22 billion monthly

UPI transactions, is driving demand for data centre infrastructure. India’s domestic AI market is projected to reach ₹11.7 lakh crore by 2032. Wood Mackenzie said Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu currently account for about 65% of installed IT load, but future investment is expected to expand into

A.P., Telangana, U.P. and Karnataka. These emerging markets are attracting significant commitments from global hyperscalers, including Amazon Web Services and Google, alongside domestic operators such as AdaniConnex, which has announced a development pipeline of 2.6 GW.

TMB Q1 net crosses ₹400 cr; now eyes overseas expansion

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Tamilnad Mercantile Bank Ltd (TMB) has reported a 34.97% year on year (YoY) increase in net profit to ₹411.51 crore for the quarter ended June compared with ₹304.89 crore in the corresponding quarter last year.

“This is the highest-ever net profit in the bank’s history. For the first time, we have crossed the ₹400 crore mark,” said Salee S. Nair, managing director and CEO of the bank. The private sector lender’s net interest income increased to ₹765.08 crore from ₹579.55 crore, a growth of 32.01% YoY. Net interest margin im-



Net interest income rose 32% YoY to ₹765.08 crore from ₹579.55 crore a year earlier.

proved to 4.29% from 3.84%, up 45 basis points. **Deposits rise 20%** The Thoothukudi-based headquartered bank’s total deposits rose 19.71% YoY, to ₹64,409 crore, while advances grew 27.01% YoY to ₹57,306 crore.

“As we move through FY27, our priorities remain centered on deepening customer relationships, strengthening our retail, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and agriculture franchises, expanding our deposit base and accelerating investments in technology and digital capabilities to enhance customer experience and operational efficiency,” Mr. Nair said. “The bank still does not have an international presence, and that’s something we are seriously looking at. We are evaluating three specific territories like Malaysia. Singapore and West Asia particularly Dubai...but that’s in the future.”

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

Digital insurance platform Policybazaar said it started offering U.S. dollar-denominated term insurance plans of partner insurers for non-resident Indians (NRIs) through the International Financial Services Centre, GIFT City, Gujarat. This allows NRIs to pay premium and receive claim payouts in U.S. dollars, addressing one of the biggest but least discussed financial risks faced by Indians living overseas – currency depreciation, it said. The launch reflects the growing role of GIFT City in bringing global financial products closer to the Indian diaspora. Over the last



New vistas: A general view of the Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFT City) in Gandhinagar, Gujarat.

few years, the IFSC enabled several banking, investment and insurance solutions traditionally available only via overseas financial centres. Global Indians can now access internationally-aligned financial products within India’s regulatory framework, Policybazaar added.

Chief business officer-Life Insurance, Policybazaar Vivek Jain said “GIFT City has created the foundation for a new generation of financial products for global Indians. Our role at Policybazaar is to ensure the opportunities reach customers in a simple and accessible manner.”

‘Top 7 Indian cities face retail space crunch in malls’

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Fresh supply of retail spaces in shopping malls fell 57% to 0.9 million sq ft during January-June across seven major cities due to delays in construction activities, according to Anarock.

The new supply of retail spaces stood at 2.8 million sq. ft in the year-ago period. The seven major cities are – Mumbai, Delhi-NCR, Bengaluru, Pune, Hyderabad, Chennai and Kolkata. Real estate consultant Anarock reported that gross leasing of retail spaces in malls stood at about 4.1 million sq. ft in the first half of the 2026 calendar year, a 24% decline from the corresponding period of the preceding year. The consultant attribut-



The lower supply of retail spaces is due to various reasons such as land availability and delay in government approvals. FILE PHOTO

ed the lower supply of retail spaces in malls to various reasons, including land availability, rising land cost, higher capex commitment compared to housing projects and the delay in government approvals. Anuj Kejriwal, CEO – Retail & CEO – Europe, Middle East & Africa at Anarock Group, said, “The supply problem is cumula-

tive and escalating - data of India’s top seven cities over the past 16 years shows a persistent mismatch between Grade A retail supply and leasing demand.” While new mall completions fluctuated sharply on a year-on-year basis, he noted that the leasing demand has steadily absorbed available Grade A space, pushing vacancy rates lower.

“We now have a chronically supply-constrained market where retailers’ biggest challenge is not drawing shoppers but finding the right spaces to serve them in,” Mr. Kejriwal said. On the demand-supply scenario of the past three calendar years, Anarock said the top seven cities added 5.3 million sq ft of new Grade A retail supply in 2023 against gross leasing of 6.5 million sq ft. During 2024, new supply fell sharply to just 1.1 million sq. ft, while leasing stayed at 6.5 million sq. ft. While new mall supply recovered partially in 2025 with 5.2 million sq. ft of new completions, leasing surged to a record 13 million sq. ft, the consultant said. “The shortage of Grade A mall space is not simply a

function of developers failing to respond to demand. Building a successful large-format retail asset is considerably more complex than delivering other forms of real estate,” Anarock observed. The consultant noted that the development of a Grade A mall requires a large and contiguous land parcel in a strategically located catchment. “The availability of suitable land is itself a constraint in established urban markets, while rising land costs can make new projects difficult to structure. Approval timelines, financing conditions and construction schedules can further delay project delivery,” Mr. Kejriwal said. The vacancy levels have dropped to 6.7% in H1 2026, according to Anarock.

Elusive founder Sky Xu in spotlight as Shein seeks Hong Kong listing



Little detail: A customer holds shopping bags with a Shein logo. REUTERS

Reuters
HONG KONG/LONDON

Shein’s draft prospectus for a Hong Kong listing, published on Sunday, offers rare details about the role of its reclusive founder and CEO, Sky Xu. According to the prospectus, Xu, 42, has served as chairman, executive director and chief executive officer “since inception”, in addition to founding the company.

Third IPO attempt

The document does not mention former banker and media executive Donald Tang, who has served as Shein’s executive chairman and public face as it pursued listings in New York and London in recent years. The fast-fashion giant’s planned Hong Kong initial public offering (IPO) marks its third attempt to go public after previous attempts floundered.

Founded in China in 2012 as Sheinside, Shein is nearing a listing that could value it at up to \$50 billion, yet Xu remains extremely private and difficult to access. He has avoided interviews and public events and has no visible online presence.

Shein has declined Reuters’ repeated requests for an interview with Xu and did not respond to questions about the founder and CEO.

Little information on website

Shein has said it aims to increase transparency, but Xu does not feature on its corporate website, where a governance section contains no information about who owns or leads the company. Western stakeholders have not always welcomed Xu’s aloofness. The lack of public information about Shein’s leadership contributed to concerns about its IPO among politicians and campaigners in the United States and Britain.

Xu briefly stepped into the spotlight in February, delivering a speech to policymakers at the Guangdong High-Quality Development Conference about Shein’s investments in its supply chain, which is concentrated among thousands of garment factories in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou.

Scant public detail

Xu was born in 1984 in Zibo, a city in eastern China’s Shandong province. Little else is known about his early years or education, although several Chinese media reports said his mother was a garment factory worker, potentially giving him a nearly insight into the industry he would later help shape. According to the prospectus, Xu and Shein’s three co-founders – Maggie Gu, Molly Miao and Tony Ren – previously worked together at a company that provided search engine marketing services to exporters. The filing also said Xu received a bachelor’s degree in international trade from Qingdao University of Technology in 2007.

According to Shein’s first sustainability report, published in 2022, Xu initially chose Chris as his English name but later changed it to Sky because he felt Chris was not distinctive enough. Sky derives from one of the characters in his Chinese name, Xu Yangtian. An industry source who has known Xu for years described him as patient, modest and pragmatic. One of China’s most prolific collectors of antique coins, Xu remains deeply involved in Shein’s day-to-day operations despite its scale, the source said.

Xu has also made strategic decisions that benefited the company despite short-term disruption, the source said, pointing to his 2015 decision to rebrand the company as Shein despite its already significant user base and online traffic.

Despite Shein’s growing global profile, Xu hesitated for years about taking the company public, the source said, believing it should not rely on outside financing to compete with rivals, particularly PDD Holdings’ discount shopping platform Temu.

Distancing from China

As Shein expanded overseas, the firm took steps to distance itself from China. In 2022, it moved its head quarters to Singapore, although suppliers and warehouses largely remain in China. Staying under the radar may be strategic, a second source close to Xu said, if he wants to minimise the risk of a Chinese government crackdown similar to the one that engulfed Alibaba founder Jack Ma in November 2020, when regulators derailed Ant Group’s \$37 billion IPO.

Trump economy at 18 months is a tale of shocks, resilience, ‘stalled progress’

Government data shows labour force, employment declined since Trump returned to office; payroll reports show manufacturing employment is lower than at end of former American President Joe Biden’s term; inflation remains above Fed’s target; some officials see imminent upside risk

NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters
WASHINGTON

The first 18 months of President Donald Trump’s second term in the White House have seen a series of policy-driven economic shocks, highlighted by the immigration crackdown and higher tariffs that he promised during his 2024 campaign, and an unanticipated war with Iran that has boosted the price of oil and threatened global supply chains. While the U.S. economy overall has withstood the policy changes and Middle East war better than many economists expected, Trump’s vow to lower prices, boost factory jobs and improve life for the middle class has yet to materialize, with the mid-term elections a little more than three months away.

Stalls in many areas

Resilient, yes, but the economy has also stalled in many of the areas where Trump said that mass deportations of undocumented people and higher import taxes would trigger a boom, with the U.S.-Israeli war against Iran intensifying some key risks.

The broadest measure of employment comes from the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ household survey. Changes in population



Dicey gamble: Trump holds tariff chart next to U.S. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick. REUTERS

statistics in early 2026 mean BLS’s published data is not strictly comparable from year to year, showing a sharp drop in employment and the number of people looking for jobs in January largely due to the new controls. But the agency does use the new population estimates for an experimental series that looks back five years to create a consistent data set beginning in April 2020. That data also shows declines in both the labour force and number of people working since Trump’s return to office, a logical development given the efforts to limit immigration and increase deportations. Coupled with an ageing native population, fewer people are available to fill jobs. Trump said his policies



Data shows dips in the labour force and people working since Trump’s return to office, a logical development given steps to limit immigration and increase deportations

would lead to a U.S. manufacturing revival, with jobs to follow. There has been an investment boom – in artificial intelligence data centres whose impact on output and jobs remains to be seen. The AI investment has pushed construction employment higher. But payroll reports show fewer manufacturing jobs than at the end of former President Joe Biden’s adminis-

tration. Biden left the presidency in January 2025. Some of Trump’s priorities are reflected in the jobs data, such as the drop in the number of government workers. But it’s hard to reshape what an economy of 342 million people demands. It’s a society that likes restaurants and bars. And it’s one that is getting older and in need of more healthcare services. Changes in hiring reflect that dynamic.

No lower prices

Inflation was a major campaign theme in 2024, with anger over the COVID-19 pandemic price shock still fresh even as price pressures eased while the Federal Reserve raised interest rates. But Trump’s promise to lower prices was never

Trump may need to allow Chinese minerals as U.S. industry struggles to meet 2027 deadline

INSIGHT

Reuters

U.S. President Donald Trump’s push to end Washington’s reliance on Chinese critical minerals by January is colliding with a stark reality: American miners and processors aren’t ready.

Trump has made U.S. mining and processing of critical minerals a national security priority since returning to office, pouring tens of billions of dollars into nearly 150 mineral companies to loosen China’s grip on supply chains for weapons and other strategic products.

Defence industry and other manufacturers are now just over five months away from a January 1, 2027 deadline under federal regulations to stop purchasing rare earths, magnets, tungsten, molybdenum and tantalum from China, Russia, Iran or North Korea.

Washington has been trying to limit such imports for years but has routinely granted companies waivers because the U.S. supply can’t meet the demand. Trump railed against such waivers in a May 10 post on his TruthSocial platform, saying: “ALL FEDERAL AGENCIES MUST BUY AMERICAN – NO EXCUSES!” Last Monday, he signed an executive order making it even harder for defence contractors to obtain waivers.

But the reality is that U.S. minerals companies are nowhere close to meeting domestic needs, according to interviews with 16 industry executives, investors, analysts and policymakers.



Too precious: Matt Green of MP Materials, displays crushed ore. REUTERS

In 2025, U.S. demand for the most-common type of rare earth magnet, for example, was roughly 48,000 metric tonnes while domestic sources supplied 300 metric tonnes, according to data from the Arthur D. Little consultancy. U.S. firms are on track to have the capacity to produce 5,000 metric tonnes by year-end.

Rare earths, among the 60 minerals considered critical by Washington, must be processed before they are turned into magnets used to make weapons, automobiles, computers and other products.

Tungsten mine

U.S. firms haven’t produced tungsten since 2015 and tantalum since 1959. Guardian Metal Resources is working to open a U.S. tungsten mine by 2028, while Lion Rock Resources is developing a tantalum mine in South Dakota, with no timeline for opening.

Chris Berry, a minerals industry analyst and consultant, said the U.S. industry has little chance of producing enough minerals to end waivers by January.

“It’s going to take many more years to get the needed infrastructure in the

ground to compete,” said Berry. The United States has reserves of most critical minerals; what it lacks is the capacity to mine and process many of the.

China’s domination

China grew to dominate the minerals-refining industry in the late 20th century and controls more than 80% of the sector today. The International Energy Agency warned this month that \$6.5 trillion of global manufacturing is at risk if Beijing imposes export restrictions on rare earths, as it has periodically in recent years.

Asked for comment, the White House referred to Trump’s executive order, which says waivers can only be issued if a contractor shows an “exhaustive effort” to avoid Chinese material and has a timeline for weaning itself off such supply. The Pentagon did not respond to requests for comment. U.S. rare earths investment has been hindered by persistently low prices for many minerals, which Washington blames on China subsidising its producers and flooding the market with cheap products, thus making American projects unprofitable.

China has repeatedly said it abides by World Trade Organization rules on global trade and works to ensure stable markets. A representative for the Chinese embassy in Washington had no further comment. Ucore Rare Metals, a minerals refining startup backed by the Pentagon, has developed a processing technology known as RapidSX that it believes is similar to but faster, cleaner and cheaper than the industry standard solvent extraction.

Pentagon’s demands

Ucore had planned to start refining by 2025 but has reworked its plans due to what it says are changing demands from the Pentagon. It now won’t begin some production until 2027 at the earliest, company CEO Pat Ryan told Reuters.

Stockpiling minerals

The Trump administration in February launched Project Vault, a \$12 billion effort to stockpile critical minerals for American manufacturers. Officials acknowledged in April that they will need to initially buy minerals from “anywhere in the world,” including China.

realistic. Historically, U.S. prices on a broad basis only fall during dire economic times. Lowering inflation is possible, but any improvement under Trump has been modest. The most closely watched price indexes show progress stalling, with inflation still above the Fed’s 2% target, and policymakers concerned about the risks of it moving higher.

Import tariffs added to the price hikes to some degree; oil’s surge to around \$100 a barrel, about 50% more than where it traded before the war in the Middle East began in late February, added to the pressure; and now the demands from the AI build-out are doing the same.

Economists expect relative price shifts. In any given period, certain goods will increase relative to others. But when the increases are big and broad enough, and different items keep rotating through the price-increase cycle, the result is more generalised inflation. Some Fed officials see that scenario as an imminent risk.

Setting aside debate about whether a “K”-shaped income distribution, in which the wealthy and highest earners prosper while lower- and middle-income households fare less well, is fair or sustainable, consumer spending has held up throughout the various Trump-era

shocks.

But it’s unclear how long that trend can continue given that the broadest measure of household spending power – disposable personal income adjusted for inflation – has stalled out and even declined recently. Disposable personal income is what’s left over after taxes and covers wages as well as things like payments from the Social Security pension programme – in effect the money left in a person’s pocket to pay for housing, food and other goods and services.

Affordability issue

Trump has veered from promising to make life more affordable to dismissing that objective as unimportant, calling recently enacted Congressional legislation aimed at improving home affordability “a big yawn” and refusing to sign it. Housing is a difficult issue. Presidents have held out home ownership as a touchstone of individual wealth and success for Americans, but lawmakers have curbed credit standards when markets got frothy and caused a global financial crisis. After years of ultra-low interest rates, the pandemic added further fuel to the U.S. housing market – driving up home prices – and then Fed rate hikes meant to curb inflation made affordability worse by pushing mortgage rates to new highs.

CARACAS

Will not take part in U.S.-backed talks: Venezuela’s Maria Machado



REUTERS

Venezuelan Nobel Peace Prize laureate and government critic Maria Corina Machado said on Sunday she will not be part of U.S.-backed talks with interim President Delcy Rodriguez planned in August. In a statement, Ms. Machado said the Opposition will “not participate” in the “design, development and operation” of the talks. AFP

LONDON

U.K.’s new PM Burnham welcomes Zelenskyy as first foreign visitor

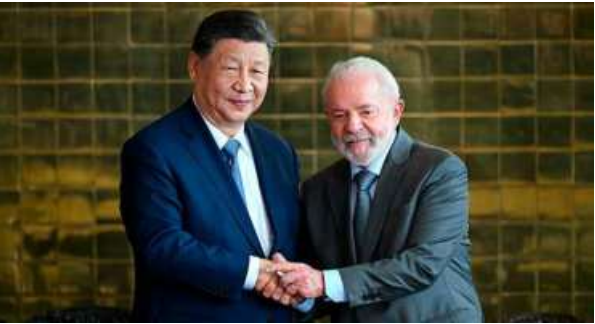


AFF

Britain’s new Prime Minister Andy Burnham welcomed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy as his first international visitor on Monday, in a move reflecting London’s resolute support for Ukraine. “Britain stands with Ukraine, shoulder to shoulder, and our support remains unwavering,” Mr. Burnham said in a statement. REUTERS

BEIJING

China supports Brazil in opposing ‘external interference’: Xi tells Lula



AFF

Chinese President Xi Jinping told Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva on Monday that he supports the country in “opposing external interference”, Beijing’s state media said, reporting a call between the leaders. According to the Brazilian presidency, Mr. Lula “agreed on speeding up talks on the Mercosur-China trade deal”. AFP

RIYADH

Houthis, pro-Iran groups based in Iraq launch drones at Saudi Arabia



AFF

Saudi Arabia said it intercepted drones launched by pro-Iran groups in Iraq on Monday, while Iran-aligned Houthi rebels in Yemen also claimed attacks on Saudi oil infrastructure. The Houthis said they launched drone attacks in response to incursions by the kingdom’s drones. Pro-Iran groups in Iraq have not claimed any attacks. AFP

Red Sea shipping slows after Houthi hits on Saudi Arabia

Reuters
SINGAPORE

Ship traffic through Bab el-Mandeb fell on Sunday after Yemeni Houthis attacked Saudi oil installations along the Red Sea coast, while transit through the Strait of Hormuz stayed low over the weekend, shipping data from Kpler showed on Monday.

Eleven commodity vessels passed through the Bab el-Mandeb strait on Sunday, the lowest level in months, the data showed.

Red Sea traffic has been disrupted off the coast of Yemen since last week by the Iran-aligned Houthis, who want to blockade Saudi exports, expanding the U.S.-Iran conflict that has already choked oil supply through the Strait of Hormuz.



Navy sailors from the Yemen’s Aden-based government seen aboard a vessel patrolling in the Red Sea on Monday. AFP

Seven of the vessels that passed through strait were oil tankers with three of them entering the Red Sea. Two of them are very large crude carriers (VLCCs) heading to the port of Yanbu to load Saudi crude while the third is a Russian-linked ship, the data showed.

Four vessels exited the

Red Sea on Sunday. Another ship is exiting the waterway through the Bab el-Mandeb strait.

Lull in Hormuz

Fewer than 10 commodity vessels passed through the Strait of Hormuz daily over the weekend even though the U.S. and Iran have paused strikes in West Asia, shipping data from Kpler showed.

Seven vessels transited on Sunday including three Iranian-linked oil products tankers that exited the strait, the data showed.

On Saturday, there were only three vessels that passed through with their transponders switched off.

On Friday, seven vessels passed, mostly exiting the Gulf, including two VLCCs carrying crude from Iraq and the UAE and a tanker carrying fuel oil.

Iran says it still controls Hormuz, not involved in negotiations with the U.S.

Six ships turned back after trying to pass the strait without permission, Iran state media reports; amid halt in campaign by both sides, Trump says ‘good chance’ of progress in talks to produce a deal, dismisses concerns on ammunition shortage

Reuters
DUBAI

Iran said on Monday it was still in control of the Strait of Hormuz and not seeking to resume peace talks with the U.S., after President Donald Trump halted a two-week bombing campaign that his top brass told him had run its course.

Following 13 successive nights of bombing that provoked Tehran to fire on U.S. bases, Mr. Trump halted the campaign over the weekend. Iran said it would pause its own attacks for as long as the U.S. pause in bombing endures.

On Monday, Mr. Trump said that diplomacy with



Tehran backdrop: A woman walks near a billboard depicting U.S. President Donald Trump in the Iranian capital on Monday. REUTERS

Iran could produce a deal to end the war, but warned that Washington would resume military strikes if negotiations failed.

“I have a lot of patience... We’ll see what happens. I think there is a

good chance that something could happen,” Mr. Trump told reporters. “If it doesn’t, we go back to doing what we were doing two days ago.”

Mr. Trump’s had suspended the campaign fol-

lowing advice from his top brass that the bombing, aimed at breaking Iran’s grip on strait, had reached the limits of what it could achieve, according to a U.S. official and U.S. media reports.

The official said the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Dan Caine, had also expressed concern over the depletion of air defence weapons.

But Mr. Trump dismissed concerns that five months of war had depleted U.S. munitions.

“We have a lot of ammunition,” he said. “We have a lot of the mid-level stuff too, more than we could ever use, no matter what.”

Earlier in the day, Es-

mail Baghaei, Iran’s Foreign Ministry spokesperson, said in a televised press conference that Iran had not asked to resume peace talks with the U.S.

In a clear bid to signal that the U.S. bombing had failed in its objective, Tehran indicated it was still in control of the crucial waterway. Several Iranian state media outlets carried the same report that Iran had turned around six “offending ships” on Monday that had attempted to cross the strait without its permission. “The traffic route in Hormuz is the route specified by Iran, and other routes are contaminated and have no way out,” the state media reports said.

President-elect says Colombia will cut ties with Cuba, Nicaragua

Agence France-Presse
BOGOTA

Colombia’s hard-right President-elect Abelardo de la Espriella vowed on Sunday to break off diplomatic relations with Cuba and Nicaragua when he takes office on August 7.

Mr. De la Espriella said he will also close 15 consulates and 14 embassies in countries including Algeria, Barbados, Ethiopia, Haiti, Hungary, Senegal and South Africa.

“In my government, there will be no ties with tyrannies,” Mr. De la Espriella said in a social media post, referring to the leftist governments of Cuba and Nicaragua. However,

er, he said the decisions “do not mean breaking off diplomatic relations” with the other countries.

“With the rest of the countries and organizations, Colombia will maintain its international relations and will guarantee attention for its nationals through other embassies,” he said.

The President-elect, whose election campaign centred on “iron fist” security policies, said closing embassies would allow the government to redirect money to security.

Mr. De la Espriella announced plans to open an embassy in Jerusalem in July as he seeks to restore ties with Israel.

A ride out



People forced to leave homes after heavy monsoon rains inundated villages in Muridke in Pakistan’s Punjab province, on Monday. Flood and rain-related incidents have killed 109 people over the past month, according to the country’s disaster management authority. AFP

Syria to seek joint security agreement with Israel: al-Sharaa

Reuters
DAMASCUS

Syria is seeking to reach a security agreement with Israel, Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa said in an interview with Al Jazeera on Sunday.

He said a deal could pave the way for peace between the two countries without compromising Syria’s right to the Golan Heights, an area that Israel captured from Syria in the 1967 Six-Day War and annexed in 1981.

Mr. Sharaa said Syria was trying to involve more countries to pressure Israel to adopt a more balanced policy towards Syria. “We are avoiding getting into

confrontations,” he added. Soon after former President Bashar al-Assad fell to rebel forces under Mr. Sharaa’s leadership in 2024, Israeli troops pushed into Syria and seized strategic territories. Israeli troops moved into a demilitarised zone inside Syria, including the Syrian side of Mount Hermon. Since then, Israel has launched strikes on Syria and detained individuals from within the country.

In a statement on X on Sunday, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres – who is visiting Syria – called for respect for Syria’s sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity.

Sudan’s Army claims control of major highway linking Khartoum to El-Obeid

Agence France-Presse
KHARTOUM

Sudan’s Army has regained control of a key highway linking the capital Khartoum with the flashpoint city of El-Obeid, military sources said on Monday.

Their rival paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have for months amassed troops around El-Obeid, attempting to encircle it ahead of an apparent large-scale assault.

They have now been pushed west, off the 400-kilometre highway that connects Khartoum with the largest city in the embattled Kordofan region.

Hours after the development, paramilitary drone strikes shook El-Obeid. At



Amid ruins: Damaged interiors of a building after it was reportedly targeted by the Rapid Support Forces in El-Obeid on Monday. AFP

dawn, RSF drone strikes tore through two municipal buildings in apparent retaliation.

Crucial link

El-Obeid lies at a key crossroads: its north-south high-

way runs from Khartoum to the rest of Kordofan, while its east-west axis connects RSF strongholds in the Darfur region to Army-controlled central and eastern Sudan.

The highway to Khar-

toum remains closed to civilians, who have for most of the war relied entirely on the eastern road to the White Nile, where the RSF regularly launches deadly drone strikes. The Army advance “opens a second supply route to El-Obeid and beyond”, according to the military source.

The war between the Army and the RSF – former allies before they fell out in a power struggle – erupted in April 2023 and has since killed over 200,000 people, aid workers estimate.

It has also created the world’s largest displacement and hunger crises, with over 33 million people in need of humanitarian aid.

Police arrest 15-year-old after festival shooting in Seattle kills three people

Associated Press
SEATTLE

A suspect arrested after a shooting that killed three people and left at least four others injured at a food festival near Seattle’s Space Needle over the weekend is 15 years old, the city’s Mayor said on Monday.

The teen was being held in juvenile detention for investigation of firearms violations and first-degree assault and was due to appear in court on Monday afternoon, Mayor Katie Wilson said.

Two suspects

Authorities are still looking for a second suspect. Investigators believe the two suspects were shooting at



Police officers at the scene of a mass shooting at the Bite of Seattle food festival in Seattle, United States, on Sunday. GETTY IMAGES

each other. Police did not have a description of the outstanding suspect, Seattle Assistant Police Chief Tyrone Davis said.

“We’re still trying to figure this out,” Mr. Davis said, adding that there was

no ongoing threat to the public.

Two people died at the scene and a third died at a hospital. They were described as two men, ages 19 and 44, and a 56-year-old woman.

The four wounded, including a 2-year-old boy, were hospitalised.

Vendors who fled, abandoning their food booths, were cleaning up on Monday.

A candlelight vigil was planned on Monday night at the centre’s International Fountain.

The gunfire erupted around 6 p.m. on Sunday in the waning hours of the Bite of Seattle, an annual three-day festival that draws hundreds of food and retail vendors and performers.

A large number of police and emergency crews responded and began evacuating the area around the sprawling Seattle Center campus.



Against all odds: Saba Rabah poses for a photograph at the Maghazi camp for Palestinian refugees in Gaza. AFP

Gaza teen triumphs despite war, loss and displacement

Agence France-Presse
MAGHAZI

Just days before her final secondary school examinations, the house opposite the temporary home where 18-year-old Saba Rabah was living in central Gaza was bombed. She and her family fled, leaving behind everything they had. It was only the latest ordeal in a war that had already claimed her father's life, destroyed their family's home and forced them into repeated displacement.

Yet against overwhelming odds, Rabah emerged as the top-ranked student in the science stream of the Palestinian national high school exams, known as Tawjihi – the first to be held in the territory since the war erupted in October 2023.

"I achieved a score of 99.9%, ranking first in the nation in the science stream," Rabah told *AFP*, dressed in her graduation gown as relatives and neighbours gathered to celebrate in Al-Maghazi refugee camp in central Gaza. The Tawjihi examinations were held in June simultaneously in Gaza, the Israeli-occupied West Bank, Egypt and several other countries with Palestinian communities for the first time in three years.

Around 89,000 students sat the secondary school examinations this year, including more than 25,000 in the science stream, where Rabah secured the highest score. She dedicated her achievement to her late father, Fayed Rabah, as well as to her mother, siblings and teachers.

As soon as the results were announced, her family erupted in celebration. Young men danced to the beat of drums as neighbours cheered.

Rabah embraced relatives, posed for photographs and accepted flowers beneath a portrait of her father hanging on the wall – a poignant reminder of the loss behind the celebration.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Smriti Sudesh

The Bab el-Mandeb Strait has returned to the geopolitical spotlight after Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi movement announced on July 20 a maritime blockade against Saudi Arabia, warning that Saudi-linked vessels transiting the strategic waterway would be targeted. Shortly afterward, the group reinforced the warning by emailing shipping companies, directing them not to load or unload cargo at Saudi ports or risk being attacked "in any location" within its operational reach. This is a major escalation of the latest simmering regional conflict to be reignited by the war launched by the United States and Israel against Iran.

The warning has revived concerns over the security of one of the world's busiest maritime corridors.

Even without a complete closure, the threat of attacks was enough to influence commercial decisions, because disruption in this narrow waterway can have consequences that extend far beyond West Asia.

The announcement came days after an attack on Sanaa International Airport on July 13. Yemen's

Saudi Arabia-based government claimed it carried out the strike to prevent an Iranian plane from landing; the Houthis blamed Riyadh and responded with retaliatory missile attacks.

In a statement, the group said the maritime embargo was an "eye for an eye" response both to that recent incident and to what they describe as nearly 12-year Saudi-led blockade of Yemen's ports and airports during the country's civil war. The timing of the latest escalation is significant. For months, the Houthis largely stayed away from threatening commercial vessels, even as the U.S. and Israel carried out military operations against Iran. They avoided opening a direct front against Saudi Arabia, which had spent recent years trying to reduce tensions with the group after years of war in Yemen.

The 'Gate of Tears'

The Bab el-Mandeb Strait, whose Arabic name means "Gate of Tears", separates Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula from Djibouti and Eritrea in the Horn of Africa. At its narrowest point, it is only about 30 km wide. Yet, this relatively small stretch of water forms the southern gateway to the Suez Canal, linking the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden and, ultimately, the Indian Ocean. Every



Strategic Strait: Bab el-Mandeb forms the southern gateway to the Suez Canal, linking Red Sea with Gulf of Aden and, Indian Ocean. AFP

vessel travelling between Europe and Asia through the Suez Canal must first pass through the Bab el-Mandeb, making it one of the world's most strategically important maritime chokepoints.

According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), around 9.3 million barrels of crude oil and petroleum products transited the Bab el-Mandeb each day in 2023.

The volumes eventually dropped, following the start of Houthi attacks, by more than half, averaging roughly 4.1 million barrels per day in 2024 and remaining near 4.2 million barrels per day by 2025.

The Strait's importance stems from geography rather than size. Commercial ships transporting crude oil, liquefied natural gas, manufactured goods,

food products, automobiles, and industrial equipment use the route because it offers the shortest maritime connection between Europe and Asia.

Instead of sailing around the Cape of Good Hope at the southern tip of Africa, vessels can transit the Bab el-Mandeb and the Suez Canal, saving both time and fuel.

The difference is substantial. A diversion around the Cape of Good Hope typically adds 10 to 15 days to a voyage, depending on the destination. For shipping companies operating on tight schedules, longer voyages reduce the availability of vessels, disrupt logistics networks, and raise freight charges. Industries dependent on just-in-time deliveries can quickly feel the impact of delayed ship-

ments. This is why the Bab el-Mandeb is often grouped with other strategic maritime chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz, the Strait of Malacca, and the Panama Canal.

Each serve as a narrow passage through which a disproportionate share of global commerce flows. Hence, any disruption, whether caused by conflict or natural disasters, can ripple across international markets.

More than just shipping

For the Houthis, the Bab el-Mandeb represents more than a commercial shipping lane. It is a strategic lever. Unlike conventional military powers, the Houthis do not possess a large navy capable of controlling regional waters. Instead, they have relied on asymmetric tactics, including drones, ballistic missiles and attacks on commercial shipping, to project influence beyond Yemen. By threatening vessels transiting one of the world's busiest maritime corridors, the group can impose economic costs on regional rivals while ensuring that the conflict remains an international concern.

The consequences of prolonged disruption would extend well beyond the immediate conflict zone. This is huge setback

for India. India has significant economic and strategic interests in maintaining stability around the Bab el-Mandeb. A substantial share of India's trade with Europe passes through the Red Sea corridor, making the route important for exporters of pharmaceuticals, engineering goods, textiles, chemicals, and machinery. India imports more than 85% of the crude oil it consumes. Longer voyages increase freight costs and delivery times, reducing the competitiveness of Indian products in overseas markets.

The country is also one of the world's largest importers of crude oil. Although India's energy supplies arrive through multiple routes, higher global oil prices resulting from instability in major maritime corridors increase the country's import bill and can eventually feed into domestic fuel prices and inflation.

The Bab el-Mandeb may be only 30 km wide at its narrowest point, but it has become one of the world's most consequential waterways. As long as global trade continues to rely on the Red Sea-Suez Canal corridor, instability in the Bab el-Mandeb will remain a concern not only for countries in West Asia but also for governments and consumers across the world.

Rohingya schools in Malaysia face closures amid surge in hate speech

Reuters
KUALA LUMPUR

Nur is a 12-year-old Rohingya Muslim refugee in Malaysia who has stopped going to school since June, after two men threatened to beat her on her way to class.

"Why do you want to go to school? Do you want to take over our country?" they asked, according to Nur, whose family declined use of her full name for fear of repercussion.

Nur is just one of many Rohingya children to face harassment and threats that have prompted refugee schools across Malaysia to close, say rights groups and educators.

"Children are so scared that they're afraid to leave



At least nine Rohingya schools have shut down in Malaysia after hate speech targeting the community raised concerns. REUTERS

the house," said Sharifah Shakirah, a Rohingya community activist brought up in the southeast Asian nation. "You're not just harassing a child for a day or two, you're creating a lasting trauma."

At least nine schools have shut nationwide, *Reuters*

checks show, after online hate speech and misinformation targeting the Rohingya led to tougher controls on the community and raised tech regulation concerns.

The Home Affairs Ministry did not respond to a request for comment on the

school closures or hate speech campaign.

Malaysia does not officially recognise the Rohingya as refugees, branding them illegal migrants, though about 1,20,000 are registered with the United Nations refugee agency.

Muslim-majority Malaysia has long sympathised with the persecuted minority from Myanmar, but opinion soured during the COVID-19 pandemic amid accusations refugees were spreading the virus, disrespecting cultural norms and competing for jobs.

Malaysians "have begun feeling burdened by issues arising from managing the Rohingya community", Deputy Foreign Minister Lukanisman Awang Sauni told Parliament last week.

Charging through history



Performers in Red Army uniforms and tourists participate in a re-enactment of a 1935 battle between Chinese Communist and Nationalist forces, at Loushan Pass in Zunyi, Guizhou Province. AFP

In Israel vote, ex-Army chief Eisenkot emerges as main rival to PM Netanyahu

Agence France-Presse
JERUSALEM

As Israel heads into a fiercely contested general election on October 27, former military chief Gadi Eisenkot has emerged as the principal challenger to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Mr. Eisenkot's rise comes at a pivotal moment in Israeli politics, with the election widely viewed as a referendum on the long-serving premier's leadership in the violent aftermath of Hamas's October 7, 2023, attack on Israel.

A recent Channel 12 poll put Mr. Eisenkot's new party, Yashar (Hebrew for "Straight" or "Upright"), ahead of Mr. Netanyahu's Likud, projecting 23 seats to Likud's 22 in the 120-member Knesset.

The same survey found

that 43% of respondents considered Mr. Eisenkot, 66, the most suitable candidate for Prime Minister, compared with 34% for Mr. Netanyahu.

Mr. Eisenkot – who has dismissed calls for a future Palestinian state as irrelevant after the October 7 attacks and pioneered Israel's strategy of disproportionate military responses in Lebanon – has built his campaign around a 10-point platform that he says will restore Israel's security, unity and democratic institutions.

Chief of staff of the Israeli military between 2015 and 2019, Mr. Eisenkot was among those credited with developing the "Dahiya Doctrine", named after a Beirut suburb that is a Hezbollah stronghold.

Advanced on the premise that Hezbollah con-

ceals fighters and weapons among civilian homes and infrastructure, the doctrine calls for a devastating Israeli response against enemy population centres when Israeli communities come under long-range attack.

At the top of his civilian manifesto is a pledge to establish a state commission of inquiry into Hamas's bloody 2023 cross-border attack, which triggered the Gaza war and quickly expanded into a broader regional conflict, and which led to Mr. Netanyahu's government being accused of overseeing an intelligence failure.

Tens of thousands of Israelis have repeatedly demonstrated in support of such an inquiry, but Mr. Netanyahu's coalition has instead proposed a commission whose members



Gadi Eisenkot gestures during the launch of an election campaign for Yashar, his party, at an event near Hod Hasharon, Israel. REUTERS

would be chosen by politicians. Mr. Eisenkot also promises a "new long-term national security doctrine" aimed at strengthening the military and reinforcing Israel's borders.

A central plank of this is a "universal national service law" that would extend compulsory service to ultra-Orthodox Jews and Arab citizens. He has also

pledged to "protect judicial independence, the rule of law, minority rights and a free press."

His overall position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, however, remains less clearly defined.

"The only signal that he sent was that Israel should be a state of law," said Tal Elovits, a researcher at Israeli think tank Molad.

"Therefore, illegal settlements and settlers' violence will be dealt with."

Relatively new to politics, Mr. Eisenkot has attracted widespread public sympathy after his son, Gal, and two nephews were killed fighting in Gaza. Mr. Eisenkot's call for universal military service has become a defining issue of his campaign, putting him at the forefront of opposition to Mr. Netanyahu's alliance with ultra-Orthodox parties.

Mr. Eisenkot has repeatedly attacked Mr. Netanyahu's agreement with his coalition partners to advance legislation exempting many Haredi men from military service.

"This is a government that chooses to weaken the Army in the midst of a brutal war, while the finest sons and daughters of this

nation are deployed across all fronts," he wrote, in a social media post.

'Different generation'

Unlike Mr. Netanyahu, who comes from one of Israel's elite families, Mr. Eisenkot is the son of Moroccan immigrants and grew up on the country's geographic periphery. "In a political universe full of Netanyahu wannabes... Eisenkot reads as a man of a different generation, far more connected to the traditional security narratives of Zionism," columnist Nadav Eyal wrote in a recent blog.

Mr. Eisenkot's understated style could prove to be one of his strongest political assets, said Mr. Elovits. "The middle class and upper middle class... look for someone that will look responsible, boring, and I think that Eisenkot has that

appeal," he said.

Although opposition leaders Yair Lapid and Naftali Bennett remain in contention, current polling suggests neither is as well positioned as Mr. Eisenkot to defeat Mr. Netanyahu.

"Many voters of the right wing who do not like what Netanyahu is doing... are looking for a home. And a reasonable house for them today is Gadi Eisenkot," said Gayil Talshir, a political science professor at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

For liberal centrist voters, Mr. Eisenkot increasingly represents the opposition candidate with the strongest chance of unseating Mr. Netanyahu. "Once Eisenkot began to rise above Bennett in the polls, the strategic voters of the liberal camp went with Eisenkot," Mr. Talshir said.

Women: Singapore bt Sri Lanka 3-2, India bt Maldives 3-0 (Sutirtha Mukherjee bt Fathimath Dheema Ali 11-4, 11-2, 11-5; Yashaswini Ghorpade bt Aishath Rafa Nazim 11-2, 11-5, 11-7; Swastika Ghosh bt Mishka Mohamed Ibrahim 11-3, 11-5, 11-2), Northern Ireland bt South Africa 3-2, Australia bt Bangladesh 3-0, England bt Cyprus 3-0, Malaysia bt Scotland 3-0.

INBRIEF



Koivun holds off Scheffler for PGA 3M Open title

Jackson Koivun, playing only his third PGA Tour event as a professional, held off top-ranked Scottie Scheffler in Sunday's final round to capture the 3M Open in record fashion. The 21-year-old American fired a five-under par 66 to finish 72 holes in a tournament record 25-under par 259 at Blaine in Minnesota (USA) and defeat Scheffler by three strokes.

New Indian Football League season to begin on Oct. 16

The next season of the Indian Football League (IFL) will begin on October 16, the AIFF said on Monday. Also among the key decisions made during the Governing Council meet in New Delhi was the move to allow a maximum of three foreigners in a line-up. It is aimed at increasing game time for Indian players. "We also discussed the roadmap for the new season, including the proposed budgets," AIFF deputy secretary general M. Satyanarayan said.

Soumya Sarkar returns to Bangladesh's Test squad

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) announced a 15-member squad for the opening Test of the two-match series against Australia. The squad includes Soumya Sarkar, who returns to the Test set-up after last featuring in the format in 2021.

The squad: Najmul Hossain Shanto (Capt.), Soumya Sarkar, Shadman Islam, Tanzid Hasan, Mominul Haque, Mushfiqur Rahim, Amite Hasan, Jaker Ali Anik, Mehidy Hasan Miraz (vice-capt.), Taijul Islam, Taskin Ahmed, Hasan Mahmud, Syed Khaled Ahmed, Ebadot Hossain Chowdhury and Musfik Hasan.



Pirlo bitter over debate that cost him Italy coaching job

Former Italy playmaker Andrea Pirlo, who was favoured for the national coaching post, expressed his bitterness on Monday over the debate which has led to him no longer being a candidate. The 47-year-old had become the favourite to be tasked with reviving the national side's fortunes after it failed to qualify for the World Cup for the third successive time. Whilst Pirlo had a stellar playing career, his coaching CV is short on success. A contract with a Russian betting firm had only added fuel to misgivings.

Esha guns down gold, Manu wins bronze in 25m pistol

The 21-year-old registers 40 hits to seal the crown while the Paris 2024 double Olympic-medallist fights through a tense shoot-off to finish with 28 hits as the two make it a double podium for India

SHOOTING

Press Trust of India
HANGZHOU

Esha Singh grabbed the gold by upstaging Olympic-medallist Manu Bhaker, who took the bronze to complete a double-podium finish for India in the women's 25m pistol event of the ISSF World Cup (Rifle/Pistol/Shotgun) here on Monday.

The 21-year-old Esha produced a commanding display in the final, registering 40 hits to seal the gold medal.

On the other hand, Paris 2024 double Olympic-medallist Manu fought through a highly competitive field, winning a crucial shoot-off before finishing with 28 hits to secure bronze.

China's Yueyue Zhang won silver with 37 hits. Manu topped the qualifying



On the podium: Yueyue, Esha, and Manu pose for a picture.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

standings with an outstanding score of 586-20x, closely followed by Esha in second place with 585-18x to comfortably advance to

the eight-shooter final. Rahi Sarnobat posted 582-16x, while Simranpreet Kaur Brar (576-20x) and Abhidnya Ashok Patil (573-

16x) delivered steady performances competing under Ranking Points Only (RPO) status.

Reflecting on overcoming the mental pressure following her record-setting World Cup gold in Munich earlier this season, Esha said: "This match was very pressure-riding for me because of the previous medal I had.

"The better you get in your event, the more you feel that weight of prestige you have to conquer. I'm happy that I was able to get past it today and grateful that I had the ability to endure it."

Another landmark

The gold medal adds another landmark achievement for Esha, who hails from Hyderabad.

Earlier this season at the ISSF World Cup in Munich, Esha set both the senior and junior world records with 43 hits in the final.

Veteran sports scribe Jaswinder Sidhu passes away

Sports Bureau
NEW DELHI

Veteran sports journalist Jaswinder Sidhu passed away in a road accident on Sunday night. He was 54.

In a career spanning decades, Sidhu, always Jassi to his friends, worked primarily with *Amar Ujala* before branching out as an independent analyst.

A regular presence in most press boxes across India and overseas, Sidhu always kept the travelling press corps in good humour. He cracked one-liners, was helpful and forged a kinship with many sports writers, including those hailing from Pakistan's Punjab and Sindh. The Sports Journalists'



Jaswinder Sidhu.

Federation of India (SJFI) expressed its profound grief and sorrow over Sidhu's demise. The Press Club of India condoled Sidhu's passing away through a post on X. "His dedication to sports journalism, unwavering professionalism and insightful reporting earned him immense respect across the media fraternity".

Mohammedan has it easy against Baghpat

DURAND CUP

Sports Bureau
KOLKATA

Mohammedan Sporting began its 135th Durand Cup campaign with a convincing 4-0 victory over Baghpat FC of Banaras at the Salt Lake Stadium here on Monday.

Fardin Ali Molla gave the home side the lead in the 29th minute, helping Mohammedan take a solitary-goal advantage into half-time even as Baghpat put up a disciplined defence.

The Kolkata outfit stepped up the pressure after the break as substitute Lalremsanga Fanaï doubled the lead in the 73rd minute following some attacking changes made by coach Mehrajuddin Wadoo. Israfil Dewan added a third in the 80th minute, before Fanaï scored his second goal in the 84th, finishing off a long ball from goalkeeper Subhadip Pandit with an impressive solo run.

The result: Mohammedan Sporting 4 (Fardin Ali 29, Fanaï 73 & 84, Israfil Dewan 80) bt Baghpat FC 0.

Infantino slams World Cup critics

Agence France-Presse
PARIS

FIFA president Gianni Infantino has hit back at World Cup critics, claiming they were "spreading hate and false rumours" and arguing the tournament delivered "only joy and happiness". In a long open letter published on Monday, Infantino urged detractors to "take a moment to reflect, meditate, pray" after a tournament marked by controversies ranging from

ticket pricing to visa issues. "Sorry that you were so consumed by hate and criticism that you missed it all," Infantino wrote in a post shared on his *Instagram* account and FIFA's official channels. "To those behind their pens and papers, behind their screens, spreading hate and false rumours, I want to say that while you are sitting behind, we at FIFA are on the front lines organising, working hard, and delivering the best show in the world."

McGrath backs Prasidh to play a key role going forward

S. Prasanna Venkatesan
CHENNAI

Australia fast-bowling great Glenn McGrath felt that India's white-ball pace attack was in the midst of a natural transition, backing Prasidh Krishna to emerge as a key figure at a time when Jasprit Bumrah is managing his workload and Mohammed Shami and Mohammed Siraj are absent.

"It's always going to be tough to just pick up from where you left off. You've got Bumrah, who's a class bowler. Shami is world class as well.

"Siraj has been around for a long time and is very experienced. They bowl incredibly well, so you can't just expect to pick up straight from where you left off," McGrath said at MRF Pace Foundation on Monday.

The 56-year-old, however, believed that India's next-gen pacers were making encouraging progress. "I think they've been doing okay. I'm a big fan of Pra-



Masterclass: McGrath and Senthilnathan interact with MRF Pace Foundation trainees. R. RAGU

sidh as well. It's always a big ask to fill the shoes of Shami and Bumrah, so it's always going to be a transitional period."

McGrath reserved special praise for Prasidh, saying that the seamer had matured a lot since he first saw him. "From seeing him when he was here (MRF Pace Foundation) to watching him play IPL cricket, he just seemed to mature - his pace and just the way he was bowling, the way he held himself.

"He's tall, bowls good areas, gets that bounce and pace. It's the whole package, really. He was very

much an enforcer when he bowled - just the way he went through the crease, the pace he was bowling at, the bounce, and the areas. Occasionally, he was a little bit short, but apart from that, he impressed me. He's really developed and put his potential into action."

Asked why Prasidh tends to bowl too short at times, McGrath said that it could stem from his role as an enforcer. "I think his job is to be the enforcer and to really unsettle batters. It worked for him a bit in the IPL. Maybe, he just went with it".

Pogacar looking to enjoy 'small things' in life after fifth win

TOUR DE FRANCE

Agence France-Presse
PARIS

Tadej Pogacar said he was looking forward to taking some time off and enjoying the "small things" in life after making Tour de France history on Sunday.

Pogacar joined an elite club of riders to have won the sport's greatest race five times - Jacques Anquetil, Eddy Merckx, Bernard Hinault and Miguel Indurain.

But he was not interested in thinking about joining such lofty company.

"Right now I just want to enjoy the moment of winning the Tour," he said. "If it's the fifth or the first, it doesn't matter - it's unbelievable to wear the yellow jersey and to cross the line in Paris winning it. I will just enjoy this moment, not thinking about any history, not thinking about (joining any club). I just want to live this moment, come back home, relax, enjoy the small things of life. I'm really happy and proud to win a fifth Tour.



Champion stuff: Pogacar joined an elite club of riders to have won the sport's greatest race five times.

AP, AFP

Every single one has a different story, a different meaning, different emotions. Each one of them feels incredible and unbelievable for me."

Mathieu van der Poel achieved a career dream by winning the final stage on the famous Champs Elysees avenue in Paris.

The cobbled classics specialist escaped with World champion Pogacar

on the Montmartre climb that was heaving with ecstatic fans. Both committed fully to the charge to the line for 10km as a group of sprinters just seconds behind inched closer to them.

In the final 700m, van der Poel surged out alone as Slovenian Pogacar wilted and he narrowly held off the pack in photo-finish. "It was no words, no

communication, we just both rode to the death, to the final and I ran out of gas," said Pogacar.

"I knew that we had to go all out, he knew we had to go all out, we both committed and he took a beautiful victory."

The 31-year-old Dutchman admitted he thought the chasers would catch him before the line.

In the end, it was his Al-



pecin Premier Tech teammate Jasper Philipsen who came closest to pipping him to the line. "I thought we were going to get caught back, but then I was just thinking about this moment, and I just put my head down in the last 500m," he said. "I just went as hard as I could, and I was just waiting until a wheel was coming past, and it didn't happen, it didn't happen. In the very end, I see a Pirelli tyre next to me, and it's the one from Jasper. It just shows that we never give up."

R. Kaushik

Two series, six matches. Two half-centuries, one Player of the Match award, one Player of the Series honour. That's Vaibhav Sooryavanshi's international CV thus far after an exhilarating, whirlwind July when he took his first, firm steps towards moving from boy wonder to a man for all seasons.

The 15-year-old's inclusion in the Indian T20I squads for the twin tours of Ireland and England was welcomed with more than a frisson of excitement and expectation. There ought to have been not a semblance of discussion on whether he should feature in the squad if not for his tender age, because especially in IPL 2026, he had showcased his exceptional talent with one bruising masterpiece after another. A season-high tally of 776 runs and the Orange Cap in his first full season should have, as it thankfully eventually did, been an automatic rite of passage to the national side. If there were any misgivings at all, it was because he was 15, not 18 or 19.

Sooryavanshi had battered the best bowlers in the world in the IPL, smashing them to smithereens and often instilling dread and fear as they ran in to deliver the little white orb because even the Cummins' and the Hazlewoods, the Bumrahs and the Rabadas, knew that the margin for error was miniscule. His consistency reiterated that he was more than just a one-trick pony. He blazed to 15-ball half-centuries for fun, the sixes flowed as if there was an invisible, illegal spring in his bat (something Sanath Jayasuriya was hilariously accused of after his pyrotechnics in the 1996 World Cup) and for the first time in many years (since maybe 1988?), India was transfixed by the breathtaking audacity of a teen phenom.

Not just India, of course. Such is the reach, magnetic pull and popularity of the world's most celebrated 20-over league that global audiences were treated to the Sooryavanshi magic. To see David take down Goliath is one of the time-tested endearing subtexts to any sporting contest. Tens of thousands willed the young lad to succeed not just for the novelty value but the sheer entertainment he provided, the joy he brought with uninhibited freedom which is often professed in the dressing room but hard to put into practice ball after ball, innings after innings.

Shreyas Iyer and Gautam Gambhir, the new leadership group of the T20I setup, chose to make the restless teenager wait for his baptism. Contrary to expectations that he would be blooded against the Irish in a series India were expected to dominate, Sooryavanshi watched from the sidelines as his colleagues crashed and

burned to an unprecedented, seismic 0-2 defeat, their first losses to the Irish in international cricket. He was eventually handed his India cap for the second of five T20Is against Harry Brook's England, in Manchester on July 4. His maiden outing fetched only 14 runs (off 10 balls), but there were two sixes thrown in, including one off Rajasthan Royals teammate Jofra Archer, a brief first appearance that suggested that he wasn't out of place in the bustling cauldron of

country vs country battle.

Sooryavanshi's next two outings in England weren't productive either - 13 off 5 balls in Nottingham, and 15 off 10 in Bristol - after which he was benched for the final game at Rose Bowl in Southampton. He must have watched with mounting frustration as, on an absolute belter, the hosts racked up 257 for three and India replied with a competitive but eventually woefully inadequate 201 for eight. There is no gainsaying how Sooryavanshi would have acquitted himself; whispers were starting to surface that the short ball into the body was a kryptonite of sorts, but there is little sustained evidence to support that theory. England brought the young lad 42 runs off 25 deliveries with one four and five sixes, hardly sensational but definitely not enough to write him off.

In Zimbabwe in the week gone by, however, the international game was privileged to witness the phenomenon reprise his IPL magic. Sooryavanshi has quite a tryst with the Harare Sports Club, where Shreyas' bunch locked horns with the host nation in a three-match showdown. India had gone through seven winless games in Ireland and England, losing six with one game (the opening fixture against England) abandoned halfway through, and Shreyas desperately needed a victory against his name after a horror start to his T20I captaincy stint.

Happy hunting ground

He needn't have worried too much, as it turned out. After all, he had the ace in his pack, a young man who dug into his memory bank, dredged up happy thoughts of his time at the Harare Sports Club, and brutalised a solid Zimbabwe pace attack spearheaded by the towering Blessing Muzarabani and the left-arm, Richard Ngarava.

Muzarabani, more than his left-handed counterpart, had played a big part in Zimbabwe making it to the Super 8 of the T20 World Cup earlier this year at the expense of fancied former champions Australia. Standing six feet eight inches (203 cms) in his socks, he used his height to great advantage, fusing bounce with movement to resemble a one-man wrecking ball. Muzarabani finished as the joint second-highest wicket-taker of the tournament; his 13 scalps (only one behind Jasprit Bumrah and Varun Chakaravarthy) came in only six bowls, his strike rate of 11 balls per wicket bettered among the top-five wicket-takers only by Shadley van Schalkwyk (6.84) of the United States, who also ended up with 13 wickets. He was expected to give India's batters, who had a miserable run in England, a torrid time, but Sooryavanshi had other plans.

In February, at the same venue, Sooryavanshi had made the Under-19 World Cup final against England a ridiculously one-sided affair well before the halfway stage of the contest. After Ayush Mhatre chose to bat, the left-handed opener went

India's youngest international cricketer, male or female, became the youngest half-centurion in all T20Is when he lashed an even 50 in the first encounter against Zimbabwe

Sooryavanshi's tryst with Harare

In Zimbabwe, in the week gone by, the international game was privileged to witness the phenomenon reprise his IPL magic



on the rampage, tearing into the shell-shocked English boys with utter disdain.

Boundaries cascaded off his bat with remarkable regularity; he reached his 50 off 32 deliveries, took only 23 more to bring up his century, and went from 100 to 150 in a mere 16 balls. By the time he was dismissed, gloving a slog-sweep to the wicketkeeper, he had hurtled to 175, from just 80 deliveries, with 15 power-packed fours and an equal number of towering sixes. He had accounted for 69.72% of the runs India had scored (251) till he was at the crease. Sooryavanshi's blitzkrieg ended off the third delivery of the 26th over, just past the halfway stage of the Indian innings. Who knows what he would have finished with had he batted for even a half-hour more.

In Sooryavanshi's corner on that occasion was Hrishikesh Kanitkar as the head coach, with former India left-arm spinner Sunil Joshi too travelling as the bowling/spin coach. And, of course, there was V.V.S. Laxman , the wonderfully affable and positive-talking Hyderabad who has quietly elevated the profile of the Centre of Excellence (previously the National Cricket Academy) without getting either his due or craving for approbation and plaudits, who travelled for the second half of the Under-19 World Cup as the team's mentor, among other things.

While Kanitkar wasn't in Harare this last week, both Laxman and Joshi were. With Gambhir and his support staff taking a break ahead of the Test tour of Sri Lanka beginning in a little over a week's time, Laxman stepped in as the interim head coach, like he has done quite a few times in the past, with Joshi for support. Perhaps, the familiarity with the ground, previous dizzying success at the venue and a sense of ease around the coaching staff that has overseen his progress over the last year and a bit helped calm Sooryavanshi down. He was clearly in his elements, reprising the destructive avatar that made him such a compelling attraction during the IPL.

India's youngest international cricketer, male or female, became the youngest half-centurion in all T20Is when he lashed an even 50 in the first encounter on Thursday, July 23. The half-century came off only 18 deliveries, though he saw off the Muzarabani threat with commonsense rather than bravado. India were chasing a modest target of 126 and Sooryavanshi's early blitz powered them to a commanding victory with 40 deliveries to spare, though the Player-of-the-Match award went to pacer Mayank Yadav for his spell of two for 18. After a whirlwind nine-ball 20 in Saturday's game two, Sooryavanshi went into overdrive in the final, dead rubber on Sunday. In the clearest indication yet that he has a terrific cricket brain nestled in that young, still developing head, Sooryavanshi batted with tremendous maturity and intelligence on a worn surface where the bounce was uneven and where the ball didn't exactly gush on to the bat.

Laxman believes that Sooryavanshi will progress and break all records at the international level as he has the potential and ability to do that

No half-measures

Sooryavanshi picked the balls to attack with care and diligence, but when he went on the offensive, he didn't hold back. There were no half-measures, his commitment to the stroke indisputably maximal. Abhishek Sharma fell cheaply again and the normally fluent Ishan Kishan struggled for timing, but Sooryavanshi seemed immune to the vagaries of the pitch.

His fifty appeared measured, yet it came off just 31 deliveries; as he raced into the 80s, visions of a maiden century loomed until he fell to a wonderful catch in the deep by Brad Evans. His final returns - 81 off 49, eight fours, four sixes. As India completed a comfortable 35-run victory to seal a 3-0 series sweep, there was only one candidate for both the match and the series honours. Welcome to the world of international cricket, Vaibhav Sooryavanshi. And what's the fuss all about, right? Laxman's personality doesn't lend itself to hyperbole, so when he says something, you know that that's precisely what he means. He was glowing in his praise of the young lad, extolling his maturity and cricket smarts not just during the last week but over the last six months, from the Under-19 World Cup onwards.

"He's got a long career ahead, and he has the attitude and mindset to improve every day," the magician with wrists of steel proclaimed. "I'm sure he will progress and break all the records at the international level. He's got all the potential and ability to do that."

Over to you now, young man, to prove the great man right.

THE GIST

Sooryavanshi needn't have worried too much, as it turned out. After all, he had the ace in his pack, a young man who dug into his memory bank, dredged up happy thoughts of his time at the Harare Sports Club

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