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DAUGHTER STOKES ROW

Revanth drops Konda Surekha from Cabinet

STATES » PAGE 3

HEAVY RAIN

Five dead in U.P.; Ganga nears danger mark in Bihar

STATES » PAGE 2

DEFENCE PACTS SIGNED

India, Belgium vow to expand bilateral ties

NEWS » PAGE 5

PARLEY

Are brands overreacting to fake outrage?

Last week a jewellery ad was pulled over attire

OPINION » PAGE 9

RECORD-BREAKER

Smriti becomes the leading run-scorer

SPORT » PAGE 16

INSIDE

Tax regime relies excessively on 'punitive action'

NEW DELHI'
Members of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance criticised the present Income Tax regime for relying excessively on what they called "punitive action" and granting tax officials significant scope for overreach, at a meeting on Thursday. » PAGE 12

Census dropped OBC lists as they featured 'classes'

NEW DELHI
The Centre had considered using the Central list and States' lists of OBCs while deciding the 2027 Census will use an open-column method for castes, officials said. But, after deliberations, it emerged this would be a problem "as the list of OBCs is a list of classes", they said. » PAGE 4

'Supersized' El Nino likely to be strongest ever

GENEVA
The El Nino weather phenomenon is set to intensify further into 2027 and could be the strongest ever, raising risks of extreme weather into next year, the World Meteorological Organisation said on Thursday. The UN weather agency said its forecasts showed a near 100% likelihood that El Nino would persist through February 2027. » PAGE 14

'Violence likely to affect conduct of Manipur polls'

NEW DELHI
Continuing Naga-Kuki violence in Manipur will make it difficult to conduct elections to the Assembly next year, Manipur Deputy Chief Minister Losii Dikho said on Thursday, indicating Naga legislators may reconsider their support to the government if their concerns are not addressed. » PAGE 6

NHAI asked to consider CCTVs at its toll plazas

NEW DELHI
The Supreme Court on Thursday raised concerns over encroachments and stationary vehicles on highways, and asked the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) to consider setting up camera surveillance systems and monitoring rooms at toll plazas to address them. » PAGE 6

Bar Council has no power to punish students: SC

- Court says the BCI, its head lack jurisdiction over students; only universities can discipline them
- SC rebukes BCI's attempt to intimidate NALSAR students who opposed CJI as chief guest at event
- The BCI's disciplinary powers under Advocates Act, 1961, are limited to advocates, court adds

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday declared that the Bar Council of India (BCI) and its Chairperson, Manan Kumar Mishra, lack jurisdiction to discipline or penalise law students, rebuking the regulatory body's attempts to intimidate NALSAR students exercising their constitutional right to protest.

The court insisted on clarifying the limits of the BCI's powers though the latter had revoked its August 13 letters to NALSAR administration to launch an inquiry against the students and to the State Bar Councils to block their professional enrolment.

The students had protested against having Chief Justice Surya Kant as chief guest at their convocation following his oral comments in court comparing youth to "cockroaches" and "parasites".

Right to dissent

A three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant said the order, drawing the boundary for the Bar Council, was designed to safeguard university space and students' right to freely express dissent against future attempts to breach.

> On an in-depth consideration of the issue, we are of the opinion that the Advocates Act, 1961 does not confer, expressly or impliedly, any power on the Bar Council of India and State Bar Councils to take any disciplinary or punitive action against law students
>
> SUPREME COURT

"The BCI has no jurisdiction or statutory competence as regards students. That is for their universities," Chief Justice Kant observed.

"On an in-depth consideration of the issue, we are of the opinion that the Advocates Act, 1961, does not confer, expressly or impliedly, any power on the Bar Council of India and State Bar Councils to take any disciplinary or punitive action against law students," the top court recorded in the order.

Mr. Mishra, who was present, said that the BCI had a role in regulating legal education.

But the court said the BCI could step in only after enrolment.

Its disciplinary powers under the Advocates Act, 1961, were, obviously, limited to registered advocates.

"Till then, BCI did not come into the picture... To say a student will not be enrolled..." Justice Joymalya Bagchi said, leaving the sentence unfinished.

The apex court was hearing a petition filed by two former NALSAR graduates, represented by senior advocate K. Parameshwar and advocate Rupali Samuel, seeking legal action against the BCI and the chairperson for threatening the 2026 batch of NALSAR students.

Freedom of speech

The petition said that the Bar Council's letters had created a chilling effect on the freedom of speech and the freedom of association among students.

Mr. Mishra said that letters issued to NALSAR and State Bar Councils were withdrawn "within one hour".

He said there was no reason for further cause of action, and the controversy should be given a quietus.

However, the court agreed with Mr. Parameshwar that the court should protect students in the future against any such violation of their rights by bodies acting without jurisdiction.

Such a situation should never arise, the senior counsel said.

It clarified that only the parent university or the competent authority under the law has any disciplinary power over students.

The Bench said the August 13 letters of the BCI were "obsolete".

Birthday bash

All smiles: A child dressed as Lord Krishna celebrates Janmashtami along with his schoolmates in Hyderabad on Thursday. AP

Iran attacks U.S. bases in defiance of Trump threats

Agence France-Presse
TEHRAN

Iran attacked U.S. military bases in Kuwait on Thursday, despite President Donald Trump threatening strikes in a renewed flare-up six months into the war.

The new clashes, which began with U.S. raids on Sunday, deepen the impasse, as Iran maintains a stranglehold on the Strait of Hormuz and the U.S. presses its counter-blockade of Iranian ports.

Mr. Trump said his military was prepared to attack Iran after extensive U.S. bombardment across the country left at least 19 Iranians dead between Tuesday and Wednesday.

FULL REPORT ON » PAGE 14

A CRPF officer during a search conducted by the ED at a home in Kozhikode on Thursday. K. RAGESH

ED launches drive against narcotics in southern States

Devesh K. Pandey
NEW DELHI

In a major crackdown, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday conducted searches at 30 locations across Tamil Nadu, Keralam, Karnataka, and Telangana in connection with eight narcotics-related cases. The agency sources said the operation was linked to the national Nasha Mukt Bharat Abhiyan for a drug-free India.

The searches are being carried out under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

In Tamil Nadu, the ED is probing the money-laundering angle pertaining to a case in which the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) intercepted N. Ajanthan and K. Madhushan, Sri Lankan nationals residing at the Mandapam Camp for refugees in Ramanathapuram, on June 11, 2024. About 1.47 kg of methamphetamine was seized by the NCB.

Sri Lankan links

The records *prima facie* revealed an arrangement in which different persons handled procurement and financing of meth, its transportation, and onward delivery to Sri Lanka.

"The mechanism was supervised remotely, with instructions relayed through the 'Sacha' WhatsApp group, and cash delivered against currency note tokens," an official said, adding that premises in Chennai and Ramanathapuram were searched.

In another Tamil Nadu case, the NCB intercepted Bysul Rahman in Chennai on July 24, 2024, and seized 5.97 kg of meth. It is alleged that the contraband was being sent to Sri Lanka. Another accused, Syed Ibrahim, was linked to Bysul Rahman and K. M. Mansoor, and had allegedly played a role in arranging or financing the transaction. The NCB further impounded ₹39.38 lakh in cash, 586 gm of gold, and 1 kg of silver. The ED searched two locations in Ramanathapuram and Tirunelveli in the case.

The Karnataka case is linked to Mruthyunjaya alias Jayanna, who was apprehended in 2022 with 1.005 kg of hashish oil and 1.2 kg of ganja, estimated to be worth around ₹80 lakh. The ED is probing the proceeds generated from the alleged drug trade and searched three premises in Kolar, Malur, and Hoskote.

In Telangana, the operation covers the FIRs against accused Kalapathi Nithu Bai and others.

Three immovable properties in the name of the main accused are under the scanner.

One Keralam case allegedly involves Ayush Vinod, who was arrested by the State police with 1.166 kg of hybrid ganja. The ED has identified accused Jagath K.M. for his alleged role in handling the financial side of the operation. Four premises were searched in Kochi and adjoining areas.

The feminist organiser and her daily rebellions

Sunalini Mathew
NEW DELHI

On her website, Gloria Steinem describes herself as a "feminist organizer", a doer, as most women are. Until the end, she hosted Talking Circles, at her New York home, where people gathered do the rough-and-tumble work of activism, but also the gentler work of community building. This "movement building" is what Steinem will always be remembered for.

The practice of gathering in a group, where everyone is heard, was inspired from India, where Steinem spent two years, after she graduated at 22, from Smith College, Massachusetts in 1956. She came to India every few years, and was closely associated with Ruchira Gupta, who founded Apne Aap Women Worldwide, a non-profit working to end sex trafficking. Steinem chaired Apne Aap's advisory board, and for Ms. Gupta, she was "a third parent."

GLORIA STEINEM (1934-2026)

Ms. Gupta says their relationship went back to the 1990s. "She had heard about my work through mutual friends and wanted to see it. I took her in an autorickshaw into the slums of Delhi, where I was organising some women. It began to rain, and I hoped the women would show up," she says. There, in front of a tumbledown building, Steinem spoke to the women about the abortion she had had in her youth. "She spoke in English; I translated, but the women connected with her story. They began to speak about their experiences with abortion."

Books and essays

With Steinem, she co-edited *As if Women Matter: The Essential Gloria Steinem Reader*, essays by Steinem, on feminist thought.

Besides this, Steinem wrote nine books, including *The Truth Will Set You Free, But First it Will Piss You Off!*, *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions*, and her memoir that is slated for release internationally in September, called *An Unexpected Life*. She was also the founder-editor of *Ms.* magazine.

Independent journalist and author, Ammu Joseph, who lives and works out of Bengaluru, remembers spending about a week as a journalism student in the *Ms.* office in 1976, four years after *Ms.* began, selling three lakh copies of its first issue.

"She debunked the whole notion of feminists being humourless and dowdy, and maybe because of her women are proud to call themselves feminists."

Ms. magazine's first issue had an illustration of a blue Kali, with eight arms, each holding an iron, hand mirror, phone, steering wheel, typewriter, frying pan, duster, and clock. It talked about issues of domestic violence, sexual harassment, and the repealing of laws that criminalised abortion.

Steinem, a product of the second-wave feminist movement, reframed abortion as "reproductive freedom". "She had the audacity to look at women's issues and at how the world is shaped by men, for men, and how women are subsidiary players in the field," says Sujata Sriram, a professor at School of Human Ecology, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. Ms. Sriram notes that Steinem's influence in the Indian feminist movement is not widespread, but that a great deal of international research sprung from her ideas.

Ms. Gupta remembers a time just before the icon passed. "We were lying in bed, and she spoke about a woman in the Himalayas who had lived until 105. She joked she would too, especially to see Trump out of office." This time, Ms. Gupta jokes: "I'd like to take that up with her now."

INBRIEF

Ram Temple Trust's new CEO holds meeting with members

Ram Temple Trust's Chief Executive Officer, Air Marshal Jeetendra Mishra (retd), on Thursday attended his first meeting with members and office-bearers after reaching Ayodhya, where he was briefed on the trust's functioning, including its accounting and administrative arrangements. The meeting was held at the trust's Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra office at Ramghat. "It was an introductory meeting where I met other members of the trust. I will take a few more days to understand my role and duties," Mr. Mishra told reporters. Though Mr. Mishra has been appointed as the CEO, he has not formally taken charge of the post yet, sources said. PTI

Haryana to launch drive to tag all stray cattle across State

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Thursday said a special drive will be launched to catch stray cattle and ensure that every animal is tagged for proper identification. Mr. Saini said proper identification of cattle would help fix responsibility and enable action against owners if animals belonging to households or cow shelters are found roaming outside. He was chairing a meeting of the Haryana Gau Seva Aayog and the Animal Husbandry Department in Chandigarh on Wednesday. Agriculture Minister Shyam Singh Rana was also present. PTI

Heavy rain kills 5 in U.P., pushes Ganga towards the danger mark in Bihar

In Himachal, heavy rain brought debris onto the Chandigarh-Shimla highway in Solan district affecting traffic movement; train services hit in West Bengal after soil beneath tracks eroded

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Heavy rain disrupted life across several States on Thursday, killing five persons in Uttar Pradesh, edging the Ganga towards dangerous levels in Bihar, causing landslides and road blockades in Himachal Pradesh and disrupting train services in West Bengal.

In Uttar Pradesh, five persons, including three members of a family, were killed in separate rain-related incidents in Chitrakoot, Amethi and Barabanki districts.

A mud house collapsed in Chitrakoot during heavy rain in Barachhi village, killing a 32-year-old man and his two children aged five and one.

A 66-year-old man in Amethi died after a mud wall collapsed amid heavy rain in Naya Purwa village on Wednesday evening. In Barabanki – among 23 districts in the State affected by floods – a 62-year-old man died and his son-in-law was injured after a mud wall collapsed on them in Dhanouli village late Wednesday night.

Commuters using a boat to navigate a flooded road following an increase in Ganga water level in Prayagraj on Thursday. PTI

CM surveys situation

In Bihar, the water-level in river Ganga on Thursday rose to a dangerous level threatening flood in several areas of districts such as Saran, Munger, Jehanabad, Bhagalpur, Begusarai, Lakhisarai, Bhojpur, Buxar and Patna. Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary and former Chief Minister Nitish Kumar both took stock of the rising water level from different points in Patna and urged people to remain alert.

"Inspected the rising water level of Mother Ganga river. Considering the potential flood situation, necessary instructions were given to the concerned officials so that general public faces no kind of inconvenience and the safety of lives and property can be ensured," Mr. Choudhary said in a post on X on Thursday.

In Himachal Pradesh, heavy rain brought debris onto the Chandigarh-Shimla highway in Solan district, affecting traffic movement, while run-off water inundated shops in the Jabli area near Dharampur.

Landslides in the Naddi area of Kangra district damaged key gravity pipelines supplying drinking water to Dharamshala, disrupting water supply to several parts of the town. As many as 95 roads remained closed for traffic across the State. A wet spell is likely to continue till September 9.

In West Bengal, the Damodar Valley Corporation began issuing flood alerts for downstream areas after releasing water from its Maithon and Panchet reservoirs amid heavy rainfall and increased inflow.

Train services were also affected in West Bengal's Eastern Railway Howrah-Malda division after soil beneath tracks between Tilpara and New Farakka eroded following heavy rain.

(With inputs from Amarnath Tewary in Patna)

'Breach of alliance ethics': Cong. ends ties with Raijor Dal

Press Trust of India
GUWAHATI

The Opposition Congress on Thursday announced the termination of all ties with Akhil Gogoi-led Raijor Dal in Assam, citing "breach of alliance ethics".

The decision, taken on the direction of State Congress president Gaurav Gogoi, came into immediate effect, the party said in a statement.

A circular to this effect, signed by APCC General Secretary (Organisation) Ramanna Baruah, was issued on Wednesday, it said.

The Congress said it had forged an electoral alliance with pan-India Left parties and several regional outfits, including Raijor Dal, ahead of the previous Lok Sabha and Assembly elections, with the objective of presenting a united opposition against "communal forces".

"However, for a majority of this period, the leadership of Raijor Dal continuously engaged in malicious propaganda and character assassination against the Congress party, violating the norms and decorum of the coalition," it alleged.

Raijor Dal chief Akhil Gogoi

"On multiple occasions, the Raijor Dal leadership made baseless, unwarranted and derogatory remarks against leaders of other constituent parties within the Opposition alliance, repeatedly undermining the fundamental ethics of the alliance," it alleged.

In light of such conduct, violating alliance ethics, the Congress said it is no longer viable to sustain political ties with Raijor Dal.

No reaction

No immediate reaction was available from the Raijor Dal leadership.

The Congress and Raijor Dal were part of a six-party opposition alliance during the last Assembly election and won 19 and two seats, respectively, in the 126-member House.

Akash Anand in need of more political maturity, won't give him key party roles: BSP chief

Mayank Kumar
LUCKNOW

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief Mayawati on Thursday said her nephew and party national coordinator Akash Anand needs to become more politically mature and decided against giving him with any major responsibility in the party.

"I have allowed Akash Anand to work in the party, which is before all of you, but he still needs to become more mature. Till then, it would not be appropriate to give him a major responsibility in the party," the BSP chief said while addressing a national-level meeting of party office-bearers in Lucknow.

The former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister also announced that her party will contest all elections across the country, however big or small, on its own.

BSP chief Mayawati with her nephew Akash Anand. FILE PHOTO

Ms. Mayawati termed the Congress "strongly anti-Dalit and anti-Ambedkar" and alleged that Opposition parties are engaged in "misleading and misguiding" Dalits and other sections of the Bahujan society. She accused them of "favouring some Dalit groups and misleading people by making baseless claims and spreading false propaganda".

She also dubbed demonstrations and road blockades as political and electoral gimmicks. "The BSP is the only Ambedkarite party in the country that is free from such political and electoral gimmicks. It is dedicated to the welfare and well-being of the entire society, especially the poor, labourers, exploited, oppressed, and neglected. The living proof of this is the development done by the BSP-led government in Uttar Pradesh for four terms," she said.

Madras High Court dismisses Stalin's plea to declare him elected from T.N.'s Kolathur

Mohamed Imranullah S.
CHENNAI

The Madras High Court on Thursday dismissed as not maintainable, a writ petition filed by DMK president M.K. Stalin to order the 100% counting of VVPAT slips of the Kolathur Assembly constituency, and consequently declare him elected after nullifying the victory of TVK MLA V.S. Babu.

The First Division Bench of Chief Justice Sushrut Arvind Dharmadhikari and Justice G. Arul Murugan, however, granted liberty to the former Chief Minister to pursue other remedies, such as filing an election petition with a request to the election tribunal to condone the delay in filing the plea.

The Bench agreed with senior counsel G. Rajagopalan and Dama Seshadri Naidu, appearing for the Election Commission of India (EC), that a writ petition could not be entertained by circumventing a constitutional bar on entertaining a challenge to parliamentary/Assembly constituency election except by way of an election petition.

Former CM M.K. Stalin

'A pandora's box'

The judges concurred with the EC's argument that entertaining such a writ petition might open a pandora's box.

Authoring the verdict, the Chief Justice said Mr. Stalin had insisted on 100% counting of VVPAT slips on the basis of alleged anomalies discovered by his representative, senior counsel N.R. Elango, during the checking and verification of the burnt memory/microcontroller in 5% (14 out of 286 machines) of the EVMs used in Kolathur constituency by a team of engineers from the EVM manufacturers.

An inquiry into such alleged anomalies could not be undertaken on the basis of affidavits filed before a writ court since it requires a full-fledged trial, including expert evidence on the technical functioning of the EVM and VVPAT units, which could be done only before an election tribunal, the Bench added.

During the course of arguments, senior counsel Kapil Sibal, representing Mr. Stalin, told the court that the writ petitioner had applied for 5% EVM verification on May 7 (within three days of declaration of results on May 4), but the EC had commenced the process only on July 29, and ended it on August 5, by which time the 45-day limitation period for filing an election petition had expired.

To this, the Bench said: "This Court is not persuaded that this circumstance can enlarge the jurisdiction of this Court under Article 226 (writ jurisdiction) of the Constitution in the face of the express constitutional bar under Article 329(b). Suffice it to observe that a difficulty of this kind, even where genuine, is not a ground on which the constitutional bar can be circumvented. It is, at best, a ground to be urged before the forum vested with jurisdiction to try the dispute."

The judges said the 5% EVM verification mechanism had been engrafted by the Supreme Court as an additional safeguard, and not in substitution of the remedy of an election petition.

Jarange-Patil agrees to take IV fluids on Day 6 of fast

Snehal Mutha
MUMBAI

Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange-Patil on Thursday agreed to take IV fluids without breaking his fast as it entered its sixth day. "I will continue to fast until the issues are resolved. I am giving two days to the government to act," he said.

Meanwhile, his supporters across the Marathwada region continued to stage "rasta roko" protests, blocking major national highways in a bid to put pressure on the government to implement their demands.

A bandh was announced in Jalna on Thursday to extend support to the protest. Similar bandhs have been observed in Beed and Dharashiv. Supporters blocked bus movement at Dharashiv Kendriya Bus Junction and a bike rally was taken out in Beed city.

Movements are not isolated, says student leader at conference on the rise of Gen Z

Ashna Butani
NEW DELHI

From prominent student leaders in the Jharkhand protests to students at IIT Delhi and NALSAR, Hyderabad, student representatives highlighted their respective issues at 'GenZ on the rise', a conference and convention organised by All India Students' Association (AISA) at Delhi's Constitution Club of India.

AISA's national president Neha, who was on hunger strike for 23 days and became a prominent face during the Jantar Mantar protest, moderated the convention. "Our movements are not isolated, they have a common thread; students across the country have realised that people running corrupt education systems can be questioned," she said before introducing student activists from across States.

Student activists at a press meet on AISA's 'GenZ on the rise' convention, in New Delhi on Thursday. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

Among those on the panel was Shaikh Irshad Mansoori, the first identified to have pellet injuries in the July 20 Jantar Mantar march. "What happened was wrong. Students were unarmed when they attacked. Gen Z has united against what is going wrong," he said.

Voicing the issues faced by students in Jharkhand against paper leaks and irregularities in the Jharkhand Public Service Commission and Jharkhand Staff Selection Commission examinations, Habiba, a protester, said students had been struggling for years and the issue went beyond paper leaks. Alleging corruption and selling of seats, she said, "Gen Z will not be quiet. Gen Z has woken up... You might wonder 'what will happen with one voice', but it all starts with one voice."

Manirathinam, the brother of Anitha, a medical aspirant who died by suicide in Tamil Nadu, spoke about continuing the fight for his sister and other students. A student representative of IIT Delhi spoke about Rishikesh Kumar's death, which led to protests on campus all through last week. Student representatives from NALSAR expressed solidarity via voice notes that were played during the convention.

(Those in distress can dial Tele MANAS helpline at 14416)

On Uttam Kumar's birth centenary, Bengal CM vows to keep politics out of Tollywood

Shrabana Chatterjee
KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari on Thursday said the government will leave politics out of the Bengali film industry while kicking off the birth centenary celebrations of late actor Uttam Kumar.

"I assure you that the State government will not interfere in anything. There will be no politics. I want everything to be transparent. There is talent and I want that talent to receive proper nourishment," Mr. Adhikari said while addressing one of the largest gatherings to celebrate the event at Tollygunge, home to the Bengali film industry.

At the event, organised next to one of the tallest statues of Uttam Kumar in the city, the CM said the Bengali film industry in its heyday was one of the best in the country. He added that renovation would be undertaken at institutions named after the actor as part of the celebrations.

CM Suvendu Adhikari addressing an event to pay tribute to actor Uttam Kumar on his birth centenary, in Kolkata on Thursday. ANI

Actor-turned-Trinamool Congress MP Dev (Deepak Adhikari); actors Prosenjit Chatterjee, Rituparna Sengupta, and Jeet; and director Haranath Chakraborty were among the top artistes present at the event.

During the tenure of the previous Trinamool Congress government, several artistes and the party were accused of "politicising" the Bengali film industry.

The government is holding a four-day celebration to commemorate the life and works of the actor popularly known as the 'Mahanayak' of Bengali cinema. Uttam Kumar was born on September 3, 1926 in north Kolkata and died aged 53 on July 24, 1980.

Kolkata was decked up on Thursday, with roads from the actor's home to Tollygunge filled with murals, cut-outs, and cultural events to honour his contributions to the industry.

Film centre, stamp

Mr. Adhikari will lay the foundation stone for the Uttam Kumar Film Centre in New Town on Friday. India Post will also launch a special postage stamp commemorating the actor.

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SIT to probe Messi case, says Keralam Home Minister

The Hindu Bureau
IDUKKI

Keralam Home Minister Ramesh Chennithala has announced the formation of a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the alleged financial misappropriation and tax evasion involving a failed bid to bring football legend Lionel Messi to the State.

"The team will conduct a detailed probe into the episode and submit a comprehensive report to the government immediately," he said.

Mr. Chennithala added that the SIT was constituted based on a note received from the Chief Minister. "I sought a legal opinion from the Director-General of Prosecution and found several discrepancies in the incident."

Telangana Minister dropped from Cabinet on CM's advice

Removal stems from remarks made by Surekha's daughter against Revanth; appointment of Chinna Reddy as Vice-Chairman of Telangana Planning Board rescinded; new appointments announced

R. Ravikanth Reddy
HYDERABAD

Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy on Thursday recommended that Governor Shiv Pratap Shukla remove Forest and Endowments Minister Konda Surekha from the Telangana Council of Ministers.

In a communication released at night, the Governor's office said Ms. Surekha had been dropped from the Cabinet with immediate effect on the advice of the Chief Minister.

The release came after Mr. Revanth Reddy met the Governor at the Lok Bhavan.

Sources said Ms. Surekha had refused to resign, forcing the Chief Minister with the option of recommending her removal.

Sources say that Telangana Minister Konda Surekha, left, refused to resign, forcing the CM to recommend her removal. DEBOSRI MITRA

Ms. Surekha's removal stems from recent comments by her daughter, Sushmitha, against the Chief Minister, and amid the political developments surrounding the Minister over the last year. In a related development, the Chief Minister decided to rescind the appointment of G. Chinna Reddy as Vice-Chairman of the Telangana Planning Board.

Both decisions came after two-day deliberations with the party high command in New Delhi for indiscipline.

New appointments

The Chief Minister approved the appointment of Gadwal Vijayalakshmi as the new Vice-Chairman of the State Planning Board. He also approved the appointment of Nerella Sharada as Chairperson of the Telangana State Commission for Women. G. Sudha Rani, a former Rajya Sabha member, will be the Chairperson of the Kakatiya Urban Development Authority.

The fresh appointments appear to be aimed at countering criticism that a woman from the Backward Classes has been dropped from the Cabinet.

New Secretariat to come up in Chennai at ₹1,200 crore: Vijay

Sai Charan
T. Ramakrishnan
CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay on Thursday announced a plan to construct a new integrated Secretariat complex spanning 20 lakh sq. ft. in Chennai at an estimated cost of ₹1,200 crore. Currently, the Legislative Assembly and Secretariat operate from the historic Fort St. George premises.

The State government, which has identified three sites for the proposed Assembly-Secretariat complex, is expected to announce its final choice by the middle of this month.

The sites are the Highways Research Station (HRS) in Guindy; a residential colony established by the Tamil Nadu Housing Board in Pattinapakkam (Foreshore Estate); and a plot once occupied by the now-defunct Indian Drugs and Pharmaceuticals Ltd. in Nandambakkam.

The complex will comprise the Legislative Assembly, the offices of the Chief Minister and Ministers, and various departments, with modern facilities, to ensure efficient governance and create world-class public administration infrastructure, intended to meet the requirements of the next 100 years, Mr. Vijay said.

Making a *suo motu* statement in the Assembly, he said a modern administrative complex would be developed with fire safety facilities and accessibility for

C. Joseph Vijay

persons with disabilities, and in accordance with green building standards. Adequate parking facilities, conference halls, public service centres, and modern amenities would also be provided.

Recalling the history of Fort St. George, Mr. Vijay said the English East India Company began its construction in 1640 and completed it in 1644. After being elevated to the status of a Presidency in 1652, it served as the official headquarters of British rule. After Independence, it continued to function as the Secretariat of the Government of Tamil Nadu. For nearly 400 years, it served as the administrative centre of the State, he said.

Of the 107-acre Fort St. George campus, only about four acres are being used by the Secretariat and are under the control of the Tamil Nadu government. As the remaining area is under the control of the Ministry of Defence and the Archaeological Survey of India, it has not been possible to expand or undertake development of the campus, he said.

Karnataka withdraws Parks Bill amid public protests

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Under intense pressure from civil society groups, environmentalists and the Opposition, the Karnataka Cabinet on Thursday withdrew the Karnataka Parks (Preservation) Amendment Bill, 2026, which was earlier passed by both Houses of State Legislature without discussion.

Opposing the 5% alienation of public spaces it allowed, the BJP had announced a protest this weekend, even as several citizens' groups had opposed the Bill.

"The Cabinet has decided to withdraw the Bill and reintroduce it in the next session after holding public discussion. Necessary modifications to the Bill will be incorporated. The Bill had been passed without discussion because Opposition did not participate in it," Deputy Chief Minister G. Parameshwara told presspersons in the post-Cabinet briefing.

The Bill had been passed without discussion when the Opposition BJP was staging a protest in the House, seeking resignation of Minister B. Nagendra, who has since resigned from his post. The BJP has called withdrawal of Park Bill its "second victory".

However, Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar took to social media later to describe the decision as a reflection of "the respect for the sentiments of the people of Karnataka".

160 detonators found near Secunderabad Army camp

Naveen Kumar
HYDERABAD

Three days after the discovery of theft of service weapons and ammunition from the Madras Regiment premises in Bollarum, Secunderabad Cantonment, 160 electric detonators were found near the Army camp on Wednesday. However, the police said the detonators were unrelated to the arms theft and were allegedly left behind during construction work beside the golf course.

The material was allegedly abandoned by unidentified persons involved in the construction activity and was not connected to the theft of weapons from the Army premises.

Bollarum Police, while inspecting the bucket, found 160 electric detonators packed in eight bundles.

A bomb disposal team from Malkajgiri examined the material and identified it as 33A-size commercial electric detonators. Following the team's directions, the detonators were secured at a safe location.

The police have registered a case against unidentified persons in connection with the abandonment of the detonators and are investigating their source and the circumstances in which they were left near the Army camp.

IAS officer Gangwar suspended following arrest in KPSC scam

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The Karnataka government has suspended IAS officer Gyanendra Kumar Gangwar, is facing an inquiry by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) in connection with alleged irregularities in examinations by the Karnataka Public Service Commission (KPSC) for filling up veterinary officers' posts.

Mr. Gangwar served as Controller of Examination in the KPSC from February 2024 to March 2026 before being appointed as Director, MSME. He is presently in the custody of the CID.

The CID is likely to summon suspended KPSC Chairman Shivashakarappa S. Sahukar for the second time in connection with the scam.

INBRIEF

Ex-TDB chief P.S. Prasanth granted bail on medical terms

The Kollam Vigilance court in Keralam on Thursday granted bail to former Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) president P.S. Prasanth who was arrested in connection with the alleged loss of gold from Sabarimala temple. Mr. Prasanth was shifted from jail to a hospital in Thiruvananthapuram last month after suffering brain haemorrhage. The court had earlier dismissed his bail petition, following which a fresh petition was filed citing the requirement for advanced medical treatment. Mr. Prasanth was arrested by a special investigation team in July.

HC asks SIT to file final report by Sept. 25 in Sabarimala case

The Kerala High Court on Thursday directed the special investigation team (SIT) probing the alleged misappropriation of gold from the Sabarimala temple to submit its final report before the Vigilance Court, Kollam, on or before September 25. The "stripping salt" as well as the "cleaning salt' involved in the two cases (pertaining to the alleged misappropriation of gold) had been forwarded to the National Metallurgical Laboratory (NML) for examination and the results were expected within two weeks. The matter was posted for hearing on October 7.

A.P. Cabinet approves ₹4,054-cr. rural water works

The Andhra Pradesh Cabinet on Thursday approved revival and rationalisation of 13,252 rural water supply works at an estimated cost of ₹4,053 crore, sanctioned a ₹950-crore government guarantee for an APTRANSCO loan from Power Finance Corporation, and approved ₹94 crore in price deficiency support for tobacco farmers. It also approved 78 flood-damage restoration works in Krishna, NTR, Guntur and Bapatla districts at a total cost of ₹624.88 lakh. It also approved several industrial land proposals.

Dry run

A fleet of civic and private water tankers lined up to collect water from a designated GVMC filling point as a severe water crisis has gripped Visakhapatnam for the past few weeks. V. RAJU

Eviction fear grips many Bengal migrant workers in Bengaluru

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The ongoing Operation Mukta, aimed at identifying and tracking illegal immigrants in Bengaluru, has left nearly 400 migrant workers from West Bengal residing in and around Hulimangala in Electronics City anxious about their future after police served notices on landlords of premises allegedly used for unauthorised garbage segregation.

They said landlords have been served show-cause notices citing health and sanitation concerns and alleging that garbage segregation units are being operated without the required permission. The workers fear that they may eventually be forced to vacate the premises.

"We have lived in this city for the past 11 years, working as garbage segregators. Now, the police come here every day asking us to vacate. Where should we go," asked Allauddin, a worker.

Apart from waste collectors and segregators, the locality is home to migrant workers too. The workers said they were not involved in any illegal activity and appealed to the authorities to distinguish between illegal immigrants and genuine migrant labourers.

Karnataka to have Global Investment, Overseas Affairs Dept.

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

After the recently announced Praja Seva Department to address grievances of the public, Karnataka will now have a Global Investment and Overseas Affairs Department to address the welfare of non-resident Kannadigas, besides providing a platform for foreign delegations, investors, and diplomats to deal with the State government.

Along with the setting up of the new department, the State Cabinet on Thursday proposed to issue NRI-K cards. "It will act like a single-window system to deal with foreign delegations, investment facilitation, partnerships, and cooperation, among others. The department's Secretariat will enable meetings of delegations with the Chief Minister, and after discussions, the proposals will be sent to departments," Deputy CM G. Parameshwara said

Besides catering to non-resident citizens, it will facilitate foreign delegations' dealings with State

The department would also look at global cultural exchanges, research and development, health, and tourism, he said.

Row erupts over road closure abutting TTD's twin complexes

A.D. Rangarajan
TIRUPATI

A controversy has erupted over the access road to the new pilgrim accommodation complex constructed by the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) on the southern side of the Tirupati railway station.

The issue has taken on political significance ahead of the local body polls with political parties targeting the TTD, and indirectly the State government over the decision to restrict colonies abutting the road access to it.

It may be recalled that the TTD began construction of the two large twin complexes – Achyutham and Sripatham – at the site of its decades-old Sri Govindaraja Choultries that existed at the same spot, located just south of the railway station. The project intends to provide accommodation to the pilgrims arriving by train, reducing crowding in the city.

The wall built by the TTD abutting the new pilgrim accommodation complexes. K.V. POORNACHANDRA KUMAR

A road running south of the complexes was originally planned from east to west, connecting the D.R. Mahal road and Rayala Cheruvu road to ease traffic congestion.

The road was also going to be an additional access route for regulating traffic at the Tirupati railway station.

The controversy arose after the TTD engineers recently constructed a wall along the boundary of the project site, abutting the Gandhipuram and Dasarimatam colonies, which are predominantly inhabited by the weaker sections.

The opposition parties demanded the road be opened up to the residents of these colonies, which is a "crammed locality".

Call for HIV test before marriage sparks debate

The Hindu Bureau
KOTTAYAM

A call by Mar Thoma Church Clergy trustee K. Thomas in Keralam, to make HIV testing mandatory for couples before marriage in the Church has sparked a debate online, after a video of his remarks surfaced in public domain.

Speaking at a family meet organised by the Church in Thiruvananthapuram on August 30, Mr. Thomas said he favoured a system under which marriages in the Mar Thoma Church would be solemnised only after the prospective bride and groom had undergone HIV tests.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar with Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy during a meeting, in Kyiv, Ukraine. PTI

India ready to help to end Ukraine war, says Jaishankar

Kallol Bhattacherjee
NEW DELHI

Days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi called for an end to the war in Ukraine during his meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Bishkek on the sidelines of the SCO summit, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Thursday met Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha in Kyiv and extended India's support to find a diplomatic solution to the war.

He said incidents of attacks on commercial shipping in the Black Sea were affecting developing economies of the Global South in areas such as energy security, agriculture production and food shortages.

Upon meeting Mr. Zelenskyy, Mr. Jaishankar said, "Our conversation centred on approaches to end the ongoing conflict."

"Every passing day of conflict only means more deaths and more destruction. Understandably, it is for the parties involved to find a way. But, if India can be of any help in any manner, we are ready, and this was the core of my discussion so far with Foreign Minister Sybiha," said Mr. Jaishankar, referring to Mr. Modi's remarks in Bishkek, where he had said, "endless war must now give way to the end of war".

He reiterated the Indian position against the war and said, the war "regrettably is now in its fifth year".

'OBC lists were not used for Census as they featured classes, not castes'

Open column for all other castes except Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities has prompted OBC groups and Opposition leaders to demand that the communities be listed and enumerated; method's utility was also questioned

Abhinay Lakshman
NEW DELHI

The Union government had considered using the Central list and the States' lists of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) while deciding that the 2027 Census will use an open-column method to enumerate castes, officials told *The Hindu*. However, following deliberations, it emerged that this would present a problem "because the list of OBCs is not a list of castes, it is a list of classes", the officials said.

According to the officials, several entries in OBC lists do not represent a caste but describe "different groups of people, like those engaged in begging".

A similar problem arose when considering the use of States' lists. One official said these issues surfaced while the government was assessing whether the methodology used in State-conducted caste surveys, such as in Bihar and Telangana, could be replicated.

The government is enumerating Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities with the corresponding Presidential lists, as it has always done. But an open column for "all other castes" has prompted OBC groups and Opposition leaders, such as Rahul Gandhi and Mallikarjun Kharge, to demand that the communities be listed and enumerated specifically. They have questioned the utility of the open-column method.

Door-to-door: Booth Level Officers distribute enumeration forms to households in New Delhi. Citizens also had the option to self-enumerate online. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Opposition leaders and several scholars have argued that the open-column method could yield results similar to those of the Socio-Economic Caste Census of 2011, which threw up over 46 lakh caste names. The Narendra Modi government had cited this as a reason not to release the caste data from that exercise.

Officials involved in the caste enumeration methodology said the options discussed had respective "pros and cons", adding that the open-column method was finalised only after considering the other options at the "highest levels".

Officials said that while discussing the use of Central or State OBC lists to enumerate caste communities, the main issue was whether all communities listed could be counted as castes.

The lists had entries such as "local borns" in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, entries describing occupational groups, or those denoting a specific class of labourers (tea garden workers in Assam), or settlers, which would not qualify as castes.

While both the Central and State lists of OBCs have such entries, they comprise a minority among the nearly 3,000 communities classified as OBC. Also, several communities in the OBC lists might be classified as either SC or ST depending on the State.

In a 2015 document on whether an OBC community can be classified based on caste alone, the National Commission for Backward Classes had concluded, "A caste can be and quite often is a social class in India... Since caste represents an existing, identifiable, social group/class encompassing an overwhelming minority of the country's population, one can well begin with it and then go to other groups, sections, and classes."

One year after the Opposition campaigned for a caste census, the Union Cabinet approved a plan to include caste in the 2027 Census forms. One of the Opposition's main arguments for the caste census was the need to enumerate the OBC population.

Govt. to spend ₹24,000 crore to modernise police force

Aaratrika Bhaumik
NEW DELHI

The Union government told the Supreme Court on Thursday that it had begun implementing a ₹24,000-crore umbrella scheme to modernise police forces over the next five years.

Additional Solicitor-General Rajkumar Bhaskar Thakare, appearing for the Centre, told a Bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta that the 'Police Modernisation Mission' would strengthen the internal security capabilities of State police forces and Central Armed Police Forces through greater use of technology.

The submission was made in a *suo motu* proceeding initiated in 2025 after the court took note of a media report highlighting non-functional CCTV cameras at police stations in Udaipur. The court had subsequently sought compliance reports from the Centre, States, and Union Territories while reviewing the implementation of its 2021 judgment in *Paramvir Singh Saini vs Baljit Singh* case, which mandated the installation of CCTV cameras at key locations in stations, including lock-ups and the rooms of inspectors and sub-inspectors.

Air quality panel holding talks with Punjab govt. and ISRO over tracking of stubble fires

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

As part of its preparation to buffer winter pollution in the Delhi-National Capital Region (NCR), the Commission for Air Quality Management in NCR and Adjoining Areas (CAQM) has said it is in discussion with authorities in Punjab and Haryana to improve measurement of stubble fires.

"While the fire counts reported from satellite passes may not be the most accurate picture of the extent of farm fires, we are in talks with the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) as well as Punjab to have better 'ground truthing' protocols," Rajesh Varma, Chairman, CAQM, said on Thursday.

An ISRO study found a shift in peak fire activity from 2020 to 2024, to avoid detection by satellites. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

Farm fires in Punjab are a major contributor to pollution during some weeks of October and November when monsoon withdrawal stalls westerly winds that flush out particulate matter pollution from vehicles, industry, road dust, agriculture waste, and in the run-up to Deepavali, crackers.

In this period, paddy stubble left over after harvesting is frequently burnt to make way for sowing wheat, it being the most economical and quickest dispensation method.

Over a whole winter, farm fires contribute no more than 15% of the particulate matter pollution but on certain weeks, this share can spike to almost 44%, several studies have shown.

Farm fires

Mr. Varma's comments come in the context of mounting evidence since 2024 that the Punjab government's claims of having reduced farm fires by 90% since 2021 were exaggerated. This is because these were counted through tracking fires via two satellites passing over India during the day and encouraging several farmers, who otherwise face the prospect of fines for being caught setting fire to their fields, to burn stubble in the evenings.

An ISRO Space Applications Centre study found a gradual shift in peak fire activity from 1.30 p.m. in 2020 to around 5 p.m. in 2024, to avoid detection by polar-orbiting satellites.

Mr. Varma stressed that defining a protocol was "complicated" in that while burnt area could give a better estimate of singed acreage, it was not always an accurate measure of the extent of particulate matter emitted from burning. "...We have asked the ISRO to give us a basic protocol this year so that we can make a beginning in getting a better estimate than fire counts," he added.

Rajasthan's Acting Chief Justice denies allegations by SC judge

The Hindu Bureau
JAIPUR

Breaking his silence over the letters reportedly written by a Supreme Court judge, the Rajasthan High Court's Acting Chief Justice Sanjeev Prakash Sharma has rejected the allegations levelled against him as baseless and called upon all concerned to "remain patient" until the Chief Justice of India (CJI) takes a decision.

The Supreme Court's Collegium has, in the aftermath of the letter, recommended the transfer of a Chhattisgarh High Court judge, Justice Sanjay K. Agrawal, to Rajasthan and his elevation as the Chief Justice, replacing Justice Sharma, who is scheduled to retire on September 26.

Justice Sanjeev Prakash Sharma

"I wish to make it clear that I reject all the allegations. They are baseless and have been levelled by the Honorable Judge out of *ranjish* (rancour)," Justice Sharma said on Wednesday night. Justice Sandeep Mehta of the Supreme Court had sought his transfer while complaining of his conduct and alleging "misuse of powers, favouritism, nepotism, and administrative lapses".

In his letters addressed to the CJI, Justice Mehta alleged that Justice Sharma had misused his powers as master of the roster by selectively moving cases to his own Bench and had favoured "rich and influential" litigants.

He said the High Court's functioning and administrative decisions under Justice Sharma had raised serious questions about the institution.

Justice Sharma said he had placed his version before CJI Surya Kant.

He called upon the lawyers, journalists and all concerned to "respect the principles of justice and exercise patience until the CJI takes a decision"

Why perks for officials who quit to avoid inquiry: plea

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday sought the Union government's response to a writ petition seeking a direction that constitutional functionaries, including judges, who resign rather than face a transparent inquiry for misconduct, should be denied retirement perks and benefits.

A three-judge Bench issued notice to the Centre on the petition filed by Pratik Vora, who submitted that "resignations to avoid facing a transparent procedure of removal come only because the constitutional functionaries are fully aware that even after their resignations, they will be entitled to all perks and benefits which they would have got had they completed their tenure".

The petition gains significance due to resignation of Allahabad High Court judge Yashwant Varma.

'Lawyers can move HC for probe into BCI protest attack'

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday allowed young lawyers to move the Delhi High Court with their petition for an independent investigation into allegations of targeted violence committed against them by an unidentified mob while they were peacefully protesting at the Bar Council of India (BCI) premises on August 21.

A Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant asked advocate Prashant Bhushan, representing petitioners Kunal Yadav and others, to approach the High Court with their plea that they were physically assaulted, dragged, abused and forcibly thrown out of the BCI premises during a peaceful sit-in for the resignation of chairperson Manan Kumar Mishra and comprehensive reforms in the regulatory body. "The assault took place inside the BCI premises that are under round-the-clock CCTV surveillance in the presence of a large deployment of Delhi Police personnel, including an officer of the rank of Assistant Commissioner of Police, who did not intervene," the petition submitted.

Mr. Bhushan, alleged that the BCI chairperson had later on referred to the protesting lawyers as "legal cockroaches" who were dealt with.

Justice Joymalya Bagchi, on the Bench, said though lawyers have a right to protest, the legal fraternity was still a disciplined community, which had multiple fora to present their grievances.

Mr. Bhushan said nobody had a right to beat up anyone.

The protesting lawyers were mostly in their twenties, he said.

SIR may be legal but is not fair: former Election Commissioner

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The ongoing special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls is an example of the "might is right" philosophy being practised by statutory bodies and institutions, former Election Commissioner Ashok Lavasa said on Thursday .

Delivering the Professor Jagdeep Singh Chhokar Memorial Lecture, organised by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), Mr. Lavasa said one of the most disturbing trends today is that statutory institutions, constitutional bodies, and governments have suddenly started behaving as if "might is right", a concept he described as outdated.

"Institutions that have the mandate of law invested in them... think whatever they do is right. You have the example of the special intensive revision, where an unfair procedure has been imposed on millions of people in the country, and you have the judiciary which has validated that," he said.

Ashok Lavasa

Disenchanting voters

The former Election Commissioner noted that while authorities argue everything being done is legal, "it is definitely not fair."

"That is what justice is all about," he added.

"It is not just about enforcing the letter of the law; it is also about protecting its spirit. How do you explain the deletion of 13 crore names [from electoral rolls]?"

He questioned whether efforts were being made to create a situation where people become disenchanted with the democratic process. "As it is, 33% of people do not even vote, and now we have created such mass anxiety," Mr. Lavasa said.

'Power dynamics'

Comparing post-independence India to the present, he noted that both the nature of politics and the profile of politicians have undergone a tremendous change.

It is valid to ask whether elected representatives are actually addressing the issues that need fixing, the former Election Commissioner said.

Mr. Lavasa asserted that critical issues affecting public life have not been taken seriously by any political party. "How many parties opposed electoral bonds?" he asked, adding that political activity today feels largely driven by power dynamics rather than addressing the general concerns of the public.

Abhishek Banerjee's office ransacked in Kolkata; six arrested

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

An office belonging to Abhishek Banerjee, general secretary of the Trinamool Congress, at Camac Street in Kolkata was ransacked on Thursday. Later, the Kolkata Police arrested six people in connection with this incident.

Mr. Banerjee alleged that the BJP supporters were behind the attack. Videos shared by Trinamool Congress leaders showed several masked men removing equipment from the office, with shattered glass and other materials scattered around, indicating vandalism.

"If this is how the Opposition is to be treated in West Bengal, with violence, vandalism and intimidation, then the Chief Minister has no moral authority to remain in office. He must resign. This is not democracy. This is political thuggery," he said. Mr. Banerjee posted on social media, sharing videos captured by cameras inside the premises. The Trinamool leader urged the judiciary to take "serious note and act to uphold the rule of law in West Bengal".

The vandalism is reported to have occurred around 4.30 a.m. Later in the day, Kolkata Police arrested six people in connection with the incident.

Former West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool chairperson Mamata Banerjee alleged that "BJP goons looted documents and equipment; they also vandalised our office after taking the Kolkata Police into confidence."

The BJP leadership said the party or its supporters had no role in the violence.

The Trinamool Congress general secretary was named in more than 16 FIRs after the BJP government came to power in May 2026.

India and Belgium ramp up bilateral defence cooperation

After meeting his Belgian counterpart, Prime Minister calls for ending conflicts in Ukraine and West Asia through dialogue; three government-level defence agreements signed; two sides also announce the establishment of a fast trade mechanism

Kallol Bhattacherjee
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday called for dialogue and diplomacy to end the ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and West Asia.

Mr. Modi made the remarks while welcoming Belgian Prime Minister Bart De Wever here, where the two sides ramped up bilateral defence cooperation by signing three government-level defence agreements.

Belgian sources informed that at least 10 private defence agreements will be sealed during the visit that will include production of Belgian military items such as rockets in India.

"Whether it is Ukraine or West Asia, we support all efforts aimed at an early end to conflicts and the restoration of peace. And eliminating terrorism in all its forms and manifestations is our shared commitment," Mr. Modi said in his remarks after he and Mr. De Wever discussed global and regional issues.

Boosting ties: Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Prime Minister of Belgium Bart De Wever in New Delhi. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Paid tributes

The two leaders also paid tributes to the more than 9,000 Indian soldiers who perished in the Flanders Fields during the First World War. A Joint Statement issued at the end of the discussions announced that the two leaders called for "safety and security of maritime routes and maintaining safe and unimpeded maritime shipping" in the context of the conflicts in West Asia and Ukraine.

The Belgian dignitary expressed support to India's campaign against cross-border terrorism and condemned the Pahalgam terror attack.

In his remarks at an event organised by the CII (Confederation of Indian Industry), the Belgian leader described the current global situation as "turbulent" and called for free trade and end to unilateral imposition of tariffs.

The two governments signed a Letter of Intent of Defence Cooperation, an MoU between Belgian Security and Defence Industry and Society of Indian Defence Manufacturers, and an MoU between the Central Bureau of Investigation and Belgium Federal Police on cooperation in combating transnational organised crime, cybercrime and related matters.

"Our security does not stop at our borders. That is why we need to work more closely with strong partners such as India – militarily, technologically and industrially," said Belgian Defence Minister Theo Francken.

On this occasion, India announced that a Defence Attache will be appointed at the Indian Embassy in Brussels. The visit included defence partnerships between Belgian and Indian defence majors. "Today, India and Europe are speaking the language of trade with renewed conviction, a language of peace, of progress and of prosperity," said Mr. De Wever.

The two sides announced the establishment of a fast trade mechanism that will deal with trade and investment and announced that bilateral trade will be doubled in the next five years. They also announced the establishment of Consular Dialogue between New Delhi and Brussels.

No defence ties with Pak., Belgium assures India

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

Belgium has assured India that it will not pursue defence cooperation or provide technological assistance to Pakistan, sources in the government said on Thursday, following bilateral talks between Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Belgium's Defence Minister Theo Francken.

According to the sources, during the meeting in New Delhi, Mr. Singh specifically raised India's concerns over the possibility of Belgian defence technology or expertise being extended to Pakistan. Mr. Francken assured the Indian side that Belgium stood firmly with India and that there was "no question" of defence cooperation with Pakistan.

The assurance assumes significance as India has been raising concerns with its international partners over the transfer of defence technologies and military equipment that could strengthen Pakistan's military capabilities.

Union Minister Rajnath Singh holding a bilateral meeting with his Belgium counterpart Theo Francken in New Delhi on Thursday. ANI

During the interaction, the two sides reviewed the entire spectrum of bilateral defence and industrial cooperation. The Ministers agreed to expand engagement through defence cooperation dialogue, high-level visits, training and capacity building.

They also discussed regional peace and security and acknowledged the need for greater maritime security collaboration in the Indo-Pacific. Both sides reiterated that the India-Belgium partnership is based on shared values, mutual trust and respect.

The bilateral meeting was held on the sidelines of talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Belgian Prime Minister Bart De Wever, who is on an official visit to India.

Earlier, Mr. Francken and Minister of State for Defence Sanjay Seth addressed the India-Belgium Defence CEOs Roundtable and B2B Meetings here.

Emphasising the potential for deeper industrial collaboration, the Belgian Defence Minister called for joint efforts to strengthen the armed forces of both countries in an evolving security environment.

Cong. chief writes to Nadda, questions delay in action over 'purification' ritual

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Thursday said the *shuddhikaran* (purification) of the Ramlila ground in Haldwani area of Uttarakhand, where he had addressed a political rally, amounted to practising "untouchability", and said his party would approach Rajya Sabha Chairman C.P. Radhakrishnan over the issue.

On September 2, Mr. Kharge, who is the Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, wrote to Union Minister and Leader of the Rajya Sabha J.P. Nadda, urging him to direct Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami to ensure that an FIR was registered against those responsible for the alleged purification ritual.

In his letter, which was released on Thursday, Mr. Kharge recalled that he had raised the matter in the Rajya Sabha on August 13 and that Mr. Nadda had assured the House that the incident would be investigated and strict action taken against those found guilty. The Rajya Sabha Chairman had also expressed his grief over the incident, he said.

> This issue... is deeply connected to the sentiments of crores of people who confront this harsh reality on a daily basis
>
> **MALLIKARJUN KHARGE**
> Congress president

'No FIR yet'

"Even after 24 days of this incident, not even an FIR has been filed against the organisations and individuals involved in this heinous act," he said.

He linked the incident to the history of caste discrimination, recalling that during the Mahad Satyagraha, when B.R. Ambedkar drank water from a public tank, caste Hindus had subsequently performed a purification ritual using *gomutra* and *gobar*.

"This issue transcends my personal self or the office of the Indian National Congress president; it is deeply connected to the sentiments of crores of people who confront this harsh reality on a daily basis," he said in his letter.

The Congress president said the ritual at the Ramlila Maidan, following his August 8 rally, was contrary to the spirit of the Constitution and human values. "This is an incident of untouchability, it is not just about purification," he told presspersons here.

Mr. Kharge also questioned the silence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah on the issue. "Whenever something wrong happens, they remain silent," he said, citing the alleged theft of donations to the Ram Temple, and atrocities against Dalits as the other instances.

He also defended the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, who had criticised the purification ritual. An FIR was subsequently registered against Mr. Gandhi over his remarks.

Congress leader K.C. Venugopal said Mr. Gandhi will not be intimidated by cases against him.

Congress questions GDP revision, asks government to explain methodology

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Thursday posed four questions to the government over the latest GDP estimates, seeking an explanation for a cumulative downward revision of ₹43 lakh crore in the estimated size of the Indian economy over the past four years and questioning the methodology used to calculate real growth.

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh asked why GDP estimates for all four years since 2022-23 had been revised substantially downwards, what components of the new methodology had driven the changes, who had been consulted in framing it and why the deflator used for calculating real GDP appeared to understate the impact of inflation.

"How has a change in methodology produced such a large drop in the estimated size of the Indian economy," he asked.

Jairam Ramesh

The questions came days after the government highlighted 7.8% real GDP growth in the April-June 2026 quarter. Mr. Ramesh said the figure required closer scrutiny and alleged that the revisions had made the growth rate appear stronger than it was.

Garg's analysis

He pointed to repeated revisions to the GDP estimate for April-June 2025, which had brought the figure down from about ₹86 lakh crore to ₹80 lakh crore.

Citing calculations by former Finance Secretary Subhash Chandra Garg, Mr. Ramesh said nominal growth in the latest quarter would have been closer to 2.6%, instead of the reported 10.3%, had the earlier base not been revised downwards.

"India's GDP growth is being inflated by a deflator that does not reflect the inflation faced by ordinary Indians," Mr. Ramesh said, referring to the gap between the GDP deflator and retail and wholesale inflation.

He also alleged that the new GDP series had reduced nominal GDP estimates for almost every quarter over the four-year period, resulting in an aggregate reduction of ₹43 lakh crore. The government needed to explain how a change in methodology could result in such a large reduction in the estimated size of the economy.

Mr. Ramesh also questioned the GDP deflator, which stood at 2.5% for the quarter, against retail inflation of 3.9% and wholesale inflation of 9.4%. The widening gap raised questions about whether the deflator adequately captured the inflation faced by households, he argued.

He cited concerns raised by former Chief Economic Adviser Arvind Subramanian and the IMF over India's national accounts, arguing that the Centre needed to provide greater transparency on the methodology underlying the estimates.

In a sharp attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Congress leader K.C. Venugopal said Mr. Modi was "a creator of a manipulated world". "Let him live in that world but the reality is quite different," he said.

BJP accuses Cong. of 'anti-Ram Temple', 'anti-Army' mindset

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Bharatiya Janata Party on Thursday accused the Congress of having an "anti-Army" and "anti-Shri Ram Temple" mindset, citing the questions raised by Congress leader and former MP Rashid Alvi on the appointment of Air Marshal Jeetendra Mishra (retd) as the first CEO of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust.

At a press briefing, BJP MP Sudhanshu Trivedi said Mr. Alvi's statement reflected the Congress's attitude of "insulting the Indian Army and the Shri Ram Temple" and described it as evidence of the "*dimagi* Naxal" mindset.

Mr. Alvi is currently not a spokesperson or office-bearer in the Congress.

"These are the same people who used to call Prabhu Shri Ram imaginary, deny the existence of Ayodhya, and insult Ayodhya. These are the same people who used to turn the Sarayu (river) red with blood. Once again today, a similarly insulting and condemnable statement has been made regarding the Shri Ram Mandir and Shri Ram Janmabhoomi," Mr. Trivedi claimed.

BJP leader described the Opposition party's attitude as evidence of 'dimagi Naxal' mindset

Targeting the Congress, he said its leaders demanded proof of the surgical strike, the Balakot strike, and called India's Army chief a "*sadakchhap gunda*" (street thug). "These are the same people whose leader Navjot Singh Sidhu went and hugged Pakistan's Army chief Qamar Bajwa," he said.

Even after the statements by Pakistan's Prime Minister and President about 'Operation Sindoor', if the Congress still had doubts, anyone harbouring such doubts could only be a "*dimagi* Naxal", he alleged.

Top Congress leaders discuss Punjab factionalism, possible Cabinet reshuffle in Himachal

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The top leadership of the Congress, including the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and party general secretary (organisation) K.C. Venugopal, is said to have discussed the leadership tussle within the party in Punjab at a meeting at party president Mallikarjun Kharge's official residence.

In a separate meeting, the top leaders also met Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu and the Pradesh Congress Committee chief to discuss a possible Cabinet reshuffle in the State.

There was no official word on the details of the meeting on Punjab, but it comes ahead of a proposed political yatra by Mr. Gandhi in the State, where elections are scheduled to be held early next year.

The dates for the yatra are likely to be finalised once the Congress resolves the intense factionalism in the Punjab unit, led by former Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi, a prominent Dalit leader.

Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and K.C. Venugopal attended the meet held at party chief Mallikarjun Kharge's residence. FILE PHOTO

Upset at not being made the PCC chief or the Chief Ministerial face before the Punjab polls, Mr. Channi and his supporters had expressed displeasure that the Scheduled Castes, who make up the highest proportion of Punjab's electorate, do not get adequate representation.

However, the party's aggressive stance over the *shuddhikaran* episode in BJP-ruled Uttarakhand and Mr. Gandhi describing it as "the practice of untouchability" may help pacify Mr. Channi.

The party is likely to urge him to spearhead the poll campaign in the State, sources indicated.

Keeping the peace

Sources said AICC general secretary in-charge of Punjab Bhupesh Baghel held a series of meetings on Thursday with Punjab leaders, including Mr. Randhawa, Mr. Warring, and the Leader of Opposition in the Assembly Partap Singh Bajwa.

AAP seeking bribes to suppress rape cases, says BJP

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Bharatiya Janata Party took aim at Aam Aadmi Party chief Arvind Kejriwal, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, and his wife, alleging that bribes up to ₹5 crore were being demanded through middlemen in the State to withdraw rape cases.

The accusation came days after the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) took cognisance of allegations that the Chief Minister's wife sought ₹5 crore to suppress a rape case.

At a press conference, BJP spokesperson Pradeep Bhandari claimed that audio recordings had surfaced in Punjab, revealing that a new "loot and corruption racket" was being run in the State.

Mr. Bhandari mentioned a rape case accused who was arrested on May 13 and granted bail on July 10. He sought a clarification from Mr. Kejriwal and Mr. Mann.

Jharkhand govt. gave exam-related work to blacklisted firm: BJP

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Bharatiya Janata Party on Thursday alleged that the Congress-Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) government in Jharkhand handed over exam-related work to a blacklisted company without following a formal tender process.

Over a dozen major recruitment exams in Jharkhand, conducted since 2014 by the Jharkhand Public Service Commission and the Jharkhand Staff Selection Commission, are under the scanner.

At a press conference, BJP spokesperson Pradeep Bhandari referred to the students' protest in Jharkhand to target the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and Chief Minister Hemant Soren.

"The unfortunate thing is that, as the investigation is progressing, it is emerging that the company, TDPL, which was a blacklisted, had been given the entire responsibility by the Jharkhand government for conducting the examinations. It (the State government) has not even issued a tender," Mr. Bhandari alleged, citing a news report.

Pradeep Bhandari

'No tender issued'

The State government gave a tender to a "tainted" company, which outsourced the work to a "dubious" company, he said. "This (outsourcing) took place in cash. So no tender was issued. No bidder was invited to conduct the examination...," Mr. Bhandari said, adding: "As there was no written tender, did some corrupt money transaction take place?"

INBRIEF

IAF pilot who shot down Pak. plane joins regional airline

Former Indian Air Force Group Captain and Vir Chakra awardee Abhinandan Varthaman has joined Goa-based regional airline FLY91 as a pilot, according to sources. Mr. Varthaman, who downed an enemy jet during an aerial combat with Pakistan in 2019 and was held captive for three days in that country, was honoured with the Vir Chakra award in 2021 for displaying an "exceptional sense of duty" during the dogfight, as per the award citation. FLY91, which started flying in March 2024, currently operates a fleet of six ATR 72-600 aircraft. Its two bases are Goa and Hyderabad. Sources said that Mr. Varthaman joined the airline as a pilot in August. PTI

Report warns against attempts to privatise ESIC

ESI Ki Baat, a report on the functioning of Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) prepared by Safe In India, a non-profit organisation, has warned the Union government against the reported attempts to privatise the ESIC. It has also recommended that the wage ceiling to avail ESIC coverage could be increased to ₹33,000 from the present figure of ₹21,000. Releasing the report, Director General of the ESIC, Ashok Kumar Singh, said the implementation of the Code on Social Security would help in more number of workers availing the ESIC benefits.

Manipur polls may be hit if Naga-Kuki violence continues, says Deputy CM

Losii Dikho, who is a member of the Naga People's Front, says Naga legislators are prepared to take 'extreme steps' if no action is taken on their concerns, including their demand for the removal of Deputy Chief Minister Nemcha Kipgen, a BJP MLA belonging to the Kuki community

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

Continuing Naga-Kuki violence in the hill districts of Manipur will make it difficult to conduct elections to the State Assembly next year, Manipur Deputy Chief Minister Losii Dikho said on Thursday, indicating that Naga legislators may reconsider their support to the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government if their concerns are not addressed, including their demand for the removal of fellow Deputy Chief Minister Nemcha Kipgen.

Mr. Dikho is a member of the Naga People's Front (NPF) which is allied with the ruling BJP in Manipur, while Ms. Kipgen is a BJP MLA from the Kuki community. Chief Minister Khemchand Singh is from the Meitei community.

In an interview with *The Hindu*, Mr. Dikho said that Central security forces had been unable to prevent the attacks, noting that he had sent several SOS messages to the Director-General of Police a day earlier, as Naga villages in Kangpokpi were surrounded by armed groups.

Mr. Dikho, who recently led a group of nine Naga MLAs in writing to Union Home Minister Amit Shah seeking Ms. Kipgen's removal, said the current situation had become untenable and accused "Kuki militant groups" of carrying out attacks on Naga civilians.

The Home Minister is yet to respond to their memorandum, he said.

"If it continues like this, election will be very difficult, especially in the hills," Mr. Dikho said, adding that the legislators were prepared to take "extreme steps" if no action was taken on their representation to the Centre.

His remarks comes amid a renewed wave of violence between the Naga and Kuki communities over the past 10 days.

At least seven people from the two communities have been killed over the past week in Kangpokpi district, where they live in close proximity.

The incidents add another dimension to the ethnic violence that initially erupted in the State on May 3, 2023 between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo people.

Manipur Deputy Chief Minister Losii Dikho says security forces have been unable to prevent the attacks. ANI

Deputy CMs feud

Mr. Dikho alleged that the latest round of violence began after a Naga youth was assaulted in Ukhrul district on February 7 and subsequently escalated into a broader conflict. He said that six Nagas had been abducted and killed by cadres of the Kuki National Front (KNF-P), an insurgent group now under the Suspension of Operations (SoO) agreement with the Centre. Noting that the group is headed by Ms. Kipgen's husband, Thangboi Kipgen, Mr. Dikho questioned her silence following the incident.

"We were given the responsibility of restoring peace after the popular government was reinstated. While efforts were being made to reach out to all communities, she did not engage with the affected people or play a role in reducing tensions. She refused to take calls after the Nagas were abducted [on May 13] and instead switched off her phone," Mr. Dikho said.

The NPF leader said relations between him and Ms. Kipgen had broken down following the killings and claimed that she had been attending Cabinet meetings virtually.

NRC before Census

While supporting the Chief Minister's efforts to restore normalcy, Mr. Dikho said the new violence threatened to undermine recent peace initiatives. He also renewed criticism of the SoO arrangement, alleging that some militant groups were operating outside designated camps and continuing armed activities.

Asked about the reasons for the ongoing Naga-Kuki conflict, Mr. Dikho attributed it to longstanding disputes over land ownership, demographic changes, and illegal immigration.

Echoing demands raised by several Meitei groups and other civil society organisations, he supported the call to update the National Register of Citizens (NRC) before a full Census exercise is conducted in the State.

Asked why the presence of Central forces such as the Assam Rifles, CRPF and BSF had not been able to prevent the violence, Mr. Dikho said, "Some sections of people accuse some security people like Assam Rifles; I do not accept that. But for security people, as of now, the handicap is that they want to protect both sides – the Nagas and the Kukis. So if there is a firing, they cannot intervene easily... even to go to the remotest villages, to the terrain, there is no proper road."

NSCN-IM training

On allegations that the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isak Muivah (NSCN-IM) was arming and training Naga village volunteers, Mr. Dikho acknowledged that the group had provided some self-defence training to villagers amid the ongoing Naga-Kuki tensions, but denied knowledge of any arms supply.

He argued that such training was intended to help Naga villages protect themselves in areas where residents felt vulnerable to militant attacks, adding that communities had resorted to self-defence because security forces were often unable to reach remote locations quickly.

States, Union Territories told to monitor glacial lakes

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Union Home Secretary Govind Mohan chaired a meeting with Himalayan States and Union Territories on Thursday, to review their preparedness to face Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs) and snow avalanches, stressing the need for proactive monitoring, risk-informed planning, and stronger early warning systems.

The review meeting comes in the aftermath of Nepal flash floods. Mr. Mohan emphasised the need for continuous surveillance of vulnerable glacial lakes and avalanche-prone regions, particularly during periods of heightened risk, and called for close coordination among State agencies, district administrations, and scientific institutions to ensure timely action on warnings.

Court asks NHAI to consider setting up CCTVs at toll plazas

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday raised concerns over encroachments and stationary vehicles on highways, and asked the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) to consider setting up camera surveillance systems and monitoring rooms at toll plazas to address them.

A Bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta was hearing a *suo motu* case initiated in the wake of two fatal road accidents in November 2025 in Phalodi district of Rajasthan and Rangareddy district of Telangana, which together claimed 34 lives. In April, the top court, while issuing a slew of directions had held that the safety of highway users forms an integral part of the right to life guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution, and that the State has a positive obligation to prevent avoidable deaths caused by hazards such as illegal parking and accident-prone "blackspots".

The counsel for the NHAI told the Bench that circulars had been issued requiring regular inspections and highway patrols to curb unauthorised parking.

The Bench, however, suggested the use of technology for more effective monitoring. "Why can't you think of having a camera surveillance system? You can have monitoring rooms at all toll plazas," the Bench said.

Senior advocate A.N.S. Nadkarni, assisting the court as *amicus curiae*, said vehicles parked illegally along highways were a recurring cause of road accidents.

Quality elementary teachers are vital to lives of children, nation-building: top court

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday emphasised the importance of educating elementary school teachers, saying the development and lives of children, and even the future of the nation, depend on the quality of training given to these educators.

"Though free and compulsory elementary education to all children aged 6 to 14 years has now attained the status of an enforceable fundamental right, we have not bestowed on teacher education the attention that it deserves... The development of a child, or for that matter, the life of a child is integrally connected to the role of an elementary school teacher," Justice P.S. Narasimha, heading a Division Bench, observed.

The court said there was no value higher than development of students' mind and character.

The top court observed that there was no human resource or value higher than the development of a student's mind and character. "Therefore, the elementary school teachers have the most important role in nation-building and as such, they have to be treated with utmost respect and care," the court said ahead of Teachers' Day celebrations on September 5.

The top court referred to judicial precedents that five duty-bearers safeguard the fundamental right to elementary education recognised in the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009. They include the government, the local authority, the neighbourhood school, the parents/guardians, and finally, the teacher.

Justice Narasimha added the sixth and seventh duty-bearers – teacher education institutions (TEIs), as defined under Section 2(e) of the National Council for Teacher Education Act, and the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) itself.

"The Council is also to ensure that the TEIs imparting teacher education function effectively, efficiently and conduct their affairs with integrity," Justice Narasimha observed.

Rajnath releases new framework for defence diplomacy

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday released *Raksha*, a comprehensive strategic framework outlining India's road map and vision for defence diplomacy and global defence partnerships over the next 10 years.

The document seeks to strengthen India's strategic engagement with friendly nations by aligning national security objectives with proactive international cooperation. It lays down an actionable vision aimed at promoting long-term stability, strengthening partnerships, and advancing India's role in an evolving global security environment.

The strategic blueprint identifies several key pillars, including deepening bilateral and multilateral defence partnerships, expanding joint military exercises, and enhancing capacity-building initiatives with friendly countries.

A major focus of the framework is also on promoting indigenous defence exports under the Make-in-India initiative. It seeks to position India as a reliable global defence manufacturing partner by expanding international cooperation around indigenously developed defence technologies.

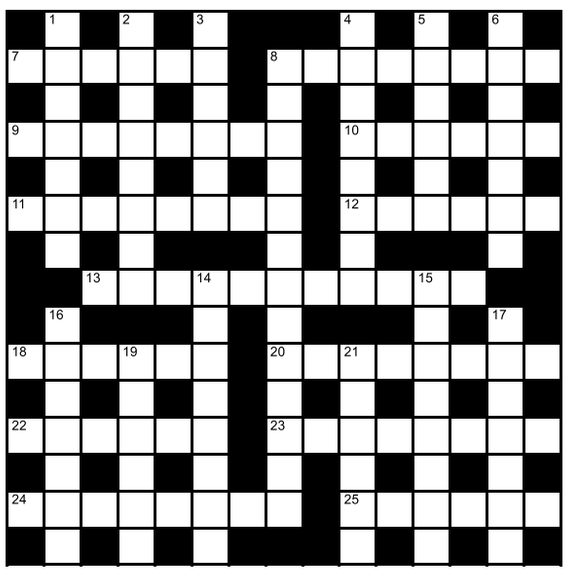
Maritime security forms another important pillar of the framework, with emphasis on strengthening India's role as a net security provider and first responder in the Indian Ocean Region. The road map underlines India's commitment to ensuring peace, stability, and security across the strategically important maritime region.

TH CROSSWORD + 14890

(set by Pixie Dust)

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

SCAN TO PLAY



Across

7 Being very new, dropping every second fish (6)
8 Portrait's irritating without moustache essentially (8)
9 Performing star singer is perhaps missing a visitor (8)
10 Extremely exotic resting place! Sweet (6)
11 Cordiality found in Guggenheim? Oh! Nobody was sent back (8)
12 Ten reportedly perished in compound (6)
13 Techie set the ball rolling? (5,3,3)
18 Say Cruise with Jerry's partner making a comeback in 'The Bird' (6)
20 Penny leaving busy airport wearing glasses for a musical (8)
22 Some children nabbed swivelling Jack (6)
23 Do your best backing flower business (8)
24 Skirt around old Buddhist monastery to find power, a measure of it (8)
25 Fun for crook to take flight (3,3)

Down

1 Elocution of contradictions (7)
2 Found a quiet husband or perhaps it's an implied comparison (8)
3 Endless border crowding weird tree (3,3)
4 Elfin repeatedly used safety device? (8)
5 Stupid firm filled with traitors from the beginning (6)
6 Star while cycling around loop puts feet up (7)
8 Can this purist make a mess of proficient stance? (13)
14 Being a main channel gift European currency (8)
15 Preferring first pair of chants over old carol (8)
16 Consequently tourist town in Greece becomes an independent country (7)
17 Spooner's clear displeasure for this part of the body? (7)
19 Car's working? Yes Man! (6)
21 They are scaled but not the first in pecking orders (6)

SUDOKU

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

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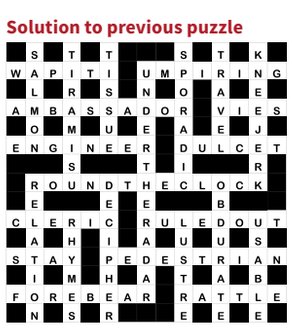
DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★☆☆

Solution to previous puzzle



Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

FAITH

The charioteer of devotees

Perumal manifested on this same earth peopled by mortals, with the difference being that mortals are born because of their deeds on previous births. Perumal chose Vasudeva and Devaki as His birth parents in His avatar as Krishna, and was born under the birth star of Rohini, in the middle of a dark, stormy night (Ashtami), in the Tamil month of Avani. His purpose was to vanquish Kamsa, Devaki's brother. One may ask why He remained on earth long after He completed His mission. It is because Krishna wanted to attain the status of a guru, reinforcing the invaluable role played by an acharya, said Damal S Ramakrishnan.

Krishna grew up as a cowherd, showcased true bhakti through gopikas, vanquished Kamsa, married Rukmini, offered Kusela the wealth of friendship, protected Draupadi in her hour of need, became a charioteer to not only Arjuna but to the entire mankind (driving them to their ultimate destination) by delivering the Bhagavad Gita. One might say He had done all that needed to be done. However, Krishna did not feel so, He felt there was one more thing to be done. Upon her release from prison, Devaki, realising that Krishna was unschooled, sent Him to sage Sandipini and after mastering everything quickly, Krishna paid his guru dakshina by restoring Sandipini's son to him. He also determined to become an acharya and the opportunity came at Kurukshetra where Arjuna refused to wage war on the 'enemies' as they were his blood relatives. Krishna became the Gita acharya delivering His discourse, the Bhagavad Gita, combining the efficacy of karma, gnana and bhakti yoga in 15 chapters.

Why accessible rehabilitation is the need of the hour in India

With the country's growing burden of non-communicable diseases, including heart disease and stroke, the need for physiotherapy is increasing; it is high time we treated physiotherapy as an important component of lifesaving care, not as an optional service tacked on after the treatment

WORLD PHYSIOTHERAPY DAY SEPTEMBER 8

Shakeeb Ahmed Khan
Christianez Ratna Kiruba

When Sidhartha Bandha's 63-year-old father suffered a stroke, the hospital did what it was supposed to do: it saved his life. But when he came back home, another struggle began.

His father could no longer do things on his own. The doctors told the family that rehabilitation and physiotherapy were important for his recovery. But the physiotherapy service available to them was far away. For a family dependent on daily earnings, travelling repeatedly for treatment meant spending money on transport, losing working days and managing the difficulty of moving a person who could barely move independently.

The family eventually had to give up on regular rehabilitation. Over time, Sidhartha's father developed contractures, a condition in which muscles and joints become stiff and shortened when a person remains immobile for a long period. Sitting, standing, changing position and doing everyday activities can become a struggle.

Sidhartha remembers a different life of his father, a life where he worked in the fields and helped with household chores. His father is alive now, his life saved. But what kind of a life was it?

Growing need: Physiotherapy and rehabilitation are crucial components of recovering after a number of conditions, including damage to the nervous system, heart disease and orthopaedic injuries. GETTY IMAGES

Where should healthcare end?

If a person survives a stroke but cannot regain the ability to move, work, participate in family life or live with some independence because rehabilitation was out of reach, is it fair to say that the job of healthcare was completed?

There is no doubt that acute medical care saves lives. But saving a life is only the first part of recovery. Rehabilitation helps a person live the life that has been saved in the way they want to.

In India, while a lot of attention has been rightfully given to improving emergency and critical care, far less has been given to what happens to patients after they leave a hospital. Physiotherapy and rehabilitation are crucial components of recovering after a number of conditions, including damage to the nervous system, heart disease and orthopaedic injuries. The question before the country today, however, is: how many people can physiotherapists actually reach?

Global organisation World Physiotherapy's profile of the Indian Association of Physiotherapists estimates 52,000 practising physiotherapists in India, equivalent to only 0.36 physiotherapists per 10,000 people, whereas, for instance, several countries in Europe have over 10 per 10,000 people.

The number tells only part of the story. The more important question is where these physiotherapists are and how many people each one can realistically reach. Are they available close to the homes of people living in rural areas? Can a person from a low-income family receive regular treatment that can last from days to months without spending a large part of the family's income on travel and treatment?

The problem, therefore, is two-fold: there are not enough physiotherapists, and those that are available are not able to reach the people who need them.

And the need is enormous.

Physiotherapy is not limited to treating back pain or helping an injured athlete. It can make a meaningful difference to people recovering from stroke, heart disease, injury, surgery and many other conditions. It can help a person stand again, walk again, use an affected limb, improve balance, become physically active and return to everyday life.

Growing burden

With India's growing burden of non-communicable diseases, including heart disease and stroke, the need for physiotherapy is increasing. Someone with heart disease may need help becoming physically active safely. An older person may need help maintaining strength and balance.

A person recovering from an injury or surgery may need rehabilitation to return to work. For all of them, physiotherapy can be the bridge between being medically stable and becoming an active, functioning member of the family and community. But that bridge is often missing.

There are a number of measures that can help, ranging from policy change to simple steps hospitals can take.

Physiotherapy is not limited to treating back pain or helping an injured athlete. It can make a meaningful difference to people recovering from stroke, heart disease, injury, surgery and many other conditions

A model that has worked is community-based learning. This model gives physiotherapy students opportunities to work in rural and underserved communities and understand the barriers people face in accessing rehabilitation.

Students are encouraged to see these communities not just as places for academic postings, but as places where physiotherapists can build meaningful careers and take rehabilitation closer to people's homes. It deserves wider attention across physiotherapy education and healthcare policy.

Another measure is to teach families how to safely continue simple rehabilitation at home. A physiotherapist does not have to be physically present for every exercise. Families can be shown how to help with safe movement, positioning, walking and everyday activities, while the physiotherapist checks progress and changes the programme when needed.

Technology can help too. Tele-rehabilitation cannot replace hands-on treatment when a person needs physical examination or direct treatment. But it can allow a physiotherapist to follow up, demonstrate exercises, answer questions and keep in touch with patients who find regular travel difficult.

India also needs to think about where physiotherapists work. If most opportunities are concentrated in large cities and private clinics, many people who need rehabilitation will continue to be left behind. Students should have meaningful opportunities to work in villages, smaller towns, primary healthcare centres and underserved communities – not as an afterthought, but as an important part of the profession.

It is high time we treated physiotherapy as an important component of lifesaving care, not as an optional service tacked on after the treatment. No one should be left unable to move simply because rehabilitation was too far away or too expensive.

(Dr. Shakeeb Ahmed Khan is a physiotherapist & disability and development professional khan.shakeebahmed@gmail.com; Dr. Christianez Ratna Kiruba is an internal medicine physician and a freelance health journalist based in Guwahati, Assam. christianezdennis@gmail.com)

Quest for better facilities: The threat is the slow erosion of household income through medicines, tests and repeated treatment. G.N. RAO

More than 40 crore Indians are caught in a healthcare gap: panel

Bindu Shajan Perappadan

More than 40 crore Indians – over a quarter of the population – are caught in a healthcare gap – too well off to rely on government subsidies, but not financially secure enough to absorb the rising cost of private care, a Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare has flagged.

Its latest report, 'Affordability and Accessibility of Healthcare Facilities in Public and Private Sector,' presented to Parliament last month, makes 368 recommendations on affordability, accessibility and regulation.

Where care is sought

The vulnerability is rooted in where Indians seek care, states the report, with more than 60% of inpatient care and 70% of outpatient care delivered by the private sector, leaving households without comprehensive financial protection exposed to private prices.

The burden extends beyond hospitalisation, with medicines accounting for nearly 30% of current health expenditure, according to the committee. More worryingly for people with diabetes, hypertension or cardiovascular disease, medicines, consultations and diagnostic tests can become a lifelong expense given that India is registering a steady increase in non-communicable disease burden.

This exposes a structural fault line in the healthcare system where the poorest have government protection; the affluent can buy private care, but the vast group in between is increasingly exposed to high costs without adequate financial protection.

For the 'missing middle', the threat may therefore not be a single catastrophic medical bill, but the slow erosion of household income through medicines, consultations, tests and repeated treatment.

The committee has linked this vulnerability to low public spending on health. Government health expenditure is 1.43% of GDP, against the 2.5% target under the National Health Policy, 2017. Health spending as a share of total government expenditure also fell from 6.12% in 2021-22 to 4.89% in 2022-23, below the 5.02% recorded in 2019-20.

The consequences are visible in the cost of care. Average out-of-pocket spending on childbirth is ₹37,630 in private facilities against ₹2,299 in public facilities – more than 16 times higher.

Government schemes such as Ayushman Bharat-PM-JAY provide hospitalisation protection to vulnerable households, but the 'missing middle' often falls outside fully subsidised coverage. Private insurance, meanwhile, can leave households facing premiums, exclusions, waiting periods and co-payments.

What is needed

The committee has therefore argued that insurance alone cannot close the gap. It has called for stronger public healthcare infrastructure, nationwide implementation of the Clinical Establishments Act, mandatory quality standards and greater price transparency in private facilities.

It has also flagged retail pharmacy practices, including excessive trade margins and the non-prescription sale of antibiotics, recommending stronger audits and enforcement. The committee's recommendations point to a problem larger than insurance coverage. The unresolved question is how to protect the millions who fall between the two.

(bindu.p@thehindu.co.in)

THE HEALTH QUIZ

Please send in your answers to health@thehindu.co.in

National Eye Donation fortnight is observed annually in India from August 25 to September 8 to raise awareness about corneal donation. Here is a quiz on the eye.

Ramya Kannan

QUESTION 1
How often should a healthy adult with no vision problems get a comprehensive eye check-up?
A) Once every 10 years
B) Once every 5 years
C) Once every 2 years
D) Only if vision becomes blurry

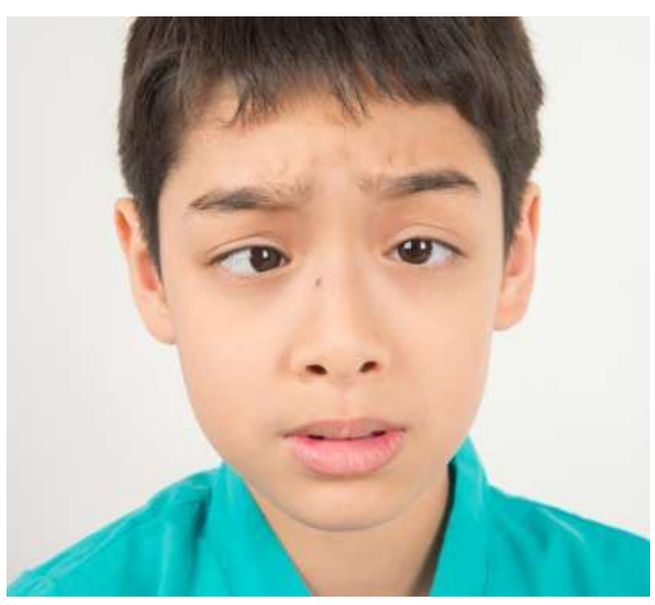
QUESTION 2
What is the new technique invented by Chennai-based ophthalmologist Dr. Amar Agarwal, which in certain cases, obviates the need for corneal transplantation?

QUESTION 3
An advanced stage of diabetic retinopathy is called Proliferative Diabetic Retinopathy. What is the earlier, milder stage where tiny blood vessels weaken, swell and leak fluid into the retina?

QUESTION 4
Will the cornea of people who used to wear spectacles or contact lenses be viable for transplant?

QUESTION 5
What does the "20-20-20 rule" that ophthalmologists recommend for those who have a good deal of screentime to deal with every day?

QUESTION 6
How soon after death should the cornea be removed for transplantation?



Visual question: What is the scientific name for squint eye? GETTY IMAGES

Answers to previous edition's quiz: 1.The milk made by a woman's body in the first days after birth **Ans: Colostrum** 2. True or False: Breast milk is digested more quickly than formula. **Ans: True** 3. Which of these is not one of the five essential food groups? **Ans: Oils** 4. How many times does a child need to try a new food before they may like it? **Ans: 10 to 20 times** 5. The deficiency of which micronutrient leads to the symptoms? **Ans: Iron** 6. Which of these is a Vitamin A rich food? **Ans: Sweet potato** 7. Which is the most important hormone used to make breast milk. **Ans: Prolactin** Visual:What is this plate of balanced food called? **Ans: MyPlate**
Winners: Diti Savalia | Monika Sinha | Gautham J GopiKrishna | Afnan Abdullah

Welcome move

The relief granted to the Gen Z protesters must not stop with them

In what should be termed a salutary gesture, the Supreme Court of India, at the request of the Union government, invoked its powers under Article 142 of the Constitution to quash criminal cases against the youth who had taken part in nationwide protests seeking examination reforms and government accountability. Led by a group, the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), in response to Chief Justice of India's "unemployment" and "cockroaches" remark – these protests swelled in numbers and reach, forcing the then Union Minister of Education, Dharmendra Pradhan, to resign. Among the demands for halting the agitations was the CJP's call to withdraw the FIRs against protesters in Delhi and other States/Union Territories, which the Court has granted, while directing the Centre to ensure that no fresh FIRs are registered over the protests in July. That the Centre asked for this step by the Court shows how the CJP's agitations resonated with the youth of the country, who agreed with the movement's core demands. It is also an acknowledgment by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government that this is a pressing issue that revealed its failings, particularly the series of paper leaks across India over the years, compounded by an employment deficit for youth.

The Centre's stand in the CJP matter is in stark contrast to how it has dealt with dissent on other issues that have driven thousands to protest in recent years. The most prominent among these were the farmer-led protests in and around Delhi, and the agitations against the communally motivated Citizenship (Amendment) Act. Both were largely peaceful, but this did not prevent the government from foisting serious charges including those related to terrorism and sedition, on peaceful protesters, many of whom remain in jail without trial or bail. Legitimate protest has long been a means of defusing pent-up discontent with government policies in India. The Centre has instead sought to criminalise it, branding dissent and disaffection as sedition to create a chilling effect. The CJP managed to overcome that ploy not only through the justness of its demands but also because the protesters' identities as youth and students transcended the limited categories of religion, caste and even class ("richer farmers") that the BJP sought to use to sow discord and delegitimise them. Even if it is too much to expect the Centre to seek similar relief for those held in earlier cases, the Court would do well to apply to them the standard it has now set for the CJP. Until it does, the relief granted to the CJP and its sympathisers will remain an exception rather than a principle.

Forging consensus

India must broaden engagement with regional multilateral groups

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's attendance at the annual meeting of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) leaders in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, marking 25 years of the Eurasian grouping, had a multi-pronged agenda. This was an occasion to meet his counterparts, for the first time since the U.S.-Israel war on Iran began more than six months ago, which has inflicted economic costs on the whole grouping. The grouping includes Iran, as well as Pakistan that has emerged a mediator between Iran and the U.S., and the Bishkek declaration that condemned the U.S. and Israel's attacks on Iran and supported Iran's right to peaceful nuclear technology under the NPT, was significant. Many of the SCO members are also in the BRICS grouping who Mr. Modi will host in Delhi on September 12-13 – this includes Russian President Vladimir Putin, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian. New Delhi is keen to forge consensus on a joint declaration, which has been difficult due to UAE-Iran tensions and Mr. Modi's discussions with Mr. Pezeshkian included BRICS cooperation. India's ties with the Central Asian Republics have flagged due to other preoccupations, making Mr. Modi's visits to Tashkent and Bishkek, and meetings with regional leaders this time, an important initiative to revive talks on trade, critical minerals, tourism and other areas. As Pakistan takes over the SCO chairmanship, the Bishkek Summit allowed Mr. Modi to set out India's agenda for the coming year. His speech at the Summit focused on the importance of dismantling the ecosystem of "terrorist financing, recruitment, radicalisation, and safe havens", calling on the SCO to eschew "double standards" on terrorism. He also pressed for a strong message to countries that "use terrorism as an instrument of policy and provide safe haven and support to terrorists" – a pointed reference to India's oft-repeated concerns about Pakistan. The Bishkek declaration's inclusion of strong language on "all forms" of terrorism, including cross-border, has thus been welcomed by New Delhi. It remains to be seen how far the Pakistan presidency will take these ideas forward.

Compared to the high-octane optics and the Modi-Putin-Xi handshake at the 2025 Tianjin SCO Summit, this year's summit was relatively sombre. The U.S.'s tariffs, its war with Iran and sanctions on Russia have damaged economic security, energy security and connectivity (the Hormuz Strait blockade), and pose major challenges to the grouping. For India, after tensions with Pakistan had peaked last year after the Pahalgam attacks and the four-day conflict, the past year has been sobering, given Pakistan's diplomatic forays with the U.S., and the new security pact with Saudi Arabia and Türkiye. In the altered geopolitical framing, India must seek to broaden its engagement with all regional multilateral organisations such as the SCO.

Youth power, an electoral force still in the making

Akshay Rout

Former Director General, Election Commission of India, and a public policy commentator

It is the season of youth in India, without any formal commemorative event to mark it. They are being courted like never before. Political parties across the aisle, Ministries, Departments, think tanks and media organisations of every kind are engaging with the theme of youth. Education and examination systems are being reassessed; skills and coaching processes are under scrutiny; unemployment is being scanned and nuanced.

The whole nation seems occupied with the subject. Political parties are ramping up their conversations on digital platforms, where young people are assumed to reside. Leaders are recasting their hitherto successful models of communication to capture the attention and gain the confidence of Generation Z – the 14-to-29-year-olds – while mimicking their candid vocabulary. College and school campuses are crowded by political personalities. The overstretch almost suggests a desperation to connect.

There have been youth initiatives

Not that the youth have never been cared for. Governments, past and present, have taken up initiatives for youth development. The last 12 years have witnessed a plethora of schemes directed at them, covering employment, entrepreneurship, skill enhancement, education, internships, sports and volunteering. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, while facing flak in certain respects, has managed to focus on quality learning geared towards innovation and the empowerment of young citizens. The proposed National Youth Policy 2026 seeks to prepare those in the 15-29 age group for the new digital age.

But beyond the good schemes, there is a lag in understanding Gen Z and Gen A (those born after 2010), who have begun to demand accountability. A NITI Aayog report speaks of 8.7 crore people in the 15-29 age group who are 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET). Despite clarifications from the government that NEET does not necessarily mean joblessness, a staggering amount of youthful energy still awaits an anchor. The yawning gap between formal degrees and job prospects remains a daunting problem. In the wake of the recent street protests, the Opposition has built a narrative that the ruling dispensation is hostile to younger generations. The question is: do they have a blueprint for the country's youth, or are they only making political capital out of the current ferment?

> India's Gen Z is gaining political attention, but is yet to consolidate into a viable electoral bloc

Not taking away from the goodwill of political entities towards the nation's future generations, the overwhelming context is the chorus orchestrated by the country's youth in Delhi and other places in recent weeks. While the youth furore and its consequences in India bear no comparison with the cataclysmic happenings in parts of the South Asian neighbourhood, a wake-up call has been sounded to those in power and those seeking to get there. The response, however exaggerated, is welcome. Parties and leaders now appear to be grappling with issues concerning the youth, regardless of whether they are motivated by electoral politics.

More an elusive vote

India has the largest youth population in the world; 65% of its nearly 1.5 billion people are below 35 years of age. About 23% of the country's electorate falls in the 18-29 age category. In elections in recent years, including the latest Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu, Assam, West Bengal, Keralam and Puducherry, there was no discernible trend of young people voting in any political direction. The outcome in Tamil Nadu showed some hints of youth consolidation, but it was far from being based on any alternative youth agenda. In last year's Bihar election, noticeable efforts by political groups to advance a youth agenda did not generate much appeal. Certain studies, however, suggest that young voters partly influenced the verdicts in the 2014 and 2019 general elections.

In the 75-year electoral history of India, while votes have been garnered under labels such as community, caste, class, farmers, industrial workers and even government employees, there has been no block identification of the youth as yet. There are steady references to the votes of Dalits, minorities, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes, as well as the Yadav vote in Uttar Pradesh and the so-called M-Y vote in Bihar – patterns that have held steady over decades.

To these has now been added, in good measure, the women's vote. A house for shelter, a toilet on the premises, gas in the kitchen and electricity at home can capture the imagination of women across regions, besides cash delivered directly into their wallets. Gratitude is then expressed through the ballot.

For reasons yet to be overcome, caste and community continue to abide as assured aggregators in the electoral arena. These, along with gender identity, have considerably subsumed youth identity. Critical issues such as employment and education constitute only a loose overhang.

Youth participation in India's elections has remained low-key compared with other demographic categories, despite an improvement in recent years, and largely due to the mobilisation efforts of the Election Commission of India (ECI). The ECI has recently galvanised its electoral literacy campaigns to orient students in schools and colleges to the electoral system, processes and practices, and to secure their informed participation.

The upcoming Assembly elections in Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Manipur and Goa will be the earliest test case to determine whether the noisy voice of the streets gets organised into a political preference, including the amount of youth candidature. A quarter of the Assembly seats in these States, especially in politically muscular Uttar Pradesh, were won roughly by margins of around 5% and could, hence, easily be swung by Gen Z voters. The comparison ends there. The youth of Uttar Pradesh and Punjab do not share a common predicament; neither do the Gen Z in Goa and Manipur, or, for that matter, the youth of Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh, which go to the polls later in 2027. Electorally speaking, the current political attention on the youth can be interpreted as an attempt to cut possible losses while making a moderate investment.

Old equations do matter

Political parties cannot abandon time-tested voting blocs for an undependable, heterogeneous multitude that may or may not walk out of its Instagram residency. Old social calculations and booth management may still hold good in actual polls, while the youth awakening may remain a story on the side. Political parties and poll campaigners have a professional finger on the pulse of the people; they will carefully watch the emergence of a real Gen Z vote from the cradle, while they adjust their plans and campaigns just that bit for now.

In the text of the Union government's vision of a developed India by 2047, the youth are regarded as the *Amrit Peedhi* (the generation of the nectar). But in realpolitik, the forthcoming State elections may show which side the nectar sweetens or whether it does so at all. Swami Vivekananda spoke of the power of youth, but in an electoral sense, that power may only now be crystallising in India.

The views expressed are personal

For newborns, the answer is hospital plus home

Abhay Bang

Physician and the founder of Society for Education, Action and Research in Community Health (SEARCH), a community health research organisation

In India, newborns are dying. Earlier, they used to die at home without medical care. Now, they are dying in hospitals. On August 24, 2026, three newborns lost their lives in an accidental fire at the government women's hospital in Amravati, Maharashtra. This was not the first such episode in government newborn care units, and it will not be the last – unless we view it not as an isolated event, but as a trend.

These are episodes of clustered newborn deaths in the government institutions (that were identified by ChatGPT)/in the format of Year/Government hospital/Newborn deaths – 2017 BRD Medical College, Gorakhpur 17; 2017 Government hospital, Ahmedabad 18; 2019 JK Lon Hospital, Kota 10; 2020 JK Lon Hospital, Kota 9; 2020 Government hospital, Shahdol 8; 2021 District Hospital, Bhandara One fire 10; 2021 Kamla Nehru Children's Hospital, Bhopal One fire 4; 2021 Government Medical College, Ambikapur 4; 2022 Medical College, Ambikapur 4; 2023 Government Medical College, Nanded 12; 2024 Maharani Laxmi Bai Medical College, Jhansi One fire 10; 2025 District Women's Hospital, Budaun 4; 2026 District Women's Hospital, Amravati One fire 3

This is not a comprehensive national registry, but only a partial list. The pattern, however, is recurring and therefore demands a systemic response.

The problems and challenges

What is going wrong? The first reason is overcrowding. India has achieved remarkable success in ensuring that women increasingly deliver in health institutions – from 39% in 2005-06 to 90% in 2023-24 (National Family Health Survey-6). But this success has created a new challenge. The absolute number of women delivering in institutions has risen from 109 lakh in 2005 to 194 lakh in 2024-25 (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), Government of India). The total number of sick newborns hospitalised in public Special Newborn Care Units (SNCUs) has also risen rapidly, from 11.3 lakh in 2021-22 to 14.45 lakh in 2023-24 – a 28% increase in two years (Health Management Information System, MoHFW). Hence, newborn-care units everywhere are becoming overloaded.

> Newborn care in India must combine safer, decongested neonatal units with strengthened home-based support

The second reason is the changing case mix. As institutional deliveries have expanded, government hospitals have become the destination not only for normal deliveries but also for large numbers of high-risk births, including premature, low-birth-weight and sick newborns referred from peripheral facilities.

Infrastructure failures are the third reason. The Gorakhpur episode of August 2017 was attributed by a district-level inquiry to oxygen deprivation following an interruption in oxygen supply. The fires at Bhandara in January 2021, Bhopal in November 2021 and Jhansi in November 2024, as well as the more recent incident in Amravati, demonstrate the risks posed by fire and electrical hazards in neonatal units. Sick newborns need warmers, incubators and ventilators. Overcrowding can increase the electrical load on these units.

Infection and staffing problems would be the fourth reason. Overcrowding, inadequate nurse-to-baby ratios, equipment shortages and poor infection-prevention practices can turn a neonatal unit into a setting where hospital-acquired infections can spread rapidly.

The Gadchiroli model

This diagnosis leads to some obvious solutions. But there is an additional way.

India already has another solution. More than two decades ago, the Gadchiroli field trial conducted by the Society for Education, Action and Research in Community Health (SEARCH) demonstrated that trained community health workers (CHWs) could provide effective home-based neonatal care (HBNC), resulting in a 62.2% reduction in neonatal mortality in the rural area (The Lancet, 1999). The trained CHWs identified and managed neonatal infections at home, supported breastfeeding and warmth, and managed low-birth-weight and preterm babies. Subsequent data from Gadchiroli, published in the Journal of Perinatology in 2005, showed that between 1996 and 2003, 97% of low-birth-weight and preterm babies – including those with birth weights above 1,800 g and gestational ages of more than 34 weeks – were managed at home, with a very low case-fatality rate.

The principles of the Gadchiroli model have already become a part of India's public health system (MoHFW, 2011). Around 8,00,000 Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) have been trained to provide HBNC, using training modules developed from the Gadchiroli experience. Therefore, India does not have to invent a new system. ASHAs, if adequately trained, supervised and supported, can provide many components of newborn care. This could take a considerable load off SNCUs and help reduce overcrowding.

Of course, a baby with severe prematurity, respiratory distress, shock, severe sepsis, serious birth asphyxia or another danger sign needs immediate facility-based treatment. HBNC is not a substitute for neonatal intensive care. But not every newborn who needs care requires a hospital bed.

The optimum strategy

India should therefore adopt a three-part strategy. First, decongest neonatal units. Strengthen HBNC by ASHAs so that appropriate, stable newborns can safely receive care at home rather than occupying scarce SNCU beds.

Second, strengthen neonatal care units. Ensure adequate numbers of doctors and nurses, appropriate nurse-to-baby ratios, functioning equipment, reliable oxygen and electricity supplies with backup systems, along with rigorous infection-prevention measures.

Third, make neonatal units intrinsically safe. Fire detection and suppression systems, electrical and oxygen-system safety measures, emergency evacuation drills and independent safety audits should become mandatory.

The success of the Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) is unquestionable. Institutional delivery can help save mothers and babies. But the next phase of India's newborn-health strategy must recognise that getting mothers into hospitals is only the first step. Every mother will give birth to a baby who needs care. But not every newborn who needs care requires a hospital bed. The future of newborn care should not be hospital versus home; it should be hospital plus home.

That would reduce overcrowding and, most importantly, ensure that each newborn receives the right care, at the right place, at the right time.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The first step

The alleged theft of devotees' donations, amounting to hundreds of crores, has seriously eroded the credibility of the Ayodhya Ram Temple administration and the Yogi Adityanath government in Uttar Pradesh. The U.P. government apparently had no inkling of what was going on. The move to appoint a retired Air Marshal as the CEO of the Ram Temple Trust (Inside pages, September 3) and other carefully selected trustees is a step towards injecting professionalism into the administration. It is incumbent upon the U.P. Government to keep a hawk's eye on the temple administration and conduct periodic checks to ensure that everything is functioning smoothly.

C.V. Aravind,
Bengaluru

Building castles in the air

One really wonders why the Congress party and the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) in Tamil Nadu are thinking aloud about who should be the next Prime Minister of India — Rahul Gandhi, Congress leader and Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, or C. Joseph Vijay, TVK president and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister. Mr. Vijay has completed only 100-odd days as Chief Minister. Rather, he is still an apprentice on the job and should focus on becoming a successful Chief Minister. Moreover, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is still on a strong wicket and, at this point in time, appears irreplaceable.

S. Ramakrishnasayee,
Chennai

Corrections & Clarifications

A report, "Air Force veteran appointed first Ram Temple Trust CEO" (Inside pages, September 3, 2026), incorrectly referred to Air Marshal Jeetendra Mishra (retired) as *Air Vice-Marshal Jitendra* Mishra (retd.) in both the text and the caption of the photograph.

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

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

Are brands overreacting to manufactured outrage?

Mitushi Sharma
Seasoned Communications Leader and published author

Santosh Desai
Founder of Think 9, CEO of Futurebrands

PARLEY

Last week, jewellery brand Giva withdrew an advertisement it made for Raksha Bandhan after netizens criticised actress Kriti Sanon's outfit as too revealing for a traditional festival. The incident is the latest in a series of brands backtracking on their advertisements following backlash that is often religiously or communally charged. Given India's current socio-political climate, are brands overreacting to manufactured outrage? Mitushi Sharma and Santosh Desai discuss the question in a conversation moderated by **Sonikka Loganathan**.

Giva withdrew the advertisement after netizens criticised actress Kriti Sanon's outfit as too revealing for a traditional festival. YT VIDEO SCREENGRAB

Was this ad withdrawn primarily because of concerns for employee safety or to minimise commercial losses?

Santosh Desai: There are two aspects to this controversy. One is that the brand did not anticipate that there would be a problem. Therefore, it is withdrawing the advertisement out of fear for the safety of its employees or because of the political storm that has been created. The other reading is that this outrage is being manufactured by the brand itself. Giva is not like Tanishq, which has enormous publicity. If Tanishq did something that it did not know would cause outrage, then it would have to be deaf, dumb, and blind. Giva has managed to create a conversation that would have been impossible for a small brand. The brand is either cynical or naive.

Mitushi Sharma: The two are interlinked. Commercial decisions are a very big part of the decisions brands take. It includes sales, but also how retailers are reacting and what is happening at the stores. In this case, I am not sure if it was an outrage that was manufactured by the brand as much as by the consumer.

In 2020, a Tanishq commercial depicting an interfaith baby shower was removed after outrage. The next year, Fab India was in trouble for a promotional campaign titled Jashn-e-Riwaaz; they withdrew it after some people complained that using an Urdu phrase alongside a Hindu festival was not right. Giva's ad, however, was not trying to send a social message. Are brands becoming more cautious about what they put out?

SD: You have to be really tone-deaf to believe that a certain kind of dressing in today's environment would not get some backlash. To argue that there was no intention would mean that you are completely impervious to the environment that exists today, and that is not a defensible position for anybody engaged in commercial activity and advertising. If this was a surprise to Giva, it shows naivety. Just because you are not communally sensitive does not mean you do not have sensitive content that people can react to. You could argue that Fab India was not intentionally trying to create some interfaith amity just because they used an Urdu phrase. Urdu is a language; it does not belong to a religion and has roots in India.

MS: It is wise to be cautious. There are enough checks and balances that ads go through, from the brief to the time an ad hits any media. The difference really is between being cautious and conscious about what is culturally sensitive versus being fearful while creating a piece of communication. Everybody has a point of view. An ad conceptualised in Mumbai might not work in Kerala. That is what research is about.

SD: This is not a normal environment. Brands are being more cautious because everybody is cautious. This brand is small. The only reason the ad came to the forefront is that some people chose to get angry and highlight it. They are using it as a pretext to continue that long-standing quarrel over each other's ideological position. This is not a natural outcome of cultural sensitivity; it is manufactured outrage.

We see women wearing various outfits in our media. Can you elaborate on this naivety?

SD: Religion and culture being two different areas that do not overlap is not really how our world exists today. There have been many attempts to control what women wear through religion. The choice of attire for Raksha Bandhan, which you could argue is a cultural festival, is now being viewed through the lens of religion. To argue that it is not likely to cause offence to people determined to see offence is an act of naivety, because I think there is enough evidence to show the fact that the control of what women wear, control of what they say, is an important part of the cultural project that we are seeing in the country today. From the first time I saw the ad, it was clear that it had the potential for controversy.

> For a brand like Giva, any publicity is good publicity. I do not think this has painted Giva in a bad light. We are in the festive season. This is going to help them
>
> **MITUSHI SHARMA**

MS: When I saw the ad, the first thing that struck me was not the outfit; it was the use of animals. I thought it was a sweet twist. I did not notice the outfit till I was made to notice it. The people looking for fodder are the people who actually pointed out that the outfit was incorrect, whether for religious or cultural reasons. When we create communication, every single thing in that piece needs to serve the message you want to give out and the product you want to sell. Is the outfit really in service of what the communication was supposed to be? The boy's outfit is absolutely fine. So, obviously, somebody at the execution end has not paid enough attention to ask whether that is really in service.

Are we seeing more self-censorship from brands?

SD: You have enough evidence that you do encounter pushback of a fairly significant kind when you cross a line that you may think is harmless. I do think that there is an element of self-censorship, and I think, like Mitushi said, when something is not in service of the communication, however harmless it might be to one set of eyes, there is a potential of it being seen in a different way by another. That awareness is something that I think a lot of brands have today.

MS: Self-censorship is 100% happening. But it is not a bad thing. Brands and agencies are not shielded from what is happening. There are a lot of discussions that happen in brainstorming rooms, in conference rooms with clients about this. The sad part about self-censorship is that there are times when a great idea never gets made. The question is why are we self-censoring? Is it to make sure that what is coming out is the best version or because of fear? Unfortunately, it is bordering on worrying about what the reaction will be on social media. So yes, there is a lot of self-censorship coming from fear as opposed to doing the right thing.

Does withdrawing an ad set a precedent for how brands respond to online outrage?

SD: Brands are not crusaders. They are in it for the money. I am always a little surprised by this insistence for brands to stand by what they are doing. What statement does it make about the state of society when brands have to withdraw communication under pressure? I think that is a separate and a larger question. But from an individual brand's perspective, it is a no-brainer. Giva is not a brand known for taking progressive positions; they are a no-name-nothing brand. Why would you take the risk of the wrath of so many people, and maybe the powers that be, in order to run an ad?

MS: I absolutely agree. If a brand decides to pull down an ad, it is completely their decision, whether for commercial or safety reasons. This particular ad has become bigger than it intended to be. Taking down this ad has made it seem as if the company has surrendered to a certain cause: that women cannot wear what they wish to wear. The ad was never meant to be that. The cost of standing by it is now much higher for them. This ad has been blown out of proportion.

When something is blown out of proportion, what position does that put a brand in?

SD: If you look at the Tanishq experience, they actually saw an increase in sales. If you were to look at it from Giva's perspective, there is nothing that has happened that will harm it. The risks are much higher for an established brand. For a small challenger brand, any reason to be in the news is a net good for them.

MS: For a brand like Giva, any publicity is good publicity. I do not think this has painted Giva in a bad light. There are two points of view, and they will always exist till we have another inconsequential matter to solve with the armchair activists. It will give them visibility and some recall in the consumer's mind. We are in the festive season, so a lot of jewellery purchases are going to happen now. This is going to help them.

To listen to the full interview
Scan the code or go to the link
www.thehindu.com

NOTEBOOK

Keeping pace with a succession of climate shock events

Disasters across South Asia expose unequal vulnerabilities and the need for a collective regional response

Meera Srinivasan

Shaky social media visuals of the Rasuwa floods in Nepal have rattled the world. With over 1,250 lives lost so far – over 4,000 people are still missing – the extent of devastation is slowly becoming evident. Seeing colleagues in Nepal reporting from different locations and bringing to us fragments of information and various news angles was a stark reminder that the full story of a climate shock rarely fits into one dramatic headline.

We read about locals, tourists on holiday, and pilgrims. We see reports of governments' outreach to help citizens, and assistance offered in rescue operations and contributions towards the herculean rehabilitation effort that awaits the country. We see social media posts from those seeking information about their missing loved ones.

While we share the risks of the growing climate crisis, each climate shock shows us that the world we live in is unequal and unfair. Soon after the flash floods, news outlets highlighted Nepal's negligible contribution to climate change – accounting for 0.1% of total global greenhouse gas emissions. A point to ponder before we are drawn to unsubstantiated claims or conspiracy theories.

Reports of at least 900 workers believed to be trapped at 12 hydropower projects affected by flash floods in the districts of Rasuwa and Nuwakot brought back memories of Cyclone Ditwah that hit Sri Lanka late last year. Many of us reported from different affected areas. Each story, every life, was undoubtedly important, but the pattern that slowly emerged was hard to ignore. While the risks may have been common, vulnerabilities are different.

Among the most affected in this disaster were Sri Lanka's Malaiyaha Tamil community, especially people working in the tea and rubber estates across the central and southern hill country. Historically marginalised, they not only contend with exploitation but are also the most vulnerable to climate shock, as Ditwah made evident.

The United Nations sought to mobilise $35 million in aid towards humanitarian assistance. The island is still rebuilding after the unprecedented floods and landslides. Some affected families stayed in temporary shelters for months, struggling to commute to the tea estates where they are employed for a daily wage. The concerns over compensation and transition to safe, permanent homes are far from gone. Ten months later, some communities tell us the cyclone is yet to pass.

Climate shock events of the magnitude witnessed in Nepal recently, or in Sri Lanka last year, draw global attention. But there are signs that show up from time to time. The stories may not be dramatic, but they are still telling.

In late 2018, districts across Sri Lanka's Northern Province were severely hit by flash floods. Tens of thousands of people were affected; crops were damaged, and villages inundated. Neck-deep in work, the then government agent (a post similar to that of a District Collector in India) of Kilinochchi, who spared time to explain the situation to me, said: "In fact, we were giving drought relief to our people even days before the flood suddenly hit us." As Sri Lanka prepares for the possible effects of El Niño this year, I am reminded of the GA's matter-of-fact comment on how people and authorities were forced to combat one climate shock after another.

We have witnessed major climate shocks in quick succession in the region. The floods in Pakistan in 2022, floods in different parts of India over the last few years, the cyclone in Sri Lanka in 2025, and now, Nepal's staggering floods. A Pakistani friend recently shared a 2009 piece from *Himal Southasian* on her social media. Authored by former diplomat Shyam Saran, it contended that South Asia is an ecologically interconnected system and called for a collaborative response to the climate crisis. Journalists in the region, however, have had more stories about natural disasters than collective strategies to tell.

meera.srinivasan@thehindu.co.in

PICTURE OF THE WEEK

When hope fades

A family member pays last respects to an effigy of a person missing in the flash floods during a symbolic funeral on the banks of the Bagmati River near Pashupatinath Temple in Kathmandu, Nepal, on Thursday. AP

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 4, 1976

Riots spread to Cape Town; march by 'coloureds'

Cape Town, September 3: Cape Town was rocked for the second day to-day by racial disturbances. Yesterday's eruption which involved 3,000 coloured youths was the first intrusion of racial violence into the white centre of any South African city since demonstrations against apartheid began in black townships 11 weeks ago.

Unconfirmed reports said 5,000 coloured youths were marching on Cape Town from outlying black townships.

One person was killed and at least two others were wounded when South African police opened fire on students throwing stones at a high school not far from the centre of Cape Town to-day.

Earlier reports said they had fired tear gas into the school yard to prevent students from marching to the City Centre, where the police opened fire with shotguns loaded with bird shots at a large crowd of coloured demonstrators.

Latest reports said the students at Trafalgar High School were using petrol bombs.

Thick clouds of tear gas rose from the streets of the City Centre. Four persons were killed in the disturbances in the city yesterday.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 4, 1926

A lecture in Bombay

Bombay, August 31: The Society for the Encouragement of Indian Art held an Exhibition at the Town Hall entirely composed of ancient Indian paintings and textiles. Mr. G. Venkatachalam, Secretary of the International University of Arts, delivered an interesting lecture yesterday. The subject was "The Historical Development of Indian Painting." The lecturer said that India stood unique in the world, as regards its output of creative genius, both of mind and handicraft. Painting was an ancient art in India but its traditions were lost in the mist of time.

Text&Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Number of villages inundated by floods in north Odisha

373 The flood situation in north Odisha remained grim on Thursday, with 373 villages inundated across Balasore, Jajpur and Mayurbhanj districts, officials said. The Subarnarekha inundated 214 villages in Balasore, while 62 villages in Jajpur and 97 villages in Mayurbhanj were affected. Around 35,740 people from Balasore were evacuated. PTI

Number of industrial units for which IDCO cleared land in Odisha

37 The Odisha Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation has allotted land to 37 industrial units, including 24 major projects and 13 proposals aimed at promoting micro, small and medium enterprises, officials said on Thursday. The IDCO Land Allotment Committee approved the proposals at a meeting held on Wednesday, a statement said. PTI

Number of jobs provided by Himachal govt. in three years

1.6 in lakh. The Congress and the BJP sparred in the Himachal Pradesh Assembly on Thursday, with the Opposition staging a walkout. Parliamentary Affairs and Industries Minister Harshwardhan Chauhan claimed in the House that the government has provided 1,60,729 employment opportunities, including 32,223 government jobs. PTI

Internally Displaced Persons living in relief camps across Manipur

24 in thousands. Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh on Thursday informed the Assembly that 36,000 out of around 60,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) have been resettled. Replying to a discussion moved by Congress MLA Th. Lokeshwar Singh, the Chief Minister said that around 24,000 IDPs were still living in relief camps across the State. PTI

Excess deaths during heatwaves in Belgium between June-August

2935 Belgium recorded 2,935 excess deaths during successive heatwaves between June and August 2026, according to the Sciensano national public health institute. Of these, 2,035 extra deaths were recorded between June 18 and July 3, while another 535 occurred between July 4 and 17. AFP

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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The gap in manufacturing sector GVA

According to the National Accounts Statistics, the manufacturing sector's GVA is ₹38.6 lakh crore in 2023-24 at current prices.; however, an 'Alternative Estimate' using data from the Annual Survey of Industries and Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises gives a lower figure, prompting a closer look at the official estimate

ECONOMIC NOTES

Jatinder S. Bedi
R. Nagaraj

Early this year, the National Statistical Office (NSO) released the new series of the National Accounts Statistics (NAS). It shows that the manufacturing sector's gross value added (GVA) is ₹38.6 lakh crore (₹38.6 trillion), constituting 14.7 per cent of GDP (gross domestic product) for the year 2023-24 at current prices. How reliable is the official estimate? This article investigates.

The manufacturing sector has two parts: One comprises all registered factories employing 10+/20+ workers with/without power, including registered companies (defined as the organised/formal sector). The other comprises unincorporated/ informal/ household units consisting of small factories/workshops falling outside the corporate/factory sector. The Annual Survey of Industries (ASI) reports the production accounts of the factory sector, while the Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASUSE) covers the informal sector. The combined output (GVA) of the factory and unincorporated sectors almost completely represents total manufacturing output.

The discrepancy in estimates

For 2023-24, the sum of the GVA of units covered by the ASI and ASUSE is ₹27.4 lakh crore (the Alternative Estimate or, AE). The official figure, as per the NAS, is ₹38.6 lakh crore. It is higher than the AE by a whopping 40.9 per cent. Let's call this the GAP. What could account for it?

While minor variations between the two estimates is understandable due to methodological or definitional issues, such a substantial GAP between the two estimates using official data sources surely raises many questions.

What are the data sources used for estimating the official GVA? For the unincorporated sector, it is ASUSE - the same as what we have used to estimate the AE. Hence, it cannot account for the GAP noted above. Moreover, the unincorporated sector's share in total manufacturing GVA is a mere 13.9 per cent.

Hence, the reason for the GAP must lie in the estimation of organised manufacturing output. The NAS uses company balance-sheet data sourced from the Ministry of Corporate Affairs' database (MCA-21), compiled using the annual statutory filings by registered companies. This practice of using the MCA data began with the previous NAS revision (base year 2011-12), partially replacing the ASI. The procedure has continued in the latest revision, with minor modifications.

A standard way to validate the GVA is to use employment data to estimate the sector's potential output by applying appropriate "technical ratios" drawn from the ASI and ASUSE datasets. The official Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) for 2023-24, estimated that the manufacturing sector employed 697.5 lakh workers.

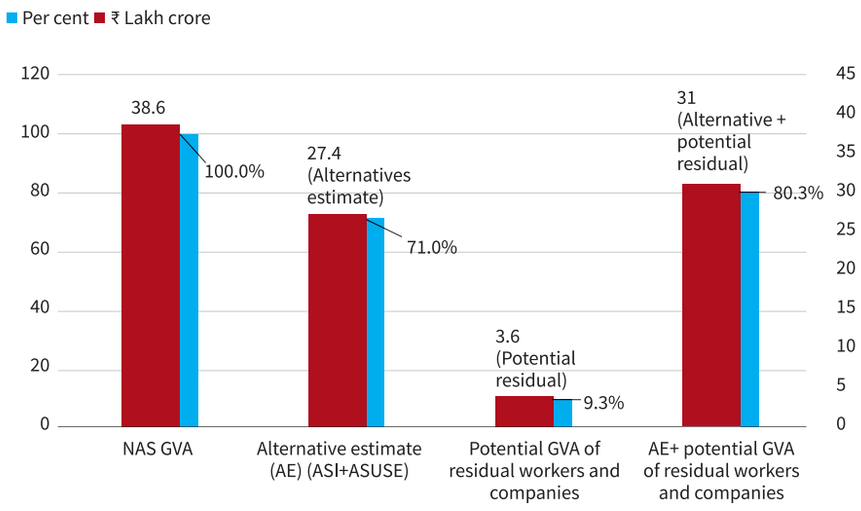
However, as per the ASI and ASUSE datasets, only 532.9 lakh workers were employed to produce the official GVA. Thus, quite possibly, the contribution of the remaining 164.6 lakh "residual workers" – 697.5 minus 532.9 – may account for the GAP in the GVA reported above.

The manufacturing sector includes the organised sector comprising registered factories and companies, and the unincorporated sector comprising small factories and workshops outside the corporate sector. REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE

Conflicting figures

An alternative estimate of manufacturing sector GVA using time-tested official datasets puts the figure below the official estimate

Figure 1: Official manufacturing sector GVA and Alternative Estimates for 2023-24



The definitions of employment in the three surveys are not the same, and their data collection methods differ. However, for a validation exercise, the PLFS estimates provide a useful reference point. Official agencies also use similar methods.

Some of this GAP is contributed by the residual 2,72,534 MCA companies, not covered in the 78,618 "private companies" captured in the ASI data. A majority of the residual companies are likely to be to non-factory private companies. The left over residual workers are likely to belong to the unincorporated sector not covered in ASUSE survey because of their small size.

Then, applying the "technical ratios" of the appropriate segments of manufacturing as derived from unit-wise ASI and ASUSE data, the potential GVA of the residual workers is estimated to be ₹3.6 lakh crore.

Then adding the potential GVA to the AE of ₹27.4 lakh crore reported earlier, the likely/potential overall manufacturing GVA could be ₹31.0 lakh crore.

This figure, however, still falls short of the official GVA estimate (of ₹38.6 lakh crore) by 24.5 per cent. In other words, the potential GVA of all workers employed in the manufacturing sector in companies and unincorporated sector enterprises would at best account for 80.3 per cent of the official estimate. It still leaves ₹7.6 lakh crore (or 19.7%) worth of NAS manufacturing GVA "unaccounted" for or "unexplained" (**Figure 1**). This is the real puzzle of the new GDP figures for the manufacturing sector.

How can this GAP be reconciled with the best alternative estimate obtained using widely used data sources? The NSO documents say that, being an establishment-based survey, the ASI reportedly fails to capture value addition taking place within an enterprise, but outside of the factory premises (such as head office, marketing and distribution, or R&D activities). Is this really true? Probably not. Available evidence does not seem to support the official view (Dholakia, Nagaraj and Pandya, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2018).

Alternatively, if the ASI-based GVA estimate did not underestimate production, how could such a large GAP arise. Is it because of the NSO methodology of scaling up of sample estimates of active companies for the universe of companies whose size and composition are hazy and unverified?

The statistical issue

As per the latest NAS, for 2023-24, manufacturing GVA is ₹38.6 lakh crore at current prices. An alternative estimate, using time-tested official ASI and ASUSE data sets, finds the official figure to be higher than the alternative estimate by 40.9 per cent.

Even after accounting for the contribution of residual companies and workers, the unexplained GAP remains at 24.5 per cent. Whether the official estimate represents a "fuller description of ground reality" through the use of corporate data, or amounts to an overestimation of output, remains a matter of contention. The statistical issue can only be resolved if the MCA data and NSO's methodologies are made public for independent verification.

(Jatinder S. Bedi is a Professor of Economics at the Institute for Development and Communication, Chandigarh. R. Nagaraj was formerly with the Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research (IGIDR), Mumbai)

THE GIST

- The National Accounts Statistics data shows that the manufacturing sector's GVA is ₹38.6 lakh crore for 2023-24, constituting 14.7 per cent of GDP. However, as per an Alternative Estimate, the sum of the GVA of units covered by the ASI and ASUSE is ₹27.4 lakh crore, a 40.9 per cent difference
- The potential GVA of 'residual workers', not captured by ASI and ASUSE data, is estimated to be ₹3.6 lakh crore. Adding this to the AE of ₹27.4 lakh crore, the potential overall manufacturing GVA could be ₹31.0 lakh crore
- Whether the official estimate represents a 'fuller description of ground reality' through use of corporate data, or amounts to an overestimation of output, is a matter of contention. The statistical issue can only be resolved if the NSO's methodologies are made public

IN THE LIMELIGHT

A filmmaking legend: Singeetham understands that not everything needs to be said through dialogue, a skill he has excelled in since his early days as a writer. FILE PHOTO

Inside the mind of Singeetham Srinivasa Rao: a masterclass in storytelling

Veteran filmmaker and an instinctive writer, Rao has spent several years exploring the possibilities of storytelling — across languages, genres and forms. At 95, he remains as curious about cinema as he has always been

Sudhish Kamath

Kamal Haasan once told me that every storyteller has one story and they just find different ways to say it. "One man in another man's shoes," he winked, talking about his oldest living collaborator Singeetham Srinivasa Rao.

Seemed like the perfect icebreaker for an interview with the 95-year-old legendary storyteller.

For a lot of his films begin by disturbing someone's identity or place in the world – Shekhar and Ranga in *Sommokadidhi Sokokadidhi*, Kamal in *Pushpak*, *Apoorva Sagodharargal* and *Michael Madana Kama Rajan*. Does putting a character in a situation where they don't belong, inspire the story, I ask the legend over a Zoom call on a Wednesday morning.

The starting point

"Yes, though there are a lot of these common elements, the starting point is always an idea. Let me give you some examples: *Sing Geetham* was an idea that I got many years ago from a conversation with Balamurali Krishna when he said there's music in everyday life. And I wanted to explore how to capture that music from life."

He demonstrates with an example from *Sing Geetham* where a random line spoken blends two notes. *Pushpak*, he says, was born out of a desire to pay tribute to the era of silent films and Chaplin.

And *Aditya 369* was a film that was inspired not just by H.G. Wells and the *Back to the Future films* but by Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*.

Twain's book, one of his early influences, might offer a clue on where Rao got hooked to the concept of one man in another man's world.

Entering the cave

There were simply no screenwriting books or textbooks when he started filmmaking. One of the first lessons his mentor K.V. Reddy gave him was that every detail on paper is sacred.

"If you write cave, the production and camera departments will not know automatically that it has to be dark. You have to write dark cave." And that's how Rao learnt on set, as young writers figure out, the significance of the scene header INT./EXT. LOCATION - DAY/NIGHT.

Rao is a writer with instinct – when he starts to write a story, he never tries to guess if it is working or not. "You have to go with your conviction. Nobody will know whether it's working or not until people watch it and tell you," he laughs. So, it is a bit of shooting in the dark, sticking to the conviction, which is why it helps that he is always thinking of the little details to flesh out the scene.

Music and spark in the detail

I prod him on *Pushpak* – the way the audio of the Finance Minister's speech on radio on the need to respect retired officers, is in sharp contrast to the behaviour of an old man checking out a maid, or even that scene with scatological humour without resorting to the sounds of toilet humour. "Yes, contrast is always the best way to find comedy in the scene. What if the place where he got the drunk man tied up is next door to a dance school?" And that's how the sound of the classical dance instructor in the background provides the score for a scene that could have potentially grossed out audiences. But with the contrast, they laugh with him instead.

As an instinctive writer, Rao understands that not everything needs to be said through dialogue, a skill he has excelled in since his early days as a writer, from *Sommokadidhi Sokokadidhi*, where we get a peek into conman Ranga's mind when he watches Shekhar at work. There are a lot of Chaplinesque silent movie devices he employs in it that he carried forward to *Pushpak*, where one suspects his love for finding the music in life led him to think of two ideas – the silent film and the musical film where everyone sings out their lines.

It took decades before he could get from the first to the second, but he continued using musical narration to achieve great economy in storytelling.

You might remember the narrator singing the fable of *Michael Madana Kama Rajan*. By the time the opening credits end, we know how they were separated at birth.

Resolving conflict through laughs

How does Rao negotiate writer-star conflicts during the writing process, I wonder, especially since he has collaborated most with Kamal Haasan, who is often credited on screenplays of his films. "There's no negotiation. Only collaboration. Because without a star, there's no film," he laughs.

How did he learn the art of comedy? Larry David, for example, found his voice by subverting social interactions. Garry Shandling struggled with self-doubt and decided that if he is funny in real life, he doesn't have to learn to be funny on stage.

Rao says he does not know about any of that theory. "I think I have always had a sense of humour. That's probably the secret of my health. I am hale and hearty because I laugh a lot."

He narrates a story from many decades ago, when he and his friend Ananthu had to travel by train from Madras to Bombay, pretending to be siblings to match with the identities on the ticket. So, they wore dark glasses, pretending to have conjunctivitis. "But throughout the journey, I could not stop laughing. I could not keep a straight face."

That anecdote does offer an insight into how Rao discovered the comedy of the average Joe in an otherworldly situation.

Finally, I ask him for a writing exercise that might help young filmmakers discover their own voice. "Take any proverb you like. Any old saying. And turn it into a modern story," he suggests.

Traditional wisdom and universal truths explored through an everyday lens might just help a young writer or two discover who they are as writers.

Also, Rao has never stopped watching films. From the days he and Balu Mahendra went film-hopping at international film festivals, to discussing *Pather Panchali* with Satyajit Ray and deconstructing Manmohan Desai's lost-and-found tropes.

"In one scene, three guys are giving blood to each other. People just didn't care that it's not realistic," he recalls of that iconic scene from *Amar Akbar Anthony*.

Even recently, he reached out to this writer after watching his film *Culture Vulture* on YouTube and sought to reach out to Ravish Kumar to share his words of appreciation for 'While You Were Watching'.

It was a year ago when this writer had approached Rao for an interview on his writing process. Between then and now Rao has already had a highly acclaimed release in *Sing Geetham*, serves as a story consultant on *Kalki 2898 AD* and is sharp enough to get working on the next – a historical spy thriller currently in the early stages of writing – yet another twist to one man's adventure in another man's world?

At 95, the incredible true story of a young man who couldn't stop laughing, finding himself in many adventures with Kamal Haasan, is far from over. He is still finding new worlds to put his men into – and new ways to make us laugh.

THE DAILY QUIZ

Please send in your answers to dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in

Gloria Steinem passed away yesterday at the age of 92. Here is a quiz on the eminent American feminist and journalist

Radhika Santhanam

QUESTION 1
What was the name of the feminist magazine she co-founded in 1971 which survives till today?

QUESTION 2
Steinem said once that she had never wanted children because she already had one. Who was she referring to?

QUESTION 3
Steinem was part of the second wave of feminism. Name the book credited with launching this wave, written by Betty Friedan.

QUESTION 4
In 2005, Steinem, Robin Morgan, and X co-founded an organisation that "works to make women visible and powerful in the media". Name X, an actor who starred in *Klute* and *Coming Home*.

QUESTION 5
In a controversial op-ed, Steinem once defended a U.S. President saying his behaviour with women may have been reckless, but did not meet the legal definition of sexual harassment or assault. Which President was she talking about?

Visual question: Where did she work, which led to her seminal 1963 undercover exposé, 'A Bunny's Tale'?

Questions and answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. The year and place where Lionel Messi won the Olympic Gold and the Under-20 World Cup. **Ans: 2008 at Beijing and 2005 in the Netherlands**
2. Goals and assists by Messi in his 207-match career for 'La Albiceleste' **Ans: 125 goals, with 111 with his left foot, and 68 assists**
3. Messi had a senior international debut to forget on August 17, 2005, because he was shown a straight red card, less than a minute after coming on in the 63rd minute, for an accidental elbow to an opponent, against this European team. **Ans: Hungary**
4. The final heartbreak which prompted Messi's first international retirement in June 2016. **Ans: The Copa America defeat to Chile**
5. Messi holds the record for most major tournament goals in men's history with ___ goals. **Ans: 35**
6. Messi share the record for FIFA World Cup appearances (six in total) with this football player. **Ans: Cristiano Ronaldo**
7. He has netted the most international goals (11) against this South American country. **Ans: Bolivia**
Visual: Messi is celebrating the triumph in this tournament. **Ans: The Finalissima against Italy in 2022**
Early birds: Arun Kumar Singh | Sudhir Thapa | Tito Shiladitya | Piyali Tuli | Samir Gupta

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

S. Upendran

What is the meaning of "bolt from the blue"? (R. Ranjith Kumar, Eraiyur)
This is an expression, which has been a part of the English language for a very long time. When you say that something was a "bolt from the blue" or a "bolt out of the blue", it means that it was sudden and totally unexpected; whatever happened really surprised you. Here are a few examples.

The news that Sumithra had lung cancer was a bolt from the blue.

Gauri seemed to really like her new job. So when she informed her parents last week that she was planning on quitting, it was a bolt out of the blue.

The word "blue" in the expression refers to the blue sky and "bolt" refers to thunderbolts. On a day when the sky is blue and there are no clouds around, one does not expect to hear thunder. If one does, one is really surprised.

What is the meaning of the term "vox populi"? (G. K. Karthigakumaran, Chennai)
This is an expression borrowed from Latin meaning "voice of the people". The term is often abbreviated to either "vox pop" or "vox pops".

The vox pop technique is normally used in radio and television broadcasting. We often see reporters walking around on the streets asking passers by to give their opinion about something. For example, we have people responding to questions as to whether America did the right thing by bombing Afghanistan.

This method of recording the opinions of people talking informally in public places is called vox populi or vox pop.

Sai Prasad is a director who likes to make use of vox pop in his programmes.

Can you get me some vox populi by six this evening?

What is the difference between "plenty" and "aplenty"? (S.S. Prasanna Venkatesh, Chennai)
As far as the meaning is concerned there is hardly any difference between the two. Both mean "large amounts of". Of the two "aplenty" is considered old fashioned. Here are a few examples.

Plenty of children joined the competition.

We have plenty of sugar left.

When you use the word "aplenty", it usually comes after the noun. For example,

Children aplenty joined the competition.

We have sugar aplenty.

I have read thrillers aplenty.

It would be wrong to say "aplenty children", "aplenty thrillers", etc.

How does one refer to one's country? "fatherland" or "motherland"? (T. Desai, Mumbai)
How you refer to your country depends upon what your mother tongue happens to be. In most Indian languages, we generally use the feminine gender to refer to our country. Native speakers of English invariably refer to their country as their "motherland". But the Germans, on the other hand, refer to Germany as their "fatherland". So, both "motherland" and "fatherland" are acceptable ways of referring to one's country.

Published in The Hindu on November 13, 2001

Word of the day

Boulevard:
a wide street or thoroughfare

Synonyms: avenue

Usage: *The hotel overlooks a tree-lined boulevard.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/boulevard

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ˈbuːˌləˌvɑːd/

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

INBRIEF

NRI deposits lift rupee to a two-month high of ₹94.6

The Indian rupee appreciated to a two-month high of ₹94.60 against the dollar on September 3, a day after the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) mopped up $137 billion through FCNR(B) deposits, external commercial borrowings and overseas foreign currency borrowings. The domestic currency opened at ₹94.30, down 50 paise from the previous close of ₹94.70 against the dollar. The rupee then gradually weakened to settle at the day's closing level.

Aditya Birla Group forays into wires and cables business

Aditya Birla Group announced its entry into the wires and cables business under brand Ultravolt. This marks the group's fourth new business foray in three years which includes paints, jewellery and a B2B e-commerce platform Birla Pivot. With an investment of ₹1,800 crore, Ultravolt will be the second largest player in the wires segment by capacity, the company said. Housed under UltraTech Cement Ltd., the business aims to be one of the top two players within five years.

PayPal says 220 employees hit in latest India restructuring

PayPal said approximately 220 employees in India were affected by workforce reductions on August 31 – representing about 4% of its India employee headcount – disputing reports of substantially higher job cuts in the country. The digital payments company said the reduction was part of its previously announced multi-year transformation programme aimed at simplifying global operations, strengthening execution, and positioning the company for long-term growth.

SC disposes of SEBI appeals against NSE in two cases

Apex court takes note of nearly ₹1,500 cr. settlement between the regulator and the exchange in co-location and dark fibre cases; resolution comes ahead of the exchange's stock market debut

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday disposed of a batch of appeals filed by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) against the National Stock Exchange (NSE) in the co-location and dark fibre cases, following a settlement of nearly ₹1,500 crore between the market regulator and the exchange.

A Bench of Justices J.B. Pardiwala and K. Vinod Chandran was hearing SEBI's appeals against orders of the Securities Appellate Tribunal (SAT) setting aside disgorgement directions issued by the regulator against the NSE in the two cases. The Bench disposed of the appeals after taking note of the settlement between the parties.

The cases stem from allegations that certain brokers were given preferential access to NSE's trading systems via co-location. REUTERS

In July, SEBI had accepted two settlement applications filed by the NSE for an aggregate amount of about ₹1,492 crore. Of this, about ₹1,224 crore pertained to the co-location case, while ₹268 crore related to the dark fibre case, also known as the leased-line connectivity case.

The cases stem from allegations that certain brokers were given preferential access to the NSE's trading systems through its co-location facility, potentially allowing them to receive market data ahead of others. The allegations of unfair access first surfaced following a whistle-blower complaint in January 2015.

The settlement comes as the country's largest stock exchange prepares for its stock-market debut, nearly a decade after it first sought to list its shares, with its plans having faced prolonged regulatory hurdles.

The proposed initial public offering (IPO) is expected to raise around ₹30,000 crore, which would make it one of the largest IPOs in India's capital market history.

Parliamentary panel flags 'punitive' tax regime, seeks data on new I-T Act's impact

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

Members of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance, cutting across party lines, criticised the present Income Tax regime for relying excessively on what they described as "punitive action" and granting tax officials significant scope for overreach, at a meeting on Thursday .

The panel, headed by BJP MP Bhartruhari Mahtab, met to discuss "Direct Tax Reforms: Simplification, Rationalisation and Ease of Compliance" with representatives of the Department of Revenue in the Finance Ministry and the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT).

The committee also flagged compliance-related glitches in the implementation of the Income Tax Act, 2026, and sought additional information from the CBDT on its impact, including changes in tax revenue collections, the number of assessees, and the volume of pending litigation.

GDP estimates

According to sources, at least one member raised the controversy surrounding the latest Gross Domestic Product (GDP) estimates, questioning the reliability of official growth figures in the context of former Union Finance Secretary Subhash Garg's claim that India's economy expanded by only 2.6% in the June quarter rather than the officially reported 7.8%. "The issue was not on the agenda today, so it was not discussed further," a committee member said.

The committee flagged compliance-related glitches in implementation of the Act.

Two themes dominated the discussions.

First, members expressed concern over the growing contribution of individual income taxpayers relative to corporate tax collections. Some pointed out that in several economies comparable to India, corporate tax collections significantly exceed those from individual taxpayers.

Second, members criticised what they viewed as the Income Tax Department's heavy-handed approach to enforcement.

"Why should all income taxpayers be treated as criminals? There is a spate of notices being issued, leaving taxpayers scrambling to prove that they have complied with all rules, while the rules themselves keep changing, sometimes even retrospectively," a ruling party member said.

GJC calls for balancing economic patriotism with cultural heritage

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

While welcoming Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call for prioritising locally-made products and reducing gold imports, the All India Gem & Jewellery Domestic Council (GJC) has said that India must balance "economic patriotism" and cultural traditions when it comes to gold jewellery. The council argued that the sector contributes "nearly 7-8%" to the economy and supports "millions of livelihoods".

The GJC was reacting to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent and repeated appeal to all Indians to stop foreign trips and weddings, to buy local, and to only buy gold if necessary.

SEBI to make changes in CAS derivative price determination in a week

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) is set to introduce changes to the methodology used to determine settlement prices for derivative contracts following the implementation of the newly introduced Closing Auction Session (CAS).

SEBI is expected to announce the changes in about a week.

The markets regulator said in a statement that it had engaged with market participants and other stakeholders after receiving feedback and suggestions on the CAS through multiple channels, including social media and other media platforms.

FLY91 inks firm order for 40 ATR aircraft

Flying higher: Fly91 will will lease another six to eight aircraft before the new aircraft begin arriving.

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Regional airline FLY91 signed a firm order for 40 70-seater ATR 72-600 aircraft, marking the largest ATR order globally by any regional airline. The deal is valued at about $1 billion though clients negotiate discounts on listed price.

The airline will lease another six to eight aircraft before the new aircraft begin arriving. For the Franco-Italian aircraft maker, a big Indian order comes nine years after IndiGo ordered 50 ATRs in 2017.

The airline, unveiled in 2024, operates 280 weekly flights to 12 destinations. It connects Pune, Sindhudurg, Solapur and Jalgaon in Maharashtra; Agatti in Lakshadweep Islands; Hubballi in Karnataka; Tirupati, Vijayawada and Rajahmundry in AP; along with Bengaluru, Goa, Kochi and Hyderabad.

Filatex's new unit to recycle polyester textiles

The Hindu Bureau
COIMBATORE

Filatex India is investing about ₹300 crore to set up a polyester textile recycling plant in Gujarat with an annual capacity of 27,000 tonne, CMD Madhu Sudhan Bhageria said.

The plant is expected to be commissioned next month and would recycle polyester textile waste into polyester chips. The company's in-house technology is capable of recovering around 80-85% of the polyester content from textile waste, the firm said.

Filatex India began research and development in polyester textile recycling in 2019 and has since secured a patent for its proprietary recycling technology.

Time warp

Good old rides: Bikers and visitors enjoy Guzzi motorcycles displayed at the museum during Guzzi inaugurating its completely redeveloped historic factory and new museum as the motorcycle maker celebrates its 105th anniversary, in Mandello del Lario, Italy. AP

Ashok Leyland MD is SIAM president

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The executive committee of the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM), the apex body representing the country's leading automobile manufacturers, on Thursday elected Ashok Leyland Ltd. managing director & CEO Shenu Agarwal as its President for 2026-27.

Mr. Agarwal, who previously served as the VP of SIAM, succeeds Shailesh Chandra, immediate past president, SIAM, and MD & CEO, Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles Ltd.

The members of SIAM also elected K. N. Radhakrishnan, director & CEO, TVS Motor Company, as the vice-president of SIAM for 2026-27.

No excuses left for textiles sector, says Goyal on tariffs

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said India's textile industry can no longer blame external factors for its weak export performance, noting that most developed markets now impose tariffs on Indian textile imports that are at par with or lower than those levied on key competitors such as Bangladesh and Vietnam.

Speaking at a workshop here, Mr. Goyal explained for years the Indian textiles industry could not compete with Bangladesh and Vietnam because of a combination of the advantage Bangladesh continued to receive as a least-developed country (LDC), and the terms Vietnam has negotiated in various trade deals with developed countries. Many developed countries offer zero duties on imports from LDCs.

Piyush Goyal

Indian trade analysts observed duty structure in the developed world was such that high-tech items were kept at low/no duty and labour-oriented goods at higher duty.

"We were not able to stand in competition to Bangladesh and Vietnam," he said. "Now, that has changed. Our rates will be better or the same if it is zero than those offered to these geographies in almost all developed world. We have no more excuses left except performance. The ball is now entirely in our court."

'FCNR flows set to complicate liquidity management'

Press Trust of India
MUMBAI

Higher-than-expected inflows through the FCNR(B) window will heighten liquidity issues and lead the Reserve Bank to deploy more tools to absorb the excess money, economists said on Thursday.

In comments that come a day after the RBI announced that banks have mopped up $127.23 billion of deposits from the diaspora at the close of the concessional swap facility, domestic rating agency Careedge said the new flows "complicate" the liquidity management for the central bank, especially with the banking system already saddled with excess liquidity at a four-year high.

'New inflows complicate the liquidity management for the central bank'

Reminding that inflows from the separate swap facility for external commercial borrowings (ECBs) and overseas foreign currency borrowings (OFCBs), from which an additional $9 billion has come in, are open till December, economists said the central bank will have to deploy additional tools to absorb surplus liquidity in the banking system.

Liquidity jump

The dollar inflows translated into a sharp increase in domestic liquidity, with the system surplus touching ₹9.71 lakh crore as of September 2, up from ₹6.7 lakh crore at the end of August.

Barclays, in its report, said the liquidity surplus is substantially above the RBI's preferred level of around ₹2.7 lakh crore and expects more liquidity absorption measures in the coming months.

'Little investment in energy innovation'

Lalatendu Mishra
PUNE

Indian Oil Corporation Ltd (IOCL) chairman A. S. Sahney lamented about the minuscule investment going into energy innovation.

"For all our strength as an energy nation, we have to address a very uncomfortable fact that energy innovation in India got very less attention, very less capital than its importance demands," he told a gathering of start-up founders, academia and industry officials at CSIR-National Chemicals Laboratory.

"In the last 5-6 years, barely 2% of India's overall startup funding has come to the energy sector. Of the total about ₹5.5 lakh crore that has gone into the startup ecosystem, only ₹11,000 cr. has gone to the energy sector," he said.

'In the last 5-6 years, barely 2% of India's overall startup funding has come to the energy sector'

"And if we take out areas like solar, wind, the funding comes down to less than ₹1,000 crore of the ₹5.5 lakh crore that have been spent," he added.

(The writer was in Pune at the invitation of IOCL)

Why oil importers are learning to live with longer trade routes

Long trip: The switch to U.S. crude comes at a cost, with the journey time nearly nine days longer. REUTERS

Reuters
LITTLETON, COLORADO

Energy trade routes that optimise distance and costs may no longer be suitable for the fractured and fractious modern world, especially for major importers. Ongoing tensions involving Iran are pushing major oil importers to develop alternative supply routes, which increasingly bypass the supply hubs that previously dominated global energy trade.

The end result is a shift away from the concentrated energy corridors of recent decades to a more dispersed network of supply lines that cost more and take longer, but help reduce exposure to geopolitical shocks and boost energy security.

Farther afield

Japan's evolving cocktail of crude oil purchases underscores the extent of the changes underway among top energy importers. Until the U.S.-Israeli war against Iran triggered a sharp drop in tanker traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, the world's fifth-largest oil buyer sourced over 90% of its crude from Middle Eastern suppliers.

Countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran have historically had supplies that were available in large and reliable volumes and were deliverable to Japan's main coastal refineries via a relatively straightforward 21-day voyage.

Since the conflict disrupted Gulf exports in late February, outbound crude flows from the Middle East have dropped drastically, with total volumes shipped from March through July 40% lower than a year earlier, according to Kpler.

That steep fall in Gulf oil supplies has forced Japan to secure more crude from alternative suppliers, most notably from North America.

Total Japanese crude oil imports from the U.S. from March through June topped 4.5 million metric tonnes, compared with less than 1 million tonnes during the same period in 2025.

That more than 400% year-over-year (YoY) jump in American supplies allowed Japanese importers to offset a 54% fall in shipments from the Middle East and limited the overall decline in Japan's crude supplies over the same period.

However, the switch to U.S. crude comes at a cost, with the journey time nearly nine days longer, driving sharply higher shipping costs and requiring a different delivery schedule for refiners to manage.

South Korea and India – also among the world's five largest oil importers – have revamped their crude origination patterns, dialling up flows from the Americas and Africa as Middle Eastern volumes dwindled.

China, the world's top crude oil buyer, has so far relied heavily on strategic oil reserves to shield itself from the fallout from the Iran conflict.

However, following that lengthy spell of draw downs, Chinese importers are expected to step up crude import interest again and will likely add to the emerging competition for supplies from the Americas and other regions later in 2026.

For crude oil exporters, the additional demand from global consumers is a boon they will happily ride for as long as it lasts.

Total U.S. crude oil exports during the second quarter –when global buyers turned en masse to alternative suppliers as Middle Eastern flows dried up – scaled a record 61.6 million metric tonnes, according to Kpler. That total was 43% higher YoY and was more than 10 million tonnes above any previous quarterly export tally.

But the U.S. was not alone in registering record oil flows this year. Brazil, Argentina, Guyana and Russia also posted record shipments so far in 2026, underscoring the widespread allure of filling the gap left by the Middle East.

Some of those nations are new suppliers to several major oil importers, or have never before consistently delivered such notable volumes to such a broad range of buyers.

For instance, Brazilian exporters have shipped three times more crude oil to India during the first half of 2026 than during the same period in 2025, locking in record volumes to Indian refiners. And some of the journey times involved are much longer than buyers are used to.

The trip from major Middle East oil terminals such as Fujairah and Ras Tanura to India's west coast is usually 3 to 5 days, while the journey from Brazil's Acu crude oil terminal to the same Indian ports takes roughly 25 days.

But from an importer's perspective, having a variety of vendors offers a new source of supply-chain resilience that may outweigh the higher shipping costs.

New Delhi to quantify ocean wealth, climate risks in new accounting push

By assigning a monetary value to marine fish stocks (found in both coastal and inland within exclusive economic zones or EEZs), India is moving towards measuring the wealth contained in oceans; fishing is a cornerstone of India's blue economy, supporting nearly 30 million livelihoods

NEWS ANALYSIS

Santosh V. Perumal

India's sustainable blue economy is all set to get a fillip with the MoSPI (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation) now beginning an unusual and potentially important statistical experiment of valuing the country's marine fish resources.

The MoSPI's concept paper 'Methodological Approach for Compilation of Experimental Monetary Asset Accounts of Marine Fish Resources' – on the basis of the U.N. System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA), a global framework of linking environment with economic accounts – is a significant shift in measuring the India's natural resources, the second largest fish-producing country in the world, which accounts for 8% of the global production.

By assigning a monetary value to marine fish stocks (found in both coastal and inland within exclusive economic zones or EEZs), India is moving towards measuring the wealth contained in oceans. The fishing industry is a cornerstone of India's blue economy, supporting nearly 30 million livelihoods, while contributing significantly to exports.

The logic is straightforward. Fish in the sea, a natural capital asset; caught during the year represent a flow of economic benefits from that asset.

Marine fish form a major component of India's capture fisheries.

Total fish production in FY25 was reported to be 19.77 million metric tonnes (MMT), of which 77% were from inland and 23% were from marine sector. The sector's contribution was an estimated ₹1.76 lakh crore, or 1.09% to the national gross value added in 2023-24. India's total marine fish production was 46.15 lakh tonnes in 2024-25, compared to 34.43 lakh tonnes in the 2013-14, reflecting the expansion of marine fisheries over time.

Sea change: India's blue economy now stands at a pivotal juncture. PTI

More than 350 varieties of marine products – including frozen fish, squid, cuttlefish, and dried items – have found their way to 130 international markets. In FY25, export of marine products was 1.7 MMT, valued at ₹62,408.45 crores, growing annually by 3.11% (in volume).

These figures however do not show whether commercially important marine fish stocks can sustain similar production in the future.

Yet aggregate production figures alone cannot reveal the changing value of individual species, regional fish stocks, or the long-term impact of fishing pressure and environmental change.

> Fish in the sea, a natural capital asset; caught during the year represent a flow of economic benefits from that asset

India joins elite few

Although there are constraints of measuring a living, mobile and constantly changing asset; if the move becomes successful, India would join a very small group of countries, which includes Australia, Netherlands, Norway, Canada, U.K., France, U.S. and New Zealand, in attempting to integrate blue natural capital into national accounts.

India's attempt comes at a time when the global experience is still at an experimental and pilot stage. Moreover, the SEEA-Fisheries' conceptual guidance appears outdated.

The Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development notes that for aquatic resources, "only a handful of countries" are at present compiling monetary asset accounts, unlike forests or minerals where methodologies are more mature.

India – which has been compiling environmental accounts since 2018 through its EnviStats India programme, covering assets such as land, water, forests, minerals and pollination – still does not have a regular, comprehensive blue economy GDP series comparable with agriculture or manufacturing. Nevertheless, the available numbers suggest blue economy to be around 4% of GDP.

Highlighting the growing importance of the sector, the latest Union Budget earmarked the highest-ever total annual support of ₹2,761.8 crore, as the PMMSY (Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana) continues to be the central pillar of the sectoral development with ₹2,500 crore in 2026-27.

India's vast coastline (of about 11,100 km), an EEZ of over 2 million sq km, and rich marine biodiversity offer immense potential to advance a $100-billion blue economy by 2030.

Blue Economy has multiple competing users and fisheries may compete with ports, tourism, offshore energy and coastal development for marine space. Integrated accounts can provide a common economic and environmental database for making such trade-offs more transparent.

New Delhi's statistically ambitious experiment could estimate the economic cost of climate-induced changes in marine resources as well as guide whether India should invest in additional fishing capacity, stock restoration or deep-sea fisheries.

NITI Aayog estimates India's EEZ resource potential at around 7.16 MMT, indicating opportunities for expansion but also warns that some deep-sea resources are vulnerable to overexploitation.

The accounting process

The first step is to define the accounting units, essentially, commercially, economically or ecologically important marine fish species to be covered. For every selected resource, there is a need to know whether it is regenerating, stable or being depleted (although India scans regular biomass estimates for commercially important stock). MoSPI therefore proposes using species-wise landing data for the preceding ten years as an initial proxy. Current landings would be compared with historical peaks to classify each stock.

The third stage is estimating the "asset life" of each resource; which acts as a bridge between fisheries science and economics; the next step involves core economic concept of calculating the resource rent – the income attributable to the natural resource after deducting labour, operating expenses, depreciation and a normal return on fishing vessels and other capital.

The expected future resource rents would then be projected over the stock's estimated asset life and discounted at a proposed 2% real rate to represent the estimated present value of the future economic benefits generated by that fish stock.

A marine fish asset account – statistical record incorporating physical condition and estimated economic value – is then finally arrived at. Unlike annual catch data, it seeks to show whether the resource that supports future fishing income is being maintained, depleted or regenerated.

However, there is a caveat that the experimental estimate is based primarily on proxy approaches necessitated by existing data limitations within the marine fisheries sector.

Core message

India's blue economy now stands at a pivotal juncture, balancing immense opportunities for growth with the responsibility to ensure sustainable and responsible use of marine resources, even as it must resist the temptation to attach monetary value to every ocean resource merely for statistical spectacle.

The real test is whether the valuation improves policy on better catch limits, sustainable harvesting, stronger coastal livelihoods and a clearer estimate of changes in national wealth.

An unusual beneficiary of Iran conflict, remote shale gas basin in Australia answers Hormuz security fears

Reuters

Hundreds of kilometres from anything resembling civilisation, a remote shale natural gas field in northern Australia may seem like an unusual beneficiary of the Iran conflict.

But energy security is once again paramount as Asia grapples with the fallout from the war, and a new scramble for long-life resources is taking shape.

Beetaloo basin

The Beetaloo basin lies about 600 kilometres (373 miles) from the Northern Territory capital of Darwin, a remote city closer to the Indonesian capital Jakarta (2,740 km) than it is to Australia's major city of Sydney, some 3,940 km away.

Beetaloo marked a milestone in its protracted development this week with the first natural gas flowing from an appraisal well to a new pipeline connected to an existing pipeline going to Darwin.

The initial flow is a tiny 40 terajoules (37 million cubic feet) per day, and will be fed into the Northern Territory's grid for electricity, and industrial and household use.

But while the startup flows are modest, the potential is vast with the companies operating in the Beetaloo reporting that recoverable natural gas reserves are at least 200 trillion cubic feet (tcf), an endowment comparable to the Marcellus shale in the U.S.

The Northern Territory Minister of Mining and Energy Gerard Maley, Tamboran Resources CEO Todd Abbott, Australia's Minister for Resources Madeleine King and Northern Territory Chief Minister Lia Finocchiaro turn on gas supply to Darwin from the Beetaloo Basin. REUTERS

Just as shale has revolutionised the natural gas market in the U.S. and provided the feedstock to make it the world's biggest exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG), there are hopes the Beetaloo can do the same for Australia.

Australia is the world's third-largest exporter of LNG, with shipments of 77 million metric tonnes in 2025, according to data compiled by commodity analysts Kpler.

Offshore gas fields in northern and north-western Australia feed plants in Darwin and Western Australia state, while three LNG facilities in eastern Queensland state rely on onshore coal-seam gas supplies as feedstock.

Beetaloo would be the first major shale play, and the main challenge is building the infrastructure needed to transport the gas from the field to either Darwin or Queensland.

Much of the discussion at this week's South East Asia Australia Offshore and Onshore Conference (SEAAOC) was about how best to get the Beetaloo gas to market.

The initial development of the basin is being done by relatively smaller operators Tamboran Resources and its partner, a subsidiary of Texas-based Formentera Partners, as well as Beetaloo Energy.

However, the big players are involved as well, with Japan's Inpex farming into Tamboran's fields for an initial $208 million and Australia's Santos starting its own drilling programme in the Beetaloo.

Inpex operates the 9.3 million tonnes a year Ichthys LNG facility in Darwin, while Santos operates the 3.7 million tonnes Darwin LNG plant, as well as the 7.8 million tonnes Gladstone LNG facility in Queensland.

Santos has approval to build a second LNG train at its Darwin plant and could use Beetaloo gas as feedstock for this, or if a pipeline is built to Queensland, it could be used to backfill the Gladstone facility.

The key for the rapid development of the Beetaloo is getting the various federal, state and territory governments to work with both the gas and pipeline companies to work out the cheapest and fastest way to build common-user infrastructure.

The view among delegates at SEAAOC was that the crisis in the Middle East was the ideal call to arms for Australia to boost its LNG profile.

Advantage Australia

Australia has the geographic advantage of being close to the major LNG buyers in Asia, such as China and Japan, as well as not being vulnerable to maritime chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz.

Qatar, which will lose its status as the world's second-biggest LNG exporter back to Australia this year, has seen its shipments collapse amid the Iran conflict, which started on February 28 when the U.S. and Israel launched an aerial campaign against Iran.

LNG struggle

While much of the focus has been on the loss of crude oil volumes after Iran tried to close the Strait of Hormuz, the conflict has also seen Qatar struggle to ship LNG, with Kpler data showing it sent no cargoes through the narrow waterway in August and only one in July.

The loss of about 6 million tonnes a month of Qatari LNG has tightened the market for the super-chilled fuel, with commodity price reporting agency Argus reporting the spot price reached $25.80 per million British thermal units on Wednesday, the highest in nearly four years and up nearly 150% from the $10.40in the week prior to the start of the Iran war. While spot prices are likely to eventually calm if a peace deal can be reached in the Middle East, the long-term impact of the current conflict will be a re-thinking of energy security inAsia.

That's where the Beetaloo comes in. With natural gas demand in Asia expected to rise by around 30% in the next 10 years, the opportunity for a new source of secure LNG becomes compelling.

PESHAWAR

15 militants trying to infiltrate were killed in KPK province, says Pak.

AFP

At least 15 militants have been killed and their attempt to infiltrate the border in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province foiled by security forces, the military's media wing said on Thursday. The militants were trying to infiltrate the Pakistan-Afghanistan border opposite North Waziristan district, the ISPR said. PTI

DUBAI

13 Yemeni forces killed in clashes with Houthis, says military source

REUTERS

Thirteen Yemeni government forces were killed in clashes with Houthi fighters on Thursday, a military source said, saying the group was trying to advance towards areas bordering the strategic Bab al-Mandab strait. The source said the Houthis were trying to sever the route connecting Taiz and the port city of Mokha. AFP

RAMALLAH

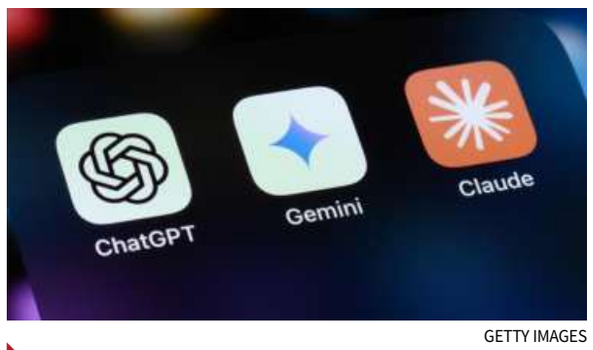
Palestinians say Israeli Army killed two teenagers in the West Bank

AFP

The Israeli Army killed two teenagers in the occupied West Bank on Wednesday night, the Palestinian Health Ministry said, while the Army said it opened fire during a "violent riot". The Palestinian Red Crescent reported that the two critically wounded teenagers were pronounced dead at hospitals in Ramallah. AFP

NEW DELHI

ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude face widespread outages; AWS also hit



GETTY IMAGES

Major artificial intelligence platforms, including OpenAI's ChatGPT, Google Gemini, and Anthropic's Claude, experienced service disruptions on Thursday, affecting thousands of users globally, according to the outage tracking website Downdetector. The disruption appeared to impact Grok and Amazon Web Services. PTI

Iran attacks U.S. bases in West Asia despite Trump's threats of strikes

Tehran's military claims it hit Kuwait's Ahmed al-Jaber Air Base; Kuwait says its forces intercepted a missile and drone strike coming from Iran, and condemned the attack as a 'threat' to the country's 'security and a grave breach of international law'

Agence France-Presse
TEHRAN

Iran attacked U.S. military bases in Kuwait on Thursday, despite President Donald Trump threatening further strikes in a renewed flare-up six months into the war.

Mr. Trump said his military was prepared to attack Iran "any time we want" after extensive U.S. bombardment of sites across the country left at least 19 Iranians dead between Tuesday and Wednesday.

Tehran has once again retaliated with strikes across West Asia this week, saying it targeted U.S. bases and forces in the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Jordan and Iraq's Kurdistan region.

Rubble lies around damaged houses following a reported attack near a wedding gathering in Iran on Wednesday. REUTERS

Iran's pummelling of U.S. military targets across the region came after a U.S. attack that hit a wedding in the country's south, prompting fury from Tehran. The Iranian Red Crescent said shrapnel from the missile attack in the coastal town of Kuhestak killed four persons, including a child, and wounded more than 50.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards chief Ahmad Vahidi vowed on Thursday to avenge the four killed. "The pure blood of these oppressed martyrs... will not go unanswered and will definitely be avenged".

U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) spokesperson Tim Hawkins said "the U.S. military never targets civilians, unlike the IRGC", referring to Iran's Revolutionary Guards.

Kuwait's army on Thursday said it was intercepting a missile and drone attack from Iran, with the Iranian army saying it hit "the Ahmad al-Jaber Air Base in Kuwait with missiles and drones".

Iran's army also said it struck Al Minhad Air Base in the United Arab Emirates, but the Gulf country reported no such attack.

Kuwait called the attacks "a direct threat to its security and stability, and a grave breach of the rules of international law".

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday voiced confidence that Iran's Islamic republic could soon fall, saying it was weaker than ever as the United States resumed attacks.

'Supersized' El Nino to be strongest ever recorded: UN

Reuters
GENEVA

The El Nino weather phenomenon is set to intensify further into 2027 and could be the strongest ever, raising risks of extreme weather into next year, the World Meteorological Organisation said on Thursday.

The UN weather agency said its forecasts showed a near 100% likelihood that El Nino would persist through February 2027, fuelled by exceptionally warm Pacific Ocean temperatures. This is the first time it has expressed such a degree of certainty, the WMO said.

"If this trajectory continues, it may be stronger than anything since our monitoring began. So literally off the charts," WMO Secretary-General Celeste Saulo told a Geneva press conference.

World Meteorological Organisation Secretary-General Celeste Saulo, left, attend a press conference in Geneva on Thursday. AFP

El Nino is a periodic warming of sea surface temperatures in the eastern Pacific caused by weakening trade winds. It occurs every two to seven years and tends to last up to 12 months, causing intense rains and droughts across Latin America.

A very strong El Nino can significantly shift rainfall and temperature patterns worldwide, and fuel extreme weather, such as droughts and typhoons.

The WMO said it was stepping up preparedness and early warning efforts in preparation to allow states to take early action.

Foreign arms, drones fuel Sudan war: UN fact-finding mission

Reuters
GENEVA

Foreign weapons, military technology, fighters and logistical networks are helping sustain Sudan's conflict and expanding the warring parties' ability to strike distant civilian areas with drones, a UN fact-finding mission said on Thursday.

The mission said investigators found grounds to believe a network involving individuals and entities in the UAE, Chad, Libya and Somalia supplied the RSF with weapons, equipment, logistics, training and foreign personnel.

The UN fact-finding mission said its investigation into external support for Sudan's military was at an early stage but had found evidence that foreign-supplied combat drones and loitering munitions – which can hover over an area before striking a target – had expanded the army's long-range strike capabilities. It said some of those weapons were used in attacks on civilian locations, including Yabus Market in Blue Nile State.

Expanded drone range and increasingly sophisticated capabilities enabled Sudan's military and the RSF to strike far beyond immediate frontlines, and evidence points to both sides carrying out attacks that killed civilians, the report said.

Fading lifeline

Vanishing habitat: A person stands near dead fish in mud as the catchment areas of the Karet Sungai Juana dam dried up due to rising temperatures in Pati, Central Java province of Indonesia on Thursday. REUTERS

U.S. sanctions Cuban ex-President Raul Castro's grandson

Agence France-Presse
WASHINGTON

The United States on Thursday issued sanctions against a grandson of former Cuban leader Raul Castro and five state-linked entities, the latest salvo in Washington's crippling pressure campaign against the communist-led island.

"Among those designated today are a grandson of Raul Castro, Fidel Ernesto Castro Calis, Banco Exterior de Cuba, and four entities exploiting Cuba's natural resources or energy reserves for the benefit of the regime," said U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio in a statement.

U.S. in June issued an earlier spate of sanctions targeting other members of Castro's family

Raul Castro, 95, no longer holds an official position but remains a key power-broker on the island. Washington filed criminal charges targeting him this year.

The United States in June issued an earlier spate of sanctions targeting members of Castro's family, as well as President Miguel Diaz-Canel and his family.

Fidel Ernesto Castro Calis is not known to play a political role in Cuba.

Toll rises to 1,259 in Nepal; risks of new floods increase due to incessant rain

Press Trust of India
KATHMANDU

The death toll due to the devastating flash floods in Nepal rose to 1,259 on Thursday as more bodies were recovered from the affected areas, while risks of fresh floods loomed due to incessant rainfall in the upstream areas of the Bhotekoshi River.

The flash floods, triggered by an ice-rock avalanche near the Nepal-Tibet border on August 26, devastated towns and villages in northern and central Nepal, leaving a trail of destruction.

As the upstream areas of the Bhotekoshi River are continuously receiving rainfall, people residing in the surrounding areas and downstream of the river are urged to remain vigilant, a technician at the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology said.

Rescue team members work to enter the tunnel at the Upper Trishuli 3A Hydropower Station in Rasuwa, Nepal. REUTERS

There is a middle-level risk associated with flash floods in rivers situated in various districts mainly those in the hilly region, she said.

Similarly, rivers situated in mountain regions including Kalikot, Humla, Jumla, Dailekh, Darchula, Baitadi and Kalikot districts are also swelling resulting in some risks associated to flash flood, she added.

The joint rescue teams led by the Nepal Army have continued their search and rescue efforts on the ninth day on Thursday, with the number of missing people estimated at 4,875.

Prime Minister Balendra Shah on Wednesday said the disaster's link to climate change must be strongly raised with the international community.

Addressing the House of Representatives, PM Shah said the scale and nature of the disaster raised serious questions about the growing risks faced by people living in Himalayan region due to climate change.

U.S. House passes legislation blocking aid to universities that boycott Israel

Reuters
WASHINGTON

The U.S. House of Representatives passed legislation on Thursday to block federal aid for universities that boycott Israel, the latest Republican-backed pro-Israel measure amid growing Democratic criticism of the Israeli government over the war in Gaza.

The Republican-majority chamber voted 237-169 in favour of the Protect Economic and Academic Freedom Act, which would have to pass the Senate in order to become law.

The war in Gaza has devastated much of the Palestinian enclave since Hamas-led fighters killed 1,200 people during an attack on October 7, 2023, according to Israeli tallies. Israeli attacks since then have killed more than 73,000 Palestinians, according to the Gaza Health Ministry.

An encampment at Harvard University where students protest in support of Palestinians in Cambridge, U.S. FILE PHOTO/REUTERS

The conflict sparked protests and calls for boycotts at many U.S. campuses. In response, Republican President Donald Trump targeted colleges and universities with probes and federal funding suspension threats. The administration and many Republicans in Congress allege that the protesters were anti-Semitic and supported extremism.

Protesters deny this, saying advocacy for Palestinian rights and objections to the devastation in Gaza should not be equated with anti-Semitism or support for extremism.

Thursday's House vote was mostly along party lines, with just two Republicans voting nay and 33 Democrats voting in favour. U.S. Representative Jerrold Nadler, a New York Democrat, said in a statement before the vote that he opposed the global Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement but would vote no because he supported Americans' right to free expression.

During Thursday's rain-soaked heat drill, workers assist a man mimicking a heat-related illness in New Taipei City. AFP

Rain dampens 'extreme heat' drill in Taiwan

Agence France Presse
NEW TAIPEI CITY

Taiwan had planned an "extreme heat drill" for government officials and emergency workers to practise their response to 40 degree Celsius temperatures, but Thursday's exercise was almost washed out by heavy rain.

As downpours drenched much of the island, officials in New Taipei City pushed ahead with the first drill of its kind in Taiwan.

Around 300 people from the labour, fire, social welfare and medical sectors took part in various scenarios that were based on temperatures reaching 40 degree Celsius for three consecutive days.

But instead of hats and sunscreen, rain coats and umbrellas were handed out to those involved in the simulations, and portable gazebos set up to protect against the wet weather. The heavy rain was a "test of our ability to respond and adapt", said Chang Ken-mu, deputy director-general of the Environment Ministry's Climate Change Administration. "In the future... we could have extreme heat in the morning and intense rainfall in the afternoon, turning a heat drill into a flood drill. This is likely to happen in Taiwan," he said.

The large-scale event involving 30 central government agencies, 16 bureaus and departments of New Taipei City, three companies and one medical facility was originally scheduled to be held last week but was postponed due to a typhoon.

"We knew it was going to rain today. The point is... under any conditions, we have to be able to operate," said Mr. Chang. Temperatures in New Taipei City often reached the high 30s during recent summer months, but on Thursday the mercury topped out at 29 degree Celsius, according to the Central Weather Administration (CWA).

Italy weighs the results as Meloni's government sets longevity record

After about four years in office, the Premier's conservative administration on Thursday became the country's longest-serving uninterrupted govt. since the Second World War; supporters point to job creation, fiscal discipline and stability, even as her critics say many of Italy's persistent problems remain

NEWS ANALYSIS

Associated Press
ROME

In a country where governments are famously short-lived, the perceived success of Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni has often been attributed to her survival skills rather than her accomplishments.

On Thursday, after 1,413 days – nearly four years – Ms. Meloni's conservative administration became Italy's longest-serving uninterrupted government since the Second World War, surpassing the record set by the late Silvio Berlusconi between 2001 and 2005.

None of Italy's 68 governments in the country's 80 years as a republic has yet to complete a five-year term without interruption. Mr. Berlusconi came closest, but a government crisis forced him to resign briefly in 2005 before forming a new Cabinet.

Ms. Meloni and her party will celebrate their feat on Friday with a large pre-election rally in the southern city of Bari.

Ms. Meloni, straightforward and pragmatic, has managed to stave off the crises and defections that have toppled past governments. The results – or lack of results – from this uncharacteristic period of stability may ultimately define Ms. Meloni's legacy and her odds of winning another term.

"If you have five years in office and not much to show when you go back to voters, it can weigh against you," said Nathalie Tocci, an international relations expert and professor at Johns Hopkins University.

When Ms. Meloni took office in October 2022, she was Italy's first female Prime Minister. Her government was also the first led by a party with neo-fascist roots, and European allies and financial markets viewed her with unease.

But Ms. Meloni has largely governed pragmatically. She maintained steadfast support for Ukraine following Russia's full-scale invasion, worked within European institutions and embraced fiscal discipline.

Some see Giorgia Meloni's tenure as proof that conservatives can govern responsibly while upholding democratic institutions. AP

Foreign policy assets

Her relationship with U.S. President Donald Trump became one of her most notable foreign policy assets – at least initially.

While political instability has reshaped governments elsewhere in Europe – including the United Kingdom and France – Ms. Meloni has kept the same coalition in place since taking office, a rarity in modern Italian politics and a central pillar of her re-election bid.

"Meloni has reaped a part of what she sowed, because I know few people so determined, so hardworking, so precise, so meticulous, who have sacrificed both their human and private spheres in order to serve the institutions," Defence Minister Guido Crosetto told *AP* in an interview on Wednesday. "For this she is now reaping exactly what she deserves in terms of international credibility," he said, speaking in a room in the Ministry filled with photos of his predecessors. "She is not reaping the same on the Italian level."

Heading toward the next election, due by the end of 2027, there is no longer any debate that Ms. Meloni can govern. The question is whether voters believe her government delivered enough to deserve another term.

Supporters point to tighter public finances, the rollback of costly measures, more than 1 million additional jobs, unemployment below 6% and youth unemployment at new lows. They also cite a sharp decline in the arrival of migrants.

Ms. Meloni says those gains resulted from policies supporting businesses and job creators. "The government's strategy has focused on supporting those who create wealth and jobs," Ms. Meloni said at a recent labour event. "We have reached a record high in employment."

But, her critics counter that many of Italy's persistent problems remain. Weak productivity, demographic decline and long-standing inefficiencies in healthcare, education and public administration remain largely unaddressed.

"The Meloni government has been certainly stable and long-running, but it hasn't achieved much in terms of structural reforms," political analyst and pollster Lorenzo Pregliasco said. Opposition leaders say Ms. Meloni's government has yet to find concrete ways to stimulate long-term economic growth beyond just controlling public debt and state deficits. Former Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, leader of the anti-establishment Five Star Movement and a possible rival at the polls, pointed to the higher cost of living.

The balancing act

Ms. Meloni's transformation from nationalist outsider to establishment figure has reassured investors and European leaders.

"Italy has somewhat lost its role as Europe's black sheep," said Stefano Manzocchi, a professor at Rome's LUISS University.

Her knack for the balancing act was highlighted during recent tensions with Mr. Trump. After Mr. Trump claimed she had "begged" him for a photo at a Group of Seven summit in France, Ms. Meloni shot back: "Italy doesn't beg." It won her points with Italians who saw it as evidence that she could maintain ties with Washington while publicly defending Italy and Europe.

"I like Meloni, I like her character because she is authoritative and doesn't let anyone walk on her," said Mr. David Del Sarto, a 52-year-old taxi driver in Rome. Ms. Tocci, the Johns Hopkins professor, noted that by pairing nationalist positions on migration and identity with tactical ability, Ms. Meloni helped accelerate the mainstreaming of Europe's hard right. Once viewed with suspicion by the political establishment, nationalist parties have gained influence within governments and European institutions.

Ms. Meloni's supporters see her evolution as proof that nationalist conservatives can govern responsibly while remaining committed to democratic institutions and Western alliances. But Ms. Meloni's willingness to become more moderate has also been viewed as a weakness by some – and it has opened room for more conservative challengers.

Retired Army General Roberto Vannacci – known for hard-line positions on immigration and national identity – has emerged as a prominent voice on Italy's far right, threatening Ms. Meloni by launching his own political party. He argues that Ms. Meloni has abandoned many of the combative promises that energised her political base, choosing instead to project an institution-friendly image to European and U.S. allies.

He may succeed in siphoning off conservative voters and lawmakers who feel Ms. Meloni moderated too much in her pursuit of stability.

Practice makes perfect

Dress rehearsal: Scientists test spacesuits at the new LUNA lunar simulation facility near the European Space Agency's European Astronaut Centre in Cologne, western Germany, on Thursday. AFP

Clancy trial hangs in balance as jury remains deadlocked over judgment

Associated Press
PLYMOUTH

The deadlocked jury in the Lindsay Clancy trial was expected to keep trying to reach a verdict Thursday and avoid a mistrial after telling the judge twice that they can't agree whether the Massachusetts mother is criminally responsible for killing her three children.

Clancy, a 36-year-old former labour and delivery nurse, doesn't deny strangling her children in the basement of their home in 2023. Her attorney argues that postpartum psychosis led to her actions, while prosecutors say she knew what she was doing when she killed Cora, Dawson and Callan Clancy, ages 5, 3 and 8 months.

Difficult questions: Lindsay Clancy's trial over her children's murders has sparked debate over maternal mental health. REUTERS

Clancy's live-streamed trial has generated intense interest, with reporters and spectators packing the courtroom. The case has also sparked deep public divisions over her culpability and the issues around maternal mental health after childbirth.

Clancy stared at the jury with no expression on Wednesday as Judge William Sullivan explained to the courtroom that jurors were at an impasse – a sign there's a growing chance of a hung jury and the trial ending without a resolution.

If the jury ultimately can't agree on a verdict, the judge could declare a mistrial. Prosecutors would then have to decide whether to put Clancy on trial again, drop the charges or try to negotiate a plea deal with her lawyer.

If the jury decides Clancy was criminally responsible for her actions, it could convict her of either murder or manslaughter. If she is acquitted, a judge could still order her confined to a mental health facility if an evaluation determines that she poses a danger to the public.

Medical experts hired by the prosecution and the defense reached sharply different conclusions about her psychiatric state when she killed the children.

Iceland sticks to U.S. security umbrella despite Trump's Greenland threats

Agence France-Presse
REYKJAVIK

Iceland has regained strategic geopolitical importance as tensions rise in the Arctic, but with no military it still relies on Washington for its security – despite the unpredictability of U.S. President Donald Trump.

By rejecting a resumption of its suspended European Union membership talks in a referendum last weekend, Icelanders voted in favour of maintaining the status quo.

This involves combining European economic integration – it already has access to the single market through the European Economic Area – with Atlanticism in defence matters.

Iceland has never had a military since gaining independence in 1944. Instead, it has depended on NATO, of which it is a founding member, as well as a 1951 bilateral defence agreement with the U.S.

Mr. Trump's repeated threats to take over control of Greenland, a Danish autonomous territory located fewer than 300 kilometres from Iceland, and his trade showdown with Canada have rattled Iceland, although it remains steadfast in maintaining its close ties to the U.S. "Of course, the political rhetoric is concerning. But it's important also to try to strengthen the relationship," Iceland's Chief of Defence Jonas Allansson told *AFP*.

After the end of the Cold War, the U.S. closed its Keflavik base in 2006, about 30 kilometres as the crow flies from Reykjavik. It gradually returned from the mid-2010s onward, amid renewed tensions with Moscow following the annexation of Crimea.

The U.S. Navy regularly deploys maritime patrol aircraft over Iceland, while NATO members police its skies and the Alliance ramps up military exercises.

The North Atlantic island is a key outpost in the so-called GIUK gap, the strategic corridor between Greenland, Iceland and the United Kingdom through which Russia's Northern Fleet submarines must pass to reach the Atlantic via the Norwegian Sea.

"The situation that we have today is quite comparable" to that during the Cold War, Mr. Allansson said. "In some ways there is more uncertainty in the equation now because of the policy of the Russian regime."

Security ties: Iceland has no military of its own and relies on NATO and a 1951 defence pact with the U.S. REUTERS

All the more so as China also shows growing interest in the Arctic, whose resources and sea routes are becoming more accessible as climate change causes the ice pack to melt.

'Atlantic watchtower'

"Today, supposed Russian and Chinese research vessels are conducting joint patrols [in the Arctic] but we all know they're not up here counting puffins," NATO's Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, Alexus Grynkewich, said during the alliance's Northern Viking exercise in Iceland in late August. Presenting itself as a "watchtower" in the North Atlantic, Iceland aims to play the role of "force multiplier" in NATO, investing in cybersecurity and infrastructure to facilitate allies' presence and transit in the region.

Reykjavik plans to devote 1.5% of its gross domestic product (GDP) to these efforts by 2035. But the plans have met with some opposition.

A leading figure in Iceland's longstanding anti-military movement, Stefan Palsson, told *AFP* it was "very irresponsible" of Iceland's government to open the country's doors so widely to the US and NATO. "More military infrastructure in Iceland makes it more likely, rather than less likely, that we will be dragged into conflict that basically has nothing to do with us," he said.

"It is completely clear in my mind that the U.S. military presence in Iceland has never been about the interest of Icelanders or our defence but it has always been about U.S. military interests," he added.

He fears that in a worst case scenario – which he himself judged "very unlikely" – Iceland could end up serving as a logistical support base if Washington were to resort to force to seize Greenland.

Mikaa Blugeon-Mered, a geopolitics researcher at the University of Quebec, noted that the mutual assistance clause provided for in EU treaties ultimately carried too little weight with Icelanders, compared to the guarantees offered by a superpower like the U.S.

"Joining the European Union today would not allow Iceland to simply swap its American umbrella for a European umbrella," he told *AFP*.

"Paradoxically, Donald Trump's threats have reinvigorated the European debate in Iceland but they have not necessarily convinced Icelanders that the European Union would offer them a better military guarantee than the set-up they already have."

MAXIMUM IMPACT

Smriti overtakes Harmanpreet to become India's highest six-hitter

PTI

Smriti Mandhana smashed seven maximums in the Asia Cup match against Hong Kong in Dubai to become India's highest six-hitter in T20Is with 95 from 173 matches (167 innings). She went past captain Harmanpreet Kaur's record of 89 (204 matches, 183 innings). The duo is followed by Shafali Verma (87 in 113 matches).

EYEING AN ENCORE

Laxman appointed India coach for the upcoming Asian Games

EMMANUAL YOGINI

V.V.S. Laxman will be the coach of the Indian men's team at the Asian Games to be held in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan, later this month. Laxman will be assisted by Sunil Joshi, Hrishikesh Kanitkar and Subhadeep Ghosh. Laxman had guided the team to the gold medal at the 2023 Asian Games in Hangzhou.

HANDLING WITH CARE

'The plan is to ensure the players get adequate rest in the future'

EMMANUAL YOGINI

BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia said that the Board's FTP (Future Tours Programme) officials had been instructed to ensure the matches are scheduled in such a way to ensure adequate rest for the players. "We are hoping for acclimatisation and friendly matches before any major series in SENA countries," said Saikia.

BIG BOOST

Rahul, Siraj and Padikkal added to South Zone squad for final

ANI

India Test players K.L. Rahul, Mohammed Siraj and Devdutt Padikkal have been added to the South Zone squad for the Duleep Trophy final against East Zone. Left-arm pacer C.V. Milind has been included as a cover for Karnataka pacer Vidwath Kaverappa. The title decider will be played from September 6 to 10 in Chennai.

The powers that be: BCCI secretary Saikia and president Manhas arrive for the meeting. EMMANUAL YOGINI

Agarkar's absence raises eyebrows

BCCI MEETING

Amol Karhadkar
MUMBAI

Ajit Agarkar's absence from the BCCI performance review meeting on Thursday has intensified speculation over his future as chief selector beyond this month.

Agarkar, who has chaired the National selection committee since July 2023, was the only key stakeholder missing from the high-profile meet.

BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia sought to downplay his absence, insisting that Agarkar was unavailable because of "personal commitments" and that the meeting had been organised "at short notice".

Yet, with Agarkar's existing contract set to expire, his non-attendance has fuelled murmurs about a growing distance between him and the Board's hierarchy. *The Hindu* understands that the relationship between the two sides has been strained since July, when Saikia publicly issued a statement backing Rohit Sharma's continuation in India's ODI set-up without consulting Agarkar and his fellow selectors. The move created unease within the selection panel.

Since then, there has reportedly been no formal communication between the BCCI administration and Agarkar regarding a possible extension. Under the Board's regulations, the former India pacer is eligible for a contract renewal, which would allow continuity through the ODI World Cup cycle.

"There was no such discussion in the meeting," Saikia said when asked whether Agarkar would get another year at the helm. "Our focus was on the performance in England and Ireland as well as the Test series in Sri Lanka and what we are going to do in the upcoming series and the World Cup".

Smriti scales the summit as India enters semifinals

The left-hander surpasses Mithali to become the highest run-getter in women's internationals; she also goes past Lanning and Wolvaardt for most hundreds in the big win over Hong Kong

ASIA CUP

Press Trust of India
DUBAI

Smriti Mandhana slayed a host of records in her 64-ball 124 (14x4, 7x6) as India marched into the women's Asia Cup semifinals with a thumping 137-run win over Hong Kong here on Thursday.

India raced to 193 for five following a second T20I hundred from Smriti, who also surpassed Mithali Raj (10,868) to become the leading run-getter in women's internationals. Smriti has 10,880 to her credit.

She also went past Australian great Meg Lanning and current South African skipper Laura Wolvaardt for most hundreds (18) across formats.

The gulf between India and Hong Kong, playing its first Asia Cup since 2012, was clearly visible as the latter struggled to 16 for one in the PowerPlay, effectively putting the stiff target out of its reach. Hong Kong was bowled out for 56 in 16.2 overs.

India pacer Nandani Sharma swung the ball both ways and got rid of opener Mariko Hill with a beauty. None of the batters was able to take on the Indian attack. It was India's second win in as many games and the overwhelming favourite will take on Pakistan in its final group game on Saturday.

Earlier, Smriti made up for a sedate start rather quickly and shared a 74-run stand with her opening partner Shafali Verma (28, 17b, 3x4, 2x6) to set the tone for the innings.

The Hong Kong bowlers made life easier for the batters by offering too many loose deliveries.

Smriti became the first Indian woman to notch up two T20I hundreds when she brought up the milestone in the 17th over.

In the following over, she plundered a couple of sixes down the ground to go past Mithali in the leading run-scorers' chart.

"I didn't know all of this happened," said Smriti when informed about her record-breaking effort.

"It's really hard for me to play the slower bowlers. Having said that, I just love batting, and I'm happy that I could contribute."

The scores:
India 193/5 in 20 overs (Smriti 124, Marina 2/46) bt Hong Kong 56 in 16.2 overs (Nandani 2/6, Shree Charani 2/16, Deepti 3/9, Prema 2/12).
Toss: Hong Kong; **PoM:** Smriti.
India's next match: Sept. 5 vs. Pakistan, Dubai, 8 p.m. IST.

Blazing away: Smriti smashed 14 fours and seven sixes in her 64-ball 124. X@BCCIWOMEN

Silken touch and a stunning range

P.K. Ajith Kumar

On that warm afternoon in Jaipur, Smriti Mandhana was talking about her childhood, about how her mother instilled a sense of competitiveness in her.

"She always used to ask me to persevere, in whatever I did, and not to leave in the middle but to go on till reaching the top," Smriti told *The Hindu*. She also said she wanted to be the best batter in the world. She already was. And that was seven years ago.

Former New Zealand all-rounder Scott Styris even said, around that time, the difference between Smriti and the next batter in women's cricket was the size of Mumbai.

When one asked her if she was aware of that remark by Styris, she said she wasn't, but she was happy, and smiled. The smile that cricket fans across the world have become so used to.

Sweet certainly that smile is, but her batting is sweeter. Not many cricketers, male or female, have made batting such a fine art. She is a treat to watch. Like David Gower or Sourav Ganguly was.

Runs continue to flow from her bat. As do records. There were more of them on Thursday.

During the Asia Cup match against Hong Kong in Dubai, she went past Mithali Raj, the woman who almost single-handedly put Indian women's cricket in the headlines when the sport had no takers, to become the leading scorer of international runs. She overtook Mithali's tally 10,868 runs during her innings of 124.

Smriti is only 30. She should be around for many more years. She will remain driven to be the best.

Numero uno

Smriti climbed to the top of the run charts in women's internationals, overtaking Mithali

Format	M	Inns	Runs	HS	Avg.	100s/50s
SMRITI MANDHANA - 10880 runs						
Tests	9	16	788	149	52.53	2/5
ODIs	120	120	5,411	136	47.88	14/35
T20Is	173	167	4,681	124	30.80	2/35
MITHALI RAJ - 10868 runs						
Tests	12	19	699	214	43.69	1/4
ODIs	232	211	7,805	125*	50.68	7/64
T20Is	89	84	2,364	97*	37.52	0/17
SUZIE BATES - 10740 runs						
Tests	-	-	-	-	-	-
ODIs	184	174	5,982	168	37.86	13/37
T20Is	186	178	4,758	124*	28.84	1/28

BCCI leaves Rohit's future up in the air

Amol Karhadkar
MUMBAI

The Board of Control for Cricket in India's (BCCI) performance review meeting on Thursday did little to clear the air around Rohit Sharma's ODI future, with its public position, on the former captain's availability for selection, akin to a batsman deftly leaving a tricky delivery outside the off stump.

BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia, while addressing the media after the meeting, appeared to brush aside speculation over Rohit's future, pointing to the opener's recent form.

"He is playing superbly in all matches. What more do you want? He scored 138 in the last match (on July 19). Don't give fodder to such rumours," Saikia said.

The remarks came after a meeting of the key stakeholders of India's men's teams to review the performances in England and Ireland and chart a roadmap towards the 2027 ODI World Cup. Saikia, however, stressed that the gathering was not a selection meeting.

"Today we did not have any selection meeting, we had a routine meeting like we have frequent meetings after an interval of two-three months.

"We discussed how our team performed in England and Ireland and a roadmap has been prepared so that we have a very good performance in the 2027 World Cup," he said.

Head coach Gautam Gambhir, Test and ODI captain Shubman Gill, T20I captain Shreyas Iyer, Centre of Excellence head of cricket V.V.S. Laxman, BCCI president Mithun Manhas and Saikia attended the meeting. Chief selector Ajit Agarkar was absent owing to personal commitments.

Yet Rohit's name inevitably hovered over the proceedings.

In July, reports had suggested that the Lord's ODI against England on July 19 could be Rohit's last in India colours. Saikia had then firmly rejected the speculation.

"Rohit is a regular member of the Indian ODI team, and he will continue to represent the country as long as he is in the scheme of things. In other words, the Lord's ODI won't be his last match," Saikia had said on July 17.

The Hindu understands, however, that the selection committee, in consultation with the team management, had informed Rohit during the Chennai ODI against Afghanistan in June that he was not part of its plans beyond the England series. Rohit is understood to have reluctantly accepted the decision.

The selection committee's position, however, was subsequently overruled by the BCCI's administrative behemoths, leading to Saikia's public clarification ahead of the Lord's game.

Thursday's meeting did not revisit that decision in a formal manner. With Agarkar absent and no selection meeting on the agenda, the question of whether Rohit remains part of India's ODI plans was deliberately left unresolved.

Perfect riposte: BCCI secretary Saikia brushed aside speculation over Rohit's future, pointing to the opener's century in the third ODI against England at Lord's. GETTY IMAGES

Alcaraz and Sabalenka advance to the third round with ease

US OPEN

Reuters
NEW YORK

Carlos Alcaraz took another solid step in his comeback from injury while fellow defending champion Aryna Sabalenka also advanced at the US Open on Wednesday, as organisers heaved a sigh of relief after clearing a backlog of rain-delayed matches.

Former winner Daniil Medvedev weathered an avian interruption to soar into the next round, with Wimbledon women's champion Linda Noskova, Naomi Osaka, Iga Swiatek, Jessica Pegula, Emma Navarro, Ben Shelton and Frances Tiafoe also progressing.

Superb shot-making

Alcaraz took centre stage in the evening session on Arthur Ashe Stadium, where the Spanish second seed dropped the opening set before blowing away Jaime Faria 4-6, 6-0, 6-3, 6-2 with superb shot-making to ease any lingering fears about his wrist injury.

Businesslike: Sabalenka taught Iatcenko a few lessons during her second-round victory. GETTY IMAGES

Sabalenka was even more impressive a short while earlier on the main showcourt, as the Belarusian crushed Russian qualifier Polina Iatcenko 6-1, 6-1.

Medvedev, the 2021 champion, had his feathers ruffled in a 6-1, 6-3, 7-5 victory over wildcard Sebastian Gorzny when two birds landed on the net.

Third-ranked Pegula needed just 56 minutes to dismantle 2020 Australian Open winner Sofia Kenin 6-3, 6-1, while Swiatek, the 2022 champion, had it easier with a 6-3, 6-2 victory over Nadia Podoroska. Eighth seed Shelton had a more difficult time, beating Poland's Hubert Hurkacz 6-3, 5-7, 7-6(3), 7-5 as he relied on the energy of the home crowd to power through.

Wimbledon champion Linda Noskova eased to a 6-4, 6-2 win over Lanlana Tararudee in her bid for a second straight Major.

TOP RESULTS

Men: Second round:
7-Medvedev bt Gorzny (USA) 6-1, 6-3, 7-5; 26-Rinderknech (Fra) bt Munar (Esp) 7-6(4), 6-2, 7-5; 22-Vacherot (Mon) bt Majchrzak (Pol) 6-4, 4-6, 7-6(3), 6-2; 11-Tiafoe (USA) bt Sakamoto (Jpn) 6-3, 7-6(2), 7-5; Merida (Esp) bt 23-Rublev 6-7(3), 6-2, 6-4, 6-4; 27-Etcheverry (Arg) bt Fearnley (GBr) 6-3, 6-3, 3-6, 6-3; 8-Shelton (USA) bt Hurkacz (Pol) 6-3, 5-7, 7-6(3), 7-5; 18-Lehecka (Cze) bt Samuel (GBr) 6-4, 6-2, 6-4; Tsitsipas (Gre) bt Harris (RSA) 6-7(1), 6-3, 7-6 (4), 6-4; 15-Bublik (Kaz) bt Mannarino (Fra) 6-3, 6-1, 6-1; 20-Paul (USA) bt Prizmic (Cro) 6-2, 6-3, 5-7, 6-4; 2-Alcaraz (Esp) bt Faria (Por) 4-6, 6-0, 6-3, 6-2.

Women: Second round:
8-Swiatek (Pol) bt Podoroska (Arg) 6-3, 6-2; 23-Mertens (Bel) bt Timofeeva 6-2, 7-6(5);13-Osaka (Jpn) bt Siniakova (Cze) 6-2, 5-7, 6-1; 1-Sabalenka bt Iatcenko 6-1, 6-1; 15-Shnaider bt Pliskova (Cze) 6-1, 7-6(4); 11-Kostyuk (Ukr) bt Stephens (USA) 6-1, 7-5; 18-Alexandrova bt Birrell (Aus) 6-1, 2-6, 6-3; 6-Noskova (Cze) bt Tararudee (Tha) 6-4, 6-2; 19-Paolini (Ita) bt Stefanini (Ita) 6-4, 6-1; 16-Cirstea (Rou) bt Parry (Fra) 6-2, 7-5; 21-Kalinskaya (Rus) bt Wang (Chn) 7-5, 2-6, 6-3; 9-Svitolina (Ukr) bt Joint (Aus) 6-2, 6-7(6), 6-4; 7-Muchova (Cze) bt Boulter (GBr) 6-1, 6-0.

INBRIEF

Anahat upsets World No. 11, enters the quarterfinals

Anahat Singh advanced to the London Squash Classic quarterfinals with a 2-1 win over higher-ranked Nele Gilis on Thursday. Reigning World junior champion Anahat, ranked 20th on the women's chart, defeated World No. 11 Gilis 13-11, 4-11, 11-8 in 39 minutes in the PSA Gold event. Late on Wednesday, Ramit Tandon lost to Mohamed ElShorbagy in the men's second round, with the Egypt-born British World No. 15 winning 12-10, 11-9.

Khephren Thuram of Juventus out till 2027

Juventus midfielder Khephren Thuram has undergone surgery on his right knee, the Turin giant said on Thursday, with Italian media reporting the Frenchman will be sidelined until next year. Thuram has not played since the end of last season due to degeneration of the cartilage in his kneecap.

Dzeko to retire from international football

Veteran Bosnia and Herzegovina captain Edin Dzeko announced on Thursday that he would retire from international duty after October's Nations League match against Sweden. The forward, who plays for Schalke in Germany's Bundesliga, turned 40 in March. "Now I feel the time has come to step aside," Dzeko said on social media. "If I have made it to the age of 40 with the national team, it is because I truly gave everything I had. Every time. Everything," added Dzeko, who has been Bosnia's captain since 2014.

Dimarco is Italy's best in players' association awards

Inter Milan fullback Federico Dimarco was named last season's best player at the Italian players' association awards. He was also named among the Serie A's top four defenders, along with Alessandro Bastoni, Manuel Akanji, and Marco Palestra. Lautaro Martinez, Nico Paz and Donyell Malen were voted the best forwards. Hakan Calhanoglu, Scott McTominay, Luka Modric took the midfield honors.

Srikanth stuns Lai, Tanvi loses the plot

The Indian veteran gets the job done in straight games; the mixed doubles pair of Kapila and Tanisha bows out in the second round

BADMINTON

Agence France-Presse
SHEZHEN

Veteran Indian shuttler K. Srikanth stunned World No. 9 Victor Lai of Canada 21-18, 21-19 to enter the men's singles quarterfinals of the China Masters Super 750 badminton tournament here on Thursday.

A marathon

In women's singles, Tanvi Sharma imploded at the back end to go down 17-21, 21-18, 16-21 to World No. 9 Tomoka Miyazaki of Japan in the second round.

India's Dhruv Kapila and Tanisha Crasto also bowed out after going down 18-21, 18-21 to Taiwan's Liu Kuang Heng and Hsu Yin Hui in mixed doubles.

The results (second round): Men: K. Srikanth bt Victor Lai 21-18, 21-19. **Women:** Tomoka Miyazaki bt Tanvi Sharma 21-17, 18-21, 21-16. **Mixed doubles:** Liu Kuang Heng & Hsu Yin Hui bt Dhruv Kapila & Tanisha Crasto 21-18, 21-18.

Gritty: Srikanth displayed his fighting ability. BADMINTON PHOTO

Ahead of Asiad, Indian boxers spar with Dominicans, Iranians

Y.B. Sarangi
KOLKATA

The Indian boxers have been attending a multi-nation camp at NIS Patiala in the run-up to the Asian Games.

Apart from the Indians, the camp features 10 pugilists from the Dominican Republic – seven men and three women – and three from Iran. The Dominican team includes two Paris Olympics bronze medallists – Cristian Pinales (80kg) and Junior Alcantara (51kg) – who are sparring in 90kg and 55kg respectively.

"The Dominican boxers have been in Patiala since the last week of August and the Iranians joined on September 1. It will benefit our boxers as we don't have enough sparring partners in the heavier weights," Boxing Federation of India (BFI) executive director Col. (retd.) Arun Malik told *The Hindu* on Thursday.

"It is difficult to get other foreign boxers for training as the European Championships start on September 15. The boxers in the Americas are preparing for the Pan-American Championships in mid-October and are not willing to travel far."

Ahead of the Asiad, the Indians will have a camp in Nagoya from September 9 to 16.

The BFI downplayed the non-allocation of a masseur to the 11 Asian Games-bound boxers. "As per sports science, a masseur is needed during training as he can give a deep muscle massage. But during a competition, a deep massage may sometimes create problems. If someone needs a masseur, we can find one for a gentle massage. We will have a masseur during our Nagoya camp," said Col. Malik.

"Physios, who know every athlete's specific needs, play a key role in recovery and rehab when boxers fight one bout after another. A doctor is also needed as boxers can get cuts, which require immediate attention," he said about the presence of two physios and a doctor in the set-up.

Joining forces: Indian boxers are benefiting from the presence of foreign sparring partners. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

East Bengal in Group B for AFC Women's CL

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

East Bengal FC has been drawn alongside Hwacheon KSPO WFC (South Korea), Ho Chi Minh City WFC (Vietnam) and 4.25 SC (North Korea) in Group B of the AFC Women's Champions League group stage.

Kolkata will host Group B from November 1 to 7, 2026, marking the first time the tournament will be played in India.

The Moshal Girls secured their place in the group stage for the second consecutive year after finishing atop Group A of the Preliminary Stage in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia, ahead of Sabah FA (Malaysia), Rovers FC (Guam), and Rajshahi Stars FC (Bangladesh).

Rajasthan's Sahil betters meet record in 1,000m

ATHLETICS

Press Trust of India
LUDHIANA

Sahil of Rajasthan ran a well-judged race to improve the boys' 1,000m meet record on the penultimate day of the 21st National Youth Athletics Championships here on Wednesday.

Sahil's winning time of 2:25.25 was better than the previous meet record of 2:26.04 set by Suraj Singh last year in Patna.

The silver medallist in the event, Haryana's Dev, also improved the previous meet record, clocking 2:25.59.

Madhya Pradesh's Ranglal D. was a close third in 2:26.83.

The results: Boys: 400m: 1. Lodenge Ramu (TG) 47.21s, 2. Manas Shinde (Mah) 47.92s, 3. Ebin KJ (Ker) 48.05s. **1,000m:** 1. Sahil (Raj) 2:25.25s (MR, previous best Suraj Singh, 2:26.04), 2. Dev (Har) 2:25.59s, 3. Ranglal D. (MP) 2:26.83s. **5,000m race walk:** 1. Vishnu (UP) 21:02.81s, 2. Prabhjot Singh (Pun) 21:17.88s, 3. Aditya Dangi (Del) 21:35.16s. **Discus throw:** 1. Dheeraj Sahu (Har) 55.85m, 2. Yash Jaglan (Har) 54.82m, 3. Swapnil Dutta (WB) 54.47m. **Heptathlon:** 1. Nagar Singh Kanesh (MP) 4812 points, 2. Adarsh Choudhary (UP) 4723, 3. Somu Madavi (TG) 4587. **Girls: 400m:** 1. Shenoor Bawa (Pun) 54.13s, 2. Lakshita (Har) 54.93s, 3. Sahaya Jemima (TN) 55.14s. **1,000m:** 1. Nagini (Kar) 2:54.25s, 2. Hunny Malik (Har) 2:54.40s, 3. Deepika (Raj) 2:54.82s. **3,000m race walk:** 1. Prachi Bishnoi (Har) 14:01.53s, 2. Ranjana Yadav (MP) 14:01.79s, 3. Khushveer Kaur (Pun) 14:09.91s.

Impressive show: Sahil and Nagini who won the boys' and girls' 1000m races. X@AFIINDIA

Asian Games: Yashvir comes in for Neeraj

Sports Bureau
KOLKATA

Commonwealth Games bronze medallist javelin thrower Yashvir Singh has been named Worlds and Olympic medallist Neeraj Chopra's replacement for the upcoming Asian Games.

As per the latest 77-member Asiad team released by the Athletics Federation of India (AFI), Yashvir and Rohit Yadav will represent India in men's javelin at the Aichi-Nagoya Games.

Neeraj, who secured a silver in the Glasgow Commonwealth Games and recorded his season's best 88.05m at the Lausanne Diamond League, prematurely ended his season due to an ankle ligament tear.

As expected, Abhishek Pal's name is missing from the list after the distance runner reportedly tested positive for a banned substance.

Yashvir. PTI

Indian junior hockey teams set for double Asian title defence

Well-prepared unit: The Indian men's team had a good outing in a three-match series against China. X@THEHOCKEYINDIA

Press Trust of India
MOQI (CHINA)

The Indian under-21 men's hockey team will eye a record-extending sixth title, while the women will chase a hat-trick of trophies when the defending champions in both categories begin their AHF Junior Asia Cup campaigns here on Friday.

The women's team will be led by mid-fielder Khaidem Shileima Chanu this time. The women will begin their campaign against South Korea on September 5, followed by Malaysia (September 6), Japan (September 8) and China (September 9).

"Our first game is against South Korea on Saturday, so we are preparing for that. The team has acclimatised well. The weather is a bit cooler (in Moqi), but conditions are good and we are really looking forward to Match 1," said coach Tim White in a press release issued by Hockey India.

Defender Anmol Ekka will captain the side, while newly appointed coach Frederic Soyez will look to begin his tenure with a title win.

The men will open their Pool A campaign against Indonesia on September 5. The title-holder will then face Japan (September 6), South Korea (September 8) and Taiwan (September 9).

Mijo Kurian claims men's 400m gold

Press Trust of India
MEERUT

Mijo Chacko Kurian of Indian Air Force (IAF) claimed the men's 400m gold, clocking 46.89 seconds, in the 15th leg of the Indian Athletics Series here on Wednesday.

The results: Men: 100m: 1. Sandeep Singh (HP, 10.65s), 2. Savin Thingalaya (Reliance, 10.66), 3. Nikhil Sarjerao Patil (Mah, 10.77); **200m:** 1. Adesh Garsa (Raj, 21.39), 2. Mijo Chacko Kurian (IAF, 21.41), 3. Ruchit Mori (Reliance, 21.50); **400m:** 1. Mijo Chacko Kurian (IAF, 46.89), 2. Muhammed Ajmal (Navy, 46.90), 3. Rashid (U.P.,); **800m:** 1. K.A. Akhil (Navy, 1:51.31), 2. Virender (Army, 1:51.84), 3. Aman Ojha (Del, 1:51.92); **1,500m:** 1. Manpreet (Pun, 3:51.39), 2. Prabhjot Singh (Pun, 3:51.76), 3. Pravin Chaudhari (Mah, 3:51.93); **Hammer:** 1. Nirbhay Choudhary (Del, 66.47m), 2. Mukul (MP, 62.54), 3. Amit Pundir (Har, 62.36); **Javelin:** 1. Manoj Kumar (TN, 77.82m), 2. Bibin Antony (Army, 73.94), 3. Vikash Sharma (Utk, 73.07); **Shot put:** 1. Ramchandra Mali (Raj, 15.91m), 2. Balaji (TN, 15.83), 3. Malkeet Singh (Pun, 15.74); **High Jump:** 1. Aaditya Raghuvanshi (MP, 2.10m), 2. Uchchaal Kumar Roy (BSF, 2.00), 3. Arnav Tyagi (U.P., 1.95); **Triple Jump:** 1. Shaheer Rizvee (U.P., 15.13m), 2. Radhe Shyam (MP, 15.10), 3. Ashok Kumar (Raj, 14.88). **Women: 100m:** 1. Avantika Narale (Railways, 12.25s), 2. Kanishka Manchanda (Utk, 12.40), 3. Aliza Mulla (Mah, 12.44); **200m:** 1. Harita Bhadra (Reliance, 23.36s), 2. Nimeksha Siddi (Kar, 24.67), 3. Priya Mohan (JSW, 24.78); **400m:** 1. Priya Mohan (JSW, 54.21s), 2. Rupal (NCoE Thiruvananthapuram, 54.89), 3. Manisha (Har, 55.36); **800m:** 1. Tanvi Malik (U.P., 2:12.16), 2. B. Pranjal Vinod (Mah, 2:13.08), 3. Gug Kaur (Pun, 2:13.76); **1,500m:** 1. Ruhi Bohra (Del, 4:38.11s), 2. Ujala (All India Police, 4:39.49, 3. Chanchal Jakhad (All India Police, 4:40.90); **100m hurdles:** 1. C. Anjali (JSW, 13.36s), 2. Prajali Dilip (JSW, 13.91), 3. Aliza Mulla (Mah, 14.43); **Hammer:** 1. Anushka Yadav (U.P., 64.92m), 2. Neha Swami (Raj, 52.22), 3. Poonam Jakhar (Ha, 48.47); **Shot put:** 1. Rakhi Sangwan (All India Police, 13.94), 2. Shikha Pawar (U.P., 13.10), 3. Tamanna (Har, 12.57); **Javelin:** 1. Ishika Singh (U.P., 45.03), 2. Khushee Yadav (Raj, 42.34), 3. Saroj Devi (Pun, 41.85); **High Jump:** 1. Rimpal Kaur (Pun, 1.64m), 2. Samapti Ghosh (WB, 1.64), 3. Sakshi Parit (Mah, 1.55); **Long Jump:** 1. Ankita Chaudhary (Del, 5.72m), 2. Deepti (Del, 5.72), 3. Sivapriya (Ker, 5.58); **Triple Jump:** 1. Meera Shibu (JSW, 12.65m), 2. Rinku Choudhary (Raj, 12.27), 3. Manali Chauhan (Har, 12.11).

It's challenging to bowl in the PowerPlay, says Siddharth

CRICKET

S. Prasanna Venkatesan
CHENNAI

There is something revealing in the way M. Siddharth talks about bowling in the PowerPlay. It is not merely a job he has been given, or a tactical responsibility. The left-arm spinner describes it as a challenge.

"It's obviously very challenging. If I do well, then it's good for the team. Why am I being preferred over a fast bowler to operate with the new ball? If a pacer is going for 20 in two overs, then I should be able to do better than that. If I can bowl two overs for 10 or 12, and even take a wicket, that's an impact for me," he said over the phone on Wednesday.

Siddharth was central to Vida Kovai Kings' TNPL title run last week.

Best economy rate

He finished second on the wickets chart with 16 scalps and recorded the tournament's best economy rate (5.08).

Ten of his strikes came in the PowerPlay. He also regularly bowled arm-balls above 110 kph.

"I have always felt that's a wicket-taking delivery for me. I see that as a strength," he said.

Siddharth played only four games in IPL 2026, but said he "was able to bring that confidence and learnings into the TNPL."

He's worked with Lucknow Super Giants' spin-bowling coach Carl Crowe, who helped remodel Sunil Narine's action.

"We worked a lot on my technique and variations like backspinner, carrom ball, bouncer, and yorker. He gave me a lot of confidence. I was able to explore more of my bowling," Siddharth said.

Focus on the bouncer

They focused extensively on the bouncer after Krunal Pandya's use of it gave Siddharth the confidence to try it himself.

"After watching him bowl that, I felt I could do it as well – that I was capable of it. I bowled it a lot in IPL practice. It came out well," he said.

He brought out that bouncer in this TNPL.

For the 28-year-old, all this work ultimately leads to one goal: "To play for India".

Spinning a web: Siddharth played a big role in Vida Kovai Kings' title run. R. RAGU

The Pakistan-sized mess

The unprecedented move to banish seven players, among them two former captains, as well as the head coach and the bowling coach midway through a series has to rank among the most bizarre and knee-jerk reactions; PCB must realise that unless it sets its house in order, the road to redemption will be strewn with thorns and boulders

GETTY IMAGES

R. Kaushik

Intrigue has been a constant subtext to cricket in the subcontinent in general, and Pakistan in particular. Once volatile and unpredictable, Pakistani cricket has, in recent times, been predictably messy and controversial, the latest events in England doing little to edify its image even as it struggles to come to terms with the reality that the glory days of the past on the field are a distant memory.

The unprecedented move to banish seven players, among them two former captains, as well as the head coach and the bowling coach midway through a series has to rank among the most bizarre and knee-jerk reactions. For effect, it is perhaps overshadowed by the Pakistan Cricket Board threat to pull out of the Lord's Test of last week because the host broadcaster aired an interview with the sons of inarguably the greatest cricketer to come out of the country, Imran Khan.

Imran is a charismatic, talismanic personality who did more to raise the stock of the nation itself than anyone else. Having cut his teeth as a raw, unpolished, fiery pacer in Sussex where he was one half of a feared new-ball combine alongside South African Garth le Roux, he blossomed into a fabulous all-rounder who formed a famed quartet – alongside Ian Botham, Kapil Dev and Richard Hadlee – for much of the 1980s. With the passage of time and the inevitable onset of injuries, he dropped pace but didn't lose much by way of impact, while upping his game a notch or three as a batter as compensation.

Crowning glory

But more than as a player, Imran's legacy was cemented through his leadership abilities. His arresting presence was unmistakable on the field of play, and even when he was involved in a captaincy musical chair battle of other people's making with Javed Miandad, he was unmissable. While others congregated around the bowler to congratulate him on taking a wicket, Imran would walk regally, at his own pace, from mid-on or mid-off; as he neared the protagonist, the rest would respectfully make way for him to pat the gushing hero on the back. Imran wasn't given to grand gestures, but his wards knew that a word of praise from the skipper was worth all the riches in the world.

His crowning glory was leading Pakistan, against all odds and from the brink of elimination, to the 1992 World Cup title. The conquest of England at a raucous MCG was the ultimate vindication of his inspirational qualities and the great gift of getting his colleagues to perform above themselves, to understand and believe that nothing was beyond them. He didn't entirely endear himself to thousands of his countrymen – among them some of his own teammates – and women by focussing more on the cancer hospital he was to open in Lahore in his late mother's name instead of eulogising the historic triumph at the post-match festivities, but even his critics acknowledged that his heart was in the right place.

Imran's plunge into politics was going to be interesting, to say the least. Historically, elected Pakistani governments have operated under the iron fist of the army but Imran was his own man, so it was inevitable that there would be tension - and that's putting it mildly. His imprisonment, his deteriorating health and concerns over his well being drove Greg Chappell, the former Australian captain and one of Imran's contemporaries, to spark an initiative that involved several internationals, many of them skippers of their respective national sides including our very own Sunil Gavaskar, to make an impassioned official plea to the Pakistani dispensation to ensure that Imran is treated with the respect he deserves and is looked after from a medical perspective.

Among the players bundled on to the plane back home were former captains Salman and Rizwan. The former, who had led the team in the first Test in the absence of Babar, was dropped for the second game

It's against this backdrop that the host broadcaster of the England-Pakistan Test series aired an interview, conducted by former England captain Mike Atherton at the Long Room, with Imran's sons Sulaiman and Kasim Khan during the Lord's Test. The Pakistan Cricket Board contemplated a boycott of the match midway before saner counsel prevailed, but that seemed to have deserted them at the conclusion of a second heavy defeat in two matches, at the end of which came the dramatic decision to recall half the team as well as Sarfaraz Ahmed, the head coach, and Umar Gul, the fast-bowling coach.

Among the players bundled on to the plane back home were former captains Salman Ali Agha and Mohammad Rizwan. Indeed, Salman had led Pakistan in the first Test in Leeds in the absence of Babar Azam, out injured; England won by an innings and 103 runs at Headingley, and once Babar was declared fit for the Lord's showdown, Salman was dumped from the playing XI for the second Test. Like Salman, Rizwan has captained the national team previously but paid the price for a middling run of scores. Also asked to fly back home was Imam-ul-Haq, the bespectacled opening batter and the nephew of revered and adored former captain Inzamam. Imam did not bat in either innings at Lord's with a low-grade calf strain which itself is now being probed, all of which has contributed to a horrible mid-series fiasco that incoming head coach Mike Hesson and Ashley Noffke, Gul's replacement, have been burdened with.

Change the only constant

Pakistan have roped in, and parted ways with, numerous leading luminaries as head coach, including Mickey Arthur, former Australia paceman Jason Gillespie and Gary Kirsten, the ex-opener from South Africa who coached India to the 50-over World Cup crown in 2011 and is now the head coach of the Sri Lankan national team. Kiwi Hesson is the latest in a long line of big-ticket names to embrace one of the most demanding tasks in world cricket, and not necessarily because of the pressure of expectations alone. Being the coach of the Pakistan team is not a double-edged sword; however, the sword constantly hovers overhead, despite the fact that almost all coaches have been compelled to function with one hand tied behind their back.

Pakistan's recent cricketing journey has been anything but successful. Apart from making it to the final of the T20 World Cup in Melbourne in 2022 when they were bested by England, they haven't quite matched history and expectations with performances. Their Test displays have been even more disappointing - they haven't so much as threatened to make it to the final of the World Test Championship over the first three cycles and are currently at the bottom of the nine-team standings of this latest campaign, with just 16 points from eight matches. To say that their chances of finishing in the top-two this time too are more miniscule than finding snow in the desert will be a massive understatement.

Tough road ahead

It's against this backdrop that Hesson, and Babar must embark on a journey of redemption and salvation. Neither will be unaware that for reasons beyond their control, the national team has become a laughing stock. Defeats by an innings, and by 194 runs, in seamer-friendly conditions where neither the batters nor the bowlers, with the honourable exception of Mohammad Abbas – who took nine wickets in the Lord's hammering – have covered themselves with glory, are impossible to bounce back from in a short series. While the rest of the cricketing world is bemoaning the increasing takeover of two-Test faceoffs, Pakistan would have loved for a third Test to not be there, given the unenviable position in which they find themselves.

Babar himself has been at the receiving end of selectorial vicissitudes more than once and must now find a way to rally his embattled, beleaguered troops who will look over their shoulder with a greater sense of insecurity than ever before. To lose so many key personnel in one swoop and still be expected to mount a face-saving fightback is a humongously tall task but between them, the leadership group of Babar, the best batter in the side, and Hesson have no other option. In less than a week's time, Joe Root's England, who themselves have little chance of making it to the WTC final, will be licking their lips in anticipation of a 3-0 sweep.

Fearsome attack

There was a time when England dreaded the prospect of running into Pakistan, even at home, with the imperious Wasim Akram and the toe-crushing Waqar Younis primed to wreak untold damage. So mesmerised were they with the late reverse swing the two magicians procured in 1992 that they threw unsubstantiated allegations of ball-tampering until Geoff Boycott, the straight-talking Yorkshireman, mocked those charges by saying that the duo was so skilled that it could 'bowl England out with an orange'. It's impossible, of course, to find replacements for these legends but for a brief while, Pakistan seemed to have found a few reasonably worthy successors in Shaheen Afridi, Naseem Shah and Haris Rauf, among others. But for various reasons, no one has really taken things by the scruff of the neck and established themselves as a long-haul strike force. That, coupled with declining batting standards in all formats, have emphatically pegged Pakistan cricket back.

There is no quick fix or early solution in sight. For Pakistan to take even baby steps towards becoming a consistently competitive outfit, the first non-negotiable ingredients are faith and patience. Constant chopping and changing, of selection panels, of captains and players, and of the coaching staff, has been nothing if not counter-productive. While it will be impossible for them to replicate the Indian model, for obvious reasons, maybe they can have a look across the border to figure out what systems the Board of Control for Cricket in India has in place and how it has worked to the benefit of cricket in India. There needs to be a systemic revamp in Pakistan, at the foremost of which is a shift in thinking, in attitude and mindset. To continue to keep making the same mistakes and then hope for a different outcome is both naïve and foolhardy. The post-Lord's developments haven't done anyone any credit, and certainly not with the final act of the series due to play itself out in Birmingham from next Wednesday. Pakistan must realise that unless they set their house in order, the road to redemption will be strewn with thorns and boulders, prickly and unmovable.

THE GIST

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