

VISUAL MEMORY

Reclaiming frames of a lost time

A collection of rare and fragile celluloid reels, believed to contain rare footage from Manipur shot mostly between the mid-1930s and early 1960s, is set to undergo professional revival with digitisation in Italy

NEWS » PAGE 5



Mecca deal: a new triple alliance in West Asia

PROFILES » PAGE 9



Why are users worried about UPI charges?

FAQ » PAGE 8



Ashish clinches India's first medal at World under-20 athletics

SPORT » PAGE 13

INSIDE



'Strait won't open until U.S. corrects its behaviour'

DUBAI
Iran's politburo-like body, known as the Supreme National Security Council, said on Saturday that the Strait of Hormuz will not open until the United States "corrects its behaviour," issuing new demands that could shake up talks on a deal to manage the waterway and traffic on it. » PAGE 12

NALSAR students don't want CJI at convocation

HYDERABAD
A large section of students of the outgoing 2026 batch at the NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad, do not want Chief Justice of India Surya Kant as the chief guest at their convocation ceremony. The university is yet to announce the date or confirm the chief guest's presence. » PAGE 2

Jharkhand exam row: CID summons three

PATNA
Amid protests by aspirants alleging irregularities in the conduct of competitive examinations in Jharkhand, the State Crime Investigation Department (CID) has issued summonses to three serving members of the Jharkhand Public Service Commission (JPSC). » PAGE 3

Two killed as Kerala RTC bus overturns

BENGALURU
Two people were killed and 25 injured after a Kerala State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) bus bound for Bengaluru toppled after ramming a signboard on the Bengaluru-Mysuru Highway near Avaragere Gate in Bengaluru South district on Saturday. » PAGE 2

IAF officer held for 'leaking sensitive data'

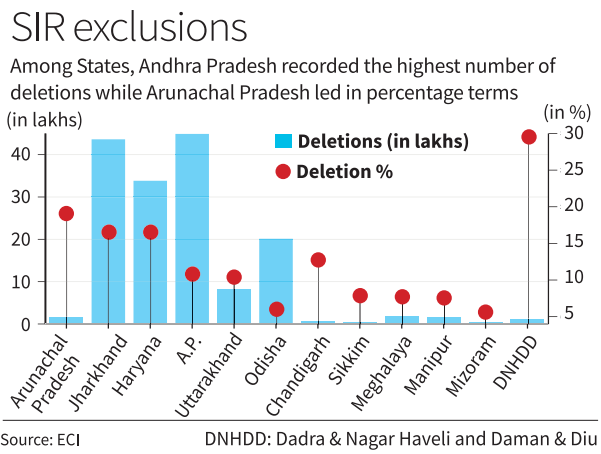
NEW DELHI
An Indian Air Force Wing Commander was arrested in May for allegedly sharing sensitive defence-related information with a Pakistani intelligence operative after he was allegedly honey-trapped through social media, officials said on Saturday. » PAGE 3

More than 1.5 crore names off poll rolls in latest phase of SIR

Third phase of SIR ongoing in 16 States and three U.T.s; Andhra Pradesh has highest deletions at 44.89 lakh while Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu had the highest proportion of deletions; enumeration phase extended in some States

Sreeparna Chakrabarty
NEW DELHI

More than 1.5 crore names have been deleted so far from the existing voter lists in the ongoing third phase of the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls conducted by the Election Commission. Of the 16 States and three Union Territories in which 'SIR 3.0' is being conducted, draft lists have been published for 12. According to an analysis of data shared by the EC, the total voters in the 12 States where draft lists have been published were 13,77,27,807 out of which 1,58,59,834 (11.51%) stand deleted on account of absent/shifted/dead voters.



The numbers in the final voter lists could increase as the EC provides a window for people to submit claims and objections for additions and deletions from the draft as well as registration of new voters.

Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu have the highest proportion of deletions at 29.64% followed by Arunachal Pradesh (19.09%), Haryana (16.38%) and Chandigarh (12.8%). Mizoram has the least pro-

portion of deletions (5.2%). In absolute numbers, Andhra Pradesh has the highest deletions at 44.89 lakh followed by Jharkhand (43.62 lakh), Haryana (33.83 lakh) and Odisha (20.12 lakh). Sikkim has the least deletions at 37,724 (8%) followed by Mizoram at 46,162.

In Manipur, 7.5% have been deleted, Meghalaya 7.67%, Uttarakhand 10.39% and Chandigarh 12.8%.

The door-to-door verification phase has been extended in Delhi, Punjab, Telangana, Karnataka, Maharashtra and thus their draft lists along with those of Tripura and Nagaland are yet to be published.

In Andhra Pradesh, which has the highest deletion in absolute numbers, 44.89 lakh (10.78%) names have been deleted with the draft now shrinking to 3.71 crore from 4.16 crore electors.

Among the deletions, 22.30 lakh accounted for shifting or being absent at the address while 15.22 lakh were reported dead and 7.37 lakh were enrolled at multiple places.

The SIR exercise has already been conducted in Bihar, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Puducherry, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep.

In Assam, due to legalities of the National Register of Citizens (NRC), a "special revision" was conducted.

Fatal plunge



Hillside horror: People gather after a private bus overturned and plunged onto a lower road in Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh on Saturday. At least seven passengers were killed and 11 injured. PTI (REPORT: PAGE 5)

Manipur CM reopens NH to allow free movement

Rahul Karmakar
GUWAHATI

The Manipur government on Saturday announced the immediate reopening of the National Highways (NH) for the free movement of people from all communities. Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh, Deputy Chief Minister Nemcha Kipgen, and Saitu MLA Haokholet Kipgen jointly announced the reopening of highways during a visit to Kangpokpi, a Kuki-majority district.

FULL REPORT
» PAGE 3

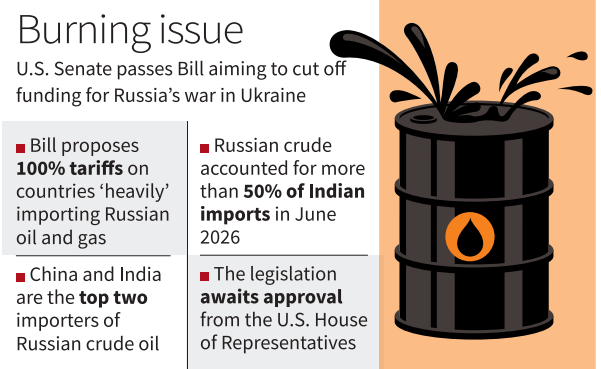
As U.S. Senate clears Bill, 100% tariff threat looms

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

The U.S. Senate has passed, with overwhelming majority, a Bill that could once again see massive tariffs of up to 100% being levied on India for its import of Russian oil.

The Senate voted 86-11 to pass the Lindsey O Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act of 2026. The Bill will now need to pass in the House of Representatives before it becomes law.

According to Senate documents, the bipartisan Act "is designed to deprive Vladimir Putin of the revenue financing Russia's war against Ukraine" by imposing sanctions on Russia's



political leadership, financial institutions, energy sector, and sanctions-evasion networks.

As per the Bill, the U.S. would after 30 days of its passage impose a tariff of 100% on the import of goods originating in a country that met one of

months preceding the date of the enactment of the Act, and that then proceeds to import oil or gas from Russia after 30 days of the Act's enactment.

Leading importers
This is the criteria that could impact India. China and India are the top two importers of Russian crude oil. Further, Russian crude accounted for more than 40% of Indian crude oil imports in May 2026 and more than 50% in June.

Scaling this back drastically within 30 days at a time when passage through the volatile Strait of Hormuz is still constrained would be very difficult for India.

The second criterion for the tariffs is if a country was among the top five nations "facilitating Russian oil sanctions evasion during the 12 months preceding the date of the enactment of the Act". India runs a much lower risk of qualifying for tariffs under this criterion as Indian oil marketing companies have repeatedly said that all their purchases have been made without violating sanctions.

If the 100% tariffs were levied, this would be the highest tariff level so far that India would have had to face during Donald Trump's presidency. This would come on top of a 10% tariff that the U.S. currently imposes on imports from India.

Youth must keep questioning, seek solutions, says PM



Prime Minister Narendra Modi greets the gathering during the 57th Convocation Ceremony of IIT-Delhi on Saturday. PTI

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Days after a massive youth protest forced the resignation of Dharmendra Pradhan as Union Education Minister, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Saturday that "the youth should question things that are accepted without a thought, but don't just stop at questioning; have the courage to also find their solutions."

He was addressing new graduates at IIT-Delhi's 57th convocation ceremony. Their degrees, Mr. Modi said, represent much more than academic success, serving also as a mandate to contribute to the nation. During the ceremony, degrees were conferred on over 3,000 graduating students, including 587 Ph.D. scholars.

Since mid-July, Mr. Modi has increased his outreach to youth, even as student protests continue in va-

rious parts of the country, seeking education reforms, particularly regarding paper leaks in competitive examinations.

Addressing the shifting geopolitical and strategic global landscape, he identified the relentless speed of technological advancement as the primary catalyst for these global transformations. He framed this era of rapid change as a dual landscape of unprecedented challenges and vast new opportunities. "The one who continuously learns is the one who will win," Mr. Modi said.

He presented honours to students, including the President's Gold Medal, Director's Gold Medal, Shankar Dayal Sharma Gold Medal, and Perfect Ten Gold Medals to meritorious students. He also remotely inaugurated Param Pragma, an AI-powered high-performance supercomputing facility established at IIT-Delhi's Sonapat campus.

Youth have worked to light a lamp in the darkness, says Rahul

Mayank Kumar
LUCKNOW

Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Saturday said India's youth are the country's greatest strength, and their potential is unparalleled in the world. Speaking in Prayagraj, he added that the youth of the country have worked to light a lamp in the darkness.

"This evening I want to speak to you about *dard* (pain), *data*, and *daulat* (wealth). The youth of India have faced fear and worked to change the country. The culture of India is one of truth and non-violence. No student should have hatred in their heart, only love. We have to end this corrupt system with love and affection. I stand with all the youth who are fighting for their rights," Mr. Gandhi said while addressing the 'Chhatron Ki Goonj' interaction programme.

The Congress leader

alleged that while families spend millions of rupees on education, the system just issues certificates without providing employment. "India's youth have all the potential, but the system has trapped them in a maze. Only 12 out of 1,000 people get permanent jobs. People's data is snatched from them and given to big companies. Then you're told to create reels and content. Young people are told to work for Blinkit, Uber, or do labour work, but you can't get a job in this country," he said.

Mr. Gandhi also emphasised that in the 21st century, progress relies on youth potential and data.



A IN-X

Meta restricts post about Kashmir pellet victim on Instagram

Peerzada Ashiq
SRINAGAR

Meta has restricted access in India to a report on Insha Mushtaq, a pellet victim in Jammu and Kashmir, on its platform, Instagram.

“We restricted access to this content pursuant to legal requirements under India’s Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules,” reads the message on a link to the post on *The Hindu’s* report, as on Saturday afternoon.

The use of pellet guns has come under scrutiny in the wake of alleged police excesses during the youth protests led by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi. The Supreme Court was also hearing petitions challenging its use.

Injured in 2016

The renewed focus on pellets spurred the Jammu and Kashmir government to announce an LPG dealership for Ms. Mushtaq to sustain her livelihood. She



Insha Mushtaq. FILE PHOTO

Use of pellet guns came under scrutiny in the wake of police action during youth protests in New Delhi

was hit in July 2016, while preparing for her Class 8th examination by the window of her home, when security forces chasing protesters opened a barrage of pellets. The pellets struck her eyes, blinding her for life.

Over 6,000 civilians suffered pellet injuries in 2016 when street protests broke out after the killing of a Hizbul Mujahideen commander Burhan Wani in an encounter in south Kashmir.

CID summons three serving JPSC members over Jharkhand exam row

The investigation agency is looking into the grounds on which TDPL was selected to conduct examinations for JPSC despite being blacklisted, sources say; CID has already questioned former JPSC chairman, and 19 people have been arrested so far

Amit Bhelari
PATNA

Amid protests by aspirants alleging irregularities in the conduct of competitive examinations in Jharkhand, the State Crime Investigation Department (CID) has issued summonses to three serving members of the Jharkhand Public Service Commission (JPSC).

According to sources, the investigating agency, probing the case of alleged irregularities in examinations for government recruitments in the State, has asked Ajita Bhattacharya, Anima Hansda, and Jamal Ahmed of the JPSC to appear before it on August 10, 12, and 14, respectively.

The CID, sources said, wants to know how TSR Data Processing Private Limited (TDPL) – the agency that conducted the examination – was empanelled and selected despite having been previously blacklisted.



Security personnel at the State Guest House in Ranchi, where a student delegation met government officials on Saturday. ANI

TDPL is a Lucknow-based company and was blacklisted by the Jharkhand Staff Selection Commission (JSSC) in May 2025 over allegations of irregularities in conduct of examination. Despite this, the company continued to conduct examinations for bodies like the JPSC.

The CID has already questioned former JPSC chairman L. Khyiangte four times as part of its in-

vestigation, and 19 people have been arrested in connection with the case so far.

Among the key demands of the aspirants, who have been protesting for more than two weeks, is the cancellation of the Preliminary Test (PT) of the 14th JPSC Civil Services Examination, and a review of exams conducted through agencies, including TDPL.

During the questioning of Mr. Khyiangte, it was revealed that the signatures of the three members were not obtained before releasing the results for the PT, and the former JPSC chairman clarified that, as per the rules, the signatures are not required for the PT exam results. Now, the investigating agency wants to know whether the members agreed to this process.

The agency is also searching for more details about the monitoring, administrative functioning, and data security of the JPSC. According to sources, the former chairman may be summoned for a fifth time after matching the statements with the three current members.

Employees arrested

Several TDPL employees have been arrested in the case, including Director Ramveer Singh, Marketing Manager Abhay Tiwari, Accountant Rakshak Singh, and technical program-

mers Usman and Ebad.

On the JPSC side, Deputy Controller of Examinations Shweta Kumari Gupta, staff member Sonu Kumar, and computer operator Dharmendra Kumar have been arrested, and interrogation is under way. Mr. Dharmendra Kumar was questioned for the second consecutive day on Friday. The investigating agency is gathering information about his role, responsibilities, and the specific officials whose emails he managed.

TDPL accountant Rakshak Singh was also interrogated about contacts with candidates, alleged tampering with OMR sheets, and financial transactions.

Four candidates who passed the exam fraudulently and three middlemen have also been apprehended. The agency expects that new facts may emerge following the interrogation of the three serving members.

It was never a prestige issue for me, says Pradhan

Satyasundar Barik
BHUBANESWAR

Former Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Saturday said he had personally sought permission from Prime Minister Narendra Modi to agree to the demands of the protesters led by Cockroach Janta Party recently at the Jantar Mantar in New Delhi. Mr. Modi had agreed and also interacted with the youth, Mr. Pradhan said.

The BJP MP from Odisha, who stepped down from his Cabinet post following the youth protests, claimed it was never a prestige issue for him. “The incidents that took place show that some people tried to mislead the Gen Z or the new generation of youth. Who are Gen Zs? I believe they are our own. It was never a matter of personal prestige for me,” he said, addressing a gathering attended by Padma Shri awardees in Sambalpur, Odisha. He said the hopes of the younger generation should be upheld.

Talks with Jharkhand govt. fail; protests to continue

Suruchi Kumari
RANCHI

As rain continued to fall over Ranchi on Saturday, the students’ protest at Jaipal Singh Munda Stadium entered its 15th day with no sign of retreat. A seven-member delegation of the Jharkhand Loktantrik Krantikari Morcha (JLKM) met the government committee, carrying with it the demands that have kept hundreds of aspirants on the streets since July 25, with no immediate breakthrough in sight.

The meeting came a day after talks between the government and the JPSC-JSSC Reform Manch, another faction leading the protest, ended without an agreement. “The talks with the government are ongoing,” said Piyush Kumar of the JPSC-JSSC Reform Manch, adding that the group had submitted copies of the evidence in its possession to the authorities on Saturday.

Both protest groups are seeking cancellation of the 14th Jharkhand Public Ser-



Jharkhand Ministers after a meeting with protesters, and, right, doctors checking the students who are on a hunger strike in Ranchi. PTI & ANI



vice Commission (JPSC) preliminary examination, a CBI probe into alleged irregularities, and wider reforms in the State’s competitive examination system.

The Reform Manch has also sought cancellation of the JSSC-CGL examination. Both groups said that the Sansad Gherao announced for Monday will go as planned.

Other demands

The delegation from the JLKM, a regional political party, pressed for several additional concerns, including issues surrounding

the hiring of trained graduate teachers and other teacher recruitment examinations.

JLKM leader Devendra Nath Mahto, who has been on a hunger strike for seven days, also demanded a review of examinations conducted by agencies, including TSR Data Processing Private Limited.

After the meeting, Jharkhand Minister Sudevya Kumar urged students and aspirants to send their suggestions to the government through a dedicated email.

The protest, however, is no longer confined to the

fate of a single examination.

Similar grievances

Under two separate tents at the stadium, supporters of the JLKM and the Reform Manch moved between stages, listening to speeches, sharing food, and sheltering from the rain. Their platforms differed in style and political positioning, but the grievances sounded similar.

Three people from the Reform Manch faction were on the fifth day of a hunger strike on Saturday. One of them, a 27-year-old JPSC aspirant named

Umme Habiba, said that fasting came only after other attempts to get the government’s attention had failed.

For 36-year-old Sonia, the struggle has stretched across years. She has spent much of her life preparing for government recruitment examinations and said she now has only four years left within her eligibility window for the middle-school teacher recruitment. “For a single woman without parents and responsibilities of siblings, I face taunts of people everyday for not being able to secure a job despite ap-

pearing five times. It will always be some scam, late results, no appointments despite exams and results. It is a pattern,” she said.

The irregularities in the 14th JPSC examination do not mark the beginning of the crisis. Rather, it is the point at which years of waiting, preparing, and alleged irregularities have finally converged. “It has been 26 years since Jharkhand was formed, but all aspirants have received is betrayal,” Ms. Sonia said. “Students keep gathering because irregularities are not uncommon and the government should think about it.”

The Reform Manch has kept political banners away from its stage, saying the protest should remain student-led. “We got a separate stage on July 29 because we didn’t want the aspirants reduced to political benefits,” one of its members said. “Many political parties with opposing ideologies, their youth wings and leaders have stood with us, offering moral solidarity.”

IAF officer held for ‘leaking sensitive data’ to Pakistan operative

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

An Indian Air Force Wing Commander was arrested in May this year for allegedly sharing sensitive defence-related information with a Pakistani intelligence operative after he was allegedly honey-trapped through social media, officials said on Saturday.

The officer, who was posted at a field unit on the Western Front, came under surveillance by the IAF intelligence wing, which later alerted the security agencies, after his interactions with a woman on social media raised suspicion. “He was under active surveillance and was handed over to the suitable law enforcement agencies,” said an IAF spokesperson.

According to officials, the officer had been going through a difficult phase in his personal life when he began chatting with the

woman. The interaction subsequently turned into regular video calls.

The officer was arrested on May 30 following a complaint by the IAF, according to the Delhi Police. He has been booked under relevant provisions of the Official Secrets Act. “Based upon a complaint by Indian Airforce authorities, a serving Air Force officer was arrested on May 30th, for allegations of being honey trapped by a Pakistani Intelligence Operative,” the Delhi Police said.

The investigation into the case has been completed and a chargesheet was submitted before the competent court on July 30, the police said, adding that the matter is now sub judice.

The case comes amid heightened scrutiny by security agencies into attempts by Pakistan-based operatives to target serving personnel through social media platforms and alleged honey-trapping.

Manipur govt. announces reopening of key highways

Rahul Karmakar
GUWAHATI

More than a year after the Union government failed to clear the “economic blockades” by ethnic groups in Manipur, the State government on Saturday announced the immediate reopening of the National Highways (NH) for the free movement of people from all communities.

The government also announced the resumption of a bus service connecting Manipur’s capital Imphal and Nagaland’s capital Kohima.

Certain community members had been barred from travelling on this arterial highway since the conflict between Kuki-Zo and Meitei communities erupted in May 2023 and shifted to one between Kuki-Zo and Naga groups from February.

Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh, Deputy



Yumnam Khemchand Singh

Chief Minister Nemcha Kipgen, and Saitu MLA Haokholet Kipgen jointly announced the reopening of highways in Kangpokpi, a Kuki-majority district.

The Tangkhul Naga Long, a Naga organisation, welcomed the announcement, but said that the government should stop the “militarisation” of Naga-inhabited areas and reject the creation of a separate administration for the Kukis in the ancestral homeland of Naga people. Kuki organisations are yet to react. Kuki and Naga or-

ganisations have been behind blockades and counter-blockades on sections of NH-2 and NH-202.

The announcement came a day ahead of a total shutdown threatened by a coalition of 14 civil society organisations seeking an Assam-like exercise to update the National Register of Citizens.

“The boundaries of Manipur were formed and have been protected by all communities over 3,000 years. Some vested interest groups are trying to create confusion among us, but there is a solution to every crisis,” the Chief Minister said, after holding meetings with community leaders in Kangpokpi as part of the government’s ongoing peace-building and reconciliation efforts. He underscored the need for all communities to identify themselves as Manipuri first and move freely to each other’s domains.

Local entrepreneurs account for 90% of new industrial units in J&K: parliamentary panel

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

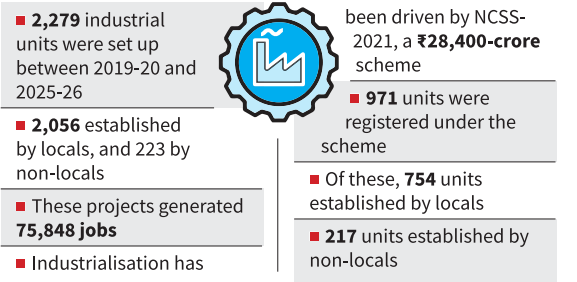
Nearly 90% of the industrial units established in Jammu and Kashmir since 2019 are owned by local people, according to a report by a Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs, which was tabled in Parliament on Friday.

Between 2019-20 and 2025-26, 2,279 industrial units were established in J&K, the report said. Of these, 2,056 units were set up by local people and the remaining 223 units by others. Together, these projects attracted investments worth ₹16,598.97 crore and generated 75,848 jobs, the report said. J&K’s Budget for 2025-26 pegs total expenditure at ₹1.12 lakh crore.

Following the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution on August 5, 2019, the National Demo-

Industrial landscape

90% of industrial units established in J&K since 2019 are owned by local people, a Parliamentary panel says



cratic Alliance (NDA) government led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at the Centre claimed that the move would bring in development and open opportunities for business investments in J&K.

The data mentioned in the Standing Committee’s report show that local entrepreneurs account for more than nine out of every 10 new industrial establishments.

The committee noted

that industrialisation has been driven by the New Central Sector Scheme-2021 (NCSS-2021), a ₹28,400-crore incentive programme notified by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade.

Under the scheme, 971 units were registered in J&K, including 754 units established by local people, and 217 units set up by others. Employment figures suggest that projects esta-

blished by non-local people tended to be larger. The 754 NCSS-linked units established by local people proposed 20,629 jobs, while the other 217 units proposed 31,268 jobs.

Under NCSS-2021, 3,338 incentive claims worth ₹951 crore had been approved, the report said, while ₹814.68 crore had already been disbursed.

The committee, led by the BJP’s Radha Mohan Das Agrawal, described the progress in industrial development as significant and said the participation of both local and non-local entrepreneurs reflected improving investor confidence in the region.

‘Encouraging sign’

“The active participation of both local and non-local entrepreneurs” is an encouraging sign, the committee said, adding that sustained policy support would be necessary to

maintain the momentum of industrial growth.

The report added that J&K had achieved a Total Fertility Rate (TFR) of 1.5, below the national average of 1.9. The Union Territory administration told the Parliamentary Standing Committee that the achievement reflected “sustained efforts towards strengthening maternal and child healthcare services, expanding access to family planning, improving female literacy, enhancing institutional healthcare delivery and promoting socio-economic development”.

The report noted that 90.3% of women in J&K marry at the age of 21 years or above, against 72.9% nationally, while female literacy stands at 77.3%, higher than the national average of 71.5%. It attributed the decline in TFR to improvements in female education and awareness.

‘BJP, RSS did nothing for freedom fight, we are the real patriots’

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Saturday stepped up his attack on the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), questioning its contribution to the freedom struggle. He accused the BJP and its ideological mentor of “lecturing” the Congress on patriotism despite having played no role in the fight against British rule.

Addressing a rally in Haldwani, Uttarakhand, Mr. Kharge sounded the poll bugle for the 2027 State Assembly election. Invoking Mahatma Gandhi’s call to “do or die” on August 8, 1942, the Congress chief said the Quit India Movement had united Indians against British rule and ultimately led to their departure from the country.

“It is an auspicious day today and we have sounded the conch shell for victory from here. This will usher in change and the Congress will form the government here,” Mr. Kharge said, linking the historic occasion to the Congress rally.

He said no genuine BJP



Mallikarjun Kharge

or RSS member had gone to jail during the freedom struggle. “The BJP and the RSS have done nothing for the country’s freedom struggle. The truth is, we are the real patriots. They are the deserters.”

Mr. Kharge also accused the BJP and RSS of “looting in the name of religion”, referring to alleged irregularities involving temple donations. He named Kedarnath, Badrinath, and the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, alleging that those accused of taking devotees’ offerings were now branding their political opponents as being against God.

Taking aim at the BJP government in the State, Mr. Kharge also questioned its “double-engine” governance model and alleged that ₹1,000 crore was being spent annually on publicity and propaganda.

Rahul and Rijiju spar over linking delimitation to women’s quota law

Country is stunted if women cannot express themselves, says LoP; in response, Union Minister challenges Cong. to support quota Bill ‘unconditionally’; Congress already supported it, now implement the 2023 law without any conditions, says Rahul

Sandeep Phukan
NEW DELHI

Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju and Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, on Saturday, sparred over the implementation of the women’s reservation law after a fresh delimitation exercise, with Mr. Gandhi questioning the Centre’s decision to link the two.

The exchange on X began after Mr. Gandhi posted a video speaking of harnessing the “energy” of India’s women and freeing them from patriarchy.

Mr. Rijiju responded by describing it as a “positive message” and said there was a “visible change of heart” in Mr. Gandhi. The Parliamentary Affairs Minister challenged the Congress to support the Bill “unconditionally”.

Hitting back, Mr. Gandhi said the Congress had already supported the legislation and asked why its implementation had been held up for three years.

“Why has it still not been implemented even af-



ter three years, and why do you now want to unnecessarily link it to delimitation?” Mr. Gandhi said in a post on X, adding, “Implement the 2023 law. Without any conditions.”

Responding to Mr. Gandhi, Mr. Rijiju said the Opposition leader knew that the reservation of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies was provided for under the Constitution

(106th Amendment) Act, 2023, or the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam. Its provisions, he said, would come into effect only after a delimitation exercise based on Census figures published after the Act’s passage in 2023. Since the figures for the ongoing 2026 Census – including caste enumeration – could take substantial time, implementation could be delayed until at least the 2034

General Election, he said.

Mr. Rijiju argued that if women’s reservation was to be implemented from the 2029 general election, delimitation would have to be undertaken at the earliest, using the latest available census figures. “The implementation methodology has been proposed under the Delimitation Bill, 2026, introduced in the Lok Sabha along with the amendments to the Constitution. However, the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026, introduced for the purpose, was defeated in the Lok Sabha,” he said.

In his video, Mr. Gandhi said India could not become a successful country without women being able to express themselves freely. “Our country is stunted and incomplete without the expression of women,” he said, calling for women to be able to question their parents, husbands, and brothers, and to speak without fear.

In a response to the video, Mr. Rijiju said: “Now, I hope the Congress party will support the Women’s

Reservation Bill unconditionally.” The sharp exchange between Mr. Rijiju and Mr. Gandhi came amid the government’s renewed effort to push through the delimitation package.

In April, the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) bloc voted against the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, which sought to increase the strength of the Lok Sabha to 850 seats and reserve 33% of them for women after carrying out a fresh delimitation exercise.

Political representation Opposition parties had raised concerns over the implications of a fresh delimitation exercise for the political representation of States that have successfully pursued population control. Though the government failed to secure the two-thirds majority mark of 360 in the current 540-strong Lok Sabha (there are three vacancies) on April 17, 2026, the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) has added more members to its fold since then.

In a U-turn, SAD backs women’s quota Bill

The Hindu Bureau
CHANDIGARH

The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) on Saturday demanded the immediate implementation of the Women’s Reservation Bill and called for an equitable delimitation process to ensure equal representation for all States. The move received support from Union Minister Kiren Rijiju. “I wholeheartedly welcome this very important decision taken by Shiromani Akali Dal following the example set by Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee..,” he said on X.

In a meeting presided over by SAD chief Sukhbir Singh Badal, the party demanded the implementation of the Bill, in addition to supporting the Centre’s proposal to increase parliamentary seats by 50% in all States. This comes amid speculation over a potential alliance between the SAD and the BJP ahead of the 2027 Punjab polls.

In April 2025, Mr. Badal had opposed the proposed delimitation. “In the garb of the Women’s Reservation Bill, the delimitation was brazenly discriminatory against Punjab,” he said.

T.N. MPs call for freezing Lok Sabha seats at 543

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

A meeting of MPs from Tamil Nadu, convened by Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay on Saturday to discuss the proposed delimitation exercise, called for maintaining the status quo by freezing the number of Lok Sabha seats at the existing 543, and retaining the current representation of the States.

It was decided that a government resolution should be adopted in the Tamil Nadu Assembly to protect the rights of Tamil Nadu and other southern States.

The meeting was held at Kalaivanar Arangam in



Discussing delimitation: Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay chairing a meeting of T.N. MPs in Chennai on Saturday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Chennai. Of the total 57 MPs – 39 in the Lok Sabha and 18 in the Rajya Sabha – from Tamil Nadu, only 19, including senior Congress leader and former Union Minister P. Chidambaram, took part in the meeting.

A total of 30 MPs (22 in the Lok Sabha and eight in

the Rajya Sabha) from the DMK, four from the AIADMK, and one each from the DMDK, MNM and PMK boycotted the meeting, while Congress MP from Mayiladuthurai R. Sudha did not participate in the meeting as she was in Karnataka due to party-

related work.

According to an official release, during the meeting, it was decided that all parties should oppose and vote against the proposed Constitutional Amendment Bill on delimitation. The participants of the meeting also objected to giving sweeping powers to the Delimitation Commission and said Parliament should have the final authority.

Mr. Vijay appealed to MPs belonging to all political parties to work together to protect the rights of Tamil Nadu, according to the release.

After the meeting, Congress MP Karti Chidambaram said increasing the to-

tal strength of the Lok Sabha to 815 or 850 and giving Tamil Nadu representation proportionate to the increase would not benefit the State in anyway.

Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK) president Thol. Thirumavalavan said the proposed delimitation of Lok Sabha constituencies should be dropped. The existing Lok Sabha strength must continue and its allocation among the States must also remain unchanged.

He said the unanimous resolution was that there should be no move to increase the number of MPs by 50% or to increase their number based on popula-

Murshidabad NCPI MPs meet Adhikari, rule out joining NDA

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

Two members of Parliament (MPs) of Nationalist Citizens Party of India (NCPI) from Murshidabad district, West Bengal, called on Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari at the State Secretariat. Abu Taher Khan, MP from the Murshidabad Lok Sabha seat, and Khalilur Rahman, Jangipur MP, met Mr. Adhikari on Saturday. They, however, asserted that they will not join the BJP or the NDA.

Speaking to media after the meeting, Mr. Khan said they raised issues concern-

ing Muslims in the district, such as deletion of names during the Special Intensive Revision exercise and restrictions on use of microphones in mosques. He said that as public representatives, they wanted to raise issues affecting the district’s minority population.

There have been several meetings between NCPI MPs and the BJP leadership over the past few days. However, the stand taken by the Murshidabad MPs has raised questions about unity within the party.

Murshidabad has a Muslim population of 70%.

Three Lok Sabha MPs – Abu Taher Khan, Khalilur Rahman, and Yusuf Pathan – had indicated they would not join the NDA, unlike 17 other NCPI MPs.

On Friday, rebel Trinamool Congress MLAs led by Leader of the Opposition Ritabrata Banerjee met the Chief Minister. Thirteen MLAs, including 11 from the minority community, were present.

After the party’s defeat in the Assembly polls earlier this year, 20 Trinamool MPs parted ways with party chief Mamata Banerjee and merged with the little-known NCPI.

Protectors are now predators, says BJP on Punjab AAP govt.

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The BJP on Saturday accused Punjab’s AAP government of exacerbating the State’s law-and-order situation, alleging “those who were made protectors have themselves become predators”.

At a press conference, BJP leader Tarun Chugh criticised the government, saying it had become “the country’s biggest example of misuse of State machinery”, with illegal mining, censorship, paper leaks, drug abuse, extortion, and employee mistreatment allegedly creating an atmosphere of fear.

He alleged illegal mining was continuing across Ravi river, Chakki river in Pathankot, and Kandli region of Anandpur Sahib, Hoshiarpur, Ropar, and Garhshankar. He also said that while AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal had promised that a new mining policy would bring ₹20,000 crore annually into the treasury, only ₹800 crore to ₹900 crore was actually reaching the exchequer. Mr. Chugh also alleged that a “Mann Tax” of ₹3,500 was being collected



Tarun Chugh

from every truck carrying illegally mined material, in a reference to the Chief Minister, Bhagwant Mann.

He further said Punjab was facing “undeclared censorship”, with newspapers, news agencies, and even small YouTube channels being harassed.

Referring to the sanitation workers who have been protesting since May 6, seeking regularisation, higher wages, and restoration of the old pension scheme, he said they had been “welcomed with batons in Barnala” on July 22.

He demanded a judicial inquiry into the Barnala lathi-charge, a CBI probe into mining-related irregularities, and a high-level inquiry into disputed recruitment exams, re-exams, and the State Education Minister’s resignation.

A BJP alliance may help Akali Dal reclaim its lost ground in Punjab

NEWS ANALYSIS

Vikas Vasudeva
CHANDIGARH

Even as ‘Panthic’ politics, a political mobilisation surrounding the Sikh community’s collective identity, continues to be the cornerstone in Punjab’s electoral space, the resitting of an alliance between the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and the BJP, could work in favour of the century-old SAD, which has been struggling to stage a political comeback in the State.

If the Akali Dal’s “core support base” sees a genuine prospect of returning to power in 2027, through this alliance with the BJP, that itself could become a rallying point drawing voters back to the SAD led by Sukhbir Singh Badal, who has served as the State’s Deputy Chief Minister in two separate stints.

Gradual downfall

Over the past decade, the SAD witnessed a gradual and significant downfall in Punjab’s politics, where Sikh identity and their issues have long been central to the political dis-



On the back foot: Over the past decade, the Shiromani Akali Dal witnessed a gradual and significant downfall in Punjab’s politics. ANI

course and different Akali groups have been fighting among themselves to capture the ‘Panthic’ space.

In 2025, the SAD saw a virtual split following the rebel faction forming a new outfit – Shiromani Akali Dal (Punjab Surjit).

Separately, the outfit ‘Waris Punjab De’ led by Lok Sabha MP and pro-Khalistan propagator Amritpal Singh, who is currently in Dibrugarh jail in Assam under the National Security Act, has been steadily building support within the ‘Panthic’ space, a trend observers link to the weakening of the SAD.

Another party, the SAD (Amritsar) led by Simranjit Singh Mann, a known hardline Sikh leader, has periodically stirred up Pun-

jab’s electoral politics. Mr. Mann’s victory from Sangrur parliamentary constituency in the 2022 by-election pointed to the fragmentation within the ‘Panthic’ political space.

While the battle to garner ‘Panthic’ support among different political and other outfits has been going on, political observers feel that the underlying strategic shifts amid speculation of a renewed SAD-BJP tie-up ahead of the 2027 Punjab Assembly elections could reshape the electoral landscape in the State.

Strong ‘tribal instinct’

Analysing the social engineering of Akali politics, Kehar Singh, former head of the Department of Polit-

ical Science at Punjabi University, believes that the traditional agrarian Jat Sikh electorate functioning as the core support base of the Akali Dal possesses a strong “tribal instinct”, and maintaining unity within this core support base is inherently difficult without a viable path to authority.

“Power is the glue which can keep them together, otherwise, they’ll just split into various groups and different loyalties. If they see that there is any prospect of coming to power through an alliance with the BJP, it becomes an attraction point to rally around Sukhbir Singh Badal,” he said.

“Without an alliance, neither the BJP nor any individual Akali faction represents a standalone viable political option in Punjab. While formal announcements are yet to be made, a revived SAD-BJP partnership would fundamentally alter the dynamics of the upcoming contest as their contesting individually would give an advantage to the Aam Aadmi Party and the Congress. Their joining hands will bring the SAD-BJP both into the reckoning,” he said.

PM has time to meet ‘traitors’, but not the youth, says Uddhav

Snehal Mutha
MUMBAI

Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray on Saturday took a jibe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, accusing him of finding time for “traitors” while being indifferent towards protesting youth and having no time to attend Parliament.

Mr. Thackeray was referring to a recent meeting of Mr. Modi with Shiv Sena chief Eknath Shinde and its six newly inducted MPs. It took place after a breakfast meet with MPs from NDA constituents on Friday.

“You can’t meet the youth on whom your government did lathi-charge, but you are assuring traitors who robbed Shiv Sena that you have their back,” Mr. Thackeray said. He also asked whether the meeting was a message to the Supreme Court, which is hearing a case related to the split in the party.

The plea was filed in Supreme Court four years ago after the Election Commission of India (EC) concluded that Mr. Shinde’s was the “real” Shiv Sena and allotted the party symbol of bow and arrow to it. Another plea was recently



Uddhav Thackeray

filed by Shiv Sena (UBT) challenging Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla’s recognition of six of its MPs merging with the Shinde-led Shiv Sena. On August 5, the Supreme Court heard the case concerning the Shiv Sena name-and-election-symbol dispute.

Mr. Thackeray pointed out that he hopes the judgment would be based on the Constitution. “However, the traitor virus is killing democracy. People who love democracy should side with the Constitution,” he added.

He also asked how the EC can argue in court that they do not have historical references of the Shiv Sena party. If they don’t have them, we could have given them, but deciding without complete information is unethical, he said.

INBRIEF



U.S. Vice-President dials PM Modi; discusses strategic ties

U.S. Vice-President J.D. Vance on Saturday dialled Prime Minister Narendra Modi and discussed ways to expand the India-U.S. comprehensive global strategic partnership. Mr. Modi congratulated Mr. Vance and Second Lady Usha on the birth of their son. “We discussed ways to further deepen India-U.S. Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership across key areas,” he said on social media. Mr. Vance’s call to the Prime Minister comes a day after Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan signed a mutual defence pact that was widely seen as a signal of a new regional alignment amid the West Asia conflict. PTI

Four militants of two banned outfits arrested in Manipur

Four militants of two banned outfits have been arrested in two Imphal Valley districts of Manipur, police said in a statement on Saturday. All the insurgents were arrested on Friday for their alleged involvement in extortion. Two cadres, aged 25 and 27 respectively, of the banned outfit SOREPA were arrested from the locality of their residence in Kakching district, the statement said. Another 52-year-old cadre of SOREPA was apprehended from Imphal East district. A 25-year-old cadre of the militant outfit People’s Liberation Army (PLA) was apprehended from Seijang Awang in Imphal East district. PTI

30 judges appointed to High Courts across country

Thirty judges were appointed to four High Courts on Saturday. Twenty of them are advocates and the rest are judicial officers. A statement from the Law Ministry said that 15 judges were appointed to the Madras High Court and eight were appointed to the Calcutta High Court. Six judges have been appointed to the Karnataka High Court and one judge has been appointed to the Madhya Pradesh High Court. Advocates and judicial officers (judges of lower courts) are appointed to High Courts. Those appointed as additional judges are usually elevated as judges (or permanent judges as they are commonly called) in two years. PTI

Amarnath Yatra suspended in J&K amid inclement weather

The Amarnath Yatra was suspended from Jammu on Saturday amid inclement weather, a forecast of heavy rain over the next few days and decline in pilgrim arrivals, officials said. No fresh batch of pilgrims was allowed to leave the Bhagwati Nagar base camp for the Kashmir Valley this morning, they said. Officials said the administration is monitoring the situation and will review the movement of pilgrims based on the weather and the condition of the Jammu-Srinagar national highway, the only all-weather road linking Kashmir with the rest of the country. Over 4.75 lakh pilgrims have visited the 3,880-metre high holy cave shrine of Amarnath since July 3. PTI

SUDOKU

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

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

Reels of a lost Manipur to undergo digital revival in Italy

Rahul Karmakar
GUWAHATI

In the age of fast storytelling with short vertical videos on smartphones, Manipur is rewinding to an era of elaborate reel-making less than a century ago. A collection of 15 rare and fragile 8mm celluloid reels, believed to contain rare footage shot mostly between the mid-1930s and early 1960s, is set to undergo professional inspection, cataloguing, and preservation digitisation in Italy. The Imphal-based S.N. Chand Cine Archive & Museum (SNCCAM) is collaborating with the Home Movies Foundation-National Family Film Archive in Bologna to digitise these reels for posterity. These reels, each up to 10 minutes long, are believed to contain rare footage shot by Maharaj Kumar

Priyabrata Singh and Kong-brailatpam Ibohah Sharma, long before Manipuri cinema found its footing. They were among 25 reels X-Cine donated to the SNCCAM. A film production company established by K. Ibohah Sharma, X-Cine is now run by his son K. Bimol Sharma, a cinematographer, editor, and filmmaker.

‘No facility in India’ “There is no facility in India to digitise such vintage reels, and digital preservation abroad involves a lot of money. So, we prioritised the digitisation of the 15 reels on Manipur’s native life, cultural traditions such as boat race, and landscapes, including Loktak Lake,” Sunzu Bachaspatimayum, the secretary of the Manipur State Film Development Society (MSFDS), told *The Hindu*



Johnson Rajkumar (left), with Paolo Simoni, inspecting a rare 8mm reel of M.K. Priyabrata Singh shot in the 1930s. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

on Saturday. The society manages the SNCCAM. The MSFDS established the SNCCAM in April 2021 to mark the commencement of Manipuri cinema’s golden jubilee celebrations. The idea was to build an institutional framework to preserve the State’s film heritage despite financial constraints, limited man-

power, and the logistical difficulties of handling ageing film materials. The project was fast-tracked after Johnson Rajkumar, SNCCAM’s principal film conservationist, participated in the FIAF Film Restoration Summer School 2026 and the 40th Festival II Cinema Ritrovato in Bologna from June 19

7 killed as bus overturns on Himachal Pradesh hill road

Death toll could rise as passengers may be buried under wreckage; investigations under way to determine cause of accident; 78 people have died in road accidents in State this monsoon season

Press Trust of India
SHIMLA

Seven passengers were killed and 11 others injured when a private bus overturned and plunged onto a lower road in Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh on Saturday morning, police said.

The accident occurred when the bus was on its way from Bairagarh to Chamba on the Bairagarh-Tissa road, a treacherous 27-kilometre mountain route in the remote Churah Valley known for its narrow paths and steep drop-offs. It serves as a key stretch on the way to the high-altitude Sach Pass. Chamba Superintendent of Police Vijay Saklani said that the exact number of people on the bus is not yet known. He said upon hearing passengers’ screams, locals rushed to help and informed police. Rescue operations are



People gather after a private bus overturned and plunged onto a lower road, in Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh on Saturday. PTI

under way with a search-and-rescue team comprising personnel from NDRF, Police, Home Guards, Fire Services, and the Revenue Department at the scene, police said. Of the 11 injured, six with serious injuries have

been referred to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru Government Medical College and Hospital, Chamba. Police said investigations are under way to determine the cause of the accident. Police said the death toll could rise further as pas-

sengers could be buried under the wreckage of the bus. So far, 78 people have died in road accidents in Himachal Pradesh during the ongoing monsoon season from June 30 till August 7.

Headmaster shot dead by unidentified men in Bengal

Shrabana Chatterjee
KOLKATA

A school headmaster was shot at and killed by unidentified men on a motorcycle in Uttar Dinajpur district of West Bengal on Saturday. The deceased, identified as Nazrul Islam, was shot down near the Madaripur area of Islampur while he was on his way to work on Saturday morning. He was rushed to the Islampur Sub-Divisional Hospital immediately after the attack, and later shifted to a government medical facility in Siliguri, but he eventually died of his injuries in the afternoon. The Islampur police have launched an investigation into the incident and are looking at CCTV footage from the area to identify the criminals behind the attack. No arrests have been made so far. The police have not been able to establish any specific motive behind the murder. The local police officials also visited the site of the incident to recover evidence.

Months after protest in Noida, many workers are struggling to find jobs

Shrimansi Kaushik
NEW DELHI

For many workers and activists involved in the April 13 Noida protest, speaking out for better wages and improved working conditions has come at a heavy cost, draining their savings and leaving them struggling to find work. Four months after the protest, workers arrested following the police action say they continue to face financial hardship. The costs of securing bail, procuring legal documents and pursuing their cases have run into tens of thousands of rupees. For some, the expenditure has crossed several lakhs. The expenses include drafting and filing court applications, affidavits, notarisation, certified copies, photocopying of documents, repeated travel to the sessions court for hearings, loss of wages due to court appearances, and other expenses such as food and local transport. Adding to the burden were repeated trips by family members between Delhi, the sessions court, the Allahabad High Court



Security personnel stand guard as factory workers stage a protest demanding a hike in wages, in Noida, on April 13. PTI

and their hometowns to obtain documents and complete verification formalities required for bail and release. Manjeet (name changed), a 25-year-old trainee supervisor at a garment manufacturing company, was picked up five days after the protest allegedly turned violent. A month after his release, he said he struggles to find work. “Having lost my job since I was arrested, I lacked the confidence to apply anywhere. After my friends insisted, I went for a couple of interviews but did not get any response,” Mr. Manjeet said. On April 18, he had just

stepped out of his company when he was picked up by the police and taken to Kasna jail. With his parents and six siblings living in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, his family could not immediately reach him. “Despite having a big family, I felt completely alone. My uncle was able to meet me only 10 days after my arrest,” he said. According to Mr. Manjeet, his uncle spent at least ₹15,000-₹20,000 on paperwork alone. “This was when lawyers took up my case *pro bono*. There were several others with multiple FIRs against them who did not have lawyers fighting their cases

to July 12. The Bologna programme, held at L’Immagine Ritrovata and associated institutions, brought together specialists and practitioners working on film preservation. Mr. Rajkumar was the only Indian selected for the training programme, enabling him to acquire practical knowledge of contemporary archival and restoration practices and establish international links. The collaboration with the Bologna-based Home Movies Foundation was one of the first outcomes of his training and new international connections. The foundation’s director, Paolo Simoni, said the footage will be digitised in accordance with internationally accepted film-preservation standards, rather than merely converting them into access copies. M.K. Priyabrata Singh,

remembered as P.B., and K. Ibohah were two of Manipur’s earliest filmmakers to use 8mm cameras. The former began using his Bell & Howell 8mm camera in 1935. Ahead of their time Together, they captured a Manipur in transition, not as commercial cinema, but as a visual record of a way of life at a time when filmmaking was beyond the reach of most people. “There’s no way of ascertaining what they shot, but we have a general idea of the subjects of each film. We believe these will be invaluable for researchers and cultural specialists who go deep into traditions, histories, and social practices,” Mr. Bachaspatimayum said. Restoring the remaining 10 reels will depend on funds and affordability, he added.

Christian forum opposes proposed FCRA amendment

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

The Assam Christian Forum has opposed the proposed amendment to the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, urging the Centre and the MPs from the eight northeastern States to abandon its “draconian” provisions. The forum said they should instead amend the existing FCRA 2010 in accordance with the norms of natural justice. “The proposed amendments pose a severe threat to civil society organisations, churches and institutions that serve the poor, Dalits, tribals and marginalised communities across Assam and the northeast,” the forum said.

Key provisions The key provisions of the proposed amendment include forfeiture of all movable and immovable assets built in whole or in part with foreign contributions since the original 1976 Act;

The changes pose a threat to civil society organisations serving the poor, says forum

the creation of a Designated Authority empowered to take over such assets and dispose of them under undefined norms; and the transfer of remaining funds of deregistered organisations to the Consolidated Fund of India. According to the forum, such an Authority permanently vested with the assets may hand the transferred funds over to any government body or sell them. The forum said the amendment Bill also raises serious concerns about freedom of religion. Provisions allowing State management of churches, mosques, and temples “while maintaining religious character” under government oversight threaten the autonomy of places of worship.

Fadnavis orders fresh probe into temple scam

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

Days after Siddhivinayak Temple trustees raised irregularities in the collection of donations, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis instructed a fresh investigation into the case. Mr. Fadnavis has ordered the State Home Affairs Department to investigate the temple’s records from 2022 to 2026. Maharashtra Navnirman Sena chief Raj Thackeray raised the issue on August 2, claiming that every year from 2023, irregularities of at least ₹18 crore had appeared. He made the accusations, saying, “after the accused were caught, the weekly donation amount increased from ₹50 lakh to about ₹1.5 crore.” Nine employees of the Siddhivinayak Temple have been arrested in connection with the case. On August 3, the trustees had sought investigation by Anti-Corruption Bureau and the Maharashtra Law and Judiciary Department.



Disrupted lives: A view of Nepali Khuti village, one of the worst-affected areas along the Dikhow River in Sivasagar district.



What remains: Moromi Bora Bordoloi searches for her children's books among the belongings left behind after floodwaters destroyed their home in Majgaon village.



Safe passage: NDRF personnel evacuate villagers from Panbesa village in Sivasagar district as floodwaters continue to isolate homes and communities.



Race to rescue: An aerial view of a rescue operation using rubber boats in flood-hit areas of Sivasagar on August 4, as teams reached people stranded by rising waters. ANI

The wounds beneath Assam's deadly flood

Mining, quarrying, deforestation and jhum cultivation may have destabilised slopes and intensified the impact of the deluge; the floods this year have killed 98 people so far, most of them in three districts — Sivasagar, Charaideo, and Jorhat; the Chief Minister has called for science-backed solutions to tackle the issues



Ritu Raj Konwar
rituraj.k@thehindu.co.in

On July 19, a cloudburst upstream sent a sudden wall of water through Upper Assam. Sivasagar, Charaideo, Jorhat and Golaghat districts are experiencing their worst flooding in decades, with the Dikhow River breaching its extreme flood level. Bihubor, Nepali Khuti, Bihari Basti, and Railwayghat are among the worst-affected areas in Sivasagar district.

Assam has a history of major floods up to five times a year, killing scores of people and animals and damaging crops and assets worth more than ₹1,000 crore annually. The floods this year have killed 98 people so far, most of them in three eastern districts — Sivasagar, Charaideo, and Jorhat.

Experts believe the catastrophe may not have been caused by extreme rainfall alone. Satellite imagery has revealed extensive excavation, deforestation and other human interventions along the river's upper reaches, particularly in Nagaland, raising concerns that decades of environmental degradation may have intensified the disaster. Coal mining, stone quarrying and shifting (jhum) cultivation have stripped large

stretches of hill slopes of vegetation, making them increasingly unstable and vulnerable to erosion and landslides. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said finding a "national solution" to the State's annual flooding was more important than declaring it a national problem.

For decades, the All Assam Students' Union and other organisations have been asking the Centre to declare the State's flood and erosion crisis as a "national problem".

"Declaring floods a national problem is not going to work. We need a national solution with scientific interventions. We need concrete schemes on how Assam can protect itself if water comes downhill from Nagaland," the Chief Minister said on Friday.

The Chief Minister said that Assam has long relied on embankments and geo-bags for flood management, but lacks a scientific mechanism to tackle the issue.

Temporary refuge: Women and children take shelter at a relief camp on the outskirts of Sivasagar town. Altogether, 133 relief camps and relief distribution centres were operational across six districts.





Picking up the pieces: Flood-displaced villagers take shelter in makeshift camps along a railway line in Betbari village, Sivasagar district.



Precious pages: Books salvaged from floodwaters are laid out along a roadside to dry in the Najira area of Sivasagar district.



Lessons continue: Children attend classes at a relief camp in Sivasagar town; with thousands displaced and staying in relief camps, temporary arrangements have been made to keep essential services going.



After the deluge: A car remains stuck in thick layers of mud and silt deposited by receding floodwaters in Nepali Khuti village.



Long wait: Villagers wait for relief supplies in Nemaian village in Sivasagar district. Normalcy is likely to take a long time to come.

A IN-X

PROFILES

A new triple alliance in West Asia

Mecca Agreement

Confronting a diminished American strategic presence, oil-rich Saudi Arabia, nuclear-armed Pakistan and NATO-ally Turkiye have formally entered a trilateral framework promising ‘collective security’ and ‘collective deterrence’ amid growing regional instability

Stanly Johny

By the time Abdullah bin Saud succeeded his father as Emir of Diriyah (the first Saudi state) in 1814, Ottoman forces, under the command of Muhammad Ali Pasha, had already launched their military campaign against the al-Saud reign. The Ottomans sought to destroy the emirate and bring the Arabian Peninsula back under their control. They entered Hejaz by the sea and then marched into the heart of Nejd. In 1818, Ibrahim Pasha, Muhammad Ali’s son, reached Diriyah, the capital of the Emirate, and laid siege to the city until it surrendered. Abdullah, his three sons and two supporters were captured and taken to Cairo, before being transferred to Constantinople, where Sultan Mahmud II rejected a request for a pardon. In May 1819, the last Emir of the first Saudi state, along with his sons and supporters, was beheaded in a square near Hagia Sophia.

The Ottoman invasion, however, did not prevent the Saudis from rebuilding the state the Pashas had destroyed. They established the second Saudi state later in the 19th century and, after its defeat, founded a third in the early 20th century. The third state, with British support, expanded its authority across much of the Arabian Peninsula, eventually giving rise to modern Saudi Arabia. The Ottoman Empire collapsed after the First World War, with the Republic of Turkey emerging as its successor. After the Second World War, both Turkiye and Saudi Arabia became close allies of the U.S., but relations between the two remained strained. Their historical rivalry and contest for influence in West Asia kept them at odds.

Tensions deepened after Turkiye took an increasingly Islamist turn under Recep Tayyip Erdogan in the 21st century. When Turkiye supported the Arab Spring protests of 2010-2011, Saudi Arabia viewed the uprisings as a threat to political stability. Relations deteriorated further after Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi dissident, was killed inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in 2018. The kingdom and the



ILLUSTRATION: R. RAJESH

republic also found themselves on opposing sides in several regional conflicts, most notably in Libya. But this rivalry has begun to melt away in recent years, as West Asia has witnessed a series of balance-shifting developments. On August 7, 2026, Saudi Arabia and Turkiye turned a page in their long and often fraught relationship by formally entering into a trilateral defence agreement with Pakistan. Under the Mecca Agreement, signed in the Saudi holy city by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Turkish President Erdogan and Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, the three countries pledged to strengthen “collective defence” and “collective deterrence”, and to treat an armed attack against any one of them as an attack against all three.

In search of strategic depth
A NATO-style collective security alliance bringing together three major Muslim-majority countries – a nuclear-armed South Asian power, an oil-rich Persian Gulf monarchy and a NATO ally that straddles West Asia and Europe – is something West Asia has not seen before. In September 2025, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia signed a

Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement committing themselves to treat any act of aggression against one as an act against both. The Saudi-Pakistan agreement showed both Saudi Arabia’s deepening strategic vulnerability and Pakistan’s increasing appetite to play a larger security role in an increasingly volatile region. Now, with the addition of Turkiye, the alliance is seeking strategic depth and military muscle. Each member of the alliance brings its own strengths and vulnerabilities. Pakistan is the Muslim world’s only nuclear power, but its economy is struggling to stay afloat. Saudi Arabia, one of the world’s largest oil exporters, has deep pockets but faces daunting security challenges, particularly from Iran and the Houthis. Turkiye has a rapidly expanding military industrial base, including advanced drone-production capabilities, but is worried about Israel’s growing militarism in its neighbourhood. Saudi Arabia, a close American ally since the late 1940s, relied on the U.S. for security, while, in return, promising an uninterrupted flow of oil. The foundations of this alliance have been shaken in recent years as the

U.S., faced with a rising China in East Asia, began to deprioritise West Asia. When Saudi oil facilities were attacked in 2019 by Iran-aligned Houthis, the U.S. did little in response. This prompted the kingdom to explore options beyond America’s security umbrella. In 2023, Saudi Arabia reached a normalisation agreement with Iran, brokered by China. But Saudi Arabia’s security anxieties only deepened when Israel started fighting a mini-regional war after the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack. After the U.S. and Israel launched the war on Iran on February 28, 2026, Tehran repeatedly attacked all Gulf states, including Saudi Arabia. This war seems to have convinced Riyadh that the U.S. security guarantees to Arab states were not as solid as they used to be. Turkiye, on the other hand, has long sought to play a larger security role in West Asia – the old fiefdom of Constantinople. It has cultivated strong ties with Qatar and maintains a troop presence there. An alliance with Saudi Arabia would provide Ankara with greater strategic space in the region. Turkiye also has its own security worries. As an increasingly militaristic Israel expands its territory

through air strikes and incursions, Ankara believes it should prepare for potential conflicts in the future. Although Turkiye is a member of NATO, Ankara has doubts about whether the NATO collective security guarantees would hold in the event of a conflict with Israel, America’s closest ally in the region. Pakistan, the third actor, brings to the alliance its hostility with India. In May 2025, it fought a brief aerial war with India after the Pahalgam terror attack. As India says it would hold Pakistan responsible for terror attacks on its soil, Islamabad is also trying to strengthen its deterrence through counter-alliances.

Shifting sands
The trilateral alliance and its collective security clause do not necessarily mean that Pakistan would go to war with Iran or the Houthis, or that Turkiye would join a future India-Pakistan conflict. After the Saudi-Pakistan agreement was signed in September 2025, Pakistan clashed several times with Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, while Saudi Arabia came under repeated attacks from Iran and the Houthis. But neither country intervened militarily on behalf of the other. So there will always be questions about the practical scope of the alliance’s collective defence commitment. Yet, the agreement remains significant because it brings together three major powers in a common security framework. Defence partnership and military interoperability among them could expand at a time when an overstretched U.S. is confronting the limits of its power in the region. The alliance also provides greater strategic space for Turkiye and Pakistan in West Asia. Other smaller states in the region could be tempted to join, while powers that have uneasy relations with the alliance’s members, including India, the UAE, Israel and Iran, could seek their own counterbalancing arrangements. West Asia’s security architecture could therefore undergo profound changes, accelerating the region’s post-American transition.

THE GIST
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▼ Saudi Arabia, one of the world’s largest oil exporters, has deep pockets but faces daunting security challenges, particularly from Iran and the Houthis
▼ Turkiye has a rapidly expanding military industrial base, but is worried about Israel’s growing militarism in its neighbourhood and the credibility of NATO’s guarantees

A progressive’s progress

Abdul El-Sayed

Michigan’s Senate race will test whether the American Left can win outside the Democratic party’s strongholds

Srinivasan Ramani

When Abdul El-Sayed, a 41-year-old epidemiologist born to Egyptian immigrants, defeated U.S. Representative Haley Stevens by a margin of fewer than 15,000 votes out of more than 1.5 million cast in the Democratic primary elections held in Michigan state in early August, the result caught national and international attention. The playing field had been weighted heavily against him. Outside groups spent more than \$60 million supporting Ms. Stevens, against roughly \$3.5 million in independent expenditure backing Mr. El-Sayed, and she had the endorsement of the Democratic establishment. The single largest source was the United Democracy Project, the super PAC directed by the pro-Israel lobbying group AIPAC, which poured \$30.6 million into the contest – the largest sum it has ever spent on a single race. Mr. El-Sayed’s win was the latest in a recent run of victories by progressive candidates over establishment-backed rivals, though unlike several of them, he has never described himself as a socialist, saying “I’m just a capitalist who understands how capitalism works”. Mr. El-Sayed’s candidacy



ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR

was backed by prominent figures on the American left, including Sen. Bernie Sanders and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. The reasons for their backing were not too difficult to fathom. Mr. El-Sayed’s key policy platform was to call for “Medicare for All” – a universal single payer health care system in which one public insurer covering everyone replaces the private insurance industry and is funded through taxation, akin to Canada’s Medicare system. Mr. El-Sayed also evinced a strong critique of Israel’s genocidal actions in Gaza, going on to call the country a rogue state and an ethno-state, and has pledged to end the U.S.’s funding of its military apparatus, besides that of Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt. He has also been a trenchant critic of President Donald Trump and his anti-immigration policies and the notorious U.S. Immigration and Customs En-

forcement (ICE), which he has called for abolishing. Another issue that binds Mr. El-Sayed to those adhering to the Democratic Socialists is support for regulating campaign finance and keeping “money out of politics”, an issue that has resonated with young people across the U.S., and in Michigan in particular, who rallied for Mr. El-Sayed. **Not an easy race** Mr El-Sayed, who completed his DPhil in public health on a Rhodes scholarship at Oriel College, Oxford, also took a medical degree from Columbia University, but went on to become an epidemiologist. At 30, he became Detroit city’s health officer. He ran for Governor in 2017, with Mr. Sanders and Ms. Ocasio-Cortez’s endorsement but lost the 2018 primary to Gretchen Whitmer, now the State’s Governor. Despite his win in the primary, the race in November will not be easy for

Mr. El-Sayed, who will be the first Muslim to be elected to the U.S. Senate if he succeeds. The Republicans have sought to brand all progressives and especially the democratic socialists as radicals and communists, using a new version of the Red Scare. Mr. El-Sayed faces Mike Rogers, a former Congressman, who has Mr. Trump’s endorsement and is well funded. After Mr. El-Sayed’s win, Mr. Rogers was quick off the blocks to accuse him, without evidence, of supporting the Muslim Brotherhood. AIPAC has also said it will continue the fight to get Mr. El-Sayed rejected. He, however, got the backing of major Democratic leaders, including those who endorsed Ms. Stevens, and the latter herself as soon as the primary results were out. Liberal commentators are, however, unenthusiastic about the triumph of progressives like Mr. El-Sayed and other democratic socialists, whom they call insurgents within the Democratic Party and who, they argue, do not have the broad acceptance in closely contested Rust Belt States such as Michigan. The Senate race in Michigan will be a litmus test of whether the progressive and democratic socialist current can win beyond Democratic strongholds in the U.S.

Moonshot’s rising star

Kimi K3

The July launch of the Chinese company’s AI model has prompted much soul-searching among U.S. Big Tech giants over their approach to open models and AI competition

Sahana Venugopal

Launch more U.S. open models, issue more U.S. visas, build more U.S. data centres, and encourage more U.S. competition – these were some of the panic-tinged solutions swirling online after the Chinese AI firm Moonshot released its Kimi K3 model on July 16. Kimi K3, with 2.8 trillion parameters and a 1 million-token context window, was billed as the “world’s first open 3T-class model”. By comparison, one of Google’s recent Gemma 4 open models reported a size of 30.7 billion total parameters. Moonshot AI candidly noted that the overall performance of Kimi K3 still “trails” Anthropic’s Claude Fable 5 and OpenAI’s GPT 5.6 Sol. However, the company claimed that Kimi K3 showed frontier-level performance across its evaluation suite. On July 27, the firm enjoyed a second burst of adulation when it released the model weights, allowing users to modify and run Kimi K3 as per their commercial needs under a far more flexible licence. Kimi K3 cost about a third of Anthropic’s Fable model in terms of the input and output token prices. While business use cases, operational needs, and other overheads influence

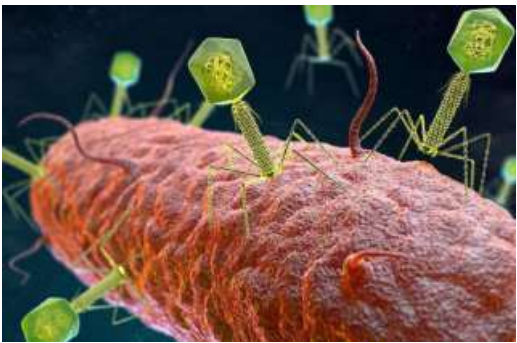


AFP

the final cost of deploying models, such price comparisons can put makers of more expensive models on edge. Over 270 companies, including Amazon, Google, Meta, Microsoft, Nvidia, OpenAI and SpaceX, have now signed an open letter titled ‘Open Weights and American AI Leadership’, calling for policy measures to support open-weight models, in order to keep innovation in the U.S. and ensure its technological dominance. Far from uniting U.S. tech firms, however, the open letter revealed a jagged split when Anthropic did not sign. The Claude-maker instead issued a separate warning stressing the risks of open-weight models, and pushed for chip restrictions against China. Furthermore, the AI firm backed by Amazon and Google had in February alleged that Moonshot was one of the AI labs that generated millions of exchanges with Claude

through hundreds of “fraudulent” accounts in order to illicitly target the U.S. model’s agentic reasoning and tool use, coding and data analysis, computer-use agent development, computer vision, and reasoning traces. In September 2024, an X user asked OpenAI CEO Sam Altman when a specific AI feature would be released. Instead of a date, the asker received a mocking response. “[H]ow about a couple of weeks of gratitude for magic intelligence in the sky, and then you can have more toys soon?” posted Mr. Altman, triggering both laughter and criticism online. **Relations with users** But AI company-customer relations have sharply changed in 2026. Users need not wait for a “couple of weeks” and express their “gratitude” for closed model updates when Chinese AI contenders such as Alibaba, DeepSeek, and Moonshot are inviting

them to try out more open models at lower prices. The success of Kimi is not exclusively a technological triumph; it marks a win in terms of optics as well. The release of Kimi K3 – and later, its model weights – has boosted the company’s standing and its claim to “empower everyone to be superhuman”. Though not named in official missives, Kimi K3 has triggered Big Tech soul-searching in the U.S. as top companies co-sign letters of concern, express sudden support for accessible models, and brainstorm ways to race ahead of China. That Anthropic has accused Moonshot of illicit distillation actually works in favour of the Chinese firm’s reputation. This may as well be an advertisement for an easier and cheaper way to access Claude-grade capabilities, regardless of Anthropic’s hand-wringing about “significant national security risks”. As more open-weight Chinese AI models enter the arena with competitive prices and licences, companies and users will vote with their wallets. The coming weeks and months will shed more light on whether Kimi K3 was a one-shot wonder, or if Chinese firms have truly raised the bar in marketing more open AI tools.



Scientists have used AI to design entire genomes for bacteriophages, viruses that infect and kill bacteria. Using 'genome language models', they generated thousands of new DNA sequences, then used them with a well-studied virus called *XI74* as a template to yield 16 functional viruses. These phages were different from any found in nature, and could together successfully kill bacteria known to resist natural viruses. The work offers a path to create treatments to fight drug-resistant bacteria.



Cepaea nemoralis snails produce five types of mucus for different tasks, such as crawling, sticking to surfaces, and defence, 'tuning' the properties using calcium. Most animal mucus is slippery but snail mucus is versatile. Scientists found that it contains collagen VI as the building block, with the snails secreting calcium carbonate granules to adjust thickness and stickiness. This simple adjustment creates anything from a lubricant to a protective barrier, and could inspire new materials in medicine.



Human engineering and land-use changes have intensified flood risks on the Yangtze river in the last 500 years. Scientists found that while flood frequency peaked during the Little Ice Age (1500-1850), human interventions have made recent floods more severe. Embankments increased the intensity of “100-year floods” by 18% and lake reclamation by 8%. The findings show how engineering projects intended to control floods have worsened their impact.

Hidden environmental cost of powering growing digital and AI-world

Mohamed Yunuss
CHENNAI

Indicating an invisible water footprint behind instant responses generated by systems such as ChatGPT, a research from the University of California, Riverside, estimates that a typical conversation with ChatGPT, involving around 20 to 50 exchanges, can consume as much as half a litre of water – a hidden environmental cost of rising dependence on artificial intelligence (AI).

India is racing to become a global hub of data centres, whose capacity has increased from about 375MW (mega watt) in

2020 to around 1,500MW by 2025, and projected to reach 13.56 GW (giga watt) by 2031-32. According to an UN report, the electricity consumption of data centres had a water footprint of 4.5 trillion litres in 2025, enough to meet water needs of Chennai for (about) 8.8 years, predicting water footprint could reach 9.3 trillion litres by 2030. Chennai's water requirements currently stand at 1,407 MLD.

Despite this, some States, which already have difficulties in meeting their water needs, have announced huge data centre projects. Google, in partnership with AdaniCon-

neX, is coming up with 1GW AI hub in Visakhapatnam and Bharti Airtel's Nxtra, and Meta's AI-enabled data centre in partnership with Reliance Industries in Jamnagar.

Some States have announced incentives to attract companies to set up their data centres. Andhra Pradesh, under its Data Centre Policy 4.0, offers 100% state GST (Goods and Services Tax) reimbursement on capital goods, 100% stamp duty exemption on first sale, and deemed distribution licenses for direct energy purchase for data center projects with a minimum capacity of 300 MW.



Some States which already have difficulties in meeting water needs, have announced huge data centre projects. JOHAN SATHYADAS J

The UP cabinet recently approved the Data Centre Policy, 2026, aimed at creating over 2GW of additional capacity. Gujarat's data centre policy for 2026-29 aims to create 7.5 GW of capacity and invest ₹6 lakh crore.

However, these projects have been met with resistance as several protests

were held in Visakhapatnam, raising concerns on the impact on environment and the pressure on resources such as electricity and water. Similarly, protests were held in Thane, Maharashtra, to oppose Amazon's proposed hyperscale project.

Data hazard
Many data centres do not disclose water consumption figures. Shaolei Ren, associate professor of electrical and computer engineering at the University of California, Riverside, told *The Hindu* that changes should be made at the policy level to improve transparency. "I would start

with mandatory disclosure of monthly and peak water use, water source, and whether the site uses potable, reclaimed, or groundwater.

Water-stressed regions could also require stricter permitting, drought restrictions, and greater use of reclaimed water," he said.

Environmental expert B.V. Subba Rao, who has also worked with the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB), said, "Most of the data centres, like any other industrial estate, will be clustered in a single place and will drain out all the water in the region.

These industries also

depend on tanker water, and thus draw water from all sources across the city."

The CGWB's 2024 assessment puts India's overall stage of groundwater extraction at 60.47%, with 11.1% classified as "over-exploited."

According to Data Centre Map, Gautam Buddha Nagar in UP is now home to at least 17 operational or upcoming data centres, and has a stage of groundwater extraction of 104.79%, per CGWB – meaning the district draws more water every year than nature replaces. Hyderabad has been officially designated over-exploited by CGWB.

INBRIEF



BEML Q1 consolidated net loss narrows to ₹27 crore

State-owned BEML has narrowed its consolidated net loss to ₹27.01 crore in June quarter FY27, helped by increased revenues. It had reported a net loss of ₹64.11 crore in the first quarter of preceding 2025-26 fiscal, the company said in an exchange filing on Friday. During the quarter, the total income increased to ₹821.19 crore from ₹642.56 crore a year ago. In a separate statement, BEML said it secured orders worth ₹1,181 crore in Q1 FY27 as compared to ₹435 crore a year ago. With this, BEML's total order book stood at ₹16,284 crore as on June 30, 2026. PTI

Eveready Industries Q1 profit rises over 22% to ₹37 crore

Battery and flashlight maker Eveready Industries India Ltd. on Saturday reported a 22.3% year-on-year increase in its consolidated net profit to ₹36.97 crore in the June quarter of FY27. The company had posted a net profit of ₹30.23 crore in the April-June period a year ago, the Burman family-promoted firm said in a regulatory filing. Its revenue from operations increased by 8.97% to ₹407.71 crore in the June quarter of FY27. It was at ₹374.14 crore in the corresponding quarter in the year-ago period. Expenses of Eveready Industries have gone up 7.13% to ₹357.03 crore in the reporting quarter.

NMDC slashes iron ore prices for second month in a row

N. Ravi Kumar
HYDERABAD

India's largest iron ore producer NMDC has reduced the price of the commodity by ₹200 per tonne, effective August 8.

This is the second consecutive month the State-owned mining major has slashed the price of key raw material for steel.

The new, per tonne prices have been set at ₹5,250 for Lump ore (65.5%, 10-40mm) and ₹4,500 for Fines (64%, 10mm).

Following the latest change, Lump ore price is below the April 5 level of ₹5,300. At ₹4,500 per tonne, the price of Fines is on the same revised April level. The latest revision reverses part of the price increases effected in the first three monthly revisions.

July output, sales

Sharing July performance numbers, earlier this month, NMDC said iron ore production stood at 4.06 million tonne (MT), an increase of more than 31% compared with 3.09 MT in the year earlier period. Sales for July was lower year-on-year at 3.40 MT (3.46 MT).

Govt. examining if Meta 'crossing into role of a publisher'

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The Centre's meetings with Meta have brought into focus a key question - whether the social media giant's recommendation systems and paid content promotion fit in its status as an intermediary, government sources said adding the key issue is whether the company complies with the provisions under the IT Act or crosses into the role of a publisher by deciding "what content is shown to whom".

Sources further said that the issue centres on whether a platform that actively decides what users see, can continue to claim intermediary status under the Information Technology Act. The issue assumes significance because Section 79 of the IT Act grants intermediaries a "safe harbour" from liability for third-party content, subject to compliance with the provisions of the law and due diligence requirements.

Sources said if Meta's recommendation systems determine "what is shown to whom" and also "promote content for pay-



The government has also asked Meta to take measure to address deepfakes

ment", it raises the question of whether such functions are consistent with the legal definition of an intermediary.

According to the sources, if a platform determines what content gets shown to users, it amounts to publishing, and platforms would then have to take responsibility for their actions.

The issue assumes significance as intermediaries enjoy certain legal protections under the Act, subject to compliance with prescribed conditions.

Sources said the government has also asked Meta to take measures to address deepfakes following multiple rounds of discussions held over the past few days.

UCBs asked to join NUCFDC, RBI proactive to sector: Shah

The Union Cooperation Minister announced that the umbrella body will soon be shifted to Maharashtra from New Delhi as 70% of UCBs were from Maharashtra, Gujarat, Goa and Karnataka

Snehal Mutha
MUMBAI

Days after the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) decided to resume issuing licenses to urban cooperative banks (UCBs), Union Cooperation Minister Amit Shah on Saturday asked the UCBs to join the umbrella body of National Urban Cooperative Finance and Development Corporation Limited (NUCFDC) for technological support and increasing the confidence of depositors.

Announcing that NUCFDC will soon be shifted to Maharashtra from New Delhi, Mr. Shah, who is also the Home Minister, asked the UCBs to look at RBI from a different viewpoint as it has proactively helped the sector in recent times. "Drawing on my experience, I can say the RBI has always proactively helped us whenever we look forward to them. RBI and UCBs have different standpoints, from which we have to come out," Mr. Shah said, while speaking at the 'Sahakar Nav-Kranti Melava' programme, during which he inaugurated



Union Cooperation Minister Amit Shah speaks during the inauguration of the NUCFDC office in Mumbai. PTI



Drawing on my experience, I can say the RBI has always proactively helped us whenever we look forward to them

AMIT SHAH
Union Cooperation Minister

the new office building of the NUCFDC in Mumbai.

He highlighted that the RBI had recently liberalised branch opening, raised limits on gold loans along with a one-time settlement option for the UCBs, allowed the UCBs to provide doorstep banking, demand drafts and life cer-

tificates facilities, and appointed a dedicated nodal officer for affairs of the UCBs. RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra announced its decision to resume licensing of UCBs, after a pause of more than two decades, as part of developing a vibrant co-operative sector.

RBI, which came out with a four-tier regulatory structure for UCBs in 2022, has now mooted an on-tap framework with significantly higher entry thresholds, including substantial minimum capital and business scale needs.

Terming small borrowers the safest category for lenders, he said, "The scheme of offering ₹2.5 lakh of loans without any

collateral was provided during my time at a UCB in Gujarat.

The management had doubts, but the repayment rate including interest is over 99% under the scheme. So, it is safest for lenders to loan to small borrowers".

According to Mr. Shah, India is home to 1,400 UCBs with deposits of about ₹6 lakh crores. Maharashtra houses 449 cooperative banks, a major contributor to the cooperative banking sector in the country.

He announced that NUCFDC will soon be shifted to Maharashtra from New Delhi as 70% of the entities are from Maharashtra, Gujarat, Goa and Karnataka.

Urging UCBs to join the umbrella body, Mr. Shah said, "It will link to the Security Operation Centre, increasing the confidence of depositors in banks and providing information about the latest reforms being made in the banking sector, necessary software facilities like Mule Hunter, and training programmes for employees."

Aditya Birla Fashion and Retail Q1 loss widens to ₹249 crore

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Aditya Birla Fashion and Retail Ltd. (ABFRL) on Saturday reported widening of its consolidated net loss to ₹248.73 crore for June quarter FY27.

The company had posted a net loss of ₹233.73 crore a year ago, according to a regulatory filing from ABFRL. However, revenue from operations was up 10.6% at ₹2,025.56 crore in June quarter FY27.

Total expenses

Total expenses of ABFRL, which owns Pantaloons and Style Up brands, along with a host of ethnic brands, were at ₹2,395.45 crore, up 11.5%.

Revenue from Pantalons business was at ₹1,204.39 crore, higher by



ABLBL has brands including Louis Philippe, Van Heusen, Allen Solly and American Eagle

10% year-on-year. Revenue from 'Ethnic and Others' was also up 10.1% to ₹830.79 crore.

Total income of ABFRL, including other income, was up 9.8% to ₹2,081.58 crore.

Last year, the Aditya Birla group demerged ABFRL's Madura business

into a separately listed entity, Aditya Birla Lifestyle Brands Limited (ABLBL), effective from May 1, 2025.

ABLBL has brands including Louis Philippe, Van Heusen, Allen Solly, Peter England, Simon Carter and American Eagle.

It also has sportswear brand Reebok, for which it has a long-term licensing agreement for the Indian market.

ABFRL owns Pantalons and Style Up, along with designer ethnic brands such as Sabyasachi, Shantnu & Nikhil, House of Masaba and Tarun Tahiliani. It also has premium ethnic wear brands, including Jaypore, Tasva & TCNS.

As of December 31, 2025, the company has presence across 1,226 stores spanning over 7.7 Mn sq.ft. retail space.

India ships Makhana to Australia

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

India has shipped 18 tonnes of Mithila makhana by sea route from Bihar to Australia, the commerce ministry said on Saturday.

The consignment,

sourced from Makhana growers of Darbhanga district, is expected to strengthen the international presence of Bihar's flagship GI product, while creating enhanced income opportunities for farmers through export-led market access.

Bihar accounts for nearly 85% of India's Makhana production.

During 2025-26, India exported more than 7,000 metric tonnes of Makhana and value-added Makhana products to more than 20 international destinations.

IRDAI asks insurers to submit data for ISP

N. Ravi Kumar
HYDERABAD

The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) has directed all insurers, except reinsurers, to submit information every month on their premium income, investment income and claims paid to the government for the purpose of Index of Service Production (ISP).

The details are needed to facilitate data requirements of the Union Ministry of Statistics and Pro-

gramme Implementation (MOSPI) in preparation of the ISP, the regulator said in a circular to all life, general and health insurers.

The general and health insurers are required from July 2026 onwards to provide details of gross direct premium, claims paid (direct) and investment income of policyholders and shareholders.

Life insurers are required to submit gross premium, benefits paid (gross) and investment income for policyholders and shareholders.

India warns Diageo on misleading claim

Reuters
NEW DELHI

India's food safety regulator warned liquor giant Diageo that it misleadingly claimed one of its top-selling whiskies was "matured in American oakcasks", when most of the product had not been matured, a confidential government notice shows.

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of In-

dia (FSSAI) announced recently it had prohibited the sales of Diageo's Royal Challenge Whisky made in Madhya Pradesh and some whisky and rum brands made in some Indian states by Diageo and India's Inbrev for using artificial flavouring, such as whisky and rum flavours, rather than proper ageing and ingredients.

The industry says it complies with the law.

Fujiyama opens Ratlam 2 GW power electronics unit

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Fujiyama Power Systems Limited (Fujiyama) has commissioned a 2 GW power electronics manufacturing facility at Ratlam in Madhya Pradesh.

The facility will manufacture a wide range of power electronics products, including solar inverters, UPS systems and other related solutions, the company said in an exchange filing on Friday.

The Ratlam facility is a key part of the company's large-scale greenfield manufacturing expansion project aimed at strengthening its integrated manufacturing capabilities across the rooftop solar value chain, it said.

Capacity increase

With the commissioning of this facility, Fujiyama's total power electronics manufacturing capacity has increased to 4.2 GW, further strengthening its ability to capture the rapidly growing rooftop solar market.

"As demand for rooftop solar solutions continues to grow across India, strengthening our manu-

The Ratlam facility is a key part of the company's large-scale greenfield manufacturing expansion project

facturing capabilities in power electronics enables us to deliver reliable, high quality products while improving operational efficiencies and supply chain integration," Chairman and Joint MD, Pawan Kumar Garg said.

Long-term growth

With the battery manufacturing facility also progressing as planned, the Ratlam complex will further strengthen the company's integrated manufacturing platform and support long-term growth strategy, he said.

In May, the company commissioned a 2 gigawatt (GW) solar panel manufacturing facility at the Ratlam complex.

Fujiyama Power is one of India's leading providers of rooftop solar solutions, offering an extensive portfolio across solar panels, solar inverters, lithium-ion and tubular batteries.

Ukraine denies targeting Bulgaria as drone explodes near pipeline



Turkiye's Parliament passes Bill aimed at peace with Kurdish rebels



Trilateral defence pact is similar to NATO's Article 5, Turkish Minister

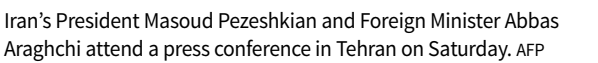


U.S. Senate confirms Todd Blanche for attorney general in narrow vote



Strait won't open until U.S. 'corrects its behaviour', says Iran as tanker hit

Associated Press
DUBAI



The United States must

blockade of Iranian ports and withdraw its military from the area. It also must “completely compensate” Iran for war damage, lift sanctions and “uncondi-

Zelenskyy visits Serbia as 4 killed in Russian attacks

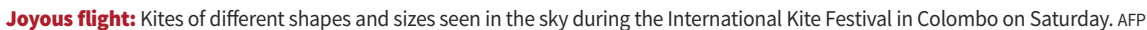
Associated Press
BELGRADE

Volodymyr Zelenskyy with Aleksandar Vucic during a press meet following their meeting in Belgrade on Saturday. AFP

Hamas says it is still ready to go ahead with U.S.'s Gaza plan

Agence France-Presse
GAZA CITY

Soaring high

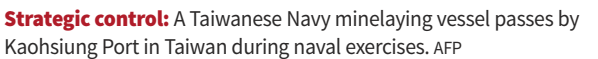


Lebanon says Israeli troops infiltrated a village held by army

Agence France-Presse
BEIRUT

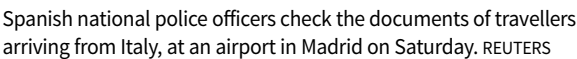
China's traffic control order for Taiwan Strait during typhoon 'ridiculous': Taipei

Reuters
TAIPEI



Spain imposes border checks on Italian travellers in response to Rome's policies

Associated Press
MADRID



The migrant rush on Ceuta also reignited the immigration debate within the European Union, whose leaders criticised Mr. Sanchez for policies that they suggested were responsible for the massive influx.

CM

ANDHRA PRADESH



Two paths to progress: While migrant workers shape the physical skyline of the Amaravati Capital Region, rural women gain vital vocational skills to transform their economic future, at a training session organised at the SRM University-AP campus. G.N. RAO

The hands that are shaping Amaravati

As Andhra Pradesh's greenfield capital takes shape, stories of migrant workers, women finding new livelihoods, and efforts to balance development with social and environmental concerns reveal the human side of building a new city. Their experiences shed a unique light on how an ambitious project is reshaping lives alongside the landscape of the capital region, writes **P. Sujatha Varma**

Cranes and earthmovers dominate Amaravati's skyline as Andhra Pradesh's greenfield capital, where towering government complexes and landmark infrastructure, takes shape. But behind the rapid construction is a quieter story of migrant workers, local communities, women exploring entrepreneurship and skill development opportunities, and the people whose lives are being transformed alongside the city.

Among the thousands of workers contributing to Amaravati's transformation is 46-year-old Deepak Maiti from Purba Medinipur district of West Bengal, who has spent the past year amid cranes, concrete, and steel helping build the capital city.

Maiti is among 1,900 migrant labourers, mostly from West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, and Odisha, engaged in constructing the sprawling multi-storied NGO housing project at Nelapadu village under Thullur mandal in Guntur district. His workday begins early and stretches for nine hours. Despite demanding schedule, thoughts of home are not far away. "My old mother awaits me back home. I visit her whenever possible," he says softly.

As dusk settles over the workers' camp, the atmosphere begins to shift. After a long day at the construction site, labourers gather around carrom boards and ludo games, sharing laughter and enjoying moments of camaraderie. Yet, conversations often drift back to families waiting thousands of kilometres away.

Maiti's story is echoed by many others at the site, each carrying a similar tale of migration, sacrifice and hope. One of them is 35-year-old Indrabhan, a farmer from Bharatpur in Uttar Pradesh, who arrived in Amaravati four months ago in search of additional income, while the crop on his farm awaits harvesting.

"Like many seasonal migrant workers, I plan to return once the farming season demands my attention," he says. On a lighter note, he adds that five fellow workers from his home State are also at the site. "I don't feel out of place, and adapting to life in the camp has been easier," he says.

Inclusivity

To make life away from home easier for these migrant workers, the contractor has put in place facilities to cater to their diverse cultural and daily needs. Separate kitchens and dining areas allow them to prepare meals according to their culinary preferences, while a grocery store within the camp stocks daily essentials, lending a sense of familiarity and routine to life far from home.

The camp site is equipped with bunk beds, sanitation facilities, safe drinking water, kitchens, dining halls, first-aid centres, CCTV surveillance, emergency response systems and recreational spaces for sports and weekend movie screenings.

Even with these facilities, the emotional burden of migration remains difficult to overcome. For 32-year-old Ramswamy from Odisha's Rayagada district, separation from family remains the hardest part of life away from home. Having arrived in Amaravati six months ago in search of work, he left behind his wife and two young children, an eight-year-old son and a two-year-old daughter. After a long day at the construction site, one ritual remains non-negotiable. "I make

Like many seasonal migrant workers, I plan to return once the farming season demands my attention.

INDRABHAN
Farmer from Uttar Pradesh

video calls every day after returning to my room. Seeing my children refreshes my body and heart," he says, a gentle smile lighting up his face. "The facilities here do not lessen the pain of separation from the family," he adds.

Life at the site is not entirely defined by work and separation. Community celebrations, including birthday events, provide workers with relief from the rigours of construction.

Welfare at the camp extends beyond accommodation and recreation. "Welfare measures complement a safety programme that begins even before a worker enters the site," says Nilanchala Hotta, Occupational Health and Safety Manager at Larsen and Toubro, the multinational conglomerate company implementing the NGO housing project.

Beyond work

The scale of these measures becomes evident when viewed against the backdrop of Amaravati's massive construction activity, stretching over expansive tracts of land. The rich alluvial plains, once known for their fertile agricultural fields nourished by the River Krishna, now bear the unmistakable marks of large-scale excavation and earthwork.

Every few kilometres, fleets of earthmovers, excavators, bulldozers, graders, dump trucks, and compactors dot the landscape, their steady movement underscoring the scale of activity under way. The roads tell the story of a city being built from the ground up. Traffic slows as signboards caution motorists with messages of "go slow", "deep excavations in progress," "heavy machinery at work," and "construction zone ahead."

Beyond the heavy machinery and construction sites, efforts have been made to support the families who have migrated with the workforce. Snaking around excavation sites will lead to a crèche set up at a labour camp in Thullur, where P. Swathi, the caretaker, is surrounded by nearly 30 children in the 3- to 10-year age group.

Bridging the language gap with the children is a challenge, shares Swathi, who is a native speak-

er. "I try to communicate with them in my broken Hindi," she says with a sheepish smile and a shrug.

Caring for children is only one part of the broader social support system. Persuading mothers to send their children to the crèche is a difficult task, says Ch. Nithisha, a gender specialist deployed by the Social Welfare wing of the Andhra Pradesh Capital Region Development Authority (APCRDA). "Attendance remains an uphill task," she adds.

Beyond childcare, efforts are also being made to address gender concerns, enhance safety, and create opportunities for women through dedicated welfare and empowerment initiatives.

"Women take time to open up, and it is important to ensure their welfare while they work far away from their homes," she says.

Bridging the gender gap

While migrant workers play a key role in Amaravati's construction, the city's development is also reshaping the lives of local communities that once heavily depended on agriculture. For generations, farming was the primary source of livelihood for families across the villages that now make up the Amaravati Capital Region.

Even as many landowners voluntarily pooled their land for the construction of the new capital, the need for alternative sources of income became increasingly important. Employment opportunities remained limited, particularly for women, owing to low literacy levels, early marriages, and socio-cultural norms that largely confined them to their homes.

Recognising this gender gap, the APCRDA has been working to make local women active participants in Amaravati's growth story. "The CRDA's Entrepreneurship Development Programme equips women with vocational skills, business training, and market linkages, enabling them to establish micro-enterprises and generate sustainable livelihoods," says Col. V. Ramulu, Group Director of CRDA Social Development Wing.

"Through this programme, we are helping women become economically independent," says Ramulu.

One such outcome of these efforts is the promotion of women-led entrepreneurship through "Amaravati Amma Vanta" initiative—a community-based food brand developed by the CRDA to promote local livelihoods and the culinary heritage of Andhra Pradesh. "This initiative supports women Self Help Groups (SHGs), local producer groups, and micro-entrepreneurs by providing

training, quality standardisation, branding, packaging, and market access for traditional food products such as millet-based foods, pickles, sweets, snacks and other value-added local specialties," Ramulu says.

The impact of the initiative is reflected in the journey of Adineni Mahalakshmi, a 21-year-old from Mandadam village, who had no understanding of the concept of financial independence. A Class VII dropout, she is now considered one of the successful micro-entrepreneurs. Mahalakshmi says, "I never thought I could contribute meaningfully to my family income."

As a homemaker, Mahalakshmi sells millet malt, which is in great demand among CRDA employees and people visiting the office for grievance redressal.

Mahalakshmi's success story is one among many that highlight the programme's wider impact on women's livelihoods in the capital region.

The initiative began with millet-based food processing training for 161 community members, leading to the establishment of 26 women-led micro-enterprises, with each entrepreneur now earning an average monthly income of ₹12,000.

"Amaravati Amma Vanta" is only one among several livelihood initiatives being promoted in the capital region. The focus is also on equipping women with marketable skills that can pave the way for self-employment and entrepreneurship.

This is evident in the beautician training classes being conducted at an auditorium on the SRM University-AP campus. The classroom buzzed with enthusiasm as participants eagerly learnt professional beauty and grooming techniques, many nurturing dreams of setting up home-based salons or small enterprises that could provide them with a steady source of income.

Nearly 100 women from villages across the Amaravati Capital Region sat engrossed as trainer G. Vasavi demonstrated beauty and skincare techniques. The beautician course, offered by APCRDA in collaboration with SRM University-AP, is one of several skill development programmes designed to equip local residents with employable skills and encourage entrepreneurship.

"I would love to start my own beauty business from home after completing this course," says Kaithepalli Sravani, a homemaker from Thulluru. Then, breaking into laughter, she adds, "Even if I don't get any customers, I can at least use what I've learned to enhance my own beauty."

For Borra Sri Durga Shanti, a young mother of two from Malkapuram, the training represents an opportunity to contribute to her family's income. "I can't wait to start my own beauty parlour and support my husband financially," she says.

"These women are quick learners and constantly ask questions that go beyond the course curriculum," says Vasavi, a cosmetologist and makeup artist.

As part of the tie-up, SRM University is also conducting training programmes in Fitness and Nutrition Science, GST and Tally, cybersecurity, digital marketing, embedded systems, and Very Large Scale Integration technology for various sections of the local community.

Environmental conservation

The focus on inclusive development transcends livelihoods and extends to the environment as well. The officials' effort to ensure that urban development goes hand in hand with environmental conservation is exemplified by the centralised tree translocation facility, which has been developed on 15 acres of land in Anantavaram.

This facility preserves mature trees that would otherwise be lost to infrastructure development. Nearly 10,000 trees representing 54 species are being scientifically relocated, rehabilitated, and nurtured before being replanted across Amaravati's future parks and avenues.

While construction machinery continues to dominate the skyline of Amaravati, officials are ensuring that development remains socially and environmentally accountable. In many ways, the foundations for the new capital are being laid not just with concrete and steel but also with the aspirations of the people building it.





A resident of Mallikarjuna Nagar Colony in Hyderabad shows his property that has been included in the prohibited list under Section 22A of the Registration Act; (below) Property owners whose holdings have been included in the Section 22A prohibited list stage a protest under the banner of the Telangana Realtors Association at the Narapally Sub-Registrar's Office in Hyderabad on Thursday, demanding the removal of their lands from the list and to seek permission for registrations. NAGARA GOPAL

Locked out of their own land

Several owners of legally purchased plots, houses and apartments across Telangana are finding themselves unable to sell, mortgage or transfer their properties after entire survey numbers containing prohibited categories such as Bhoodan, waqf, ceiling surplus and assigned lands were brought under the Section 22A prohibited list. But the Congress-led government says not one cent of land has been deliberately added to the list since it assumed office in December 2023. **P. Laxma Reddy** and **M. Rajeev** explore the ground situation

The deal is made, the buyer has been found, the price has been agreed upon, the documents are in order. Then comes the final step: registration. But for an increasing number of property owners, that is precisely where everything falls apart.

Many say they only discover that their land has been included in the prohibited list under Section 22A of the Registration Act when they walk into a Sub-Registrar Office (SRO) to complete what they believed would be a routine transaction. One of them is 40-year-old mason Udayagiri Prasad of Narapally in Medchal-Malkajgiri district, near Hyderabad.

Prasad had purchased a 66.8-square-yard residential plot in Survey No. 58 at Kachavanisingaram village in the district several years ago. When his niece's wedding approached, he decided to sell the property to repay the ₹10 lakh he owed to his elder brother. But when he approached Narapally SRO, officials refused to register the sale, informing him that the land was included in the prohibited list maintained under Section 22A of the Registration Act. "I have all ownership documents but cannot sell my own property. I had to mortgage the property's title documents to secure a private loan," he says.

Across Hyderabad and surrounding districts, owners of residential plots, apartments, independent houses and private patta lands say they are facing similar hurdles after discovering that their properties have been brought under the prohibited list. The restriction often comes to light only after a buyer has been identified, a sale agreement signed and the parties approach the SRO to complete the registration.

Mekala Harshavardhan, 28, of Boduppal, ran into a similar problem. His sister and brother-in-law, a defence official posted in Kashmir, had purchased residential plots measuring 200 and 100 square yards in Survey No. 44 of Peerzadiguda village in Medchal-Malkajgiri.

He says the Uppal SRO refused to register the properties after finding that the entire survey number was categorised as Urban Land Ceiling (ULC) land under the prohibited list.

On July 29, the Sub-Registrar wrote to the District Collector seeking clarification on whether plot no.13 (Part) in Survey No. 44 could be registered or whether it was covered under Section 22A(1)(d). Verification of the Prohibition Watch Register reportedly showed that the entire extent of about 1.58 lakh square yards in Survey No. 44 stood notified as ULC land in the name of D. Mal-la Reddy. The registration process has been kept on hold, pending clarification from the Collector.

The problem extends beyond vacant plots. A resident of Peerzadiguda approached the Medchal-Malkajgiri District Collector after registration of her apartment in Survey No. 43 was refused because the entire survey number had been classified as ULC land. Following her representation, the Uppal SRO advised her to obtain a no objection certificate (NOC) from the Collector's office before registration could be permitted.

Residents in several parts of the district, including Alwal, say similar issues have affected apartments and independent houses.

What is Section 22A?

Section 22A of the Registration Act was introduced to prevent the illegal registration of go-



There was no notice informing us that our property has been included under Section 22A. We came to know only after identifying a buyer, signing agreements and paying advance.

A PROPERTY OWNER

vernment lands, water bodies, forest lands, endowment properties, waqf lands and other protected public assets. It empowers the government to notify lands where registrations are prohibited, preventing fraudulent transfers and safeguarding public property.

Property owners and real estate representatives, however, contend that poor land records and weak coordination between departments have resulted in genuine private lands also being included in the prohibited list.

Officials familiar with the process said district administrations were asked to update records of prohibited lands about three-and-a-half months ago. In several cases, revenue authorities reportedly furnished only survey numbers instead of identifying the exact extent under government ownership. As a result, entire survey numbers were brought under Section 22A, rendering privately owned lands within them non-transferable despite owners possessing registered sale deeds, approved layouts and municipal permissions.

Developers cite a residential layout near Shamirpet police station that received approval from Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority (HMDA) in 2022 but was later included in the prohibited list, forcing the developer to seek denotification.

"Even buyers of plots in HMDA-developed and auctioned layouts are facing similar hardships, as those lands have also been included in the prohibited list," says R. Srisailam, a realtor.

For affected families, the issue goes far beyond paperwork. Farmers who depend on land as collateral, middle-class families, retirees and NRIs say they are unable to sell or mortgage properties despite holding registered ownership documents. Many owners say the lack of prior intimation has compounded their problems. "There was no notice informing us that our property has been included under Section 22A," says one property owner. "We came to know only after identifying a buyer, signing agreements and paying advance."

Applications for NOCs, they say, often remain pending for months, forcing repeated visits to Revenue offices, submission of historical ownership records and considerable expenditure on legal assistance.

Realtors seek review

The Telangana Realtors Association (TRA) has urged the State government to undertake a comprehensive review of the prohibited list.

TRA State president Naragoni Praveen Kumar

alleges that legally owned private patta lands had been wrongly included because of administrative lapses and inadequate verification of records. Registrations that were permitted earlier were now being refused in several areas, he says.

The association also alleges that registrations in some newly developed colonies were being withheld because the lands had been classified as waqf properties.

While supporting the government's efforts to protect public lands from encroachment, it demanded the immediate removal of genuine private lands from the prohibited list, fixation of responsibility for wrongful inclusion, district-level grievance redressal centres, a time-bound mechanism for issuing NOCs, an online application tracking system with SMS and e-mail alerts, and greater accountability among departments responsible for maintaining land records.

The Telangana government introduced the Bhu Bharati portal after widespread complaints over lapses in the Dhara-ni portal launched by the previous Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) government.

However, problems relating to lands classified under Part B of the prohibited list continue, with complaints from both rural and urban areas over the wrongful inclusion of private properties. Over 18 lakh acres of agricultural land are included in Part B, while fresh additions of urban lands continue to expand the list.

The Part-B category, primarily governed by Section 22A of the Registration Act, originates from a 2006 State amendment to the Central Act following the recommendations of the Koneru Ranga Rao Committee on land reforms. It empowers the government to prohibit the sale, gift, transfer or mortgage of specified land parcels through SROs.

However, the government that introduced the amendment did not frame detailed guidelines for identifying prohibited lands, resulting in the present imbroglio. Officials say the absence of clear guidelines, inclusion of patta lands, removal of the 'enjoyment' column from registration re-

cards and reliance on outdated land records have led to mismatches between official records and the actual extent of land on the ground.

The use of outdated records for categories such as Bhoodan, waqf, ceiling surplus and assigned lands is another reason for the mismatch, experts say. Land laws expert M. Sunil Kumar says Telangana follows a deeds registration system rather than a title registration system, unlike what it is followed in over 90 countries. "Placing lands in the prohibited list does not necessarily reflect the ground reality," he says, citing Kharij Khata lands that are restored to owners once tax dues are cleared.

Although the Congress government replaced the Telangana Rights in Land and Pattadar Pass Books Act, 2020, with the Telangana Bhu Bharati (Record of Rights) Act, enabling corrections at different levels instead of only through the Chief Commissioner of Land Administration (CCLA), issues relating to prohibited lands remain unresolved. Experts say District Collectors face a conflict of interest as they are tasked with protecting government land while also deciding ownership disputes, which are further complicated by unreliable land records and technical registration errors.

Although lands have periodically been removed from the prohibited list, they reportedly reappear because speaking orders confirming their clearance were never issued. The problem is said to be particularly acute in urban areas, especially Ranga Reddy and Medchal-Malkajgiri districts surrounding the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation limits.

The way forward

The growing number of complaints has revived demands for greater transparency in the preparation of the prohibited list. Experts call for recording the reasons and documentary evidence for including any land under Section 22A and suggest introducing a 'community audit' mechanism, enabling residents of villages or wards to verify ownership claims.

Displaying the list of prohibited lands in Gram Panchayat offices and inviting claims and objections, they say, could offer a cost-effective way of resolving disputes.

They have also suggested that the government resolve disputes category-wise to make lands litigation-free in a phased manner. "The government can first clear disputes relating to lands assigned before 1956 and gradually move to subsequent categories," Sunil Kumar says.

He also stresses the need for a proper adjudication mechanism at different levels so that disputes do not escalate to the office of the Chief Commissioner of Land Administration or the judiciary.

Meanwhile, Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivasa Reddy has reiterated that the government is committed to ensuring that no poor person or genuine landowner suffered because of lands included in the Section 22A prohibited list.

Chairing a high-level review meeting on August 5, the Minister said the government is pursuing the twin objectives of protecting the rights of eligible citizens while safeguarding government lands. He maintained that not even one cent of land had been deliberately added to the Section 22A prohibited list since the Congress government assumed office in December 2023.

The Minister has also directed officials to dispose of all Section 22A applications and complaints within the stipulated time, ensuring that no file remains pending. Every case, he says, should be examined on its merits, based on records and legal provisions, so that eligible landowners receive justice.

Referring to Telangana High Court's directions, he said all Section 22A disputes should be resolved within the stipulated 45-day period. He also reminded Collectors that they were the final authority to review lands included in the prohibited list and urged them to strike a balance between protecting public rights and safeguarding government interests.

