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Satwik and Chirag win China Masters

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INSIDE

U.S. denies Iran's claim of striking vessel in Hormuz

CAIRO
Iran said on Sunday it struck a U.S. vessel trying to enter the Strait of Hormuz, a claim the U.S. dismissed as a "total lie". The purported attack came a day after the U.S. said forces struck three Iranian oil tankers in response to Navy warships being targeted with ballistic missiles. » PAGE 14

Over 19 lakh people hit by floods in Bihar

PATNA
Over 19 lakh people across 11 districts of Bihar have been affected by floods, officials said on Sunday. » PAGE 4

India, China hold military talks in Arunachal

- The meeting comes ahead of the BRICS Summit, which Chinese President Xi is expected to attend
- Talks are being held amid alleged incursions by the Chinese and a military build-up at the LAC
- Lieutenant-General Kalia, chief of 3 Corps, led 12-member delegation that included the ITBP

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

Amid concerns over conflicting territorial claims and military build-up along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), the Indian and Chinese Armies held their first Corps Commander-level meeting in the Eastern Sector on Sunday, marking a significant expansion of the military dialogue mechanism beyond the Ladakh sector.

The meeting was held at the Vacha-Damai Border Personnel Meeting Point in Arunachal Pradesh amid reports of tension in the Taksing area of Upper Subansiri district.

According to Defence Ministry sources, Lieutenant-General Girish Kalia, Commander of the 3 Corps (Spear Corps), led a 12-member delegation that included an Inspector-General of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police.

Dialogue route: The meeting was held at the Vacha-Damai Border Personnel Meeting Point in Arunachal Pradesh. FILE PHOTO

The 3 Corps, headquartered at Rangapahar in Nagaland, is responsible for operational areas along the LAC in Arunachal Pradesh. The Indian Army has two Corps formations responsible for the frontier in the State – the Tezpur-based 4 Corps and the Rangapahar-based 3 Corps.

The talks are significant as Corps Commander-level meetings between the two Armies have largely been held at the Chushul-Moldo Border Meeting Point in eastern Ladakh, particularly after the June 2020 Galwan Valley clashes.

The meeting comes days before India hosts the BRICS Summit in New Delhi from September 11 to 13, which Chinese President Xi Jinping is expected to attend.

The latest meeting comes amid reports of continued Chinese activity and alleged incursions in the Taksing area, despite two high-level engagements since July.

Until now, the Corps Commander-level mechanism had primarily been used to address military issues and tensions along the western sector of the India-China border in Ladakh.

The mechanism became particularly important following the Galwan clashes, in which both sides suffered casualties.

Since then, India and China have continued to use military and diplomatic channels to manage differences and maintain stability along the LAC.

On August 6, the two countries held the 36th meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs. This was followed by the 25th round of talks between the Special Representatives (SR) on the Boundary Question in Beijing on August 26.

National Security Adviser Ajit Doval represented India, while the Chinese delegation was led by Wang Yi, Member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and Director of the Office of the Central Commission for Foreign Affairs.

Eight-point document

The two sides signed an eight-point outcome document following the SR-level talks. The agreement included a decision to establish two additional Border Personnel Meeting Points and new hotlines to strengthen communication and confidence-building mechanisms along the frontier.

According to sources, one of the newly proposed meeting points will be in the Eastern Sector under the operational responsibility of the 3 Corps, while another will be in the Central Sector.

The sources clarified that Joshimath is not among the newly identified meeting points.

Meanwhile, the Indian Army has been closely reviewing its operational preparedness along the frontier. Recently, Army Chief General Dhiraj Seth visited the headquarters of the 3 Corps, where formation commanders briefed him about operational readiness and measures being undertaken to strengthen combat capabilities.

'UN map' must reflect Indian position: govt.

NEW DELHI
India on Sunday said a United Nations-initiated proposed world map must depict the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh in accordance with the country's official map, and any "inaccurate" or "misleading" representation will be unacceptable. » PAGE 6

Rescue operations underway after a building collapsed near Satya Niketan in New Delhi on Sunday. SHEKHAR KASHYAP

5 people killed as building housing college students collapses in Delhi

Shrimansi Kaushik
NEW DELHI

Five persons were killed and six were injured when a five-storey building housing college students collapsed on Sunday in Satya Niketan, a dense hub for paying guest (PG) accommodation near Delhi University's South Campus.

Of the 11 people pulled out of the debris, four were declared brought dead at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences. One was in critical condition and died later.

A first information report under Sections 105, 290 and 125 (a) of the BNS has been filed against the building owner, Hariram Bansal, and others.

50-year-old building

The building houses a PG accommodation named Hostel Daze. Local residents said the building, which comprises a basement plus five more floors, is at least 50 years old. At least 30 students were staying in the building, they said.

Repair work was underway in the basement when the incident occurred, the police said.

The South Campus police station received a control room call at 1.34 p.m., reporting a building collapse at Satya Niketan Market. The area was cordoned off within an hour and student volunteers helped to clear out the area to facilitate the entry of earthmovers.

Teams from Delhi Fire Services, Delhi Police, the National Disaster Response Force, and the District Disaster Management Authority then reached the spot with 10 fire tenders and ambulances.

Of the remaining six injured, three were admitted to AIIMS. One of them underwent limb surgery.

An FIR has been filed against building owner Hariram Bansal and others

Another person who sustained minor injuries was discharged. A 19-year-old man was taken to Safdarjung hospital and is stable.

Repairs in basement

Daljeet Singh, a local resident helping with the rescue, said the building was not well-built and had been weakened by the repair work. "The foundation of the building is not strong. It is an old building, which had water entering the basement, which has some work ongoing. The adjacent building has also been affected with the impact," he said. "In my 48 years, I have seen the building adding floors slowly," he added.

"The building was without any support with no pillars and thin walls. The five-storey building first collapsed under its weight and then fell forward onto the road. We rushed to the spot as soon as we heard a loud sound and people started screaming," said Rahul Gaur, another local resident. He said that the ground floor also had a general store, while there were labourers working on the basement.

"Most of the PGs here have at least ten students on each floor," said Abhishek Mishra, a Delhi University law student. "The area is heavily populated by PGs which do not follow safety norms. Most of the students are from other States. Despite paying a monthly rent of ₹13,000 to ₹30,000, the PG managers do not treat students well," Mr. Mishra added.

CM VISITS SITE
» PAGE 5

Spurious liquor kills 11 in M.P.; CM orders probe

Mehul Malpani
BHOPAL

At least 11 people died after consuming spurious liquor in Sagar district of Madhya Pradesh on Sunday.

Narendra Solanki, Additional Superintendent of Police of Sagar, told *The Hindu* that those who fell ill were hospitalised. "But all are out of danger now," he said.

Officials said that early on Sunday, people fell ill in four villages – Nauraj, Gogra Khurd, Bamura, and Patan.

Sagar Collector Pratibha Pal said the post-mortem examinations were still under way and the administration was on the lookout for people who had fallen ill. Ms. Pal said a few post-mortem examinations indicated that consumption of methyl alcohol may have caused the deaths. "Interactions with local people indicated that the deaths occurred after they (victims) consumed illegal, spurious liquor," she said.

Following directions from Chief Minister Mohan Yadav, the State government launched a police investigation, suspended three excise officials and two police officers, and relieved one excise official from duty and transferred her.

Speaking in New Delhi, Mr. Yadav termed the deaths "extremely distressing and unfortunate" and said "no guilty party will be spared".

Deepak Saxena, the State Excise Commissioner, told *The Hindu* that action had been taken against four officials for serious negligence and for failing to act on recent complaints about the sale of spurious liquor in some villages of the district.

Tragic incident: A person being airlifted to AIIMS, Bhopal for advanced treatment on Sunday. He died in the hospital. A.M. FARUQUI

M.P. govt. suspends three excise officials, two police officers, and transfers one excise official

Sagar Superintendent of Police Anurag Sujania said 12 suspects had been detained and were being questioned.

U.P. trail

"A doctors' team is screening for such people, and officials like the SDM are on the spot. We are trying to identify anyone with such symptoms and send them to the Bundelkhand Medical College for observation," the Collector added. She said the initial investigation pointed to the involvement of a gang from Uttar Pradesh.

Mr. Sujania, too, said the liquor could have come from Lalitpur in U.P. "Such activities have been found there even in the past. So, we are working in the same direction and will reach its main source soon. We have detained 10-12 people so far and are trying to establish a link through a systematic interrogation," he said. Mr. Saxena suspended Kirti Dubey (Assistant Commissioner Excise, Sagar), Dilip Khandate (Assistant District Excise Officer), and Proshni Ureti (Excise Sub-Inspector, Banda Circle). Neerja Srivastava, Deputy Commissioner and in-charge of the Divisional Flying Squad, was attached to the Gwalior headquarters. The Banda police station in-charge and the Ghughra police outpost in-charge have also been suspended.

"*Prima facie*, it has been found that there had been some complaints in the past few weeks, and the officials were aware of this but failed to act properly. Had they taken any action, the sale could have been controlled. It was their responsibility," Mr. Saxena said.

The State Excise Commissioner denied complaints from other districts, however said that there has been a pattern in the production and sale of illicit liquor in Sagar.

State Congress president Jitu Patwari wrote to the Chief Minister saying, "The second such tragedy surfacing in Sagar is proof that the BJP government has not learned from the first incident! Don't wait for the third warning now! Take action so severe that no more news of deaths from poisonous liquor emerges from any village in Sagar!"

Unfair to blame me for Rahman's visit being put off, says Hasina

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

After a controversy over her August 5 press conference here, Bangladesh's former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina defended her right to hold media conferences and meet Awami League party colleagues.

"How can a press conference damage India-Bangladesh relations? I did not know that I was so powerful," Ms. Hasina said speaking to *The Hindu* over the telephone from an undisclosed location. "My intention was never to damage anything," she said. In an extensive interview that included written responses and an audio conversation, Ms. Hasina fled to India after after protests erupted in Bangladesh in 2024. She said it was unfair of the Bangladesh government to suggest that her public interactions were the reason for a planned visit by Prime Minister Tarique Rahman to Delhi to be put off.

Ms. Hasina, who faces a death sentence for ordering a police crackdown on student protestors in 2024 in which hundreds were killed, refused to apologise for the killings, citing the deaths of policemen and her party members during that time. She called on the international community to press for a revocation of the ban on the Awami League.

FULL INTERVIEW ON
» PAGE 5

INBRIEF

Maharashtra govt. forms panel for recruitment exam reforms

The Maharashtra government has formed a high-level committee to study the existing examination system and suggest necessary reforms to make recruitment examinations more transparent, secure and candidate-oriented, read a statement issued by the General Administration Department on September 4. In a meeting held on August 12, chaired by the Chief Minister, it was decided to review the recruitment examination system, it stated. The committee will visit each revenue division and hold discussions with students, candidates, and other stakeholders.

'Hindutva influencer' sent to one-day judicial custody

A Delhi court on Sunday remanded self-styled Hindutva social media influencer Swatantra Bhardwaj in one-day judicial custody in connection with the alleged assault on the father of a student activist during a protest at Jantar Mantar. Mr. Bhardwaj was produced through videoconferencing before duty magistrate Anjali Singh. On Saturday, he was produced at the residence of Additional Sessions Judge Saurabh Pratap Singh Laler, who had allowed the Delhi police's plea seeking one-day custody. PTI

Six die after overnight rain in U.P.; CM hands over relief to flood-hit

Deaths reported from Kanpur, Badaun, Ballia due to structure collapses; previous SP govt. looted all aid, now affected get 50-kg ration: Adityanath

Press Trust of India
CHITRAKOOT/KANPUR

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday conducted an aerial survey of flood-affected areas in Chitrakoot. He distributed relief material to 800 flood-affected families and handed over land allotment certificates to those rendered homeless by the floods.

Thousands of people from over two dozen flood-affected districts such as Varanasi, Badaun, Ballia and Kanpur have been evacuated to relief shelters as at least eight rivers continue to flow above the 'danger level'.

On Sunday, six persons were reported dead in three structure collapse incidents after overnight rains worsened the situation. In Kanpur, a man and his three minor daughters died while another daughter was critically injured after their house collapsed on Sunday, said the police.

Rescue teams evacuating residents from Kanpur's low-lying areas; (right) a view of the house that caved in on Sunday, killing 4. PTI/ ANI

A farmer was killed while his wife sustained serious injuries in a wall collapse in Badaun. A six-year-old girl died in a similar incident in Ballia.

Around 3.53 lakh people have been affected by the floods, as per a statement from the Relief Commissioner's office dated September 4.

Addressing a gathering in Chitrakoot after assessing the damage caused by the overflowing Mandakini, the CM said the quality of flood relief has changed since 2017, when his government came to power.

"Earlier, those affected used to get 'dry bread', with the previous Samajwadi Party government not paying attention to the issue and SP goons looting the relief meant for the victims. However, now the government provides a comprehensive relief package of 50 kg with 26 items," said Mr. Adityanath.

IIT Mandi to probe poster on 'role' of 'Shudras to serve higher classes'

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Mandi, has ordered an inquiry into a Bhagavad Gita-themed poster on the campus stating that Shudras should "serve higher classes". Director Laxmidhar Behera attributed the words to "students' interpretation of the scripture".

> Some students have interpreted the Gita in some way. I have instituted an inquiry panel to look into it
>
> **LAXMIDHAR BEHERA**
> Director, IIT Mandi

Outright condemnation

In an e-mail to the institute students on Sunday, titled 'Outright condemnation of recent poster display within campus', Mr. Behera stated that he was "shocked" after learning about the poster displayed during the Janmashtami celebrations on September 4 and stressed that it had not been endorsed by the institute "in any manner".

He later told PTI that the poster was prepared as part of a student-led event and that a committee comprising faculty members and representatives from different social categories, including Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Classes, had been constituted to look into the matter.

The controversy erupted over a poster titled 'Bhagavad Gita - The Timeless Wisdom', which was displayed outside the institute's auditorium.

It stated that Brahmins should "spread God's message", Kshatriyas should "protect society and spirituality", Vaishyas should to "drive the economy, support others" and Shudras should "serve higher classes".

Mr. Behera said he had been away from the campus, returned only on Saturday and came to know about the controversy on Sunday morning.

"Some students have interpreted the Gita in some way. I have instituted an inquiry committee," Mr. Behera said on Sunday, asserting that he and the institute stood against caste discrimination.

"I have personally fought against caste-based discrimination in any form in every forum," he wrote.

He added that the institute is committed to upholding the "values of equality, social justice, scientific temper" and other principles enshrined in the Constitution.

Mr. Behera has a long-standing association with the teaching of the Bhagavad Gita and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. He teaches a three-credit Gita course at IIT Mandi.

'Duties as per *guna*'

"We are against casteism in all forms. All occupational duties are according to *guna* (quality) and karma," he added.

Mr. Behera, an electrical engineering professor whose areas of specialisation include robotics and AI, has courted controversy over his views in the past. In 2023, he asked students to pledge not to eat meat while claiming that landslides and cloudbursts in Himachal Pradesh were occurring because of cruelty to animals. A year earlier, a video surfaced in which he claimed to have helped rid a friend's family of "evil spirits" by chanting holy mantras.

Punjab govt. objects to Centre's move to appoint HC Chief Justice

Press Trust of India
CHANDIGARH

Punjab Cabinet on Sunday evening passed a resolution against the Centre's move to notify the appointment of Ashwani Kumar Mishra as the Chief Justice of Punjab and Haryana High Court, claiming it was done without awaiting the State government's views, bypassing Constitutional norms and set procedures.

The State Cabinet resolved that the appointment and administration of oath should be put on hold until Punjab's views are obtained and duly considered, an official statement said after a meeting of the Cabinet.

Acting Chief Justice

The Centre notified Justice Mishra's appointment on Saturday, about a month after the Supreme Court Collegium had recommended his elevation. He has been functioning as the Acting Chief Justice of the High Court here since June and is scheduled to be administered oath as the High Court Chief Justice by the Governor here on Monday.

Hours before the oath ceremony, the Bhagwant Mann government convened an emergency meeting of the Cabinet through videoconferencing against the Centre's decision.

The Cabinet strongly condemned "another instance" of the Central government "bypassing" the State's constitutional rights and established procedure, the statement read.

According to sources, the Chief Minister is unlikely to attend the oath-taking ceremony.

Act against VHP 'diktat' for Navratri, NCP (SP) tells Maharashtra govt.

Press Trust of India
MUMBAI

The NCP (SP) on Sunday sought action against the Vishva Hindu Parishad's (VHP) call to bar Muslims from participating in 'garba' events during Navratri. The party termed it "unconstitutional" and questioned the Maharashtra government's "silence".

The VHP had announced that Muslims will not be allowed entry at 'garba' and 'dandiya' venues across the State during Navratri, which will begin on October 11. It issued "guidelines" for organisers to verify participants' identities by checking their Aadhaar cards and apply 'tilak' on their foreheads.

"The BJP-led government should prove to the people that nobody is above the law by taking action against the VHP's diktat," said NCP (SP) spokesperson Clyde Crasto.

After 55 years, curtains likely for T.N. State Planning Commission

T. Ramakrishnan
CHENNAI

It is likely to be curtains for the Tamil Nadu State Planning Commission (SPC), a body constituted 55 years ago, as the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam-led government has not filled the posts of Vice-Chairperson and full-time members of the panel after the resignation of the team appointed by the previous DMK government.

By convention, the incumbent Chief Minister, C. Joseph Vijay, is the ex-officio Chairperson of the SPC. The Chief Secretary (M. Sai Kumar) and the Finance Secretary (M.A. Siddique) are among the ex-officio members. The body has only an IAS officer as the Member-Secretary.

By convention, the incumbent Chief Minister, C. Joseph Vijay, is SPC's ex-officio Chairperson.

The idea is "to abolish" the concept of the planning commission, a senior official said. As the commission's "only contribution" is to provide policy inputs, the government is considering subject-specific committees of various experts, the official said.

Instead of having a standing body of experts, the TVK-led government hopes to derive more benefits by tapping into the services of various experts through different committees, according to sources.

SPOTLIGHT

The burning question of child safety at hospitals

Survivors, rescuers, and hospital staff flag lapses in fire safety audits after 3 newborns were killed in a blaze that broke out at a government maternity hospital in Maharashtra's Amravati district last month

Snehal Mutha

On the rainy morning of August 26, the front courtyard of District Women Hospital in Maharashtra's Amravati district was crowded with politicians, reporters and bystanders. Amid them stood 30-year-old Swapnil Borde. His bottle-green shirt hung limp with sweat, while his red-rimmed eyes brimmed with tears.

He is the father of one of the three newborns who died after a fire broke out in the four-storey special newborn care unit and neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) on the third floor of the maternity hospital around 3.15 a.m. on August 24. Thirty-six babies were rescued and shifted to nearby hospitals, according to Amravati District Collector Ashish Yerekar. Two sustained burn injuries, says Amol Narote, medical superintendent of the government-run super-speciality hospital. Preliminary investigations indicate that a ventilator sparked the fire.

Swapnil's newborn was of low weight and had breathing issues, so was put on a ventilator two days before the fire. He says, "This was the first baby in my family in this generation. I took him in my arms only after he died."

Outside the NICU, the empty fire extinguishers lay on the floor, while the soot-covered room, guarded by the police, continued to be frequented by people. The parents of the other two newborns who died in the August 24 fire came from Achalpur and Paratwada.

Established in 1938, the hospital is one of Amravati's major government maternity hospitals. It also caters to Wardha, Yavatmal and Washim districts. The hospital was formerly known as Dufferin Hospital, named after Lady Hariot Dufferin, who established the Dufferin Fund in 1884 to provide medical aid to women in India.

Probe under way

District Civil Surgeon Dr. Vinod Pawar, who is in charge of the maternity hospital, says, "Around 3.15 a.m., my staff in the NICU heard an explosion from the ventilator and saw fire coming out of it. They alerted the fire department and me simultaneously. Our priority was to rescue the babies."

Dr. Pawar has submitted the fire-audit-related documents to the investigation committee. The police have registered an accidental death report.

Maharashtra Minister for Public Health and Family Welfare Prakash Abitkar formed a seven-member committee headed by Public Health Commissioner Sanjay Katkar and directed it to submit its report within eight days. He said the committee's findings would be made public and responsibility fixed.

Charred remains of medical equipment after a fire ripped through the neonatal intensive care unit of a government hospital in Amravati district of Maharashtra on August 24. EMMANUAL YOGINI

On August 26, Mr. Katkar and the committee visited the spot and questioned the nurses who were present in the NICU at the time of the incident. The CCTV footage was also handed over to the committee, which comprises officials from the Maharashtra State Electricity Board, AIIMS and the Directorate of Medical Education and Research. It has been tasked with examining ventilator and electrical faults, the fire-audit history and administrative lapses. The report was due on August 31 but has not yet been released.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis announced ₹5 lakh in compensation for each family that lost its newborn in the fire and directed that the treatment of injured infants be fully covered by the government.

Of the 36 newborn babies, 11 have been admitted to Dr. Panjabrao Deshmukh Memorial Medical College (PDMMC), 10 to Hope Hospital, eight to Murkey Hospital and two to Parijat Hospital. Five were discharged with their mothers.

Survivors' accounts

Radhika Yehkade, 19, was the last to deliver her twins before the fire. They were born around 2 a.m. on August 24 and kept in the NICU. "I had a difficult pregnancy. I was in the hospital the week before my delivery. I am unable to let go of the voices in my head. Nurses shouting, 'Help,' people screaming, 'Fire, fire.' I am unable to make peace with the fact that my babies' lives would have lasted only for two hours," says Radhika, whose twins were admitted to PDMMC.

Radhika's mother, Phula Shanware, 55, also an eyewitness, adds, "The smoke was dense; the fire brigade reached in time but took almost an hour to take water pipes to the third floor."

Talking about her daughter, Phula says, "She had a tough pregnancy; we are daily wage earners and have already spent ₹80,000. We have been far from our house in Achalpur for almost 10 days."

Another woman, Arti Kharale, 27, narrated her story. "When I saw my daughter, she smelt of wet ash. My heart sank when I heard about the fire," says Arti, who lives in Amravati city. She says this was the second such fire in the hospital. The last, as reported by the media, was in September 2022.

Yogesh Savarkar, 24, is waiting outside the maternity room at PDMMC, where his daughter and wife have been transferred. He narrates, "When I entered, I saw three children covered in black powder. One child had burns on his face. We rescued them first."

Chief Minister Fadnavis has raised concerns over the hospital's mandatory fire audit.

According to data from Maharashtra's Public Health Department, of the 530 government hospitals across the State, 528 have completed fire audits. As many as 442 hospitals have fire safety systems fully installed, while only 372 hospitals hold a fire no-objection certificate (NOC).

In Amravati alone, 18 government hospitals were audited, of which 16 received the NOC.

On August 25, the Public Health Department announced a State-wide fire and electrical safety inspection of all government, private and charitable hospitals. Minister Abitkar had said, "If discrepancies are found in the audit, then they are to be rectified. Every hospital will appoint a nodal officer for fire safety, who will review fire audits, electrical safety, fire-fighting systems, emergency evacuation arrangements, staff training, and mock drills, and submit compliance information to senior levels."

Initial warning

Records show that the Dufferin Hospital Authority had flagged concerns over the fire safety systems. A letter dated June 29 stated, "The hospital had obtained a fire NOC valid from June 22, 2025, to June 21, 2026. Before this validity period lapses, a registered licensed agency must conduct a fire safety audit, and Form B must be submitted to this office – so the fire NOC renewal proposal can then be forwarded to the Fire Department of Amravati Municipal Corporation."

A follow-up letter was also written to the Public Works Department on July 17, reminding it to arrange a fire safety audit.

The ventilators in both cases were supplied by Schiller Healthcare, which has been called for the investigation. An official said a committee will be set up to create SOPs for the procurement of medical equipment.

Courage under fire

Outside the NICU, the smell of smoke lingered. In the corridor, *kaksh-sevikas* (nursing attendants) were waiting for their turns to appear before the committee as part of the investigation. Among them was Surekha Dhanvijay, 45, one of the four attendants present in the NICU, who witnessed the fire and called for help. "The moment I heard the explosion, a huge flame burst out. With our bare hands, we tried to douse the fire near the cradle and take a baby out."

"I have only one regret: that we couldn't save those three children," says Kirti Ghanvir, 45, another nursing attendant.

The *sevikas* say they do not want any appreciation as they consider this part of their jobs, but appeal to the government to increase their salaries. They say they currently get ₹8,000 a month and are hired on contract, so their salaries barely increase.

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INBRIEF

Student leaders pay tribute to activist Gauri Lankesh

Student leaders on Sunday paid tribute to the late Gauri Lankesh. Speaking at an event in Bengaluru, All India Students' Association joint secretary Danish Ali said, "We (the youth) are not friends of the people who are responsible for killing people like Gauri Lankesh." Student Federation of India joint secretary Aishe Ghosh and CJP co-convener Ashutosh Ranka took part in the event. Mr. Ranka said if Gauri was alive, she would have been a "proud cockroach".

₹2.38 lakh unaccounted cash seized in A.P. toll plaza search

The Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) seized ₹2.38 lakh in unaccounted cash during a a surprise check at the Transport Department's toll plaza at Musunuru, near Kavali in Andhra Pradesh's Nellore district, on Sunday. Officials found ₹68,000 lying by the road. Another ₹1.70 lakh was found in the boot of a car belonging to Motor Vehicle Inspector Banavath Gopi Naik of the district enforcement wing, Nellore, the ACB said in a press release. An investigation is under way.

Vijayendra steps up criticism as padayatra enters sixth day

The BJP's 10-day Ballari Chalo padayatra, led by Karnataka unit president B.Y. Vijayendra, entered its sixth day on Sunday, with party leaders interacting with farmers and shepherding communities along the route to highlight their issues. "Drought relief has not reached farmers. Schools and hospitals are functioning without adequate staff. The government is reducing the number of BPL cards, thereby depriving poor families of welfare benefits," Mr. Vijayendra said.

Siddaramaiah bats for 75% quota, release of caste count

Former Karnataka Chief Minister seeks implementation of the Socio-Educational Survey in order to achieve social justice; says he was withdrawing from electoral politics and not from public life

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Former Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Sunday demanded that the findings of the Socio-Educational Survey conducted by the Karnataka State Commission for Backward Classes be made public.

Speaking at a convention organised by the Karnataka State Backward Castes Federation, Mr. Siddaramaiah said the High Court had directed that the contents of the report not be made public."I believe that everyone here, including the Chief Minister, will listen to me. The report must be implemented. You should get social justice. Dalits, Backward Classes and minorities should get up to 75% reservation. Everyone should get a reservation according to their population. Only then can an equal society be built," he said.

Recalling his decision to withdraw from electoral politics, Mr. Siddaramaiah said elections had become prohibitively expensive. The former Chief Minister said he was withdrawing from electoral politics and not from public life.

Deputy Chief Minister G. Parameshwara hailed Mr. Siddaramaiah for mobilising the AHINDA bloc. "He created the AHINDA movement to socially, politically, and economically strengthen communities that had been neglected," Mr. Parameshwara said.

Siddaramaiah at the Karnataka State Backward Castes Federation's silver jubilee programme in Bengaluru on Sunday. SUDHAKARA JAIN

'AHINDA is not personal property'

BENGALURU
Prominent AHINDA leader and Minister Satish Jarkiholi, who was not invited to the convention, said AHINDA was not the personal property of anyone. "I was not invited, so I did not go... AHINDA is not the property of anyone. Anyone can claim the AHINDA identity".

Karnataka seeks reduction in Cauvery release

The Bureau
BENGALURU

Citing low inflows into reservoirs, Karnataka has sought to reduce its daily water release to T.N.

Ahead of the Cauvery Water Regulation Committee's (CWRC) meeting scheduled this week, Karnataka has filed an appeal before the Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA) seeking a reduction in water releases to Tamil Nadu from 9,000 cusecs a day, as ordered by it, to 2,000 cusecs.

It may be noted that the CWMA had upheld the CWRC's August 25 direction to Karnataka, asking it to ensure flows of 9,000 cusecs a day for 15 days from August 25 to be realised at the Biligundlu water gauge at the inter-State border. According to the CWMA's order, the releases by Karnataka would total up to 11.66 tmc ft.

Meanwhile, Karnataka has filed an appeal before the CWMA seeking a reduction in water releases on the grounds that the inflows into its Cauvery reservoirs are very low. It has also pointed out that the southwest monsoon is set to end soon, indicating that there is no hope for the State that there will be further inflows into its Cauvery reservoirs in future.

The CWRC is meeting again on September 8 to review the ground-level situation. On the same day, the CWMA is also meeting to review the situation.

It may be noted that Karnataka, on August 25, had appealed to the CWMA to adopt a cautious approach while asking for any further releases, and requested the Authority to reassess the situation after observing the forthcoming northeast Monsoon.

The State had told the CWMA that its Cauvery basin area was facing severe hydrological distress, due to which cumulative inflows into its four reservoirs in the Cauvery basin were about 49.18% below the 30-year average.

17 from Shiv Sena booked for 'assault' on hospital staffers

Press Trust of India
PALGHAR/MUMBAI

Those named in the FIR include party's Palghar district and city unit chiefs and the son of an MLA

More than a dozen Shiv Sena functionaries, including the party's Palghar district and city unit chiefs and an MLA's son, were booked on Sunday for allegedly assaulting, abusing and threatening hospital staffers over medical bills of injured "govindas", participants in Dahi Handi celebrations in Maharshtra.

Of the 17 who were booked, 10 have been named, including Shiv Sena district chief Kundan Balkrishna Sankhe, city chief Rahul Ramdas Gharat and MLA Rajendra Gavit's son Rohit Gavit, a police officer said.

The incident took place at Relief Hospital here in the early hours of the day after 'govindas' injured at a Dahi Handi event outside the Shiv Sena central office were brought for treatment, he said citing the FIR filed on the complaint of hospital billing receptionist Vivek Babulinga.

"Five injured participants, Omkar Kalwadkar, Akash Patil, Hitesh Chaudhari, Keshav Thakur, and Aniket Mahyavansh, were brought to Relief Hospital for treatment on Saturday night after falling during human pyramid formations," he said.

By midnight, the total medical bill for the five patients amounted to ₹19,866, of which ₹10,000 was paid in cash by an associate. "However, an argument ensued when a mob demanded that the patients be discharged without settlement of the remaining amount. At 1.15 a.m., some 15-20 people led by Mr. Sankhe and Mr. Gharat entered the casualty ward. They abused on-duty physician Dr. Lijomol and slapped Mr. Babulinga," the officer said.

The group also barged into the ICU, putting the lives of patients admitted in it at risk, and forcibly removed one of the injured "govindas" from the ICU, the officer said.

A case was registered on Sunday morning. Besides the three, the others named in the FIR are Manish alias Vicky Sankhe, Sairaj Patil, Rahul Sankhe, Manoj Gharat, Neelam Sankhe, Shubham Bandivdekar, Rishabh Vare and seven-eight unidentified persons.

They have been charged under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and Maharashtra Medicare Service Persons and Medicare Service Institutions (Prevention of Violence and Damage or Loss to Property) Act for assault, criminal intimidation, trespass, unlawful assembly and other offences, police said.

A probe is on under Sub-Inspector Vinayak Kesarkar, though no one has been arrested yet.

Congress Keralam unit cracks the whip on party workers

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

KPCC chief suspends MLA Ramya Haridas's aide and another party worker

The Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) on Sunday took a resolute stance on organisational discipline after an inquiry committee *prima facie* found that the late-night affray between Congress legislator Ramya Haridas and party workers in Chirayinkeezhu on Friday had inflicted significant reputational damage on the United Democratic Front (UDF) government.

KPCC president Sunny Joseph suspended Ms. Haridas's aide, Palayam Pradeep, and another Congress worker, Sajaad, on the charge of indiscipline and cratering the party's esteem in full public view.

Mr. Joseph had cracked the whip based on a preliminary inquiry report submitted by former KPCC president M.M. Hassan, who recorded the statements of the persons involved in the fracas as head of the three-member inquiry committee.

Earlier, Mr. Hassan had told *The Hindu* that the committee would allow representation to the opposing sides involved in the affray. A Congress insider said Ms. Haridas had spoken to the committee over phone and would later turn up in person to give her statement.

Mr. Hassan said the committee would also record the statement of district panchayat member and Youth Congress leader, Sajith Muttapalam, who had questioned the appropriateness of Mr. Pradeep "pushing a personal agenda" at block panchayat plan implementation scheme meetings ostensibly at the behest of Ms. Haridas and allegedly without the party's authorisation.

A KPCC insider said the committee found that the incident provided the Left Democratic Front (LDF) a "perfect foil" to deflect public attention from the issues plaguing the Opposition alliance, including the dispute between the CPI (M) and the CPI over the post of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition.

Festival prep

Security personnel keep vigil during rehearsals for the Mysuru Dasara celebrations. The 10-day State festival, celebrated in October, is Karnataka's grandest cultural celebration. PTI

A.P. govt. sets its sights on attracting FDI in key sectors

V. Raghavendra
VIJAYAWADA

To attract big-ticket investments, the Andhra Pradesh government is focusing on mobilising Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into the strategic sectors, such as AI infrastructure, critical minerals, semiconductors and energy transition, wherein the given sectors account for about 45% of greenfield projects being set up around the world.

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu said that the focus on strategic sectors should be intensified to broaden the investment pipeline and provide a favourable base for industrial expansion.

Fireworks blast survivors face PTSD-like symptoms

Deborah Thambi
KOCHI

Almost five months after the fireworks accident at Mundathikode in Thrissur, Keralam, some survivors are still dealing with psychological issues such as insomnia, anxiety, and flashbacks, which are typically symptoms associated with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

On April 21, 2026, a series of explosions erupted across fireworks assembly units preparing for a display organised by the Thiruvambady Devaswom committee ahead of the annual Thrissur Pooram festival. The blast resulted in 17 deaths, left over 24 people injured and damaged around 50 houses.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, some of the survivors hailing from Palakkad, Malappuram and Ernakulam districts complained that they were not offered help with their mental afflictions.

Unnikrishnan of Pathiripala, Palakkad, a pyrotechnician associated with one of the five assembly units involved in the incident, said that he was part of the rescue operations and helped the authorities identify the dead. Mr. Unnikrishnan said the terrible memories from the fateful night still haunted him, and that he has not received any help from the authorities for his mental state.

Rajan, from Kundannur, Wadakkanchery, was working in Mundathikode on the day of the accident. He still has troubles with sleeping and flashbacks. Months have passed, yet Mr. Rajan lives with the shock and grief of losing people close to him.

Charred aftermath: Remains of two-wheelers used by the workers at the blast site at Mundathikode in Thrissur. K.K. NAJEEB

Special campaign

The Thrissur District Collector recently filed a report before the Kerala High Court stating that a special campaign involving the District Mental Health Programme (DMHP) had been conducted to provide necessary psychosocial counselling and intervention to the local residents and families traumatised by the disaster. A month after the incident, the DMHP, in coordination with the Psychiatry department of the Thrissur Medical College, identified and helped six survivors living in the vicinity of Mundathikode, all of whom had presented with PTSD symptoms.

Peter Joseph, nodal officer for DMHP Thrissur, said the survivors who were treated had issues such as reliving the sights and sounds of the explosion through flashbacks, insomnia and heightened anxiety. One person had become dependent on alcohol as a coping mechanism, and almost all survivors lost their livelihood for the rest of the festival season due to the effect of the explosion on their psyche.

KCR's absence, Section 22A set to dominate Telangana session

M. Rajeev
HYDERABAD

The stage is set for the commencement of the Monsoon Session of the Telangana legislature on Monday.

The Monsoon Session is expected to witness heated debates on various issues, prime among them being the controversy over the inclusion of several private lands in the prohibited list (Section 22A of the Registration Act) that created consternation among house/land owners and the absence of Opposition leader K. Chandrashekhar Rao in the Assembly.

While the main Opposition BRS, as well as the BJP, are gearing up to corner the ruling party on the furore raised by the affected landowners, the ruling Congress is planning to release a factual picture relating to the problems that cropped up with the introduction of the Dharani web platform, which pushed many a landowner into crisis.

Revanth's challenge

Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy's challenge to BRS president K. Chandrasekhar Rao to attend the assembly proceedings or resign from the post is another major issue that is expected to dominate the proceedings.

The Chief Minister has been mentioning the absence of the Opposition leader from the House for a major part of the last three years, at a time when the Government had spent over ₹22.38 crore on his salary, security and other facilities.

"Employees will be dismissed if they fail to attend duties for a year or more. Why should Mr. KCR continue in the post when he is not attending the proceedings?" he asked.

The session will see extensive debates on the proposed changes in the polytechnic courses, fee reimbursement to students, Kalyana Lakshmi/Shaadi Mubarak and other issues.

No provision in Forest Rights Act to obtain gram sabha consent for projects: Ministry

The law explicitly states that the Ministry of Tribal Affairs is responsible for its implementation; Centre's rules and regulations require that all processes under the forest Act be completed before the concerned government authority can issue a certificate diverting the forests formally

Abhinay Lakshman
NEW DELHI

In deliberations with the Union Ministry of Power over government projects delayed due to the "critical bottleneck" of "100% gram sabha consent under the Forest Rights Act (FRA)" for forest clearance, the Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs has said that the 2006 law has "no provision for obtaining consent of the gram sabha for forest clearance", adding that "such matters" related to gram sabha consent "do not fall under the purview of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs".

In an official communication to the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC) Desk of the Power Ministry on August 31, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs said, "There is no provision for obtaining consent of the Gram Sabha for forest clearance for Stage-II forest clearance in the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 and Rules made thereunder. Therefore, such matters do not fall under the purview of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs."

While the FRA itself does not have the language of gram sabha consent specifically with respect to diverting forest land for non-forestry purposes, the Union government's rules and regulations governing the diversion of forests specifically require that all processes under the FRA be completed before the concerned government authority can issue a certificate diverting the forests formally.

These guidelines, under the Forest Conservation Act of 1980, require the identification of potential FRA claimants, the recognition of their rights where applicable, the vesting of these rights, and then obtaining a no-objection certificate (NOC) from the gram sabhas concerned regarding the proposal to divert the said forest land for the stated purpose – all of it as mandated under the FRA. This procedure of obtaining an NOC from gram sabhas is what has commonly come to be known as the procedure for gram sabha consent for forest clearance.

Parliamentary panel report on NHPC Limited said the average time for forest clearance of projects is 106 months.

The FRA explicitly states that the Ministry of Tribal Affairs is the nodal ministry responsible for the law's implementation.

Supreme Court advocate Shomona Khanna, a former legal adviser to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs under both the United Progressive Alliance and National Democratic Alliance governments, reacted to the Ministry's position on the FRA in its latest communication to the Power Ministry by saying, "This is bizarre. If such matters are not under the purview of the Tribal Affairs Ministry, then whose purview is it under?"

House panel report

The deliberations between the Union Power Ministry and the Tribal Affairs Ministry were initiated after an August 3 report by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Undertakings on NHPC Limited. In this report, the committee, based on discussions with NHPC officials, observed that the average time for forest clearance of under-construction projects was 106 months, and that the requirement that all concerned gram sabhas consent to the diversion of forest land required for the projects had become the "single most critical bottleneck, with projects like the Teesta-IV HEP being indefinitely stalled because consent from small minority of Gram Panchayats remains pending". In its report, the committee, headed by BJP MP Baijayanta Panda, took to the NHPC's recommendation that a "qualified super-majority consent" – consent of 70-75% of the affected gram sabhas – should be sufficient for "large hydropower infrastructure projects of national importance".

The House panel had thus recommended that the Power Ministry discuss the "feasibility" of such a proposal with the Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

Previously, in cases such as the Nicobar mega-infrastructure project or other independent cases related to the implementation of the FRA in States like Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and many others, the Tribal Affairs Ministry has claimed that it has no role to play and argued that this was because the FRA mandates implementation of the law to the State or Union Territory governments.

Rajnath Singh set for 3-day Sri Lanka visit to boost defence ties

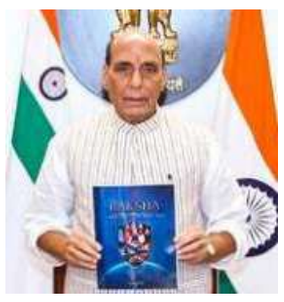
Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will undertake an official visit to Sri Lanka from September 8 to 10, marking the first such visit by an Indian Defence Minister to the island nation in 38 years. Mr. Singh will hold consultations with Sri Lanka's top leadership on a range of bilateral, regional and defence-related issues, and also interact with members of the Indian diaspora in Colombo.

The last Indian Defence Minister to visit Sri Lanka was K.C. Pant, who travelled to the country in 1988 while serving in Rajiv Gandhi's Cabinet.

Mr. Singh is expected to meet Sri Lankan President and Defence Minister Anura Kumara Dissanayake, Prime Minister Harini Amarasuriya and Secretary to the Ministry of Defence Air Vice Marshal (retd.) Sampath Thuyacontha.

Discussions are likely to cover defence cooperation, including possible collaboration in air-defence systems, and a review of ongoing security engagements between the two countries.



Rajnath Singh

The two sides are expected to review the full implementation of the India-Sri Lanka Defence Cooperation Memorandum of Understanding signed on April 5, 2025.

Mr. Singh is scheduled to visit Sri Lanka's National Defence College and inaugurate an infrastructure project, sources said.

The visit is being seen as a reflection of India's continued emphasis on its Neighbourhood First policy and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of MAHASAGAR – Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions.

Keep ST classification criteria free of 'political manipulation': tribal body

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

A resolution was passed at the national convention of the Left-affiliated Adivasi Adhikar Rashtriya Manch (AARM) in New Delhi on Sunday, outlining a charter of demands on the rights of Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities pertaining to resources, education, employment, and culture. The demands ranged from increasing the reservation percentage for ST communities and introducing reservations in the private sector to including Adivasi languages in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution and making the criteria for ST classification immune to "political manipulation".

While outfits like the Janjati Suraksha Manch and the Akhil Bharatiya Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram have called for introducing a religion criterion to ST classification that will eventually delist ST communities that have converted to Islam or Christianity, the AARM has explicitly opposed both these demands, articulating that only certain criteria needed to be reviewed to do away with outdated conditions for classification.

Brinda Karat

Communist Party of India (Marxist) leader and AARM vice-president Brinda Karat said that some criteria set by the Lokur Committee, established in 1965 to look into the criteria for identifying ST communities, had become obsolete, such as the ones requiring a community to be isolated or have shyness of contact to be considered ST, and needed to be reviewed.

Ms. Karat said, "I don't want to name the communities. In various States, the BJP is trying to divide Adivasis by helping people who are not Adivasis [and] encouraging them to demand ST certificates; and that is a very dangerous game they are playing. Ever since the BJP has come into power, or where they are in power, where there are large Adivasi communities, what we are finding is that they are using the State governments and the RSS [Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh] to divide Adivasis so that they can prop up their majoritarian identity framework."

The AARM national convention held in New Delhi saw the participation of delegates from across the country.

The demands

The AARM called for a time-bound review of rejected Forest Rights Act (FRA) claims, empowering gram sabhas, scrapping State task forces working outside their statutory ambit, and freezing forest evictions. On employment, the demands included implementing reservation in all forms of government hiring.

The AARM demanded an increase in the budgetary allocation for education in Adivasi regions; nutritious, and hot cooked mid-day meals; the reintroduction of eggs in school menus; an increase in scholarship amounts; and sports facilities for Adivasi students.

Jewellers commence dispatches for T.N. gold ring scheme for newborns

Sangeetha Kandavel
CHENNAI

With the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam-led government preparing to launch the *Thai Maaman Thanga Mothiram Thittam*, Joyalukkas Group and Kalyan Jewellers, the two jewellers awarded the tender for the scheme, have begun dispatching consignments from their facilities.

Under the scheme, a one gram gold ring will be provided to newborn babies delivered at government hospitals in the State, whose parents are residents of Tamil Nadu. A sum of ₹560 crore was allocated in the Revised Budget Estimates for this scheme. Work orders were issued to Joyalukkas and Kalyan Jewellers in a 70:30 ratio for the supply of one gram gold rings. "Shipping has commenced. The supply and dispatch process is being carried out in coordination with the State government and in accordance with the distribution and delivery mechanisms prescribed under the scheme," Joy Alukkas, chairman and managing director of Joyalukkas Group, said.

Quality check: A team at Joyalukkas Group inspecting the gold rings before they are dispatched. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

"For the first of the four lots, Joyalukkas has been entrusted with the manufacture and supply of 89,955 rings," he said.

The rings are packed in a pouch specially designed exclusively for the project, with the *Thai Maaman Thanga Mothiram Thittam* initiative clearly mentioned on the packaging. The company said it had given particular attention in ensuring the packaging was secure. "The rings are being manufactured through our supplier network and packed at our two dedicated hubs in Chennai and Coimbatore. This enables us to manage quality control, security, and dispatch in a concentrated and systematic manner."

38,550 rings

"We are supplying the required volume of 38,550 rings in planned lots. Dispatches and deliveries are being managed in batches ahead of schedule to cover all 107 locations," said T.S. Kalyanaraman, managing director, Kalyan Jewellers.

Responding to a query on how the deal would remain feasible amid fluctuations in gold prices, Mr. Kalyanaraman said: "With fully integrated manufacturing, structured logistics coordination, and real-time order tracking, we are able to maintain tight operational control and stay on top of market movements."

Muslim groups slam razing of U.P. mosque

Ziya Us Salam
NEW DELHI

Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind and Jamaat-e-Islami Hind condemned the demolition of a century-old mosque on the Saharanpur Collectorate premises in Uttar Pradesh, terming it "a serious blow to the principles of justice and due process of law".

Mahmood Madani, president of one of the factions of Jamiat, said, "Since the dispute concerned land within the Collectorate premises, the administration and the magistrate had themselves become parties to the matter. It is a universally recognised principle of law that no party can be a judge in its own cause".

He questioned the haste with which the demolition was carried out, saying it had left the affected party with little or no opportunity to seek relief from the higher judiciary.

AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami and other functionaries during the meeting at the party's head office in Chennai on Sunday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

AIADMK holds district secretaries' meeting

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami on Sunday chaired a meeting of the party's district unit secretaries at its head office in Chennai. Besides Mr. Palaniswami, senior leaders Tamil Magan Hussain, K.P. Munusamy, and Dindigul C. Sreenivasan took part in the meeting.

Former Minister D. Jayakumar, R.B. Udhayakumar, Agri S.S. Krishnamurthy, K.C. Karuppannan, K.T. Rajenthra Bhalaji, and O.S. Manian were among those who participated.

When asked if he expected anything in Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay's speech in the Assembly scheduled for Monday, AIADMK functionary and former Minister Sellur K. Raju said the Chief Minister would be speaking after having undertaken a rehearsal.

"He will memorise and deliver punchlines, but the people are worried about the rising prices of essential commodities," he added.

Over 19 lakh hit by floods in Bihar; RJD seeks Centre's aid

Amit Bhelari
PATNA

Over 19 lakh people across 11 districts of Bihar have been affected by floods, with authorities sounding an alert in downstream areas after the water level in the Ganga crossed the Highest Flood Level (HFL) mark at Gandhi Ghat in Patna, officials said on Sunday.

A State Water Resources Department (WRD) official said this situation was likely to be observed over the next three days at Hathidah and subsequent downstream gauge stations. The water level at Hathidah might even surpass the previous HFL mark.

A department official also said heightened vigilance was required in the riparian areas of Begusarai, Lakhisarai, Munger, Bhagalpur, and Katihar districts.

"In view of the surge in water levels downstream from Gandhi Ghat, officials and field staff have been instructed to remain alert and continuously monitor the levels," said the official.

People wade through floodwater following a rise in the water level of the Gandak River at Hajipur, in Vaishali, on Sunday. ANI

Meanwhile, Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) national working president and Leader of the Opposition Tejashwi Yadav demanded that the Central government declare Bihar's floods a "national disaster" and provide special financial assistance of ₹5,000 crore.

He urged the Centre to ensure the support of Air Force helicopters in flood relief and rescue operations.

Mr. Yadav said 76% of Bihar's area was flood-affected, and 19 districts were gripped by devastating floods, with more than 20 lakh people trapped in this disaster.

"Public infrastructure has suffered severe damage. There has been loss of life and property worth thousands of crores. The already bankrupt Bihar government is indifferent to assisting the flood victims. I urge Prime Minister Narendra Modi *ji* to immediately visit Bihar, survey the ground situation, and provide immediate relief," the RJD leader told pressmen in Patna.

Adopt resolution in T.N. House for proper caste census: Stalin

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

DMK president and former Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Sunday urged the State government to adopt a resolution in the Tamil Nadu Assembly urging the Centre to conduct a proper caste census to ascertain the socio-economic status of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in the country, evolve an appropriate reservation policy, and ensure the empowerment of OBCs.

In a social media message, he said the objective of the caste census could be achieved only if the census was conducted based on a list of communities prepared by the Central and the State governments.

He said the "open-ended format to record caste details without a pre-determined drop-down list or standardised menu", as announced by the Centre, was disappointing. The explanation that the communities listed in the OBC list were not castes but classes was also not acceptable, he said.

Mr. Stalin said the Centre should consult the State governments and collect details of the castes listed under the Backward Classes and Most Backward Classes categories. People should be given an opportunity to choose a caste from the combined list, he said. "If castes are collected based on the suggestions of the people, it will only create confusion. As already pointed out by those interested in social justice, it will result in claims relating to 46 lakh communities," he said.

Mr. Stalin said if the present method was followed, it would result in the waste of ₹12,000 crore and the labour of government employees. "It will not offer any benefits and will only be an eyewash," he said.

‘If my party says I should step down as its president, I will’

It is not for the govt. or the BNP to decide who will lead the Awami League, former Bangladesh PM says as she calls for the ban on her party to be revoked; she asks how her press conference could damage India-Bangladesh relations, adding that her intention was simply to tell the truth; she has not met Modi or Sonia during her stay as she has ‘decided only to meet party workers and relatives’

INTERVIEW

Sheikh Hasina

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

Defending her right to hold a press conference and meet her Awami League party colleagues while in India, Bangladesh’s former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina says she has no intention of damaging India-Bangladesh ties. In an interview to *The Hindu*, including in written replies and an extensive telephone conversation, Ms. Hasina, who has been convicted of murder and sentenced to death in Bangladesh, says she is undeterred about returning to Bangladesh, and accuses the Tariq Rahman government of continuing to harass and imprison her party workers. Excerpts:

What can you tell us about the events of August 5, 2024, when you fled from Dhaka?

On August 5 (2024), I did not leave Bangladesh by choice. My security personnel, party leaders, and family members urged me to leave the Prime Minister’s residence. I was prepared to go to Tungipara [Ms. Hasina’s hometown], and I had expressed my willingness to leave and resign as Prime Minister. But I didn’t get the chance to resign.

I did not even know that I was leaving the country. Only when I was in the helicopter did I learn from my staff that I was being taken to India.

India received me at very short notice and made arrangements for my security and stay. I am grateful for that. But it was very hard for me to accept that I had been taken out of my own country.

When you reached Delhi on August 5, 2024, did you intend to stay in India, or was there a plan for you to travel elsewhere? Have you applied for asylum or visas in any other country?

No, I did not want to go anywhere else. I am next door to my country, as close as I can be to my people. From here, I can keep in touch with them. Where else would I go? How would I live somewhere else? I do not have any means to live abroad permanently.

Given your personal equations with them, have you met Prime Minister Narendra Modi or Sonia Gandhi during your time here?

Frankly, I did not want to try and meet them, given the circumstances. No doubt, I have good relations with them, but I decided I would only meet my party workers and relatives while here. Maybe a time will come that I will go home and then come again to India, and then meet everyone, including media.

Are you sure the Bangladesh government will allow you to go back, and not stop you at the border?

This is a peculiar situation. They repeatedly ask the Indian government to send me to Bangladesh, but when I say they don’t need to send me, I will come myself, then that also seems to be a problem for them.

The Bangladesh government says your recent press conference has damaged the atmosphere for India-Bangladesh relations. Do you think your public remarks are affecting bilateral ties?

When I heard this, I was surprised. How can a press conference damage India-Bangladesh relations? I did not know that I was so powerful that one press conference of mine could damage Bangladesh’s foreign policy.

In 2007, Tarique Rahman gave a written undertaking that he would never engage in politics. But when he was in London and took up the BNP [Bangladesh Nationalist Party] leadership, he gave online speeches, held video conferences. Did my government write to the British government raising this issue? No. We did not ask another country to silence him.

My intention was never to damage anything. I wanted to tell the truth. Freedom of speech and expression is part of democracy. So, the real question is not whether my press conference damaged relations. The real question is why truth and free speech are being feared so much.

In your time as PM, you also banned the Jamaat-e-Islami. Was that a mistake? They are now the main Opposition in Bangladesh...

Jamaat-e-Islami members were war criminals – they worked with the Pakistani Army during the occupation, they were convicted for rape, murder and genocide. That is why they were banned. But later, they would be part of coalitions with other parties. In 2013, the courts cancelled their registration, and they could not stand for elections.

That was years ago. Today, even the Indian High Commission and the Foreign Secretary (Vikram Misri) have met with the Jamaat leadership...

If that is so, I have no comment.

Has the Indian government conveyed to you that you should not hold any more press conferences? What kind of support do you expect from India and the international community?

It is important for the world to understand what Bangladesh is going through today. The largest political party, the party that brought independence to Bangladesh, has been banned. My demands are simple. I ask the international community to support the lifting of the ban on the Awami League; the release of political detainees; the withdrawal of false cases; the safety and security of every citizen, especially women and girl children; freedom of movement; and freedom of speech and expression.

If the Bangladesh government were to revoke the ban on the Awami League on the condition that you step down as its president, would you agree?

Awami League is the only party in Bangladesh that works according to a constitution. It is the party that decides who will be the leader. I am prepared to step down, but who is the government or the BNP to decide who will lead the Awami League?

How do you view the recent youth protests in India? Looking back, could your government have handled the protests in Bangladesh differently?

I will not comment on India’s internal matters. India is a democratic country, and its people and institutions will deal with their own issues. No matter how differently I would have handled [protesters in Bangladesh], their sole motive was to remove me. There was no compromise with them.

Sudivya Kumar

Jharkhand Minister and close Soren aide Sudivya Kumar dies

Amit Bhelari
PATNA

Senior Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) leader and Minister Sudivya Kumar died of cardiac arrest on Sunday. He was 56.

The two-time MLA for the Giridih constituency was serving as the Higher and Technical Education and Urban Development Minister, besides holding the portfolios of Tourism, Arts & Culture, and Sports and Youth Affairs.

Chief Minister Hemant Soren, in a post on X, said, “Late at night, I received the heartbreaking news of the passing of my elder brother, our beloved Sudivya Kumar Sonu Ji. Accepting this news is extremely difficult for me. His departure has left a void in my life that cannot be expressed in words.”

“From the days of the Jharkhand movement, he stood with full devotion and strength alongside the late ‘Baba Dishom Guruji’ [late JMM patriarch Shibu Soren]. ...he devoted his entire life to the fight for Jharkhand’s identity, rights, and pride,” he said.

A close aide of Mr. Soren, Mr. Kumar played a key role in managing crises within the JMM, even during Mr. Soren’s arrest in 2024 in connection with an alleged land fraud and money laundering case.

Mr. Kumar returned to Jharkhand this week from Karnataka, where he led a State government delegation to explore ways to improve tourism infrastructure management and forest management.

Mr. Kumar is survived by his wife, two daughters, and a son.

CPI(M) identifies ‘parliamentary aberrations’, failure to follow mass line as key concerns

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

“Parliamentary aberrations”, failure in implementing the policy of mass line, and lack of collective functioning have been identified as the three primary shortcomings to be addressed as part of the CPI(M)’s “rectification campaign”, party general secretary M.A. Baby said on Sunday.

He was addressing a press conference at the conclusion of a two-day meeting of the party’s Polit Bureau in New Delhi. The “rectification campaign” comes in the wake of the party’s defeat in the Kerala Assembly election.

“The 24th Party Congress in Madurai had called for a stage-wise rectification campaign within the party. As part of implementing this, we had a discussion. Parliamentary aberrations, lack of adherence to the mass line by party comrades, and issues related to collective functioning have been identified by the party. We have to discuss how far each one of us is free from these,” he said.

CPI(M) general secretary M.A.Baby addresses the media after the party’s meeting in New Delhi on Sunday. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

A Polit Bureau statement issued later said, “The impact of alien class influences like parliamentarism was discussed along with the experiences in implementing the policy of mass line and measures to strengthen collective functioning at all levels of the Party.”

Mr. Baby did not explain the phrase “parliamentary aberrations”, only stating that it has “various dimensions”. He elaborated at length on the need for a better connection with people. “We should be with people, learn from them and listen to them,” he said. He added that when the senior leadership visits States, it should take time out beyond formal committee meetings to speak to comrades and listen to them. Each State committee would undertake this rectification exercise, he said.

Former Keralam Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, at recent public meetings in Payyannur and Taliparamba in Kannur, had blamed betrayal, internal sabotage and party workers’ susceptibility to propaganda for the party’s poor performance in these strongholds and elsewhere in the State.

‘Support party’s pick’

Mr. Baby supported Mr. Vijayan’s stance, saying that if the party decides on a candidate, all members must support that person. Any disagreements should have been raised within party forums, he said.

The Central Committee will meet in New Delhi from October 9 to 11 to discuss and strengthen the report after its deliberations.

On contesting the elections in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, Mr. Baby said the CPI(M) would remain committed to its goal of defeating the BJP and its allies. Electoral strategies had not yet been finalised and would have to be worked out at the State level. “We will explore all possibilities, keeping this goal in mind, to defeat the BJP and its allies,” he said.

Asked about Rahul Gandhi as a possible Prime Minister, Mr. Baby said the question could be answered only after the next general election and that any speculation would be futile.

However, he added: “Naturally, the Leader of the Opposition has the right [to aspire to the position]. But we do not want to engage in an exercise of hypothesising. Our goal is that the fascist regime of the BJP/RSS should be removed from power. Last time we came close to it; if we had been more careful, this could have happened in the last election. We should not miss our chance now.”

1.85 lakh names out of Manipur, Sikkim poll rolls after SIR

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

About 6.3% of voter names in Manipur and 11.2% in Sikkim have been removed from the electoral rolls during the special intensive revision (SIR) exercise. The final photo electoral rolls were published in both northeastern States on Sunday.

Before the SIR exercise began, Manipur had 20,93,076 voters, and Sikkim had 4,71,081. After the SIR, the names of 1.85 lakh voters – 1,32,456 in Manipur and 52,614 in Sikkim – have been deleted from the rolls. Manipur now has 19,60,620 eligible voters, while Sikkim has 4,18,467.

Before and during the SIR exercise, Manipur’s Kuki-Zo groups expressed fears that community members displaced after the ethnic conflict that erupted on May 3, 2023, would be deleted from the electoral rolls though the government sought to dispel such apprehensions.

More women voters

In Manipur, women voters (10,06,962) outnumber men (9,53,350), recording a gender ratio of 1,056 women for every 1,000 men electors. The State has 308 third-gender electors.

In a statement, the office of the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) said the final photo electoral rolls were published in compliance with the instructions issued by the Election Commission of India. The draft electoral rolls published on July 5 had 19,34,399 electors.

Altogether, 96,985 claims and objections filed during the claims and objections period were processed for the final rolls. In addition, all forms received before July 5 were processed for final publication. “A total of 56,871 electors have been included, and a total of 30,650 electors have been deleted from the draft electoral roll,” said the statement.

The CEO’s office said it received 19,34,399 of the total enumeration forms generated for the electors. Altogether, 1,58,677 electors whose enumeration forms were not received were excluded from the draft rolls. Of them, 72,473 were identified as shifted, 43,000 as deceased, 34,740 as absent, 7,394 as duplicate entries, and 1,070 under other categories.

During the SIR, Kuki-Zo groups had said that those displaced by ethnic conflict could be struck out of the rolls. PTI

The Sikkim CEO’s office in Gangtok said the State’s final electoral roll has 4,18,467 voters, after the deletion of 52,614 names.

The draft rolls released in July had 4,33,294 electors, of whom 3,61,159 or 83.35% were successfully mapped with their own or parents’ electoral details from the previous qualifying rolls or the last SIR. The remaining 72,135 electors (16.65%) could not be mapped, an official statement said.

‘Logical discrepancies’

Among the mapped electors, the Election Commission’s digital system identified 52,384 as having “logical discrepancies”.

“A total of 1,24,519 electors, comprising those in the unmapped and logical discrepancy categories, were issued notices to appear for hearings and establish their eligibility. Following hearings and verification, 16,485 electors were found ineligible,” the statement said.

Another 324 electors were deleted through Form-7 on grounds including death or shifting from the address. The total number of electors deleted during the claims and objections process was 16,809.

The final roll includes 2,12,534 men voters, 2,05,931 women, and two from the third gender.

Modi turned student event into political campaign: Kharge

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Sunday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of turning his interaction with students at Delhi University’s Shri Ram College of Commerce (SRCC) into a “political campaign” instead of engaging with questions on the youth and their future and education.

In a post on X, Mr. Kharge said the Prime Minister’s visit to SRCC was an opportunity for dialogue with the country’s youth but alleged that Mr. Modi chose to avoid their questions. He accused the Prime Minister of using labels for the Opposition to divert attention from the government’s failures. Referring to terms such as “*Naraaz Phupha*” (Angry Uncle), “*Dimagi* Naxal”, “Urban Naxal,” “Khan Market Gang”, “*Andolanjeevi*” and “*Parjeevi*”, Mr. Kharge said the “adjectives keep changing”, but the government’s “anti-people policies do not change”.

Mallikarjun Kharge

“Outreach is only needed when you become out of reach,” Mr. Kharge said.

Mr. Kharge also invoked the Congress’s *Chhatron Ki Goonj* campaign, urging Mr. Modi to listen to the programme and find some solutions instead of “beating around the bush”.

Delhi CM visits collapse site, says won’t spare those guilty

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta visited the site of the deadly building collapse in Satya Niketan on Sunday evening, to oversee rescue operations and ensure that all agencies are working in tandem to rescue those still trapped under the debris, even as Opposition leaders called for accountability, and a relook at the student housing crisis in the national capital.

The Chief Minister has ordered a magisterial inquiry into the incident.

Standing on the first floor of a temple adjacent to the site, Ms. Gupta declared that whoever is responsible for the collapse will not be spared, whether it is the building’s owner or a government official.

“The building was old, and some construction and renovation work was under way. Our priority is to save the lives of these children first. All officials are present here, and there will be no shortage of any kind. However, the guilty will not be spared,” she said.

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta takes stock of the condition of the injured in Delhi. ANI

‘Life-threatening crisis’

Calling the incident “heartbreaking” and “alarming”, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi said that Congress workers and volunteers from the party’s student wing, the National Students’ Union of India (NSUI), were at the disaster site and ready to provide every possible assistance.

Students’ housing struggles have now turned life-threatening, he said. “Due to the lack of good hostels in colleges or universities, students are forced to live in PG accommodations, 40-40 at a time under one roof, in inhumane conditions. Every student’s life is precious, and their protection must be ensured under all circumstances,” Mr. Gandhi said in a post on X.

Former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who heads the Aam Aadmi Party, blamed the BJP government’s “negligence” for the “tragic” and “alarming” collapse.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed his condolences to the families of victims and said authorities were working at the site and assisting those affected in the mishap.

INBRIEF

FPIs pull out ₹7,443 cr. from equities in first week of Sept.

After investing in Indian equities for two consecutive months, foreign investors turned net sellers in the first week of September, pulling out ₹7,443 crore as a rebound in crude oil prices, rising U.S. bond yields, and a firm dollar dented risk appetite. The outflow came after foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) infused ₹30,919 crore in August and ₹20,200 crore in July. Before that, they remained net sellers for four straight months from March to June. With the latest withdrawal, total outflow by foreign portfolio investors from Indian equities has climbed to ₹2.32 lakh crore so far in 2026, surpassing the ₹1.66 lakh crore withdrawn in 2025. PTI

Punjab Police arrest man wanted in U.S. over fraud

A naturalised American citizen, who allegedly defrauded the U.S. government of at least $600,000 and carried a bounty of $1,15,000, was arrested by the Punjab Police in Jalandhar, officials said on Sunday. Manjeet Singh Bedi left the United States in April and reached India via Canada to evade the law. He was arrested two days ago in a fraud case registered in Rama Mandi, the police said. During questioning, the police learned that he had committed fraud in the U.S. and fled from there. The case in Jalandhar involved allegedly duping a person on the pretext of helping him go abroad. PTI

ISRO's role is by no means diminishing: space officials

Agency will remain the bedrock of the Indian space sector, says IN-SPACe chief Pawan Goenka amid concerns raised by ISRO staff associations over 'privatisation'; agency calls concerns 'baseless'

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

The top brass of India's space establishment refuted suggestions that privatisation in the space sector threatened the workforce of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).

The role of the ISRO was "by no means diminishing", said IN-SPACe chairman Pawan Kumar Goenka on Sunday, responding to a joint letter from nine ISRO employee associations seeking written clarification on whether the government intends to transfer the agency's launch-vehicle and satellite manufacturing to private firms. "There has been some misleading narrative in the media around the future role of ISRO. Let me say it unequivocally: ISRO's role is by no means diminishing. It will remain the bedrock of Indian space sector." Dr. Goenka said in a post on X.

The reforms that began in 2020, he said, were aimed at expanding India's overall space ecosystem, with IN-SPACe authorising non-government participation and NewSpace India Limited (NSIL) commercialising mature capabilities.

> There has been misleading narrative... the direction is not a smaller ISRO. It is a larger Indian space ecosystem, with ISRO pushing the technological frontier.
>
> **PAWAN KUMAR GOENKA**
> IN-SPACe chairman

Industry would increasingly manufacture and scale mature launch vehicles and satellites, he added, while ISRO would concentrate on advanced R&D, scientific and strategic missions, and infrastructure too complex for private developers – including the Bharatiya Antariksh Station by 2035 and an Indian crewed lunar mission by 2040. "The direction is not a smaller ISRO," he wrote.

Longer clarification

His post was followed by a longer clarification from ISRO, calling suggestions of privatisation "completely baseless and incorrect" and stating that the agency would neither be privatised nor have its importance reduced. Transferring a mature technology, it said, did not amount to withdrawal from that domain; the shift was towards an "ISRO-led national space ecosystem", institutionalised through the Indian Space Policy 2023.

The agency said India now has over 450 space start-ups against a handful in 2020, and aims to grow its roughly $8.4-billion space economy to $44 billion by 2033. Ownership of critical national space infrastructure, it said, would remain with the government. The letter that prompted the responses was dated September 4 and addressed to Dr. V. Narayanan, Secretary, Department of Space and Chairman, ISRO. Its signatories cited Dr. Goenka's public remarks on August 21 that ISRO would eventually not make or manufacture any launch vehicles.

Questions raised

They asked whether that position represented an approved Space Commission decision. They further asked what would happen to sanctioned strength and recruitment over the next five to 10 years, and whether the associations would be consulted before irreversible decisions.

Employees of the Department of Space are exempted from the statutory definition of "industry" and cannot form trade unions. They instead organise as service associations recognised under the Central Civil Services (Recognition of Service Associations) Rules, 1993. The letter was copied to the Confederation of Central Government Employees and Workers.

Road map ready to make India drug-free by 2029, says Shah

Press Trust of India
PANAJI

Amit Shah

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said that the government has prepared a road map to make India drug-free by 2029, asserting that a drug-free youth population would lead to the goal of a *Viksit Bharat* by 2047.

The Centre has adopted a coordinated, nationwide strategy to dismantle the entire narcotics network, from drug trafficking to financing, while also focusing on rehabilitation, as part of its goal of achieving a "Drug-Free India" by 2029, Mr. Shah said at a press conference after chairing a high-level meeting on narcotics attended by Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant and officials of the Union Home Ministry and the State government.

Mr. Shah said that in 2019, a four-tier National Coordination Committee for Countering Drug Trafficking (NCORD) mechanism was created at the executive, State and district levels to ensure coordinated action against the drug menace in the country. "Dedicated Anti-Narcotics Task Forces [ANTFs] have been constituted in all States and Union Territories, and local police have been linked with the national strategy."

He said a Joint Coordination Committee was also formed in 2019 to enable Central agencies and State governments to take joint decisions against major drug networks, their international connections and operational gaps.

The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) has been strengthened by reorganising its cadre and enhancing its manpower, zonal presence and operational capabilities, Mr. Shah said.

The government has linked awareness, treatment, rehabilitation and livelihood opportunities with the anti-narcotics campaign, he pointed out, adding that the 1933 MANAS helpline has been introduced to support persons with drug addiction.

UN-backed map must reflect Indian position on J&K, Ladakh: govt.

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

India on Sunday said a United Nations-initiated proposed world map must depict the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh in accordance with the country's official map, and any "inaccurate" or "misleading" representation will be unacceptable.

New Delhi's assertion came two days after it voted in favour of a UN General Assembly resolution aimed at correcting the world map to promote a more accurate representation of continental landmasses. The resolution titled "Correct the Map: Rebalancing Global Cartographic Representation and Promoting Equitable Representation of the World's Regions, Particularly Africa" was adopted on Friday.

External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said India highlighted that the resolution does not constitute endorsement of any specific map, projection or depiction of national boundaries.

"India's sovereign territory, including the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, must be depicted in accordance with India's official map. Any inaccurate or misleading depiction is unacceptable," he said.

"Our position on India's sovereignty and territorial integrity is clear, consistent and non-negotiable," he noted.

Mr. Jaiswal further said: "The resolution neither adopts nor authenticates any particular world map, nor does it address political cartography, including international boundaries, disputed territories or place name".

As yoga and Ayurveda become part of India's global health diplomacy, experts press for credible standards

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

Yoga and Ayurveda have moved beyond their traditional wellness identity and are increasingly becoming part of India's global health and diplomatic strategy, with the Centre seeking to expand their footprint through medical tourism, international education, practitioner mobility and trade agreements.

The shift is particularly evident in India's recent trade diplomacy. The India-Oman Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), operationalised in June 2026, and the India-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (FTA) contain dedicated provisions on health-related services and traditional medicine. These include measures to ease licensing, develop standards and facilitate the mobility of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, Sowa-Rigpa, and Homeopathy (AYUSH) practitioners and instructors.

New opportunity

The India-European Union FTA, signed in January 2026, goes further, allowing AYUSH practitioners to use their Indian qualifications in EU countries where no regulatory framework exists and providing for AYUSH wellness centres and clinics.

The agreements represent an attempt to transform AYUSH from being a cultural export to a formalised health and services opportunity.

The India-Oman CEPA contains what the government describes as its first comprehensive commitment on traditional medicine across all modes of supply, while the India-New Zealand FTA has a dedicated "health and traditional medicine" annex covering AYUSH practices.

The Centre issued 1,646 AYUSH visas to nationals from 75 countries between January 2024 and February 2025.

The New Zealand agreement also provides structured mobility pathways, including a dedicated visa quota for AYUSH practitioners. The government said the agreement would institutionalise cooperation in education, training, standards development and wellness services.

However, the diplomatic push also raises questions about how far formal recognition and market access will translate into actual international demand.

Experts point to the need for credible standards, evidence, regulation, practitioner quality and patient safety if AYUSH is to establish itself in increasingly regulated global healthcare markets.

Senior officials in the Ministry of AYUSH said the AYUSH visa, overseas training and exchange programmes were also helping expand the sector.

"Foreign medical arrivals rose from 1.83 lakh in 2020 to 6.44 lakh in 2024, as per our data. Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, the United Arab Emirates, the United States, Germany, Russia, Malaysia, Mauritius and Saudi Arabia are among the important markets for AYUSH and Ayurveda treatment. The government does not publish a current consolidated country-wise ranking of AYUSH patients," he said.

Absence of data

However, the figure of 6.44 lakh refers to overall foreign medical arrivals and not specifically AYUSH patients. The absence of consolidated data makes it difficult to assess AYUSH's actual share of India's medical-value-travel market.

The AYUSH visa, introduced in 2023, is another component of the strategy. Between January 2023 and December 2025, a total of 3,375 foreign nationals travelled to India on AYUSH visas or e-AYUSH visas, while another 579 travelled on AYUSH attendant visas or e-AYUSH attendant visas.

Earlier, the Ministry had reported that 1,646 AYUSH visas had been issued to nationals of 75 countries between January 2024 and February 2025.

Education is also emerging as another channel of influence. Under the AYUSH Fellowship Scheme, 260 students from 32 countries were studying AYUSH in Indian institutions.

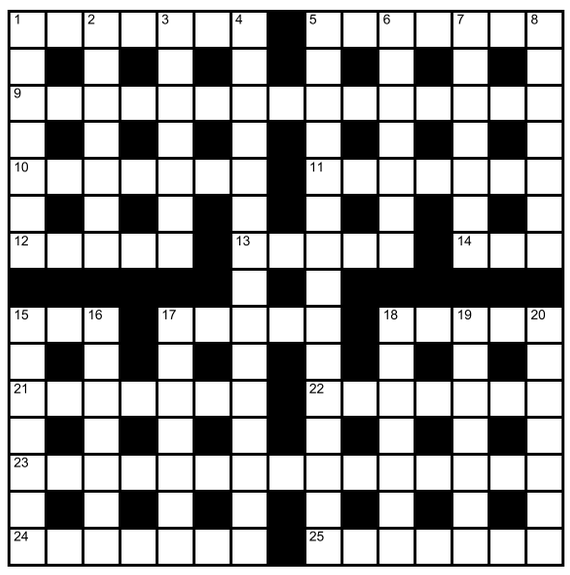
The Ministry's international cooperation programmes also support training, seminars, conferences and knowledge exchange, including yoga and education overseas.

TH CROSSWORD + 14892

(set by Vidwan)

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

SCAN TO PLAY



Across

1 Give me solicitor accepting Euros (4,3)
5 First to finish, Italian gentleman passes over (7)
9 Transformers communicate with this drunk Chilean man? Find out! (7,8)
10 Guess working after retirement is hell! (7)
11 A seed, it magically conceives (7)
12 Fish out millions for parlour (5)
13 King's quality time wasted for a snake (5)
14 Go bankrupt without one (3)
15 Plant scents, ignored at times (3)
17 Generous anchor going back to Sony at last! (5)
18 Fellow with second-hand joint (5)
21 Married Buddhist monk returns, enshrining eleven of the greatest values (7)
22 Some hoodlum brag evokes resentment (7)
23 Every bull and noble died foolishly in front of small golden-haired gals (8,7)
24 Paramour loses head and fight's cut short! (7)
25 Managed palace without slightest of tension or bitterness (7)

Down

1 Silent dumb shows killing men and women with babies (7)
2 Time to move with most comprehensive understanding (7)
3 Working around extremely small letter (7)
4 New Greek foe told about source of wisdom (4,2,9)
5 Murg biryani name spreads - one's root! (9,6)
6 No! No American eagle at court to disregard! (7)
7 It generates power for player (7)
8 Tramples kid of spouse from earlier marriage (7)
15 Part-time expert's broken promise (7)
16 Spooner's copy of document sent over net to a big plant without charge (3-4)
17 Poets freshly rendered, possibly extemporised (7)
18 When upset, Robin synthesises Spiderman's protein? (7)
19 Love going into beach to shop every so often for devil (2-3-2)
20 Doctor left out lower chest (7)

SUDOKU

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

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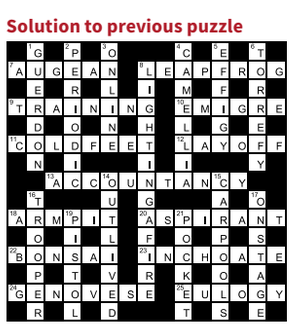
DIFFICULTY RATING: ★☆☆☆☆

Solution to previous puzzle



Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

FAITH

Rama answers Vaali

A dying Vaali questions Rama and wonders if He is indeed righteous. What was His enmity with Vaali? Why did He have to kill him, asks Vaali. Rama answers all the questions Vaali puts to Him, said Navalpakkam Vasudevachariar. Rama tells Vaali that Vaali had not cared for conventions or for uprightness. He had not consulted his intellectual superiors on the proper course of action, but had acted as he pleased. Rama points out to Vaali that everything on the earth is under the control of the Ikshvaku clan to which Rama belongs. Not only human beings, but even animals, birds and trees are under the control of this dynasty. One of Vaali's objections is as to what jurisdiction Rama has in punishing Vaali. This is Rama's reply to that objection.

Bharata is ruler of the earth and he is a king who never veers from the moral path. Rama has a duty to enforce rules in Bharata's kingdom. In fact, Rama says to Bharata that while Bharata will be king of people in his kingdom, Rama will be king of all forest dwelling beings. Having assumed this responsibility, he had to punish Vaali. Rama says there are three father figures in a man's life. One is, his biological father. The other two are his elder brother and his teacher. Therefore, that a man should be a father not only to his own son, but also to his younger brother and to his student. Since Vaali is the elder brother of Sugreeva, the latter is like a son to him. But Vaali has misbehaved with Sugreeva's wife. Is that not akin to misbehaving with a daughter-in-law? That is the primary reason for Rama to kill Vaali. How can he spare the life of someone who has sinned and has broken all rules? As the representative of Bharata, Rama cannot tolerate such conduct.

Sharpest pictures of sun's surface reveal previously unseen whirlpools

In all pictures taken of the sun's surface in the past century, the edges of its convection cells were blurred; for decades, solar physicists wondered if these edges were really frayed or if they could find more detail if they observed the cells using a more powerful telescope; new images have settled the debate

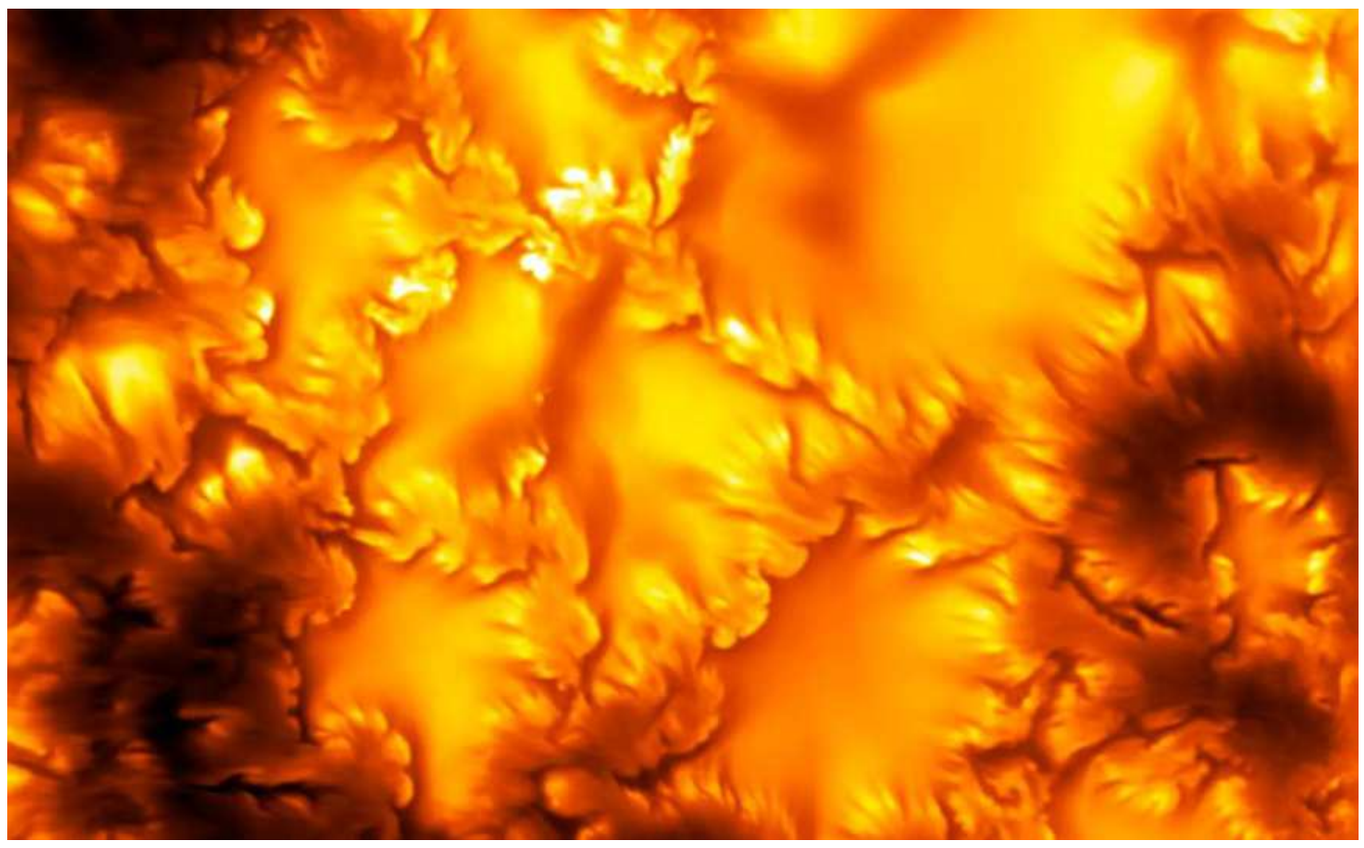
Shamim Haque Mondal

Scientists have used the world's largest telescope to study the sun to capture the highest-resolution pictures yet of the sun's surface, revealing small, violent plasma whirlpools moving across it.

The discovery could change how scientists understand the way energy and magnetic fields move through the sun's atmosphere. These whirlpools seem like an efficient way to move energy and magnetic flux, and could also be responsible for braiding the sun's magnetic fields at small scales.

Such braided fields are thought to store and release the energy that powers solar flares and other eruptions – and may help explain why the sun's outer atmosphere is so unexpectedly hot.

The team's findings were published in *Nature* on August 5.



The highest-resolution image of the sun's surface ever captured, by the Daniel K. Inouye Solar Telescope. At the edges of the solar granules, the image reveals fringed-looking structures that display swirling motions. NSF/NSO/AURA/MPS

Details on the edge

The part of the sun that we see is called the photosphere. This is a chaotic environment filled with a roiling mass of superheated plasma. The light we see on the earth is energy emitted by this plasma.

Astronomers have been taking pictures of the sun's exterior for a long time, and they have always seen a beehive-like structure there. The cells in this structure are called convection cells. Each cell spans up to around 2,000 km – the distance from Mumbai to Guwahati – and lasts for 5-10 minutes before dissipating. The visible features of a convection cell are called granules. All these granules together form the outer visible layer of the sun.

In all the pictures taken of the sun's surface in the past century, the edges of these granules were blurred. They looked like frayed cotton.

And for decades, solar physicists have wondered if these edges are really frayed or if they will find more detail if they observe them using a more powerful telescope. The new images have settled the debate.

"The weakness is in the telescope's aperture," the researchers – from the U.S. National Science Foundation National Solar Observatory (NSO), Germany's Max Planck Institute for Solar System Research (MPS), and the High Altitude Observatory (HAO) – wrote in their paper in *Nature*.

It seems that with telescopes whose primary mirrors are smaller than two metres wide, it is not possible for physicists to observe the fundamental perturbations on the sun's surface.

For their study, the researchers turned to the NSF Daniel K. Inouye Solar Telescope (DKIST) in Hawaii. Perched near the 10,000-foot-high summit of the Haleakalā volcano, the DKIST features a giant four metres primary mirror. It started scientific operations in late 2019.

The team used it to observe a magnetically active region on the sun called NOAA 14060, capturing light at a wavelength of 416 nanometres (which is visible light of a blue-violet colour). They also paired the telescope with a high-speed FastCam camera developed jointly by NSO and MPS. The camera had a exposure time of 100 microseconds, capturing up to 740 frames per second.

With the help of this camera, the researchers took many pictures of the sun's turbulent atmosphere.

Then, one member of the research team, Michiel van Noort of MPS, used an advanced image processing technology called multi-frame blind deconvolution to remove the blurring that occurs when the sun is photographed from the earth. Then the team combined multiple cleaned-up images to recover a clear image.

Dr. Noort used this technology to capture images of the sun's surface of dimension 5,800 km x 4,350 km at a resolution of 19 km. This is like being able to spot a 10-rupee coin in Mumbai from Pune. Thus, the team found that the edges of the solar granules are innumerable small coils of plasma, each only 25-170 km long, separated by around 65 km. And they had their own little magnetic fields.

Wind over a river

The researchers also found that these small plasma coils moved along the boundaries of the granules, twisting and interacting with one another. And as they did, they generated whirlpools in the plasma – vortices that spun rapidly and changed shape within seconds.

When a strong wind blows over a calm river, small whirlpools form on the water. Generally, physicists say, a vortex is formed at the interface where two adjacent fluids move past each other at different speeds. The same thing has been found happening on the sun.

Scientists have previously found such whirlpools in the atmosphere of gaseous planets like Jupiter.

This is the first time scientists have seen such a wave moving on the surface of the sun.

These whirlpools in the sun's plasma also rapidly grow in size. The scientists found that the fastest-growing vortices became 2.7-times larger than their original size in just 18 seconds. Even those that grew a little slower took only 71 seconds to reach this size. They rotated at about 1.6-2.8 km/s.

The scientists found that, over three minutes, these whirlpools constantly form, merge with each other, and break up again.

A new way

The team confirmed its observations with the DKIST using magneto-hydrodynamics simulations on a computer. In both cases, the vortices' rotational speed and energy were the same. In other words, these whirlpools are essentially the sun's engines: they capture the sun's internal magnetic energy and radiate it out into the universe.

The simulations also suggested the whirlpools lie 100-400 km below the photosphere.

The findings give solar physicists a new way to investigate the boundary between convection and magnetism. The whirlpools generate turbulence and continuously distort the magnetic fields. In doing so, they could provide the small-scale motion needed to braid magnetic field lines and release magnetic energy higher in the atmosphere.

The next step is to determine how much energy these instabilities transport and how the small vortices are connected to the more energetic events of the sun's atmosphere.

(Shamim Haque Mondal is with the Physics Division, State Forensic Science Laboratory, Kolkata. shamimmondal709@gmail.com)

THE GIST

New images captured by the world's largest telescope have provided the clearest view yet of the sun's surface, helping scientists better understand how energy and magnetic fields move through its atmosphere

Scientists used the Daniel K. Inouye Solar Telescope in Hawaii, which has a giant four metres mirror, to capture the sharpest images of the sun's surface; its advanced imaging capabilities allowed researchers to observe tiny solar features that smaller telescopes could not detect

Scientists found that tiny plasma coils on the sun's surface continuously move, twist and interact, and create fast-spinning whirlpools similar to those formed when strong winds disturb water. These vortices grow rapidly, merge and break apart within seconds, revealing a highly dynamic process never before observed

BIG SHOT

In this drone photo released by the Geological Agency (Badan Geologi) of Indonesia's Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, Mount Anak Krakatau spews volcanic smoke in Sunda Strait, Indonesia on September 5. AP

WHAT IS IT?

Sulphuric acid: not so deadly

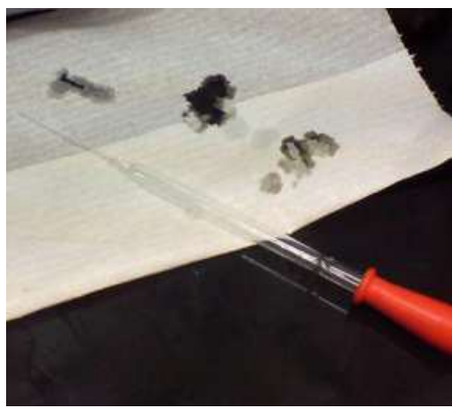
Vasudevan Mukunth

Researchers have found that certain peptides — short chains of amino acids that make up proteins — are not only stable in 98% concentrated sulphuric acid but also fold into the complex 3D shapes required to perform the functions central to life.

Thus, the findings, published *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* on September 4, defy the assumption that concentrated sulphuric acid is a bane for the building blocks of life. Scientists had previously found nucleic acid bases and amino acids to be stable in the same solvent; this is the first time a macromolecule important to biology has been shown to be capable of the same feat.

Normally, strong acids break down peptides in a process called hydrolysis; as the name suggests, water molecules break down one or more important bonds. Since 98% sulphuric acid contains almost no water, the reaction that would normally shred the peptide bonds can't happen, allowing the peptides to remain stable for several weeks at room temperature.

Using nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy, the researchers found that these peptides folded into a specific shape called an omega loop, using the sulphuric acid molecules themselves as a kind of scaffolding to help maintain the shape.



Drops of 98% concentrated sulphuric acid rapidly dehydrate tissue paper, leaving behind carbon, which stains it black. PUBLIC DOMAIN

This is however a significant departure from how proteins behave in water, where they typically form different structures like helices or sheets.

The findings are important for the search for life beyond the earth. For example, Venus is covered in clouds of concentrated sulphuric acid, which scientists previously assumed were too harsh an environment to host any complex chemistry. The new findings question this assumption.

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

Steady gaze

ISRO's EOS-05 satellite has uses in varied areas from security to weather

The successful launch of the Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) EOS-05 satellite is India's first earth-imaging satellite bound for a geosynchronous orbit, meaning that it is locked-in to the earth's rotation and can be tuned to continuously observe the same location. The rocket placed it in a transfer orbit early on Friday; onboard thrusters are expected to raise it to its final perch at some 36,000 kilometres above the earth's surface over the coming weeks. From there it can track fast-changing events such as floods, cyclones and forest fires, and monitor crops, forests, water bodies and land use. Unlike a conventional camera, its sensors examine how the earth's surface reflects different wavelengths of light, helping distinguish vegetation, water and other land cover. Because it is perched farther away than conventional low-orbit imaging satellites, its strength is not ultra-fine detail but the ability to return to the same broad areas very frequently. India has long had eyes in geostationary orbit, but they have been weather satellites, namely the INSAT-3D series. Its dedicated earth-imaging satellites have operated in low, polar or sun-synchronous orbits. Flying a few hundred kilometres up, they capture much finer detail, but move constantly around the planet, imaging a different strip of territory on successive passes and taking days to return.

EOS-05's timing could hardly be better. Given the devastation by the Bhote Koshi deluge in Nepal, which has claimed 1,344 lives, such satellites can play some role in understanding changes in landforms and how they may act as precursors to glacier-breaks and avalanches. Or, as winter approaches in north India, in establishing whether stubble fires over Punjab have genuinely declined or burning has simply shifted in time to slip past the polar satellites. ISRO has described the EOS-05 as a "strategic" satellite, a term that stretches from security to weather. All of this is premised on the data reaching a wide enough set of analysts who can turn the images into forecasts and actionable insight. There is cheer, too, that ISRO's first successful launch of 2026 – and another vote of confidence in the cryogenic stage that failed the agency in 2021 – comes after setbacks. But that does not soften the temperamental nature of launches. Two consecutive failures of the PSLV, the agency's workhorse since the 1990s, in May last year and again this January, both traced to the third stage, suggest that dependability is not infallibility. The usefulness of its payloads, and the cadence of its launches, should be ISRO's calling card, rather than any single launch as the hallmark of institutional credibility.

Bogged down

The U.S. should revive the MoU with Iran to cut its losses

Iran's attacks on American warships outside the Strait of Hormuz and U.S. retaliatory strikes on three Iranian oil tankers in the Gulf waters mark another phase of escalation in the six-month-long war between the two countries. After the collapse of the June 17 Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which sought to resolve the conflict through talks, both sides have carried out tit-for-tat attacks. Last month, U.S. President Donald Trump appeared to shift the focus of his Iran policy from military strikes to economic warfare, announcing new sanctions and tightening the U.S. Navy's blockade of Iran's ports. The U.S. also managed to get some oil tankers through the Strait of Hormuz through a southern route along the Omani coast. But Iran, which still maintains its chokehold over the waterway, continued to target vessels taking the southern route. Unable to find a way out, the U.S. returned to strikes, triggering Iranian attacks on American bases in Kuwait, Bahrain and Jordan. The latest escalation is significant because it is the first time in months that Iran has attacked U.S. military vessels, apparently seeking to break the blockade. By targeting Iranian tankers in retaliation, the U.S. has also crossed a red line. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps announced that it had struck six vessels in the Gulf – three tankers and three U.S.-linked ships – in retaliation for the American attacks on oil tankers, and vowed to expand their strikes against U.S. ships.

The central focus of the war today, which the U.S. and Israel launched on February 28 in the name of destroying Iran's nuclear programme and bringing about regime change in Tehran, is the Strait of Hormuz. That Tehran forced the U.S. to fight over a problem it created rather than pursue Washington's original objective is, in itself, a strategic victory for Iran. The frequent clashes and counter-clashes underscore two points. First, the U.S. does not have a clear theory of victory. Neither its military effort nor its economic warfare has forced Iran to change its position. The Strait remains unsafe, while the toll on the global economy is mounting. What the Trump administration appears to be doing is 'mowing the lawn', taken straight out of the Israeli playbook, with the aim of blunting Iran's attack capabilities. But each time, Iran retaliates, pursuing its own 'debasification' strategy, pushing U.S. military presence away from its immediate periphery. Second, Iran, despite its economic woes, has emerged more assertive. The more the U.S. seeks to trap Iran in an economic gridlock, the less risk-averse Tehran appears to be. As both sides seek escalation dominance, the war risks spiralling out of control. America is visibly under pressure. Mr. Trump has to accept the cold fact that he has lost this war and return to reviving the MoU before it is too late.

Judicial integrity — a case the Court cannot ignore

Kaleeswaram Raj

Lawyer at the Supreme Court of India

Serious allegations against the Acting Chief Justice of the Rajasthan High Court, Justice Sanjeev Prakash Sharma, have come to light following reports of letters written by Supreme Court of India judge Justice Sandeep Mehta to the Chief Justice of India (CJI), in which he has sought Justice Sharma's immediate transfer. Justice Mehta, who previously served as a judge of the Rajasthan High Court and is regarded for his uprightness, discipline, and integrity, wrote three such letters on August 2, 10, and 17. The contents of these letters are now partly in the public domain.

Letters that raise serious questions

The letters reportedly refer to complaints about the manner in which Justice Sharma has been functioning. They also highlight alleged instances of victimisation of judges, maladministration, improper "shifting of cases" to his Bench, and nepotism in appointments to the Permanent Lok Adalat. Justice Sharma has allegedly been intimidating some of his colleagues with the threat of retributive measures, including transfers, based on his claimed proximity to the CJI. It is reported that Justice Mehta's letters refer to specific instances of alleged favouritism towards a chosen few among the lawyers and the misuse of power in his capacity as the "master of the roster". Justice Mehta's last letter reportedly expresses concern over the CJI's alleged inaction, particularly as Justice Sharma is due to retire on September 26. So far, there has been no official denial of the reports concerning the contents of the letters. Justice Sharma, of course, has publicly denied the accusations as baseless.

A High Court functioning without a regular Chief Justice and functioning under an Acting Chief Justice for a considerably long period – in the instant case, for about 11 months – is not a good institutional gesture. The fact that Justice Sharma was earlier transferred to the Patna High Court in 2022, and that his request for repatriation to the Rajasthan High Court was rejected by the Collegium in 2023, which instead proposed his transfer to the Punjab and Haryana High Court, is also not a commendable antecedent. Justice Mehta, according to reports, is said to have wondered how such a judge came to be retransferred to the Rajasthan High Court in 2025 and subsequently allowed to function as the Acting Chief Justice, with wide-ranging administrative and judicial powers.

Of late, there have been two crucial developments. First, lawyers at the Rajasthan High Court staged a sit-in protest on the High Court premises, following which Justice Sharma had to opt out from hearing cases. Second, on August 31, the Supreme Court Collegium recommended the appointment of Justice Sanjay Agrawal as the new Chief Justice of the Rajasthan High Court. Accordingly Justice Agrawal is now appointed.

> Allegations against a High Court judge raise serious questions about judicial accountability in India

Allegations of corruption against sitting judges in India are neither uncommon nor unprecedented. Yet, certain unique features of the present reports are worth noting. A sitting judge of the Supreme Court reportedly alerted the CJI to the conduct of an Acting Chief Justice of a High Court, supported by verifiable material.

Yet, for several weeks, no cogent steps were reportedly initiated by the CJI in this regard. The CJI reportedly said that the allegations could not be treated as findings and that they "must be dealt with strictly through the established institutional mechanism". In view of Justice Sharma's impending retirement, early action by the CJI to Justice Mehta's letter could perhaps have averted some of the disturbing events that subsequently followed.

Transparency International, in its reports, has underlined the growing trust deficit in the Indian judiciary. According to its 2002 report, based on a household survey, the judiciary was identified as the second-most corrupt institution in certain South Asian countries, including India. The report is indeed shocking. Yet, the present situation in India is far more complex and multi-dimensional. There are many fine judges in India's judiciary whose integrity and public image should not be tarnished because of aberrations elsewhere, whether on or off the Bench.

Institutional responsibility, structural issues

The repeated episodes of judicial corruption in India reflect certain fundamental issues concerning the functioning of its higher judiciary.

First, the total lack of criteria, coupled with the unavoidable collaboration between the Collegium and the Executive at the Centre under the present system, makes judicial appointments highly partisan, opaque, and often arbitrary. This mechanism and its processes are incapable of identifying the cleanest and most meritorious candidates. The issue of corruption in the judiciary, like many other institutional concerns, is inseparable from the existing method of selecting candidates for judicial office. A system of inviting applications, as is prevalent in Canada, or an independent body for judicial selection, as in the United Kingdom, remains unthinkable in India.

Second, the lack of an effective mechanism to deal with corruption in the higher judiciary in India has had the effect of perpetuating the menace. The Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968, is inadequate to tackle the issue and has, for all practical purposes, become defunct. The Supreme Court, in *K. Veeraswami vs Union of India* (1991), held that, for registering a First Information Report against a judge of the higher judiciary, the permission of the CJI is a necessary precondition. As lawyer Prashant Bhushan rightly observed, "the police does not dare approach the Chief Justice for permission to investigate, unless they already have clinching evidence, which they cannot get, unless they investigate" ("Judicial Accountability or Illusion?", *Economic and Political Weekly*, November 25, 2006). Although the United Progressive Alliance government facilitated the passage of the Judicial Standards and Accountability Bill in the Lok Sabha in 2012, the Bill lapsed with the dissolution of the 15th Lok Sabha in 2014. The subsequent legislative effort to revive the Bill, with some changes, also remained a non-starter. The impeachment of erring judges, as suggested by Articles 124(4) and 217(1)(b) of the Constitution, has proved to be a failure. Likewise, the in-house mechanism adopted by the Supreme Court in 1999 has not proved to be fault-free or even effective.

Earlier crises, different responses

But these considerations could not have been reasons for the CJI not to act promptly upon the concerns allegedly expressed by Justice Mehta. On the contrary, the lack of a permanent systemic solution to the issues raised should have been an additional reason for the CJI to take remedial measures expeditiously and diligently, and to do whatever was possible within his authority. The situation called for judicial statesmanship. In 1990, when an inquiry was underway against Justice V. Ramaswami for alleged misconduct, he was advised by then CJI Sabyasachi Mukharji, to take leave and keep away from judicial work.

Thereafter, when the impeachment motion against Justice Ramaswami failed in Parliament due to the Congress party's strategic abstention, the judge attempted to resume judicial work, with about nine months of his tenure remaining.

However, then CJI Venkatachaliah refused to allocate any cases to him for hearing, notes Justice K. Chandru in his book, *Who Will Judge the Judges?* (2026). Even last year, when partly burnt currency notes were reportedly found in the outhouse of Justice Yashwant Varma at his Delhi residence, then CJI Sanjiv Khanna, quickly transferred him to the Allahabad High Court, where he was not allocated any judicial work, practically. In the reported decision in *XXX vs Union of India* (2025), the Supreme Court emphasised the responsibility of the CJI in matters relating to judicial integrity and allegations of corrupt practices.

Justice Sharma allegedly claimed that the CJI is proximate to him. This was a factor that led to undesirable and avoidable speculations. Given the nature of the allegations and their immediate verifiability, it was imperative that the CJI acted promptly and convincingly, so that further damage to the system and the institution could have been reduced, if not prevented altogether.

Harnessing BRICS 'POWER' to empower the world

Xu Feihong

The Chinese Ambassador to India

The 18th BRICS Summit is about to be held in New Delhi on September 12-13, 2026. China extends full support to India for its BRICS presidency, stands ready to work with all BRICS members and partners to jointly draw a blueprint for the high-quality development of a greater BRICS, and leverage BRICS POWER to empower the world. I would like to share my personal views on the greater BRICS cooperation, with the help of the five letters of the word Power.

The first is P for Principle. The world is now undergoing accelerated transformation unseen in a century, and witnessing a trend toward deepening multipolarity, economic globalisation, and the collective rise of the Global South. In the meantime, hegemonism and power politics are becoming increasingly rampant. Lingering geopolitical conflicts trigger a succession of crises and challenges.

As an important force for world peace and development, BRICS must resolutely uphold the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, and safeguard the basic norms of international relations, including sovereign equality, non-interference in internal affairs and peaceful settlement of disputes, and prevent the world from sliding back into the law of the jungle where the strong prey on the weak.

Upholding international principles

Chinese President Xi Jinping put forward the vision of building a community with a shared future for humanity and four global initiatives, including the Global Security Initiative and the Global Governance Initiative, which provided China's solutions on addressing common human challenges and building a better world together.

The second is O for Openness. The world economy is currently facing a sluggish recovery, coupled with the spread of protectionism. Certain countries have undermined the international economic and trade order by erecting tariff barriers, seeking decoupling and disrupting supply chains.

It should be recognised that economic globalisation is an inevitable trend of history. BRICS should uphold the multilateral trading system with the World Trade Organization (WTO) at its core, safeguard the basic principles of the WTO such as the most-favoured-nation treatment, and resist all forms of protectionism. We should join hands to deepen cooperation in energy and mineral resources, infrastructure, and industrial and supply chains to maintain an open global economic landscape.

> The five commitments for strengthening BRICS cooperation and empowering the Global South to build a more peaceful, open, and prosperous world

China stays committed to building an open global economy, so as to share opportunities in openness, and achieve common development.

The third is W for Win-Win. BRICS should adhere to the Spirit of Openness, Inclusiveness and Win-Win cooperation. We should continue putting development at the centre of the BRICS agenda, accelerate the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, strengthen dialogue and build consensus on launching the formulation of the post-2030 global development agenda, and ensure that Global South countries participate in international cooperation as equals and share the fruits of development.

Economic and financial cooperation

We should pursue mutual benefit and win-win results to further consolidate economic cooperation. It is necessary to strengthen greater BRICS coordination on macroeconomic policies and adopt more trade and investment facilitation measures. We should push forward local currency and cross-border payment cooperation and improve the financial safety net, so as to enhance the ability to ward off external risks. In the face of global energy and food security challenges, we should build a more resilient and sustainable agriculture and food system.

The fourth is E for Engine. BRICS countries account for nearly half of the world's population, around 30% of global economic output, and one-fifth of global trade. We are also home to major natural resources, key manufacturers and vast markets. According to international agencies such as the International Monetary Fund, greater BRICS growth will be nearly three times faster than the G-7 by 2028, further highlighting its role as an engine of world economic growth.

We should leverage our respective advantages, deepen practical cooperation in fields such as business, finance, science and technology, forging more cooperation in the digital economy, smart manufacturing, and new industrialisation. We should actively promote the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) with sectors including science and technology, health, agriculture and education, thereby injecting fresh impetus into world economic growth. China has established the China-BRICS AI Development and Cooperation Center and the China-BRICS New Quality Productive Forces Research Center, and welcomes active participation of all parties.

The fifth is R for Responsibility. BRICS countries are the main force in safeguarding fairness and justice and the backbone of promoting unity and cooperation. We must shoulder the responsibility of maintaining world peace and development. Over this year and the next, India and China will take on the BRICS rotating presidency in succession. Maintaining sound coordination between our two countries is conducive to the steady and sustained progress of greater BRICS' cooperation, and will better safeguard the common interests of developing countries.

China-India ties

Since the beginning of this year, under the strategic guidance of the two leaders, President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, China-India relations have maintained a momentum of improvement and development. The two sides strengthened dialogues at all levels and promoted exchanges and cooperation in various fields to achieve positive results. Five direct flight routes between the Chinese mainland and India have been resumed. After a six-year suspension, border trade has been reopened.

China looks forward to working with India to translate the important consensus reached by the two leaders into concrete actions, being good-neighbourly friends and partners that help each other, and pushing China-India relations to move forward in a sustained, healthy, and stable manner. May the 18th BRICS Summit in New Delhi be a great success. We welcome you all to China next year to continue empowering the world with BRICS POWER.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dangers on highways

A series of accidents on national highways has drawn attention to the serious problem of illegal parking along highways. Even a seemingly minor instance can lead to devastating accidents. The recent accidents seem to have drawn the government's attention to the issue and highlighted the urgent need to take effective measures to reduce the number of accidents and casualties. Strict action against illegal parking, along with improved road safety measures, can play a significant role in preventing such tragic incidents (Front page, September 6).

Salman,
Kozhikode, Keralam

Spurious rabies vaccines

The seizure of spurious rabies vaccines and the failure of such vaccines at a private laboratory recently expose a critical breach in medical safety. Rabies has a near-100% case fatality rate once clinical symptoms manifest, making timely, potent post-exposure prophylaxis the only defence against an otherwise almost invariably fatal disease. A fake vaccine creates a lethal illusion of security. Regulatory authorities must enforce strict track-and-trace systems and batch verification across the supply chain.

Dr. Vijaykumar H.K.,
Raichur, Karnataka

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

The political cost of UCT schemes

K. R. Shanmugam
Former Director, Madras School of Economics and Economic Consultant to GoTN

Sankarganesh Karuppiah
Indian Revenue Services Officer

Since 2020, Unconditional Cash Transfer (UCT) schemes have become an important electoral strategy in India, particularly to attract women voters. Some examples of such schemes include the Kalaignar Magalir Urimai Thittam in Tamil Nadu, the Lakhsmir Bhandar in West Bengal, and Gruha Lakshmi Yojana in Karnataka. Yet, despite increasing the amount of cash before the 2026 elections, some governments which implemented these schemes were defeated. One possible explanation for the loss could be the political cost associated with UCTs.

UCT schemes are well-intentioned as they provide financial support to women. They partially advance SDG (Sustainable Development Goal) 5.4, which calls for a recognition of women's unpaid domestic and care work. According to the Ministry of Finance's latest Economic Survey, States are expected to spend about $18 billion on UCTs in 2025-26, much of it targeted towards women.

Critics, however, argue that these schemes function as electoral "freebies." Their financing often requires expenditure switching or larger fiscal deficits, and reduces resources available for productive investments, including employment generation and self-employment programmes. Moreover, once households become dependent on UCTs, withdrawing them is difficult as political parties encourage competitive welfarism.

Targeting challenges

A fundamental challenge in targeted UCT programmes is beneficiary identification. Since governments cannot directly observe incomes for most workers in the informal sector, they rely on proxy indicators such as land ownership, electricity consumption, or household assets. This inevitably produces both inclusion errors (benefits reaching ineligible households) and exclusion errors (eligible households being left out). These targeting errors, whether real or perceived, can impose significant political costs.

The Kalaignar Magalir Urimai Thittam scheme illustrates this challenge. Although the ruling party at the time promised ₹1,000 per month to all women-headed households before the 2021 election, fiscal constraints led the government to restrict eligibility based on income, land ownership, and other criteria when the scheme was launched in September 2023. Initially, about 1.13 crore women were covered. Following widespread complaints from women who believed they met the eligibility criteria, another 16.94 lakh beneficiaries were added in December 2025. The scheme cost ₹13,807 crore in 2025-26.

Despite the expansion, dissatisfaction persisted. Many women who considered themselves unfairly excluded reportedly became even more aggrieved when eligible beneficiaries received an advance payment of three months' entitlement along with a special summer relief payment. Although the precise electoral impact cannot be measured, even modest shifts in voter preferences can influence outcomes in closely contested constituencies.

These experiences highlight an important feature of targeted welfare programmes. Political costs arise not only from actual errors but also from perceived ones. Individuals who fail to satisfy official eligibility criteria may nevertheless believe that they have been treated unfairly. Likewise, households that legally qualify may be perceived as undeserving because they appear relatively affluent. Such perceived targeting errors can be as politically consequential as actual administrative mistakes.

This reveals an inherent tension between economics and politics. Economics favours targeted programmes so that scarce public resources reach those most in need. Politics, however, rewards broader inclusion because voters evaluate governments not only by the benefits they receive but also by those they believe were unfairly denied. Consequently, targeted UCT programmes carry an unavoidable political cost.

Conditional cash transfers and other incentive-based welfare programmes offer a more sustainable alternative. Linking benefits to socially desirable outcomes produces broader developmental gains. Tamil Nadu's Midday Meal Scheme illustrates this principle. Since participation depends on school enrolment, self-selection reduces grievances.

The broader lesson is that welfare programmes tied to education or other desirable behaviours can achieve developmental objectives with lower political costs. In contrast, UCTs remain inherently vulnerable to inclusion, exclusion, and perceived targeting errors.

> Linking benefits to socially desirable outcomes produces broader developmental gains

India's unemployment data dilemma

Santosh V. Perumal

The government has finally found a way to measure the statistical elephant of unemployment; however, it may be incomplete – much like the blind men who touched different parts of a pachyderm and mistook it for the whole truth.

The challenge in measuring the unemployment rate using the Current Weekly Status (CWS) approach – where a person's activity status is determined based on the preceding seven days – is to assess not only whether people are employed, but also the nature of their jobs, the frequency and regularity of their payments, and the overall quality of employment. In an economy where a vast majority of the population are involved in informal work, employment cannot be analysed through a headline rate of high frequency indicator, if it can be called so.

India's decision to transform the quarterly/yearly unemployment data into a monthly indicator is economically desirable, even if its credibility is questionable given the nature of its database, which seldom takes into account circular migration.

Efforts have been made to strengthen India's database comprising EPFO (Employees' Provident Fund Organisation) and ESIC (Employees' State Insurance Corporation) payroll data, GST-based enterprise information, income tax records, corporate payroll data, gig economy employment data, and rural wage indicators but at present, even these sources remain fragmented. Unlike a mature labour market – comprising payroll surveys, unemployment insurance records, formal contracts, and extensive administrative databases – India's large informal employment market is difficult to track.

Most advanced nations count unemployment using a Labour Force Survey based on the definition of the International Labour Organization (ILO). The U.S., Japan, EU and the U.K. have decades of household survey data with detailed information on full-time versus part-time jobs, hourly wages, job duration, labour mobility, and unemployment spells.

A leading indicator

The latest Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) says that India's unemployment rate for those aged 15 years and above marked a four-month low of 5.1% in July. The review period coincided with the peak of kharif season, when demand for agricultural labour rose for land preparation, transplanting, and allied activities. Since construction, agriculture, small trade, logistics, and local services see seasonal fluctuations, it is likely that July's decline reflects increased hiring in these segments rather than a broad-based expansion in formal sector jobs.

Monthly unemployment should at the best be a leading indicator, not a comprehensive measure of labour market health.

India has a labour market where various reports suggest that 90% of the population are involved in the informal sector; agricultural employment remains seasonal, with wage payments negotiated informally and where underemployment/disguised employment is widespread. Indicating limited granularity, data is rather sketchy on wage growth, hours worked, job quality, occupational shifts, and sector-wise employment trends. Therefore, monthly unemployment data reflects seasonal movements rather than structural improvement. A fall in unemployment may indicate distress-driven entry into low-productivity jobs rather than genuine employment creation.

The overall decline in unemployment was owing to rural areas, where unemployment declined to 4.5% from 5%; but it should not be read as a major improvement in the job market. Independent labour studies estimate that there are between 30 to 35 million seasonal labourers moving across India annually, forming the invisible backbone of urban construction and infrastructure.

The July data saw an increase in the labour force participation rate, a positive supply-side signal, but stronger investment and job creation prefix sustainable employment recovery. The challenge is to convert this participation into stable, high-productivity jobs.

The revamped PLFS is a significant improvement over earlier low-frequency labour statistics but its success ultimately depends on whether it gauges the reality of the job market – not merely measuring it more frequently. A credible labour market barometer is the need of the hour to capture the livelihoods of millions of workers.

> A fall in unemployment may indicate distress-driven entry into low-productivity jobs rather than genuine employment creation

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18 centuries: tracing Smriti Mandhana's journey to the top

With her record-breaking century at the Asia Cup, Smriti Mandhana surpassed Mithali Raj to become the highest run scorer in women's international cricket

DATA POINT

Devyanshi Bihani

When Smriti Mandhana scored her 18th international century against Hong Kong at the Women's T20 Asia Cup in Dubai on September 3 – in just 57 balls – she set a new record for scoring the highest number of centuries in women's international cricket across all formats. That was not the only record she broke in that match.

By the time she was run out for 124, she had overtaken her former captain Mithali Raj to become the highest run-scorer in women's international cricket. She had taken her career tally to 10,880 runs, 12 more than Mithali's record of 10,868. Her score was also the highest in the history of the Women's T20 Asia Cup, surpassing Chamari Athapaththu's 119 not out from 2024.

Her seven sixes took her career tally to 95, making her the leading six-hitter for India in women's T20Is and the fourth-highest in the world. Smriti also became the first Indian woman to score more than one century in the T20 format, and while doing so, she equalled Mithali's record of 93 fifty-plus scores in international cricket

Mandhana's century-making was a slow burn before it became a sprint. Her international career began with a T20 match against Bangladesh in April 2013, three months before she turned 17. She waited for three years to taste her first century, in her 32nd international innings in 2016 against Australia. But it took 115 more innings and five years to reach her fifth, and another 92 innings to get to 10. Then, the sprint started. Ten of her 18 centuries came within the last two years, and at a notably higher strike rate **(Chart 1)**.

Winning streak

That acceleration becomes even more striking when compared with the other top five century-makers. Australia's Meg Lanning reached 10 hundreds in 123 innings, just about half the number of 239 innings that Smriti took to score hers. All the other four crossed the milestone of 10 before their 200th innings. In contrast, Smriti's performance has soared after she crossed her 200th **(Chart 2)**. Of Smriti's 18 centuries, 14 came from ODIs, two in Tests and two in T20Is.

In ODIs, she has scored 5,411 runs with an average of 47.88. In 16 Test innings, she scored 788 with an average of 52.53 and in 167 T20I innings, she scored 4,681 runs with an average of 30.65. Across all three formats, she has 10,880 runs, 75 fifties and an average of 38.86, showing that her record is built on consistency as much as several spectacular peaks.

Moreover, the pace at which she has accumulated her runs really sets her apart.

While she had already become the fastest woman to reach 10,000 runs in just 281 innings, she has now become the highest run scorer in 303 international innings – fewer than the other four players with more than 10,000 runs, all of whom, except Stafanie Taylor, are now retired from international cricket **(Chart 3)**.

This pace is reflected in how Smriti clearly stands out with her overall strike rate of 99.57. It is nearly 10 points higher than Suzie, the next fastest among the five. Batting average is the only indicator where she lags among the five, but that too only against her compatriot and inspiration Mithali **(Chart 4)**. She is in the same league as the other three.

A few years back, she had said that her mother taught her to persevere – "to go on till reaching the top". Smriti had also said that she wanted to be the best batter in the world. At just 30, she may have already realised that ambition. But, as she said in the press conference after her records-breaking Hong Kong match, "it is just the start".

Gearing up for higher peaks

The data for the charts were sourced from Statsguru, the searchable cricket statistics database available at cricinfo.com. All the figures are as of September 4, 2026, when the data was collected

CHART 1: Ten of Smriti's 18 centuries came in the last two years. Her centuries have also been accompanied by a higher strike rate

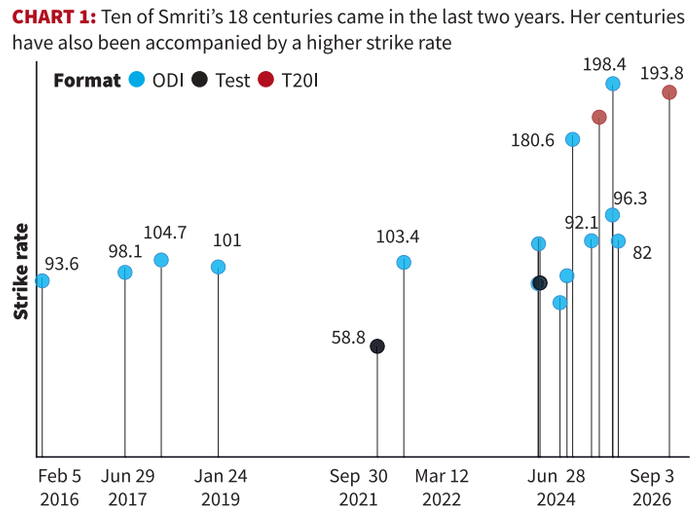


CHART 2: Most of the centuries of the other top scorers came before their 200th innings. Smriti became prolific after crossing her 200th

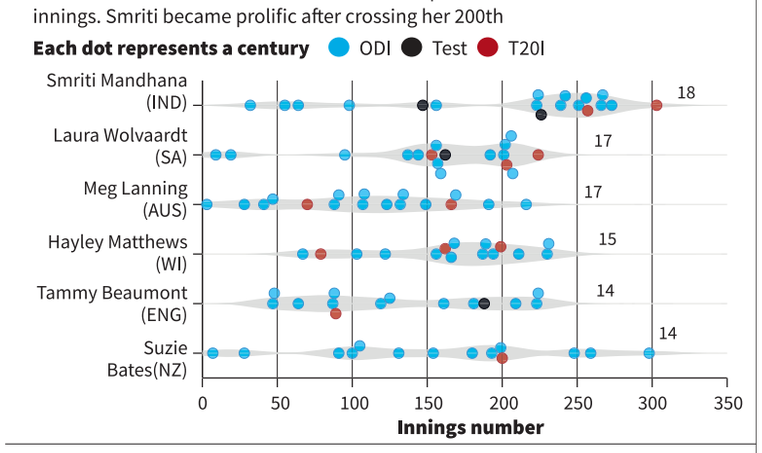


CHART 4: Smriti took fewer innings to become the top scorer with a higher strike rate while Mithali holds the highest average

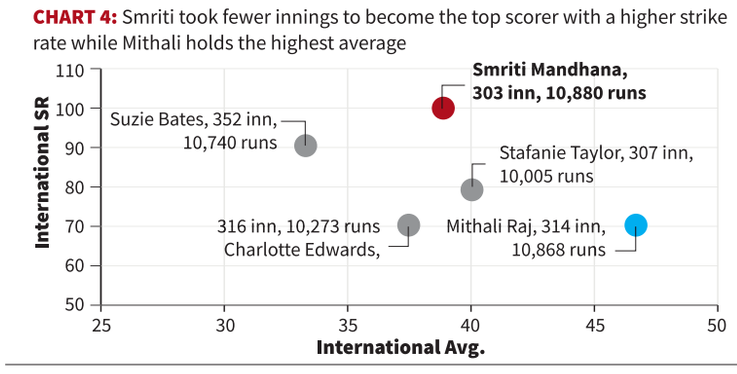
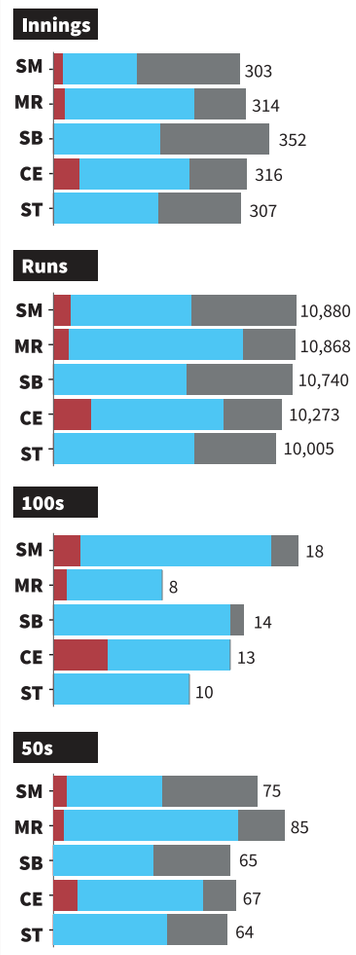


CHART 3: Smriti's innings, runs, centuries, and fifties, in comparison with the other four players who have scored over 10,000 runs in women's international cricket

Mithali Raj - **MR** (IND), Smriti Mandhana - **SM** (IND), Suzie Bates - **SB** (NZ), Charlotte Edwards - **CE** (ENG), Stafanie Taylor - **ST** (WI)



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 7, 1976

Snake boats to be standardised

Kottayam, September 6: A scheme has been prepared by a Government-sponsored Committee to standardise the snake boat which is the main attraction in the boat races in Kerala.

This Government Committee conducts the Nehru Trophy boat race. The existing boat races are losing their charm because the competing snake boats are of different lengths, and the capacity of rowers differ.

Many of the snake boats in Central Travancore like Pacha, Payipad and Kodupunna can carry between 70 and 80 rowers, while the snake boats like Karichal, Kalooparamban and Jawahar Thayankari can take in over 100 persons. Because of this vast disparity in manpower, the snake boats like Karichal and Kallooparamban alone are now winning the trophies in most of the races. In the light of this, a scheme has been prepared by the Nehru Trophy Boat Race Committee to standardise the snake boats with equal length and strength of rowers.

The Committee is also considering the grant of loans to help this standardisation. According to a tentative scheme, a loan of Rs. 10,000 will be given to each boat.

Four major boat races will be held in various parts of Central Travancore this weekend. The Sree Narayana boat race will be held on September 8, while the Vembanad boat race will be conducted on September 9.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 7, 1926

Railway extension in the Punjab

Lahore, September 6: In accordance with the new policy of railway extension in the Punjab, a reference to which was made by the Governor while inaugurating the Kangra Valley Railway in May last, two other lines Shahdara Narowal and Sirhind Rupar Railways have been sanctioned which are the type of those cross connections to which the Governor referred as being essential for the comfort and convenience of passenger traffic. The first is a line between Lyallpur and Jaranwala, which will pass through the rich tract irrigated by the Lower Chenab Canal. The other will link up Rohtak, Gohana and Panipat forming a direct connection between the Delhi-Ambala line of the North-Western Railway.

Text&Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Goal speed of Indian Railways' hydrogen train

110 in kmph. The Indian Railways is working to operate the country's first hydrogen-powered train at speeds of up to 110 kmph after completing trials at 120 kmph, Railway Board Chairman and CEO Satish Kumar said. He said consultations were under way with all stakeholders to decide the rail sections on which the new hydrogen train could be operated. PTI

Number of people dead in Israel strikes in Lebanon

4 Lebanon said four people were killed on Sunday in strikes that Israel said it carried out after Hezbollah had launched drones at its soldiers in south Lebanon, the latest escalation amid a fragile truce. Lebanon's Health Ministry reported two people killed in south Lebanon's Nabatieh al-Fawqa and two women killed in nearby Arab Salim. It said 20 other people were wounded. AFP

Number of people affected by floods in Bihar

19.57 in lakh. Over 19 lakh people across 11 districts of Bihar have been affected by floods. Due to the rise in water levels of various rivers in the State, people in 330 gram panchayats across 11 districts — Patna, Bhojpur, Saran, Vaishali, Bhagalpur, Begusarai, Buxar, Samastipur, Munger, Katihar and Araria — have been affected, the officials said. PTI

Flights affected by Indonesia volcanic eruption

209 Indonesia halted operations at its main international airport outside Jakarta on Sunday after ash spewed from the Anak Krakatoa volcano more than 150 kilometres away, impacting thousands of passengers. Mount Anak Krakatoa erupted on Saturday, producing a fountain of lava and booming sounds that could be heard up to 700 kms. AFP

Percentage of voters deleted in Sikkim in SIR exercise

11 in per cent. A total of 52,551 electors were deleted from Sikkim's electoral roll during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR), reducing the number of voters by around 11.16%, a statement said. The final roll has 4,18,467 eligible voters, compared with 4,71,018 in the pre-SIR voters' list, the Chief Electoral Officer's office said in a statement. PTI

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Does inflation targeting work in India?

India's Phillips curve is found to be flat, while households' inflation expectations remain consistently higher than the RBI's projections; this suggests that inflation targeting can lower output and employment without a commensurate reduction in inflation

ECONOMIC NOTES

Rohit Azad
Indranil Chowdhury

India has just completed a decade of inflation targeting (IT) as a formal policy framework of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). Under this framework, the RBI is supposed to contain inflation at 4% within a band of (+/-) 2 percentage points. In this piece, we explain the theory behind inflation targeting and test it against the Indian experience.

Managing demands

The RBI seeks to control inflation through two channels: controlling demand and influencing the public's inflationary expectations. The RBI flexes its policy rate of interest (called the repo rate), which is increased when inflation kicks in. This pushes commercial banks' lending rates up.

Households become wary of taking home or consumer loans, while businesses postpone decisions to build factories. Demand comes down and, as a result, so does inflation.

The second route works through anchoring the inflationary expectations of the public at large. The assumption is that high expectations about inflation tomorrow influence inflation today because capitalists build these expectations into their current pricing decisions and workers into their wage decisions. Inflation is a self-fulfilling prophecy. So, if the RBI can somehow tether these expectations to its projected path of inflation, it can contain this prophecy. Both these routes work through a relationship called the New Keynesian Phillips curve (NKPC).

This curve describes a relationship between the level of GDP and inflation in an economy. It is proposed that a rise in output leads to an increase in inflation. Prices are a markup over costs. For simplicity, let us assume wages are the only costs in an economy. Workers demand wages; capitalists add a profit margin to determine prices. If wages rise, prices follow suit. But why should wages rise with output?

The wage-price negotiation process provides the key to understanding the NKPC. Consider a worker who would like to buy 5 kg of rice during a month for her family. Since she will not receive a sack of rice as her wage, she will have to settle for a money wage with which she can buy that amount of rice.

The time difference between fluctuations in money wages and the purchase of rice makes expectations a key factor in the process. For example, if she expects the price of 1 kg of rice at the time of purchase to be ₹100, she would negotiate for ₹500 as wages to buy those 5 kg. But if she expects the price to be ₹200, she would ask for ₹1,000. Wage costs would go up (for the same bundle of wage goods), as would prices.

A rise in output and employment, this framework argues, makes workers stronger and enables them to demand more rice – say from 5 kg to 6 kg – for the same number of hours of work. Thus, the wage demand curve rises with output (see panel (a) of **Graph 1**). Since prices are nothing but a markup over costs, the price curve (NKPC) has the same upward-sloping shape. On top of that, if the price expectations for rice were to change from ₹100 to ₹200, the wage demand curve, and the corresponding NKPC, would shift up for every level of output/ employment. In other words, the position of the NKPC is determined by expectations, and its slope by the bargaining power of workers and capitalists.

If the economy were to behave in this manner, there are two obvious ways to bring inflation under control (see panel (b) of Graph 1). Slide the economy down along the NKPC curve (the trade-off range marked in the graph where both inflation and output fall) or manoeuvre workers' expectations to a lower level across the board, so that the wage demand curve, hence the NKPC, shifts down, resulting in a fall in inflation with no impact on output. Expectation management is a less painful way of managing inflation. This is inflation targeting in a nutshell.

All of this works well in theory. But what if the real picture of the Indian economy is depicted in **Graph 2**? What if the NKPC is flat and there is no trade-off between output and inflation? Additionally, what if people's expectations do not match the RBI's projections of lower inflation in the future – that is, the flat NKPC stays put instead of shifting down? Then, a policy of inflation targeting, which brings output down without lowering inflation at all, leads to a combination of lower output and flat stagflation (a left-pointed arrow in Graph 2).

Is the Indian Phillips curve upward sloping?

Our academic work published in the Economic and Political Weekly provides a more rigorous test of the Phillips curve, finding it to be flat under multiple configurations and methodologies. For the present purposes, a 'first cut' of that story is presented here. **Chart 1** uses monthly data on industrial output, as measured by the Index of Industrial Production (IIP), and CPI inflation between April 2012 and March 2026. The best-fit trend line in Chart 1 shows India's NKPC is, at best, flat.

But why is there such a gap between reality and mainstream economic theory? Because the basic premise of a rising wage demand curve, and consequently NKPC, as shown in Graph 1, is incorrect. For economies such as ours, an overwhelming majority of workers (around 92%) do not have any bargaining power, let alone fixing wages. They are simply price takers. Wages do not rise with output/employment.

Projections and expectations

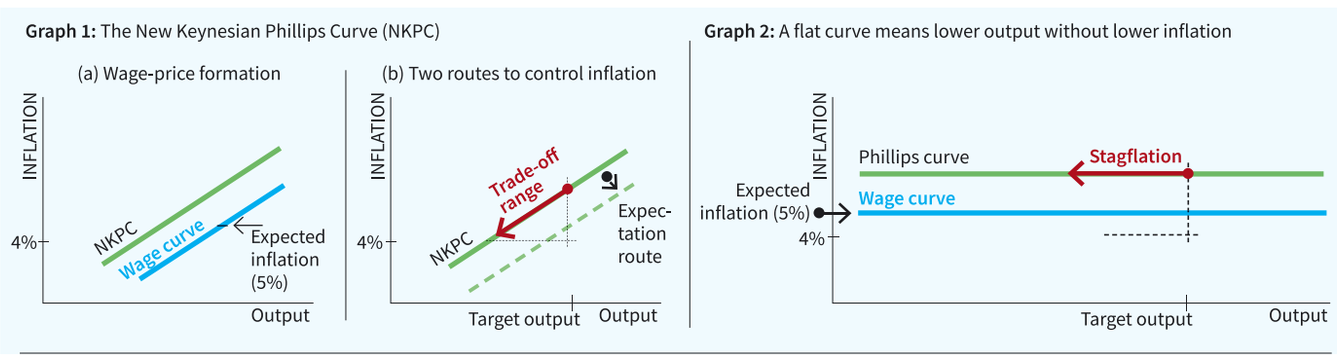
Even if the Phillips curve is flat, IT enthusiasts would argue that shifting it down would still do the job. But for this to happen, people's expectations should, by and large, match the RBI's projections. What does the Indian data tell us? The RBI surveys Indian households about their inflation expectations a quarter and one year ahead. These expectations are plotted over this period against the RBI's own projections. **Chart 2(a)** shows that expectations are consistently higher than the projections, that too, on average, by a margin of four percentage points. Even when expectations are plotted against actual inflation, the gap is similar (see **Chart 2(b)**). So, the expectations story is way off what is claimed to defend IT.

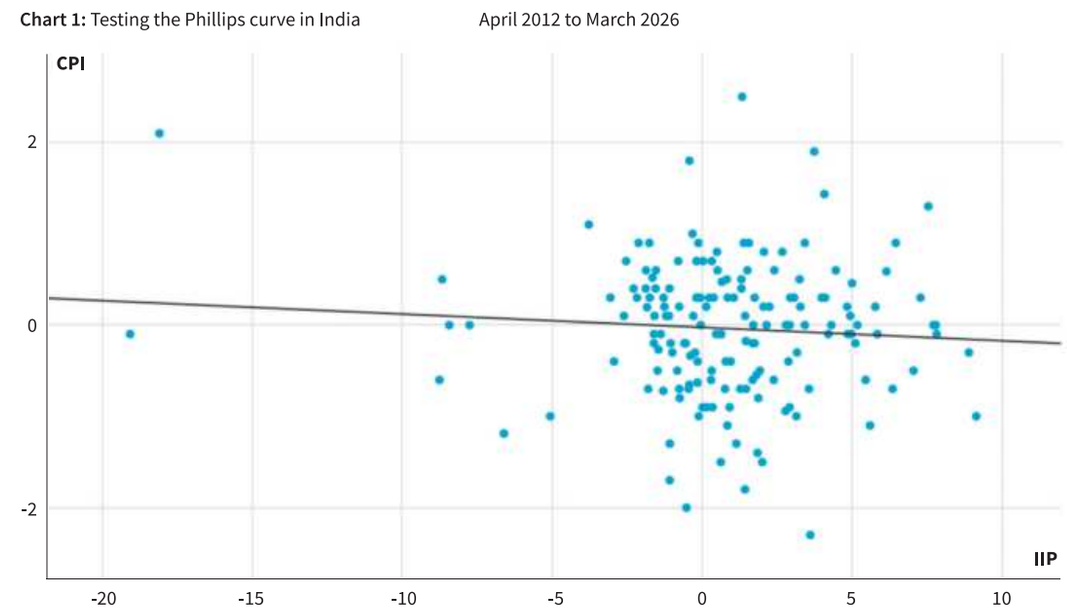
John Maynard Keynes would have asked the RBI: 'When facts change, I change my mind. What do you do sir?' Unfortunately, the RBI does the opposite as it tries to force-fit a macroeconomic model to a world where the underlying assumptions of the model do not hold. In the process, it inflicts pain on the common people of this country by forcing them out of employment without any commensurate gain in controlling inflation.

(The authors are a part of the DevMac (Development Macroeconomics) network, which seeks pluralism in Economics)

Off the mark

Ten years into inflation targeting, the Indian experience raises questions about its underlying assumptions





1. The x-axis is the output gap, measured as the de-seasonalised IIP minus the trend IIP. The y-axis is the first difference of CPI-C inflation (base 2012). 2. Since most macro variables grow over time, care needs to be taken while working with them. Because of this common underlying time trend, you may get a clear relationship between two variables, which is actually spurious. This common trend needs to be removed before we can draw any conclusion about the relationship between these variables, a process which is called making data stationary. Often, subtracting the previous year's value from the current year eliminates the time trend.

Chart: Azad & Chowdhury. Source: Database on Indian Economy, RBI

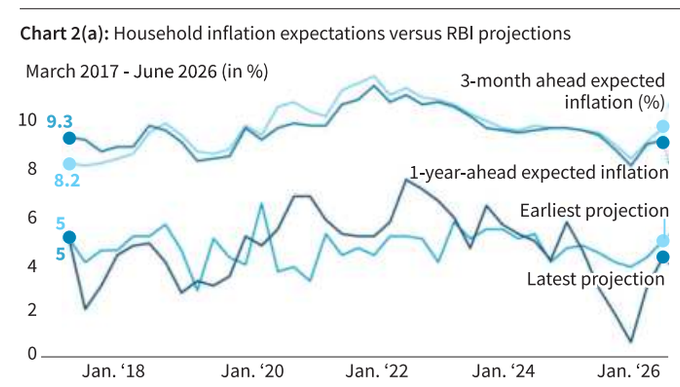


Chart: Azad & Chowdhury. Source: Households' Inflation Expectations Survey and Monetary Policy Statements, Various Years, RBI

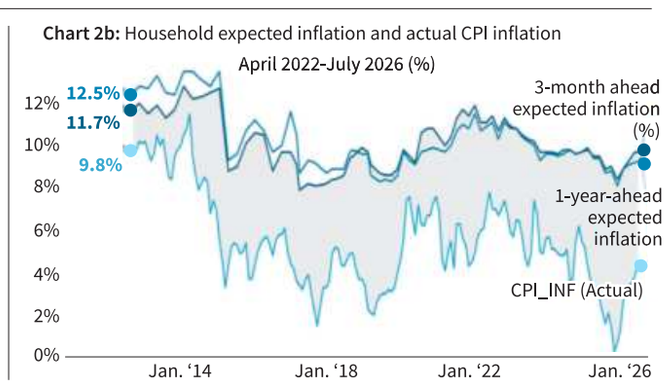


Chart: Azad & Chowdhury. Source: Database on Indian Economy, RBI

THE GIST

- Inflation targeting works through higher interest rates to curb demand and through managing people's expectations of future inflation
- The theory assumes that higher output and employment strengthen workers' bargaining power, pushing up wages and prices. However, this assumption does not hold well in India, where most workers have little bargaining power
- The inflation-targeting framework relies on macroeconomic assumptions that may not reflect the realities of the Indian economy, potentially imposing high costs on employment and ordinary households

CACHE

Music lovers worldwide are noticing signs of AI tracks in both online and offline spaces, even as they call for greater transparency. GETTY IMAGES

Why Australia's music industry banned AI music in chart listing

Australia's ARIA has barred wholly AI-generated songs from its charts while allowing music made substantially by humans with AI assistance; the move has intensified calls for transparent AI labelling and greater accountability from streaming platforms

Sahana Venugopal

The story so far:

Australia's music industry body – the Australian Recording Industry Association (ARIA) – on August 25 banned songs wholly made using AI, noting such tracks will be ineligible for listing on its charts. The announcement comes after the viral fame of an AI remix of Madonna's 1989 song 'Like a Prayer,' made by Australian music producer and disc jockey Josh Fawaz earlier this year. The AI song enjoyed multiple weeks on the country's top 20 chart and ranked second on ARIA's top 20 Australian singles chart, per AP. It also scored over 23 million views on YouTube.

The use of AI to compose the song was not clearly disclosed initially, angering listeners and musicians who want synthetic music to be transparently labelled.

Which songs are banned under the new rules?

The industry body ARIA's rules do not ban outright the use of AI in music. Neither does it have a zero-tolerance policy for AI in art. Instead, the updated code notes that a recording developed with the help of Gen AI is eligible for listing when it is "substantially human made" and "raises no stream or chart manipulation concerns." This still leaves a lot of room for artists to create music with Generative AI tools.

In fact, ARIA CEO Annabelle Herd insisted that the chart listings should evolve to "keep room for" artists already using AI tools in their work.

To truly exclude AI-generated music from human creations, even casual listeners need a reliable way to differentiate between the two; for this, transparent labelling standards are required across platforms

"The ARIA Charts will always remain a transparent measurement of the music Australia consumes, but a chart that rewards unlicensed AI output would undercut the very basis of the recorded music we exist to represent," she said.

What penalties will users and distributors face?

ARIA has stated that it may reject ineligible recordings, apart from excluding them and removing them from charts whenever needed, adjusting chart positions, withdrawing accreditations, or rescinding its awards.

But when considering the global music industry as a whole, there is not much punitive action that original music artistes and producers can take against users making AI-generated versions of their songs. The optics of a world-famous singer suing a small creator over an AI remix do not favour the true creators.

Instead, musical artistes and the companies representing them have been taking AI music generation platforms such as Suno and Udio to court, accusing them of using copyrighted works without permission.

In late August, music publishers including Sony Music Publishing and Warner Chappell sued Anthropic, as well as its co-founders Dario Amodei and Benjamin Mann, alleging digital piracy and the data harvesting of copyrighted works.

Anthropic disagreed with the claims and intends to defend itself in court, reported *TechCrunch*.

Scraping copyrighted content to build AI is still a grey area. However, the 2025 ruling against Anthropic in the authors' lawsuit that ended in a landmark $1.5 billion settlement made one thing clear: that U.S. courts may take a more serious view of AI companies pirating copyrighted content for AI development.

Will music platforms be held accountable for AI?

To truly exclude AI-generated music from human creations, even casual listeners need a reliable way to differentiate between the two at first glance. For this, transparent labelling standards are required across streaming platforms such as Spotify and Apple Music.

Later this month, Spotify users can expect to see "AI Persona" labels that identify artists who were entirely created with AI. In addition to this, Spotify will not include AI Personas in listeners' editorial or algorithmic recommendations.

The labels will depend on both self-disclosure as well as the platform's own checking process. Users will also be able to learn if the artist self-disclosed their AI status, or if Spotify had to apply the label.

While this label applies to AI artists, the platform has features such as AI Credits and SongDNA in order to understand if specific tracks were created with AI.

But more users are asking for ways to filter AI-generated or AI-assisted music entirely. A spike in unlabelled AI song tracks on platforms such as Instagram makes it difficult for creators to curate background music for their videos and photos. For example, art-based businesses marketing handmade goods to buyers can face flak over accidentally using AI music in their Reels. Taking down and re-uploading the Reel would cost them views.

Challenges exist offline as well. Music lovers and connoisseurs have complained that AI soundtracks are seeping into more public spaces, as commercial properties such as stores and cafés err on the side of caution by choosing generic AI music over popular licensed tracks they may need to pay for.

THE DAILY QUIZ

Identify these personalities from their Wikipedia page subheadings

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

Mohammed Hidhayat

QUESTION 1
Childhood - Public speaker - Pune Ashram - Arrival in the United States - 1984 bioterror attack.

QUESTION 2
Early life - Mathematics career - Life in Montana - Mail bombings - Manifesto.

QUESTION 3
Early life - Founding a blood-testing startup - Self-made female billionaire - Downfall - Fraud charges.

QUESTION 4
Early life - Career - Photography hobby - Later years - Death - Discovery and recognition - Legacy.

QUESTION 5
Early religious and political influences - Founding a new religious organisation - Relocation to a South American country - Mass murder–suicide.

QUESTION 6
Early life - Led own gang - Massacre - Surrender - Political career - Assassination.

Visual Question:
Identify the African leader and fill in the blank. Early life - Rise in Army - Seizure of power - Expulsion of _____ - War with Tanzania - Exile - Death - Erratic behaviour, self-bestowed titles and media portrayal. AP

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. What was the name of the feminist magazine she co-founded in 1971 which survives till today? **Ans: Ms. magazine**
2. Steinem said once that she had never wanted children because she already had one. Who was she referring to? **Ans: Her mother**
3. Steinem was part of the second wave of feminism. Name the book credited with launching this wave, written by Betty Friedan. **Ans: The Feminine Mystique**
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. **Ans: Jane Fonda**
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? **Ans: Bill Clinton**
Visual: Where did she work, which led to her seminal 1963 undercover exposé, 'A Bunny's Tale'? **Ans: The Playboy Club**
Early Birds: Dodo Jayaditya | Prem Nath Tiwari | Rony S. Emmanuel | Sukdev Shet | Tamal Biswas

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Getting him to open up is like pulling teeth

Students urged to think rather than parrot textbook answers

S. Upendran

"It was good to see your mother after nearly three years. Will she be here for some time?"

"Maybe for another two weeks. She said that you'd put on weight."

"She told me the same thing. I've been trying to lose weight for the past six months, but it's like pulling teeth."

"Pulling teeth? Getting one's tooth pulled is not an enjoyable experience. Was my mom saying you're going to have a problem losing weight?"

"The expression 'pulling teeth' has several different meanings – all of them negative. When you say that completing a task was like pulling teeth, it means it was a slow and painful process."

"There were times when you just wanted to throw your hands into the air, and walk away!"

"That's right! Trying to have a conversation with Renu was like pulling teeth."

"How about this example? For many people, getting up early in the morning is like pulling teeth."

"That's a good example. My parents had a tough time waking me up when I was in school."

"Talking about school. Unlike most people I know, you never talk about your school days. Getting information from you about your school days is like pulling teeth."

"You'll find that pulling teeth is a lot easier than getting me to talk about my school days."

"In that case, I will stop asking questions related to that phase of your life."

"Thank you. So, what's been..."

"Tell me, what's the difference between 'aping someone' and 'parroting someone'?"

"Tell me, what does a parrot do?"

"It flies around and ...."

"That's not what I mean. When you talk to your pet parrot which has been with you for a while, what does it do?"

"When I say something, it sometimes repeats what I said."

"Exactly! It repeats what you've said. Doesn't really say anything new, does it?"

"It's not capable of saying anything new."

"Which is why the expression 'to parrot someone' carries with it the sense that it is mindless repetition..."

"In other words, when you parrot someone, you are saying things without really understanding what you're saying."

"Exactly! The Vice Principal parrots whatever the principal says."

"My boss hates that. He doesn't want anyone to merely parrot what he says."

"Such people are difficult to find. Unlike his sister, Ravi is not very bright. He merely parrots everything she says."

"So, now tell me, what does 'ape someone' mean?"

"When you ape someone, you mimic someone. In this case, what you do is to copy his mannerisms, style, the way of walking, talking, etc. And you do a very bad job of it."

"We tried to ape our favourite rock band."

"That sounds good. Children frequently ape their parents."

"We all do that when we are very young."

upendrankye@gmail.com

Word of the day

Shibboleth:
a favourite saying of a group, organisation, or individual

Synonyms: slogan, motto, idiom, tagline

Usage: *The phrase became a shibboleth among university students.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/shibboleth

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ʃɪbəlɛθ/

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

Balanced bond portfolio blueprint

Vaishali R. Venkat

It's always easy to buy a bond. A bond can 'promise' regular income but a well-built bond portfolio is a different ball game. It must be able to withstand a default, changing interest rates, and shifting economic conditions. A good portfolio ensures a single issuer's default does not wipe out a large chunk of your investment.

The starting point is simple: ask yourself when and how much money you need, whether you want periodic interest or capital appreciation and how much risk you are willing to take: risk tolerance. The answers to these questions will decide the bonds you choose, the lock-in period and if at all you need bonds in the first place.

The spread

Don't let the bond portfolio turn a collection of similar bets. Mix Central and State government securities, Treasury bonds, corporate bonds and bank bonds, and spread the money across issuers, sectors and banks. Government debt can anchor the relatively safer end of the portfolio, while corporate bonds may offer higher yields with a mix of risk and return rather than depend on a single issuer.

Perpetual bonds

Stagger maturities rather than having all bonds mature at the same time. Perpetual bonds have no fixed maturity and can provide regular income but there is no predetermined date for repayment of the principal. They, therefore, need closer scrutiny and are not risk-free.

Interest structure

The interest structure can be diversified too. A portfolio can include zero-coupon bonds, bought at a discount, and pay no periodic interest; alongside fixed-rate, floating-rate and inflation-linked bonds. Convertible bonds offer another option: these hybrid instruments can be converted into a predetermined number of shares of the issuing company.

Credit rating

Before buying, credit rating must be the first warning signal. Higher-rated bonds such as AAA and AA usually carry lower credit risk than BBB, BB or lower-rated bonds. But a rating is no guarantee against loss; read the offer document and assess issuer before investing.

Rebalancing

A bond portfolio needs regular monitoring. Track interest payments, interest rate changes, RBI announcements, developments involving the issuers, and rebalance when allocation drifts from the original plan. Check whether interest payments are made on time, watch out for defaults and track credit ratings. If these alter the risk profile or portfolio's initial allocation, rebalance accordingly. Review it at least every six months or once a year.

Finally, track the economy. Stay alert for major economic or political developments that might hit issuers. GDP growth, inflation, joblessness, CPI, WPI, Budget and sectoral performance can impact interest rates and bond prices. Follow these along with developments in Indian/global economy to help understand the forces affecting bond holdings.

No single bond, issuer, maturity or credit rating can suit every investor. The objective is to build a combination that matches need for income, capital protection, liquidity and risk. Remember, higher returns generally come with higher risks and even highly-rated debt is not entirely free from risk. Read the key offer document thoroughly, try to make sense of terms and conditions before investing in bonds. A disciplined approach can help ensure that bonds play their intended role.

(The writer is an NISM & CRISIL-certified Wealth Manager and certified in NISM's Research Analyst module)

Send queries on personal finance and investing to the moneywise@thehindu.co.in ID. Our experts in personal finance will respond to select queries, but will not give specific recommendations for investment in a particular mutual fund, share or fixed deposit.

ILLUSTRATION: SAAI

Buying insurance at discount? Think twice

In insurance, the cheapest option is not necessarily the one that gives you the best value. Prudence here is not making assumptions but looking at both sides of the bargain.

BETWEEN THE LINES

K. Nitya Kalyani

Buying insurance is commendable. Being a prudent buyer of insurance is even better.

That means more than bargaining for lower premium or looking for more benefits. Insurance is different from most products and services we buy. The price reflects the risks the insurer is taking and the cover and benefits offered.

So, when you pay less it is worth asking: what, exactly, am I giving up?

In the previous instalment, we saw how an insured, peeved at not getting a discount on a hospitalisation policy, decided not to renew. This meant losing accrued benefits and importantly, the cover itself.

We all love discounts. There is nothing wrong with wanting the best value from a transaction. The problem arises when we focus on what we save without understanding what we may be giving up.

Consider the experience of a neighbour. The owner of several vehicles, he bought a rugged beast of an SUV. He felt he had earned the right to ask his insurer for a concession. After all, he had been a client for a long time and had several vehicles insured with the company.

The agent obliged with what appeared to be a handsome discount on the motor insurance premium.

> You may be making a saving with a discount but always take a sharp look at what you are no longer getting for that saving

A good deal, or so it seemed. Until the SUV faced a dug-up highway, flipped over the median and had to be towed to the dealer's garage. That was when the discount got an entirely different meaning.

The insured found the discounted premium came with a restriction on where the repairs could be done. Repairs at the manufacturer's authorised workshop were not covered under the terms of the discounted policy. Getting the repairs done at a non-network garage could mean delays in getting spare parts, concerns about workmanship and, potentially, implications for manufacturer warranties.

No free lunch

The premium had been reduced but so was the cover. While the restriction was stated in the policy document, the agent did not explicitly tell the client what the discount entailed. The point he missed was: it may be a perfectly legitimate discount, but it may not be a free lunch.

As an aside, buying vehicle cover from the dealer who also has an authorised garage is a win-win decision as said before in these columns. This way, the claim documentation, estimates, approval, repairs and cashless settlement will all take place seamlessly by the same or closely-related entities.

> With most products, paying less means getting the same product at a better price if you manage to negotiate well. Insurance does not quite work that way.

I recalled a long-ago incident where a premium discount on a home fire policy resulted in the removal of flood cover. Chennai, as we know, is no stranger to floods, sometimes with tragic consequences. Luckily, since 2021, flood cover has been inbuilt with a single bundled premium following an IRDAI stipulation.

Claims too

While you have to be careful about discounts when buying or renewing insurance, claims can be fraught too. When a windshield breaks, the damage may be covered by motor insurance. But making a claim for a replacement, costing about ₹8,000, could mean no-claim bonus (NCB) is cut by one slab at least. With some insurers it disappears totally.

If you had accumulated the maximum NCB of 50% of the own-damage premium, losing it could mean paying substantially more at renewal. The claim may be admissible, but is it worth making?

With most products, paying less means generally getting the same product at a better price if you manage to negotiate well. Insurance does not quite work that way. The premium is a price for a particular bundle of risks, conditions, exclusions and benefits. Change the bundle and the price can change too.

Knowing changes

Before accepting a lower premium, ask what has changed. Has an add-on been removed? Has a deductible been introduced or increased? Do you have co-pay now? Has a particular facility or service, like cashless claims, been restricted? Has the choice of repairer or hospital been limited? Has some other condition changed?

You may be making a saving, but take a sharp look at what you are no longer getting for that saving. In insurance, the cheapest option is not necessarily the one that gives you the best value. Prudence here is not making assumptions but looking at both sides of the bargain.

The discount may be real. The cost of the discount may simply show up later.

(The writer is a business journalist specialising in insurance & corporate history.)

Gold and silver rise

PRECIOUSMETALS

Short-term trend in gold and silver have turned positive post the breakout of key resistance level; the trend would remain positive until the support level is breached

B.Krishnakumar

Breaking the downtrend of several months, precious metals recovered sharply in August. The expectations around interest rate hike by the U.S. Federal Reserve played a key role in influencing the prices. The weakening of the U.S. Dollar too helped precious metals stage a recovery in August.

Comex gold gained 9.73 % in August to settle at $4,497.3/ounce by month end. Comex silver posted an even better performance gaining 16.32% to settle at $67.2/ounce.

Gain in local markets

Mirroring global market trend, the precious metal prices settled higher in the local markets too. The gains were, however curtailed by Indian Rupee strengthening against the U.S. Dollar.

MCX Gold gained 7.75% to settle at ₹1,54,456/10 gm. MCX Silver, too, closed on strong note at ₹2,40,250/kg, a 8.46% gain last month.

Comex gold price managed to breakout above the resistance level of $4,410 mentioned last month. In line with last month's observation, the price later moved to the target zone of $4,650-$4,700. The short-term outlook for gold has turned positive and the price could head to the next target at $4,750-$4,800.

The positive outlook for Comex gold would be under threat only if the price falls below the support at the $4,200-$4,220 zone. Until this zone is breached, expect the gold price to head to the target mentioned above.

Similar to gold, Comex silver price, too, staged a breakout above the resistance level of $66. The short-term outlook as a result has turned positive. The price could now head to the immediate target zone of $72-$74. The positive outlook would be valid as long as the price stays above the support level at $62.5.

MCX gold price, too, crossed above resistance level at ₹1,49,000 and later scaled a high of ₹1,64,773 on August 24 before receding a bit in the past few days. The short-term outlook has turned positive and the price could head to ₹1,66,000-₹1,68,000 zone. The positive outlook would invalidate if the price drops below ₹1,48,000.

Similar to gold, the trend in MCX silver price has turned positive after the price moved past the resistance level of ₹2,45,000. As long as the price stays above ₹2,25,000, the price could move to next target zone of ₹2,56,000-₹2,59,000.

To summarise, the short-term trend in both gold and silver have turned positive post the breakout of key resistance level. The trend would remain positive until the support level mentioned above is breached.

(The author is a Chennai-based analyst/trader. Views, opinions in this column are based on an analysis of short-term price movement in gold and silver futures at COMEX & Multi Commodity Exchange of India. This is not a trading or investment advice.)

Bank Fixed Deposit Rates

Bank Name	Interest Rates (%) Highest Slab	1-year Tenure	3-year Tenure	5-year Tenure
Small Finance Banks				
AU Small Finance Bank	7.40	6.35	7.40	6.75
Equitas Small Finance Bank	8.00	7.10	7.10	7.00
ESAF Small Finance Bank	8.00	6.00	6.00	5.75
Jana Small Finance Bank	8.00	7.00	8.00	7.77
Shivalik Small Finance Bank	8.00	6.00	7.50	6.25
slice Small Finance Bank	7.75	6.25	7.50	7.00
Suryoday Small Finance Bank	8.25	7.25	7.25	8.25
Ujjivan Small Finance Bank	7.80	7.25	7.25	7.20
Utkarsh Small Finance Bank	8.10	6.00	7.50	7.00
Private Sector Banks				
Axis Bank	6.50	6.25	6.50	6.50
Bandhan Bank	7.45	7.00	7.25	5.85
City Union Bank	7.25	6.65	6.50	6.55
CSB Bank	7.10	5.00	5.75	5.75
DBS Bank	6.85	6.30	6.40	6.25
DCB Bank	7.50	6.90	7.00	7.50
Federal Bank	6.70	6.25	6.50	6.40
HDFC Bank	6.50	6.25	6.45	6.40
ICICI Bank	6.50	6.25	6.45	6.50
IDFC FIRST Bank	7.10	6.50	7.10	6.75
IndusInd Bank	7.00	6.75	7.00	6.65
Jammu & Kashmir Bank	7.05	6.55	6.80	6.85
IDBI Bank	6.50	6.20	6.35	6.25
Karnataka Bank	7.00	6.50	6.15	6.15
Kotak Mahindra Bank	6.80	6.35	6.40	6.25
RBL Bank	7.20	7.00	7.20	6.70
SBM Bank India	7.30	7.10	7.10	7.00
South Indian Bank	6.80	6.25	6.20	5.70
Tamilnad Mercantile Bank	7.25	6.80	6.70	6.70
YES Bank	7.25	6.65	7.00	6.75
Public Sector Banks				
Bank of Baroda	6.75	6.25	6.25	6.30
Bank of India	6.85	6.50	6.70	6.00
Bank of Maharashtra	6.65	6.40	5.25	5.00
Canara Bank	6.60	6.25	6.25	6.25
Central Bank of India	6.75	6.10	6.00	6.00
Indian Bank	6.65	6.10	6.05	6.00
Indian Overseas Bank	6.60	6.50	6.10	6.10
Punjab National Bank	6.60	6.25	6.30	6.35
Punjab & Sind Bank	6.85	5.85	5.85	5.95
State Bank of India	6.45	6.25	6.30	6.05
Union Bank of India	6.55	6.20	6.10	6.00

Home Loan Interest Rates

(In %)

Name of Lender	Loan Amount (Rs.) Upto 30 lakh	Above 30 lakh & upto 75 lakh	Above 75 lakh
Public Sector Banks			
Bank of Baroda	7.20-9.00	7.20-9.00	7.20-9.25
Bank of India	7.10-10.00	7.10-10.00	7.10-10.25
Bank of Maharashtra	7.00-9.90	7.00-9.90	7.00-9.90
Central Bank of India	7.10-9.15	7.10-9.15	7.10-9.15
Indian Bank	7.15-9.15	7.15-9.15	7.15-9.15
Indian Overseas Bank	7.20 #	7.20 #	7.20 #
Punjab and Sind Bank	7.35-10.75	7.35-10.75	7.35-10.75
Punjab National Bank	7.30-9.30	7.25-9.20	7.25-9.20
State Bank of India	7.25-8.55	7.25-8.55	7.25-8.55
UCO Bank*	7.15-9.25	7.15-9.25	7.15-9.25
Private Sector Banks			
Axis Bank	8.00-11.90	8.00-11.90	8.00 - 9.10
Bandhan Bank	8.55 - 13.52	8.55 - 13.52	8.55 - 13.52
City Union Bank	8.25-9.50	8.50-10.00	8.75-10.50
CSB Bank	8.30 #	8.30 #	8.30 #
Federal Bank	8.35 - 10.50	7.35 - 10.50	7.35 - 9.50
HDFC Bank	7.75 #	7.75 #	7.75 #
HSBC Bank	7.45 #	7.45 #	7.45 #
ICICI Bank	7.55 #	7.55 #	7.55 #
Karnataka Bank	7.48- 11.80	7.48- 11.80	7.48- 11.80
Karur Vysya Bank	8.50-10.65	8.50-10.65	8.50-10.65
Kotak Mahindra Bank	7.60 #	7.60 #	7.60 #
RBL Bank	9.00 #	9.00 #	9.00 #
South Indian Bank	7.25 #	7.25 #	7.25 #
Tamilnad Mercantile Bank	7.90 - 9.30	7.90 - 9.30	7.90 - 9.30
Housing Finance Companies (HFCs)			
Aditya Birla Capital	7.75 #	7.75 #	7.75 #
Bajaj Housing Finance	7.25 #	7.25 #	7.25 #
GIC Housing Finance	8.20 #	8.20 #	8.20 #
Godrej Housing Finance	7.65 #	7.65 #	7.65 #
ICICI Home Finance	7.50 #	7.50 #	7.50 #
LIC Housing Finance	7.15 #	7.15 #	7.15 #
PNB Housing Finance	7.75-10.05%	7.60-10.05%	7.50-9.95
Sammaan Capital	8.75 #	8.75 #	8.75 #
SMFG India Home Finance	9.25 #	9.25 #	9.25 #
Tata Capital	8.00 #	8.00 #	8.00 #

*Extra concession of 0.05% & 0.10% for women borrowers/takeover loans respectively
Rates as on September 2 #onwards Source:Paisabazaar.com

Streaming six-yard sales through YouTube Live

Ad medium: Madras Sarees uses YouTube Live to take customers through the saree's fabric. REUTERS

Shakthi H

What does an IT career have to do with a saree business?

For Chennai-based Ramya Devanathan, quite a lot. After 18 years at Tata Consultancy Services, she turned an attire that has been a part of her life since her teenage years into a business. The Covid-19 pandemic, which pushed consumers to buy everything from groceries to medicines online, gave her an opportunity. Devanathan decided to take the saree online too, via Madras Sarees – choosing a D2C model instead of investing in physical retail, and paying homage to her city through the brand name.

Affordable sarees

Festivals and occasions have long driven saree purchases, but Devanathan saw few options for affordable sarees meant for work and everyday wear. That was the space Madras Sarees chose to explore, retailing cotton and silk sarees. There are linen-cotton sarees at ₹999, aimed at those who wear sarees regularly to work.

But a saree is not a simple product to sell. Devanathan points to the number of variables involved: fabric, weave, construction, regional identity, colour, drape and price. The way a saree is made can also vary, from handloom and powerloom weaving to techniques such as jacquard and printing.

That breadth makes it challenging to position the category, says Jermina Menon, Brand and Marketing Strategist at Bhartiya Urban. Handloom, she notes, is a "beautiful" word, but it can also make a saree more expensive. A brand, therefore, needs to be clear about the customer and price point it is addressing, she says.

The challenge becomes more pronounced online, as consumers cannot touch or feel the fabric. Madras Sarees uses YouTube Live commerce to take customers through the saree's fabric, construction, regional identity and authenticity, says Devanathan. The format also allows them to see the flow and weave of the saree, while covering measurements, wash care and styling. She recalls a doctor who was rushing to surgery but was watching a live session when she spotted a saree colour she liked. Unable to make the payment immediately, she sent a WhatsApp message asking the team to block the saree until she could return to complete the purchase. Getting a customer to make the first purchase is only part of the equation. Menon says a brand should also give customers a reason to come back. Performance marketing can help generate the initial sale, she says, but the product must do the talking after that.

Madras Sarees is also looking beyond conventional retail touchpoints. Devanathan says a saree kiosk has been set up in the city's Abhiramapuram area, with the broader idea of locating such outlets in spaces where consumers are usually waiting for some other service – such as a salon or a EV recharge point where a customer charging her car can browse the sarees, place an order and have it delivered.

(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)

Festive rush: logistics networks brace for peak demand and faster deliveries

Today's customers increasingly expect deliveries marked by speed, flexibility and visibility, even as the festival shopping window stretches over several months and reaches deeper into tier-II and tier-III cities; For logistics companies, this means adopting a more technology-driven model

NEWS ANALYSIS

T. E. Raja Simhan

Beginning with Onam in August to Pongal in January, India's festival calendar is turning into an extended peak season for the logistics industry, with the e-commerce, organised retail, consumer electronics, fashion and consumer durables segments expected to push cargo and express volumes higher.

What's different this year is not merely the quantum of demand. Today's customers increasingly expect deliveries marked by speed, flexibility and visibility, even as the festival shopping window stretches over several months and reaches deeper into tier-II and tier-III cities.

For logistics companies, this means shedding the traditional response of adding trucks, aircraft capacity, manpower and warehouses during peak season in favour of a more technology-driven model – one built around predicting emerging pressure points and moving capacity before bottlenecks develop.

This includes distributed fulfilment, multimodal networks and flexible capacity.

The festival season is becoming a test of not just how much freight India's logistics networks can carry, but also how intelligently they can respond to changing demand, say company officials.

Season of rush: Organised retail, consumer electronics, durables are likely to push volumes. K.V.S. GIRI

Huge volumes

A spokesperson of Flipkart said the e-commerce company's supply chain and logistics subsidiary Ekart handles more than 3 billion packages a year, most of it related to festival season shopping, including its 'Big Billion Days' sales. As volumes scale up, Ekart's infrastructure can handle up to 10 times the normal volume in peak periods.

In pace with rising expectations, Flipkart offers same-day and next-day delivery in 250 cities, supported by Ekart's nationwide logistics network. At the same time, the emergence of quick commerce is adding another layer to the festive rush, with almost 1,050 micro-fulfilment centres across 130-plus cities active on its Minutes platform.

> Festival season is becoming a test of not just how much freight logistics networks can carry but also how intelligently they can respond to the changing demand

Longer, broader peak

Since the festival season runs from August to January, the cargo flow is more sustained rather than occurring in short, sharp spikes around individual shopping events. Blue Dart expects to see increased movement of apparel and fashion accessories, consumer electronics and mobile devices, helped by festival sales promotions, product launches and growth in online shopping.

"We anticipate a healthy increase in cargo movement during the festive period, driven by sustained consumer demand and strong momentum across e-commerce and retail sectors," said Vikram Mansukhani, Chief of Operations, Blue Dart.

The delivery service company is also seeing demand from D2C brands and marketplaces that need agile logistics networks during seasonal peaks.

"Our focus during the festival season this year is on enhancing network agility, operational efficiency, and customer experience. We continue to strengthen our forecasting and capacity planning capabilities through data-driven insights and predictive analytics, enabling us to respond more effectively to volume fluctuations. We are also augmenting processing capabilities at select locations and leveraging our integrated air and ground network to deliver greater speed and reliability," Mansukhani said.

Vijay Kumar, CEO, Express Industry Council of India (EICI), said that while the festival season remains one of the busiest periods for the express delivery industry, digital commerce is expanding beyond major metros into tier-II and tier-III markets, bringing more customers into the express delivery ecosystem.

Building capacity

Logistics companies began preparations months before the first major festival orders were placed.

Abhishek Chakraborty, CEO, DTDC Express Ltd., said the company expects substantially higher festival cargo movement this year, with Onam volumes already clocking nearly 30% more than the monthly average. The impact was even greater in international deliveries, with revenue during the Onam month nearly twice the monthly average. "We expect demand to remain elevated during the festival cycle, until January," he said.

The firm has strengthened its network capacity by adding new facilities, transit hubs and processing infrastructure across key demand corridors. It is using data-led planning to deploy manpower, vehicles and processing capacity according to anticipated volumes, he said.

DTDC is also optimising movement across high-density corridors and using technology to improve shipment visibility and load planning. Its network of 16,500-plus customer access points, along with its hubs and branches, provides the company with the scale and flexibility needed to respond as volumes build, he said.

One interesting initiative by DTDC is its Vallam Express, in Kerala, which takes last-mile delivery onto waterways to reach communities that have limited road connectivity. The service is expected to facilitate more than 5,000 deliveries during the year, Chakraborty said. FreightFox expects festival season demand to be about 40% higher compared with last year, according to Nitish Rai, founder and CEO.

(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)

When provocation becomes buying motivation

Amit Vijay Mohile

Is risque risky? From liquor counters to Instagram checkouts, brands are packing titillation into products and sales

It was around 8.30 pm when Rahul Chhibber, a 32-year-old consultant, stopped at a South Delhi theka and told the salesman, "Chaar BroCode dena. Full maza hai isme."

The salesman handed over the four bottles of IndoBevs' 15% ABV carbonated wine that Chhibber wanted, and threw in the company's latest brand extension, BroTection – a packet of condoms. "Extra maza ke liye," he said with a wink. BroCode. BroTection. The transaction itself had become the advertisement.

Marketing strategy: Brands are turning risqué positioning into products, purchase occasions and. BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

From liquor counters to Instagram checkouts, brands are turning risqué positioning into products, purchase occasions and transactions across consumer categories worth an estimated ₹40,000 crore.

"We are moving from risqué communication to risqué brand architecture," said brand strategy specialist Harish Bijoor.

"Earlier, the provocation typically sat in the advertising. What brands are experimenting with now is putting it into the product, occasion and transaction."

Men's innerwear is making a similar turn. Lux Cozi, VIP, Rupa Frontline and Amul Macho built mass recall around masculinity, humour and innuendo, most memorably Macho's "Yeh toh bada toing hai". Now D2C brand UNDRESS is pitching ₹799-₹1,399 intimate wear around female gaze, dates and intimacy.

Look, feel desirable

Instead of selling underwear primarily as an everyday necessity, UNDRESS is associating it with occasions where consumers consciously want to look and feel desirable – a first date, Gen Z hook-up, Valentine's Day, honeymoon or weekend away with a partner. Desire becomes a reason to trade up.

"The Risqué 2.0 playbook is a brilliantly pragmatic strategy," said Prathap Suthan, chief creative officer at Bang In The Middle. "What we are seeing is the weaponisation of the transaction." Brands, he said, are moving provocation "into products, retail and checkout".

Commercial canvas

The sexual wellness and condoms market is estimated at ₹12,300 crore annually; men's intimate wear at ₹18,000-22,000 crore; male grooming and deodorants at ₹5,500-6,500 crore; and ready-to-drink alcobevs at ₹2,500-3,200 crore – cumulatively ₹38,300-44,000 crore, as per industry estimates.

RTD alcobevs demand is estimated to be growing 18-22% annually, men's intimate wear 11.5-13%, male grooming 8.5-10% and sexual wellness 6-11%. BroCode clocks ₹200-250 crore annual retail sales, while IndoBevs targets more than ₹700 crore in branded alcobev revenue in FY27.

Risqué marketing isn't new. Benetton used visual shock, FCUK sexual wordplay and Calvin Klein sensuality; in India, Tuff Shoes' campaign featuring Milind Soman and Madhu Sapre in the buff had courted controversy while MR Coffee promised "Real pleasure doesn't come in an instant".

"Risqué advertising has been used globally for brands ranging from apparel, fashion and alcohol to even ice cream," said advertising veteran Ambi Parameswaran. "In India we are still using this form of advertising to sell undergarments and alcohol after the misstep of Tuff Shoes."

(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)

Why does India's food safety system need a Clint Eastwood?

OPINION

Shubho Sengupta

Between May and July, Tukaram Mundhe, a 2005 batch IAS officer from Maharashtra reportedly walked into 3,137 restaurants, issued 764 improvement notices and shut down 165 eateries. And became a Singham-style folk hero in the process, celebrated on social media and news channels as the bureaucrat finally did what the system was supposed to do.

The thing is, Maharashtra's Food and Drug Administration has FoSCoS – the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India's integrated digital platform – which is supposed to track licensing, inspections, lab results, and penalties, with the whole chain digitised and connected. So you don't really need a vigilante – it should be quiet, boring, predictable and effective work. There's information, but no enforcement, not until Mundhe shows up. In theory, FoSCoS is elegant. Violation found lab test ordered results analysed audit conducted adjudication penalty issued restaurant closed. Clean. Logical.

The system has too many blockers and not enough doers, however. Violations sit in audit, then in adjudication, then in enforcement – with each step a checkpoint that can delay matters indefinitely.

How others fixed this

Singapore has inspections and rules just like we do, but here's the critical difference: when a restaurant fails inspection, the rating gets published right there on the storefront, online, everywhere customers see it. The owner doesn't fear the inspector or worry about fines – he fears customers who see "Failed" and go somewhere else instead. Revenue drops the same week, the owner fixes the problem instantly and market pressure does what bureaucracy never could. In Denmark and Australia, violations go public within days, the media picks it up... and if one district is lenient, the neighbouring district looks clean by comparison, so officials can't hide.

For transparency: India has stop hoarding data and make it public quickly. MOORTHY. M

What we shouldn't do

India needs to stop building systems for bureaucrats and start building systems for customers. Publication of violation data should be automatic – online within 48 hours, in food delivery apps, restaurant windows, so customers know before they eat.

Celebrating Mundhe is basically admitting the system doesn't work. A folk hero in regulatory enforcement is like one in water supply – it means something fundamental is broken.

Singapore doesn't have headlines about its food safety commissioner, neither does Denmark, or Australia, because when a system works it's invisible. So the question isn't where to find the next Mundhe but how to build a system that doesn't need him.

Many Mundhes...

Also, I realised while I was writing this – the 'Mundhe principle' is portable. Let's take a quick look at other industries and categories.

Real estate: Buyers have no idea if a building was flagged for structural issues. But if property listings showed municipal violation history, demand drops for buildings and developers would rush to fix.

TV channels: There's official data on complaints against news channels for promoting fake news, hate speech, bias, and so on. But if that data appeared where you were choosing what to watch...

Schools: Education department inspects and finds violations, but parents don't see it. Imagine school violation data published where you're comparing institutions – suddenly, principals would move faster.

Hospitals: There is data on doctor complaints, disciplinary actions, malpractice cases.

Patients don't see any of it. You pick a doctor on reputation or luck. But if that data appeared in the public domain...

The lesson isn't that India needs more heroes. It's that India needs to stop hoarding regulatory data.

(Shubho Sengupta is a digital marketer with an analogue past)

ARABSALIM

Lebanon President calls for U.S. help after 4 killed in Israeli strikes

AP

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun urged Washington and the international community to help stop Israeli attacks after strikes on Sunday killed at least four people despite a truce and an Israel-Lebanon deal. Israel said it targeted Hezbollah operatives and sites in response to a drone attack a day earlier. AFP

RIYADH

'Plans by Israeli Ministers for Gaza expulsions threaten Trump peace'

AFP

Eight Islamic and Arab countries — Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Pakistan, Indonesia and Turkiye — on Sunday condemned plans voiced by Israeli government Ministers for the removal of Palestinians from the Gaza Strip, saying the designs jeopardise a U.S.-backed peace in the territory. AFP

TAIZ

More than 140 killed in latest Yemen clashes: military sources

AFP

Fighting between Yemeni government forces and Iran-backed Houthi rebels in southwest Yemen killed more than 140 combatants between midday Saturday and early Sunday morning, military sources said. Those killed include 84 Saudi-backed Yemeni government troops and 57 Houthi fighters, sources added. AFP

MOSCOW

Russia dismisses drone accusations, says Germany 'wants war again'

AFP

Germany "wants war again", Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said in an interview on Sunday, dismissing Berlin's accusation that Russia was to blame for a drone attack on Leipzig airport. The German government blamed Moscow for the incident, saying Russia sent "low-level agents" for an attempted "hybrid attack". AFP

Iran says it struck a U.S. vessel in Hormuz; Washington denies claim

Tehran says it struck the unmanned U.S. vessel attempting to enter the strait, while U.S. military rejects this as a 'total lie'; Iran's Speaker Ghalibaf warns that any further U.S. aggression would face 'faster, more intense and more painful' responses

Associated Press
CAIRO

Iran said on Sunday it struck an unmanned U.S. vessel trying to enter the Strait of Hormuz, a claim that the U.S. military dismissed as a "total lie". The purported attack came a day after the U.S. military said forces struck three Iranian oil tankers in response to Navy warships being targeted with ballistic missiles. Experts called it a dangerous escalation after Iran's previous attacks at sea targeted commercial shipping.

The war began with U.S. and Israeli attacks on Iran on February 28. But since a fragile ceasefire agreement was announced in June, on-and-off fighting has persisted, with both sides trying to inflict military and economic pain as negotiations have collapsed.

Dangerous waters: Vessels transit the Hormuz Strait off the coast of the port city of Bandar Abbas in southern Iran on Saturday. AFP

The United States and Iran resumed attacks last week, following a month of relative calm, with the Strait of Hormuz and areas along Iran's southern coast again being targeted. At least five people were killed earlier in the week during a U.S. bombardment that returned attention to the area where a school was hit in the war's opening strikes.

Iran's top negotiator Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf threatened a more forceful response to any further U.S. attacks.

"The Americans must have understood that the era of proportionate responses has come to an end," said Iran's Parliament Speaker, who has acted as chief negotiator in talks to end the war.

"Any aggression against Iran's interests and security will receive a faster, more intense and more painful response," he added, in a speech carried by state media.

Mr. Ghalibaf added that alongside the military front, Iran's main battle was now over production and people's livelihoods.

Iran's Economy Minister Ali Madanizadeh said that Tehran planned to respond to U.S. economic pressure with reforms and rejected the notion that sanctions would cause it to change course, according to state media.

"They think that by pressuring the economy of a country they can change the decisions of its people," Mr. Madanizadeh said.

(With inputs from AFP, Reuters)

China teams scour ruins at flood-hit border crossing

Reuters
GYIRONG

Chinese officials said on Sunday that workers had recovered 12 more bodies as the search continued for hundreds still missing after a massive mudslide destroyed China's main border crossing with Nepal.

China on Sunday, for the first time, opened up its devastated Gyirong County in Tibet – the site of the destroyed border immigration post – to select media to show the scale of destruction caused by the flash floods. Not only did the immigration post disappear without a trace, most rescue officials struggled to point out the exact location where the building once stood.

The mudslide has killed more than 1,300 people on both sides of the border, with more than 5,000 missing. On the Chinese side, 43 were confirmed dead and 519 remained missing as of Saturday.

Rescue workers conduct relief operations at the Gyirong Port area in Shigatse, Tibet Autonomous Region, China on Sunday. REUTERS

Officials said that recovery teams were taking fingerprints and recording identifying features such as tattoos as bodies were recovered. They had also collected 993 personal items from the site.

Families and diplomats representing countries with missing nationals have privately expressed growing frustration over what they describe as limited information-sharing by China. Beijing's Foreign Ministry has said its release of information about the floods was "transparent and timely".

(With PTI inputs)

'Israeli PM orders evacuation of some West Bank outposts'

Agence France-Presse
JERUSALEM

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has ordered the evacuation of some settlements in the occupied West Bank deemed illegal under Israeli law, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich said Sunday.

"To my knowledge, Netanyahu has given the instruction to evacuate" certain settlements, Mr. Smotrich said, adding that he did not approve of the measure.

While all Israeli settlements in the West Bank are considered illegal under international law, some established without government approval – often consisting of just a few prefabricated homes – are also considered illegal by Israel.

Several Israeli media outlets also reported on Sunday that Mr. Netanyahu had issued the order, with Israel's largest news site *Ynet* saying it was the result of U.S. pressure.

Bezalel Smotrich

At the end of August, Mr. Netanyahu had promised to continue establishing settlements in the West Bank despite growing international backlash.

The construction and expansion of Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territory has increased significantly under his government.

According to Mr. Smotrich, the evacuation concerned outposts built in areas under the control of the Palestinian Authority and without official authorisation.

The leader of a far-right party that advocates the annexation of the entire West Bank, Mr. Smotrich boasted on Sunday that he had led "a revolution" by building and legalising "villages, farms, roads and thousands of homes" in the territory, which has been occupied by Israel since 1967.

The West Bank has seen a surge in violence since the outbreak of war in the Gaza Strip following Hamas's attack on Israel on October 7, 2023.

More than 500,000 Israelis live in settlements in the Palestinian territory, among some three million Palestinians.

State in mourning

Residents and relatives of the victims killed in a bus crash gathering during their funeral at a church in the town of Sao Lourenco, on the island of Fogo, on Sunday. At least 25 people, many of them schoolchildren and teenagers, were killed when a bus plunged into a ravine. AFP

Ex-President Raul Castro reappears at a military event

Associated Press
HAVANA

Former Cuban President Raul Castro reappeared in public at a military event that celebrated the anniversary of an Army branch responsible for protecting its top leaders.

Cuban state television aired more than 10 minutes of footage on Saturday night that showed Mr. Castro, 95, in his traditional olive-green military uniform, alongside his bodyguard and grandson, Raul Guillermo Rodriguez Castro. The former leader's previous public appearance was on August 13.

The former President, who no longer holds any formal position in government or in the island's Communist Party, rarely appears in public.

U.S. envoys make Kyiv visit amid push for peace in Ukraine war

Reuters
KYIV

U.S. peace envoys Jared Kushner and Steve Witkoff met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Kyiv on Sunday as the Trump administration renewed its push to end Russia's four-and-a-half-year war in Ukraine.

Mr. Kushner and Mr. Witkoff travelled from Moscow, where they held three hours of talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Saturday but did not appear to secure a breakthrough in the conflict. Kremlin aide Yuri Ushakov described Saturday's meeting as "highly useful".

After the first round of talks between Ukrainian and U.S. negotiators that lasted about three hours, the U.S. envoys said that they were looking forward to making more progress.

"Substantive, important, and we are very encouraged," Mr. Witkoff told presspersons after the talks, which also included a working lunch.

Bhutan leads Southeast Asia region in eliminating rabies

Ramya Kannan
CHENNAI

Bhutan has become the first country in the World Health Organization's Southeast Asia region to eliminate dog-transmitted rabies as a public health problem. The WHO, on Saturday, validated Bhutan's achievement. The mountain kingdom's last rabies death was in June 2023.

Rabies is a viral disease that is almost always fatal if clinical symptoms appear. It is estimated that rabies still claims the lives of approximately 59,000 people each year, with a third of these fatalities occurring in India, where it remains a huge problem with local bodies failing at animal birth control and vaccination programmes.

The disease is endemic throughout the country except for the Andaman and Nicobar and Lakshadweep Islands, and cases are reported from all over the country, the year round. About 96% of the mortality and morbidity is associated with dog bites.

Target for 2030

The National Rabies Control Programme aims to reduce mortality from rabies among human beings and progressively achieve the target of bringing rabies deaths to zero by 2030.

Rabies is almost always fatal if clinical symptoms appear.

In a message shared on the WHO website, its Director-General, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, congratulated Bhutan "which is another step towards our goal to end human deaths from dog-transmitted rabies by 2030".

He further noted the interventions that made the success possible: "Bhutan's success shows that the health of humans, animals and the environment we share is inextricably linked. By uniting health workers, veterinarians, and communities, Bhutan has shown that the fight against rabies is won not in silos, but through solidarity across all sectors."

Two-pronged strategy

WHO validation recognises that a country has eliminated dog-transmitted human rabies and consequently through the absence of human deaths from the disease for at least two years, while demonstrating the capacity to prevent transmission from re-emerging.

Rabies deaths are preventable. A two-pronged strategy is advocated globally – vaccinating dogs to curb the disease at source, and using post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) after a bite. PEP consists of thoroughly washing the bite area with water and soap, administering a full course of human rabies vaccine, and whenever necessary, rabies immunoglobulins.

Nilesh Buddha, Officer-in-Charge, WHO South-East Asia Region, complimented the country: "The dedication of health workers, veterinary professionals and De-suung volunteers known as 'Guardians of Peace' helped take dog vaccination, population management and community awareness to every part of the country."

A strong collaboration was initiated between the Ministries of Health and the Agriculture and Livestock, together with partners, local governments and communities, united through a One Health approach, Bhutan's Health Ministry sources explained. Continued access to PEP, mass dog vaccination, dog population management, community engagement and strengthened surveillance marked the country's programme.

Still hip: A fan poses near a Freddie Mercury statue during Montreux Freddie Day in Switzerland on Saturday. AFP

Fans celebrate Freddie Mercury's 80th birthday

Agence France-Presse
MONTREUX

Thousands of Queen fans sang, cheered and partied at the Freddie Mercury statue in Montreux on Saturday to celebrate what would have been the legendary British singer's 80th birthday.

Wearing outlandish outfits reflecting Mercury's stage costumes, fans gathered in honour of the frontman in the Swiss town where he sought peace in his final years and recorded his last vocals. "It is a special birthday, so you've got to make the effort to come and celebrate all things Freddie," said Sonia, who travelled from Canberra.

Fans hailed from Australia to Japan to even the housing estate in Feltham, near London's Heathrow Airport, where Mercury's Parsi family moved to after fleeing the Zanzibar revolution in 1964.

The bronze statue of Mercury in a triumphant pose, erected in 1996 overlooking Lake Geneva, was decked with balloons, flowers and tributes left by well-wishers.

Appreciation of Queen's legacy and Mercury's unique talent has only grown since his death in 1991 from bronchial pneumonia, brought on by AIDS. Among the world's best-selling artists ever, most of the group's sales have come since the singer's passing at the age of 45.

Queen owned Mountain Studios, built into the Montreux Casino, and recorded six albums there. Now a Queen exhibition space, visitors can try out the mixing desk. The Freddie Days birthday event has been running since 2003 and has grown over time. The free, five-day event's volunteer organiser Lucien Muller told *AFP* that 14,000 to 16,000 people were expected to attend.

Parton and Steinem deaths days apart bring double dose of grief for feminists

Gloria Steinem and Dolly Parton embodied two versions of the same idea — women should know themselves well enough to make the right choices; their deaths eight days apart sent a double dose of grief around the world as many asked who would take their places at forefront of women's rights

NEWS ANALYSIS

Associated Press

One shaped and delivered the language of feminism. The other rejected the label but showed how feminism can be done: with a microphone dusted in rhinestones, and without apology.

Gloria Steinem and Dolly Parton embodied two towering versions of the same idea: that women should know themselves well enough to make their own choices about matters intimate and societal. Their deaths eight days apart sent a double dose of grief around the world and across generations as many women (and some men!) asked who would take their places at the forefront of women's rights.

Steinem, overtly political, went undercover as a Playboy bunny to deliver an exposé, founded Ms. Magazine and spent the rest of her life urging women to support each other. Parton, on the other hand, defined herself as a larger-than-life daughter of the American South who told stories with music and included everybody – but refused to play politics or call herself a feminist.

"Dolly taught us to dream big. Gloria taught us to speak up," wrote Demond B. Nason, a New York City singer. "Both reminded us that a woman could walk into a world that told her who she was supposed to be – and simply decide to become something else."

Parton didn't say so, but Steinem insisted more than three decades ago that the pair fit together under the same feminist flag.

"If feminism means each of us finding your unique power, and helping other women do the same, Dolly Parton certainly has done both," Steinem wrote in 1987, when Ms. Magazine named the singer one of its "Women of the Year."

Many shared the sense that Steinem and Parton belonged together. "Both believed in women: in our ability to decide who we are, make our own choices, take care of one another and shape the world around us," wrote Swati Narayan in a column for American Kahani, an online news outlet for Indian and South Asian Americans.

Between Parton's death on August 25 and Steinem's on September 2, Ms. Magazine re-ran Steinem's essay with an editor's note: "Steinem celebrated Parton not only as a gifted songwriter and magnetic performer, but as a shrewd businessperson who transformed femininity into a source of humor and power – and used her success to lift up working women, poor communities and the mountain people of her native Tennessee."

Priceless respect: Flowers outside Gloria Steinem's home after the announcement of her death at the age of 92 in New York. REUTERS

Two sides, same coin

The embrace wasn't mutual, at least not publicly. And that, Parton acknowledged, was by design.

"I don't do politics. I have too many fans on both sides of the fence," she said in 2019 on "Dolly Parton's America," Radiolab's podcast. "Of course," she added, "I have my opinion about everything, but I learned years ago to keep your mouth shut about things."

The star was asked directly whether she thought of herself as a feminist. "No, I do not," she said flatly, later explaining that she did not want to be associated with what she viewed as political extremes even as she advocated for women and their opportunities.

Parton was clear, though, that her lyrics were intended to shine light on women's hardships and the realities of a world that the superstar agreed was dominated by men. She wrote about teenage pregnancy, abortion and adoption in "Down from Dover." She supported equal pay (See: "9 to 5," the movie and the song). One of her most famous songs is called, "Just Because I'm a Woman."

She just didn't use words like "oppression" or "patriarchy." And unlike Steinem, Parton didn't endorse political candidates. Asked on CNN during the 2016 presidential campaign whether she preferred Republican Donald Trump or Democrat Hillary Clinton, she replied: "I think they're both nuts."

Feminism splintered under the pressure of public policy debates over such issues as abortion and the rejection of Clinton in the 2016 elections, the rise of Mr. Trump and the modern-day emergence of identity politics.

Steinem's version of feminism today is more aligned with Democrats at a time when, at least for now, the country has swung Republican. Steinem lived to see the Supreme Court overturn the 1973 ruling Roe v. Wade, eliminating the constitutional right to abortion, a pillar of the 1960s feminist movement she embodied. The Equal Rights Amendment remains unratified. And Americans have yet to elect a woman President.

So if you're an opponent of abortion rights or if you voted for Mr. Trump, can you still be a feminist in 2026? And would you want to be called that in public or on social media? To the end, Steinem insisted it wasn't the label that mattered. What counted as feminist was whether a woman knew herself well enough to make her own choices rather than be defined as the daughter or wife of a man.

But partisanship surfaced even in the ritual public mourning for the two women. Parton's passing touched off an immediate expression of grief from sources ranging from Mr. Trump to her fans in the LGBTQ+ community. Mr. Trump ordered flags to be flown at half-staff as a show of "respect" for her.

In contrast, there was no such rush to recognise Steinem beyond her liberal and centrist constituency, even from conservatives who had expressed respect for her accomplishments as an influential historical figure. Their silence two days after Steinem's death contrasted with the outpouring of grief, thanks and respect for Steinem from leading figures on the left, particularly of her generation. Hillary Clinton, who also saluted Parton, said Steinem's activism was built on optimism despite abundant roadblocks for women.

"The lived experience became much more real and applicable to our entire society when Gloria began to point it out," Ms. Clinton posted. Steinem said for years that she's using her torch to light others. "If we each have a torch, there's a lot more light," she told the National Press Club in 2013.

Social media offered evidence that supporters of both women would pass it on. Liz Webster, an American hair and makeup artist living in Germany, called Steinem and Parton "two very different women who shaped the way I saw what a woman could be."

Germany's far-right AfD leads polls ahead of key eastern State election

Agence France-Presse
BERLIN

German voters headed to the polls on Sunday for a key regional election in the ex-communist east where the far-right, anti-immigrant, Moscow- and Trump-friendly AfD is expected to secure an easy majority.

However, the Alternative for Germany (AfD), which polls have put at over 40% for months in Saxony-Anhalt, is not guaranteed to win the absolute majority needed for it to control the State's government.

Such a breakthrough would be the first time since the Nazi-era of the Second World War that the far-right has run a German State, a prospect that alarms mainstream parties and minority groups.

German flags at the venue of an AfD event during the election to Saxony-Anhalt in Magdeburg on Saturday. AFP

Polls opened at 8 a.m. (0600 GMT) and some 1.7 million voters had until 6 p.m. (1600 GMT) to cast their ballots.

The small State of 2.1 million people is currently governed by the centre-right CDU of Chancellor Friedrich Merz in coalition with two smaller parties.

State Premier Sven Schulze hopes to form another multi-party coalition to cling to power.

All major parties have maintained a "firewall" of non-cooperation with the AfD, whose Saxony-Anhalt branch is categorised as "right-wing extremist" by Germany's domestic intelligence agency.

The AfD's telegenic top candidate Ulrich Siegmund – who has a large social media following – has confidently predicted an absolute majority.

"It was the others who erected the firewalls," he told Bild daily. "If no-one wants to work with us, then we'll just have to do it alone."

Such a scenario would shake Germany, which has sought to atone for its dark Second World War history and so far kept extremist parties in check.

Clearing out prayers

Making room: A worker removes notes from a crack in the Western Wall, Judaism's holiest prayer site, ahead of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, in Jerusalem's Old City on Sunday. Visitors place notes in the wall as part of a prayer ritual. REUTERS

China's memories of Mao Zedong turn to nostalgia 50 years after his death

Agence France-Presse
NANJIE

The crimson flags on Nanjie village's "East is Red" Square hang limp in the sweltering summer heat as a trickle of tourists take photos with a towering statue of Chairman Mao Zedong, still gleaming white almost 50 years after he died.

The Great Helmsman, who died September 9, 1976, is still very much a fixture in central Henan Province's Nanjie – often dubbed "China's last Maoist village".

Nostalgia for Mao's egalitarian ideals is growing in China as memories of his turbulent rule fade and the country grapples with a slowing economy and inequality.

Mao, who led the 1949 communist revolution against the ruling nationalists, ushered in an era of collectivised ownership he argued would drive industry and unite the country, but his drastic policies are also blamed by historians for mass starvation and millions of deaths.

While the ruling Chinese Communist Party maintains Mao was a revolutionary hero, it publicly acknowledged after his death that his devastating Cultural Revolution was a "grave mistake" – a verdict upheld by subsequent leaders. In Nanjie, countless murals of the former Chinese leader are plastered around the village.

Residents still live under Maoist principles of shared ownership, while the rest of the country moved on from that economic model. "I still revere him very much," Xie Kaiyue, a 22-year-old local university student, said of Mao, who died almost three decades before she was born.

"I think young people in the village and, actually, myself, aren't as strong-spirited as in the past... People were purer," she said.

Sanitised history

Around 500 kilometres north, in the mountain village of Dazhai in Shanxi Province, once promoted by Mao as a national model after locals terraformed its arid hills into irrigated fields, tourists reminisce about an era when the Great Helmsman dominated political and social life.

"[People] didn't have enough to eat or to wear," Li, a 64-year-old tourist from Xi'an, said of his childhood. "But... the whole country was full of vigour, and there was a spirit of struggling with heaven, earth, and people to change every aspect of China," the retiree said.

The Great Helmsman Mao Zedong, who died September 9, 1976, is still very much a fixture in central Henan Province's Nanjie. AFP

Now, Dazhai is overflowing with shops selling items that support Mao's personality cult – posters, playing cards, and crockery emblazoned with his image, and the "Little Red Book" of his quotations.

Still, references to dark chapters of his decades in absolute power are tightly censored in public discourse. The decade-long episode instigated by Mao in 1966 saw intellectuals brutally targeted as "class enemies" and schools shuttered, setting China back for years in education and development.

Private property and land were collectivised, while economic management pushed the country to the Great Famine, which the government says killed around 15 million people, while historians estimate around 20-43 million.

"Everything you see in the public domain... is the party line. No one is allowed to deviate from this," said scholar Xu Chenggang, who was targeted as a child in Beijing during the Cultural Revolution because his father was labelled a "rightist".

Mao's face is printed on banknotes, his portrait overlooks Tiananmen Square, and his body is preserved in a mausoleum.

Every year new movies and TV shows dramatising Mao's life beam the message of his great deeds to public.

Public discussion has been squeezed under current leader Xi Jinping, who warns against "historical nihilism", or narratives contradicting the party's own. "The Communist Party told people there were mistakes, but what's the meaning of 'mistake'? No one knows," Xu said.

The sanitised history has left space for romanticised interpretations among youths frustrated by long working hours and intense competition in education and the job market.

In December, a viral video series on Bilibili – a platform popular with those under 30 – argued that the 2017 movie 'Youth', which follows young performers in a military dance troupe during the 1970s, was a subtle ode to the Cultural Revolution.

The videos, which praised Mao and blamed capitalist elites for crushing the movement, were removed after gaining over 35 million views in less than a week. Many also credit Mao with laying the foundation for China to become a modern, technologically advanced nation, said Mobo Gao, professor of Chinese studies at Adelaide University. "They ask, where did [today's China] come from? It came from the establishment of the PRC," said Gao, who lived through the Mao era in rural Jiangxi Province.

In Shijiazhuang, an industrial city of seven million northeast of Dazhai, 20-year-old Wang Zhihao and his classmates posed with a giant Mao statue.

"We admire and revere Chairman Mao very much. He is a great figure," Wang said, as the sound of elderly residents singing songs praising the Communist Party drifted over from the nearby square. "He led the founding of New China."

FAVOURITE VENUE

We always perform well at the China Masters, says Satwiksairaj

BADMINTON PHOTO

Playing here (at China Masters) is always good. After coming back from an injury, this has been a tournament that has given us a lot of confidence. In 2024, we played here after the Olympics and made the semifinal. We were not in a good shape last year, but we went till the final — Satwiksairaj Rankireddy.

EARLY EXITS

Yuki and Anirudh fail to clear first round in US Open doubles

FILE PHOTO

Yuki Bhambri, *right*, and Anirudh Chandrasekar suffered first-round exits in men's doubles at the US Open on Saturday. Yuki and Kiwi Michael Venus went down to Americans Ryan Seggerman and Patrik Trhac 6-7(4), 6-7(3) while Anirudh and Belarusian Ivan Liutarevich lost 4-6, 7-5, 4-6 to Great Britain's Arthur Fery and Joshua Paris.

BIZARRE EXPERIENCE

I felt like I couldn't play tennis: Keys on her third-set implosion

GETTY IMAGES

I obviously got off to a really good lead, and then I got really scared, like I couldn't swing. I think she (Zheng Qinwen) started playing better: I started playing poorly. Then I felt like I couldn't play tennis anymore — Madison Keys after squandering a 5-0 lead in the decider to crash out of the US Open.

JOVIC'S TAKE

'We put on a show and it took everything to get through that'

REUTERS

Iva Jovic outlasted Alexandra Eala in an epic three-hour showdown at the US Open on Saturday. "The level was absolutely incredible. We put on a show and it took everything to get through that... losing my earrings, falling literally flat-out on the floor, ending with cuts on my knees, and suffering mental breakdowns," said Jovic.

Third time lucky for Satwik-Chirag pair

The Indian combination, which had lost in the final of the 2023 and 2025 editions, produces a terrific comeback in the summit clash; it is ready to go 'all guns blazing' at the Asian Games

The band is back: Chirag and Satwik were slow off the blocks, but upped the ante in the crunch. BADMINTON PHOTO

CHINA MASTERS

Press Trust of India
SHENZHEN

The Indian men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty produced a stirring comeback to beat China's He Ji Ting and Ren Xiang Yu in a thriller and clinch the China Masters Super 750 title here on Sunday.

Satwiksairaj and Chirag, who had finished runners-up in the 2023 and 2025 editions, fought their way to an 11-21, 21-13, 21-17 victory. The Indians bagged their second title of the season, having earned the Singapore Open crown.

The title is a big boost for the World No. 5 pair as it gears up to defend the gold medal at the Asian Games, scheduled in Japan from September 19. "It feels really special. Obviously, going into the Asian Games, winning a title definitely gives a huge boost. We are working in the right direction," Chirag said after the Indian combine won its 10th BWF World Tour crown.

"I think we will go back home, push ourselves to the limit, train for the next 10 days and go all guns blazing at the Asian Games. We want to go out there and have some fun."

The Indians could not take early control of the rallies as He and Ren zoomed to a 5-0 lead with attacking strokes in short exchanges. He looked in ominous touch, raining down thunderous smashes, while a wide shot from Chirag allowed the Chinese pair to wrap up the opener.

The Indian combination produced a far better show in the second game, tightening the defence and extending the rallies. Satwiksairaj also opted for a flick serve to keep the Chinese guessing and prevented them from engaging in the front court often.

The local hopefuls were behind 8-12 after losing a 45-shot rally, and the Indians stretched the summit clash into a decider with an attacking return from Satwiksairaj.

Although the Chinese secured a four-point advantage, their opponents leveled the score at 7-7. Down by two points at the interval, Satwiksairaj and Chirag kept themselves within striking distance of He and Ren. After drawing parity at 16-all, the Indians had three match-point opportunities, the first of which Chirag took.

Sabalenka keeps her hat-trick hopes alive; Jovic sets up clash with Gauff

US OPEN

Agence France-Presse
NEW YORK

World No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka entered the US Open quarterfinals on Sunday, beating American Taylor Townsend 6-4, 6-3 to keep her bid for a rare three-peat alive.

Sabalenka needed all of her resolve against the multi-faceted Townsend.

The match opened with five breaks of serve before Sabalenka managed a comfortable hold for a 4-2 first-set lead.

The Belarusian star's sustained power and precision proved a little too much for Townsend.

Sabalenka will face either sixth-seeded Wimbledon champion Linda Noskova of Czechia or 11th-seeded Ukrainian Marta Kostyuk for a place in the semifinals.

Fourth-seeded Coco Gauff battled through in straight sets, and 18-year-old US compatriot Iva Jovic held off Philippines sensation Alexandra Eala in three sets to reach the last 16 on Saturday.

Former champion Gauff beat Spain's Cristina Bucsa 6-3, 6-4, relying on her defensive skills as she climbed out of a 3-1 hole in the opening set.

Gauff next takes on Jovic, the 14th seed who won the duel of rising stars with 17th-seeded Eala 7-5, 3-6, 7-5.

Six-time Grand Slam champion Iga Swiatek saved three set points in the second set, dominating both tie-breakers in her tight 7-6(3), 7-6(3) win over Czech Maria Bouzkova.

Men's top seed Alexander Zverev made short work of Chile's Alejandro Tabilo, winning 6-2, 7-6(2), 6-2.

Zverev will meet Italian Luciano Darderi for a quarterfinal berth after the 21st seed beat Australian wild card Dane Sweeny 6-4, 6-3, 6-3.

Fifth-seeded French Open finalist Flavio Cobolli of Italy fell to 21-year-old Alexander Blockx.

Belgium's Blockx shocked Cobolli 6-7(4), 6-3, 6-0, 6-3, winning 11 straight games from 3-2 down in the second set.

Blockx next faces Francisco Cerundolo, who rallied to upset ninth-seeded Taylor Fritz 3-6, 4-6, 6-3, 6-4, 6-4.

Gritty win: Jovic edged out Eala in a three-setter. GETTY IMAGES

TOP RESULTS

Fourth round: Women:
1-Sabalenka bt Townsend (USA) 6-4, 6-3.
Third round: Men:
24-Cerundolo ((Arg) bt 9-Fritz (USA) 3-6, 4-6, 6-3, 6-4, 6-4;
28-Blockx (Bel) bt 5-Cobolli (Ita) 6-7(4), 6-3, 6-0, 6-3.
Khachanov bt Bonzi (Fra) 6-3, 6-2, 6-4; 21-Darderi (Ita) bt Sweeny (Aus) 6-4, 6-3, 6-3.
Gea (Fra) bt Zheng (USA) 7-6(7), 3-6, 4-6, 6-3, 6-2.
van de Zandschulp (Ned) bt 31-Bergs (Bel) 3-6, 7-6(3), 4-6, 7-6(6), 6-3.
1-Zverev (Ger) bt 25-Tabilo (Chi) 6-2, 7-6(2), 6-2.
14-Tien (USA) bt 17-Mensik (Cze) 6-3, 1-6, 6-7(2), 6-3, 6-4.
Women: 5-Andreeva bt Bartunkova (Cze) 6-2, 7-6(5);
8-Swiatek (Pol) bt 25-Bouzkova (Cze) 7-6(3), 7-6(3).
4-Gauff (USA) bt Bucsa (Esp) 6-3, 6-4; 13-Osaka (Jpn) bt 23-Mertens (Bel) 6-3, 3-6, 7-5.
14-Jovic (USA) bt 17-Eala (Phi) 7-5, 3-6, 7-5; 2-Rybakina (Kaz) bt Starodubtseva (Ukr) 7-6(6), 6-3.

Arsenal delivers statement fightback; Barca coasts

EURO LEAGUES

Agence France-Presse
LONDON

Arsenal delivered an emphatic response to Chelsea's emergence as potential Premier League title contender with a 2-1 win that ended its rival's unbeaten start on Sunday.

Mikel Arteta's side trailed to Morgan Rogers' second-minute goal but the champion showed why it is the firm favourite to retain the title with a blistering response.

Kai Havertz bagged the equaliser midway through the first half and Martin Odegaard netted Arsenal's winner soon after the interval.

Lamine Yamal struck twice for Barcelona as it demolished Valencia 5-0 on Sunday to maintain its 100 % start in La Liga and move three points clear at the top.

Fermin Lopez, Raphinha and Pedri were also on target for Hansi Flick's swaggering visitors on a hot afternoon on Spain's east coast.

Defending champion Bayern Munich was held to a scoreless draw by promoted Schalke in the Bundesliga.

The draw ended Bayern's run of 67 consecutive matchdays atop the Bundesliga table and was its first scoreless draw since February 2025.

A last-gasp winner from Lautaro Martinez sealed a win for Inter Milan as the Serie A champion fought back from two goals down to edge visiting Napoli 3-2.

Sealing it: Odegaard completes Arsenal's comeback with this smart finish. REUTERS

The results: Premier League: Everton 2 (George 83, Maitland-Niles 90+6) drew with Manchester United 2 (Mbeumo 46, Sesko 88); Arsenal 2 (Havertz 25, Odegaard 50) bt Chelsea 1 (Rogers 2).

LaLiga: Valencia 0 lost to Barcelona 5 (Yamal 6, 84, Lopez 22, Raphinha 50, Pedri 79).

Bundesliga: Eintracht Frankfurt 1 (Burkardt 6) lost to Augsburg 4 (Ibrahimovic 46, Fellhauer 47, Claude Maurice 65, Rieder 89); Hamburg 0 lost to Mainz 5 (Becker 19, Mwene 41, Tietz 48, 83, Koenigsdoerffer 90+1).

On Saturday: Premier League: Hull 0 drew with Aston Villa 0.

LaLiga: Athletic Bilbao 3 (Nico Williams 46, Navarro 48, Sancet 90) bt Atletico Madrid 0.

Serie A: Inter Milan 3 (Martinez 56, 90+1, Thuram 82) bt Napoli 2 (Politano 50, Hojlund 53); Roma 2 (Hermoso 89, Soule 90+3) bt Atalanta 1 (Ederson 47).

Bundesliga: Schalke 0 drew with Bayern Munich 0.

Pipers beat Grandmasters despite Carlsen's stalemate

GLOBAL CHESS LEAGUE

P.K. Ajith Kumar
BENGALURU

Magnus Carlsen rushing to his chessboard is not a very unusual sight.

He was sporting a shy smile at his fans at Lalit Ashok on Sunday afternoon as he walked briskly towards the venue for Alpine APL Pipers' match against Ganges Grandmasters on day two of the Tech Mahindra Global Chess League.

The World No. 1 from Norway was held to a draw by former World championship challenger Ian Nepomniachtchi.

Carlsen, however, could afford to smile as his team won 11-6.

It was the second victory in as many matches for the defending champion as the two Indians, K. Humpy and Vidit Gujrathi, scored full points – they were playing with black pieces – against Stavroula Tsolakidou and Leinier Dominguez Perez.

Fyers American Gambits, playing at home, lost its first match after posting two wins on the opening day. Gambits were beaten 7-9 by Grandmasters.

Mixed fortunes: Nepomniachtchi's effort against Carlsen eventually went in vain. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The defeat of Javokhir Sindarov, the World No. 4 and the challenger for this year's World championship, to Nepomniachtchi proved costly. It was on time that the Uzbek lost.

There was more disappointment for two-time title-winner Triveni Continental Kings as it went down to Cheq Mumba Masters 9-10. Kings have lost all their three matches while Masters could heave a sigh of relief after losing two, including one to PBG Alaskan Knights (6-11) earlier in the day.

The results: Ganges Grandmasters lost to Alpine APL Pipers 6-11 (Nepomniachtchi drew with Carlsen; Aronian drew with Anish; Dominguez Perez lost to Vidit; Shuvalova bt Divya; Tsolakidou lost to Humpy; Murzin drew with Mendonca).

PBG Alaskan Knights bt Cheq Mumba Masters 11-6 (Anand drew with Vachier-Lagrave; Arjun bt Pranesh; Yagiz Kaan lost to Mamedyarov; Lagno drew with Harika; Batsiashvili bt Yip; Abhimanyu Mishra bt Daneshvar).

Ganges Grandmasters bt Fyers American Gambits 9-7 (Nepomniachtchi bt Sindarov; Aronian lost to Nihal; Dominguez Perez drew with Dubov; Shuvalova bt Bibisara; Tsolakidou drew with Khademalsharieh; Mendonca drew with Maurizzi).

Triveni Continental Kings lost to Cheq Mumba Masters 9-10 (Firouzja lost to Vachier-Lagrave; Wei drew with Pranesh; Aravindh lost to Mamedyarov; Zhu lost to Harika; Kosteniuk bt Yip; Pranav bt Daneshvar).

Olympiad crucial for Gukesh, says MVL

P.K. Ajith Kumar
BENGALURU

Maxime Vachier-Lagrave believes the Chess Olympiad in Samarkand could be crucial for D. Gukesh in the defence of his World title. The Chennai Grandmaster will be taking on Javokhir Sindarov in the championship match in Geneva later this year.

The Olympiad, the ultimate World team event in chess, gets underway on September 15 in Uzbekistan, Sindarov's home country. "If Gukesh can capitalise on the confidence he has from his previous two Olympiads, in which he had excellent performances, and comes up with a great show again, he could suddenly go into the World championship in a much better mood," Vachier-Lagrave told *The Hindu*. "I think it would be very helpful for him if he gets a little bit of confidence back."

MVL, as the Frenchman is known in chess circles, feels Gukesh needs a break to be at his best again. "He has been struggling a bit with his results, but he has also been experimenting and got maybe too much out of his comfort zone," the 35-year-old said. "He is a formidable opponent. I remember some really good clashes with him."

Vachier-Lagrave.
K. MURALI KUMAR

Sindarov may be viewed by many as the clear favourite, but there isn't any for Vachier-Lagrave. "You have two very strong young players who will be fighting it out," said Vachier-Lagrave, who is playing for Cheq Mumba Masters in the Global Chess League here.

"At the last World championship, Gukesh was coming in really strong and Ding Liren looked like he couldn't play chess. But, suddenly Gukesh was under pressure."

MVL has his own World championship to look forward to as he is part of the pilot edition of the newly launched Total Chess World Championship Tour.

INBRIEF

FIFA confirms Infantino will run in presidential election

Gianni Infantino will stand in March's FIFA presidential election despite the backlash over his now-abandoned plan to bring private investment into the World Cup. Football's global governing body made the confirmation on Sunday. "The FIFA president announced in April that he will stand for re-election in 2027," a FIFA spokesperson said. Infantino had declined to answer questions about his future as he arrived for the opening of the women's U-20 World Cup in Poland.

Mansi finishes runner-up at Indonesia Masters Super 100

Indian shuttler Mansi Singh finished runner-up at the Indonesia Masters Super 100 badminton after going down 16-21, 8-21 to China's Xu Wen Jing in the women's singles final in Jakarta on Sunday. The world No. 76 Indian had defeated Canada's Rachel Chan, while Xu beat third seed Anmol Kharb in the semifinals.

Skipper Kishan dons the lead role as East batters dominate proceedings

His unbeaten ton the highlight as the visitor reaches 385 for four; Abhimanyu, Sooryavanshi, Shikhar and Kushagra, too, punish South bowlers

DULEEP TROPHY FINAL

S. Dipak Ragav
CHENNAI

Ishan Kishan led from the front with a sprightly unbeaten 111 (135b, 14x4, 1x6) as East Zone amassed 385 for four against South Zone on the opening day of the Duleep Trophy final at the MAC Stadium here on Sunday.

The Jharkhand batter built on the efforts of opener Abhimanyu Easwaran (72, 86b, 10x4, 1x6) and No. 3 Shikhar Mohan (85, 120b, 9x4, 3x6) after opting to bat.

While Kishan headlined the day, it was Vaibhav Sooryavanshi who hogged the limelight.

It is not often that you see packed stands for a domestic game in India. Yet, even before the first ball was bowled, the C, D, and E stands at Chepauk were nearly full in anticipation of seeing the wunderkind. And in the first 90 minutes of the day, the youngster kept the fans on their feet through some elegant strokeplay.

Second nature: Kishan kept busy without trying to be aggressive. R. RAGU

The 15-year-old got on his toes nicely to counter the bounce from the red-soil pitch and punched South Zone pacers Mohammed Siraj and M.D. Nideesh to the off-side fence a few times.

And when Siraj went full, Sooryavanshi had no second thoughts about lofting down the ground for a six and a four. The southpaw eventually holed out on the leg-side trying to pull C.V. Milind for 44.

At the other end, Abhimanyu kept pace with the youngster and did not hold himself back, be it pulling Siraj effortlessly or giving the charge to the spinners.

Post lunch, Shikhar and Kishan combined forces, adding 94 for the fourth wicket, capitalising on a below-par effort from the South bowlers.

Shikhar was largely untroubled, confidently driving Siraj for back-to-back boundaries through the off-side before launching off-spinner T. Vijay for a six and two boundaries off consecutive deliveries.

Kishan kept busy without trying to be aggressive, bringing up his half-century off 71 deliveries. In the final session, he pressed on the accelerator and brought up his century in style, driving Shreyas Gopal down the ground majestically.

Alongside his Jharkhand teammate Kumar Kushagra (63 batting, 75b, 4x4, 5x6), the duo added an unbroken 144 runs for the fifth wicket as East established an early hold on the contest.

The scores: East Zone — 1st innings: Abhimanyu Easwaran run out 72, Vaibhav Sooryavanshi c sub (Tanay) b Milind 44, Shikhar Mohan b Milind 85, Sudip Kumar Gharami c Milind b Vijay 6, Ishan Kishan (batting) 111, Kumar Kushagra (batting) 63; Extras (nb-4): 4; Total (for four wkts. in 79 overs): 385.

Fall of wickets: 1-100, 2-133, 3-147, 4-241.

South Zone bowling: Siraj 14-1-96-0, Nidheesh 10-2-39-0, Vijay 22-3-114-1, Milind 13-1-56-2, Shreyas 19-3-77-0, Rasheed 1-0-3-0.

Toss: East.

A special hundred for Shreyas Gopal and a special effort from Shikhar

S. Dipak Ragav
CHENNAI

On a day when he made his 100th First Class appearance during the Duleep Trophy final, South Zone leggie Shreyas Gopal felt he was happy to prove a point that wrist-spinners can have a long career.

"I was told that there are not too many leg-spinners who have played 30-50 games. I wanted to show that leg-spinners can play red-ball cricket and still be successful. I put a lot of work into my bowling," said Shreyas on Sunday.

The 33-year-old had one of his best years in the Ranji Trophy last season, claiming 48 wickets and scoring 469 runs, playing a key role in Karnataka reaching the final.

"I think it's just tactically trying to get a little better. Using the crease, understanding the situation and when to attack, when to defend," he explained on the areas he has improved.

Pulling his weight: Shikhar made a fluent 85 on the opening day. R. RAGU

"Most times it would come off. Sometimes, like today, it won't come off. But as long as you go in with a plan, it actually gives you a sense of direction," he said.

Last year, Shreyas also led Mangaluru Dragons to title triumph in the Maharaja Trophy KSCA T20 tournament and felt his time with M.S Dhoni at Chennai Super Kings helped him a lot.

"There are so many questions I've asked (Dhoni) over these last two years, and I just tried to take the whole thing over there. I wouldn't say we won because of that, but definitely some of those moves I wouldn't have made if I hadn't had that experience or that time with CSK," said Shreyas.

Meanwhile, East Zone batter Shikhar Mohan, who made a fine 85 on the opening day, was pleased that he could carry his good form from his maiden Ranji campaign last season where he made 613 runs.

"Coming into this match, I just wanted to carry that form from the Ranji Trophy. Ishan (Kishan) *bhaiya* gave me a lot of advice while I was batting. He was telling me which shots were on and which were not. Thanks to that, we had a great partnership," said Shikhar.

All the hard work is paying off, says Rudrankksh as he gears up for Asiad

SHOOTING

Uthra Ganesan
BHOPAL

Going for his second Asian Games, 22-year-old Rudrankksh Balasaheb Patil is a far cry from the teenager who took to the firing station in Hangzhou.

It's been only three years but the period since then has seen the shy, nerdy and overthinking kid grow into a more assured, relaxed and quietly confident person.

Excitement

"Excitement," he declared when asked what was the predominant feeling. The Indian pistol and rifle shooters have gathered here for a short preparatory camp starting Sunday before leaving on the 14th for Nagoya.

Rudrankksh, the only Indian male shooter who will participate in two events, is not bothered with the responsibility, challenge or expectations of managing both.

Motivated: Rudrankksh says the aim is gold, and that his hunger to win is unabated. R.V. MOORTHY

The 10m air rifle and the 50m 3 Position are completely different and come with their own set of challenges. Rudrankksh, though, insists it isn't impossible.

"I am getting to participate in two events and I am able to see that all the hard work which I have put in is paying off," he told *The Hindu*.

"This is the first Asian Games and fourth international competition in which I will compete in two events.

"Every time I have improved a little bit. I have good coaches, good support staff. I am excited."

He missed out on a medal in the 10m by the barest of margins in a shoot-off with compatriot Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar and is not hesitant to admit it hurt.

"Last time I came fourth in a shoot-off, I was really sad about that honestly. I don't want to experience that, I would like to improve my rank. Of course, the aim is gold. So there is a lot of motivation. The hunger and greed is unabated. And I think my training is going decent, so let's see," he said.

> Every time I have improved a little bit. I have good coaches, good support staff. I am excited

He is also learning to understand his own body and to manage it, and his mind, between events. "I used to be at extremes back then; completely in or completely out.

"I would control myself at the moment something happened but once the event was over, I would be very sad or high-strung, wanting to keep winning at all costs. Now I am comparatively more in control," he said.

SNAPSHOTS

India qualifies for under-20 Asian Cup

TASHKENT: India qualified for the AFC under-20 Asian Cup after 20 years. The Blue Colts registered a 3-0 win over Bangladesh in their final Group B qualifier at the Do'stlik Stadium on Sunday. Danny Meitei Laishram opened the scoring in the 25th minute before Vishal Yadav doubled India's advantage with an acrobatic finish on the hour mark. Substitute Md Arbash then sealed the contest with a powerful strike in the 79th minute. The victory took India to six points. Uzbekistan's win over Syria later in the day ensured India finished second in Group B and qualified as one of the seven-best runners-up across the eight groups. Uzbekistan topped the group with nine points while Syria ended up third with a tally of three.

Danny Meitei scored the opener. X@INDIANFOOTBALL

India junior men rally for a draw; women swamp Malaysia

MOQI (CHINA): The Indian men's hockey team showed tremendous grit to rally and secure a 3-3 draw against Japan in its second Pool A match of the Junior Asia Cup on Sunday. The women's team, meanwhile, consolidated its position at the top of the points table with an 11-1 hammering of Malaysia in its Elite Pool match. In the women's match, India had as many as seven different players scoring with four goals from field play, five from penalty corners and two from penalty strokes.

The results:

Men: India 3 (Anmol Ekka 4, 60, Ashu Maurya 10) drew with Japan 3 (Ryushin Sasaki 11, Kazuki Nakanishi 48, 59).

Women: India 11 (Puja Sahoo 1, 42, Purnima Yadav 4, 17, Binima Dhan 8, Krishna Sharma 14, Sukhveer Kaur 21, Geeta Yadav 28, 53, Sanika Chandrakant Mane 43, 58) bt Malaysia 1 (Nur Mohd 38).

Messi creates both Miami goals in Atlanta draw

MIAMI: Lionel Messi set up both goals for Inter Miami as the Major League Soccer champion drew 2-2 with Atlanta United on Saturday in the Argentina star's first match since announcing his retirement from international football.

Modric available for Croatia in Nations League

ZAGREB: Croatia's veteran midfielder and captain Luka Modric will stay with the squad in the forthcoming Nations League matches, the national football federation said on Saturday. Modric, who will turn 41 on Wednesday, confirmed to coach Slaven Bilic and HNS head Marijan Kustic that he remains available to the Croatian national team.

I just tried to bowl at the stumps, says Shree Charani

Press Trust of India
DUBAI

Young left-arm spinner Shree Charani, whose incisive spell helped India dismantle Pakistan in their Women's T20 Asia Cup clash, said the team's slow bowlers map out their strategy together before matches and then focus on executing it as well as possible.

"In the meeting, we three sit together... Prema, me, Deepti di and Radha (Yadav) di and we discuss what to do (in the match). So, we just try to implement that here (on the field) whatever Deepti and Radha di say," said Charani.

The 22-year-old spinner, who is just one wicket away from completing a half-century of T20I wickets, attributed her success to keeping things simple and focusing on getting the basics right.

"It's just about myself.

Shree Charani. GETTY IMAGES

Like I just want to focus on my things... I want to do my things correct," she said.

Charani said that after assessing the pitch and sensing that it would offer turn, she simply focused on bowling at the stumps and let the ball do the rest.

"I just tried to bowl on the stumps. By seeing the pitch, we know it may turn so I just focused on that."

Diamond League finals: Werro wins with a meet record

Agence France-Presse
BRUSSELS

In-form Swiss Audrey Werro was forced into a dip for victory in the 800m while newly minted World record holders Masai Russell and Alison dos Santos also raced to meet records on the second and final day of the Diamond League finals on Saturday.

Werro was pushed all the way by Femke Broeders-Bol.

Werro, 22, dipped for the line after a tight final 200 metres for victory in 1m 54.75s, one of eight meet records set during a high-octane night of track and field in the Belgian capital.

Russell delivered in the final 50 metres to win the 100m hurdles in 12.20s.

In the absence of Norway's Karsten Warholm, Dos Santos led from gun-to-tape in the men's 400m hurdles. The Brazilian timed 46.70s to obliterate the meet's previous best of 47.51 set by American Andre Phillips back in 1986. Two-time Olympic silver medallist Kenny Bednarek equalled his own world lead of 19.62s when winning the 200m – the American dominating a sprint in which reigning Olympic champion Letsile Tebogo of Botswana came fourth in 20.01.

Werro. REUTERS

And Jamaica's Tina Clayton wrapped up the 100m in 10.92s, with European champion Amy Hunt of Britain taking second ahead of American Sha-'Carri Richardson.

China's Ziyi Yan dominated the women's javelin with a best of 68.42m before Jamaica's Rajindra Campbell set a National record of 23.08m, a world leading mark, in the men's shot put.

Italy's Andy Diaz Hernandez then went out to 17.74m in the triple jump before unbeaten Marileidy Paulino clocked 48.64s for a fourth trophy in the 400m to further re-write the King Baudouin stadium record books.

There was a shock in the women's 1,500m as Poland's Klaudia Kazimierska clocked a National record and world lead of 3:54.05, smashing Faith Kipyegon's meet record by a huge 0.70s.

American Hana Moll, 21, followed up on her victory in Zurich by improving by 1cm her personal best to 4.91m to win the pole vault.

Finally, Rumesh Tharanga Pathirage wrote himself into the history books by becoming the first Sri Lankan to become a Diamond League champion by winning the men's javelin with a best of 89.04m.

The graceful artist's brush with history

It was only fitting that Smriti's record-breaking stroke, in India's Asia Cup match against Hong Kong, came on the off-side. It was not just her former India captain that she moved ahead of on account of her 64-ball 124. She also took the record for the most hundreds in women's international cricket from Australian legend Meg Lanning

P.K. Ajith Kumar

Smriti Mandhana danced down the track. She launched into Ruchitha Venkatesh, and sent the hapless off-spinner over wide long-off.

The six took her past fellow-Indian Mithali Raj, making her the leading scorer of runs in international women's cricket.

It was only fitting that her record-breaking stroke, in India's Asia Cup match against Hong Kong China at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium last Thursday, came on the off-side. She is, after all, the goddess on the off-side.

It was not just her former India captain that Smriti moved ahead of on account of her 64-ball 124. She also took the record for the most hundreds in women's international cricket from Australian legend Meg Lanning, who retired at the age of 31, and South Africa captain Laura Wolvaardt (17 each).

Lanning and Mithali were the two outstanding batters in women's cricket. Ian Bishop had once said, Lanning was one of the very few players, male or female, that he would stop whatever he was doing just to watch her bat. And she is regarded by many, including the great Charlotte Edwards, as the greatest female cricketer of all time.

But for Mithali, humble and amiable off the field and ruthless on it, girls like Smriti would not have had an idol to look up to in India.

Until a decade ago, Mithali was the main reason why people in the country were aware of the existence of women's cricket in India. She would score big runs with remarkable regularity and force her way into the sports pages.

Women's cricket in India may be big now with big money, but for a long time it was the runs of Mithali and the wickets of Jhulan Goswami, along with thankless efforts from their teammates and their predecessors as well as the sacrifices of a man called Mahendra Kumar Sharma (an organiser who sold his property so that he could fund women's cricket), that kept the sport alive.

Mithali and Jhulan are a bit unlucky in that their careers ended a year before the WPL began. They deserved to be part of the most glamorous and lucrative league in women's cricket.

Smriti has certainly been lucky. Or cricket fans have been lucky. The WPL has played a major role in widening the fanbase of women's cricket considerably. So a lot more people have been able to enjoy the sheer artistry of Smriti's batting.

Make no mistake, there is no one in women's cricket that gives as much joy. Yes, Wolvaardt has her own fans, and her cover drive is perfection; it is one of the greatest sights in cricket. And yet, Smriti is in a league of her own. When she gets going, you know why sport, at the highest level, is able to compete with art. The thing with Smriti is that even when she isn't at her best, she can look good enough.

One recalls her speaking at a press conference about how she felt she wasn't exactly at her best, after playing a big knock and some lovely strokes. That was the perfectionist in her speaking. A real artist is like that.

K.R. DEEPAK

While the artistry in her batting may be a gift, her phenomenal success is something she has worked hard for. When she was little, her mother asked her to reach the top of whatever activity she chose for herself. She followed that advice.

Look at the way she is getting better and better. She is scoring faster, and she is converting far better, too. She has of late been hitting more hundreds in international cricket than she used to: last year alone, she made six of them.

Breathtaking

One of those hundreds gave India an excellent chance of pulling off a most unlikely chase against Australia. The Aussie women had made 412, and that too, without even batting for the full 50 overs at New Delhi. That was 111 more than the successful chase in a Women's ODI at the time (since then India and New Zealand have set new records).

That night in Delhi, Beth Mooney, with a brilliant 75-ball 138, seemed to have batted India out of the match, but Smriti was in no mood to go down without a fight. Her breathtaking 125 off 63 balls raised India's hopes. One recalls, while watching the match from the media box, going back to the scorecard of that incredible men's ODI between South Africa and Australia at Johannesburg in 2006 (the host had chased down the target of 435 with Herschelle Gibbs making an unforgettable 111-ball 175).

Like Gibbs, Smriti was batting as if she was in a dream. As long as she was at the wicket, the target was going to be reachable for India: after 20 overs, India was 204 for two. With skipper Harmanpreet Kaur batting alongside Smriti, the Women in Blue had every reason to think of the unthinkable. The two, however, were soon dismissed, and though Deepti Sharma scored a valiant 72, India went on to lose by 43 runs.

It may have come in a losing cause, but that innings by Smriti will be remembered for not just her elegance, but for her aggression and courage. When you add to Mooney's superlative hundred in the first half of the match, it was a shining example of how much the women's game has travelled, how much these brave women have made use of the opportunities that have come their way after decades of negligence.

Smriti had once told this correspondent how glad she was to see that the women's game was getting its due, how the fans had begun to follow women's cricket closely. She spoke of how people were now telling her about Radha Yadav instead of the girl who bowled left-arm spin.

When Smriti began her journey in cricket, you could barely have imagined such a time would arrive. In her Maharashtra town, Sangli, she was the first girl to train under Anant Tambvekar, her first coach. It was after watching her brother Shravan, who played for the Maharashtra junior team, that she wanted to become a cricketer. Rahul Dravid had presented her a bat through him.

Smriti played with that bat during her India debut against Bangladesh in the final T20I at the Reliance Stadium in Vadodara in 2013. Later that year, in the same Gujarat city, she scored a stunning 224 off 150 balls for Maharashtra against Gujarat in a West Zone under-19 one-day game at the Alembic ground. That innings was one of the early signs of her extraordinary talent.

She was 17 then.

Thirteen years later, she holds two of the most significant all-time records in women's cricket. In fact, after her record-breaking innings, she said: "It is just the start, I would say."

She admitted: "Going past the international record of the centuries, I mean, 18 is a good number to go past, firstly I will say that. But again, two of the legends of women's cricket, Meg Lanning and Mithali Raj. Genuinely, these are the two people who I have grown up watching a lot of my cricket, tried to take a lot of things from them as batters. So I am really happy that I could go past them in whatever way."

Smriti will continue to spread happiness wherever she goes. Her batting is like that. Little wonder, her fans are spread across different countries, be it England or Australia. She is hugely popular in the leagues she plays there.

She has also earned a lot of respect from her peers or former stars. When they speak about the batters they enjoy watching, it is Smriti that they often talk about first.

Former England batter Mark Butcher and former Sri Lankan quick Rumesh Ratnayake have said Smriti reminded them of David Gower. W.V. Raman, former India opener who has also worked with her as the coach of the National team, has compared her to Sourav Ganguly.

Of course, Ganguly and Gower were among the most stylish players of their generations. At the moment, few batters could give the connoisseurs of cricket as much pleasure as Smriti.

At 30, there is plenty of cricket left in her yet. So the cricket fans can look forward to more delightful innings from her. She may be the world's best batter, but that doesn't mean that she cannot try to get better. During the Women's T20 World Cup in England recently, when she had an opportunity to chat with former Australian opener Matthew Hayden, she sought tips on batting from him.

Smriti remains committed to her art as ever.

THE GIST

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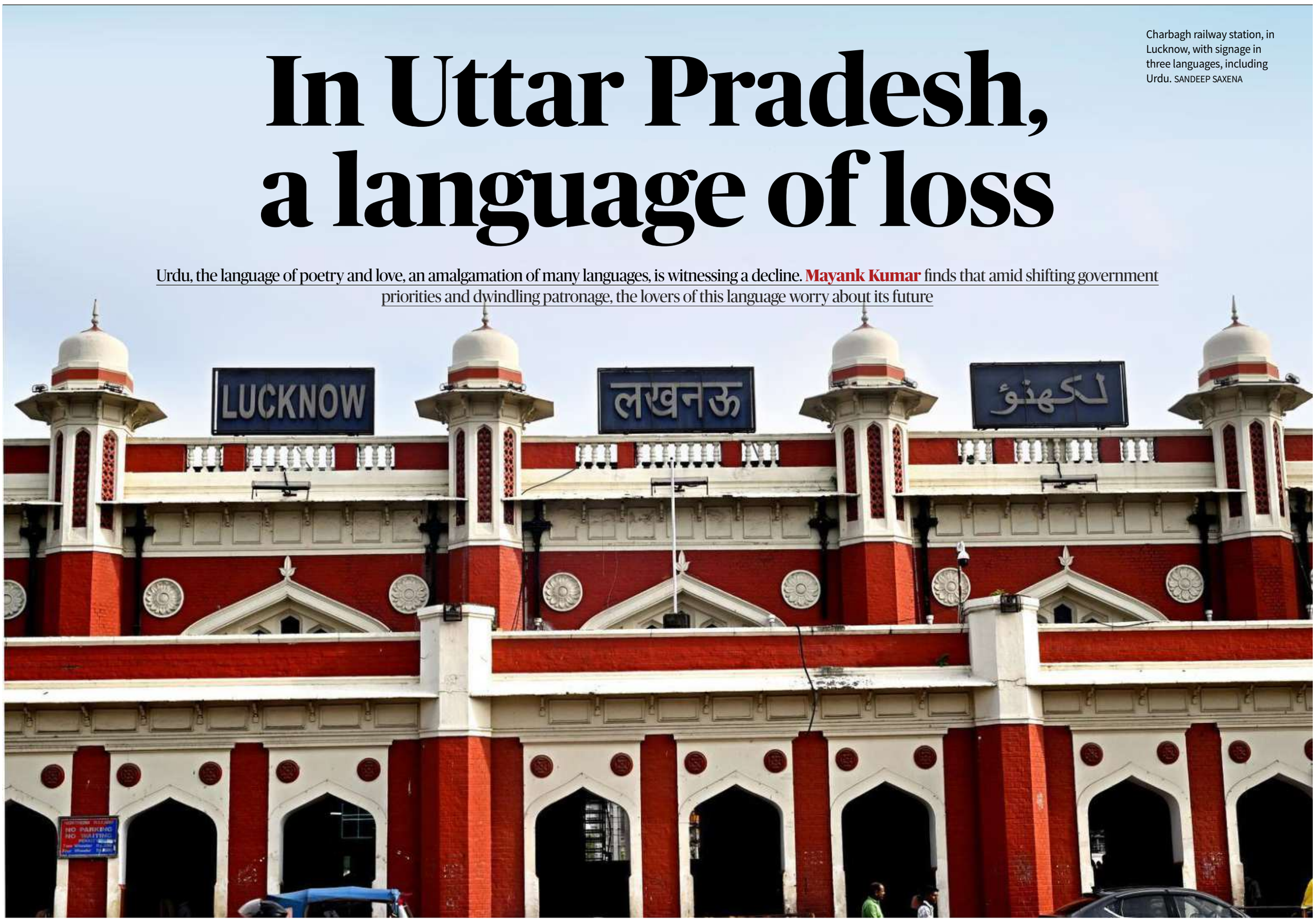
- Smriti will continue to spread happiness wherever she goes. Her batting is like that. Little wonder, her fans are spread across different countries, be it England or Australia. She is hugely popular in the leagues she plays there

In Uttar Pradesh, a language of loss

Urdu, the language of poetry and love, an amalgamation of many languages, is witnessing a decline. **Mayank Kumar** finds that amid shifting government priorities and dwindling patronage, the lovers of this language worry about its future



Charbagh railway station, in Lucknow, with signage in three languages, including Urdu. SANDEEP SAXENA

Naeem Ahmed, 58, stands on a stool arranging books. He focusses unusually hard on a task he has been doing for decades, something muscle memory would have carried him through.

Naeem rented a 120-or-so-square-foot space five months ago, at Lucknow's bustling Nakhas Chauraha, to relocate his bookshop, Danish Mahal, from Aminabad. At Nakhas Chauraha, crowds, traffic, and noise overwhelm the senses, and his bookstore stands cheek by jowl with plastic buckets and synthetic suits. Aminabad was where Urdu lovers from across the city gathered, and the air was once filled with spices and the shops with chikankari embroidery.

"I am not able to generate a profit, but I want to keep my family's love alive. The only option was shifting here," says Naeem, adding that the rent is far lower here.

Danish Mahal has been synonymous with Urdu literature and language in Lucknow, and for over 85 years was a refuge for poets, scholars, writers, and intellectuals. The bookstore moved to its new location in December 2025, but has been operational since 1939. "From the beginning our bookshop was located in Aminabad. Urdu lovers from across the city would gather to buy books and discuss them over cups of tea, but rising book costs and decreasing profit forced us to close there," says Naeem, who graduated in Urdu Literature from Lucknow University.

Urdu is Uttar Pradesh's second official language, but even from the 2001 Census to the 2011 count, the number of Urdu speakers who selected it as their mother tongue dropped from 12.1 million to 10.9 million. Naeem and his son themselves converse in Hindi.

Lucknow's Awadhi traditions, built from the 18th Century onwards, with the fracturing of the Mughal empire, are defined by *tehzeeb,* roughly translating to a culture based on the arts and refinement. '*Pehle aap* (you first),' often parodied in Hindi movies, is the philosophy of humility embedded within everyday Urdu conversation.

Across Lucknow, advertising in Urdu is absent, and public messaging is mostly in Hindi. The paint of the few murals with Urdu lettering is peeling.

Lucknow residents say that in a post-Babri Masjid Uttar Pradesh, a narrative of Urdu associated with Muslim conquerors from a distant land, is being built.

The Urdu disconnect

"My father, Naseem Ahmed, started the shop and spent over 70 years serving Urdu lovers. He managed to make ends meet; I hope I can do the same," Naeem says, slowly. He laments that Urdu faces challenges now, and the immediate impact is on bookshops.

"I was paying ₹18,000 a month as rent, but over the past seven years, I have not been able to make that. How long will I suffer losses," he asks, as if of many things: the diminishing book business, a failing family venture, and a language that is slowly being eroded. "At least five prominent Urdu book shops have closed in Lucknow over the past decade. None of them was able to make a profit."

Sensing the volatility of the market, the limited use of Urdu in daily discourse, and a government whose support of the language has been dwindling, he advised his son, Nabil Ahmed, 25, to choose another trade. "My son holds an MBA degree and is running a garment shop. I can't ask him to enter a loss-making business," says Naeem, whose son's shop is next door.

> From the beginning our bookshop was located in Aminabad (in Lucknow). Urdu lovers from across the city would gather to buy books and discuss them over cups of tea, but rising book costs and decreasing profit forced us to close there
>
> **NAEEM AHMED**
> Proprietor, Danish Mahal

About three kilometres from Nakhas Chauraha is the Dargah Hazrat Abbas, built in the late 1800s. Faiz Baqir runs RB collection, a garment shop where he sells sherwanis and salwar-suits.

"I have an MA degree in Urdu from Lucknow University, but there are no jobs in the market for us. The only option is to sit for NET (National Eligibility Test) and JRF (Junior Research Fellowship)," he says. These provide entryways into an Assistant Professor job and PhD admissions in universities, respectively. "But even if we pass, there are so many applicants for a job," says Baqir.

Before 2010, he adds, there used to be a good number of Urdu translator jobs in multiple government departments. "It used to be a major attraction, but with modern digital methods of translation, opportunities have diminished," he says, adding that this has disconnected a new generation of job seekers from Urdu.

At Baqir's shop, Asad Rizvi, in his 40s, sits on a plastic chair, sipping tea. A Lucknow local and freelance journalist, he says the government neglects Urdu in multiple ways.

"Urdu newspapers are closing across U.P. I have seen five newspapers shut because the government stopped advertising in them or just kept advertising to the minimum," he says, vocalising the pain of many locally-circulated newspapers dependent on government advertising, because large corporate houses choose national brands to place ads. Rizvi says it is local newspapers that are living textbooks for people, because they give both hyper-local news and an opportunity to improve language.

Rizvi holds forth on how Urdu journalism played a part in India's struggle for independence. Maulvi Muhammad Baqir, who founded and edited the *Delhi Urdu Akhbar* in the 1850s, was one of the pioneers of Urdu journalism. "His newspaper reported on the events in Delhi in 1857 (during the first war of Independence). The British saw it as being sympathetic to the rebels. After the British recaptured Delhi, he was arrested," says Rizvi, a raconteur.

"On September 16 that year, he was executed by a firing squad on the orders of a British officer. He is remembered as the first journalist in India to be executed for his journalism," Rizvi ends, with a flourish.

Education suffers

Anees Ashfaq, a former head of Urdu Department in Lucknow University, sits surrounded by many Urdu books in his library at home. He says the beauty of Urdu is in its syncretism. Urdu evolved in the Gangetic plains during the eras of the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire, between the 12th and 19th Centuries. It is a linguistic amalgamation of local dialects derived from Prakrit, such as Khari Boli and Braj Bhasha, incorporating Persian, Arabic, and Turkic vocabulary. "The region that is now Uttar Pradesh played a pivotal role in shaping its grammar, enhancing its literature, and establishing its cultural institutions," says Ashfaq.

The spoken variants were initially known as Hindvi, Hindustani, or Rekhta, before evolving into the standardised form of Urdu. The daily exchanges between local communities and administrative courts in northern India solidified its status as the prevalent lingua franca.

Now, Lucknow University is experiencing a decline in student enrolment within its Urdu Department. For MA Urdu in the current academic session, 2026-27, there are only 65 students in a course where 120 seats are available.

This is a steep drop from previous decades when the university had to increase seats to meet high demand.

A 20-minute auto ride from Dargah Hazrat Abbas leads to the Uttar Pradesh Urdu Akademi. Set up in 1972 to promote Urdu, the academy now chooses not to speak – in any language.

The Secretary did not take calls, respond to messages, or answer an email. There has been no Executive Committee for almost three years now, says local Hindi media.

Lucknow residents say some of the academy's regular activities, like book publishing, library operations, and Urdu coaching, are still on-going, though not in the robust way they were once conducted.

Some major initiatives, like annually honouring Urdu writers, poets, and journalists have been suspended. Staff shortages have also become a major problem. While the Academy previously employed 54 employees, this number has now dwindled to just 18. Most employees have retired, and new recruitment is not happening.

"The Executive Committee has the authority to recommend staff requirements to the State government," says Mumtaz Ahmed, an accountant of the Urdu Akademi. Until a committee is formed, the recruitment process cannot begin. The minority welfare department is in charge of appointing the committee.

Naeem, from Danish Mahal bookstore, says the academy, which used to purchase books regularly from the shop, has not placed any order for almost a decade now.

Booksellers say that until about a decade ago, they stocked Urdu books from Pakistani writers, but they stopped sourcing these fearing that any contact with people from across the border would bring them trouble.

Structural and elementary issue

Urdu language proponents and Lucknow residents say the crisis of Urdu is structural, as the language is not utilised as a medium of instruction in mainstream schools. However, it is on both the Central Board of Secondary Education's list of first languages, as well as on the Uttar Pradesh education board's medium through which education can be imparted.

"Urdu is often regarded as a secondary language due to the lack of trained teachers. In urban and elite education institutions, English prevails, while rural and government schools emphasize Hindi along with English," says Tariq Qamar, 51, who writes Urdu poetry and participates in literary events around the country.

Urdu is both spoken and taught in madrasas, but over 7,000 recognised madrasas in U.P. have not received funds from the government for over six years. The government has also not paid the honorarium to teachers, some of whom impart Urdu education.

"Those teaching modern subjects also give education to pupils on Islamic subjects and Urdu. Many of these madrasas survived for years on these grants paid to teachers. With no grant, these teachers are not motivated to impart quality education, ultimately harming Urdu and other traditional languages like Arabic," said Shahid Ali, a teacher who teaches Social Science along with Urdu and Arabic.

On August 5, 2026, the Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister linked madrasas with terrorism. Rizvi links the crisis of Urdu with the situation of Muslims in the political discourse: "Sadly Urdu is connected with the religious and ethnic identity of Muslims, which has led to its marginalization in India." He adds that as English becomes more prevalent, Urdu literature and the cultural experiences that go with it, such as mushaira performances, are increasingly losing relevance for the youth.

Urdu enthusiasts say literature and language education must adapt to connect with the youth. "The language must evolve to include science, technology, environment, and social sciences. Only then will the youth want to learn or engage with Urdu," Baqir says.

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Naeem Ahmed, who owns Danish Mahal bookstore in Lucknow. SANDEEP SAXENASANDEEP SAXENA

Neglected and uncared-for: Sterilisation of community dogs is outsourced to contractors at the ABC centres in local bodies. These centres lack facilities to take good care of the dogs. The photo shows the Coimbatore Corporation's ABC centre at Ondipudur. M. PERIASAMY

Failing at ABC

The abject failure of the Animal Birth Control programme in the State is apparent on the streets. Here, **P.V. Srividya** does a deep dive to reveal that the ABC programme, besides being in a shambles, is inhumane, corrupt, and cruel, in many cases.

An internal dossier of the Oulgaret Municipality in Puducherry documented an event in late 2025. Fifty emaciated dogs were released from an Animal Birth Control (ABC) centre there. The animals had been starved for a month and 20 dog deaths were recorded. There were also 50 complaints against the veterinarian. The ABC centre was run by the Hyderabad-based Vet Society for Animal Welfare and Rural Development. "Just before the inspection, the animals were released hastily," says G. Ashok Raj, activist and honorary member of the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI).

"The animals came out skin and bones; many had sutures falling apart. Community dog feeders saw some dogs dropping dead. We suspect they were starved for days," he said.

In July, the Supreme Court dismissed petitions seeking prevention of animal cruelty at ABC centres in local bodies where sterilisation of community dogs is outsourced to contractors. It also upheld its earlier order allowing organisations that do not have Project Recognition Certificates (PRCs) from the AWBI to perform sterilisation.

On July 23, community dogs were found alive with loose sutures and no post-operative care at an ABC shelter in Velankanni in Nagapattinam district. Activist V. Dhanasekaran said dog carcasses were found in the garbage, and they had bloody sutures and wires and ropes (banned in the dog-catching process under the ABC Rules) around their necks. The District Animal Welfare Officer's report said 70 dogs – 64 males and six females – had been sterilised in three days by two veterinarians with the Chennai-based Pet Care Foundation. The organisation was blacklisted, the town panchayat executive officer told *The Hindu*.

An in-depth investigation by *The Hindu* across the State reveals this is not merely a case of a few NGOs taking advantage of the system.

Quick-fix surgeries

Local bodies handle ABC by outsourcing the process. The allocation is ₹1,650 per dog, including ₹450 for sterilisation and vaccination and ₹200 for catching and release. Effectively, local bodies incentivise projected numbers in ABC, not actual outcomes, activists say, adding that this has reduced the ABC process into an assembly-line work on a massive scale. Dog-catchers, since they are paid per catch, reportedly try to boost numbers and pick up "unfit" dogs too – pups, lactating dogs, sterilised dogs, and pregnant ones.

On September 2, a female dog was found with its intestines spilling out, fighting for life, at Mannargudi in Tiruvarur district, after being sterilised at the ABC centre there. "If it was not found on time, the dog would have died," says a veterinarian.

"Evisceration happens when skin and muscle open up and abdominal organs come out, primarily because the surgical sutures have fallen apart. This is mostly seen in females," explains a senior surgeon trained by Worldwide Veterinary Services.

"Evisceration and hernia are surgical complications arising from improper suturing techniques, entirely the surgeon's fault. In suturing, we call it a bite; the distance between two bites should be less than half-a-centimetre. This process naturally takes more time. ABC centres do not follow this; instead they push young veterinarians to do more surgeries. Skin sutures may open in case the animal is hyperactive," the surgeon says.

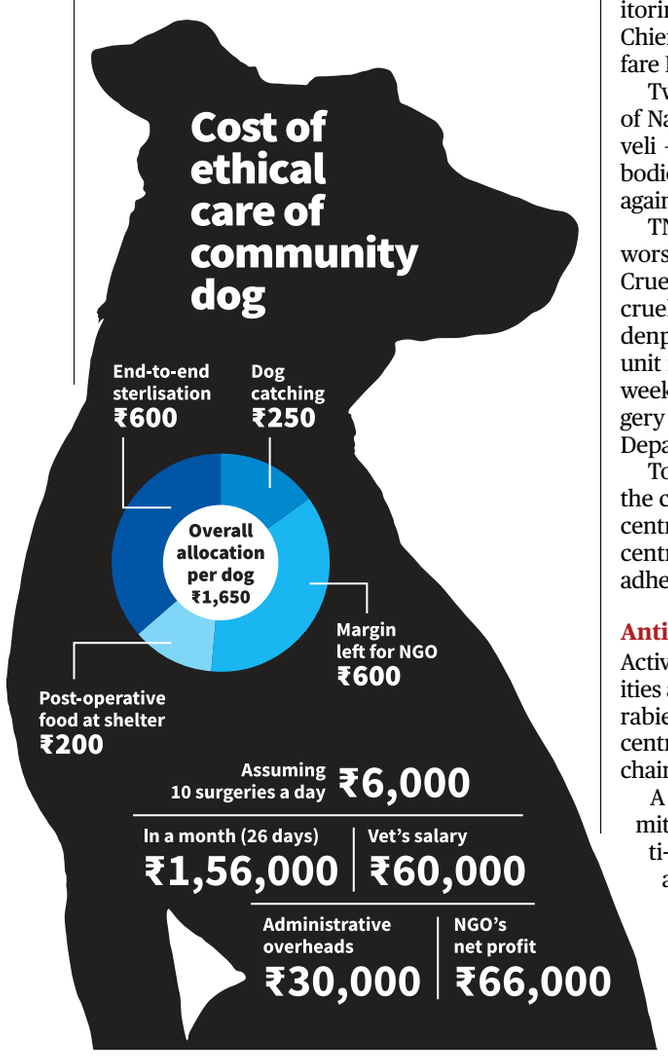
> I agree there may be a nexus between some local bodies and NGOs. But I have written to the Municipal Administration Department to withhold bills and constitute panels to implement the ABC programme properly
>
> **P. CHOKKALINGAM,** Member, State Monitoring Committee for the ABC programme

Pain management is also given short shrift at these centres. A multi-modal analgesic can provide relief to the animal after surgery. However, many ABC centres skip this to cut cost, the surgeon further says. In pain, the dog licks the sutures, thus opening them up. Surgical site infections are also caused by reuse of leftover suture material, the surgeon points out.

Speed is again a criterion in male sterilisations. "There are two kinds: on-scrotal and pre-scrotal. The on-scrotal technique leaves gaps between sutures for fluid drain, and therefore is not recommended for shelter dogs (or owner dogs, for that matter) because it increases the chances of catching infections from unhygienic floors," says another veterinarian trained by the Worldwide Veterinary Services, who worked with an NGO at an ABC centre. He says he had to quit because the NGO had insisted that he perform more on-scrotal procedures.

Mandates under ABC Rules

The ABC Rules, 2023, mandate humane capture of community dogs with nets; feeder outreach before capture; geotagging of capture and release at same location; CCTVs in the operation theatre; pre- and post-operative care; clean and spacious kennels; food twice a day; and water at all times. They call for establishing organ inspection committees to count the number of organs for billing claims and also advises the immediate destruction of the organs through deep burial or incineration.



On April 20, 2026, Vatsala of Tiruppur noticed a six-year-old community dog missing. He had been neutered four years ago, his ear notched as a mark of sterilisation. Vatsala suspected the hand of Pranimitran, the NGO hired by the Tiruppur Corporation for its ABC project, and went to the centre to check. "At the centre, I saw the dog lying on the floor seemingly lifeless. I thought he was dead. I confronted the founder at the centre and asked him why they had taken a sterilised dog. He claimed that the dog needed vaccination, but he had no explanation for the dog having been anaesthetised for a vaccine shot." An FIR was later filed against the NGO over the death of two pups in Tiruppur.

Pranimitran's contract had been terminated by the Hosur Corporation following complaints of animal mutilation, botched surgeries, and non-disclosure. The NGO was blacklisted by the AWBI for the same reasons, said an official of the Board. However, the Tiruppur Corporation brought the NGO on board. A Tiruppur Corporation official says, "There are many complaints against Pranimitran, but we haven't found a contractor to replace it."

Only six organisations have the recognition for carrying out ABC procedures in the State, but there are about 15 'NGO-contractors' operating in this space now. "Even the AWBI is aware of this. The gap between ABC and birth rate should be met," says P. Chokkalingam, Member, State Monitoring Committee for the ABC programme and Chief Executive Officer, Tamil Nadu Animal Welfare Board (TNAWB).

Two other blacklisted NGOs – Jeeva Karunyam of Nagercoil and Rajeshwari Goshala of Tirunelveli – continue to work for the respective local bodies. At Avadi in Chennai, two FIRs were filed against International Peace Trust.

TNAWB-run centres in semi-rural areas are worse, says the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) coordinator and anti-cruelty officer, V. Balakrishnan. At T. Nalligoundenpalayam in Pollachi, the post-operative care unit is 2 km away from the surgery centre. "Last week, a female dog died of evisceration after surgery by a veterinarian of the Animal Husbandry Department," he claims.

To understand the math, *The Hindu* calculated the cost of care of a dog (see graphic) for an ABC centre. Factoring in economies of scale, an ABC centre can make a profit of ₹66,000 even while adhering to ethical standards of care.

Anti-rabies vaccine

Activists question the efficacy of cold chain facilities available at ABC centres to preserve the anti-rabies vaccines. They say a vast majority of the centres do not have efficient refrigerators for cold chain maintenance.

A doctor who had earlier worked with Pranimitran in Hosur claims the NGO did not give anti-rabies vaccines to the dogs. "We did an average of 650 surgeries a month. I did an average of 15 surgeries a day. But I did not administer vaccines, because there was no cold chain; the vaccines need to be stored at 2 degrees Celsius. The fridge was not in good condition, there were power cuts, and there was no generator. The NGO did not provide us with fresh batches of vaccines either. This is the case at most ABC centres, the honourable exceptions being centres such as Besant Memorial Animal Dispensary (BMAD) in Chennai," adds the doctor.

In response to a question from *The Hindu*, Pranimitran points the finger elsewhere: "The cold chain is provided by the Corporation and is inspected by them, and if the vaccines are ineffective, there would be a rabies outbreak." At Oulgaret in Puducherry, the fridge was in disrepair for some time when the ABC was functioning last year, says Mr. Ashok Raj, the activist.

There is also extensive relocation of community dogs that are picked up for sterilisation, in violation of the ABC Rules, according to community feeders. They point out that a healthy dog returned to the same locality is also a real-time audit of the community's money spent.

Fudging numbers

At Oulgaret, a bucket of organs stored at the ABC centre was quietly transported to Neyveli township in nearby Cuddalore district to provide organs for an organ counting committee inspection in 2025, says an eyewitness. "The double counting was done by the same veterinarian who was also doing ABC surgeries at Neyveli. A petition was given to the Collector then complaining about this practice."

"Numbers are cooked up because targets are unreasonable. When NGOs botch up, they wash their hands off the case and vanish," alleges a Corporation official, fixing the blame on the NGOs. Bills are cleared on the basis of NGOs' claims, photos of surgery, photos of dogs, and occasional organ counts by municipal sanitation officers, *The Hindu*'s investigation reveals. Now, the Corporations have withheld payment for bills raised over the last three months.

In Tiruppur, with over 9,000 surgeries done, the committee has just been formed, says an official. "I agree there may be a nexus between some local bodies and NGOs. But I have written to the Municipal Administration Department to withhold bills and constitute committees to implement the ABC programme properly," says Dr. Chokkalingam.

The Hindu's questions to the Director of Municipal Administration, as to whether time-tagged photos, videos of organ count, and destruction of organs were being audited for every batch of sterilisation bills, were unanswered. There was no response to questions about ABC targets too.

Activists have recommended that community animals be brought under an animal management framework under the Animal Husbandry Department and not be put through an arbitrary system with little control or supervision.

While community feeders, who want an efficient and accountable ABC programme, are leading the protests in this area, it makes good financial and civic sense for the government to institute a systemic overhaul of its current ABC strategy. As the country struggles to handle its community dogs in a humane manner and is under assault for failed ABC and vaccination programmes, a transparent and animal-centric birth control and anti-rabies vaccine programme is the need of the hour.

(With inputs from Ancy Donal Madonna in Tiruchi; P. Sudhakar in Tirunelveli; Sibi Sreevathson T.C. in Coimbatore; and S.P. Saravanan in Erode)