



Chennai » Coimbatore » Bengaluru » Hyderabad » Madurai » Noida » Visakhapatnam » Thiruvananthapuram » Kochi » Vijayawada » Mangaluru » Tiruchirappalli » Kolkata » Hubballi » Mohali » Malappuram » Mumbai » Lucknow » Cuttack » Patna



**U.S. ENVOY IN MANIPUR**  
**Modi and Trump share a special bond, says Gor**  
NEWS » PAGE 5



**FIVE-DAY WEEK DEMAND**  
**Strike hits banking services nationwide**  
BUSINESS » PAGE 11



**IMMIGRANT WOES**  
**U.S. may end H-1B visa holders' grace period**  
NEWS » PAGE 12



**SATYA NIKETAN PG COLLAPSE**  
**When home in Delhi became a death trap**  
*Unsafe reality behind student housing boom*  
GROUND ZERO » PAGE 7



**SUMMIT CLASH**  
**Sabalenka to meet Rybakina in final**  
SPORT » PAGE 14

## INSIDE



**SC seeks timeline for FSSAI's food label roll-out**

**NEW DELHI**  
The Supreme Court has put the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India's (FSSAI) two-phase rollout of front-of-pack warning labels (FoPL) under the scanner, warning that the second phase could be "indefinitely postponed" in the absence of a clear timeline. » PAGE 5



**U.S. marks 25 years since 9/11 terrorist attacks**

**NEW YORK**  
Americans commemorated the 25th anniversary of 9/11 on Friday, remembering the victims, the shock, and the sweeping consequences of the al-Qaeda attacks on symbols of the United States' might and prosperity. » PAGE 12

**Vice-principal of Kolkata college 'forced' to resign**

**KOLKATA**  
Vice-principal of Surendranath Law College in Kolkata resigned on Friday after a 23-hour 'gherao' by students over the college's order mandating 70% attendance to appear for upcoming semester exams. The ABVP hailed the "win" and "purified" her office with Gangajal. » PAGE 2

**Dipke requests Jarange-Patil to call off strike**

**MUMBAI**  
Abhijeet Dipke, founder of the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), met Maratha activist Manoj Jarange-Patil at Antarwali Sarati on Friday, and requested him to end his fast. Mr. Jarange-Patil has been on a hunger strike demanding reservation for Marathas. The meeting took place on day 14 of the fast. » PAGE 2

**India-EU FTA closer to reality; text with Council**

**NEW DELHI**  
The European Commission has forwarded the text of the India-EU Free Trade Agreement to the European Council for its signature and conclusion, signalling that the legal vetting and finalisation of the text have been completed and all that remains are the internal approvals. » PAGE 11

# End Ukraine war, says Modi as he meets Putin

The two leaders review cooperation across defence, energy, space and other sectors, as they meet ahead of BRICS Summit; India ready to assist in peace efforts, dialogue is the way forward, says PM

**Kallol Bhattacharjee**  
NEW DELHI

Russian President Vladimir Putin, the first foreign dignitary to arrive here for the BRICS Summit, held a bilateral meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday and reviewed the full spectrum of bilateral ties.

"During today's meeting we talked about: closer trade ties, including implementation of the Programme for Economic Cooperation 2030. Cooperation in areas like infrastructure, energy, technology, defence, culture, and more," said Mr. Modi.

Sources said the two sides discussed steps to increase the bilateral trade target to \$100 billion by 2030 and projects on civil nuclear cooperation. Mr. Modi reiterated his call to end the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

"The two leaders reviewed progress in bilateral cooperation in political, economic, defence, energy, space, skill mobility, and people-to-people domains," said the External Affairs Ministry.

They exchanged views on the conflict in West Asia and the spillover effects of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in the Black Sea region. Several Indian sailors were killed in attacks by Russian and Ukrainian forces on foreign-flagged vessels.

### Gift and invitation

"PM once again reiterated that dialogue and diplomacy was the way forward in resolving conflicts and in-



**Token of friendship:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi gifts President Vladimir Putin a Russian translation of the *Thirukkural*, in New Delhi, on Friday. REUTERS

dia stood ready to assist in peace efforts," the Ministry said in a press note.

Mr. Putin invited Mr. Modi for the 24th India-Russia Annual Summit, which India accepted. The dates of the summit will be decided as per "mutual convenience" following diplomatic consultations.

The talks featured ways to expand industrial cooperation with Russia, collaboration in railway and tunneling, developing a steel value chain, and more business-to-business opportunities. Russia has been

increasing employment opportunities for Indian blue-collar professionals and cooperation in the mobility of skilled manpower.

Against the backdrop of the conflict in West Asia and supply chain disruptions, measures to ensure the flow of energy and fertilizers through strategic joint ventures were discussed, as was cooperation in critical minerals.

Mr. Modi gifted Mr. Putin a Russian translation of *Thirukkural*, the classical Tamil poem collection authored by poet Thiruv-

luvar. Mr. Modi was accompanied by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, Principal Secretary Shaktikanta Das, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, and other senior officials in the meeting.

The two leaders last met on the sidelines of the SCO summit in the Kyrgyz Republic's capital, Bishkek, on August 31. Mr. Modi had called for an end to the Ukraine war then.

**REPORTS ON**  
» PAGES 3 & 4

## Modi, Pezeshkian discuss Iran conflict

**Kallol Bhattacharjee**  
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday met with Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian ahead of the BRICS Summit and called for resolving the ongoing conflict with the United States "through dialogue and diplomacy". Speaking at a public event later in the evening, President Pezeshkian said his talks with Mr. Modi will help Iran's energy and commercial ties with India and referred to Israel and the U.S. as "bullies" and said, "Iran will not be bullied."

Mr. Modi drew attention to the disruption in the energy supply chain because of the conflict and emphasised the need to ensure freedom of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz, which has been caught in a chokehold ever since the U.S.-Israel coalition attacked Iran on February 28.

President Pezeshkian, who arrived here earlier for his first visit to India since he took charge in 2024, emphasised "commonalities" between the two sides and called for deeper cooperation.

### 'More special'

"Happy to have met the President of Iran. This visit is more special because it is his first visit to India. We believe that we should move forward with a long-term win-win strategy. The prevailing situation in the region was also discussed. India remains steadfast in its commitment to the pursuit of enduring peace," Mr. Modi said.

Referring to the U.S.-Israel attack on Iran, Mr. Pezeshkian said, "Iran will not accept bullying. History of humanity tells us that



Masoud Pezeshkian

bullies and oppressors are ultimately destroyed."

"The Prime Minister reiterated India's consistent position that all issues must be resolved through dialogue and diplomacy," said the Ministry of External Affairs. "He also underscored the need for continued efforts to ensure lasting peace and stability in the region, safeguarding freedom of navigation and commerce, and the safety of seafarers," said the Ministry, highlighting the challenges India has been facing on energy security and maritime freedom because of the chokehold in the Strait of Hormuz.

Mr. Modi appreciated Iran's regular participation in the multilateral consultations under BRICS and welcomed President Pezeshkian to the Leaders' Session of the BRICS Business Forum. The Iranian leader is accompanied by a large delegation that includes Foreign Minister Syed Abbas Araghchi and Minister of Finance Seyed Ali Madanizadeh.

At the BRICS Business Forum, Mr. Pezeshkian called for greater use of national currencies to deal with "currency risk and mutual settlement". He called for the creation of a Joint BRICS insurance company with an initial capital of \$10 billion to cover major infrastructure and energy projects.



**China calls for 'long-term' view on ties with India**

**BEIJING**  
Beijing said it was willing to work with New Delhi to handle relations "from a strategic height and long-term perspective" ahead of Xi Jinping's talks with Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit. » PAGE 3



**'India building economic bridges amid barriers'**

**NEW DELHI**  
Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday highlighted the issue of rising trade barriers and disrupted sea trade routes, saying India was building bridges amid these constraints and using its presidency of BRICS to establish new networks. » PAGE 4

**Negotiators race to finalise 'Delhi Declaration'**

**NEW DELHI**  
As New Delhi prepared to host the BRICS Summit of 11 emerging economies, negotiators were working late into the evening on Friday to forge a consensus for the "Delhi Declaration". Diplomatic sources and officials said that all member countries had agreed to "almost all the text, with the exception of one paragraph". » PAGE 3

## Houthis take control of Red Sea coast in Yemen

**Agence France-Presse**  
SANAA/DUBAI

Yemen's Houthis seized a strategic Red Sea island on Friday after capturing territory along the coast, sealing their takeover of a vital shipping corridor linking Europe and Asia.

After a week-long offensive that has left hundreds dead, the Houthis appeared to be in control of territory along the Yemeni side of the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, the southern gateway to the Red Sea and, in turn, the Suez Canal.

A military official of Yemen's Saudi-backed government said the Houthis have seized control of the country's entire Red Sea coast. "Everything that was under our control on the western coast has fallen," the official said.

The capture of Mayyun island, in the middle of the narrow waterway, heightens the fighters' ability to attack Saudi tankers, which they have been targeting since July.

Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest oil exporter, has relied on the Red Sea ever since Iran's Hor-



**Mangled remains:** Wreckage of a Saudi Karayel unmanned combat aerial vehicle shot down over Hajjah governorate in Yemen, according to Houthi authorities. REUTERS

**The Houthi offensive has cost more than 500 lives, and has displaced about 46,000 people**

ter, has relied on the Red Sea ever since Iran's Hor-

muz blockade choked off its shipments via the Gulf.

**Praise from Tehran**  
Mohammad Mokhber, an adviser to Iranian supreme leader Mojtaba Khamenei, congratulated the Houthis on their "resounding victory" on Friday.

A member of the Houthi's politburo had sought to allay fears for global shipping in an interview released on Friday, insisting "there is no cause for international concern".

"Freedom of navigation and international trade in the Red Sea and Bab al-

Mandab are safe and orderly," Hazem al-Assad told the Al-Araby al-Jadeed news outlet on Friday.

The Houthi offensive has cost more than 500 lives, and has displaced about 46,000 people, the UN migration agency said on Friday.

The Houthis carried out their heaviest missile and drone attack in years this week against Saudi Arabia -- Yemen's northern neighbour -- setting oil sites ablaze and wounding 73.

Before the Red Sea offensive, the Houthis already controlled a large part of Yemen's north.

### Saudi hits back

While Saudi Arabia has hit back with air strikes and ordered troop reinforcements from Aden, where the Saudi-backed government is based, it has failed to stop the Houthis' lightning advance. Houthi media said two Saudi strikes hit Mokha's airport on Friday, while a local official there said the city's seaport was also hit by six missiles of unknown origin.

## 'Indian biotech firms must expand avenues'



N. Ram, Director, The Hindu Group, hands over a memento to chief guest Suchitra Ella in the presence of G. Viswanathan, founder and chancellor of VIT, and G.V. Selvam, VIT vice-president, at the Biotech Conclave, 2026 in Chennai on Friday. B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

**The Hindu Bureau**  
CHENNAI

Stressing India's shift from relying on vaccines developed in the West to building its own research and manufacturing capabilities, Suchitra Ella, Padma Bhushan recipient, co-founder and managing director of Bharat Biotech, and CII President-Designate, said on Friday that Indian companies should look beyond the domestic market and develop products for other developing countries, particularly for

infectious diseases.

She was delivering the inaugural address at the Biotech Conclave 2026, organised by VIT Chennai in association with *The Hindu*, which brought together experts across academia, research, and investment. Sessions and panel discussions at the event in Chennai covered a range of topics, from funding for biotechnology research to advances in gene editing and drug discovery.

**DETAILED COVERAGE ON**  
» PAGE 10

INBRIEF



Nagaland Chief Minister, his deputy call on Shah in Delhi

Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio and his deputy Yanthungo Patton, called on Union Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi on Friday, officials said. They said the meeting covered several development, administrative and security issues. Mr. Rio said the meeting was to request Mr. Shah's intervention and support in fast-tracking Nagaland's developmental aspirations. "Grateful for his continued guidance and support towards Nagaland's progress and development," Mr. Rio said in a post on X. Mr. Patton also said on X that meaningful discussions took place on matters concerning Nagaland. PTI

Relief for Trinamool as HC puts fire dept. notice on hold

The Calcutta High Court on Friday directed the Fire Services Department not to implement its order to vacate two floors of a high-rise building housing Trinamool Congress leader Abhishek Banerjee's office at Camac Street in Kolkata until the court rules on a plea challenging the directive. Hearing of the Trinamool's petition challenging the order to vacate the premises concluded after the parties completed their respective submissions in the matter. "The authorities are directed to restrain from giving any effect to the letter dated September 4, 2026," Justice Krishna Rao directed. PTI

With eye on poll, BJP to begin 'drug-free Punjab' drive amid row over Dalit villager's death

The Hindu Bureau  
CHANDIGARH

With an eye on the 2027 Assembly poll, the BJP on Friday announced the launch of 'Nasha Mukht Punjab Yatras' from September 18 to "highlight the drug menace" in the State.

State BJP president Kewal Singh Dhillon said the yatras will cover all 117 Assembly constituencies and turn the fight against drugs into a mass movement. He was addressing a press conference along with party national vice-president Manpreet Badal and former State chief Sunil Jakhar.

The campaign comes close on the heels of a row that erupted following the alleged death by suicide of a Dalit villager, who was reportedly under pressure to apologise for questioning Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema over the sup-



Punjab BJP president Kewal Singh Dhillon. FILE PHOTO

ply of 'chitta (synthetic drugs)' in the State.

Mr. Dhillon alleged that three major challenges are confronting Punjab - growing drugs menace, deteriorating law and order situation, and corruption. "The yatras are not merely an anti-drug awareness campaign, but an attempt to confront the grave threat that it poses to Punjabiyat, our culture, values and the proud identity of the land of the gurus. The drug crisis is tearing families apart,

pushing Punjab's youth, traditionally known for their contribution to the armed forces, sports and nation-building, towards violence and gang-related activities. It is also imposing a heavy financial burden on families forced into debt or to sell their land and assets for treatment," he said.

Mr. Dhillon said BJP president Nitin Nabin will flag off the first yatra on September 18 from Pathankot district. It will be followed by marches from Fatehgarh Sahib (September 19), Fazilka (September 20) and Talwandi Sabo (September 21).

In March, Union Home Minister Amit Shah had sought a chance to form the next government, promising that the BJP will free the State from the scourge of drugs within two years.

(Those in distress can contact Tele MANAS at 14416 to seek help)

National Song row: J&K Cong. chief hits out at Omar

Peerzada Ashiq  
SRINAGAR

The Congress on Friday reacted sharply to ally National Conference (NC) vice-president and J&K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah's remarks that the "Congress wanted people of Kashmir to go jail over the National Song".

Terming Mr. Abdullah's remarks "detached from reality", J&K Pradesh Congress Committee chief Tariq Hameed Karra said: "Are we wrong to expect our Hon'ble CM to be equally capable of standing up for secular and inclusive values as the CMs of Kerala and Tamil Nadu by limiting Vande Mataram to first two stanzas at State events?"

Former Army havildar held two weeks after arms theft from regiment in Secunderbad

Naveen Kumar  
HYDERABAD

A former Army Havildar was arrested on Friday in connection with the recent theft of 12 firearms and over 1,800 rounds of ammunition from the 20 Madras Regiment premises at Bolaram in the Secunderabad Cantonment area in Telangana.

All the stolen firearms and ammunition were recovered, said Telangana Director General of Police (DGP) C.V. Anand at a press conference here.

The accused, Upputholla Mallesh, 37, retired from the 20 Battalion, Madras Regiment, on June 30 after 16 years of service. He was given premature retirement over health concerns



Telangana DGP C.V. Anand and senior officers inspect the recovered weapons in Hyderabad on Friday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

and disciplinary issues, the Malkangiri police said. They said he had suffered a ligament tear in his leg but was keen on working. However, his request was not considered. Investigators

are examining whether he nursed a grudge against his superiors on the issue.

Call records erased

The DGP said he had been under surveillance as he

was spotted around the regiment a few days before the theft. The suspicion gained strength when he appeared before investigators with his call records and WhatsApp history erased, the DGP said. The police also noticed him sweating and appearing shifty while being questioned.

He said intelligence and other agencies had analysed around 8.5 lakh mobile numbers during the probe. The suspect list eventually came down to two people - Mallesh and another havildar.

A key hurdle in the investigation was the absence of CCTV footage from the area on the night of the theft. Mr. Anand said the CCTV system was not

working because the power supply at the location was switched off at night as a precaution following a fire incident there.

According to investigators, Mallesh entered the regiment at night on August 30, broke the locks, took the firearms and ammunition and concealed them.

Probe teams had examined several angles, including espionage, following the theft.

The police said that after Mallesh's role became clear, investigators spoke to his family members on Thursday and informed them that the probe had taken a serious turn. Mallesh then confessed at the Task Force office, the police said.

Vice-principal of Kolkata college 'forced' to resign; ABVP 'purifies' her office

Was locked in office for entire night, no one came to help, says Mohammadi Tarannum after stepping down following 23-hour protest by college students over 70% minimum attendance rule

Shrabana Chatterjee  
KOLKATA

The vice-principal of Surendranath Law College in Kolkata resigned on Friday after a 23-hour 'gherao' by students over the administration's order mandating 70% attendance to appear for the upcoming semester exams.

Speaking to mediapersons after stepping down, Mohammadi Tarannum accused the protesters of confining her to her office for the entire night without electricity.

The Akhili Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), which participated in the stir, hailed the "win for students" and went on to "purify" her office with Gangajal.

"I... hereby tender my resignation from the said position due to certain unavoidable family, health-related and personal issues," stated the resignation letter. During an interaction with the media, the vice-



Protesters at Surendranath Law College. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

principal said she had sought help from Higher Education Minister Kauslav Bagchi, who, according to her, had promised to intervene.

The stand-off, which started on Thursday afternoon and ended at 1 p.m. on Friday, saw several heated exchanges between

the protesters and Ms. Tarannum.

Like all colleges affiliated with Calcutta University, Surendranath Law College is headed by a vice-principal.

"The 70% attendance requirement is set by the Bar Council of India. Neither I nor anyone else can al-

ter this fact. I cannot take this pressure. I fell sick. I was locked here for the whole night. No one came to rescue me," she said.

"I did not resign, I did not resign," Ms. Tarannum chanted as she was escorted out of the college by the police.

'No attendance system'

The Minister said he agreed with the 70% attendance requirement. However, he added, "That place does not even have a proper attendance register. How will they keep attendance if there is no system in place?"

Mr. Bagchi also said there was a "culture of political favouritism" during the previous Trinamool Congress government.

ABVP State media in-charge Ananta Barui said, "Students will not tolerate discrimination, arbitrary decisions or misuse of authority in institutions. The resignation is a victory for students' rights and academic justice."

Now, Vijay's plan for new Secretariat faces protest; parties back fisherfolks' demand

The Hindu Bureau  
CHENNAI

The Tamil Nadu government's proposal for a new Secretariat complex at Pattinapakkam in Chennai has triggered a massive backlash from the local fishing communities as well as political parties. Fisherfolk from 12 hamlets have warned of mass protests if the ₹1,200-crore project goes ahead at the proposed site.

AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami on Friday termed the TVK-led government's decision to "unnecessary". In a statement, he said that when the government was in the midst of a severe debt and struggling with an acute shortage of funds, with farmers' and social issues requiring its immediate attention, the Secretariat complex at a cost of ₹1,200 crore was "not essential". He pointed out that the proposed site was a "congested area", marked by traffic bottlenecks, the residential localities of fishing communities, and schools.

Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)) State



The CPI(M) has urged the Tamil Nadu government not to commence any construction work at the Pattinapakkam. B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

secretary P. Shanmugam said the Tamil Nadu government had issued a government order (GO) in a hurry for the construction of the new Secretariat. He demanded that an all-party meeting be convened to arrive at a consensus on selection of a suitable location.

Speaking to reporters in Chennai, he said there was no denying that the existing Secretariat is "inconvenient". But the government should not be in haste while planning an administrative headquarters and Assembly complex. Mr. Shanmugam said the fishing community living in the area close to the identified location was opposing the proposal, and the government should listen to its concern.

Maratha reservation: Dipke meets Jarange-Patil, requests him to call off hunger strike

The Hindu Bureau  
MUMBAI

Abhijeet Dipke, founder of the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), met Maratha activist Manoj Jarange-Patil at Antarwali Sarati on Friday, and requested him to end his fast.

Mr. Jarange-Patil has been on a hunger strike for reservation for the Maratha community. The meeting took place on day 14 of the fast.

In a post on X, Mr. Dipke wrote that he met Mr. Jarange-Patil, and inquired about his health. He said that Maharashtra needs Mr. Jarange-Patil and requested him to call off his fast and take care of his health.

'Strike for the people'

The CJP founder said the strike is for the children of the Maratha community to get education and employ-



CJP founder Abhijeet Dipke, centre, with Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange Patil, left, in Jalna district on Friday. PTI

ment and had the government done the same, there would not have been a need for a hunger strike.

He said the government was elected to do work for the people, but it did not do that work and left the people in the lurch. Mr. Dipke said he visited the home of Prathamesh Deshmukh on September 10, who killed himself over a loan of ₹2.5 lakh. "Mr. Jarange-Patil is on a hunger strike so that people do not have to die.

Why the government does not come to Antarwali Sarati and talk to Mr. Jarange-Patil. What the Chief Minister and the Deputy Chief Minister are doing," Mr. Dipke said.

He said Ministers send their own children abroad to study while lamenting the dismal state of educational infrastructure in villages.

(Those in distress can contact Tele MANAS at 14416 to seek help)

U.P. 'nyay panchayat' to seek justice for slain singer Ankit Balyan

Press Trust of India  
MUZAFFARNAGAR

A panchayat has been called by the father of slain Haryanvi singer Ankit Balyan at his residence in Shamli district in Uttar Pradesh on Friday to discuss measures to secure justice for his son.

International Jat Parliament president Manu Choudhary said the gathering at Banthikheda village will also decide the date for a 'Nyay Maha Panchayat' to demand the arrest of two absconding shooters and other conspirators involved in Balyan's murder and raise the issue of alleged lack of cooperation by Haryana Police with investigators from Uttar Pradesh.

A similar community panchayat was held at Balyan's residence late on Thursday that was attended by the several Jat leaders, including Balyan Khap head and Bharatiya Kisan Union leader Naresh Tikait, Gathwala Khap head Baba Shyam Singh, and Mr. Choudhary.

Meeting with Nayab

The panchayat decided that a five-member committee would meet Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini to raise their demands, Mr. Tikait said.

The participants also sought action against conspirators living abroad or lodged in jails and financial aid from the State government for Balyan's family.



## IN-Y

**Key participant:** South African President Cyril Ramaphosa inspecting a guard of honour. ANI

CM  
YK

CM YK  A IN-X



More heft  
The BRICS Summit allows India to advance its global ambitions

Forging a joint statement at a major multi-lateral conference, in the midst of global conflicts where members are involved is never easy – for India, hosting the BRICS Summit in Delhi is the second time in recent years, since the G-20 Summit in 2023, that it has had to shoulder such a responsibility. That, however, is not the only reason India's BRICS presidency comes at a difficult time. The past few occasions India has hosted the coalition of emerging economies – in 2012, 2016 and virtually in 2021 – it was a smaller grouping of just five major powers, where managing consensus was easier. Since the expansion in 2024 – adding Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE – and Indonesia's induction in 2025, BRICS' identity has evolved, but a common focus remains elusive. In addition, global conflicts involving BRICS members have grown. The war involving Iran has heightened this impact, as Iran, a victim of the U.S.-Israel strikes, as well as the UAE that was attacked by Iran in retaliation, are members that have been unwilling to agree to a common narrative on the problem. India's position on Israel also came into conflict with other members earlier this year, as the grouping has traditionally taken a much more critical line on Israel's actions. The largest share of New Delhi's problems as host comes however from the United States, where President Donald Trump has accused it of plotting to overthrow the U.S. dollar's domination of the global economy, and has been threatening tariffs on all members for planning to increase intra-BRICS payments and trade. As the Modi government seeks to restore ties with the Trump administration, on trade and its Indo-Pacific strategy, hosting BRICS also risks invoking America's ire, however irrational.

As a result, a success in reconciling all these different strands at this time would indeed be a shot across the bow for the grouping and a big win for Indian diplomacy. Since it was first conceptualised 25 years ago, and a summit convened in 2009, the BRICS countries have risen in global stature and economic heft, benefitting intra-BRICS trade. Today, BRICS accounts for half the world's population, two fifths of the global economy and a fourth of global trade; it also includes many of the world's top energy producers and biggest consumers. While the grouping prefers not to be called anti-western it is certainly a powerful counter to the G-7, and western-led thinking. Being part of BRICS gives India more heft in advancing its ambitions on the global high table, and its presidency has ensured it prominence on the world stage, as leaders and representatives of 11 BRICS countries including Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin and Masoud Pezeshkian begin deliberations on Saturday at the Bharat Mandapam to discuss the future of global governance.

Eyes on the road  
Judicial fiat alone cannot prevent traffic fatalities

Despite hosting only 1% of the world's vehicular fleet, India accounts for around 11% of road traffic fatalities, due in some part to widespread non-compliance with wearing seat belts and helmets while driving. Post-crash investigations have often revealed victims being ejected from vehicles or suffering lethal secondary collisions against vehicles' interiors; children are also vulnerable due to the patchy use of child restraint systems and rear-seat belts. Recently, a Supreme Court Bench asked the Road Transport Ministry to consider a petition to reduce road traffic deaths by habituating the use of these measures. Actual policing is certainly wanting, including due to chronic shortages of traffic police cadres; there is also room to constrain manufacturers to install tamper-proof seat belt reminders and thwart modifications after purchase. The Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act 2019 instituted or scaffolded various mechanisms to prevent road traffic deaths whereas the national data so far have not presented evidence of improvement at the scale India needs.

However, in 2024, Road Transport Ministry data said that two-wheeler riders constituted 46.2% and pedestrians 20.6% of road deaths. Seat belts and child restraints only protect occupants of enclosed vehicles, so better enforcing their adoption will address the reasons underlying only one-third of the total mortality. In fact, speeding has been found to be the dominant recorded violation associated with fatalities, and a national strategy focused on mitigating opportunities for vehicles to accelerate to high speeds may yield greater gains. Second, neither the Union government nor State governments have systematically employed the 'Safe System' approach. While individual responsibility and the duty of care accruing to schools and similar institutions matter, governments are still expected to design roads assuming that not everyone will behave perfectly. Put differently, they need to reduce the probability as well as the severity of crashes, including by identifying and fixing accident-prone locations, setting up physical environments that compensate for human error, reducing children's exposure to two-wheeler traffic, and improving timely access to trauma care. Finally, India lacks a public culture that reinforces safe behaviour and deters unsafe behaviour. For India to reduce road mortality in a sustained manner, governments must treat safety through a combination of approaches that does not overstate the role of individual decisions. It is also commendable that the Court has referred the petition to the Centre, rather than assume an interventionist posture as it did in 2019, in a tacit acknowledgment that road safety has outgrown judicial fiat.

When India hosts the 18th BRICS summit in New Delhi on September 12-13, 2026, under the banner of "Humanity First", the occasion will be draped in a familiar promise: that the bloc is building an alternative to the western-dominated global financial order. A new bank to rival the World Bank. A reserve fund to free countries from the International Monetary Fund. A path away from the dominance of the U.S. dollar. Seventeen years into the BRICS project, it is worth asking a blunt question: has any of this actually materialised?

The short answer is no; the reasons have less to do with intention than with structure. The BRICS countries, for all their rhetoric about reshaping the world, are deeply enmeshed in the very system that they claim to challenge. The institutions they built reflect that reality.

**The same bank, different nameplate**  
The New Development Bank (NDB), launched in 2015, was BRICS's flagship creation. It was supposed to offer developing countries an alternative to the World Bank: loans without the political strings, governance without western dominance, financing in local currencies rather than dollars.

A decade later, half of the NDB's outstanding bonds are denominated in U.S. dollars, with the Chinese yuan making up most of the rest. The South African rand accounts for just one per cent. Local currency lending, which the bank's own leadership set as a target of 30% of its portfolio by the end of this year, sat at roughly 22% as of mid-2025. The NDB's first rupee-denominated bond was still in planning stages as late as September 2025, a full decade after the bank opened for business.

The NDB courts the same western credit-rating agencies (S&P, Fitch, Moody's) that the BRICS governments publicly criticise as biased against developing countries. And when those agencies' rules collided with bloc solidarity, the ratings won. In March 2022, days after Russia invaded Ukraine, the NDB froze all operations related to Russia, a founding member and 20% shareholder, to protect its own credit standing in New York. Russia has since relinquished its turn at the NDB's rotating presidency, extending the Brazilian incumbent's term to 2030. Whatever else this is, it is not an institution that operates outside western financial discipline.

The bank's total project approvals reached \$39 billion by the end of 2024. To put that in



Sushovan Dhar

Member of the Committee for the Abolition of Illegitimate Debt (CADTM)

BRICS promised a new financial order through the New Development Bank, but the truth is that it remains deeply tied to the old one

perspective: the World Bank Group commits roughly \$100 billion every year. In a full decade of operation, the NDB has approved less than what its supposed rival disburses in six months. More importantly, the NDB co-finances projects with the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) rather than offering a genuine alternative to them. The relationship is complementary, not competitive. That may be smart banking, but it is a far cry from the institution's founding rhetoric.

**The safety net nobody uses**  
Alongside the NDB, the BRICS countries established the Contingent Reserve Arrangement in 2015: a \$100 billion pool of foreign exchange reserves meant to help member-countries weather financial crises without turning to the IMF. In principle, this was the most radical idea in the BRICS repertoire: a mechanism that could, over time, break the IMF's monopoly on emergency lending to the Global South.

In practice, the CRA has never been activated. Not once in a decade. And a closer look at the fine print reveals why. Any member-country that wants to draw more than 30% of its allotted share must first enter into a programme with the IMF. The escape hatch, in other words, leads right back to the institution that it was supposed to escape. The CRA has no permanent staff, no independent surveillance capacity, no research wing. It is, in effect, a promissory note dressed up as an institution; one that, by its own rules, cannot function independently of the very body it was created to rival.

If there is one idea that captures the public imagination about BRICS, it is de-dollarisation: the notion that the bloc will reduce the world's dependence on the U.S. dollar and shift global trade toward local currencies. Media coverage of every BRICS summit amplifies this promise. The reality is more modest than the headlines suggest.

The 126-point declaration issued at the Rio summit in July 2025 – the bloc's most comprehensive statement to date – does not contain the word "de-dollarisation" even once. Russian President Vladimir Putin himself stated in November 2024 that the bloc has "not sought to abandon the dollar". India opposes any move toward a common BRICS currency, fearing trade reprisals from Washington. South Africa considers the idea too risky. China prefers the gradual internationalisation of the yuan on its

own terms. When U.S. President Donald Trump threatened a 10% tariff surcharge on countries aligning with "anti-American" BRICS policies, the bloc offered no collective response. The episode was revealing: it showed how little it takes to deter the BRICS from even the appearance of challenging the dollar system.

Perhaps the most telling detail is what the BRICS actually ask for when they talk about reforming global finance. The declarations issued at both the Kazan summit in 2024 and the Rio summit in 2025 call for a "quota-based and adequately resourced" IMF. Read that carefully. The BRICS are not calling for the IMF to be replaced, restructured, or even fundamentally reformed. They are asking for a bigger say within it.

The problem is structural. The U.S. holds 16.49% of IMF voting rights, and all major decisions require an 85% supermajority. This gives Washington, and Washington alone, an effective veto over every significant decision that the fund makes. The BRICS countries know this. They have known it for decades. And yet their official position is to ask for more chairs at a table whose rules guarantee that the outcome will always be decided by someone else.



**What this tells us about BRICS**  
The bloc's defenders will point out that the NDB has financed real infrastructure, that its expansion to include Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates reflects a genuine desire among Global South countries for alternatives to western-led institutions, and that the frustration driving the BRICS agenda: with IMF conditionality, with dollar hegemony, with a financial system designed in 1944 by and for the industrialised West.

But the gap between the rhetoric and the record matters. The BRICS countries have not built an alternative financial architecture. They have built a set of institutions that operate within the existing one: lending in dollars, deferring to western rating agencies, designing safety nets that require IMF approval, and pledging loyalty to the very governance structures they publicly denounce. As India prepares to chair the bloc, the honest question is not whether BRICS can reform the global financial order. It is whether the governments that make up the bloc have any material interest in doing so, or whether, for their ruling establishments, a better seat at the existing table has always been the real objective.

A bigger BRICS, shaped by India's vision

The BRICS summit in New Delhi (September 12-13, 2026) will be a landmark one for a couple of reasons. First, it takes place against the backdrop of geopolitical turbulence unleashed by a combination of forces: raging wars and conflicts, a breakdown in global governance and the changing nature of global alliances. Second, the BRICS now has 11 prominent members (and about 10 of them who are partner countries) and its collective economic output (in purchasing power parity) outstrips that of the G-7, making it the one of the largest and most important transcontinental grouping outside of the West. Last but not the least, technological forces such as artificial intelligence and quantum computing are being weaponised with both great powers trying to win the battle for tech supremacy.

**India's BRICS moment**  
India must be credited with thorough preparation for this summit. In many ways, India has followed the successful template established when it hosted the G-20 Summit in New Delhi in 2023. In a similar vein, around 350 meetings were conducted by India in cities across the country, with as many as 22 held at the ministerial level. India has announced that it will focus on "building resilience, innovation, cooperation and sustainability", thus giving a new twist to the BRICS acronym. In doing so, India is seeking to refocus and recalibrate the BRICS agenda.

BRICS has traditionally comprised three pillars: political and security; finance and the economy; and, finally, culture and people-to-people exchanges. While all three pillars are important and, indeed, interlinked to an extent, it is the view of this writer that the agenda pursued by India relates more to the second and third pillars than to the first. The leaders will largely decide what to do with the big geopolitical issues of our times. However, substantive outcomes seem assured, given the outcome of the meetings chaired by India so far.



Mohan Kumar

Former Indian Ambassador to France and currently Dean/Professor at the O.P. Jindal Global University

BRICS, which is now too big to fail, confronts geopolitical turbulence while pursuing practical cooperation

Hence, this writer's sentiment is that, no matter what happens at the summit level, BRICS will have much to show in terms of cooperation across various areas. Quite simply put, BRICS is now too big to either ignore or fail.

**Building resilience, driving innovation**  
When it comes to resilience, the work done by BRICS under India's stewardship has been stellar. This includes the launch of the BRICS Digital Centre of Excellence for Smart Grids and Energy Storage, the adoption of the BRICS Logistics Supply Chain Cooperation Framework, and the establishment of the Centres of Excellence on Agro-Ecology and Regenerative Agriculture, to name just a few initiatives. Once operationalised, these initiatives will provide the ballast needed for BRICS countries to become truly resilient.

On innovation, India has tried to push the envelope within BRICS. Proposals such as a start-up innovation fund, an incubator network, a digital public infrastructure repository, a science and research repository, and the action plan of the BRICS Working Group on research infrastructures and mega science projects will be beneficial to all BRICS members, particularly since they are not all at the same level of development when it comes to scientific research.

On cooperation, the BRICS leaders will hopefully endorse recommendations pertaining to, but not limited to, revitalising the multilateral trading system; welcoming the network of centres of excellence on mental wellness; establishing the BRICS urbanisation forum; enhancing the digital capacity of women; and, more broadly, intensifying cooperation in areas such as education, youth skilling, and the BRICS Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) Cooperation Portal. All of these initiatives provide concrete benefits to the man (or woman) in the street in BRICS countries.

It is particularly comforting to note that

"sustainability" is very much part of the Indian agenda. The Brazilians made it the centrepiece of their BRICS agenda last year, and India seeks to build on where its Brazilian friends left off. There are specific areas of cooperation under this rubric: combating desertification; developing guidelines for disaster management and forest-fire preparedness; the BRICS forum on sustainable aviation fuels; and advancing climate resilience through people-centric and community-based adaptation. The last of these is critical, since international fora tend to focus almost exclusively on mitigation.

The central tenet of the Indian agenda, as may be seen from above, is to create a collaborative platform that enables the sharing of knowledge and best practices, facilitates joint research, and promotes capacity building. If this is not a people-centric, humanity-first approach, then what is?

**Keeping BRICS on course**  
BRICS is here to stay and will, slowly but steadily, help its members achieve two central objectives: enhance their strategic options and drive geopolitics towards a truly multipolar world. These are, of course, organising principles of India's foreign policy. In a world characterised by geopolitical uncertainty, other countries, too, see enormous value in adopting a foreign policy based on these principles. If there is one caveat for the BRICS grouping, it is this: it must avoid getting caught in geopolitical currents that are not necessarily of its making and certainly not of any strategic value for its members. All eyes may be on leaders such as Chinese President Xi Jinping, Russian President Vladimir Putin, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, as it should be. But the bigger picture remains that of the BRICS grouping living up to its full potential. The Delhi Summit ought to make concrete progress towards that end.



The views expressed are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

**BRICS must pursue peace**  
The BRICS Summit in New Delhi needs to be more aspirational than merely a forum for geopolitical positioning. Amid two major ongoing wars, India should leverage its BRICS presidency to demonstrate to the world that the Global South can also contribute to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. India uniquely enjoys cordial relations with all the countries in the grouping, giving it a strategic diplomatic space that many other BRICS members do

not possess. As a result, India has acquired considerable diplomatic strengths. Its bilateral meetings with the leaders of countries directly involved in the conflicts can be proactively utilised to build consensus around peace and dialogue. India can also vociferously reiterate the position it articulated at the Bishkek SCO Summit last month: there should be no "endless wars", but certainly an "end to the wars".

G. Ramasubramanyam, Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh

**Undermining democracy**  
United States President Donald Trump's 'promise' to give \$5,000 to adult voters if his party wins the election is a worrying development for democracy ('World' page, September 11). The scheme strongly resembles India's own "freebie culture", in which political parties promise cash and consumer goods to win votes. Seeing the world's oldest democracy adopt a similar strategy shows that vote-buying is becoming a global concern. Elections should be about sound

policies and long-term vision, not the use of public money to buy votes.

Kshirasagara Balaji Rao, Hyderabad

**Need for fruit safety**  
I wish to draw attention to a concern that many of us may have noticed in our fruit markets – the way bananas are sometimes artificially ripened. A banana may look perfectly ripe from the outside. Yet, in my experience, the familiar fragrance of a naturally ripened banana is often

absent, along with some of the sweetness and flavour we normally associate with it. Artificial ripening itself is not the issue. When done scientifically, using approved methods, it is a legitimate practice. The concern is the use of prohibited substances to speed up the process, apparently for quicker turnover and higher profits. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) prohibits the use of calcium carbide, popularly known as "masala", for the artificial ripening of fruits.

Ethylene, on the other hand, is an approved ripening agent. State food-safety authorities and the FSSAI should continue to keep a close watch on fruit markets, storage facilities, wholesalers and ripening premises, particularly where the use of prohibited ripening agents is suspected. Consumers, too, have a meaningful role to play.

Radhakrishna Prasad B.R., Bengaluru

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

# GROUND ZERO



A rescue operation underway after a building collapsed in Satya Niketan, a major student hub, in Delhi. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

## When home in Delhi became a death trap

The collapse of a five-storey building in Delhi's Satya Niketan on September 6 killed seven people. The incident has exposed the precarious housing conditions for students in the capital, where the demand for affordable accommodation far outstrips the availability of institutional hostels. **Lavpreet Kaur** reports on the rescue and the questions being raised over the safety of paying guest accommodation

In the gloomy afternoon of September 6, Amit Choudhary, 20, stood waiting for a friend at the Nigori tea stall in Satya Niketan. A major student hub in south Delhi, Satya Niketan is located about 2 kilometres from Delhi University (DU)'s South Campus. The two of them had planned to drive to the university's North Campus, about 20 km away. Suddenly, the ground beneath him shook. He heard a deafening sound and saw a huge cloud of dust. "I was blinded for 2-3 minutes," he recalls. When the dust began to settle, Choudhary was shocked by what he saw. The five-storey building a few steps away, named Hostel Daze, had vanished. In its place was a heap of concrete slabs, bricks, and twisted metal. He could hear cries for help from beneath the rubble. For the first few minutes, nobody went near the site, says Choudhary. Live electricity wires had fallen, and the neighbouring building, packed with female students, was shaking. People stood panic-stricken at windows and on staircases, afraid that that building might also come down. They watched, frozen, as screams continued to rise from beneath the debris next door. Seven people, including a labourer, died. Twelve people were rescued, while five others are battling for their lives in hospital. In Satya Niketan, many students stay in buildings that have been altered and expanded over the years to accommodate more tenants. As per the police investigation, Hostel Daze had been extended from its original structure, with changes made to the basement and ground floor. Locals and students say 35-40 students stayed there as paying guests (PG). Since September 6 was the Sunday of a long weekend, there were fewer students in the building at the time of the tragedy. The incident has raised questions about the safety of buildings across the neighbourhood: in 2022, a three-storey building in Satya Niketan collapsed during renovation work to convert it into a PG accommodation, killing two labourers and injuring four others. It has also exposed failures by both the building owner and the authorities responsible for enforcing construction and safety regulations. Officials from the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) say the building had no sanctioned plan and that the owner had not obtained the required fire no-objection certificate or occupancy certificate. The civic body, meanwhile, has no record of inspections or enforcement action against the unauthorised construction.



### Hands before machines

Choudhary says the first people to attempt rescues at the scene were not uniformed personnel; they were students, shopkeepers, and residents. When he and a few other students realised that some people were trapped beneath a big slab of concrete, they began breaking through it by hand. The reinforcing steel bars inside the slab would not give way easily. "It took us about an hour to break the slab," he says. Between broken pieces of concrete still held together by steel,

This area is the most common choice for those of us who join DU because of its proximity to campus. But after what I saw, I don't want to stay here any more.

UNNAYAN  
Student

they began pulling people out. Choudhary says that by the time Delhi Fire Service personnel reached the scene through the narrow lanes, three people had been rescued. According to the Delhi Fire Service, the first distress call reached them at 1.33 p.m., about 15 minutes after Choudhary recalls the building collapsing. The first vehicle turned out from the service a minute later, according to Chief Fire Officer A.K. Malik. Assistant Divisional Officer Santosh Kumar was among those who responded. It was his day off, and he was leaving home in Safdarjung to visit a temple when his phone rang. He says he immediately climbed into the response vehicle outside his house and changed into his uniform on the way. "When a call comes, everything else becomes insignificant," he says. But the last stretch had to be covered on foot. Satya Niketan's lanes are so narrow that two people can barely walk side by side. Fire personnel carried hammers, shovels, electric cutters, and other equipment towards the site. By 1.50 p.m., after a preliminary assessment of the scale of the collapse, Kumar says they sought more people on ground and a senior officer. Kumar remembers one victim being trapped beneath a large concrete slab, with only his legs visible. His face and abdomen were pinned beneath the slab. "It took us over 30 minutes to get him out. We could hear his heartbeat. We just wanted to pull him out alive," he says. As he was being placed on a stretcher, another survivor informed Kumar that more people remained trapped. "I could see them. Some of them were crying to be saved. I held their hand and told them, 'Don't worry, you will be okay.' I hope they were able to recover from their injuries," Kumar says. The rescue operation involving the Delhi Fire Service, the National Disaster Response Force, and the Delhi Police continued into the following day. The final survivor was pulled out at noon on September 7.

### Identifying the dead

At the AIIMS Trauma Centre, located about 7 km from the scene, Pushpa Jhaji sat in the waiting area, crying for her 19-year-old son Arpit. He had

celebrated the festivals of Raksha Bandhan and Janmashtami with his family in Dewas in Madhya Pradesh and had returned to Delhi just hours before the building collapsed. He called his mother after reaching his PG at 8 a.m. At around 11.30 a.m., he called her again on video. "Who would have known that was the last time we would speak," says Jhaji, crying.

On hearing the news, she and her husband Bhupendra caught the first flight to Delhi with two other family members. They reached AIIMS around midnight.

For hours, they were unable to find out what had happened to Arpit. The next afternoon, Jhaji was finally taken to see an unidentified body. The face was severely distorted. Then she noticed the mole on his chest.

Near the mortuary, Biren Singh Yadav waited for the body of his nephew, Akshat Singh Yadav. The 19-year-old's face was also too disfigured to be immediately recognisable. The family eventually identified him by the mark left by an operation he had undergone as a child.

Akshat, too, had gone home and returned to Delhi just two days earlier. His mother had asked him to stay back for a little longer. "But he said he had to leave for classes," Biren says.

### Running away

By the evening of the tragedy, students in neighbouring PGs had begun packing their suitcases.

Anushriti, 20, from Kanpur, had been staying in Satya Niketan for nearly a year. She was sleeping on the fourth floor of a nearby PG when her bed shook. She left her accommodation in her night clothes with only her phone in hand and went to a friend's home in Moti Bagh.

By about 10 p.m., the area beneath the Durgabai Deshmukh South Campus Metro station had become a waiting area for students who had nowhere to sleep. Many sat on the footpath.

Unnayan, 19, a student who lives in a cramped accommodation in Satya Niketan and had been house-hunting in the same locality that morning, saw the building collapse just 20 metres away. The image kept returning whenever he tried to sleep. He eventually left his PG at about 1 a.m. and went to a friend's home in Ber Sarai. But he could not sleep there either.

Another student from Guwahati, who has no relatives in Delhi, spent the night at her college. She says the classrooms were turned into temporary shelters, with mattresses spread across the floor.

### Living on borrowed floors

Satya Niketan did not become a student neighbourhood overnight. Its proximity to South Campus, the metro station, Ring Road, and colleges such as Motilal Nehru College, Sri Venkateswara College, Aryabhata College, and Ram Lal Anand College has made it one of the most sought-after residential areas for students from outside Delhi.

However, the demand for rooms has outpaced institutional accommodation. DU has more than 2.5 lakh students in conventional programmes, while its hostel capacity is estimated at only around 9,000 beds. More than half its students come from outside the capital, according to the university's 2024-25 annual report. That gap has produced a parallel housing economy.

MCD officials and Malik say the five-storey building was originally constructed as a G+1 (ground floor plus one upper floor) structure in the 1970s and 1980s when Satya Niketan was being developed as a resettlement colony by the Delhi Development Authority to provide modest, low-rise housing for displaced families and low-income groups from across Delhi. The original structure had no columns or beams and relied on load-bearing brick walls. Malik says three additional floors were added in 1990.

As per the MCD, freehold rights were granted in 2011, allowing owners to extend buildings up to the permissible floor-area ratio, subject to an approved building plan and the condition of the existing structure. But this building never had a sanctioned plan.

Similarly, across Satya Niketan and other areas



They (the men hired by the contractor) were digging a basement within a building when it was already occupied. The additional floors and the basement are anyway illegal, but the building should have at least been vacated if they wanted to carry out work.

A.K. MALIK  
Chief Fire Officer

such as Mukherjee Nagar, Old Rajinder Nagar, and Karol Bagh, old residential houses have gradually been converted into PGs. Floors have been divided into rooms, rooms into beds, and balconies, terraces, and other spaces absorbed into the rental market.

A bed in a shared room can cost ₹12,000-₹24,000 a month, while annual academic fees at DU range from ₹15,000 to ₹80,000, depending on the course and college. In these buildings, two beds are placed just inches apart, leaving barely any space to stand. Food and water may be included, while electricity is charged separately. "Students often accept these conditions because the alternative is to pay more for a flat farther from college or spend hours travelling every day," says a student, Yash Malhotra.

The result is a neighbourhood of narrow lanes lined with multi-storey buildings, balconies jutting over roads, and electricity and cable wires strung between structures.

Several students who left Satya Niketan after the collapse say cracks and seepage are common in rented accommodation, but leaving is not easy. Rent agreements, deposits, and the shortage of available rooms can make it difficult for them to leave even when they are unsafe.

The economics are stark. Landlords have a steady stream of prospective tenants, while a student arriving in Delhi may have only days to find a room before classes begin. In such a market, a room does not remain vacant for long.

Police say the PG operator of Hostel Daze, Sudhanshu Lovneesh, and his business partner, Shubham Tyagi, had taken four floors on lease in August 2025 for ₹1.05 lakh a month. They were operating seven PGs in the vicinity. The police say the operators had taken the building on a lower rent than the market rate because of its "dilapidated condition". This detail has become central to the investigation.

Two days before the collapse, Dhruv Singh Bhatia, a third-year student of Motilal Nehru College, had visited the PG to check on first-year students from his college. About 15 students from the college stayed there and had complained about loud work in the basement, where water had also accumulated.

Bhatia says he noticed cracks in the building, damp walls, and three or four beds packed into some of the small rooms. The entrance was narrow and the building poorly maintained.

"It is scary that I was here just two days ago. We told the students, 'Let's wait and see for one or two days. And this happened,'" he says.

### The aftermath

According to the police investigation, Mahesh Gupta, the son of the property owners, had engaged a labour contractor, Sanoj Kumar, about 10 days before the incident, for work in the basement and on the ground floor.

Investigators found three truckloads of debris in the basement, which had been used to raise its level to that of the ground floor. On the day of the collapse, a wall on the ground floor that obstructed space intended for a shop was allegedly removed. Police suspect the alterations and the resulting changes in the load on the structure contributed to its collapse.

"They were digging a basement within a building when it was already occupied. The additional floors and the basement are anyway illegal, but the building should have at least been vacated if they wanted to carry out work," Malik says.

Sanoj was arrested in Kasganj in Uttar Pradesh on September 9 and brought back to Delhi. Police say he was being paid ₹2,800 a day for the work. An FIR under Sections 105 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder), 290 (negligent conduct with respect to pulling down, repairing, or constructing buildings) and 125 (a) (endangering life or personal safety of others) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, has been registered.

The property was registered in the name of Urnila Gupta. The police say her husband Hariram Gupta and son Mahesh were involved in its management. All three were arrested from Bhiwadi in Rajasthan, where they were hiding.

After the incident, the MCD suspended five South Zone officials, including the Deputy Commissioner, and began inspecting and sealing buildings in the neighbourhood. It demolished the wobbly building next door and evacuated the PGs and hostels nearby.

The Delhi High Court has taken up the issue of student accommodation, including the shortage of institutional hostels and the safety of private PGs. A petition has sought city-wide safety audits and accountability for regulatory failures. The Court has also been asked to examine the shortage of hostel accommodation for DU students.

The Delhi government has said it plans to strengthen regulation of PG accommodation, including licensing and safety requirements.

Many students have left Satya Niketan, saying they will not return until the MCD conducts safety checks and assures them that the buildings are safe. "This area is the most common choice for those of us who join DU because of its proximity to campus. But after what I saw, I don't want to stay here any more," says Unnayan.

A relative of a student from Guwahati says she had moved to the PG only a month ago. "How can we let our child live here knowing that she is not safe," she asks. "Even if it means she has to travel longer to get to her classes, we would rather have her somewhere safe."

lavpreet.kaur@thehindu.co.in



Tents set up at Magh Mela 2026 in Uttar Pradesh in January this year. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

# Faith travels first class

Pilgrimages across India are shifting from hardship to high-end comfort, fuelled by massive infrastructure projects, connectivity, and luxury travel packages. This commercial boom has escalating environmental and climate risks, raising debates over public spending priorities, writes **Radheshyam Jadhav**. Travellers to sacred spaces, however, feel the merging of spirituality and comfort is the new yatra playbook

Vilas Shete, 69, and his wife, Ranjana, sit in numbing disbelief as news of the rising death toll flashes across their screens from Nepal. Just days before, the couple had been standing on that ground at Gyirong Port on the Nepal-China border, smiling for photographs. They had been on a pilgrimage to Mount Kailash and Lake Mansarovar. Now, the area is devastated, ravaged by a flood that even swept away the check post they had crossed.

The couple has been on many of India's well-known religious tours, including to the 12 Jyotirlingas, Shirdi, Char Dham, and Narmada Parikrama. Every time they step out for religious tours, especially in other States, it cost nearly ₹50,000.

Shete, a retired employee of the Maharashtra State Transport Corporation, lives in Pune and believes that religious tourism, especially in the mountains, takes you near nature and closer to God. He believes that without a spiritual component, tourism lacks fulfilment.

Travel companies, private groups, and spiritual sects that organise religious tours across India are now doing brisk business. With the Central government's push to develop infrastructure around places of religious interest, people's growing religiosity, and women's increasing mobility and money power, the demand for group tours in non-budget categories has increased. So has the supply. For instance, travel company Thomas Cook organises an "Ayodhya to Kashi Quick Bhakti Yatra with Taj stays" at over ₹1 lakh. For the Kumbh Mela in Uttar Pradesh, The Ultimate Travelling Camp offers "exclusive glamping packages" where "enlightenment meets extravagance". Several tour operators offer "spiritual luxury" or "VIP darshan" for Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh.

A 2025 report by consulting firm KPMG projected that India's spiritual tourism sector would grow at a Compound Annual Growth Rate of 18.2%. The Ministry of Tourism does not maintain specific data around the number of pilgrim visits across the country. However, the government has, in various Press Information Bureau handouts, said that spiritual tourism continues to attract millions of domestic and international visitors every year. India is home to some of the world's significant religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism.

There is also no data on what slice of the spiritual market caters to tourists who opt for trips in the luxury or affordable luxury (bridging the mass to luxury market) segments. The pilgrimage to Mount Kailash and Lake Mansarovar, for instance, cost the Shetes ₹2.72 lakh each, but this can go up to ₹7 lakh, depending on the tour operator and route.

After China reopened the route after six years, and the first batch of pilgrims took the trip in 2025, Kailash-Manasarovar has become the latest spiritual destination that people flock to, in what is sometimes a lifelong quest to visit at least a few of India's spiritual destinations. While the



There is nothing wrong with seeking a peaceful, luxurious experience that offers mental peace, physical comfort, and an unhindered spiritual journey

**YUVRAJ LAHOTI**  
Academician,  
Pune

Kumbh Mela and the inauguration of the Ram Mandir pushed up the demand for spiritual tourism, pilgrimages have always been a part of India's cultural life.

What has changed is that the youth are also now opting for them. Also, "Group packages are surging in popularity, with women travelling in these groups, with or without their husbands," notes Gopal Bhatt, a Nainital-based tour operator and vehicle fleet owner.

Kathmandu scribe Krishna Adhikari, who has witnessed Nepal's socio-economic evolution over 30 years, notes a steady rise in Indian religious pilgrims over the last decade. "As the numbers are growing, the tourist companies, vehicle vendors, hotels, and other service providers are crowding into Kathmandu and also on the route to the pilgrimage places," says Adhikari.

According to the Hotel Association of India, 2025 reflected renewed confidence and strong demand in the hospitality sector, driven by spiritual tourism hotspots like Ayodhya, Jammu, Varanasi, Puri, Amritsar, and Tirupati, alongside the Maha Kumbh boosting Tier II and III markets. International arrivals along spiritual circuits grew steadily.

## Divine access

Bengaluru-based Vrishali Balloli, a frequent religious traveller, in her early 50s, combined trekking with spirituality during a trip to Uttarakhand's Chamoli district in 2024. She visited the Valley of Flowers National Park, Gurdwara Hemkund Sahib, Badrinath, and Rishikesh.

Reflecting on the journey, she says, "My earlier trekking experiences were very good, but this time it was an out-of-this-world experience. My eyes overflowed as I experienced something divine during this journey."

Balloli's local group tour package costs ₹24,000, and her total trip costs about ₹40,000.

"Travelling to religious places has become easy and accessible, thanks to the Central government's efforts to connect religious corridors and improve connectivity," she adds.

The Union Ministry of Tourism's PRASHAD scheme provides financial assistance to State Governments and Union Territory Administrations to develop tourism-related infrastructure at identified religious and heritage sites. The government has sanctioned 54 projects across India, with an investment of ₹1,726.74 crore, focussing on infrastructure and visitor amenities.

Complementing this, the Swadesh Darshan scheme develops integrated tourism infrastructure across 15 thematic circuits, including Buddhist, Sufi, Himalayan, Krishna, and Ramayana. So far, 76 projects have been sanctioned and an investment of ₹5,290.33 crore has been made, as of March 2026.

"Across India, journeys of faith continue to draw millions of pilgrims every year. These sacred travels do more than deepen spiritual connections. They sustain local livelihoods, support traditional crafts and enterprises, and serve as important drivers of regional economic growth," the Government of India stated in an explainer titled 'A Decade of Tourism-Led Growth' published in June 2026.

Balloli is planning on more religious trips. "I want to visit as many religious places in India as possible in comfort, and now it is possible. Soon, I want to visit Mansarovar," she says, adding, "But I will complete the Char Dham Yatra first."

## Peak pressure

Uttarakhand, known as Devbhoomi or the Land of Gods, welcomes devotees to numerous temples, most notably the Char Dham Yatra. This high-altitude Himalayan pilgrimage encompasses four holy sites: Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath, and Badrinath. Traditionally completed on foot in a clockwise direction beginning from Yamunotri, now, these are done by road or helicopter.

Dehradun-based Amogh Panwar, who is a hotelier, tour planner, and trekking organiser, and has been in the tourism industry since 1992, describes Uttarakhand's religious tourism as reaching a level of "madness." He calls it an all-in-one package featuring the Himalayas, adventure, spiritual sites, and facilities ranging from basic to five-star accommodation across a landscape supported by five luxury hotels, over 500 travel agents, and private helicopter service providers.

Offering options ranging from ₹40,000 to ₹2 lakh to ₹5 lakh per day, the sector is now seeing seniors opting for luxury itineraries which their children abroad pay for. Wealthy travellers frequently choose packages featuring helicopter services for quick darshans, sometimes clubbing them with birthdays or anniversaries in the Himalayas.

Char Dham helicopter operations – split between roughly nine shuttle companies and about 25 charter firms – generate a seasonal business exceeding ₹1,000 crore, says Panwar. Industry in-

siders warn that intense competition causes safety to take a back seat, as corners are cut and checks are skipped. A former operator and a former Nehru Institute of Mountaineering volunteer revealed that pilots are often incentivised to increase daily sorties, resulting in fatigue, rushed decisions, risky flights in unpredictable mountain weather, and minimal oversight regarding passenger limits or pricing.

Last year, Shraddha Jaiswal, her husband Raj Kumar, and their two-year-old daughter Kashi travelled from Yavatmal, Maharashtra, to celebrate Shraddha's 35th birthday. They took a helicopter to Kedarnath. They were killed in the fifth helicopter crash in Uttarakhand within six weeks.

"The mountains are not built for business. With the rising number of tourists, the hills are being cut and nature is expressing its wrath again and again," says Kishan Singh, a taxi operator.

Singh notes a shift in mindset, recalling that earlier religious travellers believed enduring hardship and walking to destinations brought them closer to God, whereas today the opposite is true. "It is becoming difficult to recognise if the people coming here are spiritual or they just want to buy everything including the luxury and blessings by throwing money at the experience," an agitated Singh adds.

Social environmental activist Mushtaq Pahalgami, with The Himalaya Welfare Organization in Pahalgam, working for sustainable environment development in the region, says that the fragile Himalayas must be protected from any further haphazard development.

Pahalgam, in Jammu and Kashmir, sits among lofty mountains and evergreen forests, attracting domestic and international tourists. From here, people travel to the Amarnath Cave, located 72 kms from the district headquarters. Amidst the burgeoning traffic – 1.13 lakh people, reportedly, visited in the first five days of the 2026 season. Pahalgami says, locals are working hard to maintain the environment and hills as they are.

## Pilgrimages of comfort

Once a tiny town of over 25,000 residents, Shirdi is now a global religious tourism destination centred around the Sai Baba temple. Resident Satish Vajapurkar, who attributes much of the town's early growth boost to late actor Manoj Kumar's 1977 film *Shirdi ke Sai Baba*, notes that daily footfall reaches about 40,000, soaring to 1 lakh during celebrations in a landscape of over 150 luxury hotels.

"We have to maintain the infrastructure and services at international standards as people from across the world come here. We have found currencies of 26 countries in the donation box at the temple," he says.

Supported by regular VIP visits, an airport, and luxury travel companies, the rising number of visitors has boosted Shirdi's economy. The official records with the temple show that for the financial year 2024-25, the total annual income of the Shree Saibaba Sansthan Trust, Shirdi, stood at ₹850.62 crore. Investments in bank fixed deposits were ₹3,918 crore, as of March 31, 2025.

Academician Yuvraj Lahoti from Pune, says he wants to look at temples beyond Maharashtra now. "I have added Ayodhya to my itinerary. There are groups which now go monthly or twice a month (from Pune)," he says, adding that Ayodhya provides good infrastructure and a streamlined darshan. He notes that the idea of enduring a torturous journey as part of spirituality is a thing of the past. "There is nothing wrong with seeking a peaceful, luxurious experience that offers mental peace, physical comfort, and an unhindered spiritual journey," he adds.

He adds that the experience at Varanasi's Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple corridor is excellent compared to his earlier visits, proving that comfort, easy access, and a hassle-free environment are essential for modern temple-goers.

Balaji Murumbe, a professional from Latur, in his late 20s, who recently visited Tirupati to resolve personal challenges ranging from marriage hurdles to financial strain, notes that religious tourism serves a dual purpose by offering routine breaks with a deeper search for meaning. Observing trends within his own travel circle, including a Gujarati couple making regular trips to Tirupati to seek blessings for a child, Murumbe says that annual or semi-annual vacations have become synonymous with religious tourism.

The Maharashtra government has planned an expenditure of ₹34,000 crore to develop infrastructure and hospitality for the 2027 Simhastha Kumbh Mela in Maharashtra's Nashik city.

Supreme Court judge Justice Prasanna Varale observed at a public event that if even 0.1% of the Kumbh allocation had been spent on Marathi-medium schools, more than 100 schools could have been saved from closure. The education budget, he said, is shrinking.

However, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis says that 93% of the Kumbh allocation was being invested in permanent infrastructure that would benefit Nashik for the next 50 years. As the Kumbh nears, the State government hopes to welcome crores of devotees not only for the Kumbh but also to reassert that Lord Hanuman was born in Anjaneri near Nashik and not in Kishkinda in Karnataka.

Rashmi Jain, a sociologist and Vice-Chancellor at the University of Technology in Jaipur, in Rajasthan, notes that this period is marked by both, a newly developed urge to reconnect with roots and culture, and the social media pressure to be seen. "Several forces have converged here, alongside narratives crafted by spiritual leaders and *katha vachaks* (religious storytellers), drawing the youth. Remote religious sites are now made accessible with modern connectivity, driving the new era of religious luxury tourism".

radheshyamj@gmail.com



Kailash Manasarovar yatris gather at Nathu La Pass after Sikkim Governor Om Prakash Mathur flagged off the first batch of pilgrims on June 20, 2026. PTI

TELANGANA



U.Sandhya, a farmer and member of self-help group, flies an agriculture drone over her fields in Motakondur village of Yadadri Bhuvanangiri district. She is among 35 women from SHGs across 13 mandals who are trained to take up tech-based livelihood opportunities. NAGARA GOPAL

Women take the controls as farms embrace new tech

Drones are opening a new frontier for women in Telangana's self-help groups, giving them a chance to enter technology-led agriculture and build independent businesses. From crop-spraying to farm services, the new skills are taking them beyond the traditional activities of SHGs. The change comes as farmers across the State increasingly turn to artificial intelligence, mobile phone apps, satellite monitoring and smart irrigation for crop and resource management, writes **P. Laxma Reddy**

The drone hums over a paddy field in Motakondur village in Telangana's Yadadri-Bhuvanagiri district, drawing the attention of scores of villagers. At the controls is 33-year-old farmer Usirika Sandhya, who covers the crop with pesticide in a matter of minutes, a task that would otherwise require hours of back-breaking work with a hand sprayer.

For Sandhya, however, the drone is about more than making farm work quicker. It is an attempt to spare her husband, Mahesh, the health problems he faces after long hours of pesticide spraying, while also opening up a new livelihood opportunity for her.

Her experience reflects a larger shift taking place in rural Telangana, where women from self-help groups (SHGs) are beginning to take up technology-driven agricultural services as drone pilots and rural entrepreneurs.

"Every crop season, my husband spends hours spraying pesticides with a hand sprayer, and the work takes a toll on his health. So, I wanted to find a solution and invested in a drone, seeing its growing use in villages," she says.

Sandhya, who has studied till Class 10, and Mahesh, who has completed an Industrial Training Institute course, cultivate cotton and paddy on about 15 acres in the village, of which only two acres belong to them.

"I came to know that SERP is encouraging women to become drone pilots, and sought the help of the Zilla Samakhya (district federation) and the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) officials for financial assistance and training. I underwent 10 days of training," she says.

A drone unit, comprising a battery-operated vehicle to safely carry the drone, was handed over to Sandhya during Independence Day celebrations at Bhuvanagiri, the district headquarters, on August 15 this year. The unit cost ₹7.90 lakh.

She is among 35 women from SHGs across 13 mandals who have been trained by the DRDA to take up modern, technology-based livelihood opportunities. For this, DRDA has partnered with pharmaceutical major Hetero and MIRAI, a company supplying agricultural products and connecting local farmers with global trade channels.

Around 50 people have also been trained in neighbouring Nalgonda district, as per MIRAI.

Yadadri District Collector Anuraag Jayanti says the initiative is aimed at "helping the trained women create self-employment opportunities" while providing farmers access to modern, technology-driven agricultural services.

For Sandhya, the drone is also an investment

We plan to train more women as drone pilots, particularly those from agricultural families. SHG members have already shown their ability to run small and medium businesses, and have recently entered the solar sector under Indira Mahila Shakti scheme.

**DIVYA DEVARAJAN,**  
SERP Chief Executive Officer

she hopes will eventually pay for itself. She is awaiting her Remote Pilot Certificate from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) and is looking to offer drone-based agricultural services to other farmers.

She has already begun building a professional identity for the venture, preparing branding and marketing material and receiving initial enquiries from potential customers while completing her training and certification.

"I am optimistic that within a few years, I can clear the bank loan for the drone," she says.

But Sandhya is not the only woman looking at agriculture differently. P. Jhansi, 29, from Aregudem village in Yadadri Bhuvanagiri district, is among those trained under the programme and is awaiting clearance for her application under the Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP), a credit-linked subsidy scheme of the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises.

"I had never imagined flying a drone for agricultural operations since we were involved in age-old traditional methods of farming. But thanks to the government's initiatives, we are now using the latest technologies," she says.

**Financial assistance and training**

The financial viability of the model remains crucial as more women are trained. District Rural Development Officer T. Nagi Reddy says efforts are being made to help the trainees access PMEGP. "Eligible applicants can get government subsidy of up to 35% of the unit cost," he adds.

For the women, learning to fly a drone is only the first step. MIRAI director N.Vijaya Suseel says the programme also focuses on helping them build a business around the technology: "The trainees are supported in mobilising farmers, conducting field demonstrations, acquiring customers, scheduling drone operations, managing the business and providing service support."

The shift is taking SHGs beyond their traditional roles in thrift, microcredit and small enterprises, with women increasingly entering technology-intensive and emerging sectors.

SERP Chief Executive Officer Divya Devarajan says the organisation plans to train more women as drone pilots, particularly those from agricultural families.

"SHG members have already demonstrated their ability to run small and medium businesses, and have recently entered the solar sector under the Indira Mahila Shakti scheme," she adds.

The push has also received national attention. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has praised 53

SHG members from Sangareddy district who learnt drone operation through the DRDA in May last year. They are, however, reportedly yet to receive drones because of policy-related issues.

The State's efforts to bring technology into agriculture extend beyond drones. Farmers are increasingly using artificial intelligence, mobile applications and other digital tools to make decisions on weather, crop management, irrigation and markets.

Namireddy Srinivas Reddy, a farmer from Molakatnam village in Nalgonda district and a practising advocate, uses large language model tools such as ChatGPT for information on pest and fertiliser management.

He also uses artificial intelligence-based apps to check weather forecasts before spraying pesticides in his sweet lime orchard and to track daily lime prices. Some farmers are also experimenting with remotely operated smart drip-irrigation systems, he says.

Tech in the fields

For 26-year-old Byram Madhu of Munjampalli village in Endapalli mandal of Jagtial district, digital technology is helping promote more efficient farming practices. He works for a Hyderabad-based climate-tech company developing carbon-credit and regenerative-agriculture projects and encourages farmers to reduce water use in paddy through the company's mobile app, which uses digital field data and satellite-based monitoring.

Tipparti Ajay, also from Munjampalli, owns a harvester and tractor and undertakes tilling work for farmers. He says weather apps and digital tools for measuring land are increasingly proving useful in his work.

These individual uses of technology are part of Telangana's broader effort to build a digital agriculture ecosystem. The State's Information and Communications Technology (IT&C) Policy, launched in 2016, identified technologies such as drones, artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, machine learning and cloud computing as areas for development.

An Emerging Technologies Wing was established within the IT&C Department in 2018, followed by a specialised Digital Agriculture Wing as the nodal agency for technology adoption in agriculture.

The State has been working with the Agriculture Department to promote data-driven policymaking and technology-based solutions, including the use of drones, AI and the Internet of Things (IoT) for crop-health monitoring, pest prediction, soil-nutrient testing, quality assessment and market linkages.

Partnerships with research and technology organisations are also being used to provide farmers with evidence-based advisories and improve crop planning.

"At our Centre for Digital Agriculture and Technology at Rajendranagar, the Professor Jayashankar Telangana Agricultural University is using AI, IoT, remote sensing, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), drones and robotics for climate-smart and precision agriculture," says university Vice-Chancellor Aldas Janaiah.

The centre houses specialised units such as the Agro Climate Research Unit, the All India Coordinated Research Project on Farm Implements and Machinery Unit, the Remote Sensing

and GIS Lab, the PJTAU Drone Academy and the SBI ARISA Lab. Their work spans farm mechanisation, digital advisories, weather-based agrometeorological services, crop monitoring, drone pilot training and smart farming technologies.

PJTAU has also contributed to the development of crop-specific Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for spraying pesticides on crops using drones. It has developed a drone-based package of practices for wet direct-seeded rice covering the application of herbicides, nutrients and pesticides. The university has also strengthened its drone-training capabilities. Four faculty members completed DGCA-certified Master Trainers Training in 2024.

The DGCA has approved the PJTAU Drone Academy to offer dual certification for small- and medium-category drone pilot training, making it the first institution among Remote Pilot Training Organisations (RPTOs) and State Agricultural Universities in the Telugu States to receive such recognition. The academy has trained as many as 780 remote pilots.

The technology push is also creating space for agri-tech entrepreneurship. Agri & Food Innovation Hub (AgHub), a hub-and-spoke incubator with its Innovation Hub at the PJTAU campus in Hyderabad, supports agri-tech and food-tech start-ups and student entrepreneurs from across the country.

Meanwhile, the Association for Innovation Development of Entrepreneurship in Agriculture (a-IDEA), the technology business incubator of the ICAR-National Academy of Agricultural Research Management (ICAR-NAARM), Hyderabad, has supported more than 350 agri-start-ups through incubation, acceleration and mentoring programmes.

More than 92 startups have been accelerated through its AGRI UDAAN Food and Agribusiness Accelerator Programme. It has facilitated nearly ₹25 crore in grants and seed funding, while startups supported by it have collectively raised about ₹160 crore from private investors.

The startups work across different areas including AgTech, FoodTech, biotechnology, AI, robotics, farm mechanisation, supply chains and sustainability. "The success of our startups and the impact created at the grassroots level, benefiting more than 1.5 lakh farmers, reflect the transformative potential of technology and entrepreneurship in agriculture," says Raman Meenakshi Sundaram, director of ICAR-NAARM and president of a-IDEA.

**Limits to going digital**

The spread of digital agriculture is, however, not without hurdles. While AI and other technologies can improve productivity, resource efficiency and farm-level decision-making, their adoption is constrained by the structure of Indian agriculture itself. More than 85% of operational holdings are in the small and marginal category, according to the latest Agriculture Census, limiting the economies of scale needed to deploy some advanced technologies.

Low farm incomes and indebtedness can further restrict farmers' ability to invest in digital tools, while gaps in digital literacy and internet use remain in rural areas, as indicated in studies conducted by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), National Statistical Office and other institutions.

Last-mile connectivity and other infrastructure gaps also continue to pose challenges in several villages.

For Telangana's farmers and rural entrepreneurs, therefore, the question is no longer whether technology can enter the field. It is whether the ecosystem around it – training, finance, connectivity, services and market access – can keep pace with the technology itself.



Business

INBRIEF



SEBI proposes extending IT framework of MIs to arms

SEBI on Friday proposed extending the IT and cyber security framework of Market Infrastructure Institutions (MIs) – comprising stock exchanges, depositories, and clearing corporations – to their subsidiaries to strengthen regulatory oversight. While MIs are governed by SEBI and operate in compliance with its IT and cybersecurity frameworks, the applicability and regulatory jurisdiction of these framework are not explicitly defined over their subsidiaries. The move comes even as SEBI highlighted that there could be a case for MIs to take services of their subsidiaries to carry out certain activities. These subsidiaries may need to operate in close coordination with the parent MI.

India partially cancels debt sale for first time in a year

In what market participants are seeing as an early indication from Indian authorities on interest rates, the central bank partially canceled an auction of shorter duration government security to curb any further spike in bond yields, traders said on Friday. The RBI accepted bids worth only ₹45.06 billion (\$471.12 million) for the 6.20% 2029 bond, just over 40% of the planned borrowing in the paper of ₹110 billion. The RBI sold seven-year bond at slightly higher than expected yield, while a new 30-year paper was auctioned at a cutoff yield that was in line with estimates. The three-year or 6.20% 2029 bond yield was dealt at 6.4566%, up 25 basis points in last four weeks since it was issued.

India's forex reserves jump by a record \$44.903 billion

India's forex reserves jumped by a record \$44.903 billion to a new lifetime high of \$785.706 billion during the week ended September 4, the RBI said on Friday. In the previous reporting week, the overall reserves increased \$11.475 billion to a new all-time high of \$740.803 billion. The kitty had been declining since the start of the conflict in West Asia earlier this year, as the rupee came under pressure and the RBI had to intervene in the forex market through dollar sales. However, the reserves started increasing since the RBI announced concessional forex swap initiatives in June this year amid a sharp depreciation in the local currency. The move has yielded over \$136 billion in new flows.

Goyal calls for local-currency trade among BRICS nations

Union Commerce Minister highlighted that BRICS cooperation would create jobs, wealth and prosperity for countries that represent half of the global population and 40% of the global GDP

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan  
NEW DELHI

Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal on Friday urged the gathered BRICS members and partner countries to link their payment systems and conduct more trade in local currencies.

Speaking at the inaugural session of the BRICS Business Forum 2026, Mr. Goyal highlighted that BRICS cooperation would create jobs, wealth and prosperity for countries that represent half of mankind and 40% of the global gross domestic product (GDP). "BRICS today represents almost one-fourth of global trade, and India is an important pillar of intra-BRICS trade," Mr. Goyal



The Commerce Minister also urged the gathered BRICS leaders to open their markets to each other's products. ANI

said. "Engineering goods and electronics account for the largest segment of India's manufactured exports. India is also known as the pharmacy of the world." Minister of External Affairs S. Jaishankar, also speaking at the event,

said that higher economic security means greater self-reliance while also remaining inter-connected. "The objective is to strengthen our ability to absorb shocks while remaining connected and competitive," Mr. Jaishan-

kar said. "That calls for genuine market practices, predictable business environment, diversified commercial relationships, and transparent trade and industry.

Without naming any one particular currency or nation, Mr. Goyal spoke about enhancing local currency trade and also how trade should at no point become an impediment to growth.

The Commerce Minister also urged the gathered BRICS leaders to open their markets to each other's products, including raw materials and critical minerals, and to work together to simplify regulatory procedures and facilitate faster clearance of consignments.

India-EU FTA closer to becoming reality; text placed before Council

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan  
NEW DELHI

The European Commission has forwarded the text of the India-EU Free Trade Agreement to the European Council for its signature and conclusion, signalling that the legal vetting and finalisation of the text have been completed and all that remains are the internal approvals.

"Today, the European Commission has put forward its proposals to the Council for the signature and conclusion of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the European Union and India, seeking authorisation for its signature and conclusion," the Commission said in a statement on Friday.

The EU's Ambassador-designate to India and Bhutan Jean-Eric Paquet took



Vetting of the text is completed and all that remains are the internal approvals.

to X to celebrate the achievement, saying this would "clear the path for early approval", and adding that the full text of the agreement was now being made public. "With its proposals, the Commission is seeking Council's approval to sign the agreements which will then require European Parliament's consent, before conclusion and entry into force," the statement said.

NSE IPO set to garner ₹22,569 crore from the capital market

Ashokamithran T.  
MUMBAI

The National Stock Exchange (NSE) is set to raise ₹22,568.9 crore via IPO from the capital market, after a decade-long wait.

The initial public offering (IPO) will comprise only an offer for sale, wherein existing shareholders will sell their shares and no fresh capital will be raised.

The price band is set between ₹1,700 and ₹1,785 a share, which will open for public subscription between September 17 and 24.

The IPO will open for anchor investors on September 16.

NSE had initially filed its draft prospectus with a proposal to raise ₹26,579.6 crore, which was later revised to ₹22,568.9 crore,



The IPO will open for anchor investors on September 16.

17.7% lower than the proposed size. Going by the prospectus, SBI cut half of its selling shares to 1,59,69,410.

Selling shareholders include SBI, which will sell ₹2,850.5 crore, making it the largest stake sold, assuming subscription at the upper price band, and Canada Pension Plan, which will sell ₹2,119.5 crore.

Finance Minister flags AI safety, systemic risks, calls for responsible adoption

Lalatendu Mishra  
MUMBAI

Union Finance and Corporate Affairs Minister Ms. Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday warned that frontier artificial intelligence (AI) laboratories are "racing straight to self-improving superintelligence", raising significant concerns over AI safety and systemic risks.

Addressing the valedictory session of the Global Fintech Fest (GFF) 2026 in Mumbai, Ms. Sitharaman called on the fintech industry to build systems that are "fast yet accountable, autonomous yet reversible, and innovative without diluting consumer trust".

"AI may assist judgement, but responsibility must remain human and institutional," she said,



Nirmala Sitharaman

stressing that greater consequences from AI-driven decisions should be accompanied by stronger safeguards.

"The more serious the consequence of a decision, the stronger the requirement for review, explanation and appeal," Ms. Sitharaman said.

She urged regulators, boards and senior management to take direct responsibility for understanding how AI is deployed within their organisations.

"They must know where AI is being used, what decision it influences, what data it relies upon and what harm can arise if it fails," she said.

The Finance Minister said AI systems involving higher-risk use cases should undergo greater scrutiny before deployment and throughout their operational lifecycle.

At the same time, she cautioned against an approach that treats AI adoption and AI avoidance as the only alternatives. Institutions that remain dependent on legacy systems, she said, risk becoming less capable, losing competitiveness and eventually fading out.

"The relevant choice is therefore not between deploying AI and avoiding AI. The real challenge is between responsible adoption

and well managed adoption," she said.

Ms. Sitharaman also highlighted the dual nature of emerging technologies, particularly agentic AI and quantum computing, and questioned how financial institutions can balance breakthrough efficiency with growing systemic risks.

She noted that tokenisation has reduced unnecessary intermediaries and enabled near-instantaneous asset transfers, while agentic AI has moved beyond providing recommendations to taking autonomous actions, compressing processes that previously took days into seconds.

However, the Finance Minister cautioned that the speed enabled by these technologies could amplify risks.

India in talks to get Australian, Chilean lithium blocks: Reddy

Saptaparno Ghosh  
NEW DELHI

The Union Mines Ministry is in talks with Australia and Chile to acquire lithium blocks, while seeking five additional blocks in Argentina, Union Mines Minister Mr. G. Kishan Reddy said on Friday, as India steps up efforts to secure supplies of the critical mineral.

"India has limited lithium reserves. Therefore, we acquired five blocks in Argentina and are now seeking to acquire five more [blocks there]," Mr. Reddy told reporters on the sidelines of the third edition of CII's Global Summit on Advanced Materials, Critical Minerals & Metals.

"Similarly, we are speaking to Australia and Chile," he said, adding talks were both at the government-to-government level and among private entities.

Private sector role

The Ministry is also encouraging Indian private companies to enter overseas markets, undertake exploration and subsequently mine the resources, with the extracted minerals to be supplied to India, Mr. Reddy said.

Separately, the Minister



Union Minister Kishan Reddy at CII's Global Summit.

highlighted e-waste recycling as an important source of critical minerals for India.

As many as 125 entities have registered to avail incentives under the government's ₹1,500-crore e-waste recycling package, of which 58 have been cleared, he said.

The projects are expected to recover around 96 kilotonne of critical minerals annually. The Mines Ministry has approached NITI Aayog to determine the allocation of incentives for each of the 58 eligible entities, Mr. Reddy added.

"About 25-30% of India's needs for critical minerals can be acquired via e-waste recycling," he said, underlining the role of secondary sources in reducing the country's dependence on overseas supplies.

'MPC to revise growth, inflation dynamics at next meet'

Press Trust of India  
NEW DELHI

Reserve Bank's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) will reassess growth and inflation dynamics at its meeting next month amid rising prices of crude oil due to the ongoing West Asia crisis, Governor Sanjay Malhotra said.

In an interview to a media channel, the Governor also said almost 50% of the Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank), or FCNRR(B) deposits, mobilised under the forex swap facility is for five-year tenor. Inflows under the FCNRR (B) deposits totalled \$127.22 billion in the recently concluded RBI swap facility.

On inflation, Mr. Malhotra said rising crude prices will have an impact but it will depend on how much is passed through, he said.

"Crude has gone up. July was for the Indian basket an average of \$82 dollars/barrel. [In] August it has gone up to \$90/barrel and so that will certainly have some impact, but it will depend again on the pass-through," he said.

He said the government had to a great degree cushioned price rise as a result which the economy weathered the shock really well.

Banking services hit as unions hold strike seeking 5-day week

Press Trust of India  
NEW DELHI

Banking services, particularly at public sector banks, were hit across India on Friday as employees affiliated to the United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU) observed a nationwide strike demanding immediate implementation of a five-day work week.

The strike call given by the UFBU, an umbrella body of seven unions representing 90% of officer and employee strength, however, did not impact the functioning of private sector banks. Most branches of public sector banks across India were either completely or partially closed.

Services such as cash deposits, withdrawals, cheque clearances, and administrative work were hit at branches of most public sector banks (PSBs) and some old-generation private sector banks.

Disruption at branches

Reports coming from different parts of the country, including Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh indicated complete disruption of transactions at the branch level.

Madhya Pradesh Bank Employees Association



Banking services were hit in Kolkata on Friday. ANI

chairman Mohankrishna Shukla told PTI about 42,000 employees and officers from nearly 7,000 of the state's 8,707 bank branches joined the strike.

In Himachal Pradesh, bank employees and officers participated in large numbers to support long-pending demands, particularly the implementation of a five-day banking system. Representatives from banks and affiliated unions attended a protest demonstration to express their solidarity with the strike.

"Bank employees were compelled to resort to a strike to press for their legitimate demands," said UFBU state convener Narendra Sharma and All India Bank Officers' Confederation (AIBOC) State President Ashutosh Sharma in a statement issued at Shimla.

Drydocks-Cochin Shipyard JV to boost ship repair industry

Press Trust of India  
NEW DELHI

Drydocks World, a DP World group company, and Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL) on Friday announced the signing of a joint venture (JV) pact to operate and expand the Cochin ship repair facility.

DP World, in a statement, said the 50:50 joint venture will operate and expand the International Ship Repair Facility (ISRF) in Cochin, strengthening India's ship repair ecosystem and serving growing regional and global demand.

A Shipping Ministry official said Drydocks World and CSL will invest ₹900 crore each in the project.

The agreement was signed by Captain Rado Antolovic, CEO, Drydocks World and Jose V J, CMD of Cochin Shipyard Ltd, on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit 2026 in New Delhi, in the presence of Sarbananda Sonowal, Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW), and Omran Sharaf Alhashimi, UAE Assistant Foreign Minister for Advanced Science and Technology.

The agreement builds on the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by Drydocks World

The pact builds on MoU under which they would explore collaboration in ship repair, allied services

(DDW) and CSL during India Maritime Week 2025, under which the two organisations agreed to explore opportunities for collaboration in ship repair and allied maritime services.

Global ship repairs

According to the statement, under the arrangement, the joint venture will operate, consolidate and expand the International Ship Repair Facility (ISRF) in Cochin, creating additional capacity to service a wider range of vessels and meet the growing requirements of Indian, regional and international customers.

The partnership is expected to strengthen Cochin's position as a maritime services hub, while creating opportunities across ship repair, engineering, fabrication and associated maritime services in Kerala, it said. Mr. Sonowal said: "This is a major opportunity for Kerala to emerge as a leading maritime services hub."

SBI may tap UPI for small firms credit worthiness

Press Trust of India  
MUMBAI

State Bank of India (SBI) is developing a solution to use UPI data as a proxy to assess a small business entity's creditworthiness in the absence of GST registration, a top official said.

The country's largest lender is confident of providing end-to-end digital loans within a day for such borrowers, its MD Ashwini Kumar Tewari said here, adding that this will help assuage concerns about such businesses being left outside formal finance.

"UPI (Unified Payments Interface) can substitute GST (goods and services tax) if regular sales are happening. We are developing a UPI solution (for businesses) without GST, and we will use that (UPI transactions) as a proxy for sales," Mr. Tewari said.

The bank has been able to solve lending challenges for the businesses registered with GST, and is in a position to lend within ten minutes, he said, speaking at the annual Global Fintech Fest here.

However, there are difficulties in the case of businesses not having a GST number, he said, pointing out that this is where alternative data inputs become important.





DESERVING

Rybakina played really well and took away the No. 1 spot: Sabalenka



REUTERS

I really understand how tough it is to reach the World No. 1. It's a lot of work. Yes, that was one of my goals, but right now there's not much I can do. I didn't really perform well in the middle of the season. Elena (Rybakina) took it over and played really well. She took away the No. 1 position — Aryna Sabalenka.

TOUGH OPPONENT

'Sabalenka is an aggressive player, has a big game and big serve'



AP

She's a very aggressive player and it's difficult to play against her. She has a big game and a big serve. I need to come with all the energy I have, bring my best serve and make the right decisions at the right moment. Since it's the final, you want to win and do your best — Elena Rybakina on Aryna Sabalenka and the title decider.

BIDDING GOODBYE

Former doubles World No. 1 Rajeev Ram calls time on career



GETTY IMAGES

Former doubles World No. 1 Rajeev Ram called time on his career after he and Joe Salisbury lost in the semifinal at the US Open in New York. He finished his career with six Major titles — two in mixed and four in men's — and 32 ATP Tour doubles crowns. He also won six Masters titles and two Olympic silver medals.

WITHIN SIGHT

Sri Lanka beats Pakistan, clashes with India in the Asia Cup final



GETTY IMAGES

India will face Sri Lanka in the women's Asia Cup final after the defending champion notched up a four-wicket win over Pakistan in Dubai on Friday. **The scores:** Pakistan 130/5 in 20 overs (Fatima Sana 47 n.o., Chamari 2/24, Chamudi 2/25) lost to Sri Lanka 134/6 in 18.4 overs (Harshitha 36, Kavisha 33, Sana 4/38). **PoM:** Sana.

Sabalenka blows away Pegula, sets up final with Rybakina

The Belarusian keeps her bid for a rare three-peat alive; the Kazakh battles back to oust Gauff in three sets

US OPEN

Agence France-Presse  
NEW YORK

Aryna Sabalenka stormed past Jessica Pegula in straight sets on Thursday to keep her bid for a rare US Open three-peat on track, booking a championship showdown with Elena Rybakina.

Sabalenka was unstoppable in a 7-5, 6-2 victory at the Arthur Ashe Stadium, where she beat Pegula on the way to US Open victories in 2024 and 2025. Rybakina battled back to beat 2023 champion Coco Gauff 3-6, 6-4, 6-4.

Sabalenka, bidding to join Chris Evert and Serena Williams as the only women to win three straight US Open titles, pounded third-seeded Pegula remorselessly with her powerful groundstrokes. "I was super desperate," said Sabalenka, who has had a slow summer since back-to-back wins at Indian Wells and Miami in March.

Sabalenka's frustration at her inability to make any



Contrasting wins: Rybakina and Sabalenka took different routes to reach the title decider. GETTY IMAGES

headway against Pegula's serve showed in a tense first set. But she maintained her focus and was rewarded as Pegula, feel-

ing the pressure to stay in the set as she served 5-6 down, fell behind 0-40. The American saved one set point but couldn't sal-

vage the next.

Sabalenka kept rolling in the second set, attacking Pegula's suspect second serve and seizing a break

THE RESULTS

**Women: Semifinals:**  
1-Sabalenka bt 3-Pegula (USA) 7-5, 6-2; 2-Rybakina (Kaz) bt 4-Gauff (USA) 3-6, 6-4, 6-4.

for a 3-1 lead when she lashed a forehand into the corner. She sealed the victory with another break courtesy of another thunderous forehand.

Gauff's bid to return to the final had got off to a smooth start, the American gaining the lone break of the opening set for a 4-2 lead and pocketing the set.

But Rybakina hit back with an early break on the way to a 4-1 lead in the second. Gauff responded superbly, breaking back and holding to square the set at 4-4 to roars from the crowd. But she was unable to make the most of her fightback and double-faulted in the 10th game to hand two set points to Rybakina, who pounced to force a third set.

Rybakina looked on the brink of victory after breaking Gauff for a 5-3 lead in the third. Gauff broke back, but Rybakina clinched it the next game.

Poor show in Sri Lanka due to long break: Siraj

CRICKET

S. Dipak Ragav  
CHENNAI

Following India's recent Test tour of Sri Lanka, Mohammed Siraj came under scrutiny after an underwhelming performance in the two-match series.

The Hyderabad pacer took just one wicket in each of the four innings. Siraj's woes continued in the Duleep Trophy final that concluded here on Thursday, where he managed just one wicket as South Zone lost to East Zone.

In the first innings of the Duleep final, Siraj was lacklustre, but he came up with an improved effort in the second essay.

"In the first innings, the pitch looked fresh, so I tried to bowl too fast. Because I was forcing it, my rhythm was off. In the second, I told myself to forget the outcome and just run in with good, natural rhythm. The moment I did that, the old Siraj was back in action, and the ball started coming out beautifully," he said.

Before the Lanka tour, Siraj's last competitive game was the one-off Test against Afghanistan in June. The 32-year-old said



Siraj could claim only four wickets in the two-Test series against the Lankans. FILE PHOTO

the two-month break was the reason for his poor form.

"Coming off a two-month break straight into a match, my rhythm wasn't quite there. Heading into this game, my primary goal was to find that flow. Playing this match helped tremendously," said Siraj.

"After two months off, your body doesn't react

the same way — everything feels a beat slower. Getting through this game got my body moving again and brought my rhythm right back."

While there is a lot of focus on workload management, Siraj reckoned his body doesn't need long breaks.

"Every bowler's body is different, mine doesn't handle long breaks well. A short breather is fine, but in my career, I had never taken two full months off," he quipped.

"I was working out in the gym and bowling occasionally, but no amount of practice can replicate match intensity. It was a new experience, but a learning curve for me going forward."

In the two Tests, Siraj struggled with his pace as well, operating in the 120-130 kph zone and never touching 140 kph.

"I'm purely a rhythm bowler. If I'm not in sync, I can't explode through the crease. That was the struggle in Sri Lanka — my run-up felt disjointed. Some strides were too short, others were too long, and that broke my flow and cost me pace. Out here, everything clicked, and the pace followed naturally," he added.

Pipers, Grandmasters inch closer to summit clash

GLOBAL CHESS LEAGUE

P.K. Ajith Kumar  
BENGALURU

Magnus Carlsen showed his magnanimous side on Friday. The World No. 1 was presented with the Player-of-the-Match trophy after Alpine APL Pipers scored a crucial win against Fyers American Gambits at the Lalit Ashok.

He, however, handed over the trophy to his teammate Vidit Gujrathi, crediting the Grandmaster from Nashik for the 9-7 victory in the match between the two top teams at the Tech Mahindra Global Chess League.

Carlsen, who beat Javokhir Sindarov, said: "In my game, I was doing pretty well early on but Sindarov put up a good fight. I was able to wriggle out and find the win. As much as I am happy with my win, I don't deserve the award as much as the man who won us the match."

That statement was greeted with loud applause by the crowd. Vidit said he was honoured by Carlsen's gesture.

The five-time World champion wasn't the only one who was feeling generous on this day. Ganges Grandmasters' Stavroula Tsolakidou was named the



Mind games: Zhu, top right, defeated Lagno to star for Continental Kings while Firoozja held Anand. SUDHAKARA JAIN

Player-of-the-Match for her win against Carissa Yip of Cheq Mumba Masters. She, however, presented the trophy to the team's coach B. Adhiban.

The Grandmasters romped home 16-1, with five of the six players winning their games. Going into the final day of the league phase, they have 18 points, the same as the Pipers. But the Grandmasters have 88 points, six more than the Pipers.

The two franchises are inching closer to the final, with only the American Gambits, who are on 15 match points, having an outside chance, but it is

not in their hands alone.

**The results: PBG Alaskan Knights lost to Triveni Continental Kings 7-13** (Anand drew with Firoozja; Arjun bt Wei; Erdogmus bt Aravindh; Lagno lost to Zhu; Batsiashvili lost to Kosteniuk; Abhimanyu lost to Pranav).

**Alpine APL Pipers bt Fyers American Gambits 9-7** (Carlsen bt Sindarov; Giri drew with Nihal; Vidit bt Dubov; Divya lost to Assaubayeva; Humpy drew with Sarasadat; Murzin drew with Maurizzi). **Ganges Grandmasters bt Cheq Mumba Masters 16-1** (Nepomniachtchi bt Vachier-Lagrave; Anronian bt Pranesh; Perez bt Mamedyarov; Shuvalova drew with Harika; Tsolakidou bt Yip; Mendonca bt Daneshvar).

The Bumrah-Sooryavanshi face-off

Vivek Krishnan  
NEW DELHI

In this year's IPL, Vaibhav Sooryavanshi had left jaws on the floor when he nonchalantly deposited Jasprit Bumrah over mid-on for a six off the first ball he faced from the ace pacer.

On Friday, under lights at the Arun Jaitley Stadium, another glimpse of the box-office duel between the precocious teen and seasoned operator was on view. This came in a mere practice session for the Indian team ahead of the first T20I against Afghanistan on Sunday, but the intensity of the battle was enchanting nevertheless. Sooryavanshi and Bumrah haven't yet featured for India together.

Sooryavanshi had to be fairly measured on Friday evening, for Bumrah hit his straps and tested the left-hander with the lengths that he found.

The 32-year-old beat Sooryavanshi all ends up on one occasion with a peach on a good length, and also nailed his yorkers most of the time. Sooryavanshi wasn't fazed, however, as he unfurled a delightful punch off the back foot later.

For Bumrah, it was largely about finding his groove after an injury layoff. He had hurt his left knee during the ODI series against England in July, and had failed to recover in



Titan and teen: Bumrah and Sooryavanshi are yet to play together for India. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

time for the recent Test series versus Sri Lanka. He bowled in the nets for nearly 45 minutes.

The training stint was attended by the entire 15-member squad. After a drizzle, India was in buoyant mood as it started with elaborate fielding

drills. With fielding coach Subhadeep Ghosh, who took over from T. Dilip in August, encouraging the players with the enthusiasm of a recent hire, flat and high catches as well as ground fielding were practised rigorously.

If greater emphasis on

the fielding seemed noticeable, it may be to address India's sloppiness on the tour of the United Kingdom in June-July.

A number of catches were spilled as Shreyas Iyer & Co. suffered series defeats to both Ireland and England.

Razaullah heroics delay England's victory push

PAKISTAN IN ENGLAND

Agencies  
BIRMINGHAM

An audacious 81 (63b, 4x4, 9x6) by debutant Razaullah rescued Pakistan from 318 for eight and helped it reach 449 on the third day of the third and final Test against England on Friday.

Razaullah put on 121 for the ninth wicket with Mohammad Abbas (42) as the visitors set a target of 130.

Trailing by 320 at the end of the opening exchanges, Pakistan showed fight as Azaan Awaiz (59), Shan Masood (95) and captain Babar Azam (76) made half-centuries.

The scores:

Pakistan 133 & 449 in 96.4 overs (Awaiz 59, Masood 95, Babar 76, Razaullah 81, Abbas 42, Atkinson 3/109) vs. England 453.



Razaullah. GETTY IMAGES



GETTY IMAGES

Historically, a career average of 50 in the five-day game has been the gold standard that batters have aspired for. But since 2020, only three have achieved the benchmark whilst scoring a minimum of 2000 runs, in contrast to 19 from 2000 to 2009 and 11 from 2010 to 2019. Why this decline?

Vivek Krishnan

In the glorious annals of Test cricket, which will ring in its 150th anniversary next year, some numbers have acquired permanence over time.

Sir Don Bradman’s otherworldly Test average of 99.94 will forever be iconic. Sunil Gavaskar’s 10,122 runs, on account of the Indian being the first in the world to cross 10K, is epochal. The mild-mannered Sri Lankan off-spinner Muttiah Muralitharan’s 800 scalps, snared with a ferocious snap of his right arm, is another monumental figure.

**The magic figure**

More broadly, in sync with the sport’s tendency to set benchmarks through statistics, a career average of 50 has long been the magic figure for batters in white flannels. Operating in another stratosphere without doubt was Bradman, whose average over 52 Tests from 1928 to 1948 is an insurmountable peak of the kind unlikely to be witnessed again in all of sport.

Moreover, Bradman’s influence extended beyond the field, with his runs acting as a balm to hordes of Australians suffering the grim consequences of the Great Depression.

For the rest, who cannot reach such dizzy heights, averaging half as much as the pre-eminent Australian over a reasonably lengthy career is a measure of bona fide greatness. To do so, a batter must be able to straddle different worlds,

The mindset is not there to survive. Even balanced pitches become talked about because batters don’t stay for long

WASIM JAFFER

ranging from the fast and bouncy surfaces of Australia and South Africa in the southern hemisphere to the dusty, spin-friendly decks of the subcontinent.

But in a landscape where so much of the Test game is undergoing transformation, there is perhaps a change unfolding here as well.

Among those with a minimum of 2000 runs starting January 1, 2020, only three have achieved the gold standard of 50 – the recently retired Kane Williamson of New Zealand and a pair of Englishmen in Joe Root and Harry Brook. The corresponding data for preceding decades point to a perceptible shift: 11 batters had a 50-plus average from 2010 to 2019, and as many as 19 from 2000 to 2009.

**A multitude of factors**

It isn’t by happenstance that the beginning of this shift coincides with the introduction of the World Test Championship (WTC) in 2019. Ever since teams have been incentivised to pursue silverware at the end of every two-year cycle, they have prioritised optimising home advantage by looking to win as many games as possible in familiar climes.

The chance to bag 12 points for a victory in the WTC, as opposed to four for a draw, encourages the pushing of the envelope. Result-oriented surfaces, where ball dominates bat, have thus become common.

The venues in Australia offer a striking example. In years gone by, most pitches Down Under

had sharp pace and steep bounce, but they were also eminently favourable to batters who relished the cut and pull. Once the new Kookaburra ball lost its lustre, the willow-wielders were in prime position to make hay under the baking sun.

Now, the balance has swayed significantly in favour of the pacers. So much so that three of the last seven Tests have finished inside two days, with the fast men reaping the rewards. Even the Sydney Cricket Ground, traditionally conducive to guile and flight, has turned into a fast-bowling paradise.

“Probably averaging 35 with the bat is the same as averaging 45 a decade ago. I think the wickets have changed that much,” Aussie quick Josh Hazlewood told the media recently.

**Changed thinking**

In the view of former India opener Wasim Jaffer, a pa-

Probably averaging 35 with the bat is the same as averaging 45 a decade ago. Wickets have changed that much

JOSH HAZLEWOOD



tient accumulator of runs during his playing days, a rise in result-oriented strips shouldn’t be an alibi for batters’ shortcomings. He contends that the prevailing mindset of run-makers, given their routine exposure to white-ball cricket, seldom lends itself to digging in and grinding out a meaningful score.

Increasingly, to paraphrase Jaffer, finding batters in the mould of Rahul Dravid or Cheteshwar Pujara is going to be like looking for a needle in a haystack.

“As soon as the ball seams, swings or spins, and conditions are a little in favour of the bowlers, the batters want to attack their way out of trouble,” Jaffer told *The Hindu*. “You’re not going to find somebody like Dravid or Pujara who will play out a session or a spell and cash in a little later. We are generally living in a time where patience is non-existent.”

Jaffer concurred with the broad sentiment that many of the pitches of late haven’t been straightforward for batting. However, he cited the example of Headingley 2002, one of India’s famous overseas wins in which Dravid, Sachin Tendulkar and Sourav Ganguly peeled off centuries, to assert that such challenges have been conquered.

“The mindset is not there to survive. As a result, even balanced pitches become talked about because the batters don’t stay for long. They make it look tougher at times,” he argued, before recollecting, “I was part of the Indian team in Leeds in 2002. The conditions were very difficult. Still, the Test went into the fifth day. We had batters like Sachin, Sourav and Rahul. They survived the tough phases, and then it became easier.”

**More than one reason**

When it comes to defensive technique too, there has probably been a downturn. A case in point is the waning ability of Indian batters against spin on tracks assisting turn.

While the presence of the Decision Review System (DRS) has added another degree of difficulty, for batters are far more prone to being adjudged leg-before, very few appear adept at using the depth of the crease to move fully forward or back. Over the past two home seasons, India has borne the brunt, against New Zealand left-arm spinner Mitchell Santner and South African offie Simon Harmer.

The bowlers, often condemned to anonymity in the shorter formats, deserve their share of the credit. The widespread use of the wobble-seam delivery, a type of release where the seam isn’t perfectly upright on purpose, is an illustration of the ingenuity of fast bowlers coming to the fore.

Though the delivery isn’t exactly new, there seems to be greater awareness among a wider pool of quicks about the benefits of the seam wobbling on its way to the batter. For the men facing up, in comparison to dealing with swing through the air, there are no obvious clues to lean on when the ball deviates off the surface after pitching.

“It’s an additional weapon in the armoury of fast bowlers. The wobble seam sometimes confuses you as a batter. If it lands in the right spot and darts back in, it creates problems,” Jaffer observed.

It brings us interestingly to Virat Kohli, Pujara and Ajinkya Rahane. Formidable occupants of India’s middle-order until three years ago, they have all retired from Test cricket over the past 15 months.

At the time of their exits, the fact that none of them finished with an average above 50 was perceived to be a blot on their careers. It may not be so in the years to come.

STACKING UP



English Premier League standings

| #  | Team           | GP | W | D | L | GF | GA | GD | PTS |
|----|----------------|----|---|---|---|----|----|----|-----|
| 1  | Man. City      | 3  | 3 | 0 | 0 | 7  | 2  | 5  | 9   |
| 2  | Arsenal        | 3  | 3 | 0 | 0 | 6  | 1  | 5  | 9   |
| 3  | Hull City      | 3  | 2 | 1 | 0 | 3  | 0  | 3  | 7   |
| 4  | Chelsea        | 3  | 2 | 0 | 1 | 8  | 7  | 1  | 6   |
| 5  | Brentford      | 3  | 1 | 2 | 0 | 5  | 2  | 3  | 5   |
| 6  | Liverpool      | 3  | 1 | 2 | 0 | 6  | 4  | 2  | 5   |
| 7  | Newcastle      | 3  | 1 | 2 | 0 | 6  | 4  | 2  | 5   |
| 8  | Everton        | 3  | 1 | 2 | 0 | 5  | 3  | 2  | 5   |
| 9  | Leeds United   | 3  | 1 | 2 | 0 | 3  | 2  | 1  | 5   |
| 10 | Brighton       | 3  | 1 | 1 | 1 | 8  | 5  | 3  | 4   |
| 11 | Man. United    | 3  | 1 | 1 | 1 | 7  | 6  | 1  | 4   |
| 12 | Sunderland     | 3  | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3  | 3  | 0  | 4   |
| 13 | Crystal Palace | 3  | 1 | 0 | 2 | 4  | 8  | -4 | 3   |
| 14 | Ipswich Town   | 3  | 1 | 0 | 2 | 4  | 8  | -4 | 3   |
| 15 | Bournemouth    | 3  | 0 | 2 | 1 | 4  | 5  | -1 | 2   |
| 16 | N. Forest      | 3  | 0 | 2 | 1 | 2  | 3  | -1 | 2   |
| 17 | Aston Villa    | 3  | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0  | 5  | -5 | 1   |
| 18 | Tottenham      | 3  | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0  | 5  | -5 | 1   |
| 19 | Fulham         | 3  | 0 | 0 | 3 | 4  | 7  | -3 | 0   |
| 20 | Coventry       | 3  | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0  | 5  | -5 | 0   |

Spanish LaLiga standings

| #  | Team            | GP | W | D | L | GF | GA | GD | PTS |
|----|-----------------|----|---|---|---|----|----|----|-----|
| 1  | Barcelona       | 4  | 4 | 0 | 0 | 17 | 2  | 15 | 12  |
| 2  | Alaves          | 4  | 3 | 1 | 0 | 10 | 3  | 7  | 10  |
| 3  | Real Madrid     | 4  | 3 | 0 | 1 | 10 | 3  | 7  | 9   |
| 4  | Real Betis      | 4  | 3 | 0 | 1 | 5  | 5  | 0  | 9   |
| 5  | RC Deportivo    | 4  | 2 | 2 | 0 | 8  | 5  | 3  | 8   |
| 6  | Sevilla         | 4  | 2 | 1 | 1 | 7  | 6  | 1  | 7   |
| 7  | Atletico Madrid | 4  | 2 | 1 | 1 | 7  | 6  | 1  | 7   |
| 8  | Osasuna         | 4  | 2 | 1 | 1 | 5  | 6  | -1 | 7   |
| 9  | Real Sociedad   | 5  | 2 | 1 | 2 | 6  | 8  | -2 | 7   |
| 10 | Athletic Club   | 4  | 2 | 0 | 2 | 6  | 5  | 1  | 6   |
| 11 | Levante         | 4  | 1 | 2 | 1 | 5  | 5  | 0  | 5   |
| 12 | Espanyol        | 4  | 1 | 1 | 2 | 6  | 5  | 1  | 4   |
| 13 | Racing Club     | 4  | 1 | 1 | 2 | 7  | 8  | -1 | 4   |
| 14 | Rayo Vallecano  | 4  | 1 | 1 | 2 | 7  | 10 | -3 | 4   |
| 15 | Getafe          | 4  | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2  | 5  | -3 | 4   |
| 16 | Celta           | 5  | 0 | 3 | 2 | 2  | 5  | -3 | 3   |
| 17 | Villarreal      | 4  | 0 | 2 | 2 | 6  | 8  | -2 | 2   |
| 18 | Malaga          | 4  | 0 | 2 | 2 | 1  | 7  | -6 | 2   |
| 19 | Elche           | 4  | 0 | 1 | 3 | 5  | 12 | -7 | 1   |
| 20 | Valencia        | 4  | 0 | 1 | 3 | 1  | 9  | -8 | 1   |



F1 Drivers' standings

| #  | Driver         | Team         | Points | Wins |
|----|----------------|--------------|--------|------|
| 1  | A.K. Antonelli | Mercedes     | 267    | 7    |
| 2  | G. Russell     | Mercedes     | 201    | 2    |
| 3  | L. Hamilton    | Ferrari      | 191    | 1    |
| 4  | L. Norris      | McLaren      | 171    | 2    |
| 5  | C. Leclerc     | Ferrari      | 155    | 1    |
| 6  | M. Verstappen  | Red Bull     | 127    | 0    |
| 7  | O. Piastri     | McLaren      | 116    | 0    |
| 8  | I. Hadjar      | Red Bull     | 71     | 0    |
| 9  | L. Lawson      | RB           | 51     | 0    |
| 10 | P. Gasly       | Alpine       | 41     | 0    |
| 11 | A. Lindbald    | RB           | 29     | 0    |
| 12 | F. Colapinto   | Alpine       | 21     | 0    |
| 13 | O. Bearman     | Haas         | 18     | 0    |
| 14 | G. Bortoleto   | Audi         | 10     | 0    |
| 15 | N. Hulkenberg  | Audi         | 6      | 0    |
| 16 | C. Sainz Jr.   | Williams     | 6      | 0    |
| 17 | A. Albon       | Williams     | 5      | 0    |
| 18 | E. Ocon        | Haas         | 3      | 0    |
| 19 | F. Alonso      | Aston Martin | 3      | 0    |
| 20 | Y. Tsunoda     | RB           | 1      | 0    |
| 21 | L. Stroll      | Aston Martin | 0      | 0    |
| 22 | V. Bottas      | Cadillac     | 0      | 0    |
| 23 | S. Perez       | Cadillac     | 0      | 0    |



A.K. Antonelli



G. Russell

F1 Constructors' standings

| Pos | Team         | Points | Wins |
|-----|--------------|--------|------|
| 1   | Mercedes     | 468    | 9    |
| 2   | Ferrari      | 346    | 2    |
| 3   | McLaren      | 287    | 2    |
| 4   | Red Bull     | 204    | 0    |
| 5   | Racing Bulls | 75     | 0    |
| 6   | Alpine       | 62     | 0    |
| 7   | Haas         | 21     | 0    |
| 8   | Audi         | 16     | 0    |
| 9   | Williams     | 11     | 0    |
| 10  | Aston Martin | 3      | 0    |
| 11  | Cadillac     | 0      | 0    |



Badminton Men's ranking

| #  | Player             | Points | Events |
|----|--------------------|--------|--------|
| 1  | Jonatan Christie   | 87631  | 17     |
| 2  | Christo Popov      | 87002  | 20     |
| 3  | Kunlavut Vitidsarn | 86915  | 16     |
| 4  | Chou Tien Chen     | 86580  | 27     |
| 5  | Anders Antonsen    | 85405  | 17     |
| 6  | Shi Yu Qi          | 84075  | 13     |
| 7  | Kodai Naraoka      | 77540  | 20     |
| 8  | Alex Lanier        | 76985  | 15     |
| 9  | Victor Lai         | 76465  | 18     |
| 10 | Alwi Farhan        | 71619  | 18     |
| 11 | Li Shi Feng        | 70433  | 16     |
| 12 | Lakshya Sen        | 65573  | 21     |
| 13 | Lin Chun-Yi        | 64924  | 18     |
| 14 | Loh Kean Yew       | 64100  | 20     |
| 15 | Toma Junior Popov  | 62697  | 20     |

Top Indians

|                        |                         |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| Lakshya Sen<br>Rank 12 | Ayush Shetty<br>Rank 20 |
|------------------------|-------------------------|

Badminton Women's ranking

| #  | Player               | Points  | Events |
|----|----------------------|---------|--------|
| 1  | An Se Young          | 121,287 | 15     |
| 2  | Wang Zhi Yi          | 103,989 | 16     |
| 3  | Akane Yamaguchi      | 102,576 | 18     |
| 4  | Chen Yu Fei          | 86,651  | 14     |
| 5  | Ratchanok Intanon    | 74,606  | 20     |
| 6  | Han Yue              | 72,488  | 13     |
| 7  | Putri Kusuma Wardani | 72023   | 17     |
| 8  | Tomoka Miyazaki      | 71,456  | 22     |
| 9  | Pornpawee Chochuwong | 69,027  | 16     |
| 10 | Nozomi Okuhara       | 64,160  | 18     |
| 11 | P.V. Sindhu          | 64,151  | 13     |
| 12 | Kim Ga Eun           | 59,281  | 16     |
| 13 | Line Christophersen  | 57,940  | 22     |
| 14 | Michelle Li          | 57,427  | 21     |
| 15 | Mia Blichfeldt       | 54,483  | 12     |

Top Indians

|                        |                         |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| P.V. Sindhu<br>Rank 11 | Unnati Hooda<br>Rank 24 |
|------------------------|-------------------------|



Test Batting

| #  | Player          | Rating | Career best |
|----|-----------------|--------|-------------|
| 1  | Harry Brook     | 856    | 898         |
| 2  | Steve Smith     | 840    | 947         |
| 3  | Joe Root        | 820    | 932         |
| 4  | Travis Head     | 811    | 884         |
| 5  | Temba Bavuma    | 775    | 806         |
| 6  | Rachin Ravindra | 740    | 740         |
| 7  | Rishabh Pant    | 713    | 801         |
| 8  | Daryl Mitchell  | 710    | 804         |
| 9  | Shubman Gill    | 709    | 807         |
| 10 | Kamindu Mendis  | 706    | 784         |

ODI Batting

| #  | Player           | Rating | Career best |
|----|------------------|--------|-------------|
| 1  | Shubman Gill     | 801    | 841         |
| 2  | Daryl Mitchell   | 794    | 840         |
| 3  | Virat Kohli      | 767    | 908         |
| 4  | Rohit Sharma     | 758    | 879         |
| 5  | Ibrahim Zadran   | 719    | 756         |
| 6  | Babar Azam       | 689    | 894         |
| 7  | Joe Root         | 674    | 810         |
| 8  | Shai Hope        | 673    | 782         |
| 9  | Charith Asalanka | 659    | 705         |
| 10 | Harry Tector     | 653    | 730         |

T20I Batting

| #  | Player           | Rating | Career best |
|----|------------------|--------|-------------|
| 1  | Ishan Kishan     | 910    | 916         |
| 2  | Sahibzada Farhan | 848    | 848         |
| 3  | Abhishek Sharma  | 819    | 931         |
| 4  | Phil Salt        | 799    | 881         |
| 5  | Dewald Brevis    | 789    | 806         |
| 6  | Pathum Nissanka  | 751    | 796         |
| 7  | Tilak Varma      | 750    | 845         |
| 8  | Jos Buttler      | 748    | 794         |
| 9  | Harry Brook      | 734    | 734         |
| 10 | Mitchell Marsh   | 706    | 706         |

Test Bowling

| #  | Player         | Rating | Career best |
|----|----------------|--------|-------------|
| 1  | Mitchell Starc | 872    | 872         |
| 2  | Matt Henry     | 861    | 870         |
| 3  | Jasprit Bumrah | 853    | 908         |
| 4  | Pat Cummins    | 841    | 914         |
| 5  | Ollie Robinson | 831    | 831         |
| 6  | Marco Jansen   | 825    | 825         |
| 7  | Kagiso Rabada  | 807    | 902         |
| 8  | Scott Boland   | 804    | 820         |
| 9  | Noman Ali      | 785    | 853         |
| 10 | Josh Hazlewood | 783    | 864         |

ODI Bowling

| #  | Player             | Rating | Career best |
|----|--------------------|--------|-------------|
| 1  | Rashid Khan        | 714    | 775         |
| 2  | Abrar Ahmed        | 675    | 675         |
| 3  | Jofra Archer       | 649    | 682         |
| 4  | Keshav Maharaj     | 645    | 737         |
| 5  | Mitchell Santner   | 644    | 656         |
| 6  | Maheesh Theekshana | 641    | 680         |
| 7  | Mujeeb UR Rahman   | 663    | 757         |
| 8  | Varun Chakravarthy | 663    | 818         |
| 9  | Mohammad Nawaz     | 658    | 672         |
| 10 | Maheesh Theekshana | 658    | 686         |

T20I Bowling

| #  | Player             | Rating | Career best |
|----|--------------------|--------|-------------|
| 1  | Rashid Khan        | 753    | 828         |
| 2  | Abrar Ahmed        | 736    | 757         |
| 3  | Adil Rashid        | 710    | 747         |
| 4  | Adam Zampa         | 700    | 746         |
| 5  | Nathan Ellis       | 675    | 678         |
| 6  | Wanindu Hasaranga  | 668    | 809         |
| 7  | Mujeeb UR Rahman   | 663    | 757         |
| 8  | Varun Chakravarthy | 663    | 818         |
| 9  | Mohammad Nawaz     | 658    | 672         |
| 10 | Maheesh Theekshana | 658    | 686         |

# The Special One's latest sermon: **Bellingham** as gospel

GETTY IMAGES



| Athlete               | Time     | Date         | Athlete               | Time    | Date         |
|-----------------------|----------|--------------|-----------------------|---------|--------------|
| Jarmila Kratochvilova | 1:53.28s | 26 Jul, 1983 | Ana Fidelia Quirot    | 1:54.44 | 9 Sep, 1989  |
| Nadezhda Olizarenko   | 1:53.43  | 27 Jul, 1980 | Audrey Werro          | 1:54.45 | 16 Jun, 2026 |
| Audrey Werro          | 1:53.70  | 27 Aug, 2026 | Caster Semenya        | 1:54.60 | 20 Jul, 2018 |
| Audrey Werro          | 1:53.80  | 28 Jun, 2026 | Keely Hodgkinson      | 1:54.61 | 20 Jul, 2024 |
| Audrey Werro          | 1:53.98  | 7 Jun, 2026  | Lilian Odira          | 1:54.62 | 21 Sep, 2025 |
| Pamela Jelimo         | 1:54.01  | 29 Aug, 2008 | Jarmila Kratochvilova | 1:54.68 | 9 Aug, 1983  |
| Caster Semenya        | 1:54.25  | 30 Jun, 2018 | Femke Broeders-Bol    | 1:54.71 | 27 Aug, 2026 |
| Keely Hodgkinson      | 1:54.33  | 7 Jun, 2026  |                       |         |              |