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NEARBY

### CM launches pulse polio drive in Chennai

CHENNAI
As part of the national pulse polio immunisation campaign, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay on Sunday administered oral polio vaccine to children in Palavakkam near Chennai. » PAGE 6

### Govt. diverting attention from real issues: Stalin

CHENNAI
DMK president M.K. Stalin on Sunday accused the TVK-led government of diverting people's attention from pressing issues instead of addressing them. » PAGE 6

EDUCATIONPLUS » PAGE 2 & 5

# Shared responsibility must for Indian Ocean, says Modi

Indian Ocean a 'shared home', says PM after meeting the President of the Seychelles; two sides unveil 19 outcomes in areas including defence, maritime security, space, and digital payments

**Press Trust of India**
VICTORIA

India envisioned an Indian Ocean where maritime security was ensured alongside economic prosperity and where partnership was defined not by size, but by mutual respect and trust, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday during his visit to the Seychelles.

Mr. Modi, who held wide-ranging talks with President Patrick Herminie of the archipelago, said they agreed that the Indian Ocean was "our shared home" and therefore "its security, sustainability and prosperity are our shared responsibility".

"Our vision is to make the Indian Ocean an ocean of opportunity," Mr. Modi said after delegation-level talks with Mr. Herminie, during which they took stock of the economic partnership between the two countries and discussed new opportunities in industries, connectivity, technology, digital infrastructure, and other areas.

After the talks, the two sides unveiled 19 outcomes, expanding cooperation in areas ranging from defence and maritime security to digital payments, space, healthcare, agriculture, and education.

The two sides also announced the gifting of a fast patrol vessel to the Seychelles, the handover of 10 utility vehicles and five Laser Radial class boats to the Seychelles Defence Force, the completion of the refit of *PS Zoroaster* for the Seychelles Coast Guard and the upgrading of a Dornier aircraft with a glass cockpit.

**Sea of opportunities**: Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses the National Assembly of the Seychelles in Victoria on Sunday. ANI

### Climate impact

Mr. Modi also addressed the National Assembly of the country, where he emphasised that the Global South, especially island nations, was the most impacted by climate change.

He reiterated that those who had contributed the least to climate change should not bear the greatest burden of its consequences and said climate action must be guided by "fairness, responsibility, and equity".

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ARMY EVENT
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# Govt. rejects Pak. allegations over Karachi terrorist attack

**Kallol Bhattacherjee**
NEW DELHI

The Centre on Sunday "categorically" rejected "baseless allegations" Pakistan has made about India being involved in an attack on a security installation in Karachi.

"We have seen Pakistani reports making baseless allegations against India regarding the recent incident in Karachi. We categorically reject them. Instead of pointing fingers at others, Pakistan would do better to look inwards, take credible actions (against) the terror infrastructure on its territory and rid itself of its proclivity to rely on terrorism as an instrument of state policy," said Randhir Jaiswal, official spokesperson of the External Affairs Ministry.

Saturday's attack in Karachi's Gulistan-e-Jauhar neighbourhood killed at least three and injured four personnel of Pakistan Rangers (Sindh), the country's DGISPR had said. "The assailants, after a blast at the main gate of the camp, attempted to breach the perimeter security," it said.

Following Saturday's attack, Pakistan's Information Minister Mohsin Naqvi had said, "These terrorists are normal terrorists. India is supporting them."

Pakistan security personnel inspect the rooftop of a compound in Karachi on Sunday following an alleged militant attack. AFP

### Multiple attacks

Multiple terror attacks rocked Pakistan this weekend that spread from Karachi to Balochistan, where groups such as Jamaatul Ahrar and Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) were allegedly involved.

Throughout June, Pakistan has carried out operations in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, and Sindh regions against groups that it has linked with India. The BLA said it had carried out an attack on a Pakistani military camp in Ziarat, Balochistan. In a message to the media, it vowed to continue such attacks.

# Ayodhya row: houses of 8 accused searched

**Mayank Kumar**
LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh Police on Sunday searched the residences of all eight accused in the alleged embezzlement of Ram Temple donations.

The residences of Ramashankar Yadav, one of the accused and a close aide of Champat Rai, the general secretary of Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust who submitted his resignation on Saturday, were among those searched.

The police questioned his family members present on the premises.

The police teams were accompanied by local magistrates during the searches. The development came two days after all the accused, who were associated with keeping track of the donations at the temple, were remanded in judicial custody till Monday by a court in Ayodhya.

### CM, SP chief lock horns

A war of words between Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav intensified on Sunday, with Mr. Yadav questioning how the Chief Minister who frequently visited Ayodhya was not aware of the wrongdoings and corruption and Mr. Adityanath accusing the previous SP government of "firing upon Ram *bhakts*".

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'JURISTIC PERSON'
» PAGE 10

## *Flaunting colours*

Members of the LGBTQIA+ community and allies participate in a pride march in Chennai on Sunday. B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM (REPORT: PAGE 4)

# Woman dies after botched home birth

**The Hindu Bureau**
COIMBATORE

**Her husband helped in the delivery, allegedly watching YouTube videos of natural childbirth**

A 32-year-old woman from a village in Tiruppur district died of post-partum haemorrhage and related complications on Sunday, after she gave birth to a baby at her home, allegedly assisted by her husband watching YouTube videos on birthing, on June 24.

The police said that following complications, K. Sasikala, of Punjaithalavaipalayam in Uthukuli taluk, was taken to a private hospital in Coimbatore, where she died on Sunday morning. The woman went into labour in the early hours of June 24. Her husband Kolanthasamy, 35, and mother-in-law assisted in the delivery, allegedly watching videos of natural childbirth on YouTube. She gave birth to a female child, the police said.

The woman developed post-partum haemorrhage as the placenta was not expelled after the childbirth. She was taken to the Government Erode Medical College and Hospital at Perundurai. Thereafter, she was admitted to a private hospital in Coimbatore on June 25 and died without responding to treatment on Sunday, the police said.

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# DGS stands by removal of restrictions on Indian shippers despite strikes in the Gulf

**S. Vijay Kumar**
**M. Kalyanaraman**
CHENNAI

India's maritime regulator will stand by its June 26 directive removing curbs on Indian seafarers and ship owners operating in the Persian Gulf, despite a fresh surge in regional hostilities.

The Directorate General of Shipping (DGS) clarified its stance as the International Maritime Organization (IMO) halted its evacuation of stranded ships following recent attacks.

Indian officials say that negotiations are under way on restarting the IMO's plan and expect a resolution soon.

Some Indian-flagged vessels are waiting for transit permission from Omani authorities and Iran's Persian Gulf Strait Authority. AFP

The Friday notification superseded a June 13 notification that imposed restrictions after the U.S. attacks on *Marivex*, *Settebello*, and *Jalveer* carrying Indian crew and was based on the Indian government's threat assessments and advice from the External Affairs Ministry.

Some Indian-flagged vessels have asked for transit permission from Omani authorities and Iran's Persian Gulf Strait Authority, and approval is awaited, said an official.

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### Iran launches new attacks, threatens to halt discussion

DUBAI
Iran on Sunday launched drone and missile attacks targeting Bahrain and Kuwait in response to U.S. air strikes against the Islamic Republic, and threatened a "complete halt" in negotiations to end the war if Washington continues its attacks. » PAGE 14

# Elephant death from suspected explosives brings back focus on Kerala 'killing zone'

**K.S. Sudhi**
KOCHI

Human-induced elephant deaths are back in focus in Kerala after the death of a *makhna* (tuskless male) elephant, reportedly after chewing on fruit stuffed with explosives, in the Malayattoor forests in Ernakulam district on Saturday.

While forest officials are probing the incident, the death has put the spotlight on continuing elephant killings in the Munnar-Parambikulam-Malayattoor forest sector, one of the major elephant mortality hotspots in Kerala.

This is the second such incident in the region in two months. In May, a tusker died a few days after biting a jackfruit stuffed with explosives – aimed at deterring crop raiding by wildlife – in the Kuttampuzha forest. A tribesperson was arrested in connection with the incident. In the same month, another elephant was electrocuted in the Neriamangalam Range in Kaverippady.

Officials treating the elephant found injured in the Malayattoor forests in Ernakulam, days before its death. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Crop raiding and habitat intrusions by elephants and retaliation by humans have contributed to elephant deaths in the region, according to a study on elephant mortality in Kerala between 2019-20 and 2024-25 by an expert team led by Pramod G. Krishnan, the former Chief Wildlife Warden, Kerala.

### Rising incidents

The study had identified electrocution as the leading unnatural cause of death, with incident rates tripling over the six years. "Explosives and poaching persist as threats, with juveniles increasingly falling victim to explosive traps often set for wild boar," noted the report.

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## INBRIEF

R. RAGU

### Over five lakh children in city given polio vaccine

The Greater Chennai Corporation on Sunday vaccinated 5,06,426 children, achieving 91% coverage under the Intensified Pulse Polio Immunisation Drive across zones. The remaining 50,451 children, who could not be vaccinated on Sunday, will be covered during the upcoming mop-up rounds, according to officials.

### Policeman dies after being knocked down by truck

Jaiganesh, a 48-year-old policeman, was fatally knocked down by a sewage lorry on Rajiv Gandhi Salai on Sunday. When he was proceeding from his house on a two-wheeler, the lorry hit his vehicle from behind. Jaiganesh sustained a severe head injury and died on the spot. Police arrested the driver.

**Text & Context and Science**

Weekday features on *The Hindu* epaper (epaper.thehindu.com) carries explainers, special articles and quizzes. In the latest issue (June 29, Monday), the following articles are available:

- Can neutral ships be lawfully attacked? **newsth.live/shipattacks**
- Smart AI caching can keep the data flowing when disaster strikes **newsth.live/aicaching**

You can use your smartphone's inbuilt features to access these articles. If it's an Android phone, use Google Lens to read and tap the url to access an article. If it's an iPhone, use Live Text on camera to do the same.

# High bitumen rates press the pause on road laying works

Contractors are unable to complete the works as bitumen prices have increased since the war in West Asia; the State government is expected to take a decision on fixing the rates in the budget

**Aloysius Xavier Lopez**
**Deepa H. Ramakrishnan**
CHENNAI

Work to re-lay damaged roads in and around the city has been disrupted owing to an increase in bitumen prices in the past few months. The prices of bitumen variants, the major component in road laying, have increased due to the war in West Asia as the cost of crude also went up. Bitumen is a byproduct of crude.

Civic agencies such as the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) have also cancelled tenders as contractors have been reluctant to implement the works owing to price escalation. Road works worth ₹60 crore have been cancelled.

The price of bitumen VG (viscosity grade) 30, which is used for smaller streets without heavy traffic, has increased from ₹47,852 per tonne in December 2025 to ₹76,852 per tonne in June 2026. Bitumen VG 40, the variant used for bus routes and highways with heavy traffic, has gone up from ₹50,342 per tonne in December 2025 to ₹84,772 per tonne in June 2026.

**High costs:** Contractors have not been able to complete the work after milling roads in several areas of the city. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The light diesel oil, used for heating in the plants, has soared from ₹59,464 per kilo litre to ₹1,00,444 per kilo litre.

Sources said that GCC contractors have not been able to complete the work after milling 26 roads in areas such as Sholinganallur and Ramapuram, putting motorists to hardship.

"When the road is not relaid soon after milling, road users, especially two-wheeler riders, find it difficult to use these stretches. Accidents also happen due to the road surface. The government should allow contractors to finish works that are stuck for want of bitumen," said Sholinganallur resident B. Narayanan.

Though the GCC has ordered the contractors to complete the works that have been started, contractors say they would go bankrupt if they do so. Work on 140 roads that need relaying after milling too has been delayed. GCC officials are keeping their fingers crossed hoping for some good news on July 1 when the State government is expected to take a decision on the rates.

Highways department officials also said that contractors have slowed down re-laying and repair works. "Luckily, there were no heavy rains requiring bitumen. The prices have more than doubled, which is extraordinary," said a Highways contractor.

Price adjustment clauses in contracts will be valid only if the duration of the work is for over 12 months. A feature called pass through is used for three materials–bitumen, steel and cement–for which the price bands are fixed during bidding. Agencies like NHAI and CPWD bear the additional costs if there is an extraordinary increase in prices, said a long-time Central government contractor.

This time, for NHAI projects, the Centre issued a circular stating that, after April, for ongoing projects, the difference in price of bitumen will be borne by them. However, even then, contractors found it difficult to procure bitumen since they had to pay upfront. "Earlier, they would lift the loads and then make payments. We didn't want the projects to slow down or stop as it is very difficult to restart big projects, considering the investments in men and machinery," said an official NHAI source.

Contractors and government agencies are now pegging their hopes on reduction of bitumen prices as crude rates have come back to pre-war levels.

**Daily ordeal:** Tipplers outside a house opposite a Tasmac outlet on Canal Bank Road in Adyar. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

# Women, elderly bear the brunt of nuisance near Tasmac outlet in Kasturba Nagar

**R. Aishwaryaa**
CHENNAI

"Guests to our apartment are threatened by drunk men", said Sekar, a resident living opposite a Tasmac outlet on Canal Bank Road in Kasturba Nagar of Adyar Zone. "Women are scared to walk past. We have even helped a woman who cried out for help when a tippler allegedly tried to harass her," he said.

According to locals, a 70-year-old woman living on this street rarely ventures out alone because of fears of theft and intimidation. Neighbours and members of the Adyar Kasturba Nagar-South Residents' Welfare Association (AKNS RWA) often assist her with errands and daily activities, they claimed.

The association stated that the outlet is located within 50 metres of Kasturba Nagar MRTS station and within 500 metres of Madhya Kailash temple and Kalvari Church. It also claimed that railway authorities had objected to the location of the shop.

Mr. Sekar said, "Cars have been damaged and tyres punctured. Women feel unsafe because many men loiter here in an intoxicated state and are often not properly dressed," he alleged. This outlet was not among the more than 700 Tasmac shops ordered to be closed by Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay last month, but it must be closed, he added.

The association has been petitioning the State government to close the outlet, as public drinking, harassment and safety concerns have persisted in the area for many years.

**Harassment**

According to their petition to the Velachery MLA R. Kumar recently, women and girls face catcalling and harassment, particularly after 6 p.m., while customers frequently consume liquor on the roadside and park vehicles along Canal Bank Road. Quarrels among tipplers often spill onto public spaces, forcing many to avoid the stretch. The representation also cited littering of liquor bottles and food packets.

The association said drunk individuals were often found lying unconscious near entrance to houses, parking ramps and the MRTS station, creating persistent nuisance and safety hazard.

"Due to congestion around the shop, residents said they were often forced to take other interior roads for daily commute or to go to shops," they added.

# Koyambedu market hit by waterlogging owing to delay in storm-water drain work

**Aloysius Xavier Lopez**
CHENNAI

Koyambedu Market Complex was inundated on Sunday after a spell of rain in the city.

Traders and visitors complained about the inundation of the market complex on social media on Sunday.

Visitors complained that sewage was mixing with rainwater in the area, increasing the risk to the health of the visitors to the market complex.

Following the rise in number of complaints on social media, the Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority (CMDA) installed motor pumps to bail out the water.

By evening, the water receded inside the market complex, but a few stretches of roads in the area continued to witness water stagnation.

Visitors to the Koyambedu market complex complain that sewage mixes with rainwater, posing a health risk to them. B. VELANKANNI RAJ

Senior CMDA officials said the work on the storm water drain network in the market complex was not completed because of the delay in traffic police clearance to implement the work across the highway stretch of Poonamallee High Road to drain the water to the nearest waterway.

**Senior CMDA officials said the delay in work was because of the delay in traffic police clearance to implement the work across Poonamallee High Road**

The work on a new storm water drain network was announced by the DMK government in the Assembly in 2024. The work was carried out at an estimated cost of ₹17 crore. However, the delay in the work across the highway has increased the risk of flooding in the market complex.

# Self-financing medical and dental colleges to collect fee only for 4.5 years, says State govt.

**The Hindu Bureau**
CHENNAI

The Selection Committee, Directorate of Medical Education and Research, has issued a notification directing all self-financing medical and dental colleges and State private university medical colleges to strictly comply with fee regulations relating to the MBBS course.

The circular reiterated the National Medical Commission's public notice, which directed all medical colleges/institutions/universities to collect MBBS course fee only for the prescribed academic duration of 4.5 years. All these private institutions were told that they should not collect any other fee other than what is fixed by the committee.

It may be recalled that in February this year, a section of students, parents, and activists flagged an issue that some self-financing medical colleges in Tamil Nadu were demanding tuition fees for the fifth year of MBBS/BDS, which is the internship year, from Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe students despite rules prohibiting the same and directives from the Directorate of Medical Education and Research.

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# Ex-IFMR associate pens down experiences in book

**The Hindu Bureau**
CHENNAI

T.S. Gopal, who was long associated with the Institute for Financial Management and Research (IFMR), has penned a book 'Walk With Me Down Memory Lane' in which he recalls his experiences in professional and public life and his passion for music.

Retired High Court judge Justice Prabha Sridevan released the book and former Chief Election Commissioner T.S. Krishnamurthy received the first copy at TAG Centre in the city on Sunday.

After releasing the book, Justice Prabha Sridevan said that it was an engaging and engrossing book and one could come across several genres of writing in the book laced with humour.

The book showed that Mr. Gopal has gone beyond the call of duty during his service at IFMR, Ms. Sridevan said. As someone who kept engaging with students, Mr. Gopal has remained young and music too has played a role. "Even while intending to help someone socially, he has some very special guidelines. He thinks events organised by institutions that help people must be simple," Justice Prabha Sridevan said.

Dignitaries at the launch of author T.S. Gopal's book 'Walk With Me Down Memory Lane' in Chennai on Sunday. R. RAGU

Mr. Gopal thought organisations which subsist on largesse must not splurge, Ms. Sridevan said and added: "There is some truth there and I liked it."

She further said: "As somebody who has been in the legal field, his [Mr. Gopal's] attachment to [late eminent jurist] Mr. Nani Palkhivala is something that makes him very special to me," she said.

During his speech, Mr. Krishnamurthy said Mr. Gopal had a many-sided personality with multi-talented capabilities. Endorsing Ms. Sridevan's words, Mr. Krishnamurthy said that Mr. Gopal's services went beyond his call of duty. Mr. Gopal was a fund-raiser for many charitable causes and a great music promoter, he said.

"His [Mr. Gopal] experiences in the IFMR were quite exciting. in the sense, how he dealt with his bosses, starting with Mr. S.L.N. Simha and ending with Mr. Ramchander. He knew the strengths and weaknesses of the people, and he could manage inside institutional politics," Mr. Krishnamurthy said.

The book was interesting, enticing and enjoyable and was exciting all through and very well-articulated, he said.

In his speech, Mr. Gopal said as a student of English literature, he used to read judgments for their literary content.

"Many times, judges have inspired me with their language." Mr. Gopal further said: "The book is a compilation of my writings and my experiences in professional and public life." Programme organisers R.T. Chari and S.R. Madhu also spoke.

**Timings**
**CHENNAI**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **MONDAY, JUN. 29** | | |
| RISE | 05:46 | SET 18:39 |
| RISE | 18:19 | SET 04:54 |
| **TUESDAY, JUN. 30** | | |
| RISE | 05:47 | SET 18:39 |
| RISE | 19:09 | SET 05:47 |
| **WEDNESDAY, JUL. 01** | | |
| RISE | 05:47 | SET 18:39 |
| RISE | 19:55 | SET 06:39 |

| Chennai Weather | max | min |
|---|---|---|
| Tiruvallur | 40 | 26 |
| Chennai Airport | 39 | 28 |
| Chennai City | 38 | 28 |

**Chennai Airport Today**
**36°C** Weather will be warm and uneasy. Night will also be uneasy. Light rain and thundershowers may occur.

**Chennai Airport Tomorrow**
**37°C** Morning will be comfortable. Day will be warm and uneasy. Chances of light rain and thundershowers. Night will also be uneasy.

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ISSN 0971 - 751X

## INBRIEF

### GCC Commissioner reviews monsoon-related measures

The Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) has set August as the deadline to complete all ongoing storm-water drain works. Commissioner G.S. Sameeran, during a review meeting at the Ripon Buildings on Saturday, directed officials to expedite the de-silting of 44 waterways and canals, restoration of lakes, strengthening of flood-protection walls, completion of lake improvement works, and removal of blockages at river and outfall canals. According to a press release, officials were asked to prioritise connecting incomplete storm-water drain stretches and continue de-silting silt traps.

### History-sheeter shot in leg and arrested near Vandalur

A history-sheeter, Selva from Oterri near Vandalur, was apprehended after being shot in the leg by police officials on Sunday. A senior police official of the Tambaram Police Commissionerate said Chella alias Selvakumar had three murder and 10 criminal cases against him. Based on a tip-off, a special police team raided his hideout in Otteri. However, on seeing the team arrive, Selvakumar and his accomplice Kanakaraj allegedly assaulted an officer with a knife in a bid to escape. In retaliation, Otteri police Sub Inspector Satheesh shot the accused in his leg and nabbed him. A policeman sustained injury in the alleged knife assault. The police team seized more than 20 kg of ganja. While Selvakumar was admitted to Tambaram Government Hospital for treatment, his accomplice Kanakaraj was also arrested.

# Several raise voice against new amendment act at Pride march

LGBTQIA+ community expresses disappointment with Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Act 2026 with many wearing customised clothes symbolising their opposition to the Act. They also carry slogans on inclusivity, rights

**The Hindu Bureau**
CHENNAI

**Asserting their rights:** Participants at the annual Self-Respect Pride March in the city on Sunday seen sporting colourful headgears, umbrellas, and flags. Several organisations and volunteers came together to conduct the event. B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

At the 18th edition of Chennai's annual Self-Respect Pride March, some parents whose children are part of the LGBTQIA+ community came together to flag off the Pride march at Rajarathinam Stadium on Sunday. It was hosted by many organisations and volunteers that come under the Tamil Nadu Rainbow Coalition.

There were more placards, this time, about the community's disappointment with the Union Government's Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Act 2026 and many even wore customised clothes signifying the same, apart from raising slogans on inclusivity and rights.

"We have asked parents who have accepted their children that are part of the community to inaugurate the march because it acknowledges them as well as encourages other parents to do the same," said Jaya, general manager at Sahodaran. Apart from the amendment act, she said the State government should look into pending demands such as horizontal reservation, employment opportunities in Tamil Nadu, altering the Tamil name of the transgender welfare board to Thirunar Nala Variyam, gender-neutral washrooms, and surrogacy rights. "More sensitisation programmes should be carried out in schools by the State government," Ms. Jaya added.

Prathiba and Varadarajan who were holding a placard that read 'Proud Parent Ally' said many parents have a binary idea of the world and expect their children to fit into those ideas. "This is where the issue of acceptance comes from, but acceptance is all the community is looking for," they said.

**The Pride March included a 'Naangal' programme, where folk dance and spoken word poetry were performed**

With many different identities in the community, the members who walked along held specific pride flags. A couple of 18-year-olds, Cherishma and Tejaswini who attended the Pride March for the first time said they had been waiting for this day with so much excitement. "We raised slogans against homophobia and for inclusivity. We thought many older people will only show up but a lot of people of our age have come, which makes us happy," said Ms. Cherishma.

Apart from thousands of people who gathered at the march from Chennai, a few also joined from other parts of the world. At the entrance of the stadium, there were colourful headgears, umbrellas, flags that anyone could pick up for the march, along with about 20 outlets with volunteers who gave away refreshments. Rachel, a transwoman said that the Pride March is primarily about their rights. She added that the amendment act was regressive.

A young trans man who did not want to be named, said that the amendment act erases trans men completely, and many in the community have been deeply distressed by it this year.

The Pride March ended with a 'Naangal' programme, where singers, dancers, poets from the community, and allies showcased performances from folk dance to spoken word poetry. Activists also spoke at the gathering.

## MoU signed for indigenous chips in CCTV cameras

**The Hindu Bureau**
CHENNAI

Mindgrove Technologies, headquartered at IIT Madras Research Park, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Prama India Private Limited to deploy indigenously designed chips in CCTV surveillance cameras and advanced video security systems.

According to the firm, this is one of the largest commercial integrations of Indian-designed silicon to date. Prama will integrate Mindgrove's proprietary Vision SoC (its second chip), funded under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology's (Meity) Design Linked Incentive scheme across its video surveillance and security product portfolio.

Shashwath TR, co-founder and CEO of Mindgrove Technologies, said, "This engagement validates our Vision SoC as a production-ready platform capable of meeting performance, reliability, and scale requirements in real-world security systems."

Ashish P. Dhakan, Managing Director & CEO, Prama India, said, "Beyond technology development, this collaboration will help build strategic capabilities within India's semiconductor ecosystem and foster innovation".

# Hospital for geriatric care inaugurated in city

**The Hindu Bureau**
CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar, on Sunday, inaugurated Athulya Geriatric Care Hospital, dedicated to geriatric care, at Valasaravakkam in Chennai.

Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar inaugurates Athulya Geriatric Care Hospital in the city on Sunday. J. JOHAN SATHYADAS

**'Dignified care'**

Mr. Arlekar said geriatric care should go beyond medical infrastructure and technology, and place equal emphasis on compassion and human connection. While the neglect of older persons by younger generations was a broader societal issue, he said healthcare facilities catering to the elderly should be equipped with modern medical equipment while ensuring that patients receive dignified, humane care.

Karthik Narayan, founder and managing director of Athulya Senior Care, said India's rapidly ageing population underscored the urgent need for specialised geriatric healthcare. He noted that the country has nearly 116 million senior citizens, a figure projected to rise to around 340 million by 2050.

**Health infrastructure**

Dr. Narayan pointed out that India has only around 20,000 dedicated senior care beds, compared with nearly eight million in China and close to three million in the U.S. He said Athulya Hospital was established to bridge this gap and deliver integrated care tailored to the physical, emotional, and functional needs of older adults.

The facility was launched in the presence of G. Srinivasan, founder and CEO, Athulya Senior Care, Krishna Kavya, founder and director, and Prasanna Natarajan, director. The hospital offers comprehensive and multidisciplinary medical services across medical specialties, including cardiology, nephrology, and rehabilitation medicine.

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Fax No. 02426-243601
e-mail: uniengineermpkv@gmail.com

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No. MPKV/WRK/TC/1857/2026 Dated: 25/06/2026

**E-Tender Notice**

The University Engineer invites online e- tenders in B-1 form for the following works under at MPKV Jurisdiction.

| Sr. No. | Name of work | Estimated cost (Rs.) |
|---|---|---|
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| 2 | Construction of Boys Hostel for RCSM Agriculture College at Kolhapur. | 9,08,25,234.00 |
| 3 | Construction of Boys Hostel Building for College of Agriculture at Pune. | 7,58,91,758.00 |
| 4 | Construction of Boys Hostel Building at Central Campus MPKV Rahuri. | 8,38,46,226.00 |
| 5 | Construction of Compound wall along boundaries of Sy.No. 48, 57/1,59, 60 and 62 at College of Agriculture, Pune. | 4,88,93,390.00 |
| 6 | Construction of Administrative Building, sale counter & Farm Structures for Agriculture Technical School and various farm & allied structures for Kuran Dairy Farm at Manjri, Dist-Pune. | 10,85,45,710.00 |

For Detail Tender Notice please see website Portal https://mahatenders.gov.in
Organization- Department of Agricultural
Department- Mahatma Phule Krishi Vidyapeeth, Rahuri.
Division- University Engineer

Sd/-
(Milind Dhoke)
University Engineer

## Three men found dead after being hit by trains

**The Hindu Bureau**
CHENNAI

Three men were found dead on railway tracks after being hit by trains in three different places on Saturday night. While one was found dead near the track between Guindy and St. Thomas Mount, another was lying dead on the track near Chromepet station. The other man was found dead near the platform at Tiruvallur railway station.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

**ENROLMENT NOTICE** After ten days of the publication of this notice and within three months thereafter I, J. ARUNA, D/O M. JAGADEESA VEERABAHU, Aged: 23 years, Permanently residing: B–108, CEEBROS BELVEDERE, KUMARASAMY NAGAR 2ND STREET, SHOLINGANALLUR, CHENNAI – 600119, intend having my enrolment as an Advocate moved before Bar Council of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry High Court Campus, Gate No. 4, George Town, NSC Bose Road, Chennai – 600104. Those who has any valid objections may notify the same to the Bar Council within 10 days. J. ARUNA

CHANGE OF NAME

**I, AMITH** Kumar Sharma, s/o; Lakshmi Narayan Sharma r/o: Tower No.4, Flat No 094, DLF Garden City, Semmancherry, Sholinganallur, Kancheepuram–600119. Have changed my name as Amith Kumar Lakshmi Narayan Sharma.

**I, HARSHIL** Sharma Amith Kumar, s/o; Amith Kumar Lakshmi Narayan Sharma r/o: Tower No.4, Flat No 094, DLF Garden City, Semmancherry, Sholinganallur, Kancheepuram–6000119 Have changed my name as Harshil Sharma

I, PADMANABAN MAIDILI, W/o Mr. Padmanabhan, (DOB: 16.04.1970) R/o Ruby Block, 1/2, Bharathi Street Lalithambal Nagar, Thirumullaivoyal, Chennai - 600062, shall henceforth be known as MYTHILI PADMANABHAN. The names PADMANABAN MAIDILI and MYTHILI PADMANABHAN are of one and the same person.

PERSONAL

CHANGE OF NAME

**I, SANJAY** Menon Narayanan, s/o; Menon Narayan Ayyappan, r/o: Flat No 110, Bay View Apartments, No.05 Raja Rangaswamy Avenue, Valimiki Nagar, Thiruvanmiyur, Chennai–600041. Have changed my name as Sanjay Menon.

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# Parents worry over lack of clarity on three-language policy

With English considered a foreign language, Class IX and X students have been forced to change their second language at the last minute. Parents are frustrated over the policy's rushed implementation

**Meghna M.**
CHENNAI

Parents and teachers are frustrated with the confusion regarding the implementation of the three-language policy for Classes IX and X at CBSE schools as the deadline approaches. Practical difficulties, lack of student agency, and last-minute stress to learn a new language are just some of the challenges in implementing the circular, said educators.

While the CBSE circular stated that two of the languages opted by the students should be native to India, while the other could be a foreign language. However, educators pointed out that English, which was the medium of instruction in most CBSE schools, was considered a foreign language, thereby ruling out the option of learning a foreign language such as French. This has been a cause for concern for Class X students set to face the boards this academic year.

### Under pressure

For Aditi, a Class X student of a private CBSE school in the city, learning Tamil as the second language in time for her board exams has been stressful. She opted for French from Class VI as she wanted to pursue her higher education elsewhere. "She has to face her board exam, and this is unnecessary stress for her. Will she be able to focus on her core subjects to pursue the stream she wants or focus on the language to make sure she passes? We don't know Hindi and hence, Tamil is the more logical option but at what cost?" asked Sreena N., Aditi's mother.

In May, CBSE had directed all schools to implement three languages for Classes VI to X, where at least two of the languages taught are native languages.

While the Class X student will not have to write a board exam in the third language, the internal marks will appear on the pass certificate.

**Short on time:** Class X students, who had to switch from French to other Indian languages, are stressed as they will have to learn the new language before they take up their board exams. R. RAGU

Veda, a Class IX student, has to opt for Hindi as the third language but nobody in her family knew it. "We are all stressed for her. None of us know the language to even offer support. This is a bad decision," said her mother Renu (name changed).

Varsha (name changed), mother of a Class IX student, added that there had been no clarity from the school regarding the language question. "She was a French student and will now have to learn some other language but how will this progress? There has been no answer from anyone," she said.

### Shortage of teachers

School principals pointed out that practically the policy could not be implemented as the number of Indian language teachers do not match the demand.

"CBSE has taken the decision to implement the policy right before schools reopen. What of the teachers we have already hired? Further, if a couple of students want to learn Malayalam, where are the teachers to teach them?" asked N. Vijayan, senior principal of Zion and Alwin Group of schools.

Pointing out that CBSE had approved their affiliate schools to take up English as a medium of instruction, Mr. Vijayan added that English as the foreign language should be removed so students get a choice to learn another foreign language of their choice.

With English's status as a foreign language limiting options, many schools have been forced to rely on their already existing options and introduce Sanskrit as the third language. Hence, schools in the city have decided to wait for the Supreme Court decision, which is scheduled for mid-July, when the court reopens after vacation.

But parents pointed out that the verdict would still cause a massive disruption as it would come in the middle of the school year.

Raghu (name changed), a parent of a Class VII student, said their child could not opt for her mother tongue Konkani, as there are neither teachers nor textbooks.

"She will be forced to take Hindi. This indirect imposition of the Hindi language due to abrupt implementation violates our fundamental rights," he added.

# Elevated corridor from Nallur to Madhavaram may happen if State waives its portion of GST for project

**The Hindu Bureau**
CHENNAI

There remains a glimmer of hope for the construction of a 10.4-km elevated corridor from Madhavaram to Nallur toll plaza. Sources in the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) said the project would be revived if the State government waived its portion of the Goods and Sales Tax (GST) for the proposed project.

"Around 60% of the cost would go towards materials, which attract GST and 9% on that is not much in terms of tax. The State government wants this project, and so it would be their contribution towards the same. The land acquisition, if any, would be very minimal," said a source. In February this year, during a meeting held by the Secretary, Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, with the Tamil Nadu Chief Secretary, the NHAI accepted to take up the project, subject to a waiver of the State's component of the GST. The modalities of implementation were being finalised along with the updation of the DPR, an official source said. A retired Highways Department official said instead of an elevated corridor, it would be better to construct three flyovers at Puzhal covering Retteri Road, at Kavankarai, and at Sothupakkam junction covering Revathy Stores junction.

"An elevated corridor would would cost much higher than three flyovers. Since around 60% of vehicles using the road are two-wheelers, an elevated corridor won't be of any help. Whereas flyovers will help reduce congestion at five junctions," he added.

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**Cancellation of Certificate of Registration - Public Notice**

In exercise of the powers conferred under Section 45-IA (6) of the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934 (the Act), the Reserve Bank of India, by its order dated May 19, 2026, has cancelled the Certificate of Registration No. B-07.00104 dated November 30, 2017, issued to M/s Kiranglobal Business Investment Limited (bearing Corporate Identity Number (CIN) – L65921TN1993PLC024511, having its registered office at New No. 43, Old No. 22, P Block, 3rd Main Road, Anna Nagar, Chennai – 600 040) for carrying on the business of a Non-Banking Financial Institution as defined in section 45-I(a) of the Act. The company, therefore, cannot carry on the business of a Non-Banking Financial Institution under the Act.

A detailed list of registered NBFCs is available in our website (https://rbi.org.in/Scripts/ BS_NBFCList.aspx).

This notice is issued in public interest.

Place:Chennai
Date: June 29, 2026

Sd/-
( R Kalavathi)
Deputy General Manager

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पंजीकृत एनबीएफसी की विस्तृत सूची, हमारी वेबसाइट (https://rbi.org.in/Scripts/ BS_NBFCList.aspx) पर उपलब्ध है।

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स्थान :चेन्नै
दिनांक: 29 जून 2026

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# Beyond the board

Reimagining teaching in higher education at the beginning of a new academic year

**Clement Arockiasamy**

GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

A professor pauses mid-lecture. A slide remains half-explained, a thought suspended in the air. As a new academic year begins and campuses come alive once again, attention drifts not to the screen or the board, but to a student seated at the back, gazing out of the window. Is it disengagement, uncertainty, or a search for meaning that the lecture has not yet reached? In that fleeting moment, teaching reveals its deeper question: not what is being delivered, but what is truly being understood.

As colleges and universities reopen, beyond a return to schedules and syllabi and planning lectures lies a more fundamental inquiry: not just what we teach, but how and why we teach. Teaching cannot be measured solely by adherence to syllabus or method, nor only by outcomes such as grades or placements. It exists in the balance between what we aim to teach and what students truly carry forward.

### Beyond content

For generations, the blackboard – and now the smart board – has symbolised structured instruction: clarity, authority, direction. Yet in a world of abundant information, students no longer depend solely on teachers for access to knowledge. The educator's role has expanded from delivering information to cultivating inquiry, from providing answers to framing meaningful questions. If higher education were only about degrees and employability, information delivery would suffice. But its purpose extends to preparing individuals to engage critically with ideas, navigate complexity, and contribute thoughtfully to society. A lecturer may transmit knowledge, but an educator shapes perspective.

Within the university ecosystem, the teacher remains closest to the student's intellectual journey. A single question, a moment of encouragement, or even a passing remark can shape how a student thinks long after the semester ends. As we look ahead to a future shaped by AI and constant change, certain capacities remain essential: critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity.

Students today navigate academic pressure, social comparison, and digital distraction. Classrooms must, therefore, become spaces where students feel respected, heard, and intellectually safe. Among all teaching skills, listening is the most vital. It is through listening that educators understand what students grasp, what they question, and what remains unspoken.

### Intellectual investment

This broader vision also calls for a renewed commitment to intellectual depth on the part of educators. Lecturers who invest in books, read beyond the syllabus, engage with diverse authors, and bring fresh perspectives into the classroom make a quiet but powerful academic investment. When students encounter ideas that go beyond the expected text, learning becomes less about coverage and more about discovery.

In many lecture halls, the challenge is not a lack of content, but a lack of engagement. The quiet student at the back – often seen as inattentive – may reflect a deeper disconnect. Addressing this requires inclusive practices that draw in every learner. Even language matters: a word of encouragement can invite participation, while a careless remark can silence it.

The debate between memorisation and understanding remains relevant. Education must move beyond repetition toward application, analysis, and reflection.

Effective teaching rests on a balance between content, pedagogy, and the learner. An overloaded syllabus can restrict exploration, while excessive focus on method can dilute clarity. The student must remain at the centre, not as a passive recipient but as an active participant.

Teaching also involves knowing when to step back. As students grow, the educator's role evolves from instructor to facilitator, from guide to collaborator. Ultimately, a teacher in higher education is also a mentor, a catalyst for inquiry, and a quiet influence on how students come to see the world.

The true measure of education lies not in what is written or displayed, but in what endures. Perhaps that student at the back is not disengaged at all but simply waiting for a reason to look up.

*The writer is a Chevening Scholar, a graduate from the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, U.K., and a teacher trainer.*

## SCHOLARSHIPS

**IDFC FIRST Bank MBA Scholarship**
Offered by IDFC FIRST Bank.
**Eligibility:** Indian nationals residing in India and enrolled in the first year of a two-year full-time MBA programme in one of the 46 MBA colleges (check link below) with an annual family income not exceeding ₹600,000 from all sources. Applicants must have a valid mobile number linked to their Aadhaar number.
**Rewards:** ₹100,000 for each year of study
**Application:** Online
**Deadline:** July 8
www.b4s.in/edge/IFBMS7

**AICTE Saksham Scholarship for Specially Abled Students**
Offered by the All India Council for Technical Education.
**Eligibility:** Indian nationals from the specially-abled categories with a benchmark disability of 40% or more who have secured admission into a degree or diploma programme in AICTE-approved institutions in the current academic year and have an annual family income not exceeding not exceeding ₹800,000.
**Rewards:** ₹50,000 a year
**Application:** Online
**Deadline:** October 31
www.b4s.in/edge/ASSST4

Courtesy: Buddy4study

## AI Adoption Survey

QS I-GAUGE has launched an AI Adoption Survey for Educators, to assess educators' perceptions of AI, their current usage patterns, and readiness to adopt AI in professional roles. The findings are expected to provide valuable national-level insights into how educational institutions can responsibly, effectively, and ethically integrate AI into academic ecosystems, even as AI continues to reshape teaching, learning, assessment, research, and administrative functions.

**Who can participate:** Faculty members from schools across all educational boards, colleges, universities and other higher education institutions across India.

**How to participate**
Teachers from schools can visit https://survey.zohopublic.in/zs/jmBMY6
Faculty from higher education institutions can visit https://survey.zohopublic.in/zs/yzBMBr

## From Page One

### Woman dies after botched home birth

On a complaint filed by the Block Medical Officer, Kunnathur, the Uthukuli police registered a case against Kolanthasamy, under Section 105 (punishment for culpable homicide not amounting to murder) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

"The deceased woman's family members did not want to file any complaint. They said the couple had planned for a natural delivery at home," Uthukuli Inspector S. Saravanan said.

Health Department sources said the infant was healthy and stable. The couple has a six-year-old daughter. Inquiry revealed that the woman was not registered under the Pregnancy and Infant Cohort Monitoring and Evaluation, its maternal and infant care tracking system.

## INBRIEF

### EPS flags irregularities in recruitment of teachers

AIADMK leader Edappadi K. Palaniswami on Sunday urged the TVK-led government to inquire into the allegations of irregularities in the recent recruitment of assistant professors and ensure the appointment of eligible candidates. "How can a candidate who scored 100 in the objective paper get zero in the descriptive? It shows there has been no uniform method of awarding marks."

### Elephant found decapitated at tiger reserve in Pannaikadu

Forest Department officials spotted a decapitated elephant's carcass at the Srivilliputhur-Megamalai Tiger Reserve in Pannaikadu, and detained Mokka Raja, 40, and Peria Thavasi, 42, from whom they recovered the tusks on Friday. Officials said that following information, veterinarians from the Department of Veterinary Sciences visited the forest and found the carcass. The post-mortem indicated that the elephant was about 40 years old and had died a few days ago.

# 'Civil Supplies Corpn.'s fiscal risk differs from other PSUs'

Subsidy inadequacy, reimbursement delay, and the compounding costs of deferred obligation are among the core issues flagged in the recently released White Paper on fiscal management in T.N.

**The Hindu Bureau**
CHENNAI

The fiscal risk of the Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation (TNCSC) represents a different character from that of other State Public Sector Undertakings, such as power utilities and transport corporations, according to the recently released *White Paper on the Fiscal Management of Tamil Nadu*.

"It is not a risk of commercial failure but of subsidy inadequacy, reimbursement delay, and the compounding costs of deferred obligation," the document said, adding that the Corporation "is not a loss-making enterprise in the conventional sense."

Regarded as the "operational backbone" of the State's public distribution system, the Corporation procures paddy and other commodities from farmers; processes and stores them; and distributes food grains, sugar, pulses, and edible oil through fair price shops to ration card holders. Apart from being the Union government's nodal agency for paddy and ragi procurement, the TNCSC implements special welfare schemes. It receives subsidy inflows from the Government of India and the State government, while the payments relate to procurement, distribution, and debt servicing obligations.

The White Paper has identified three characteristics of the entity's financial metrics. In only one (2022-23) of the past five years had the TNCSC recorded a cash surplus. That surplus was due to the timing of subsidy receipts that had been delayed from the prior year, when Pongal kits and COVID relief distributions had inflated payments.

The deficit trajectory "is worsening sharply". After narrowing to ₹1,166 crore in 2024-25, the deficit rose to ₹5,245 crore in 2025-26 – nearly reverting to the levels seen in the pandemic-affected years of 2020-21 and 2021-22.

The 55% increase in working capital debt in the past five years had also led to the rise in interest payment, which "now consumes a significant and rising share of the TNCSC's annual payments – a cost that is entirely unproductive," the White Paper said. "It [the cost] funds neither procurement nor distribution, but simply the servicing of previously accumulated deficit financing."

**Worsening deficit**

Key financial features of the Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation

(₹ IN CRORE)

| Year | Receipts | Payments | Suprlus/ Deficit | Working Capital Debt Outstanding |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2021-22 | 18,534 (17,583) | 24,739 | -6,205 | 17,500 |
| 2022-23 | 23,188 (13,569) | 22,021 | 1,167 | 20,000 |
| 2023-24 | 18,539 (10,499) | 20,206 | -1,667 | 19,600 |
| 2024-25 | 22,293 (10,770) | 23,459 | -1,166 | 20,410 |
| 2025-26 | 25,533 (20,957) | 30,778 | -5,245 | 27,181 |

**Figures given in brackets under the second column refer to food subsidy provided by the Tamil Nadu government.*

# State to promote e-cooking in hotels and cloud kitchens

**S. Vijay Kumar**
CHENNAI

The Tamil Nadu Power Distribution Corporation Limited (TNPDCL) will accelerate the adoption of electric cooking (e-cooking) in commercial and institutional establishments such as restaurants, hotels, cloud kitchens, and industrial canteens.

Acting on a request by the Government of India to States and Union Territories, the TNPDCL issued an order to all distribution companies under its control to prioritise applications seeking new service connection or loan enhancement for e-cooking, official sources said on Sunday.

TNPDCL's Director (Distribution) instructed Chief Engineers (Distribution Region) across the State to fast-track new electricity connection/load enhancement requests from commercial and institutional establishments, and carry out capacity upgrades on priority. They were told to provide a simple online application process on the Distribution Company (DISCOM) portal for new connections/load enhancement, the sources said.

With escalating tension in the Gulf region following Iran's attack on Kuwait and Bahrain in response to the U.S. strikes, the demand for petroleum products, including Liquified Petroleum Gas (LPG), saw a surge, despite the Ministry of Power advising people to avoid panic buying of petrol, diesel, and LPG. The Centre encouraged the citizens to use alternative fuels such as Piped Natural Gas and electric or induction cooktops, the sources said.

A senior official in the Energy Department said the steps taken to boost migration from LPG to e-cooking was an ongoing process that commenced before the developments in the Gulf region.

Though the Centre and national oil companies reiterated that there was no shortage of LPG stock or supply, there were allegations that an artificial demand had been created by vested interests, especially in the supply of commercial gas. Commercial gas cylinders were supplied at a much higher cost, forcing restaurants to cut down their menu and increase food rates, the sources added.

When contacted, J. Radhakrishnan, Chairman and Managing Director, Tangedco, said the initiative to expedite new service or load enhancement requests was an opportunity for commercial establishments to migrate to clean energy. Many popular restaurants had already adopted e-cooking. "Quite a lot of people have moved to clean energy. The circular issued by TNPDCL on the advice of the Government of India is to address the increasing demand for commercial gas," Dr. Radhakrishnan said.

# Girl who went missing found dead in well

**The Hindu Bureau**
RAMANATHAPURAM

A five-year-old girl, who went missing while sleeping at her grandmother's house in Ramanathapuram, was found dead in the well of a neighbour on Sunday morning. The deceased, identified as the daughter of Karthikai Selvi and Balaganesh of Madurai, had accompanied her mother and younger sister to her maternal grand-parents' house at M.S.K. Nagar in Ramanathapuram a few days ago. The family members were sleeping at the house on Saturday night. Around 5.30 a.m. on Sunday, Karthikai Selvi woke up and found her elder daughter missing.

The family searched the house, the homes of relatives, and nearby areas, but could not trace the child. On a complaint, the Ramanathapuram Bazaar police launched a search, found the body in the well, and sent it for postmortem. A case of suspicious death has been registered.

# Vijay launches Pulse Polio Immunisation Campaign; 52.91 lakh children to benefit

**The Hindu Bureau**
CHENNAI

As part of the national Pulse Polio Immunisation Campaign, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay on Sunday launched the special drive at the Government Adi Dravidar Welfare School in Palavakkam on the outskirts of Chennai.

Mr. Vijay launched the campaign by administering the oral polio vaccine to children and distributing gifts to them.

An official release said the State government had made elaborate arrangements to administer polio drops to 52.91 lakh children aged below five at 43,051 centres across the State, including government hospitals, anganwadi centres, and schools.

Temporary transit booths were set up at bus terminals, railway stations, airports, toll plazas, and check posts to administer polio drops. The polio vaccination centres functioned from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Apart from the administration of polio drops at the centres on June 28, the drive would continue on June 29 and June 30 at transit booths.

The entire drive will cover the children of migrant workers from other States residing in Tamil Nadu.

More than two lakh health workers, anganwadi workers, teachers, and volunteers were deployed for the campaign, the release added.

Minister for Health and Family Welfare K.G. Arunraj, Sholinganallur MLA P. Saravanan, and senior officials from the Department of Health and Family Welfare and the Greater Chennai Corporation were among those present.

**A dose of protection**: Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay launching the immunisation drive in Chennai on Sunday. R. RAGU

# Stalin accuses TVK-led government of not addressing power cuts, farmers' problems

**The Hindu Bureau**
CHENNAI

DMK president M.K. Stalin on Sunday accused the TVK-led government of not addressing pressing issues such as power outages and protests by farmers, and instead, indulging in diverting people's attention.

Speaking at an event at Vanagaram in Chennai where hundreds of supporters of former AIADMK Minister P. Benjamin joined the DMK, Mr. Stalin said that in the last five years, Tamil Nadu had reached new heights in several sectors. "It was the DMK that made Tamil Nadu the second-largest economy in India. We formulated welfare schemes that benefited all sections of society and ensured that they reached the people," he said.

M.K. Stalin

"Because of their confidence in the DMK government, investors from across the country and around the world came forward to invest in Tamil Nadu, leading to the creation of employment opportunities. But now there has been a change in government. Within one month, Tamil Nadu has reached a situation where it is heading downhill," he said.

According to him, industrial establishments are hesitant to invest in the State due to the deteriorating law and order situation, increasing sexual abuse cases, drug menace, and robberies. In many of these crimes, members of the ruling party were the accused, he said.

"There are power cuts and protests by farmers. But instead of addressing these issues, the government is in a take-diversion mode. People have now understood the tactics of the new government," Mr. Stalin said.

He said the responsibility of protecting Tamil Nadu rests with the DMK. "We cannot allow the Tamil Nadu we nurtured with great care to deteriorate," said Mr. Stalin, who also listed several welfare measures implemented by the previous DMK government.

Meanwhile, former senior office-bearers and district-level functionaries of the MDMK joined the DMK in the presence of Mr. Stalin at Anna Arivalayam, the party headquarters, on Sunday.

# *Football fuels the dreams of these fishing hamlets*

The craze for the sport remains indomitable in Kanniyakumari's Thoothoor zone, with each village having its own ground. Amid FIFA World Cup 2026, the hamlets brim with excitement, heated debates over favourites, and life-size cut-outs of stars

**Shankari Nivethitha B.**
NAGERCOIL

As the FIFA World Cup 2026 enters the Round of 32 on Monday IST, the streets of the coastal villages in Kanniyakumari district, particularly the eight villages that form the Thoothoor zone, has been brimming with excitement, heated debates over favourite teams and players, and life-size cut-outs of football stars lining the road.

The football craze in these villages remains indomitable, with each village having its own football ground. Many young men either train the local boys or participate in football sessions themselves.

The Thoothoor zone has also produced notable footballers such as Michael Regin, Michael Soosairaj, Raegan Albarnas, Jockson Dhas, M. Viknesh, K. Lijo, and John Paul.

Speaking about the villagers' passion for football, Erayuman Sagar, a Tamil writer and social activist, said, "During the World Cup season, these villages light up with a festive atmosphere."

Highlighting the fact that Thoothoor fishermen are renowned for their deep sea fishing skills, he added, "Next to that, they possess great talent in football."

Mr. Sagar said that while fishing was their livelihood, football was the air they breathe. "From young children to those who head out to sea for their livelihood, almost everyone can be seen wearing a football jersey," he said.

The passion for football in the region has also fostered a strong tradition of women's participation in the sport. Most villages have separate football teams for girls, with some conducting football tournaments exclusively for them.

"Even in the 1980s, women players from the region represented Tamil Nadu. The women's team from this region was particularly strong, and through a club called KRYC, the players went on to represent the State," Mr. Sagar said.

K. Lijo of Erayumanthurai, who is associated with FC Bengaluru United, said football instils discipline in younger generations. He felt that at a time when drug abuse was becoming rampant, boys who take up football were less likely to be drawn towards such harmful influences.

Jockson Dhas from Vallavilai, who represented the Tamil Nadu team in Santosh Trophy and also played for Chennaiyin FC, echoed similar views, stating that football kept youngsters away from unhealthy distractions and excessive mobile phone addiction.

Several players from the regions have secured government jobs through their sporting achievement. However, there has been a huge concern over the limited opportunities available through the Tamil Nadu government's sports quota.

*Read the full story on newsth.live/soccerdreams*

**Sporting spirit**: Local residents come together for a football session at Eraviputhenthurai village in Kanniyakumari. N. RAJESH

# Fans and family bid a tearful farewell to Bhagyaraj, funeral held with full state honours

**The Hindu Bureau**
CHENNAI

Veteran actor and director K. Bhagyaraj was given a tearful farewell as he was cremated with full state honours on Sunday.

The 73-year-old legendary screenwriter passed away on Saturday following a heart attack.

On Sunday morning, his mortal remains were taken in a vehicle that bore his photograph and a writing pad that carried the words: 'With love, yours, K. Bhagyaraj'. Many gathered to bid farewell to him as the funeral procession passed through various roads to the crematorium.

Full state honours were accorded, after which the cremation took place at Besant Nagar.

Water Resources and Rural Development Minister N. Anand and Minister for School Education, Tamil Development, and Information and Publicity Rajmohan were present when the last rites were performed.

Since Saturday, several political leaders and celebrities have paid their respects to his mortal remains. Many, including Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay; DMK president M.K. Stalin; actor-politician Kamal Hassan; and actors Rajinikanth, Mammootty, and Sivakumar paid their respects in person.

**Final journey:** The funeral procession of veteran Tamil actor and director K. Bhagyaraj in Chennai on Sunday. B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

## INBRIEF

### Revanth, other leaders offer tributes to P.V. Narasimha Rao

Political leaders across party lines paid rich tributes to former Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao on his 105th birth anniversary on Sunday, recalling his contributions to nation-building and economic reforms. Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy paid floral tributes to Narasimha Rao's portrait at his residence in Jubilee Hills. Ministers Komatireddy Venkat Reddy and Adluri Laxman Kumar accompanied him.

### A.P. issues policy guidelines for airport bars, liquor shops

The Andhra Pradesh government has issued guidelines for the grant of bar and liquor shop licences at airports in the State, excluding Tirupati Airport, based on a Group of Ministers' study of policies of other States. The policy allows airport bars and shops with 24/7 operations and flexible serving points, treating terminals as licensed premises. A graded Retail Excise Tax has been introduced – ₹25 lakh annually for bars at airports handling over 20 lakh passengers, ₹15 lakh for smaller airports, and ₹1 crore for liquor shops.

### TTD cancels VIP, Srivani darshan amid huge rush

The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) has cancelled Monday's VIP Break Darshan and withdrawn the same-day online Srivani Darshan quota as part of a crowd-management exercise to cope with the unprecedented influx of pilgrims to Tirumala. The decision comes as the hill shrine witnesses one of the biggest pilgrim rushes in recent years. Over 1.5 lakh devotees were waiting for the darshan on Saturday.

# Kerala Minister's support for PMAY logo kicks up a storm

K.M. Shaji's stand is in contrast to that of the previous LDF govt., which had opposed placing the emblem in front of houses built under the scheme, citing concern for the dignity of beneficiaries

**S.R. Praveen**
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The stand by the Minister for Local Self-Governments, K.M. Shaji, that the Kerala government was not opposed to the Centre's insistence on placing an emblem in front of houses built under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) has drawn sharp criticism from the Opposition.

The Minister's stand is in sharp contrast to that of the the previous LDF government, which had opposed the same, citing concern for the dignity of the beneficiaries of the housing scheme.

Mr. Shaji, who met presspersons on Sunday, claimed that reports which said the PMAY emblem had Prime Minister Narendra Modi's photograph were wrong.

"I said there was nothing wrong with displaying the PMAY emblem. Can anyone show me a PMAY emblem carrying the Prime Minister's photograph? Over 1.2 lakh poor families will get new houses under the scheme. Houses meant for the poor should not be blocked by creating unnecessary controversies in the name of an emblem," Mr. Shaji said.

He said that the previous government had withdrawn from the PMAY agreement not because of ideological reasons but due to its inability to provide the State's financial share.

The Leader of the Opposition, Pinarayi Vijayan, on Saturday posted on his Facebook page a video of a speech he had made on the issue during his tenure as the Chief Minister. "When you put up an emblem or logo in front of a house, it conveys a message to those who are living there that the house does not belong to them. The houses belong to the beneficiaries. Our stand is that no display board which questions the self-respect of the beneficiaries should be put up in front of houses. If the Union government's stand is that it will not provide its share of housing schemes if the logo is not put up, we are ready to give up that aid," Mr. Vijayan had said.

> I said there was nothing wrong with displaying the PMAY emblem. Can anyone show me a PMAY emblem carrying the PM's photograph? Houses meant for the poor should not be blocked by creating unnecessary controversies in the name of an emblem
>
> **K.M. SHAJI**
> Kerala Minister for Local Self-governments

# See children as wealth, says CM Naidu

**The Hindu Bureau**
VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu has stressed the need for the joint family system to return, and said the government has been giving incentives to families to have two or more children, treating them as wealth at a time when the fertility rate is dropping.

Launching the national pulse polio immunisation drive by administering oral polio drops to a few children at his residence on Sunday, Mr. Naidu said raising and looking after children should not be limited to women alone, and that, in the past, when there were joint families, everyone became partners in raising the young ones.

**Share responsibility**

He recalled that grandmothers, grandfathers and other family members played an important role in raising children with values, and said husbands and men must also take the responsibility of raising children, especially where women were working.

Mr. Naidu said the mindset of viewing children as a burden must go, and that the situation was changing around the world, with children seen as wealth, keeping the future in view.

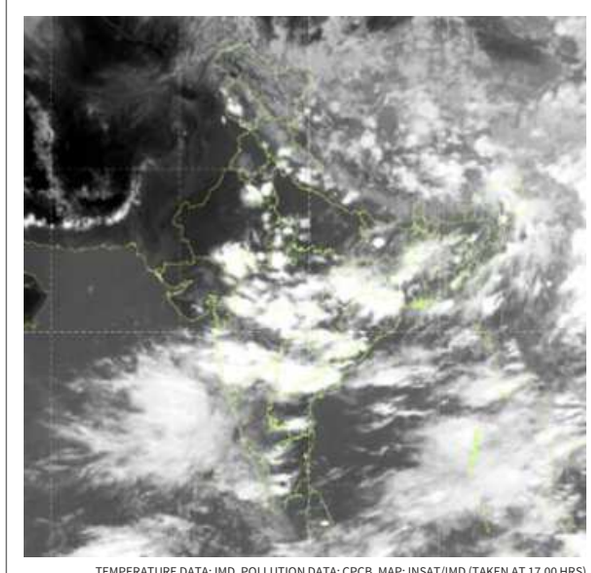
He advised parents to have all the vaccines provided by the government administered to their children as per schedule, to protect them from crippling diseases.

Officials of the Department of Family Welfare told the Chief Minister that the drive was aimed at administering polio drops to about 49.2 lakh children under the age of five during the three-day programme.

Commissioner of Family Welfare and other senior officials of the State Health Department and the National Health Mission were present.

## WEATHERWATCH

Rainfall, temperature & air quality in select metros yesterday



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 17.00 HRS)

**Forecast for Monday:** Heavy to Very Heavy Rainfall very likely at isolated places over Arunachal Pradesh, Assam & Meghalaya and Kerala & Mahe. Heavy Rainfall very likely at isolated places over Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Coastal Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Lakshadweep, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura.

| CITY | RAIN | MAX | MIN | CITY | RAIN | MAX | MIN |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Agartala | — | — | — | Kurnool | 20.0 | 37.5 | 26.4 |
| Ahmedabad | — | — | — | Lucknow | 0.6 | 39.7 | 27.8 |
| Aizawl | — | 31.5 | 24 | Madurai | — | 40.0 | 27.5 |
| Bengaluru | — | — | — | Mangaluru | 7.6 | 28.2 | 23.9 |
| Bhopal | — | 37 | 24 | Mumbai | 6.2 | 32.4 | 26.2 |
| Bhubaneswar | — | 38.4 | 27.4 | Mysuru | — | 32.0 | — |
| Chandigarh | — | 39.1 | 29.2 | New Delhi | — | 42.1 | 30.2 |
| Chennai | — | 37.8 | 25.6 | Patna | — | 39.6 | 00.0 |
| Coimbatore | — | 32.8 | 23.6 | Port Blair | — | 28.9 | 25.0 |
| Dehradun | — | 37.1 | 26.8 | Prayagraj | — | 43.4 | 30.0 |
| Gangtok | 41.2 | 21.6 | 19 | Puducherry | — | 38.7 | 26.9 |
| Goa | 28.4 | 29.4 | 24.6 | Pune | 4.1 | 33.0 | 23.8 |
| Guwahati | — | 32.3 | 27.5 | Raipur | 4.6 | 38.7 | 25.9 |
| Hubballi | — | 29 | 23 | Ranchi | — | 30.7 | 24.0 |
| Hyderabad | — | 35.8 | 26.2 | Shillong | — | 28.1 | 17.0 |
| Imphal | — | 29.9 | 23.7 | Shimla | — | 27.4 | 18.2 |
| Jaipur | — | 40.0 | 29.8 | Srinagar | — | 33.8 | 19.7 |
| Kochi | 56.8 | 28.8 | 23.8 | Thiruvananthapuram | 8.6 | 30.5 | 23.9 |
| Kohima | — | — | — | Tiruchirappalli | — | — | — |
| Kolkata | — | 37.5 | 27.0 | Vijayawada | — | — | — |
| Kozhikode | 5.2 | 28.8 | 26.6 | Visakhapatnam | 7.4 | 34.2 | 28.4 |

*(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)*

**Pollutants in the air you are breathing**

| CITIES | $SO_2$ | $NO_2$ | CO | PM2.5 | PM10 | CODE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ahmedabad | 6 | 7 | 21 | 35 | 107 | Moderate |
| Bengaluru | 10 | 33 | 61 | — | 103 | Moderate |
| Chennai | 5 | 11 | — | 43 | 67 | Good |
| Delhi | 13 | 53 | 72 | 84 | 149 | Moderate |
| Hyderabad | 7 | 12 | 33 | 44 | 76 | Good |
| Kolkata | 5 | 21 | — | 45 | 47 | Good |
| Lucknow | 7 | 28 | 57 | 143 | 94 | Moderate |
| Mumbai | — | 23 | 20 | 101 | — | Moderate |
| Pune | — | 21 | 86 | 29 | 46 | Good |
| Visakhapatnam | 14 | 52 | 9 | 62 | 118 | Moderate |

**Yesterday**

In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Panipat, Haryana recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 366 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Naharlagun, Arunachal Pradesh recorded a healthy AQI score of 17

**Air Quality Code:** Poor Moderate Good (Readings indicate average AQI)

**$SO_2$:** Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

**$NO_2$:** Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

**CO:** Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.

**PM2.5 & PM10:** Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

# Jigani murder: hunt on for woman's live-in partner

**The Hindu Bureau**
BENGALURU

The death of a 30-year-old Karnataka woman, initially treated as an unnatural death, has now been confirmed as murder after the post-mortem examination report.

The Jigani police have launched a manhunt for the prime suspect, who has been absconding since the incident.

The body of the victim, identified as Akshata Indaragi, 30, from Ilkal in Bagalkote district, was found in a decomposed state at a rented house near Patalamma Temple in Jigani, on June 17. She had been staying in a house owned by municipal councillor Ramesh.

Neighbours alerted the house owner after noticing a foul smell and finding that the house had remained locked for nearly three days. The police initially registered a case of unnatural death.

CCTV footage later revealed that Akshata's live-in partner, identified as Nanne Saab, had left the house and gone missing after the incident. The house owner subsequently lodged a complaint expressing suspicion over her death.

The post-mortem report confirmed that Akshata had been strangled and assaulted before being murdered, prompting the police to register a murder case.

During the investigation, the police found that Saab was already married. They also discovered that Akshata had earlier been married to Krishna Indargi and had two children from that marriage.

# Shivakumar-Kumaraswamy clash deepens over township project

**Sharath S. Srivatsa**
BENGALURU

The political battle for dominance in the Vokkaliga community – a major land-owning caste in Karnataka's Old Mysore region – has intensified, with the Bidadi Township Project emerging as a flashpoint.

While the initial opposition centred on farmers' concerns, it has now turned into a contest for one-upmanship among Vokkaliga leaders.

Though it was widely expected to become a thorny issue soon after Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar occupied the top post in the State Congress, his political rival and Union Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy has upped the ante, attracting wider attention within the farming community in south Karnataka. Both leaders are from Bengaluru South district, of which Bidadi is a part.

The political narrative has turned messy, with allegations over Mr. Shivakumar's wealth countered by a poster campaign targeting Mr. Kumaraswamy and his family.

Mr. Kumaraswamy's actions are also being portrayed by the Congress as "smacking of jealousy", with a fellow Vokkaliga unable to stomach the rise of another leader from the community. Mr. Kumaraswamy on Sunday countered this by asking whether a leader should be allowed to "loot" simply because he is a Vokkaliga.

Incidentally, the project was conceived and notified by Mr. Kumaraswamy during his first term in 2006-07, a fact that is now being highlighted by the Congress. Mr. Shivakumar has repeatedly said that he is not ready to "denotify it now and go to jail".

Mr. Kumaraswamy has vehemently denied that it is a clash of Vokkaliga personalities, maintaining that the opposition is only to the project. Party sources argued that the "soul and identity" of the Vokkaliga community was its land, and that the community had lost vast tracts of it as Bengaluru's landscape expanded rapidly over the last three decades.

"Our focus is to protect farmers from real estate interests. It is only incidental that about 80% of farmers in the region are Vokkaligas," a leader claimed.

He also pointed out that the project had been opposed by the Congress during Mr. Kumaraswamy's tenure.

# Bhogapuram airport charges may be among country's highest

**K. Srinivasa Rao**
VIZIANAGARAM

Flying from the upcoming Bhogapuram International Airport of Andhra Pradesh, to be operated by GMR Airports Infrastructure Ltd., is likely to become more expensive, with passengers required to pay one of the highest User Development Fees (UDF) among major airports in the country.

According to representatives of air travellers' associations, Visakhapatnam airport – which will cease operations once the Bhogapuram airport becomes functional – currently does not levy any UDF. Passengers will have to bear not only higher travel costs to reach Bhogapuram in Vizianagaram district but also the additional UDF on both departure and arrival. The Airports Economic Regulatory Authority of India (AERA) has approved a UDF of ₹835 for departing domestic passengers and ₹355 for arriving domestic passengers at the airport.

For international travellers, the fee has been fixed at ₹1,255 for departures and ₹545 for arrivals. GMR-operated airport in Hyderabad charges ₹750 as UDF for departing domestic passengers and ₹1,500 for departing international passengers, but does not levy any UDF on arriving passengers. Asked about the wide variation in UDF, a GMR spokesperson said that the charges were fixed in accordance with AERA's recommendations.

A view of the under-construction airport at Bhogapuram. FILE PHOTO

# 'BJP wants politics of development'

**The Hindu Bureau**
HYDERABAD

BJP president Nitin Nabin on Sunday called upon cadres to step up preparations for the upcoming municipal elections in Telangana, and urged them to intensify outreach efforts and position the party as an alternative to the ruling Congress and Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS).

On his visit to Hyderabad on Sunday, Mr. Nabin addressed a booth *pramukh sammelan* in Nampally and also virtually inaugurated nine district offices from Rangareddy rural party office. Addressing the *sammelan*, Mr. Nabin wanted cadres to prepare for a 'new struggle' based on service, sacrifice and commitment rather than power and privilege.

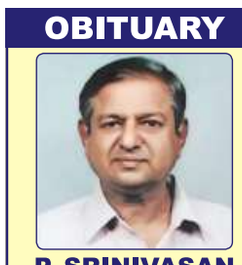
Stressing the importance of organisational strength, he said the BJP's success depended on its booth-level workers and reiterated the party slogan, '*booth jita toh chunav jitaa* (win the booth, win the election)'.

Greater Hyderabad and municipal polls are approaching, he said, adding that only the BJP can bring real development. "We want politics of development, not politics of dynasty and corruption," he said. Mr. Nabin said the Congress government had failed to fulfil promises made to the youth, particularly on employment, and charged both the Congress and BRS with pursuing vote-bank politics through their relationship with the AIMIM.


## OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

**DEATH**

**OBITUARY**



**P. SRINIVASAN**
aged 73 years,
Retd. Canara Bank employee,
passed away on 27-06-2026
at Bangalore, leaving behind
Vasanthi, Vyaas Narayanan,
Vinithra, Rajesh,
grandchildren and brothers.

**DEATH**

**OBITUARY**
**Dr. G.B. Sukumaran**
(10.01.1951 – 28.06.2026)
HOD (Retd), Dept. of Geology,
Presidency College, Chennai
passed away.
Deeply mourned by family.

**DEATH**

श्रीचक्रराज-निलया श्रीमत्त्रिपुरसुन्दरी
śrī-cakrarāja-nilayā śrīmat-tripura-sundarī
श्रीशिव-शिवशक्यैकरूपिणी ललिताम्बिका
śrī-śiva-śiva-śaktyaikarūpiṇī lalitāmbikā

**In Loving Memory**

**KANAKAM DEVAGUPTAPU**
**29-06-1952 to 27-06-2026**

Our beloved mother and wife of Sri. Seshagiri Rao Devaguptapu, merged into the loving embrace of Sri Lalita Mahatripurasundari on 27-06-2026.
**Final rites on 29-06-2026** at the Besant Nagar Crematorium, Chennai.

Deeply mourned by Family & Friends.
**Aparna, Divya & Upendra**

**IN MEMORY OF YOUR LOVED ONES**
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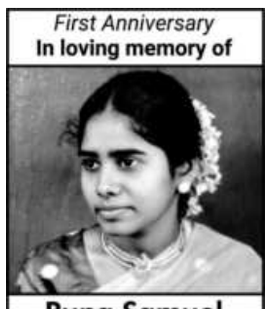

**Rupa Samuel**
*29.09.1944 - 29.06.2025*
Unable are the loved to die,
For love is immortality.
- Emily Dickinson
Children and grandchildren

**DEATH ANNIVERSARIES**

**8th ANNIVERSARY**
*In Everlasting memory of*

**Smt. Durga Chandrasekaran**
Founder, Durga Driving School
16.10.1957 – 29.06.2018
*You will live in our hearts forever*
*fondly remembered by*
Husband : **Chandrasekaran**
Sons : **Srikanth & Vijay**
Daughters-in-law : **Deepika & Meena**
Grandson : **Ridhaan Vijay**
**Friends & Relatives**
9840445560 / 9962918404

## Buyer beware

### Tracking down defective batches of drugs is essential

The Health Ministry's notification to expand Schedule H2 drugs to entire therapeutic classes now from a curated list of brands earlier is a commendable change from regulating based on revenue to regulating based on risk. The government had introduced Schedule H2 in 2022-23, which required a barcode or QR code on each pack of specific drugs to verify the pack's authenticity. It is part of a framework that also touches on regulating active pharmaceutical ingredients and export-oriented pharmaceutical compliance. Now, with the additional symbols encoding a product identifier, the manufacturing licence number, batch number, and other details, authorities hope to better track down defective batches. Counterfeit networks have long targeted vaccines, cancer medicines and antimicrobials, with WHO flagging high volumes of fake antimicrobials in low- and middle-income countries. India has one of the world's highest antimicrobial resistance rates, and substandard antimicrobials can lead to sub-therapeutic dosing, exerting selection pressure on resistant strains. The Narcotics Control Bureau has also expressed concerns about medicinal opioids and psychotropic substances 'leaking' into illicit markets. The government will hope that the new system addresses the U.S. FDA's and the European Medicines Agency's recurring concerns about quality control, an issue on which India has found itself on the back foot over contaminated cough syrups. The U.S. Trade Representative has also repeatedly identified India as a leading source of counterfeit medicines, with many fake pharmaceuticals seized at the U.S. border originating from or transiting through India.

Together with policy changes effected by the Jan Vishwas Act 2026, the new framework finally distinguishes between procedural non-compliance and substantial non-compliance, considering only the latter constitutes meaningful enforcement. In the long term, the government should rationalise the compliance burden and eliminate the risk of corruption associated with discretionary enforcement. The government must also recognise that the QR code system will only be effective if backed by a state-managed database that pharmacists and regulators can access in real time, supported by interoperable software and scanning infrastructure across States. Second, pharmacists and consumers must develop a habit of verifying medicines before a sale. Third, the compliance needs imposed by new packaging requirements and the IT integration will strain MSME manufacturers in particular. Finally, prescription data on controlled substances is sensitive information and will need to be handled with a digital governance layer that does not yet exist. Thus, whether the new framework will improve India's reputation as a pharmacy comes down to its implementation.

## Sharing waters

### The Tungabhadra dam is a good example of inter-State cooperation

The coming together of the Chief Ministers of Karnataka (D.K. Shivakumar), Telangana (A. Revanth Reddy) and Andhra Pradesh (N. Chandrababu Naidu), along with Union Jal Shakti Minister C.R. Patil, at the inauguration of the 33 spillway gates of the Tungabhadra dam on June 25 was significant beyond the optics. The three leaders pledged greater inter-State cooperation, which is welcome given that the dam has largely remained free of major disputes due to an established water-sharing formula and the Tungabhadra Board's regulation of releases. Located in Karnataka's Koppal district, the dam is considered to be the lifeline of the three southern States, providing irrigation to about 16.4 lakh acres – 9.26 lakh in Karnataka, 6.25 lakh in Andhra Pradesh, and 87,000 in Telangana. It hit the headlines in August 2024 when a crest gate was washed away during heavy inflows – which also happened when the dam was full with 105 thousand million cubic feet (tmc ft) of water. The damaged gate was replaced with a temporary one, but with much water wasted, the authorities, who did not want to take chances with the other 32 gates, chose to install high-grade steel gates, at ₹51 crore and which are expected to last 60 years.

Notwithstanding the bonhomie, the differences among the leaders on some issues concerning the larger Tungabhadra project cannot be brushed aside. The Upper Bhadra project, a major lift irrigation scheme under implementation in the central region of Karnataka and upstream of the Tungabhadra dam, has emerged as an irritant for Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. At one stage, the BJP-led Union government had made a provision of ₹5,300 crore in its budget for 2023-24, a few months before the Karnataka Assembly elections. However, the Centre later chose not to include it under any of its schemes, but this is being implemented by a Karnataka government undertaking. It remains to be seen whether the spirit of camaraderie will help the three neighbours to overcome their differences on the Upper Bhadra issue. The Tungabhadra dam is also facing excessive siltation, which has reduced its storage capacity from the original 133 tmc ft to about 106 tmc ft. Mr. Patil has assured the Chief Ministers about the Centre's plan to remove silt from water reservoirs across the country including the Tungabhadra. More importantly, the Union government should closely monitor and expedite, wherever required, the execution of dam rehabilitation and improvement projects being taken up in 19 States. Any laxity with regard to dam safety may have disastrous consequences. The focus must be on prevention, not reparation.

# The new digital slavery needs constitutional guardrails

**Shashi Tharoor**

Fourth-term Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) for Thiruvananthapuram (Congress party), the Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs and the Sahitya Akademi Award-winning author of 29 books, including, most recently, 'The Sage Who Reimagined Hinduism: The Life, Lessons and Legacy of Sree Narayana Guru'

In his profound encyclical, *Magnifica Humanitas*, Pope Leo XIV grounds the contemporary crisis of technology in elemental theology, reminding humanity that the individual stands at the absolute centre of divine creation. Yet, this sacred human dignity faces an unprecedented challenge. The Holy Father warns that artificial intelligence (AI), left unchecked, threatens to turn the ownership of our personal data into a new form of digital slavery – a subjugation as cruel as human bondage. Because the stakes are so inherently tied to human dignity, the Pontiff insists that the governance of AI cannot rely on vague good intentions, nor can it be left to the private consciences of the engineers who build these systems. Instead, he issues an urgent call for robust, binding law over abstract ethics, independent public oversight over the empty promises of Silicon Valley's modern pharaohs – and a clear requirement that a human being remains accountable whenever an automated system decides who gets a loan, a job, a medical bed, or an education. Pope Leo XIV's core demand is that this new electronic Curia be strictly regulated rather than quietly surrendered to a handful of private tech monopolies whose reach and resources already outstrip most sovereign governments. He even goes so far as to commend the courage to deliberately slow down the development of AI.

**When regulation lags**

However, a fundamental problem remains: AI and morality do not observe the same time. AI is developed at the breakneck speed of the start-up culture, driven by an ethos to move fast and run perpetual beta tests on society in the guise of progress. This velocity is fuelled not just by commercial rivalries, but by relentless mathematical innovation spanning from Silicon Valley to Shenzhen. It presents a deeper hurdle for lawmakers worldwide: parliament can govern what a person does, but it can never forbid a mathematical theorem, a discovery, or an equation from being made. How do lawmakers fulfil the Pope's wishes?

Law in most democracies moves slowly. By the time landmark legislation such as the European Union's Artificial Intelligence Act or the United Kingdom's Online Safety Act were painstakingly debated and passed, the specific technical harms they were built to combat had already mutated, leaving an entire generation to grow up inside unaddressed digital vulnerabilities. Policymakers have historically been behind the innovation curve, and under current paradigms, we will be again.

If legislation is fated to lag behind innovation, the consequences for democratic societies are not merely regulatory; they are existential. Democracy cannot function if citizens cannot distinguish reality from fabrication. At its core, democratic governance relies on a shared epistemic foundation: a collective agreement on basic facts from which public debate, policy, and electoral choices can flow. When that foundation is systematically undermined, the entire democratic project is threatened. Today, AI-generated disinformation and advanced synthetic media ("deepfakes") have advanced to a level of fidelity where the human eye and ear can no longer reliably detect forgery. This is already our reality. Highly convincing audio and video duplications of political leaders are deployed strategically during sensitive electoral cycles to depress voter turnout, fabricate scandals out of thin air, and instantly shatter public trust in legitimate state institutions.

This vulnerability is hyper-charged by algorithmic manipulation. Big Tech platforms operate on business models engineered exclusively to maximise user engagement. Because outrage, fear, and sensationalism generate the highest click-through rates, platform algorithms systematically prioritise and amplify hyper-partisan content, driving radicalisation. By trapping citizens within hyper-customised echo chambers, these systems normalise online hate and accelerate social fragmentation. In doing so, private platforms exert an unprecedented form of unaccountable power, effectively rewriting the rules of the public square to optimise quarterly corporate profits at the expense of social cohesion.

**Democracy's digital vulnerability**

When a society is deeply polarised and stripped of a shared reality, it becomes a soft target for foreign interference. Adversarial nation-states and non-state actors have weaponised these platform vulnerabilities, transforming them into a theatre for sophisticated information warfare. Foreign information manipulation operations are no longer clumsy, bot-driven spam campaigns; they are highly targeted, AI-driven psychological operations designed to covertly exploit pre-existing religious, ethnic, or socioeconomic fault lines within a target nation. By covertly funding, generating, and amplifying divisive narratives, hostile foreign actors can destabilise a democracy from within, turning its own citizens against one another. These coordinated campaigns represent nothing less than a direct, strategic threat to democratic sovereignty itself. As the world's largest democracy and a global technology hub, India stands at the absolute epicentre of this crisis. In an environment where digital adoption outpaces structural digital literacy, the weaponisation of synthetic media and algorithmic polarisation poses a unique threat to India's pluralistic society.

If traditional, reactive legislation is doomed to always trail behind mathematical innovation, India cannot rely on standard, backward-looking regulatory frameworks. Instead, an enduring law and policy framework for India must be anchored in five foundational pillars that operate concurrently.

First, AI governance must adopt a strictly rights-based framework that prioritises individual human dignity and digital autonomy, ensuring citizens possess unalienable rights over their personal data, strict consent protocols, and clear protections against algorithmic discrimination in critical sectors such as employment, credit, and health care. Second, platforms must be subjected to genuine democratic accountability; large technology firms can no longer hide behind absolute safe-harbour immunities while their algorithms profit from the viral spread of destabilising disinformation. They must be legally compelled to introduce structural transparency, allowing independent audits of their recommendation engines and forcing them to accept systemic liability for algorithmic amplification that results in real-world violence.

Third, even as these frameworks are constructed, free speech protections must remain fully intact. The power to define and combat disinformation must never devolve into a tool for state-sponsored censorship or the silencing of political dissent. The focus of regulation must remain strictly on structural platform mechanics, such as automated bot networks and deepfake originators, rather than the heavy-handed policing of individual ideological speech.

Fourth, because technical fixes are entirely insufficient without building cognitive resilience within the populace, India must launch a massive, state-backed educational initiative focused on media literacy and digital citizenship. This curriculum must be integrated across schools, universities, and rural community centres to train citizens to critically evaluate digital sources and identify emotional manipulation tactics. Finally, to defend national sovereignty, India must establish sophisticated, cross-sector early-warning systems capable of detecting coordinated misinformation operations in real-time. By leveraging advanced detection tools and fostering deep collaboration between state security apparatuses, independent fact-checking networks, and ethical hackers, the nation can identify and neutralise foreign information warfare campaigns before they achieve viral velocity.

**A constitutional imperative**

Ultimately, the lesson of our era is clear: AI governance cannot remain merely regulatory or technical. It is a profound mistake to treat the manipulation of the information ecosystem as a series of isolated technical glitches to be patched with minor corporate updates or narrow statutory tweaks. Because these technologies possess the unique capability to distort truth, polarise societies, and erode the sovereign choice of voters, AI governance must rise to the level of a constitutional imperative. The right to an unmanipulated information ecosystem, where reality can be clearly distinguished from corporate or state fabrication, must be viewed as an indispensable extension of the fundamental right to life, liberty, and free expression.

> Unchecked AI threatens democracy, demanding constitutional safeguards beyond conventional regulation

# July opens the biggest chapter in India-U.K. trade ties

**Harjinder Kang**

His Majesty's Trade Commissioner for South Asia and the British Deputy High Commissioner for western India

Trade deals are important for accelerating prosperity but not every deal is a game changer. One that drives shared growth across key sectors, unlocks opportunity for businesses of all sizes, and pushes the envelope for bilateral trade qualifies to achieve that tag. And so, it is no surprise to see businesses and trade associations using the term in relation to the United Kingdom-India Free Trade Agreement (FTA) which is formally known as Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA). India remains the fastest-growing economy in the G-20 and it is on track to become the world's third-largest economy within the next five years. Complementing this the U.K. remains one of the top global destinations for investment and was the third fastest-growing economy in the G-7 in 2025. Securing preferential access to each other's market is not an abstract diplomatic win; it is an economic advantage that will deliver significant returns in both countries over time. This FTA is forecast to boost Indian GDP by £5.1 billion, the U.K.'s GDP by £4.8 billion and increase bilateral trade by £25.5 billion every year in the long run.

Bilateral trade was already worth £48 billion a year in 2025. From July 15, it will be cheaper, quicker, and easier for businesses to trade across both countries. Even before this deal came into force, we have seen the creation of thousands of new jobs on both sides and that is showing no signs of slowing down, as the countdown to entry into force closes and a new era of growth between the two nations begins. We should all be excited to see what the two countries and businesses on both sides can achieve in the years ahead. These are the hallmarks of a historic deal; but it is not just about the numbers.

**A story of scale and depth**

From day one, both sides agreed that this deal must be broad, deep, and a driving force that brings long-term growth for both countries. Nearly three years of intensive negotiations preceded this deal and there is no doubt that the agreement reached is the most economically significant trade deal that the U.K. has done since leaving the European Union; it is also one of the most comprehensive trade deals that India has ever done. In short it is a win-win for businesses and consumers and for both economies. To give readers just a flavour of the far-reaching benefits – 99% of U.K. tariff lines will be duty-free for Indian products and India will remove or reduce tariffs on 90% of its tariff lines for U.K. products.

For India, this could support jobs in labour-intensive sectors such as textiles, leather, jewellery and, equally, it will boost exports in services such as IT and finance by a large margin.

Similarly, tariff duties on U.K. exports to India are estimated to fall by around £400 million when the deal comes into effect, and further to £900 million in later phases. Critical industries such as aerospace, automotives, medical devices, and whiskies will all benefit significantly, adding billions to the U.K. economy. This is transformational and it is also just the beginning.

**Benefits beyond Mumbai and London**

One of the most persistent criticisms of trade policy is that the gains created are only concentrated in a few places. We have ensured that this deal benefits all aspects of the local economy beyond the major cities in both countries. Several unprecedented and dedicated provisions across high-growth and high-value sectors from each side are agreed in a deal spanning 30 chapters. In practical terms, that means manufacturers, innovators, supply chain businesses, and service exporters – often based far away from the major cities – can compete more effectively with cheaper imports and fewer barriers. For instance, a textile manufacturer from Indore, Madhya Pradesh, will now be able to trade more efficiently into the U.K. just like an auto-parts manufacturer from Birmingham will be able to trade more cost effectively into India.

Modern trade goes beyond just tariffs and that is why this agreement's provisions on customs, digital trade, and services are central to its exceptional standard. Improved customs provisions will help goods reach markets faster – particularly valuable for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that cannot afford excessive red tape. On services, where the U.K. is globally renowned, the agreement locks in market access across key sectors, providing the predictability that U.K. businesses need to expand in India and vice versa. The deal also includes India's first-ever standalone chapters on anti-corruption, gender, and development – and one of the most comprehensive labour and environmental commitments that India has ever made in a trade deal. But it is not just about access; it is also about securing appropriate protections for domestic producers, which is what this deal does so well.

For instance, India maintains protections for dairy products and edible oils, while the U.K. shields sugar, milled rice, pork, chicken, and eggs. In an era where trade agreements are judged not only on growth but also on sustainability and fairness, this deal shows how it is done.

**Making the deal count**

It is clear that this landmark deal combines measurable economic gains, deep market access in the sectors of the future, practical trade facilitation, strong domestic protections, and the first-of-their-kind values chapters. It sets a template for what modern trade agreements should look like: pro-growth, pro-worker, pro-innovation – a gold standard for trade deals.

As we close in on entry into force, the task is clear: let us maximise it. Businesses from both countries should champion exports, explore procurement opportunities, map supply chains against new rules of origin, and move quickly because in trade, first-mover advantage is real, and it rarely comes twice.

> The U.K.-India Free Trade Agreement, the 'gold standard of modern trade deals', comes into force on July 15

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

**Ayodhya fund case**

Reports of alleged irregularities in the handling of funds raised for the Ram temple in Ayodhya demand urgent public scrutiny (Front page, June 27). Thousands of donors across the country contributed in good faith to a cause presented as both religious and civic. Transparency and accountability are non-negotiable when public contributions are involved. A shrine built on collective faith deserves an administrative framework beyond reproach. The authorities must thoroughly investigate these allegations and take swift corrective action to restore public confidence.

**Kshirasagara Balaji Rao,**
Hyderabad

Temple fund scandals are seldom the work of a few dishonest individuals alone. They are usually a combination of omission and commission: systemic loopholes are either deliberately created or conveniently left unattended. Cash-intensive institutions demand the highest standards of transparency, independent audits, digital accounting, CCTV-backed custody chains, and clear segregation of responsibilities. When these safeguards fail, faith itself becomes collateral damage. The lesson is that sacred institutions must be governed by systems so robust that temptation finds no opportunity and dishonesty no refuge.

**R. Narayanan,**
Navi Mumbai

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

# How schools can tackle adolescent malnutrition

**SubbaRao M. Gavaravarapu**

Scientist G at the ICMR-National Institute of Nutrition and leads the Let'sFixOurFood Initiative

**Bharati Kulkarni**

Director, ICMR-National Institute of Nutrition

As schools across the country reopened after summer vacation, classrooms were filled once again with the energy, aspirations and anxieties of millions of adolescents. Yet hidden behind their growing ambitions lies a silent public health emergency – adolescent malnutrition. The recently released NFHS-6 (2023-24) findings are stark. Obesity among women aged 15-49 years has risen from 24% to 30.7%, and among men from 22.9% to 27.3%. High blood sugar among men aged 15 and above jumped from 15.6% to 20.9%, and among women from 13.5% to 17.8%. What is most alarming is that lifestyle changes once associated with cities and affluent communities such as sedentary behaviour, processed diets, stress and rising obesity, are now affecting rural populations too. India faces a double burden: undernutrition among children and surging obesity among adults, with obesity driving diabetes, heart disease and stroke. These crises do not begin in adulthood. Their roots lie in adolescence, making schools the most critical setting for prevention.

**Addressing diets differently**

Schools must recognise that malnutrition is no longer only about thinness. India is witnessing the 'thin-fat' phenotype –children who appear lean yet carry dangerous metabolic risk. According to the Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey (CNNS, 2019), 27.4% of Indian adolescents are stunted. At the same time, obesity is rising, particularly among the urban youth. More strikingly, 35% of children under five are stunted yet carry adult-level triglycerides, which is like a metabolic time bomb associated with adult-onset diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Preventing these diseases must begin in school, not in hospitals decades later.

Studies on Delhi school adolescents confirmed that the consumption of milk and dairy products, green leafy vegetables and fruits is lower than what is recommended. Far too many children consume cereal-heavy diets while proteins and protective foods remain woefully inadequate. Schools can address this through improved midday meals, healthier canteens and food demonstrations that teach students how to build balanced plates. The Dietary Guidelines for Indians 2024 recommend that half the plate by volume should consist of fruits and vegetables. Yet research confirms that sedentary and screen-heavy behaviours are inversely associated with daily fruit and vegetable intake – a dangerous compounding effect. School gardens, fruit breaks, and local seasonal produce can normalise healthier eating habits.

**Addressing sugar and UPFs**

Moreover, the bitter truth about sugar has to be revealed. Sugary drinks, High fat sugar and salt (HFSS) foods, and Ultra-Processed Foods (UPFs) are rapidly replacing traditional foods. Studies highlight alarming trends in free sugar and UPF consumption among Indian adolescents. A recent World Health Organization study has revealed that UPF consumption in India has been surging at more than 13.7% year-after-year. The bitter truth is that the excess sugar consumed today becomes a metabolic risk tomorrow. Schools must actively discourage sugary beverages and display sugar boards showing hidden sugar content. Reinforcement, not one-time campaigns, converts knowledge into practice.

Physical inactivity must be treated as seriously as poor diet. Schools should guarantee structured physical activity and sports as core educational components, not optional extras. This is especially urgent as urban lifestyle habits such as reduced movement, changing diets, and rising obesity are now affecting rural communities too, making inactivity a nationwide epidemic, not only city schools' problem.

> Schools are not merely educational institutions; they have the potential to be powerful public health promoting institutions

Thus, among the most common risk factors for non-communicable diseases in children and adolescents are unhealthy diets and insufficient physical activity. The rapid rise of adolescent obesity increases the risk of early-onset Type 2 diabetes, hypertension and heart disease, and will lead to substantially greater healthcare spending. UPF-free school zones must become a national movement backed by consistent policy.

**Schools advancing public health**

It is here that the Let's Fix Our Food (LFOF) initiative offers a compelling direction. Led by the Indian Council of Medical Research-National Institute of Nutrition (ICMR-NIN), the LFOF consortium is a multi-stakeholder initiative working to create healthier food environments for adolescents by advancing evidence-based policy, empowering youth through nutrition literacy, and campaigning for regulatory frameworks. Its outputs include recommendations for regulating HFSS food advertising, taxation on unhealthy beverages, a model school nutrition curriculum and a food label reading kit.

A 2025 *Lancet* study projected that 21.8 crore men and 23.1 crore women in India will be overweight by 2050, with the steepest rise expected among adolescents and young adults aged 15-24 years.

Schools must move beyond textbook nutrition education and adopt skill-based approaches such as reading food labels, recognising portion sizes, understanding marketing tactics, and basic cooking. Schools are not merely educational institutions; they have the potential to be powerful public health promoting institutions. School-based interventions in India have demonstrated measurable improvements in dietary behaviour and reductions in sugary beverage consumption. A child protected from unhealthy diets today is far less likely to become a patient tomorrow.

# The politics around custodial deaths

## The Opposition in Andhra Pradesh is attacking the government on its excesses

STATE OF PLAY

**Sumit Bhattacharjee**

The recent alleged custodial death of a person at the Krishnalanka police station in Vijayawada in the NTR district of Andhra Pradesh is turning out to be a major political issue.

Gade Sai Krishna, who, according to the police, has a criminal history, was picked up by the Circle Inspector of Krishnalanka police station, S.S.V.V. Nagaraju, on May 9 from his residence in Markapuram for questioning in connection with some old cases. He has been missing since then. G. Vijaya Lakshmi, mother of Sai Krishna, after making repeated rounds to the police station to inquire about the whereabouts of her son, filed a *habeas corpus* petition in the Andhra Pradesh High Court on June 2. Based on the petition, the court ordered the NTR Police Commissionerate to produce Sai Krishna by June 15. Upon failing to meet the deadline, the High Court further directed the police to produce him on June 29.

In the meantime, voices of protest grew louder and the Opposition parties, including the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) and the Congress, left no stone unturned in blaming the administration and the government. They shaped the narrative as one of custodial torture and death, which, they claimed, was being hushed up by the police.

Ever since the incident started gaining prominence, former Chief Minister and YSRCP president Jagan Mohan Reddy has sought to highlight, what he describes as, police excesses under the ruling party and has even gone to the extent of accusing the government of "Red Book" governance. It may be recalled that during the run-up to the 2024 elections, the present IT Minister Nara Lokesh had spoken of a "Red Book," indicating that he had noted down incidents and the names of people who had reportedly committed excesses during the YSRCP rule and that, once in power, he would deal with them suitably.

**Same playbook?**

Not long ago, during the 2024 election campaign, a similar murder case had become the Achilles' heel of then Chief Minister Jagan Reddy. His own Member of Legislative Council (MLC), Ananta Satya Udaya Bhaskar, popularly known as Ananta Babu, was involved in the murder of his driver, Subrahmanyam.

Chandrababu Naidu, then in the Opposition, and Jana Sena Party (JSP) leader Pawan Kalyan had turned the issue into a major political talking point during their election campaign. As the deceased man was Dalit, they targeted Mr. Reddy and his party leaders by accusing them of being biased against the Dalit community. The issue became a major political plank for the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in the run-up to the 2024 election campaign.

While this incident may not have been the tipping point for Mr. Reddy's rout in the elections, it did play a role and may have contributed to the polarisation of Dalit voters, particularly in the Godavari districts, where the community has a significant vote share.

While Ananta Babu's case was turned into a caste-based political narrative, Sai Krishna's case may not evolve into one. Both the accused and the victim belong to the same community, and there is no apparent political angle to it, though the Opposition is trying its best to give it a political twist. What exactly happened to Sai Krishna is still not known, as neither his whereabouts nor his body (if he is dead) has been found.

In the meantime, a seasoned Mr. Naidu has taken stock of the situation and appears to be dealing with it firmly. The Chief Minister inquired into the incident in detail and directed DGP Harish Kumar Gupta to suspend Mr. Nagaraju. Subsequently, the police registered a murder case against the CI, and he was taken into custody on June 23.

Further, the Government constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to investigate the alleged illegal detention, custodial death, and destruction of evidence in Sai Krishna's case. Mr. Naidu also met the mother of the missing youth and assured her of a transparent investigation.

The challenge before the ruling alliance is to prevent the controversy from turning into a larger political debate. While the authorities concerned have so far taken the necessary action and set the course of the narrative, much depends on fast-tracking the investigation and bringing it to a logical conclusion before the Opposition can transform it into a political rallying point in the days ahead.

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# Will a survey error threaten the credibility of govt. schools?

## The finding that government schools are charging fees in rural areas is at odds with all existing government policy and needs to be properly investigated

DATA POINT

**Anish Gupta**
**Gaurav**
**Deepti Kushwaha**

In a written question in the Rajya Sabha earlier this year, an MP highlighted that 27% of students in government schools are paying fees – including admission, tuition, examination and development charges – and sought a response from the Ministry of Education. The MP's claim was based on the findings of the Comprehensive Modular Survey: Education (CMS-E), conducted by the National Statistics Office as part of the 80th round of the National Sample Survey (NSS) from April-June 2025 **(Charts 1 and 2)**.

The finding that a sizeable share of students, even in government schools, paid fees surprised many, since it could suggest that those schools were illegally charging fees, raising concerns over the implementation of the Right to Education (RTE) Act, which mandates free education for all children up to age 14. The survey covered 52,085 households, including 28,401 in rural areas.

This article examines whether government schools are indeed charging such fees, or whether the findings reflect issues related to data collection, compilation or both.

To identify the source of the problem, the average course fees paid by students in rural and urban areas were compared using education expenditure data for students in Classes 1 to 8, who are covered under the RTE Act. For the analysis, the course fees reported in the survey – which include admission fees, tuition fees, examination fees, development fees and other compulsory payments – were classified into four categories: no fees, ₹1-₹5,000, ₹5,001-₹10,000 and above ₹10,000.

The analysis showed that, among those reporting course fees above ₹10,000, the average course fee paid by students in government schools in rural areas was higher than that paid by their counterparts in private schools.

Second, the data across all four course-fee categories showed that the percentage difference in average total educational expenditure between students in government and private schools ranged from –50.4% to +4.0% in rural areas and from –57.2% to +34.3% in urban areas **(Table 1)**. Both points challenge the widely held perception that students in government schools incur substantially lower educational expenses than those in private schools.

Third, several States reported unusually low proportions of students with no course fees in government schools. In rural areas, the share of such students is particularly low – in Ladakh (0%), Tripura (2.6%), West Bengal (43%) and Kerala (53%).

Fourth, the percentage of students with no course fees in government schools is substantially lower in rural areas than in urban areas. For instance, in Himachal Pradesh this was 55.6% and 78.3% respectively, with similar patterns observed in six other States, which is difficult to reconcile with any existing government policy.

**Possible problems**

A commonly cited explanation for such discrepancies is data-collection error.

First, even when survey investigators understand the intended meaning of the questions, they may struggle to communicate it to respondents in the same context in which they were designed. For example, a key question on educational expenditure in this survey is Question 9(i) in Block 5. It asks about "course fees", which include admission fees, tuition fees, examination fees, development fees and other compulsory payments. Interestingly, in common usage, the term "tuition fees" is often understood to mean fees paid for private coaching or supplementary education.

However, in school education, "tuition fees" refers to payments made to schools for teachers' salaries and basic academic resources. While the survey intends to capture this, respondents may have reported spending on private coaching as tuition fees.

Second, information was collected using Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI), under which responses are recorded directly on tablets. While this approach may facilitate faster processing, it also introduces certain limitations. For example, in earlier paper-based NSS surveys, enumerators could leave questions blank when respondents gave no answer. With CAPI, non-response is generally not permitted, and enumerators must enter a value before proceeding. Previous surveys suggest that non-response, resulting in missing observations, was not uncommon and in the NSS 75th Round (2017), it was 39.4%. However, there were no missing observations in 80th Round of survey, which used CAPI.

This raises the possibility that some course-fee values may have been entered merely to proceed to the next question. Moreover, even minor modifications may disrupt the process, and features such as autocorrect can sometimes distort recorded responses. Even the World Bank has noted that CAPI systems can be highly rigid.

If a large number of students do not have access to free education, the issue warrants serious scrutiny. Yet it is surprising that, despite the matter being raised in Parliament, neither the Central government nor any State government has come forward to investigate.

Conversely, if the findings result from flaws in data collection and validation, as the evidence above suggests, those responsible must be held accountable. Such errors not only distort policy research but also tarnish the reputation of government schools and teachers.

## Misleading data?

The data for the charts were sourced from the NSS 80th round, the Comprehensive Modular Survey: Education (CMS:E), 2025

Students arrive at a government high school in Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh after the summer vacation on June 12. G.N. RAO.

**Chart 1:** The share of students who reported expenditure on course fees by type of school

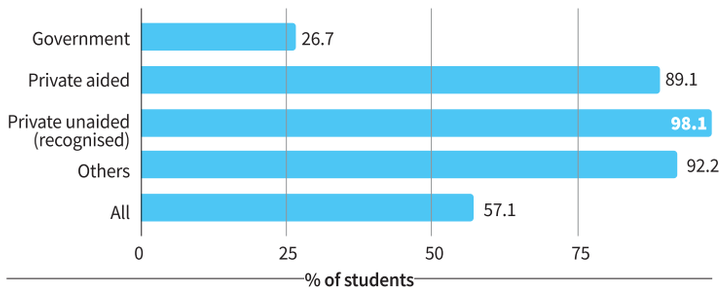


**Chart 2:** The share of students who reported expenditure on course fees in government schools in rural and urban areas. Figures in %

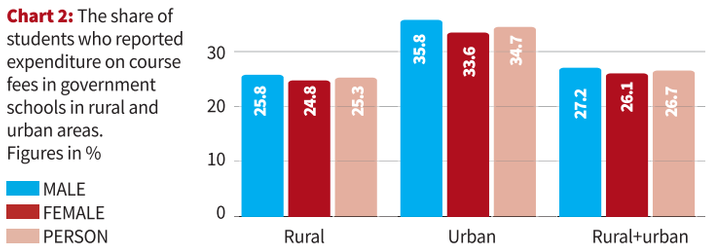


**Table 1:** Average total expenditure by course fee categories (in ₹)

| Course Fee category | School type | Average exp on course fee | | Average total expenditure | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Rural | Urban | Rural | Urban |
| 0 | Government | 0 | 0 | 1,824 | 2,470 |
| | Private (aided & unaided) | 0 | 0 | 3,677 | 5,767 |
| 1-5000 | Government | 736 | 1,009 | 3,920 | 5,255 |
| | Private (aided & unaided) | 2,621 | 2,800 | 7,866 | 8,200 |
| 5001-10000 | Government | 6,917 | 6,827 | 15,839 | 19,956 |
| | Private (aided & unaided) | 7,595 | 7,837 | 15,236 | 14,857 |
| Above 10000 | Government | 24,000 | 19,443 | 31,850 | 30,856 |
| | Private (aided & unaided) | 22,608 | 28,458 | 35,742 | 41,452 |

Based on authors' calculations

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FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 29, 1976

## Seychelles attains Independence today

Victoria (Seychelles), June 28: "The String of Pearls", a group of 92 islands of Seychelles in the western Indian Ocean will take its rightful place in the comity of nations when it attains independence to-morrow after centuries of French and British Colonial domination.

A new chapter will unfold in the lives of 68,000 Seychellois people when the President, Mr. James R. Mancham, will raise the flag of the world's youngest nation at a colourful ceremony in Victoria, marking yet another great victory for a member of the third world.

Delegations from all parts of the world have gathered in picturesque Victoria, capital of Seychelles, to represent their respective nations on this historic occasion.

India is represented by the Minister of State for Tourism and Civil Aviation, Mr. Surendra Pal Singh, and the Indian High Commissioner to Kenya, Air Chief Marshal Arjan Singh.

The Seychelles archipelago has a land area of only 279 sq.km but stretches across 3,88,000 sq. km. The climate in the islands, despite their proximity to the equator, is equable.

Although the islands were probably known to seafarers as early as 916, they remained uninhabited for several centuries. The establishment of the first French colony in 1770 brought Seychelles in the path of Anglo-French rivalry in the Indian Ocean. After no fewer than seven capitulations to the British, the period of French rule finally ended in 1814 when Seychelles became a dependency of the British colony of Mauritius.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 29, 1926

## Raw cotton in the Madras presidency

The receipts of loose cotton at presses and spinning mills in the Madras Presidency from 30th January to 18th June 1926 amounted to 250,446 bales of 400 lb lint against an estimate of 551,400 bales of the total crop of 1925-26. The receipts in the corresponding period of the previous year were 311,321 bales. 30,642 bales mainly of pressed cotton were received at spinning mills and 123,701 bales were exported by sea, while 11,730 bales were imported by sea from Karachi and Bombay.

## From Page One

### 'Shared responsibility must for Indian Ocean'

"The Global South, and especially the island nations, are the most impacted by climate change. Its effects are already visible on our coastlines, in the marine ecosystems, in weather patterns, and in our communities," he said.

"We will continue to explore new opportunities for the industries of both our countries. We will also work towards enhancing connectivity between India and the Seychelles. This will not only boost our bilateral trade but also strengthen our ties with East Africa and the Indian Ocean region," he said.

The Prime Minister, who is on a three-day visit to the archipelagic nation, attended the golden jubilee celebrations of the National Day of Seychelles as the Guest of Honour.

Earlier in the day, at a special ceremony, Mr. Modi was also conferred with 'Guardian of the Blue Horizon' by Mr. Herminie for his "green leadership and efforts towards advancing the interests of developing countries and his longstanding commitment towards promoting the blue economy".

The outcomes after the talks on Sunday included an extradition treaty, an agreement on cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space, an agreement to advance UPI-based digital payments in the Seychelles, an umbrella line of credit agreement with the Export-Import Bank of India and an agreement for preliminary preparations for a new the Seychelles National Hospital, according to the Ministry of External Affairs.

### Ayodhya row: houses of 8 accused searched

"The Chief Minister who was setting a world record in visiting Ayodhya still did not get this information even after going there. That is why the proverb was made – darkness under the lamp. How many times has he gone there, and yet he has no news of this. What are the State intelligence agencies and police force doing? This shows complete lack of competence," said Mr. Yadav.

In response, Mr. Adityanath said the SP government fired upon Ram Bhakts. "Those who speak of making Ayodhya a religious city should first look at their own history. The SP government that had Ram devotees fired upon, opposed the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, stopped Shri Krishna Janmashtami celebrations, and even banned the Kanwar Yatra is today talking about making Ayodhya a religious city," he said in Hathras.

### DGS stands by removal of curbs on Indian ships

These vessels are LPG carrier *BW Loyalty*, container ships *CMA CGM Manaus* and *CMA CGM Diamond*, and *Volvox* dredger.

While removing restrictions, the DGS has asked Masters of vessels operating in or transiting through the Gulf region, including the Strait of Hormuz and adjoining waters, to maintain heightened security vigilance, closely monitoring navigational warnings and other warnings or instructions received from security agencies. Indian-flagged vessels have been advised to coordinate with the United Kingdom Marine Trade Operations and Maritime Information Cooperation Centre and keep the Indian Navy, missions in respective countries, as well as the DGS updated on transit.

Calling the DGS notification a mature one, Anil Devli, CEO of Indian National Shipowners Association, said every shipowner would be vigilant and would only proceed after doing a total risk assessment.

IMO Secretary-General Arsenio Dominguez, said that shipowners had to make their own risk assessment before transiting either of the two routes currently available.

### Elephant death puts focus on 'killing zone'

The study estimated that 744 wild elephants died between April 2019 and March 2025 and human-induced causes accounted for 77 deaths while Munnar and Ranni areas accounted for "higher incidence of electrocution." The primary elephant mortality zones in the State also included the Wayanad landscape, Nilambur region and Periyar-Ranni-Konni landscape.

The death of a pregnant wild elephant in the Silent Valley forest in 2020, also a suspected case of the animal getting injured after feeding on fruit stuffed with firecrackers, had stirred widespread outrage. The animal, which was unable to eat after suffering injuries to its mouth, had stayed in a river in an apparent effort to ease pain.

The Forest Department has been asked to probe the latest incident, said Shibu Baby John, State Forest Minister.

Ironically, the incident occurred just a day after senior forest officials met at Thattekad to discuss the "Management Effectiveness Evaluation (MEE) for elephant reserves for the 2026-27 cycle."

The post-mortem report indicated the cause of death as septicaemia caused by injuries. The factors that led to the incident are being looked into, said P. Pugazhendi, Chief Wildlife Warden, Kerala.

# CJP stir: Wangchuk goes on fast at Jantar Mantar

The activist starts strike calling for Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation; says he cannot remain silent when young people raised concerns over the education system; AISA joins hunger strike

**Ashna Butani**
NEW DELHI

Activist Sonam Wangchuk having a word with CJP founder Abhijit Dipke at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on Sunday, demanding the resignation of Dharmendra Pradhan. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Environmentalist and educator Sonam Wangchuk began a hunger strike on Sunday afternoon at the Jantar Mantar here, where the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) has been protesting since June 20, demanding the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan for multiple irregularities in the examination system.

Prior to the hunger strike, CJP founder Abhijeet Dipke had said on social media platform X that he had visited Rajghat with Mr. Wangchuk to pay tribute to Mahatma Gandhi. Soon after that, Mr. Wangchuk began his hunger strike, seeking justice for students and calling for the Minister's resignation.

**'Water cut off'**

The Delhi Police had cut off the water and sanitation facilities at Jantar Mantar after Mr. Wangchuk announced his strike, Mr. Dipke alleged.

The police termed the allegation "falsehoods and misinformation". The Deputy Commissioner of Police, New Delhi said online that the Delhi Police, being a law enforcement agency, had no role to play in providing these facilities.

Explaining his decision to join the protest, Mr. Wangchuk said education had been close to his heart for the last 40 years and that he could not remain silent when young people raised concerns over the education system.

"I have been forced to sit here, I am not doing this happily. I am sitting on a fast in support of both issues. Many people ask me, you were doing a movement in Ladakh, why are you with CJP now. Education, which is the issue here, has been close to my heart for the last 40 years, since I was a student," he said. Many others, including farm leaders, joined the protest on Sunday. At least six student activists have joined Mr. Wangchuk in the hunger strike, demanding Mr. Pradhan's resignation.

"I am not alone. I have been told that some youth are also going on hunger strike. Wherever you are, I salute you," he said. The All India Students' Association (AISA), which previously expressed solidarity with the CJP's protest, on Sunday said six students associated with the AISA have decided to go on the hunger strike, too.

"Students have called for the strike in complete solidarity with the call by Sonam Wangchuk, and will fight shoulder to shoulder in the struggle for Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation, repeal of NEP (National Education Policy) 2020, and scrapping of the National Testing Agency," the AISA said in a statement.

*(With PTI inputs)*

# Indian diplomats hold talks with officials of Chinese news agency

**Press Trust of India**
BEIJING

Shweta Singh with Wang Jianxin at *Xinhua* News Agency, in Beijing, China. PTI

Officials of the Indian Embassy in Beijing have met representatives of China's state-run Xinhua news agency amid ongoing efforts between the two countries to normalise relations.

The meeting took place between Shweta Singh, Minister of the Embassy, and Wang Jianxin, Deputy Director-General of the Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Department of Xinhua.

"On 24 June 2026, Embassy officials met representatives of Xinhua News Agency at its headquarters in Beijing and exchanged views on issues of mutual interest," the Indian Embassy said in a post on X, along with a photo on Sunday, without providing details.

**Enhancing engagement**

Indian officials described the meeting as part of efforts to enhance engagement with Chinese media.

Both countries are currently in the process of normalising relations post the Eastern Ladakh conflict in 2020, which had frozen their ties.

Currently, both countries have resumed Kailash-Manasarovar Yatra, visas and flights. China, for its part, has been calling for restoration of visas for its journalists.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, in his meeting with National Security Adviser Ajit Doval last week in New Delhi, called for both countries to promote exchanges in various fields, including media.

Mr. Wang was in New Delhi to attend the BRICS NSA meeting.

In April 2023, China froze the visas of two Beijing-based Indian journalists while they were on leave in India, alleging that Chinese scribes were not receiving visas.

Later, Beijing also declined to renew the visa for one more Indian journalist while permitting the PTI bureau to continue.

Recently, China has given a journalist visa to *The Hindu* Correspondent to work from Beijing.

# Ram Temple graft case concerns assets of a 'juristic person'

NEWS ANALYSIS

**Krishnadas Rajagopal**
NEW DELHI

The embezzlement case is based on the alleged misappropriation of devotees' donations at the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. ANI

The Ram Temple embezzlement case raises serious allegations of misappropriation of cash and valuables donated by devotees as an "expression of piety" to a Hindu deity, uniquely considered a 'juristic person' who is a minor in law.

Series of judicial decisions, right from the days of the Privy Council to Supreme Court's judgments in the Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple and the Ramjanmabhoomi Temple cases, hold the deity as a legal entity capable of holding property.

The Padmanabhaswamy Temple case saw the Supreme Court hold that donations given by worshippers belong strictly to the deity. By detailing Maharaja Marthanda Varma's act of dedication of his kingdom to the deity, the 2020 judgment provided an insight into the acceptance of the deity as a separate entity as far back as in the 18th century.

The importance of the act of donating to a deity as an expression of Hindu piety was discussed by the Privy Council in *Vidya Varuthi Thirtha Swamigal v. Balusami Ayyar and Others*, a case law which dates back to 1921. "Hindu piety finds expression in gifts to idols and images consecrated and installed in temples," the judgment said.

It noted that these gifts or donations by devotees were made to the deities *eo nomine* (in the name of the deity itself), providing proof that a deity was a juristic entity vested with the capacity of receiving gifts and holding property.

The courts have, however, recognised that a dedicated property vests in the idol only in an "ideal sense". The physical possession and management of that property must be taken over by a "human agency". But this person or group of individuals have the status of a mere 'manager'. The ownership of a dedicated property vests entirely with the deity.

This legal principle was reinforced by Justice B. K. Mukherjea in his lead judgment in *Angurbala Mullick versus Debabrata Mullick* in 1951. "In a Hindu religious endowment, the entire ownership of the dedicated property is transferred to the deity or the institution itself as a juristic person, and the shebait or mahant is a mere manager."

**Position of a minor**

The Supreme Court in *Bishwanath and Others v. Sri Thakur Radhaballabhji* had declared a deity to be in the legal position of and requiring the protection afforded to a 'minor'. "An idol is in the position of a minor. When a person representing it leaves it in the lurch, a person interested in the worship of the idol can certainly be clothed with an ad hoc power of representation to protect its interest," the court held in the 1967 judgment.

The Constitution Bench in the Ram Janmabhumi Temple case described a Hindu idol as the "material embodiment of a testator's pious purpose".

Even the Income Tax law recognises a deity as a legal person and considers it a material manifestation of the devotee's belief and prayers. The 1969 case law of *Yogendra Nath Naskar versus Commissioner Of Income-Tax, Calcutta*, has termed a Hindu deity as an 'individual' to be treated as a unit of assessment under the Income Tax Act.

"Neither God nor any supernatural being could be a person in law. But so far as the deity stands as the representative and symbol of the particular purpose which is indicated by the donor, it can figure as a legal person and in that capacity alone the dedicated property vests in it," the top court had held.

# After 15 years, over 250 CRPF officers get maiden promotion

**Press Trust of India**
NEW DELHI

More than 250 officers of the country's largest paramilitary Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) finally received their first career promotion after a wait of 15 years, officials said on Sunday.

Their much-delayed elevation came about after prolonged litigation and conditional resolution of pending service issues related to seniority and vacancies.

On June 26, the CRPF headquarters issued orders promoting 263 Assistant Commandant-rank (AC) officers to Deputy Commandant (DC). The AC rank is the entry-level officer post in the Central forces.

"The development is significant because it will act as a morale booster for the officers who waited 14 to 15 years for their first promotion, which should ideally have come in five years," a senior CRPF officer said.

**SC order**

A Supreme Court order issued on April 16 clarified the position in this context.

The CRPF headquarters followed up with the Union Home Ministry, leading to the issuance of the much-delayed order, the officer said.

He said the newly promoted officers would, however, continue to serve in their current positions because their posting orders could not be issued immediately due to "operational and administrative constraints".

A second officer said these orders would further impact lower-rank personnel, as promotions to the AC rank would now occur from the Inspector rank, creating a ripple effect for other subordinate ranks.

# Indian Army contingent to participate in Seychelles' 50th National Day event

**Saurabh Trivedi**
NEW DELHI

The contingent of 32 personnel from the Assam Regiment is led by Captain Aryan H. Deolekar. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

An Indian Army marching contingent will participate in the 50th National Day celebrations of the Seychelles on Monday, marking the golden jubilee of the island nation's Independence.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will attend the event as the guest of honour, underscoring the close bilateral ties between the two countries.

The Army said the contingent of 32 personnel from the Assam Regiment will be led by Captain Aryan H. Deolekar.

An Indian Navy marching contingent, accompanied by a military band, will take part in the ceremonial parade, reflecting the strong and enduring defence partnership between India and the Seychelles.

The two nations share long-standing historical ties that have grown into a robust strategic partnership spanning defence cooperation, development assistance, maritime security, culture, and trade, it added.

The participation of Indian armed forces personnel in the celebrations is seen as a symbol of mutual trust, military camaraderie, and the shared commitment of both countries to deepen bilateral relations. Such ceremonial engagements also reinforce defence cooperation and highlight India's role as a reliable partner in promoting peace and security in the Indian Ocean region.

Officials said India's participation in the Seychelles' golden jubilee celebrations reaffirmed the special partnership between the two countries and reflected the expanding scope of bilateral engagement.

# Justice P.S. Narasimha to be part of SC Collegium

**Press Trust of India**
NEW DELHI

Justice P.S. Narasimha is set to become a member of the Supreme Court Collegium following Justice J.K. Maheshwari's retirement on Sunday.

Being the fifth senior-most judge, Justice Narasimha will officially be a part of the Collegium until he retires on May 2, 2028.

The Collegium will now comprise Chief Justice Surya Kant, Justice Vikram Nath, Justice B. V. Nagarathna, Justice M. M. Sundresh, and Justice P. S. Narasimha.

Under the Collegium system, which came into existence in 1993 following a Supreme Court judgment, the five top judges of the apex court recommend the appointment, transfer, and elevation of judges to the Supreme Court and the 25 High Courts.

# Mamata loyalists file complaint over the 'misuse' of party name

Mamata faction leader tells police that the rebels' meeting was an exercise aimed at creating confusion and damaging the reputation and credibility of the party; the group seeks permission to observe a Martyrs' Day event in Kolkata on July 21

**Shiv Sahay Singh**
KOLKATA

Trinamool Congress leaders loyal to Mamata Banerjee have filed a police complaint against party rebels led by Ritabrata Banerjee, the Leader of Opposition in the West Bengal Assembly, alleging misuse of the party name and symbol.

The faction has written to the Commissioner of Police, Kolkata, seeking permission to observe Shahid Divas (Martyrs' Day) on July 21 in front of Victoria House in the city's Esplanade area. While the police have not given permission, the group led by Mr. Ritabrata has plans to organise a similar programme.

On behalf of the leaders backing Ms. Banerjee, Trinamool MP Dola Sen filed a complaint with the Kalighat and Newtown police stations in Kolkata. This grouping of leaders is also called the Kalighat camp of the Trinamool.

Kunal Ghosh and Dola Sen of the Mamata faction at the proposed venue for the party's Martyrs' Day rally in Kolkata, on Sunday. ANI

In the complaint letter sent to the officer in-charge of the Kalighat police station, Ms. Sen, one of the national joint secretaries of the Trinamool, alleged that the rebel MLAs Javed Khan and Sandipan Saha had called all the Trinamool councillors from Kolkata for a meeting on Saturday afternoon, claiming to be the general secretaries of the party.

Ms. Sen alleged that such an exercise was aimed at creating confusion among party workers, damaging the reputation and credibility of the party, misleading members into attending an unauthorised meeting and facilitating unlawful activities by misusing the party name.

On June 22, the Trinamool rebels, led by Mr. Ritabrata, had organised a special session of the party at a hotel in Kolkata and set up a national working committee in the presence of several MLAs and former legislators. The rebels removed Mamata Banerjee and Abhishek Banerjee as chairperson and national general secretary of the party.

Both the factions – the Kalighat camp and the rebels – have written to the Election Commission informing it about the newly formed working committee and other organisational changes in the party.

**Ritabrata's reaction**

Commenting on the police complaint, Mr. Ritabrata said, "Anyone can file a complaint. There are laws and the Election Commission in the country. Let's trust in those laws and the Election Commission."

After the Trinamool's defeat in the West Bengal election, several of its MPs and MLAs have rebelled against the leadership. Nearly 65 of the 80 MLAs are supporting a camp led by Mr. Ritabrata.

Regarding the Martyrs' Day event, Ms. Sen told presspersons that Ms. Banerjee would address Trinamool workers on July 21, as she had been doing in the past.

The former Chief Minister has told her close confidants that even if five party workers are present, she will address the gathering. On Sunday, Ms. Sen and party MLA Kunal Ghosh reached the proposed site and took measurements for the construction of a stage.

Martyrs' Day has been the biggest organisational events of the Trinamool Congress.

# Defections part of larger conspiracy; rebel MPs must be disqualified: Uddhav

**Press Trust of India**
PARBHANI

Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray on Sunday demanded the immediate disqualification of the six party MPs who recently defected to the Eknath Shinde-led camp, alleging that their switch was part of a larger political conspiracy.

The Lok Sabha Speaker must uphold the rule of law regarding the defections, the former Maharashtra Chief Minister said at a rally in Parbhani, alleging that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s central leadership was systematically "clipping the wings" of its own State leaders.

The MPs loyal to the Shiv Sena (UBT) had submitted a formal representation to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, seeking an opportunity to present their side, Mr. Thackeray said, noting that party MP Arvind Sawant had cut short an official visit to Kargil after the Speaker had advanced the date of the hearing. "If there is a rule of law in this country, these six MPs should be disqualified. I still believe in the Lok Sabha Speaker because if he does not follow the law, he cannot ask others to follow it. We respect his authority, not his wishes," the Shiv Sena (UBT) leader said.

Uddhav Thackeray

Earlier this week, six rebel Lok Sabha members of the Shiv Sena (UBT) joined the ruling Shiv Sena led by Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde. They had won against candidates of the BJP and Shiv Sena in the 2024 Lok Sabha Election. The Shiv Sena (UBT) won nine Lok Sabha seats in Maharashtra in 2024.

Mr. Thackeray has undertaken a tour of the constituencies represented by the rebel MPs. Sanjay Jadhav, one of the rebel lawmakers, is from Parbhani.

The Sena (UBT) chief alleged that the defections were part of a "bigger political game" he termed "Operation Devendra", aimed at sidelining Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, just as the party had done to other leaders in the past.

Attacking the BJP over the Ram Temple donation issue, Mr. Thackeray accused the saffron party of exploiting the temple for political gain, labelling it the "Babur Janata Party". "Babur demolished the Ram Mandir. A 'Babur Janata Party' has now come to loot the newly constructed temple. What is the difference between them?" he said.

# Congress kicks off units' revamp with new appointments

**The Hindu Bureau**
NEW DELHI

The appointment of Virudhunagar Lok Sabha member B. Manickam Tagore as the new Tamil Nadu Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) president on Saturday was part of a series of organisational changes that the Congress high command was expected to undertake in the immediate future.

B. Manickam Tagore

Besides Tamil Nadu, Kerala will get a new PCC chief as the incumbent, Sunny Joseph, has become a Minister in the State government.

A prominent Scheduled Caste leader and eight-term Lok Sabha member, Kodikunnil Suresh, who has served as a working president of the Kerala PCC twice, is seen as the front-runner for the post.

In the southern States, the Congress no longer has a prominent Scheduled Caste face as a PCC chief following the change of leadership in Tamil Nadu.

**Changes in Punjab**

In Punjab, where the Assembly election is scheduled early next year, the party has appointed three observers to examine the leadership issue, as factionalism has often spilled into the open.

There is also a buzz about a change in leadership in States, including Bihar and Rajasthan, though there is no official word on the matters. All India Congress Committee (AICC) leaders in charge of several States are likely to be changed.

Avinash Pande, the AICC in-charge for Uttar Pradesh, where the Assembly election is scheduled early next year, took to social media to announce that his tenure in the State ended on Saturday.

The Maharashtra AICC in-charge, Ramesh Chennithala, is now Kerala's Home Minister and, therefore, a new in-charge has to be appointed.

Jitender Singh has already resigned as the AICC in-charge of Assam after the party faced its worst defeat in the recent Assembly election. Among the frontal organisations, the Congress Seva Dal has got a new chief, with former Youth Congress president Srinivas B.V. being appointed its chief organiser.

# VB-G RAM G will push workers to starvation: Congress

**Sobhana K. Nair**
NEW DELHI

The Congress said on Sunday that even some BJP-governed States had raised concerns over the financing scheme of the new Viksit Bharat – Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act (VB-G RAM G), which the "vengeful and petty" Modi government bulldozed through Parliament without consultations.

The new scheme requires a majority of the States to bear 40% of the total expenditure.

After a report in *The Hindu* revealed that several State governments, including some governed by the BJP, had raised objections with respect to the new Act, Congress general secretary (communications) Jairam Ramesh, in a post on X, said Union Rural Development Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan's home State of Madhya Pradesh was among those that had raised concerns.

Mr. Ramesh said that the Centre had not carried out any consultations before replacing the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) with the VB-G RAM G Act.

"The Modi government, vengeful and petty as ever, bulldozed the repeal of MGNREGA through Parliament without any thorough consultation with the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Rural Development, State governments, or other relevant stakeholders," he said.

> MGNREGA guaranteed right to work derived from the Constitution. VB-G RAM G will guarantee only centralisation and further financial stress on the States
>
> **JAIRAM RAMESH**
> Congress leader

Mr. Ramesh said concerns were being raised by several States over the design of the new scheme, which is scheduled to be launched on July 1. *The Hindu* reported on Sunday that at least three States, two of them with BJP-led governments – Bihar and Madhya Pradesh – raised concerns over the proposed shift of financial burden on State governments under the new rural employment programme. The new scheme requires a majority of the States to bear 40% of the total expenditure, in contrast to the MGNREGA, under which the Centre bore 100% of the wage bill and the States had to pay only a part of the material bill, which accounted for only 10% of the total budget.

**'Voicing concerns'**

"The Rural Development Minister's own home State is voicing concerns around the Modi government's new pet project," Mr. Ramesh pointed out.

Mr. Chouhan had been Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister for over 16 years.

Contrasting the new employment programme with the MGNREGA, the Congress leader said, "MGNREGA guaranteed right to work derived from the Constitution. VB G RAM G will guarantee only centralisation and further financial stress on States."

**'A conspiracy'**

Congress general secretary Randeep Surjewala, sharing a copy of *The Hindu*'s report on the social media platform X, said replacing the MGNREGA with the VB-G RAM G was a "calculated conspiracy to push rural India and workers toward starvation". "The question is straightforward: If even the 'double-engine' governments can't shoulder this 40% cost burden, how will poor workers get employment on the ground?" he said,

# Govt. launches portal for auditing of rural schemes

**The Hindu Bureau**
NEW DELHI

Ahead of the implementation of the Viksit Bharat – Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) from July 1, Union Rural Development Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan launched a "Rural Internal Audit Portal" during the Rashtriya Gramin Vikas Sammelan here on Sunday.

The Ministry said the AI-enabled portal marked a significant step towards enhancing transparency, accountability, and technology-driven governance. The portal is a unified digital platform for end-to-end management of internal audits covering both risk-based and compliance audits.

The Ministry said the portal had transformed internal audit from a fragmented, paper-intensive, and largely manual exercise into a transparent, technology-enabled, and data-driven management system.

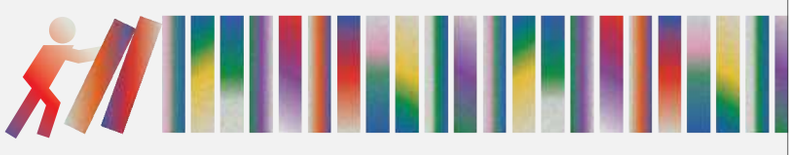
Speaking at the event, Mr. Chouhan said when he was the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, he had noticed irregularities in implementing the erstwhile MGNREGA in many places. He said there were shortcomings such as use of machines for work instead of labourers, errors in muster rolls, and incorrect attendance that led to significant misappropriation of funds.

"We are making certain changes such as increasing the working days of labourers from 100 to 125. No needy labourer will be left without work," he said.

The Union Minister said the revamped scheme would have improved implementation.

THE HINDU GROUP

CELEBRATING THE QUIET DREAMERS WHO DRIVE POWERFUL CHANGE.



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- Social Transformation
- Young Changemaker

# Humayun Kabir booked for making 'threatening remarks'

**Senjuti Sengupta**
KOLKATA

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) unit in Murshidabad has lodged a first information report against the chairperson of the Aam Janata Unnayan Party (AJUP), Humayun Kabir, for allegedly issuing murder threats to a religious community during a rally on Friday.

According to the officials, the Naoda MLA sparked a controversy with his remarks at a rally in the Rejinagar constituency.

"The FIR was lodged by the BJP's youth wing and Ram Sita Sewa Mandir. The FIR was based on a viral video from the rally in which Mr. Kabir was allegedly heard saying [he would] mobilise a religious community against another if they cross the line," said an official from the Behrampur police station.

Mr. Kabir reportedly issued a warning targeting West Bengal Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari, demanding an immediate end to the BJP's political dominance in Murshidabad district.

**Another FIR**

The development comes only a day after another BJP leader in English Bazaar of Malda lodged another first information report against the Aam Janata Unnayan Party leader for allegedly inciting religious communities against each other.

**BEFORE THE NATIONAL COMPANY LAW TRIBUNAL**
**KOCHI BENCH**
**CP(CAA) /4/ KOB/2026**
**IN**
**CA(CAA)/ 03/KOB/ 2026**

**IN THE MATTER OF SECTIONS 230 TO 232 AND OTHER APPLICABLE PROVISIONS OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2013 AND RULES FRAMED THERE UNDER AND IN THE MATTER OF SCHEME OF DEMERGER BETWEEN KALYAN SILKS TRICHUR PRIVATE LIMITED (DEMERGED COMPANY) AND KALYAN SILKS PRIVATE LIMITED (RESULTING COMPANY) AND THEIR RESPECTIVE SHAREHOLDERS AND CREDITORS**

Kalyan Silks Trichur Private Limited, a company incorporated under the provisions of the Companies Act, 1956, having corporate identity number U51311KL2001PTC014624 and its registered office at 4/621/2 Kuriachira P.O., Thrissur - 680 006, Kerala, India. — Petitioner Company No. 1/ Demerging Company

Kalyan Silks Private Limited, a company incorporated under the Companies Act, 2013 having corporate identity number U47820KL2025PTC098581 and its registered office at 25/1371, Kuriachira P O, Thrissur- 680 006, Kerala, India. — Petitioner Company No. 2/ Resulting Company

...collectively referred to as the Petitioner Companies

**NOTICE OF HEARING OF COMPANY SCHEME PETITION**

A Company Scheme Petition under Sections 230 to 232 and other applicable provisions of the Companies Act, 2013, for sanctioning the Scheme of Demerger between Kalyan Silks Trichur Private Limited ("Demerging Company") and Kalyan Silks Private Limited ("Resulting Company") and their respective shareholders and creditors ("Scheme"), was admitted vide Order dated 17 June 2026 by the Hon'ble National Company Law Tribunal, Kochi, (NCLT). The said Company Scheme Petition is fixed for hearing before the Hon'ble NCLT on 28 July 2026.
Any person desirous of supporting or opposing the said Company Scheme Petition should send to the Petitioner Companies' Advocate - Mr. Aswin Gopakumar, at aswin@veritaelegal.com (in soft copy) and / or at Veritae Legal, No. 36/117, 1st Floor, Lisie Hospital Road, Kottecanal Junction, Ernakulam – 682 018, Kerala, India (in hard copy), notice of such intentions, in writing, signed by him/her or his/her Advocate, with his/her full name and address, so as to reach the Petitioner Companies' Advocate not later than seven days before the date fixed for final hearing of the said Company Scheme Petition. Where he/she seeks to oppose the Company Scheme Petition, the ground of opposition or a copy of his/her affidavit shall be furnished with such notice.
A copy of the Company Scheme Petition will be furnished by the undersigned to any person on payment of prescribed charges.

Sd/-
Date : 29-06-2026
Place: **Kochi**
**Mr. Aswin Gopakumar**
**Advocate for the Petitioner Companies**

## INBRIEF

### Arunachal Pradesh landslide dams river; Assam on alert

A massive landslide caused by heavy rainfall blocked the flow of the Siji River in Arunachal Pradesh's Lower Siang district on Sunday, endangering lives and infrastructure downstream. District officials said rainfall-induced water accumulation had increased the possibility of the dam giving way and causing a flash flood. The district authorities have alerted residents of Likabali town and villages along the Siji river, which becomes the Gai river in Assam. People have been advised to stay away from riverbanks, avoid unnecessary movement near the river, evacuate low-lying and flood-prone areas if instructed by the authorities.

### DGCA begins probe after propeller hits trainee pilot

Aviation watchdog Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) is probing the incident of a trainee pilot sustaining injuries after being hit by a running propeller of a trainer aircraft at the Kanpur airport on Friday. The incident occurred after the trainee pilot deboarded the twin-engine Tecnam P2006T aircraft VT-NBV, and the instructor concerned has been derostered from flying training duties pending investigation, the DGCA said in a statement on Sunday. The DGCA also said it has issued directions that the aircraft concerned should not be utilised pending investigation. The trainee pilot is admitted to a hospital in Kanpur. PTI

# From seas to skies, India is becoming self-reliant: Modi

PM highlights indigenously built missile systems, says June was a 'landmark month' for India's defence sector; he thanks people for responding to his call for austerity amid the West Asia crisis

**Saurabh Trivedi**
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday hailed India's growing self-reliance in defence manufacturing, pointing to the maiden flight of the first made-in-India C-295 transport aircraft and the successful test of the indigenous Long-Range Land-Attack Cruise Missile (LRLACM). He also thanked citizens for supporting his appeal for austerity amid the West Asia crisis.

Addressing the nation in his monthly radio programme *Mann Ki Baat*, Mr. Modi said June had been a "landmark month" for India's aviation and defence sectors.

> As many as 40 such aircraft [C-295] are being built right here in India and this is giving new strength to MSMEs and the aerospace sector ... From the seas to the skies, our India is becoming increasingly secure and self-reliant
>
> **NARENDRA MODI**
> Prime Minister

**'Indigenous' industry**

Referring to the C-295 programme, he said 40 aircraft are being manufactured in India, giving a major boost to the country's MSMEs and aerospace industry while creating employment opportunities.

The first C-295 transport aircraft manufactured in India completed its maiden flight on June 10. The Indian Air Force is procuring 56 aircraft under a ₹21,935-crore deal, with 40 being manufactured by Tata Advanced Systems Limited in partnership with Airbus at a facility in Gujarat's Vadodara.

The Prime Minister cited the successful flight-test of the indigenous LRLACM conducted by the Defence Research and Development Organisation earlier this month.

"From the seas to the skies, our India is becoming increasingly secure and self-reliant," he said, adding that all major subsystems of the missile had been indigenously developed.

Mr. Modi referred to the recent induction of *INS Dunagiri*, *INS Shanshak*, and *INS Agrya* into the Indian Navy, saying the warships were designed and built entirely in India.

**West Asia conflict**

The Prime Minister thanked citizens for responding positively to his appeal for conserving resources amid the conflict in West Asia. He said many people had begun carpooling, using public transport, postponing foreign travel and increasing the use of natural fertilizers. He noted that several families had decided to recycle old gold instead of buying new jewellery for weddings.

"I am grateful to every citizen of the country; not only have they supported my appeal, they are also actively cooperating in every way," he said.

**The PM praised Nagaland's 'Baby League' football initiative for children aged 5 to 12**

Highlighting environmental conservation, Mr. Modi praised the efforts of biologist Purnima Devi Barman in changing public perceptions about Assam's *hargila* bird (greater adjutant) and lauded community initiatives in Meghalaya to preserve the State's living root bridges, for which India has sought UNESCO World Heritage status.

The Prime Minister commended women in Madhya Pradesh's Rajgarh district for converting plastic waste into eco-bricks used for beautifying public spaces and praised Nagaland's 'Baby League' football initiative for children aged five to 12.

For Ganesh Chaturthi, Mr. Modi urged people to purchase idols crafted by Indian artisans, calling on buyers to check the both the material used and the country of manufacture before making their purchase.

# Sanskrit University introduces B.Tech. in AI and data science

**The Hindu Bureau**
NEW DELHI

In the first instance of a Sanskrit university in India entering engineering education, the Central Sanskrit University has introduced a B.Tech. programme in artificial Intelligence and data science from 2026-27.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his *Mann ki Baat* address on Sunday, said this was a significant effort to prepare the youth for new technology while keeping them rooted in their heritage.

The B.Tech. programme, on lines of the National Education Policy, 2020, is designed to transform Sanskrit institutions into multi-disciplinary centres of learning. The programme is AICTE-approved and has a total sanctioned intake of 66 seats: 60 regular seats and six supernumerary ones.

**AI tools in Sanskrit**

The programme is expected to support development of AI-enabled tools for Sanskrit and Indian languages, strengthen language technologies, enable digitisation and preservation of classical texts and promote inter-disciplinary research linking AI with Indian Knowledge Systems.

"This marks a crucial step towards integrating modern technology with India's traditional knowledge. It will facilitate the development of new AI tools for Indian languages and accelerate the digitisation and preservation of our ancient texts and manuscripts," the Prime Minister said.

**Traditional domains**

The programme will also provide opportunities to apply modern computational techniques to traditional domains such as Ayurveda, Yoga, Jyotisha, Nyaya, and other classical disciplines.

The technical components of the programme include artificial intelligence, machine learning, data science, python programming, statistics, cloud computing, data analytics and deep learning, an official spokesperson of the Education Ministry said.

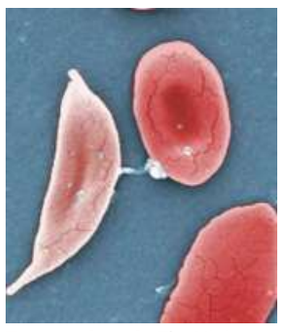
The language and knowledge system components include natural language processing, computational linguistics, machine translation, speech recognition, conversational AI, language technologies, knowledge representation and optical character recognition (OCR) for ancient manuscripts.

# New Anaemia Mukt Bharat norms seek early action

**Bindu Shajan Perappadan**
NEW DELHI

The Union Health Ministry is set to launch revised operational guidelines for the Anaemia Mukt Bharat Abhiyaan (AMB) on Monday, expanding the national programme's strategy to include a new beneficiary group, greater emphasis on dietary interventions, and digital tracking of beneficiaries.

The guidelines, to be released by Union Health Minister J.P. Nadda during the 16th meeting of the Central Council of Health and Family Welfare at Vigyan Bhawan in Delhi, mark the transition of the programme from Anaemia Mukt Bharat to Anaemia Mukt Bharat Abhiyaan.



**Treat and track:** The Ministry proposed a digital ecosystem to monitor anaemia services.

**New framework**

The revised framework seeks to strengthen anaemia control through improved testing, treatment, monitoring and community participation.

The revised programme adds low birth weight babies (0-6 months) as a seventh beneficiary group, recognising the need for early intervention.

A new "eating right" component has been introduced as the seventh intervention to promote the regular consumption of iron-rich and diversified diets. The seventh institutional mechanism focuses on strengthening monitoring and evaluation through digital tracking. The guidelines also replace the existing T3 with a T4 strategy of Test, Treat, Talk, and Track, which emphasises routine haemoglobin testing, treatment according to national anaemia management protocols, systematic tracking of beneficiaries for referral and follow-up, and counselling on healthy dietary practices.

The Ministry has also proposed an integrated digital ecosystem for monitoring anaemia services.

The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) shows that 67.1% of children aged six to 59 months, 57% of women aged 15 to 49 years, 52.2% of pregnant women, and 59.1% of adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 years are anaemic.

# Advisory issued for pilgrims undertaking Mansarovar Yatra

**Press Trust of India**
NEW DELHI

The External Affairs Ministry has advised Indian citizens undertaking the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra through private tour operators to exercise caution, asking them to verify if their operator is duly registered.

"This Ministry is in receipt of several requests for help and assistance from Indian citizens stuck in Nepal while undertaking Kailash Mansarovar Yatra without the required entry permit and visas for China, through tours organised by private tour operators," the Ministry said in an advisory issued on Saturday.

"Citizens are advised not to commence their journey from India until all required travel documents have been obtained for undertaking the complete journey," it said.

Commencing travel without confirmed documentation or in anticipation of obtaining the necessary documentation "increases the likelihood of being stranded".

"Pilgrims are also strongly advised to verify that their tour operator is duly registered and authorised," the Ministry said.

In April, the Ministry had announced that the annual Kailash Mansarovar Yatra was set to take place from June to August this year via two routes – Lipulekh Pass in Uttarakhand and Nathu La in Sikkim.

The tour resumed last year after a gap of nearly five years as part of efforts to normalise the relations between India and China.

It was suspended because of the military standoff between the two sides in eastern Ladakh.

# Police recreate crime scene with accused at Pune fort

**Press Trust of India**
PUNE

The police on Sunday took Siya Goyal, an accused in the alleged murder of her fiancé and Pune realtor Ketan Agarwal, to Lohagad Fort to reconstruct the crime scene, using a dummy to recreate the moment he was pushed to his death, an official said.

The police is investigating various aspects of the case including the digital footprint of the two accused. PTI

The exercise was aimed at establishing the exact chain of events of the June 18 incident, when the 25-year-old victim was allegedly killed by Ms. Goyal, 20, and her alleged lover, Chetan Chaudhary, 22, he said.

"A crime scene recreation was conducted this morning. The accused was taken to the actual spot where the incident took place," a senior official from the Pune rural police said. He said that a dummy body was created, and police officials asked Ms. Goyal to demonstrate how she pushed Mr. Agarwal from the location. She also showed the route taken to reach the crime spot.

Mr. Chaudhary would be taken to the fort separately for a similar reconstruction, he added.

Ms. Goyal and Mr. Chaudhary have been arrested for allegedly conspiring to kill Mr. Agarwal and pushing him off Lohagad Fort in Pune district.

Ms. Goyal has allegedly told the police that she did not want to marry Mr. Agarwal, and hence plotted with Mr. Chaudhary to kill him as she thought calling off the wedding would bring disrepute to the family.

Investigators are probing various aspects of the case, including the planning, the movements of the accused before and after the incident, their digital footprint, and the motive behind the murder, a senior police official said.

## TH CROSSWORD + 14832

(set by Pixie Dust)

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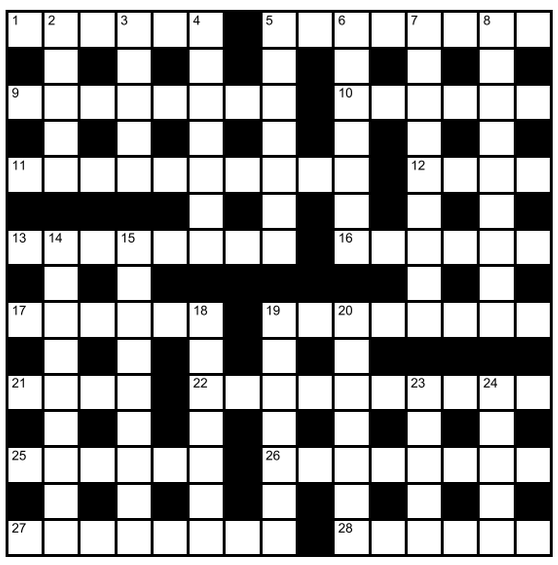
SCAN TO PLAY



**Across**

1 Perhaps the curt city folk (6)
5 Drug seller is quick covering damage (8)
9 Clueless Inspector General's tirade overwhelming new officer at first (8)
10 Is this creator redesigning pantries? (6)
11 Surprisingly, strange associate quits subsequently in support (10)
12 Member cycling around a storm (4)
13 Like a stag, colony resident ogled - abandoning last trace of shame (8)
16 Hence the French people, heartless and glum (6)
17 Florida completes uniformly chosen constructions (6)
19 Most insensitive subset to bust (8)
21 Magnificent huskies smuggled in this manner (4)
22 Quarrelsome Finny ruled out (10)
25 Character without bit of loyalty and grace (6)
26 In comparison, some vital errands partly withdrawn (8)
27 Anxious playing drest repeatedly? (8)
28 Come, rise, dance exhibiting revolutionary passion (6)

**Down**

2 Close tense contest! Missed the beginning (5)
3 Discovered snoop uses net (5)
4 German supporting family blunder (7)
5 Spotted Penny at church with journalist (7)
6 A lecturer flags plants (7)
7 Bloomers from post-graduate doctor and grey-haired saint (9)
8 Wild dance around large infinite pole in Christian festival (9)
14 Point of Mathematician or the astronomer (9)
15 Rock's tipping point, Mark switching places with Lira (9)
18 Son leaves carrying revolver finally and shoots (7)
19 Advanced deer? (7)
20 Delighted Henry quit and laughed in a high-pitched voice (7)
23 Records Spooner's accents (5)
24 Celebrate climbing bar (5)

## SUDOKU

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| 8 | | | | 3 | | | | |

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Solution to previous puzzle

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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| 5 | 7 | 8 | 4 | 6 | 2 | 3 | 9 | 1 |
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## FAITH

### Temples, replica of Vaikunta

One may wonder, in today's state of incredulousness, what the purpose of a temple is. God resides in Vaikunta, which is the supreme abode, and we cannot experience it in our mortal lives. Temples, a replica of Vaikunta, are accessible to us and their purpose is to give the devotees an opportunity to experience the Lord while on this earth, said Tirukkudanthai Dr. Venkatesh.

As mortals, we are unable to ascend to Vaikunta; therefore, Perumal has descended to us in temples, to give us a chance to experience the bliss of Vaikunta. The rajagopuram which we behold first is symbolic of the rajagopuram of Vaikunta. In his Tiruvaimozhi, Nammazhwar says, *Kodi adi nedu magizh gopuram*, referring to the gopuram in Vaikunta. Similarly, Chandogya Upanishad details the *Airammadia kulam* (pond) in the celestial abode of Perumal. Echoing this, the temple ponds or pushkaranis are a representation of the heavenly water body. The same text also specifies presence of a sacred ashwatha tree (Somasavana) there, which is represented by the sthalavriksham in temples. The Visakha upastambham in Vaikunta is depicted in temples by the dwajastambham, the flag pole. The sanctum sanctorum of the God in temples is the equivalent of the Golden Hall where Maha Vishnu resides in Vaikunta. The many sannidhis surrounding the main deity in temples are the eternal servants, the Nithya Suris, who serve the Lord in the celestial strata, who enjoy their own chambers in a temple. When Perumal descends, the Nithya Suris accompany Him, to serve Him. They also guide devotees to Him, progressively. In short, temple visits are a virtual experience of Vaikunta for devotees.

# Med cover inadequate and not affordable

**COVERNOTE**

You should be sure that you can maintain an even higher medical fund and that should be over and above your retirement planning

**K. Nitya Kalyani**

How much hospitalisation insurance is enough? For the average city living middle class family ₹5 lakh looks woefully inadequate because which city hospital even has ₹5,000 rooms?

Because, with the sub limit of 1% of sum insured (SI) on room rent, you will be dipping into your pocket for the extra room rent. You can buy an additional cover for extra premium to protect against that. Be sure to read up about it and opt for it on your next renewal. But what is left uncovered is the share of expenses you will bear on all other services like surgeons' or physicians' fees going by the sub-limit rules. Mercifully medications and diagnostic procedures don't come under the sub-limit. A higher SI comes at a higher premium and that escalation is going to be endless, we have seen. The real problem we are left to focus on is the inadequacy of SI. With rising healthcare costs, the question has changed to how much of your expenses are left uncovered by your SI. Remember, that gap is going to widen each coming year. This diminution of protection is cause for serious concern.

Let's get back to the 'Why not self-insure for the first ₹10 lakh and take only a top-up?" idea.

We saw that if you can maintain a ₹10 lakh medical fund and keep enhancing it, if you can resist spending it on that family holiday, and if you can pay your hospital expenses and replenish your fund without feeling the financial pain, this is a workable idea. This comes with some age-related pros and cons. For the below-30s family, it may work well because hospitalisations may be few and far between and the fund can keep earning returns and growing. However, nobody can predict serious illnesses and accidents and the fund would be one more demand on the family's expenses.

In the next decade and a half of your life, till age 45, the medical fund is much easier to create and maintain with better earnings and cashflows, and you can have no basic policy, saving on premium and maintain the top up. However, this is when lifestyle illnesses start making their appearance, parents are getting older and children can contribute with ills and spills. At this stage you can move to start a small basic policy of ₹5 lakh.

From age 45 to 60 avoiding a basic policy means substantial premium savings as the rates rise sharply. If you have significant accumulated wealth you can rely on self-insurance with maybe that small basic policy we saw earlier plus a sizeable top up.

This is the age group when chronic illnesses increase and hospitalisations can be expected. You should be sure that you can maintain an even higher medical fund and that should be over and above your retirement planning. Insurance becomes a much more efficient part of the game plan at this stage. Your medical fund also should be periodically reviewed and enhanced, preferably during your earning years when the funds are still flowing. By the 60s your basic policy should be for a higher SI and that means you should enhance it a few years prior in order to work off the waiting period for pre-existing diseases. Definitely do this before retirement so that you are not left without insurance. Getting a fresh policy or enhancement of SI after this age is quite a challenge. If your employer provides a retirement policy, it is wise to opt for that and build other policies around it.

Much as we may plan about and spend on insurance, we are truly happy When we don't need to use it. So, after reading all this if you plan on jogging every morning, cutting back on smoking and junk food and getting a full night's sleep, even better!

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

**People pleasing:** Money leaves the wallet not out of necessity, but out of social expectation and peer pressure. SAINATH B.

# Treatflation: The invisible 'ghost' in office culture

This ghost does not ask for a feast; neither does it care if it's month-end or your budget is already stretched; it simply asks for a bite, again and again, which may gobble up your savings over time

**TREAT TRAVAILS**

**Vaishali R. Venkat**

There is a hungry 'ghost' 'haunting' your office. It neither rattles chains, bangs on doors, roams dark corridors, nor lives in deserted, dilapidated buildings. It silently lurks in WhatsApp groups, emails or phone calls. Its ambush is never a one-time affair. It strikes again and again, often when least expected.

This invisible ghost rarely asks for a feast and never compels; a small bite usually suffices. It does not care whether you are carrying a mountain of debt, whether it's month-end, budget is already stretched, or if your wallet can withstand another hit.

Most employees feed this ghost: a pocket-friendly contribution for a birthday cake, a party for promotion, a wedding or a team lunch. The strangest thing is that this ghost never feeds on fear but on goodwill. Nobody is forced to offer a bite, yet, this ghost is somehow fed. I call this ghost Treatflation, a portmanteau of 'treat' and 'inflation' that captures the rising cost of recurring workplace celebrations.

It is the accumulation of countless small contributions in the name of treats. Each request seems modest in isolation. Yet, over time, these small acts of participation can quietly become a drain on personal finances. It's an invisible financial burden wherein workplace camaraderie slowly begins to resemble a subscription fee for a 'utility' you never subscribed to.

> It is our tendency to change our behaviour in order to fit in with a group and maintain good relationships with the people around us

> Most employees contribute because they want to fit in, maintain good relationships and avoid being the only person who declines

Treatflation is not created by greedy bosses or demanding colleagues. It is sustained by decent people doing decent things. Every contribution is usually voluntary; every occasion is genuine; every amount is modest. Yet, over the course of a career, when thousands of such gestures accumulate, they raise an uncomfortable question: can even goodwill become so expensive?

Treatflation is powered by a force that social psychologists call 'Normative social influence.' It is our tendency to change our behaviour in order to fit in with a group and maintain good relationships with the people around us.

Put simply, it is the urge to conform to group expectations. Most employees do not contribute because they are forced by their bosses or colleagues, but because they want to fit in, maintain good relationships and avoid being the only person who declines. As a result, money leaves the wallet not out of necessity, but out of social expectation and peer pressure. In the 1950s, psychologist Solomon Asch demonstrated this tendency in a series of conformity experiments. He found that people often aligned their behaviour with a group even when their own judgement suggested otherwise. The lesson was simple: the desire to fit in and avoid standing out proved stronger. The behaviour underlying Treatflation is a simple human need: the desire to belong. Most people would rather contribute a few hundred bucks than risk appearing indifferent to the group.

The consequences of this desire are not merely social; they are financial as well. Left unchecked, this desire expresses itself through a steady stream of small contributions.

What makes Treatflation different from most expenses is not its size, but its frequency. A ₹500 contribution rarely attracts attention, but if it occurs just twice a month, it adds up to ₹12,000 a year. Over a 30-year career, the cumulative cost can exceed ₹3.6 lakh. The result is a financial leak that many employees may feel the pinch of, but rarely plug. Viewed differently, the same ₹1,000 invested every month at a 10% annual return could potentially grow to nearly ₹20 lakh over 30 years. When millions of employees across the country repeatedly make thousands of small contributions year after year just to maintain relationships with friends, colleagues and relatives, then culture itself becomes an economic force. Treatflation is simply one of its many manifestations. Economists devote considerable attention to studying how people spend money on consumption, investment and savings. Treatflation reminds us that people also spend money on something less visible: social acceptance and belonging.

In a relationship-oriented society such as India, the cumulative value of such spending may be far greater than we realise. So, the next time a contribution request pops up, perhaps the question should be if the price of belonging is worth the wealth you give up in return. Also, if declining the contribution leaves you feeling left out, the wealth you give up may well be worth the sense of belonging you receive in return. After all, relationships have value too, even if they cannot be measured in monetary terms. The key is to maintain balance and make that trade-off consciously rather than contributing unknowingly.

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

# What are asset allocation funds

**THINKINVESTOR**

Asset allocation, the proportion of how much you should invest in various asset classes to create a portfolio, is the first step in your investment process

**Venkatesh Bangaruswamy**

Asset management companies in India can now offer lifecycle funds, a category of funds introduced by SEBI this year. Such funds can hold equity, bonds and commodities. Hybrid funds typically carry equity and bonds.

For our discussion, we refer to all multi-asset-class funds as asset allocation funds. In this article, we discuss the characteristics of such funds and what you should be mindful of before investing in such funds. Asset allocation funds typically have an asset allocation range. Suppose a fund invests in equity and bonds and has an asset allocation range of 65-75% in equity and 25-35% in bonds. This allows fund managers to tactically move between 65% minimum allocation to equity to a maximum allocation of 75%.

Now, asset allocation, the proportion of how much you should invest in various asset classes to create a portfolio, is the first step in your investment process. Importantly, your asset allocation is a function of how important your life goal is. Your children's education portfolio, for instance, may require a conservative allocation (more bonds, less equity) than, say, your retirement portfolio.

By investing in asset allocation funds, you are giving-up the first step in your investment process. This is because fund managers will manage the asset allocation based on the fund's mandate and their view of the asset markets, not based on your life goals. This is not to say that asset allocation funds do not serve a purpose. It is useful if you believe that determining asset allocation for each of your goal is a tedious process. Technically, outsourcing your asset allocation would mean hiring an investment advisor to custom-tailor portfolios to meet your life goals. Asset allocation funds cannot fulfill such objectives.

Asset allocation funds carry some benefits. For one, such funds are tax efficient compared to you separately managing an equity and a bond portfolio for each goal. This is because fund managers moving money between stocks and bonds within the fund will not be taxable for you, unless you sell your units in the fund. For another, you get the benefit of professional expertise. Fund managers are better equipped than us to understand how to tactically move between equity and bonds. But if you prefer bank deposits for your bond allocation, asset allocation funds may not be an optimal fit for your goal-based investment.

*(The author offers training programmes for individuals to manage their personal investments)*

## 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 | 7.75 | 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 | 8.10 | 7.25 | 7.25 | 7.90 |
| 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 | 6.45 | 6.25 | 6.45 | 6.45 |
| Bandhan Bank | 7.45 | 7.00 | 7.25 | 5.85 |
| City Union Bank | 7.25 | 6.65 | 6.50 | 6.55 |
| CSB Bank | 7.35 | 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 | 6.80 | 6.25 | 6.75 | 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 | 7.35 | 6.50 | 7.35 | 6.75 |
| IndusInd Bank | 7.00 | 6.75 | 7.00 | 6.65 |
| Jammu & Kashmir Bank | 7.30 | 6.80 | 6.70 | 6.75 |
| 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 | 7.85 | 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 | 6.70 | 6.10 | 6.00 | 6.00 |
| Indian Bank | 6.80 | 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 | 6.65 | 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** | | | |
| State Bank of India | 7.25-9.05 | 7.25-9.05 | 7.25-9.05 |
| Bank of Baroda | 7.20-9.00 | 7.20-9.00 | 7.20-9.25 |
| Union Bank of India* | 7.15-9.60 | 7.15-9.60 | 7.15-9.60 |
| Punjab National Bank | 7.25-9.25 | 7.20-9.15 | 7.20-9.15 |
| Bank of India | 7.10-10.00 | 7.10-10.00 | 7.10-10.25 |
| Bank of Maharashtra | 7.10-9.90 | 7.10-9.90 | 7.10-9.90 |
| Punjab and Sind Bank | 7.30-10.70 | 7.30-10.70 | 7.30-10.70 |
| Indian Overseas Bank | 7.20 # | 7.20 # | 7.20 # |
| Indian Bank | 7.15-9.55 | 7.15-9.55 | 7.15-9.55 |
| Central Bank of India | 7.10-9.15 | 7.10-9.15 | 7.10-9.15 |
| **Private Sector Banks** | | | |
| Kotak Mahindra Bank | 7.60 # | 7.60 # | 7.60 # |
| ICICI Bank | 7.50 # | 7.50 # | 7.50 # |
| Axis Bank | 8.00-11.90 | 8.00-11.90 | 8.00 - 9.10 |
| HSBC Bank | 7.45 # | 7.45 # | 7.45 # |
| South Indian Bank | 7.20 # | 7.20 # | 7.20 # |
| Karur Vysya Bank | 8.50-10.65 | 8.50-10.65 | 8.50-10.65 |
| Karnataka Bank | 7.47-11.70 | 7.47-11.70 | 7.47-11.70 |
| Federal Bank | 8.35 - 10.25 | 7.35 - 10.25 | 7.35 - 9.25 |
| Tamilnad Mercantile Bank | 7.90 - 9.30 | 7.90 - 9.30 | 7.90 - 9.30 |
| Bandhan Bank | 8.41-13.38 | 8.41-13.38 | 8.41-13.38 |
| RBL Bank | 8.20 # | 8.20 # | 8.20 # |
| CSB Bank | 8.30 # | 8.30 # | 8.30 # |
| HDFC Bank | 7.75 # | 7.75 # | 7.75 # |
| City Union Bank | 8.25-9.50 | 8.50-10.00 | 8.75-10.50 |
| **Housing Finance Companies (HFCs)** | | | |
| LIC Housing Finance | 7.15 # | 7.15 # | 7.15 # |
| Bajaj Housing Finance | 7.25 # | 7.25 # | 7.25 # |
| Tata Capital | 8.00 # | 8.00 # | 8.00 # |
| PNB Housing Finance | 7.50 # | 7.50 # | 7.50 # |
| GIC Housing Finance | 8.20 # | 8.20 # | 8.20 # |
| SMFG India Home Finance | 9.25 # | 9.25 # | 9.25 # |
| Sammaan Capital | 8.75 # | 8.75 # | 8.75 # |
| Aditya Birla Capital | 7.75 # | 7.75 # | 7.75 # |
| ICICI Home Finance | 7.50 # | 7.50 # | 7.50 # |
| Godrej Housing Finance | 7.65 # | 7.65 # | 7.65 # |

*Extra 0.05% rate concession to borrowers taking insurance
Rates as on July 24 #Onwards Source:Paisabazaar.com

RIYADH

## 14 nationals killed in helicopter crash in Saudi Arabia: state media

REUTERS

A helicopter crash in Saudi Arabia killed 14 Saudi citizens on Sunday, the kingdom's official press agency reported, adding that the aircraft belonged to state oil giant Aramco. The helicopter crashed in Ras Tanura in the country's east. The Saudi Press Agency said that an investigation was under way. AFP

NEW DELHI

## Ousted leader Sheikh Hasina vows to return to Bangladesh 'this year'

AP

Bangladesh's fugitive former leader Sheikh Hasina who fled to India in 2024 after a student-led uprising has vowed to return to her country "this year", according to an interview published on Sunday. "I want to say clearly: overcoming every conspiracy [against me], I will return to my country this year," she told broadcaster NDTV. AFP

JERUSALEM

## Israel approves landmark proposal to recognise Armenian genocide

AP

Israel on Sunday recognised the massacres of Armenians during the First World War as genocide, a move seen as a rebuke to Turkey. "The Cabinet has approved the proposal to recognise the Armenian genocide," Israel's Foreign Ministry said. Armenians seek recognition of the mass killings under the Ottoman Empire as genocide. AP

TOMBLAINE

## Skydiving plane crash in eastern France kills all 11 people aboard

REUTERS

A skydiving plane crashed on Sunday in eastern France, killing all 11 people aboard, local authorities said. The crash in the town of Tomblaine killed five instructors, five nursing students and the pilot. The incident is "the most serious general aviation accident in terms of loss of life", according to France's BEA aviation safety agency. AFP

# Iran attacks Bahrain and Kuwait after U.S. strikes, threatens to halt talks

IRGC strikes target Gulf nations hosting U.S. military; U.S. Central Command says it struck key Iranian military infrastructure after Saturday's ship attack; Araghchi says any attempt to bypass arrangements in Hormuz will lead to 'increase in tensions'

**Associated Press**
DUBAI

Iran again launched drone and missile attacks on Sunday targeting Bahrain and Kuwait in response to new U.S. airstrikes against the Islamic Republic, and threatened a "complete halt" in negotiations to end the war if Washington continues its attacks.

Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) claimed responsibility for the attacks in Bahrain and Kuwait.

Kuwait's military said air defences intercepted Iranian drones and missiles just after the U.S. strikes in Iran. Kuwait, which hosts a major U.S. military base, said it intercepted two ballistic missiles.

**In ruins:** Rescue personnel work in a residential building hit by an alleged Iranian drone in Muharraq, Bahrain, on Sunday. REUTERS

Bahrain's Interior Ministry said the Iranian strikes damaged a residential building near the international airport. Bahrain is home to the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet, whose base came under repeated attack during the war.

The U.S. military's Central Command said it struck Iranian military "surveillance infrastructure, communication systems, air defence sites, drone storage facilities and minelayer capabilities" following an attack on a ship at sea on Saturday.

### Trump threats

Meanwhile, U.S. President Donald Trump on social media accused Iran of violating the ceasefire and warned of a point where the U.S. may no longer be reasonable "and will be forced to militarily complete the job."

"If that happens, the Islamic Republic of Iran will no longer exist!" Mr. Trump wrote.

Efforts to reopen the Strait of Hormuz without Iran's direct oversight sparked the days of crossfire and have imperilled the talks for a lasting ceasefire.

Iran insists that it alone must govern the strait, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf that once carried a fifth of the world's oil and natural gas.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi reiterated the claim on Sunday.

"Any attempt to establish new or separate arrangements from those currently being carried out by the Islamic Republic of Iran will only lead to further complications, delay the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz and increase the level of tension," Mr. Araghchi said.

# Israel strikes south Lebanon despite framework accord

**Agence France-Presse**
BEIRUT

Israel renewed its strikes on Lebanon on Sunday, Lebanese state media reported, two days after an agreement was signed by the two countries, which a Hezbollah lawmaker warned would lead to "internal conflict".

The strikes come a day after one person was killed in an Israeli strike on the south, according to Lebanon's Health Ministry, with the Israeli military saying it targeted Hezbollah members near its self-proclaimed "security zone", which reaches 10 kilometres into Lebanon.

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency (NNA) reported several strikes on Sunday.

The Israeli Army said a soldier "fell in combat" in southern Lebanon. In a later statement, Israeli military chief Eyal Zamir approved plans for "continued operations in the security zone, in accordance with the ceasefire agreement".

**Status quo:** An Israeli flag hoisted atop a destroyed building in southern Lebanon on Sunday. AP

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun said on Saturday that his country "would assume its responsibilities" in implementing the framework agreement.

Hezbollah lawmaker Hassan Fadlallah said on Sunday that "the agreement of humiliation and disgrace signed by the authorities will never see the light of day".

He added that what "the authorities have done amounts to sedition aimed at pushing the country into chaos and shifting the conflict from one with the enemy to an internal conflict".

# Europe suffers over 1,300 excess deaths amid heatwave crisis

**Agence France-Presse**
GENEVA

The World Health Organization said on Sunday that over 1,300 excess deaths had been recorded in Europe since June 21 in connection with the record-breaking heatwave roasting much of the continent.

Tens of millions have been braving a weekend of extreme temperatures in Europe as a deadly heatwave moves eastwards, with some countries announcing rising death tolls and health services warning of saturation. On Sunday morning, French health officials said there had been around 1,000 more deaths than expected in their country just since Wednesday.

And across Europe, "more than 1,300 excess deaths have been recorded since June 21", WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on X.

"Heat stress is often called the 'silent killer' - and European homes, workplaces and schools were not built for these temperatures," he said.

# Two killed, major oil refinery damaged in Russia as Ukraine keeps up assault

**Associated Press**
KYIV

Ukraine kept up its heavy drone assault on Russia, setting fire to a major oil refinery in the south and killing at least two people, Russian authorities said on Sunday.

Ukraine has markedly stepped up its long-range attacks on Russian military industries and energy facilities in recent months, aiming to cut Moscow's revenue for its invasion – now in its fifth year.

Debris from downed Ukrainian drones sparked a blaze at the refinery in Slavyansk-na-Kubani, a town in Russia's Krasnodar region. The falling debris killed one person in Slavyansk, according to regional authorities.

Vladimir Putin says Russia will overcome security challenges during his speech at a congress of the United Russia party. REUTERS

The Slavyansk site is one of southern Russia's major refineries, processing close to 4 million tons of crude per year.

Ukrainian drone strikes killed one person in Russia's Belgorod region.

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Sunday vowed to ensure security and overcome challenges.

"Yes, we see the problems, we are aware and are responding to them, but we will certainly ensure the security of both the country and our citizens, as well as the inviolability of Russia's borders," Mr. Putin said at the United Russia party congress.

Russia attacked Ukraine with 142 long-range strike drones and eight missiles overnight, according to the Ukrainian air force.

# Iraqi officials held in anti-corruption drive; raids in Green Zone

**Agence France-Presse**
BAGHDAD

Iraqi security forces launched raids in Baghdad's fortified Green Zone on Sunday to arrest officials including MPs suspected of corruption, amid heavy deployment in the area.

The Green Zone houses the U.S. Embassy and other diplomatic missions, as well as international institutions and government offices.

The large-scale raids, which included other neighbourhoods in Baghdad as well, were aimed at arresting senior Iraqi officials and politicians.

Iraq's news agency (INA) quoted a senior official as saying that "several suspects accused of corruption have been arrested". The official added that the arrests "involved members of Parliament whose immunity was removed," as well as other officials.

Iraq's new Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi has vowed to fight corruption and mismanagement that have plagued Iraq for decades.

# Sport

# Rohit unleashes massive throw, qualifies for Asiad

ATHLETICS

**Y.B. Sarangi**
BHUBANESWAR

Javelin thrower Rohit Yadav unleashed a massive throw in his last attempt to qualify for the Asian Games with a new meet record, while long-jumper M. Sreeshankar displayed amazing consistency to make the cut with his season's best on the concluding day of the National inter-state athletics meet at the Kalinga Stadium here on Sunday.

Rohit, who had achieved his best (83.76m) in Ludhiana earlier this month, recorded four throws between 77m and 80m before hurling the spear to 87.05m in his final attempt to improve his personal best and break Manu D.P.'s four-year-old meet record of 84.35m. He also registered the season's second best throw in the world behind Sri Lankan Rumesh Pathirage (92.62m).

**Giving it his all:** Rohit came up with a special effort in his final attempt. BISWARANJAN ROUT

"Even though I've been throwing 85m-plus during training, my personal best has been improving by little margins. I just replicated how I did it during the training and gave my best in the final throw," said Rohit. Pumped up by his hunch and pushed by his training partner Shahnavaz Khan, Sreeshankar looked in good rhythm and logged five consecutive 8m-plus jumps with his fourth attempt earning him his season best mark of 8.38m.

It was just three cm less than his personal best and meet record achieved here three years ago. It was the seventh best in the world this season.

Sreeshankar and his Kerala Ancy Sojan (Kerala) were named the best athletes of the meet.

Uttar Pradesh (71 points) and Haryana (82) won the men's and women's team championship respectively while Tamil Nadu was the overall champion with 138 points.

**The results (finals):**

**Men: 400m (Asiad Q Mark 45.97):** 1. Vishal T.K. (TN) 45.43, 2. Manu T.S. (Ker) 45.60, 3. Jay Kumar 45.73; **10,000m (Asiad QM 29:00.00):** 1. Abhishek Pal (UP) 30:03.88, 2. Sawan Barwal (HP) 30:08.08, 3. Sailesh Kushwaha (Kar) 30:23.13; **3,000m steeplechase (Asiad QM 8:36.57):** 1. Balkishan (Har) 8:50.98, 2. Sharuk Khan (UP) 8:53.18, 3. Shubham Bhandare (Mah) 8:54.90; **4x400m relay (Asiad QM 3:04.23):** 1. Tamil Nadu 3:09.32, 2. Karnataka 3:09.51, 3. Kerala 3:09.89; **Long jump (Asiad QM 7.91m):** 1. M. Shreeshankar (Ker) 8.38m, 2. Shahnavaz Khan (UP) 8.30m, 3. David P. (TN) 8.06m; **Javelin (Asiad QM 77.87m):** 1. Rohit Yadav (UP) 87.05m (NMR, Old 84.35m, Manu D.P., 2022), 2. Yashvir Singh (Raj) 83.72m, 3. Sachin Yadav (UP) 82.32m.

**Women: 400m (Asiad QM 53.72):** 1. Prachi (UP) 53.24, 2. Kiran Pahal (Har) 53.45, 3. Devyaniba Zala (Guj) 53.46; **10,000m (Asiad QM 33:50.00):** 1. Seema (HP) 34:28.75, 2. Soniya (Utk) 34:35.22, 3. Ravina Gayakwad (Mah) 35:44.45; **3,000m steeplechase (Asiad QM 9:47.53):** 1. Ankita Dhyani (Utk) 9:44.05, 2. Khushbu Gupta (UP) 10:36.47, 3. Kumari Parru (Raj) 10:52.28; **High jump (Asiad QM 1.80m):** 1. Pooja (Har) 1.83m, 2. Supriya B. (Kar) 1.80m, 3. Khyati Mathur (UP) 1.80m; **4x400m relay (Asiad QM 3:31.23):** 1. Tamil Nadu 3:35.87, Karnataka 3:36.18, 3. Kerala 3:39.70; **Heptathlon (after day two) (Asiad QM 5605 points):** 1. Pooja (Har) 5619, 2. Anamika K. (Ker) 5466, 3. Khushi (Har) 5438.

# Russell back to winning ways

AUSTRIAN GP

**Reuters**
SPIELBERG

George Russell won the Austrian Grand Prix from pole position on Sunday to trim Mercedes teammate Kimi Antonelli's Formula One lead to 40 points.

Max Verstappen finished 1.6 seconds adrift, after crashing in qualifying and starting fifth, at his Red Bull team's home circuit with Antonelli third and 0.3 behind after a thrilling chase to the line.

Antonelli has 171 points to Russell's 131 with Ferrari's Lewis Hamilton, fifth on Sunday after running second and battling Verstappen wheel-to-wheel, on 125.

**Smile of Success:** Russell claimed his second victory of the season after the triumph in the opening Australian GP. AFP

**The results:** 1. George Russell (Mercedes) 1h:26m:37.979s; 2. Max Verstappen (Red Bull) +1.611s; 3. Kimi Antonelli (Mercedes) +1.986; 4. Oscar Piastri (McLaren) +21.809; 5. Lewis Hamilton (Ferrari) +26.393; 6. Isack Hadjar (Red Bull) +29.399; 7. Lando Norris (McLaren) +31.505; 8. Charles Leclerc (Ferrari) +45.659.

**+1 lap:** 9. Liam Lawson (Racing Bulls); 10. Arvid Lindblad (Racing Bulls); 11. Gabriel Bortoleto (Audi); 12. Nico Hulkenberg (Audi); 13. Pierre Gasly (Alpine); 14. Oliver Bearman (Haas); 15. Franco Colapinto (Alpine); +2 laps: 16. Esteban Ocon (Haas); 17. Alexander Albon (Williams); +3 laps: 18. Fernando Alonso (Aston Martin);

**DNF:** Lance Stroll (Aston Martin); Carlos Sainz Jr. (Williams); Sergio Perez (Cadillac);Valtteri Bottas (Cadillac).

**The standings: Drivers:** 1. Antonelli 171; 2. Russell 131; 3. Hamilton 125; 4. Piastri 80; 5. Norris 79.

**Constructors:** 1. Mercedes 302; 2. Ferrari 204; 3. McLaren 159; 4. Red Bull Racing 115; 5. Alpine 57.

WIN-WIN SITUATION

## Austria and Algeria advance after playing out a thrilling draw

REUTERS

Austria and Algeria played out a thrilling 3-3 draw in Kansas City on Saturday in what amounted to a win-win result in their World Cup Group J finale. It allowed both to progress to the round of 32 while eliminating Iran from the tournament. Iran would have advanced as one of the eight best third-placed teams had Austria or Algeria won.

AGEING LIKE FINE WINE

## Modric becomes oldest assist provider at the marquee event

REUTERS

Veteran midfielder Luka Modric continues to defy age. At 40 years and 291 days, Croatia captain Modric became the oldest player on record — since 1966 — to register an assist at a World Cup. He delivered the decisive corner that Nikola Vlasic headed home in the 83rd minute to seal the Group L victory over Ghana.

BONUS POINT

## India exacts revenge on England in penalty shootout in Pro League

WORLDSPORTPICS

India beat England 3-2 in a penalty shootout after a goalless draw in the return leg of the Hockey Pro League in London on Sunday. Abhishek, Shilanand Lakra and Hardik Singh converted in the shootout as India secured the bonus point with a composed display. Zachary Wallace and David Goodfield scored for England.

ON THE CHARGE

## Rachin and Mitchell shine as New Zealand eyes series victory

AFP

England captain Ben Stokes' prospects of a victorious farewell were slim as New Zealand closed in on a series win in Nottingham. England was 103 for four at stumps on day four. **The scores:** New Zealand 438 & 234/8 decl. in 83 overs (Rachin 94, Mitchell 100 n.o, Archer 4/53) vs England 354 & 103/4 in 15 overs (Foulkes 3/42).

# Messi magic again as Argentina stays perfect with easy victory

Coming off the bench, the 39-year-old scores from a free-kick in the reigning World champion's 3-1 win over Jordan; Lo Celso and Lautaro also get on the scoresheet; Scaloni's men finish the first round with nine points

FIFA WORLD CUP

**Ayon Sengupta**
DALLAS

The hallmark of champions is not simply their brilliance but the quality waiting beyond the spotlight. Argentina started without several of its biggest names, including captain Lionel Messi, against Jordan yet scarcely looked diminished as it completed a flawless Group J campaign with a 3-1 triumph on Sunday.

Lionel Scaloni made nine changes to the side that beat Austria, with only goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez and striker Lautaro Martinez retaining their spots. For much of the opening half, the loudest cheers inside the Dallas colosseum were reserved not for the players on the pitch but the man sitting in the dugout.

Every time the giant screen showed Messi, seated alongside clubmate Rodrigo De Paul with an amused expression, the stadium erupted before returning to its familiar chorus. On the field, Argentina's understudies gave their fans more to cheer for. The breakthrough arrived in the 19th minute after Mohannad Abutaha brought Giovani Lo Celso down just outside the penalty box. The midfielder punished the untidy Jordanians by curling his free-kick around a poorly organised wall.

Argentina's pressure soon brought another reward. Lautaro's angled effort struck the post before Marcos Senesi, following up on the rebound, was caught in the face by Nizar Al-Rashdan's raised boot. After a VAR review, the referee pointed to the spot, and Lautaro calmly sent his penalty into the bottom-left corner.

In Messi's absence, Argentina found different routes to goal, and around the half-hour mark, the contest was already drifting away from Jordan. But the Asian side refused to become a supporting act. Mousa Al-Tamari's sliding finish in the 55th minute cut short the deficit, just as Messi started warming up.

The moment the No. 10 stepped towards the halfway line, the crowd found another gear. The roar that greeted his arrival dwarfed every celebration that had come earlier. His now-customary World Cup goal – for a seventh successive match – arrived in the 80th minute as he outfoxed Jordanian goalkeeper Yazid Abulaila with a low free-kick that flew past the wall. At last, the full house of 70,649 got what it had been waiting for.

**Air of invincibility:** Messi capped off another good Argentine performance with a second-half strike. AFP

### The standings

| GROUP J | M | W | D | L | GF | GA | GD | Points |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Argentina (Q) | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 1 | 7 | **9** |
| Austria (Q) | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 6 | 0 | **4** |
| Algeria (Q) | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 7 | -2 | **4** |
| Jordan (E) | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 8 | -5 | **0** |

**Q:** Qualified | **E:** Eliminated

Source: FIFA

### Round of 32 schedule

| DATE | TEAMS | TIME |
|---|---|---|
| June 29 | South Africa vs. Canada | 00.30 a.m. |
| June 29 | Brazil vs. Japan | 10.30 p.m. |
| June 30 | Germany vs. Paraguay | 2 a.m. |
| June 30 | Netherlands vs. Morocco | 6.30 a.m. |
| June 30 | Ivory Coast vs. Norway | 10.30 p.m. |
| July 1 | France vs. Sweden | 2.30 a.m. |
| July 1 | Mexico vs. Ecuador | 6.30 a.m. |
| July 1 | England vs. DR Congo | 9.30 p.m. |
| July 2 | Belgium vs. Senegal | 1.30 a.m. |
| July 2 | USA vs. Bosnia & Herzegovina | 5.30 a.m. |
| July 3 | Spain vs. Austria | 00.30 a.m. |
| July 3 | Portugal vs. Croatia | 4.30 a.m. |
| July 3 | Switzerland vs. Algeria | 8.30 a.m. |
| July 3 | Australia vs. Egypt | 11.30 p.m. |
| July 4 | Argentina vs. Cape Verde | 3.30 a.m. |
| July 4 | Colombia vs. Ghana | 7 a.m. |

* The dates and times pertain to India

THE RESULTS

**Group L:** Croatia 2 (Sucic 31, Vlasic 83) bt Ghana 1 (Luckassen 73); Panama 0 lost to England 2 (Bellingham 62, Kane 67). **Group K:** DR Congo 3 (Wissa 68-pen, 90+1, Mayele 78) bt Uzbekistan 1 (Shomurodov 10); Colombia 0 drew with Portugal 0. **Group J:** Jordan 1 (Tamari 55) lost to Argentina 3 (Lo Celso 19, Martinez 31-pen, Messi 80); Algeria 3 (Belghali 45, Mahrez 60, 90+3) drew with Austria 3 (Arnautovic 28, Sabitzer 55, Kalajdzic 90+6).

### Tuesday's matches

ROUND OF 32

**Germany** vs. **Paraguay,** 2 a.m.

**Netherlands** vs. **Morocco,** 6.30 a.m.

**Ivory Coast** vs. **Norway,** 10.30 p.m.

The day and time(s) pertain to India

# The Perry-Gardner show ends Women in Blue's run

T20 WORLD CUP

**P.K. Ajith Kumar**
LONDON

Ellyse Perry and Ashleigh Gardner are two of the shining reasons why the current Australian women's team is frighteningly formidable. The two gifted women joined hands to end India's T20 World Cup dream at Lord's on Sunday afternoon.

Australia chased down India's 170 for four with six wickets and six deliveries to spare. The South Africans, who predictably defeated Bangladesh by four wickets, joined Australia in the last four. England and West Indies made the grade from the other group. When the Aussies began the chase, Renuka Singh brought joy to her team and a highly partisan crowd. She had Georgia Voll lbw off the second ball, which jagged back in at good pace.

Phoebe Litchfield, returning from injury, and Beth Mooney put the chase on track with a 50-run partnership for the second wicket, but when they both departed, India's hopes soared. At 68 for three, Australia had plenty to do. But, Perry (56, 38b, 8x4) and Gardner (53 n.o., 29b, 3x4, 3x6) stayed calm and pushed their side confidently towards the target.

It was a pity that Harmanpreet's stunning knock, when India needed it desperately, ended in a losing cause. But for the skipper's 27-ball 56 (6x4, 3x6), India would have struggled to post a meaningful total against a line-up that bats deep.

The Women in Blue, choosing to bat, were struggling to force the pace. Smriti Mandhana (38, 37b, 6x4) and Shafali Verma (34, 26b, 3x4, 2x6) gave another fine start, but their 66-run stand off 55 balls wasn't brisk enough.

Shafali looked more threatening of the two until she tried to make room against the Australian captain Sophie Molineux, lost balance and was castled.

Smriti was tragically run out after Jemimah Rodrigues (34, 28b, 1x4, 1x6) possibly didn't hear the call for a quick run. Jemimah and Harmanpreet put on 64 for the third wicket before the former was retired out to bring in India's designated finisher Richa Ghosh. But, on this day, the captain took over that role.

Harmanpreet swung her bat to maximum effect. She hit her counterpart for three sixes in the final over, which went for 23 runs.

But, Perry and Gardner put the smile back on their captain's face.

**Swing time:** Perry and Gardner's counterattack shocked India. AFP

SCOREBOARD

**INDIA**
Smriti Mandhana run out 38 *(37b, 6x4)*, Shafali Verma b Molineux 34 *(26b, 3x4, 2x6)*, Jemimah Rodrigues retired out 34 *(28b, 1x4, 1x6)*, Harmanpreet Kaur c Perry b Molineux 56 *(27b, 6x4, 3x6)*, Richa Ghosh (not out) 1 *(1b)*, Deepti Sharma (not out) 4 *(1b, 1x4)*; Extras (w-3): 3; Total (for four wkts. in 20 overs): 170.

**FALL OF WICKETS**
1-66 (Shafali, 9.1 overs), 2-83 (Smriti, 11.3), 3-147 (Jemimah, 18.6), 4-166 (Harmanpreet, 19.5).

**AUSTRALIA BOWLING**
Hamilton 3-0-17-0, Garth 3-0-24-0, Gardner 2-0-25-0, Perry 1-0-7-0, Wareham 3-0-16-0, Sutherland 4-0-35-0, Molineux 4-0-46-2.

**AUSTRALIA**
Georgia Voll lbw b Renuka 4 *(2b, 1x4)*, Beth Mooney c Radha b Deepti 22 *(20b, 2x4)*, Phoebe Litchfield c Smriti b Shree Charani 24 *(25b, 2x4, 1x6)*, Ellyse Perry c Shafali b Shree Charani 56 *(38b, 8x4)*, Ashleigh Gardner (not out) 53 *(29b, 3x4, 3x6)*, Georgia Wareham (not out) 4 *(2b, 1x4)*; Extras (lb-3, nb-2, w-4): 9; Total (for four wkts. in 19 overs): 172.

**FALL OF WICKETS**
1-4 (Voll, 0.2), 2-54 (Litchfield, 6.6), 3-68 (Mooney, 9.1), 4-168 (Perry, 18.4).

**INDIA BOWLING**
Renuka 4-0-41-1, Kranti 1-0-12-0, Shafali 4-0-29-0, Shree Charani 4-0-32-2, Deepti 4-0-31-1, Radha 2-0-24-0.

**Toss:** India.
**PoM:** Perry.
*Australia won by six wickets with one over to spare.*

# Japan out to douse Brazil's firepower

**Ayon Sengupta**
HOUSTON

The World Cup has always belonged to the dreamers. The knockout rounds, however, have little time for romance.

For Japan, that moment arrives in Houston on Monday. The Samurai Blue have become one of world football's most consistent overachievers. Since 2002, on four occasions, it has emerged from difficult groups, but Japan is yet to win a men's World Cup knockout match.

Standing in its way, this time, is Brazil – a nation that has lifted the trophy more times than any other.

Carlo Ancelotti's side appears to be finding its rhythm since falling behind early on Matchday 1, before drawing with Morocco. Brazil responded with six unanswered goals in wins over Haiti and Scotland to finish top of its group and Neymar's return after 981 days has added another boost to its attack.

Recent history, though, offers a note of caution, as Brazil lost 3-2 to Japan in a friendly in October 2025. Japan coach Hajime Moriyasu is trying to draw inspiration from that result.

"Last time we proved to Brazil that we aren't a pushover," Moriyasu said. "That is great progress for us. The Brazilian team is a top team in the world and we greatly respect them. In the match, we don't know what will happen. We will have a chance to win as well."

Japan, meanwhile, is on an unbeaten 10-match run. It reached the round of 32 after defeating Tunisia 4-0 and drawing with the Netherlands and Sweden, with Daichi Kamada (3) and Ayase Ueda (2) leading the goal-scoring charts.

Brazil, however, possesses a different level of firepower. Vinicius Junior has four goals, Matheus Cunha has scored three and teenager Rayan has emerged as another exciting option in Ancelotti's evolving attack.

Japan has spent decades proving it belongs among football's elite. On Monday, it must prove it can finally beat one of them when it matters.

Suzuki will have a tough job on his hands. AFP

### The standings

| GROUP L | M | W | D | L | GF | GA | GD | Points |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| England (Q) | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 6 | 2 | 4 | **7** |
| Croatia (Q) | 3 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 5 | 5 | 0 | **6** |
| Ghana (Q) | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 0 | **4** |
| Panama (E) | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 4 | -4 | **0** |

**Q:** Qualified | **E:** Eliminated

Source: FIFA

### The standings

| GROUP K | M | W | D | L | GF | GA | GD | Points |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Colombia (Q) | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 3 | **7** |
| Portugal (Q) | 3 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 6 | 1 | 5 | **5** |
| DR Congo (Q) | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 1 | **4** |
| Uzbekistan (E) | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 11 | -9 | **0** |

**Q:** Qualified | **E:** Eliminated

Source: FIFA

# Ireland stuns India, clinches T20I series

**Top show:** Ireland's superlative effort ended India's 16 T20I-series winning streak. GETTY IMAGES

**Press Trust of India**
BELFAST

Jai Moondra, a software engineer from Rajasthan's Tonk, rocked a star-studded batting line-up filled with IPL stars as Ireland did the unthinkable, shocking reigning T20 World champions India by one run to complete a historic 2-0 series win here on Sunday.

In slightly nippy, blustery conditions, Moondra (3/32), who still holds an Indian passport, removed Sanju Samson and Abhishek Sharma for first-ball ducks with icing on the cake being skipper Shreyas Iyer's wicket.

India managed only 153 for nine after the hosts made 154 for eight.

Towards the end, Harshit Rana (21, 10b, 2x4, 1x6) tried his best before being dismissed off the penultimate delivery of the contest.

The series defeat also ended India's 16 T20I series winning streak that started mid-2023.

Earlier, debutant Prince Yadav gave a good account of himself with three scalps. Harry Tector (53) and Ben Calitz (37) added 65 runs for the fourth wicket before Dube (2/25) got wickets off successive deliveries to help restrict the hosts.

SCOREBOARD

**IRELAND**
Tim Tector c Abhishek b Harshit 5 *(6b, 1x4)*, Ross Adair c Tilak b Arshdeep 16 *(7b, 1x4, 2x6)*, Harry Tector c Kishan b Prince 53 *(47b, 5x4, 1x6)*, Lorcan Tucker c Kishan b Prince 15 *(18b, 2x4)*, Ben Calitz c Tilak b Dube 37 *(23b, 3x4, 2x6)*, Gareth Delany b Dube 0 *(1b)*, George Dockrell c Axar b Arshdeep 19 *(14b, 1x4, 1x6)*, Liam McCarthy c Kishan b Prince 2 *(4b)*, Jai Moondra (not out) 1 *(1b)*; Extras (lb-2, nb-1, w-3): 6; Total (for eight wkts. in 20 overs): 154.

**FALL OF WICKETS**
1-17 (Tim, 1.5 overs), 2-21 (Adair, 2.2), 3-48 (Tucker, 7.3), 4-113 (Calitz, 14.4), 5-113 (Delany, 14.5), 6-144 (Dockrell, 18.3), 7-153 (Harry, 19.4), 8-154 (McCarthy, 19.6).

**INDIA BOWLING**
Arshdeep 4-0-35-2, Harshit 3-0-17-1, Prince 4-0-22-3, Dube 3-0-25-2, Shedge 2-0-25-0, Axar 4-0-28-0.

**INDIA**
Sanju Samson lbw b Moondra 0 *(1b)*, Abhishek Sharma c Hollard b Moondra 0 *(1b)*, Ishan Kishan run out 12 *(11b, 1x4)*, Shreyas Iyer b Moondra 10 *(7b, 2x4)*, Tilak Varma c McCarthy b Hollard 55 *(46b, 3x4, 1x6)*, Axar Patel c Tucker b Hollard 14 *(18b)*, Shivam Dube c Dockrell b Humphreys 20 *(16b, 2x4)*, Suryansh Shedge c Tim b Hollard 1 *(5b)*, Harshit Rana c Tim b Harry 21 *(10b, 2x4, 1x6)*, Arshdeep Singh (not out) 4 *(5b)*, Prince Yadav (not out) 6 *(1b, 1x6)*; Extras (b-1, lb-4, nb-1, w-4): 10; Total (for nine wkts. in 20 overs): 153.

**FALL OF WICKETS**
1-0 (Samson, 0.1), 2-1 (Abhishek, 0.4), 3-19 (Shreyas, 2.4), 4-35 (Kishan, 4.5), 5-74 (Axar, 11.3), 6-109 (Dube, 16.1), 7-117 (Tilak, 17.2), 8-121 (Shedge, 17.5), 9-147 (Harshit, 19.5).

**IRELAND BOWLING**
Moondra 4-0-32-3, Humphreys 4-0-28-1, Hollard 4-0-26-3, McCarthy 4-0-22-0, Harry 4-0-40-1.

**Toss:** India.
**PoM & PoS:** Moondra.
*Ireland won by one run to win series 2-0.*

## INBRIEF

### Jangoo and Chase put WI in command against Sri Lanka

A double-century by relative newcomer Amir Jangoo, *in pic*, and 194 from captain Roston Chase put the West Indies in a commanding position with the sixth-wicket pair's partnership of 401 lifting the home side to a mammoth first innings total of 626 for nine declared on the third day of the first Test against Sri Lanka in Antigua on Saturday.

**The scores:** Sri Lanka 308 in 71.5 overs & 15/1 in 4 overs vs West Indies 626/9 decl. in 160.5 overs (Jangoo 233, Chase 194, Milan Rathnayaka 5/124).

### Padikkal scores half-century as match ends in a draw

Devdutt Padikkal hit a patient 67 (101b, 5x4) in India-A's second innings as the opening 'Test' against Sri Lanka-A ended in a draw with weather disrupting the proceedings on the fourth and final day at Galle on Sunday. The second 'Test' will be played from July 2 to 5.

**The scores:** India-A 452/6 decl. & 189/8 decl. in 57 overs (Devdutt Padikka 67, Dilum Sudeera 5/49) drew with Sri Lanka-A 330 & 70/2 in 15 overs.

### Stokes to retire from int'l cricket after NZ Test series

England captain Ben Stokes will retire from international cricket after the third Test against New Zealand, the team said on Sunday. The announcement came midway through day four of the Test at Trent Bridge. It ends Stokes' 15-year international career that peaked when he starred for England in its win over New Zealand in the 50-over World Cup final in 2019.

### India finishes third in AVC Men's Volleyball Cup

India finished third in the AVC Men's Volleyball Cup after defeating Bahrain 25-23, 23-25, 25-21, 25-17 in the playoff match in Ahmedabad on Sunday. Skipper Jerome Vinith scored 24 points while Joel Benjamin and Chirag Yadav logged 17 points apiece. In the title decider, Indonesia got the better of South Korea 34-32, 25-16, 25-23.

### Bhagat claims gold; Krishna wins mixed silver

Para badminton star Pramod Bhagat won the men's singles SL3 gold at the British & Irish International, in Dublin on Sunday. In an all-Indian final, Bhagat defeated compatriot Nitesh Kumar 23-21, 21-14. Bhagat also added a bronze in the mixed doubles SL3-SU5 category alongside Manisha Ramdass. Tokyo Paralympic champion Krishna Nagar won silver in the mixed doubles SH6 category alongside Nithya Sre, while adding a bronze in the men's doubles SH6 event with Sivarajan Solaimalai and also singles.

### Haryana men and Punjab women emerge champions

Haryana and Punjab emerged the men's and women's champions of the fifth Fast5 senior National netball championship at the Vaasavi International School in Puducherry on Sunday. Puducherry Chief Minister N. Rangasamy graced the occasion as the chief guest.

**The top-three: Men:** 1. Haryana, 2. Puducherry, 3. Punjab & Telangana; **Women:** 1. Punjab, 2. Haryana, 3. Puducherry & Telangana. **Special awards: Best players: Men:** Shahrukh Khan (Puducherry), Tarun (Haryana); **Women:** Versha, Sonakshi (both Haryana), Angel, Jaswinder (both Punjab), Jaya Priya (Puducherry).

#### LIVE TELECAST

**Zimbabwe vs Bangladesh:** One-off Test, Day 2, FanCode, 1 p.m.

**England vs New Zealand:** Third Test, Day 5, Sony Sports Ten 2 & LIV, 3.30 p.m.

**Wimbledon:** Star Sports 1, 2, SS Select 1, 2 & JioHotstar, 3.30 p.m. onwards

**FIFA World Cup:** Unite8 Sports 1, 2 & Z5 App, 10.30 p.m. & 2 a.m. (Tuesday)

# Sinner starts clear favourite to defend his crown

The top-seeded Italian will have to contend with the hot weather; Sabalenka will look to end a Slam drought as she targets a maiden crown at SW19; Djokovic against begins quest for 25th Major

WIMBLEDON

**Reuters**
LONDON

Wimbledon begins on Monday, with defending champion Jannik Sinner chasing a fifth Grand Slam title and women's top seed Aryna Sabalenka chasing her first Major of the year.

In the absence of rival and two-time winner Carlos Alcaraz, Sinner is the clear favourite this year, but the Italian may have to contend with the hot weather and his own lack of preparation. After his second-round defeat at the French Open from a near-winning position when he cramped up in sizzling conditions, the 24-year-old skipped the warm-up tournaments ahead of the grasscourt Slam.

He said this could work to his benefit, however, ahead of his opening clash with Serbian Miomir Kecmanovic on Monday.

"If you play a tournament before here, maybe it's not going the way you would like to, you come here with some doubts," he told reporters. "If you don't play any tournament, you don't have these doubts, you just go and play."

Sabalenka has been at the top of the WTA rankings since late 2024, but the Belarusian has only won one Grand Slam title in the past 18 months, despite reaching four finals. She also suffered a collapse against Diana Shnaider in the French Open quarterfinals last month, losing the last 10 games in a row.

**Boon, not a bane:** Sinner is unperturbed by his lack of preparation ahead of the tournament and says it could work to his benefit. REUTERS

She said she wanted to "quit tennis" after her collapse in the the French Open but has since worked with a psychologist and said she was not affected as much by losing to Jessica Pegula in this month's Berlin Open semifinals.

"I felt really good throughout the tournament there. I struggled a little bit here and there, (but) overall I feel like things are clicking back together," she told reporters ahead of her opening match against Teodora Kostovic.

The four-time Major champion has never won Wimbledon, but she has reached the semifinals in her last three appearances.

Novak Djokovic has spent the last 2-1/2 years trying to capture a 25th Major that would see him overtake Margaret Court. Wimbledon could be his best bet for achieving that.

Since he won his seventh Wimbledon title in 2022, the Serb has reached two finals and a semifinal at the All England Club.

"Playing on grass, comparing to clay, you don't need to exert as much physical effort. So that's better for me," he added.

"I always loved playing on grass. I have a very good score here, history, in Wimbledon. That gives me a higher dose of confidence coming into the tournament."

Serena Williams, another seven-time champion, had doubts about accepting a wildcard into this year's singles draw but is now looking forward to enjoying her return.

"I think in general my expectations are definitely different for the first time in my career," Serena told reporters on Sunday in London. "I feel like my feelings are just – not that I never enjoyed it before, or else I wouldn't be here today – but I feel like I'm really going to enjoy being out there."

**Monday's order of play:**
**Centre Court:** 1-Sinner vs. Kecmanovic (Srb); 1-Sabalenka vs. Kostovic; Wu vs. 7-Djokovic (Srb).
**Court No. 1:** Ruzic vs. 30-Raducanu; Cilic vs. 8-Medvedev; Linette vs. 5-Andreeva.
**Court No. 2:** 4-Pegula vs. Vidmanova; Zheng vs. 26-Norrie; 3-Auger-Aliassime vs. Shevchenko; Korpatsch vs. 7-Gauff.

# If I were India coach, I will build the batting line-up around Sooryavanshi: Swann

CRICKET

**S. Shrivathsan**

If there is a competition to find Vaibhav Sooryavanshi's biggest fan, former England off-spinner Graeme Swann will certainly be in the mix.

During a 40-minute media interaction on Sunday, Swann could not stop waxing eloquent about the 15-year-old, even when questions pertaining to other topics were posed at him. Describing Sooryavanshi as a "once in a generation talent", the 47-year-old felt that a "box-office batter" like him should not be kept away from the India T20I XI for long.

"If I were the Indian captain or coach, I would have Sooryavanshi in immediately. The sooner India plays him, the sooner he gets exposed to international cricket.

"There is no reason why he cannot be the best player in the world for the next 15 years. He is that good," Swann said.

The southpaw has been made to wait for his international debut after being benched in the two-match series in Ireland.

"If you look at the XI, there is none who deserves to be dropped based on performances.

"But you could argue that Sooryavanshi outperformed them all in the IPL. Let us face it; his stats do not lie. So personally, I would build a batting line-up around him.

"The hype around him is real. He can hit the best bowlers all over the park and destroy them. He is not old enough to drive in this country (England) but is old enough to smash the best bowlers.

Sooryavanshi. SLC

"He can be an absolute match-winner. When you look at the Indian T20I and ODI teams, they are full of world-class players. The fact that a kid who is more exciting has come along is astonishing," Swann went on to add.

The Englishman also opined that new skipper Shreyas Iyer will match the high standards set by his predecessors Rohit Sharma and Suryakumar Yadav.

*(Watch India vs. England first T20I live on July 1 from 10 p.m. IST on Sony Sports Ten 1 SD & HD, Sony Sports Ten 5 SD & HD & Sony MAX).*

# Ethan, Harshavardhan become India's 96th and 97th GMs

**Sports Bureau**
CHENNAI

India got its 96th and 97th Grandmasters in a day as Ethan Vaz and G.B. Harshavardhan completed the achieved their respective titles at different tournaments on Saturday.

The 14-year-old Ethan from Goa, obtained his third and final GM norm at the "Chess Summer in Sarajevo - GM Mix" tournament in Sarajevo, Bosnia & Herzegovina. He also won the GM tournament with a score of seven points from nine rounds while remaining unbeaten.

Harshavardhan became the country's 97th GM by remaining unbeaten in the second Chola Chess GM-norm round-robin tournament in Chennai on Saturday.

The 22-year-old from Chennai finished with four wins and five draws for 6.5 points from nine rounds.

Ethan and Harshavardhan. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Harshavardhan said: "It's a huge relief and I am so happy. I got both my IM title in 2020 and my GM crown in Chennai. That is a great coincidence."

He added that the win over Michal Krasenkow in the seventh round was crucial as the Polish GM was leading till then.

"Krasenkow was unbeaten and the win was very important for me.

"My Elo rating is 2507 and I want to take it to 2600 by the end of the year," he said.

Harshavardhan earned his first GM norm by winning the Asian Juniors in 2022, and his second came at the Asian Continental in 2025, through which he qualified for the FIDE World Cup in Goa.

#### ENGAGEMENTS

**Cricket:** TNCA I division league, fourth round, day one, Sea Hawks vs. Young Stars (Tagore); Globe Trotters vs. SKM (Vivekananda); Grand Slam vs. Vijay (CSK-Guru Nanak); Jolly Rovers vs. Singam Puli (IITM-Chemplast); Nelson vs. Pristine (Wahe Guru-A); Swaraj vs. MRC-A (A.M. Jain), 9.30 a.m.

## AROUND THE CITY

### Krasenkow and Aleksandrov triumph

GM Michał Krasenkow of Poland and GM Aleksej Aleksandrov of Belarus emerged champions of the Second Chola Chess GM Norm Round Robin Tournament and the First Chola Chess IM Norm Round Robin Tournament, respectively.

Krasenkow scored seven points from nine rounds to clinch the GM Norm title, finishing ahead of IM G.B. Harshavardhan (6.5) and IM Harsh Suresh (6).

In the IM Norm event, Aleksandrov finished with 6.5 points, edging FM Daakshin Arun (6), who earned his second IM norm, while IM L.M.S.T. De Silva (5.5) took third place.

### Rakshan and Aravind slam centuries

M. Rakshan (124, 108b, 10x4, 2x6) and B. Aravind (103, 97b, 12x4) helped Syndicate Nanganallur thump Gurunanak Combines by 214 runs in the DCAC first division league.

Rakshan (Syndicate Nanganallur, 124); Aravind (Syndicate Nanganallur, 103).

**The scores:**
**I div.:** Syndicate Nanganallur 330/3 in 45 overs (M. Rakshan 124, B. Aravind 103, Sathyanarayan 59 n.o.) bt Gurunanak Combines 116 in 27 overs (Akshay Kumar 4/26).
Seshadhri MCC 235/8 in 45 overs (V. Suresh 35, Rishi Rajagopal 61, R. Seshanth 49) bt Venugopal 231/9 in 45 overs (E. Gokul 30, S. Suresh Kumar 77, T. Aswinraj 35, Mohisn M. Shaik 3/66).
Vijay 113 in 31.4 overs (N. Jeeva 3/18) lost to Venugopal 116/5 in 20.1 overs (L. Mani Barathi 32).

# Srikanth makes it to US Open final

**Press Trust of India**
FULLERTON

K. Srikanth edged out Japan's Yudai Okimoto in a three-game thriller to progress to the men's singles final of the US Open Super 300 badminton championships here.

Srikanth recorded a 22-20, 15-21, 21-19 win over World No. 33 Okimoto in 72 minutes to enter his first final of the season where he will meet World No 46 Su Li Yang of Taiwan.

In women's singles, sixth seed Devika Sihag fell to Denmark's second seed Line Christophersen 21-15, 11-21, 15-21 in the semifinals.

**The results (semifinals): Men:** K. Srikanth bt Yudai Okimoto 22-20, 15-21, 21-19; Su Li Yang bt Rounak Chouhan 17-21, 19-21.

**Women:** Line Christophersen bt Devika Sihag 15-21, 21-11, 21-15.

## SNAPSHOTS

### Indians U-15 wrestlers strike it rich at Asians

PATTAYA: Indian women wrestlers clinched three gold medals – Samruddhi Satish Patil (33kg), Vinakshi (46kg), and Disha Shokeen (66kg) – as the country bagged an impressive eight medals on the second day of the under-15 Asian wrestling championships here on Sunday. India also won two silver and three bronze medals. Meanwhile, the Greco-Roman team finished third overall in the team standings with 150 points.

**The results: Finals: 33kg:** Samruddhi Satish Patil bt Madina Nosirova (Uzb) 8-2; **36kg:** Sara Kori bt Divya Rani 6-2; **42kg:** Ramu Sugibayashi (Jpn) bt Dnyaneshwari Vrusheshwar Shinde 9-7; **46kg:** Vinakshi bt Muslima Hojimamatova (Uzb) 7-4; **66kg:** Disha Shokeen bt Nowa Doike (Jpn) 11-0.

**Third place: 54kg:** Nisha Mor bt Lo I Huang (Tpe) 8-0 (fall); **58kg:** Dipanshi bt Anudari Bayanmunkh (Mgl) 6-1; **62kg:** Anjali Santosh Vetal bt Khongorzul Lkhagva Ochir (Mgl) 15-2.

### Veteran racehorse trainer Syed S. Shah passes away

PUNE: Veteran racehorse trainer Syed S. Shah, 88, passed away on Sunday morning at a city hospital here. Shah, who secured his trainer's license in 1969, became one of the most respected names in horse racing before retiring in 2025.

Shah, who learned the basics of training from his elder brother S.M. Shah, tasted his first major success in 1973 when his horse Mansoor caused a big upset by winning the Indian Derby ahead of the favourite Bade Miya, trained by S.M. Shah!

Shah trained more than 900 winners. In 2008, he again won the Derby with Hotstepper and repeated the feat next year with Antonios.

# Rieko bags the Chief Minister's Cup

BENGALURU: Mr. P. Arun Kumar's Rieko (Neeraj up) won the Chief Minister's Cup (1,200m), the chief event of the races held here on Sunday (June 28).
The winner is trained by S. John.
**1. LITTLEOVER PLATE (1,200M): PREVIEW** (Suraj) 1, Calix (Akshay K) 2, Sai Princess (Jagadeesh) 3 and Charming Prospect (A. Asbar) 4. 2, 1-1/2 and Snk. 1m 12.68s. Rs. 35 (w), 10, 11 and 49 (p), SHP: 30, THP: 105, FP: 68, Q: 22, Trinella: 917/872, Exacta: 5,067/1,303. Favourite: Calix.
Owner: Sans Craintes Stud Farm [p] Ltd. Trainer: James Mckeown.
**2. MAHALAKSHMI PLATE (1,600M): MICHIKO** (Kiran Rai) 1, Sea Diamond (Vishal S) 2, Rising Form (Faizan Khan) 3 and Magna Carta (S. Sachin) 4. 4-1/4, 1/2 and 3. 1m 39.79s. Rs. 17 (w), 12, 13 and 51 (p), SHP: 33, THP: 115, FP: 70, Q: 49, Trinella: 1,013/634, Exacta: 1,217/347. Favourite: Michiko.
Owner: Mr. Amarjeet Singh Narula. Trainer: G.Y. Rajesh Babu.
**3. RICHELIEU STAKES (1,400M): STEELY CHALLENGE** (Antony) 1, Queendom (Akshay K) 2, Lightning Blizz (Suraj) 3 and Mericle Beauty (Ankush) 4. Not run: Lots Of Luck. 4-3/4, 5-1/4 and 6-1/2. 1m 24.54s. Rs. 16 (w), 10, 14 and 11 (p), SHP: 40, THP: 29, FP: 73, Q: 44, Trinella: 93/34, Exacta: 492/453. Favourite: Steely Challenge.
Owners: M/s. Rapar Galloping Stars LLP & Mr. Rajan Aggarwal. Trainer: Darius Byramji.
**4. CHIEF MINISTER'S CUP (1,200M): REIKO** (Neeraj) 1, Dream Seller (Sandesh) 2, Crown Drive (Hindu S) 3 and Knotty Charmer (Antony) 4. 3/4, Lnk and Hd. 1m 11.21s. Rs. 22 (w), 10 and 13 (p), SHP: 27, THP: 33, FP: 41, Q: 18, Trinella: 136/83, Exacta: 357/60. Favourite: Dream Seller.
Owner: Mr. P. Arun Kumar. Trainer: S. John.
**5. KARNATAKA SUB-AREA CUP (1,400M): VEGATHA** (Antony) 1, Lux Aeterna (Akshay K) 2, Victoria Doresaani (L.A. Rozario) 3 and Irish Coffee (Arul) 4. Not run: Gachchhatu. 3/4, 3-1/4 and 2. 1m 23.65s. Rs. 16 (w), 10, 12 and 12 (p), SHP: 34, THP: 27, FP: 61, Q: 47, Trinella: 183/56, Exacta: 840/784. Favourite: Vegatha.
Owners: M/S. Cherie Sports Pvt Ltd rep. by Mrs. Smita Bajoria & Mr. Cheriyan Abraham. Trainer: P.S. Chouhan.
**6. TUDOR JET PLATE (1,200M): RIVER DEEP** (A. Asbar) 1, Carat Love (Akshay K) 2, Noble Cause (S. Sachin) 3 and IL Volo (Kiran Rai) 4. 1-1/2, 1-1/2 and Nose. 1m 12.98s. Rs. 23 (w), 11, 13 and 15 (p), SHP: 37, THP: 49, FP: 70, Q: 34, Trinella: 157/72, Exacta: 233/93. Favourite: River Deep.
Owner: Mr. Md. Minhaj Raza. Trainer: V. Lokanath.
**7. DESERT GOD PLATE (1,600M): IMPERADOR** (Vishal Bunde) 1, Regal Aristocracy (Antony) 2, Pledge (Akshay K) 3 and Absolute Thunder (Arul) 4. 1-1/4, 1-1/4 and 5-3/4. 1m 37.09s. Rs. 61 (w), 15, 14 and 15 (p), SHP: 43, THP: 49, FP: 330, Q: 103, Trinella: 539/103, Exacta: 1,101/688. Favourite: Pledge.
Owners: M/s. Arun Alagappan Racing LLP, Mr. M.P. Vikram, Mr. A.S. Karthik Chandra, Mr. Ronak J Kimmane & Mr. Ananth Iyengar. Trainer: Prasanna Kumar.
Jackpot: Rs. 1,177.
Runner up: 70.
Mini Jackpot: 667.
Treble (i): 84; (ii): 246.

# Resurrection Game: Can Serena and Djokovic turn back the clock?

At Wimbledon 2026, the American great will return to competitive singles after a near four-year absence while the Serb will look to win his first Major since the 2023 US Open. At 44 and 39, age is not on their side. Skill, experience and pedigree will, however, not be in short supply

N. Sudarshan

If you are looking for the most complete CVs in world tennis, you shouldn't be going beyond Serena Williams and Novak Djokovic.

Serena has 23 singles Majors – an Open Era record – and 14 in doubles. She has won every Slam at least thrice in singles and twice in doubles.

The American has clinched the Olympics singles gold once (London 2012), the doubles gold thrice (Sydney 2000, Beijing 2008 and London 2012), and the erstwhile Fed Cup (now Billie Jean King Cup) in 1999. Since 1990, no player has won more singles titles on the WTA Tour than Serena's 73.

Djokovic has an all-time men's record 24 singles Majors, secured every Slam at least thrice, and bagged all nine Masters 1000s and ATP Finals at least twice. He won the Davis Cup for Serbia in 2010, and when he pocketed the Olympics singles gold at Paris 2024, following a sensational victory over Carlos Alcaraz, it filled the last existing gap.

It is natural for everyone to expect that the two legends will now be resting on their incredible laurels, vacationing year-round, soaking in the sunshine, swimming the sea, and taking long and calming strolls with their partners and children in tow.

## Back to the grind

But from Monday at Wimbledon, Serena and Djokovic will be seen hitting tennis balls again, not for fun but in all seriousness as full-blooded professionals. The former is closing in on 45, and is a mother of two, with the second child yet to turn three. The latter has just stepped into the 40th year of his life and is also a father of two.

Yet, here they are, sparring with players a decade or two younger, and looking to shoe-horn another high-impact bullet point into their already exceptional resumes.

Serena, a seven-time winner and four-time runner-up at Wimbledon, is making a comeback to competitive singles for the first time since US Open 2022 while Djokovic, a seven-time winner and three-time finalist at SW19, will be on his 21st successive visit to the All England Club.

What is their motivation? Serena, in her own words, has said that it is an opportunity to show her two daughters what it takes to perform on the biggest stage. She has also been inspired by her sister Venus, 46, who made the doubles quarterfinal at the 2025 US Open. In fact, Serena and Venus will also be playing doubles at Wimbledon, having been granted a wild card.

"I had nothing better to do," Serena said at the Queen's Club in London recently, eliciting great laughter from the crowd which watched her pair up with Canada's Victoria Mboko and win a round. "I got tired of sitting at home. My kids are out of school for the summer, so why not?

"I don't need to win. I've won more than most people have in their whole lives. I don't have anything to lose. Everything is a gain," she observed.

For Djokovic, it is the "thrill of competition". At the Australian Open earlier this year, he beat the then World No. 2 Jannik Sinner over five sets in the semifinal, and pushed No. 1 Alcaraz hard in the final before succumbing in four sets. A month later at Indian Wells, he stated that he would keep going as long as he has the "flair and quality, and the motivation".

"I still enjoy getting out there in front of the fans and being competitive," Djokovic said. "I have proven to myself primarily, and to others, that I can still compete at the highest level. I still have that edge, and I'll keep on going as long as I feel like it."

Serena certainly looks leaner and fitter than when she last played on the Tour, thanks to the effectiveness of new-age weight-loss drugs. After her second pregnancy, she couldn't "beat the weight" and turned towards GLP-1 medication.

Glucagon-Like Peptide 1 (GLP-1) is a naturally occurring hormone that nudges the pancreas to release insulin, slow down digestion and reduce hunger. Semaglutides and Tirzepatides perform this function when ingested in the form of medicines, reducing food intake and leading to significant weight loss.

These two drugs have been on the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) monitoring programme since 2024 and there is a raging debate whether they can be bracketed as performance-enhancers. How Serena benefits will further this discussion.

But this is only one part of the story. Playing tennis is part of Serena's muscle memory and that aspect is not going away. At her peak, she had the most devastating serve on Tour, and even a watered-down version will give her the first-mover advantage on a slick and fast surface like grass.

There is also her on-court aura, the overarching nature of which can make opponents shrink. Only a handful have risen to the challenge, like Naomi Osaka and Bianca Andreescu did when they beat Serena in their maiden Major finals at the 2018 and 2019 US Opens respectively.

"I see her in the gym more than I have seen her when she was at her prime," Djokovic said last week at Wimbledon. "It's admirable, honestly, the effort she's putting in. For her to come back after years of being absent, two children later, and to give so much effort not just for her own satisfaction but to also give all of us the pleasure of seeing her is remarkable."

However, there are challenges galore. A similar comeback in singles was once attempted by Martina Navratilova in 2002 when she was nearly 46. That lasted only 10 matches over three years, and featured just three wins. Navratilova did go on to have a wonderful second wind in doubles, but Serena has said that anything other than singles is "not my journey right now".

## Lacking the edge

Having not experienced a competitive environment for nearly four years, Serena is bound to be rusty. Even before that, she was in a state of semi-retirement, playing just eight singles matches from Wimbledon 2021 and tasting defeat in five.

Present-day singles is also more powerful and explosive than at any other time. A reality check may well await Serena, who once dominated the Tour with her athleticism and superior heft of stroke.

Unseeded and unranked as she is, the early rounds will not be easy. Against World No. 87 Maya Joint, Serena may have a softer-than-expected opening, but she is drawn to meet the fast-rising 21-year-old from Philippines Alexandra Eala, the big-serving Czech and 2021 finalist Karolina Pliskova, and defending champion Iga Swiatek in the subsequent rounds.

In contrast, Djokovic, by virtue of still being in the top-10, has the ranking protection to ease in. Unfortunately, the seventh seed has also been dealt with a banana skin of a draw.

After China's Wu Yibing (No. 102), the Serb can potentially meet Stefanos Tsitsipas, a two-time Slam finalist and former World No. 3 but now down to 87, Joao Fonseca, who beat him in the third round at French Open and is now No. 27, and 12th seed Andrey Rublev in the second, third and fourth rounds respectively. Since the run to the final in Melbourne, Djokovic has done precious little, playing just seven matches and losing three. After winning the ATP Finals in November 2023, which came two months after he secured the last of his 24 Majors, he has just two Tour titles – ATP 250s in Geneva and Athens, both last year.

In fairness, Djokovic's struggle has not been in beating mid-level players but the elite ones in Sinner and Alcaraz. As they are almost always ranked in the top-two, every player who dreams of a Slam invariably has to beat both.

Prior to the success over Sinner at the Australian Open, Djokovic had lost five straight times to the Italian, with three of those at Majors. Against Alcaraz, he has lost four of his last five Slam contests, with three of them coming in finals.

While there is little doubt that the duo has elevated the quality of tennis, the physicality in the game has gone through the roof. So much so that Djokovic, who once raised fitness standards to such levels that it triggered massive shifts in the way Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal prepared, is now struggling to keep up. It doesn't help that Sinner and Alcaraz are nearly 15 years younger.

## Playing catch-up

"It's just age, the wear and tear of the body," Djokovic said after losing to Sinner in the semifinal at Wimbledon 2025. "As much as I'm taking care of it, reality hits me. It's tough for me to accept that because I feel that when I'm fresh and fit, I can still play really good tennis. I have proved that.

"But playing best-of-five [sets] has been a real struggle physically. The longer the tournament goes, the worse the condition gets. These guys are fit, young and sharp. I feel like I'm going into the match with a tank half-empty. It's just not possible to win a match like that.

"But it's one of these things I accept and embrace, deal with the reality the way it is, and try to make the most out of it."

Wimbledon 2026 will give Djokovic the best opportunity to do this. In Alcaraz's absence, he has just one big worry in Sinner. Alexander Zverev is the second seed, but the reigning French Open champion has a history of stumbling on grass and never gone past the fourth round at The Championships.

Though Djokovic's best surface was hard for long, the lush green lawns of south-west London have been immensely hospitable. Over the years, he has mastered the art of moving on the slippery turf, improved his volleying to a significant degree, and spot-serves like the best in the business.

## Remarkable record

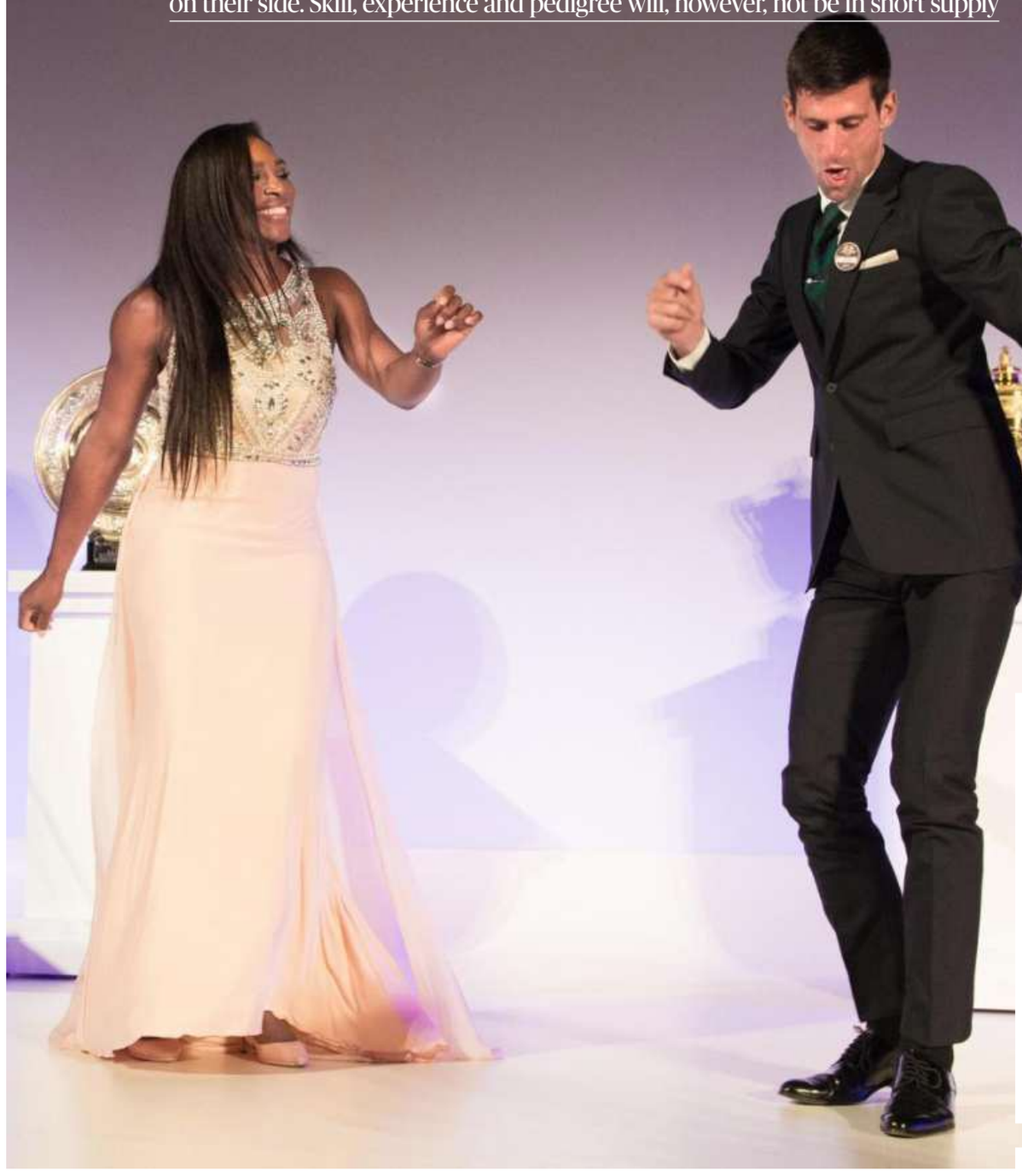
In his last seven visits to Wimbledon, he has earned four titles, made two appearances in the final and one in the semifinal. The dash to the 2024 summit clash, in particular, was astounding, because it hadn't even been six weeks since Djokovic had gone under a surgeon's scalpel to mend a torn meniscus in his right knee.

"I think I'm better prepared than I was for Roland-Garros," Djokovic said looking ahead. "Obviously, playing on grass, compared to clay, you don't need to exert as much physical effort. And I always loved playing on grass. I have a very good history at Wimbledon.

"Roland-Garros was physically very draining, demanding, but the effort was there. Anyway, I was planning to peak at Wimbledon after the shoulder injury kept me away from the Tour. I knew that going straight into Roland-Garros was going to be quite difficult... maybe too big a challenge for me, and that's what happened.

"But I knew that's going to give me a bit more time to prepare for Wimbledon. So, hopefully, I'll have a good tournament here."

With a combined 47 Grand Slam singles trophies, Serena and Djokovic are tennis royalty. Can they be at their regal best at the crown jewel of the sport?



GETTY IMAGES

## THE GIST

- Serena is returning to the Tour so that her daughters can watch her play as a professional. Her sister Venus' comeback last year has also proved inspirational
- Djokovic continues to play for the "thrill of competition", and also because he still believes he can beat the top players. The most recent example came at the 2026 Australian Open when he defeated Sinner in the semifinal
- Serena's record at Wimbledon and her playing style which flows from the serve can be her allies. But a severe lack of match practice and opponents' power game can be her foes
- Djokovic has a proud record at SW19 and has developed a fine grass-court game. But having played just seven matches since the final in Melbourne, he may be undercooked

**Djokovic has an all-time men's record 24 singles Majors, secured every Slam at least thrice, and bagged all nine Masters 1000s and ATP Finals at least twice**

**Serena has 23 singles Majors – an Open Era record – and 14 in doubles. She has won every Slam at least thrice in singles and twice in doubles**

# Smart AI caching can keep the data flowing when disaster strikes

In cooperative caching, different parts of a disaster-response network, including satellites, drones, base stations, and emergency vehicles, work together to store and share useful data; when one node receives or generates important content, such as satellite images or video, nearby nodes may also cache copies based on demand

Shamim Haque Mondal

Two years ago, Mundakkai and Churalmala in Kerala experienced powerful landslides that killed hundreds of people. Last year, a large village in Dharali, Uttarakhand, was washed away following heavy rain. In the monsoon season of 2025, the States in Northeast India were devastated by frequent floods. More than a hundred people lost their lives after heavy rain in Uttar Pradesh on May 13-14 this year.

During such disasters, it is common for telecom towers to topple over, power lines to be cut, and roads to be closed. In these situations, real-time information as to what is happening on the ground, where people are stuck, which routes are still open, etc. becomes crucial for rescue workers and medical workers. In the absence of such communication, rescue operations are delayed, more property is damaged, and more lives are lost.

During disasters, real-time information about where people need help and which routes are still open is crucial for rescue and medical workers. REUTERS

## Cooperative caching

'Solving' communications in disaster-affected areas is a long-standing problem. Recently, in a paper published in the IEEE *Transactions on Services Computing*, researchers from Ireland, led by Sangita Dhara of Trinity College Dublin, presented a novel approach – a way to transmit important real-time information using a technology called collaborative caching even if the local network is in a subpar condition.

At a time of disaster, the local administration typically has three main communication channels: satellite or satellite-based communications, drones or unmanned aerial vehicles, and some *ad hoc* network based on the ground. A satellite can beam data down over a wide area, so accessing that signal is relatively easy, but the big problem here is data latency, i.e. the delay in getting information. Time is of the essence. It is also possible to take pictures from the sky or transmit live video using drones. However, they are limited by their short range, limited battery capacity, and, above all, obstacles in the form of inclement weather. Finally, ground-based wireless networks can help with local communication – but they are often damaged or non-functional during disasters.

In this context, the researchers have presented cooperative caching. Here, different parts of a disaster-response network, including satellites, drones, base stations, and emergency vehicles, work together to store and share useful data. When one node receives or generates important content, such as satellite images or video, nearby nodes may also cache copies based on the demand. This cooperation allows rescue teams to retrieve information from the nearest available source rather than a distant origin, reducing delay, improving reliability when infrastructure is damaged, and increasing the chance that critical information is available in real time.

## Automatic decision-making

Creating this caching system is technologically not simple, however. The drones are airborne, rescue vehicles are on the road, and the position of satellites is constantly changing. It is also difficult to know when and where information will be required, plus the storage of each device will be limited.

To address this problem, the researchers developed a statistical model called contextual multi-armed bandit (CMAB), an AI model that optimises caching decisions quickly.

The model learns from each of the previous decisions, then reviews three factors: what data are recently available, what data demand is currently high, and how much memory is needed in the cache.

For example, it would be helpful to understand that a photo taken 10 minutes before a flood is more effective than a photo taken one hour before the flood. Similarly, video footage or a map of a place that most rescuers are asking for is more important than those that fewer ones are looking for. Sometimes, instead of caching high-resolution video – such as 4K video – short text alerts or warning messages could help rescuers remain productive without taking up large amounts of storage. The model is taught to make such decisions automatically.

**The researchers developed a statistical model called contextual multi-armed bandit, an AI model that optimised caching decisions quickly**

## Federated learning

While in CMAB each node learns from what information it alone has, a more advanced version called FMAB – short for federated multi-armed bandit – learns from its information as well as what the nodes nearby have learnt.

"Caching decisions are executed periodically rather than per request, amortising the computational cost," the researchers wrote in their paper. "Even the highest observed decision latency of Contextual MAB [around 87 microseconds] remains negligible compared to network delays, ensuring system complexity does not hinder the practical applicability for dynamic and real-time, post-disaster deployments."

The work also highlights the importance of a three-tier network, where space, air, and ground are working together, called Space Air Ground Integrated Network (SAGIN). Here, each layer plays a unique role, but the limitations that exist between them are greatly reduced due to caching, and the system becomes more efficient. In the post-disaster scenario, it is important not to look at all the information that is available but only at which information is more useful. An updated road map can tell us which bridges are still usable while a live video can let us know that boats are urgently needed in a specific part of the floodplain.

## All together

As a result, content should be seen not only as data but as time-dependent actionable data. And the goal of advanced caching should be to learn how to store the most valuable information in the most appropriate place with limited resources.

To meet this goal, SAGIN works to build external infrastructure, CMAB helps to make acceptable decisions, and FMAB can make the network stronger in the post-disaster period by spreading those decisions across multiple nodes.

However, the results of this simulation-based study depend on many parameters, such as the weather at the time, the flight of the drone, energy management, hardware malfunctions, cyber security, and the behaviour of rescuers in reality.

Moreover, it is not always technically possible to determine which content is valuable or preferable. In many cases, the needs of the local administration or humanitarian considerations can also speed up the rescue.

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

### THE GIST

- It is common for communication to get disrupted when a disaster occurs. The absence of real-time information delays rescue operations
- Researchers from Ireland found a way to transmit important real-time information using a technology called collaborative caching even if the local network is in a subpar condition
- The work also highlights the importance of a three-tier network, where space, air, and ground are working together, called Space Air Ground Integrated Network (SAGIN)

## BIG SHOT

Zoraide de Deus Mota, 104, Zulina de Deus Nunes, 103, and Levita de Deus Nunes, 109, pose for a photo after samples were collected for longevity research in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on June 23. Recently named the world's oldest living siblings, the sisters are part of a study exploring genetic factors linked to longevity. REUTERS

## WHAT IS IT?

# Life on Mars: enduring mystery

Vasudevan Mukunth

In a new study in *Science Advances*, an international team of researchers has reported finding organic matter on Mars. Using the NASA Perseverance rover, the team recorded a distribution of complex organic carbon within an ancient river valley on the red planet's Jezero Crater.

Using the rover's SHERLOC instrument, the researchers detected a complex and hardy form of organic matter called macromolecular carbon within fine-grained mudstones. According to the study paper, published in *Science Advances*, this is significant as it represents the most robust detection of organic material in Jezero Crater to date and is the first time such a material has been found directly on a natural rock surface on Mars.

Over the last decade, the NASA Curiosity rover has found organic molecules in Gale Crater, proving the building blocks of life could be preserved in Mars's lakebed rocks. However, Perseverance's previous scans of the floor of Jezero Crater only showed localised and faint hints of organic materials.

The new evidence, from the Neretva Vallis channel, suggests organic matter could be more widespread on Mars than thought. The fact that these organic materials have also been found alongside minerals like carbonates and sulphates suggests they may have been trapped and preserved by water-driven processes billions of years ago.

A selfie taken by NASA's Perseverance Mars rover in 2025 shows the Cheyava Falls rock to the rover's left. NASA

While the new study noted that these organics could have been formed by geological (i.e. abiotic) processes rather than biological ones, the findings are, in the paper's words, "astrobiologically compelling", showing that complex carbon can survive the planet's harsh radiation for aeons.

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

Text&Context

THE HINDU

## NEWS IN NUMBERS

### Number of children covered in T.N. polio vaccine programme

**53** in lakh. Tamil Nadu CM C. Joseph Vijay launched a Statewide health drive, aiming to administer the oral pulse polio vaccine to children under the age of five. The National Pulse Polio Immunisation campaign was rolled out across more than 43,000 authorised vaccination centres. PTI

### Govt. schools covered in Rajasthan's mental health programme

**1,500** Officials claimed that Rajasthan is the first State in the country to launch such a programme. RSCERT Director Shweta Fagediya said that a pilot project conducted in Sirohi and Banswara districts in 2024 yielded encouraging results. PTI

### Approximate surplus stock held by private firms for kharif season

**30** in per cent. FSII Chairman Ajai Rana said while the sector was well-prepared following a bumper seed production season for corn, rice, and millets, a survey of 1,000 farmers showed 75% had already purchased seed while the remaining 25% were waiting for the monsoon. PTI

### Number of targets in Iran struck by the U.S. army during ceasefire

**10** The U.S. military said on Saturday it had struck 10 targets in Iran at President Donald Trump's direction, continuing a string of attacks that have shaken the war's uneasy ceasefire. The U.S. says strikes were a response to an Iranian attack on an oil tanker. PTI

### Magnitude of the earthquake in northeastern Japan

**6.1** A magnitude-6.1 earthquake rattled northeastern Japan early on Sunday, according to the Japan Meteorological Agency. No tsunami warning was issued, and there were no immediate reports of damage or casualties. PTI

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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# Can neutral ships be lawfully attacked?

What protections does international law afford neutral merchant vessels? When can neutral ships lawfully lose that protection? Can oil tankers and blockade runners be treated as military targets? What legal remedies are available to India after the deaths of its seafarers? How does international law regulate attacks?

LETTER & SPIRIT

Kartikey Singh

**The story so far:**

Recently, the U.S. Navy carried out Hellfire missile strikes against three merchant tankers – *Marivex, Settebello and Jalveer* – all carrying Indian seafarers. While *Marivex* and *Jalveer* escaped without casualties, three Indians aboard *Settebello* – the chief engineer, an engine fitter, and a deck cadet – were killed. Although U.S. President Donald Trump and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian signed an MoU on June 17, intended to end the conflict and reopen the Strait of Hormuz, this fragile peace has already been breached by fresh confrontations between U.S. and Iranian forces. Beyond these shifting geopolitical tides, the fundamental legal questions surrounding the attacks on neutral shipping and the accountability for civilian lives lost in these combat zones remain unresolved.

**What laws govern naval operations during armed conflict?**

The two primary bodies of law governing naval operations during an international armed conflict are the (1) "law of naval warfare" – a branch of law of armed conflict or International Humanitarian Law (IHL) – and the (2) "law of the sea". The former regulates the conduct of hostilities at sea, including which vessels may be attacked and when merchant ships may be visited and searched, captured, destroyed after capture, or attacked, as well as the declaration and enforcement of 'naval blockades'. The latter provides the maritime legal framework within which the rights and obligations of belligerent (warring states) and neutral parties operate, thereby shaping the geography of naval operations.

The "law of the sea", set out primarily in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), often called the "Constitution of the Oceans", defines maritime zones such as the territorial sea (up to 12 nautical miles), exclusive economic zones (EEZs) (up to 200 nautical miles), the high seas, and international straits. Although the U.S., Israel, Iran, and some neutral states are not parties to UNCLOS, its relevant provisions are widely regarded as customary international law binding on all states.

**Are neutral merchant vessels and civilians protected?**

The "law of naval warfare" does not confer unrestricted authority upon belligerents. Its operation is constrained by IHL, neutrality law, and the "law of the sea". While ethical restraints on warfare have roots in ancient Greek, Roman, Indian, and Chinese civilisations, their modern legal expression lies in IHL, codified in the 1949 Geneva Conventions and supplemented by other treaties and customary international law. Designed to limit human suffering by regulating the 'means' and 'methods' of warfare, IHL protects the wounded, sick, prisoners of war, civilians and civilian objects, while restricting certain weapons and methods of combat. Unlike the UN Charter, which governs the legality of starting a war (*jus ad bellum*), IHL regulates the conduct of war (*jus in bello*) through the principles of 'distinction', 'proportionality', 'military necessity' and 'precaution'.

In naval warfare, as on land, civilians and civilian objects are generally protected from attack. Accordingly, submarine cables, pipelines, container ships, and tankers carrying food, fertilizer, or oil may not be targeted. Likewise, the right of "transit passage" through international straits, codified in Part III, Section 2 (Articles 37-44) of UNCLOS and recognised under customary international law, also continues during armed conflict. Equally important is the law of maritime neutrality – a key component of the "law of naval warfare" – which regulates relations between belligerent and neutral states by protecting neutral territory, shipping and commerce from unnecessary interference while requiring neutrals not to provide military assistance to either side. In the Strait of Hormuz, which straddles the territorial seas of Iran and Oman and carries roughly one-fifth of global oil supplies, neutral merchant vessels therefore remain entitled to exercise "transit passage" despite the hostilities.

Commercial vessel *MT Jalveer* after it was attacked off the coast of Oman near Shinas Port. ANI

**When do the neutrals lose their protected status?**

Under IHL, during an armed conflict, attacks may be directed only against 'military objectives'. At sea, some vessels (like enemy warships and naval auxiliaries) qualify as 'military objectives' by their nature, while others acquire that status because of their use or activities at the time of attack. Yet, the "law of naval warfare" permits attacks on merchant vessels in certain limited circumstances, although not in neutral waters. The San Remo Manual on International Law Applicable to Armed Conflicts at Sea (1994) – the most influential restatement of the "law of naval warfare" – provides that objects may be targeted when they make an effective contribution to military action and their total or partial destruction, capture, or neutralisation offers a definite military advantage (Paragraph 40 of the Manual).

Applying this principle to neutral shipping, Paragraph 67 of the Manual, which specifically addresses merchant vessels flying a neutral state's flag, permits attacks on neutral merchant ships reasonably believed to be carrying "contraband" or breaching a "blockade", and after prior warning they intentionally and clearly refuse to stop, or intentionally and clearly resist visit, search or capture, or where ships 'otherwise make an effective contribution to enemy's military action'. The International Law Association's Helsinki Principles on the Law of Maritime Neutrality (1998) adopt a similar approach. By contrast with 'neutral' merchant vessels, which typically cannot be captured merely for trading with the enemy, 'enemy' merchant vessels are generally liable to "capture" outside neutral waters. However, even the 'enemy' merchant vessels may be attacked only when, and for as long as, they qualify as 'military objectives', for instance, by laying naval mines, performing functions normally undertaken by naval auxiliaries, or gathering and transmitting tactical intelligence.

**Can oil tankers be attacked?**

Significantly, the U.S. military has alleged that the Palau-flagged *Settebello* was illegally transporting Iranian oil. While disputed, the claim raises the question of whether oil carried aboard a 'neutral' merchant vessel can be treated as "contraband". Given its military utility, oil may, in certain circumstances, qualify as "contraband", but only if destined for enemy-controlled territory or otherwise supporting the enemy's military effort – a concept particularly relevant to neutral merchant vessels, since enemy merchant ships are already generally liable to capture outside neutral waters.

More fundamentally, the legality of attacking oil tankers turns on whether they qualify as 'military objectives'. Under the traditional view, commercial exports do not become military objectives merely because they generate revenue for a belligerent; the tanker and its cargo must make an effective contribution to military action, and their destruction must offer a definite military advantage. Ordinary export trade, including oil sold on the open market, is generally considered too remote from military operations to meet this test. In contrast, the U.S.-backed "war-sustaining" theory treats objects that finance or sustain an enemy's war effort as military objectives, potentially rendering oil exports that generate revenue closely linked to military operations lawful targets.

**What about naval blockades?**

The U.S. justifies the strikes on the grounds that the vessels were violating an American blockade. Both the San Remo Manual and the Helsinki Principles recognise "blockade" enforcement as a legitimate belligerent right and permit force against neutral vessels reasonably believed to be breaching a lawful "blockade". A blockade seeks to prevent vessels and aircraft of all nations from entering or leaving enemy-controlled ports, airports or coastal areas, thereby restricting both the import of supplies and the export of goods. Notably, it must be publicly declared, applied impartially to all vessels of all states, including neutrals, and be effective rather than a mere "paper blockade".

However, compliance with the aforesaid "law of naval" warfare governing blockades is not, by itself, sufficient to justify attacks on neutral vessels. As many international law scholars argue, such actions must also comply with the UN Charter, adopted in 1945, following the devastation of World War II, to maintain international peace and security. Article 2(4) of the Charter prohibits states from using force against another State's 'territorial integrity' or 'political independence', except pursuant to UN Security Council authorisation or in self-defence under Article 51, including, under the contested but widely invoked doctrine of 'anticipatory' self-defence, against an imminent threat.

Since the U.S. war against Iran arguably has neither Security Council authorisation nor a valid self-defence claim, many scholars view it as violating the UN Charter itself. Consequently, the "blockade" forms part of an unlawful use of force and is therefore unlawful as a matter of *jus ad bellum*, regardless of its compliance with the law of naval warfare (*jus in bello*). In other words, the "blockade" and measures taken to enforce it may satisfy the latter but not the former, since the exercise of belligerent rights to enforce a "blockade", unlike self-defence or UN Security Council authorisation, is not recognised as an exception to Article 2(4)'s prohibition on the use of force.

Importantly, the UN Security Council may authorise forcible measures by member states, and Article 42 expressly identifies "blockade" as one such measure. However, outside a "blockade" authorised by the Security Council, there does not seem to be any *jus ad bellum* basis for using force against neutral merchant vessels to enforce a "blockade". The exercise of belligerent rights through attacks on vessels flagged to "neutral" states, including the forcible enforcement of a "blockade" against neutral shipping, sits in direct tension with the UN Charter, irrespective of whether force may lawfully be used against the blockaded state itself. Even where a state possesses a valid *jus ad bellum* basis for using force to repel an armed attack, it may employ only such force as is necessary and proportionate; that right does not ordinarily extend to attacks on third states or their vessels absent an independent basis for self-defence.

**What is next for India?**

Beyond the serious doubts surrounding the legality of the U.S. strikes, key questions remain: what intelligence supported the attack; were less intrusive measures such as boarding, diversion or capture available; and were adequate warnings issued to allow civilians to protect themselves? For India, the incident is not merely a diplomatic issue but a legally cognisable injury to its nationals. Under the doctrine of "diplomatic protection", India has standing to espouse claims arising from injuries to its citizens caused by an internationally wrongful act, demand explanations, seek accountability and compensation, and call for an independent investigation into the deaths of the three seafarers.

*(Kartikey Singh, lawyer, and currently working as a Law Clerk-cum-Research Associate at the Supreme Court of India. The views expressed are personal)*

## THE GIST

- International law generally protects neutral merchant vessels and civilians during armed conflict, but that protection may be lost in limited circumstances, such as when ships effectively contribute to military action or breach a lawful blockade.
- The legality of the U.S. strikes on neutral tankers depends not only on the law of naval warfare but also on the UN Charter, raising questions over the lawfulness of the blockade, the targeting of neutral shipping, and compliance with international humanitarian law.
- The deaths of three Indian seafarers raise issues of state responsibility, diplomatic protection, accountability, and India's right to seek explanations, an independent investigation, and compensation.

CACHE

# Do unprecedented security measures address NEET's real vulnerabilities?

While extraordinary security measures may safeguard printed question papers, deeper risks arising from institutional blind spots, insider networks, and powerful commercial interests remain largely unaddressed

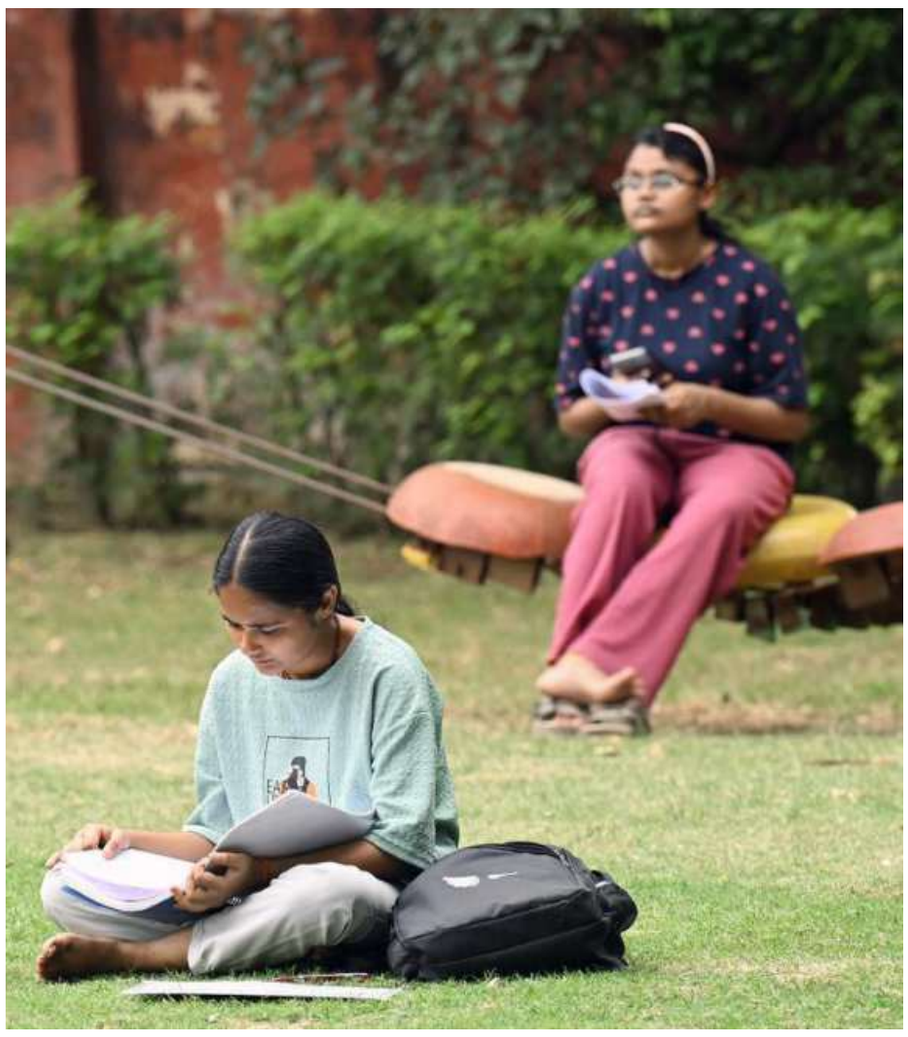
Rajeev Kumar

The National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) has evolved into one of India's most high-stakes examinations, where a student's medical career often depends on performance in a single three-hour test conducted once a year. Intense competition for medical seats, immense social prestige, and the high economic value of a medical degree create enormous academic, financial, and psychological pressure.

The stakes are further amplified by management quota admissions, for which several crores of rupees may be offered, particularly in family-owned hospitals. In such an environment, paper leaks, impersonation, unfair means, coaching-centre collusion, insider access, and other forms of malpractice are not merely security failures but manifestations of the powerful incentives surrounding medical admissions.

Following the NEET-2026 controversy, the Union government made unprecedented security arrangements for Indian public examinations. Coordinated by the Cabinet Secretary and involving the Air Force, paramilitary and police forces, AI-enabled surveillance, biometric authentication, GPS-tracked logistics, and nearly seven lakh personnel, the exercise was comparable in scale to China's Gaokao. It demonstrated that the logistics of a high-stakes examination can be secured through an extraordinary national security and administrative effort.

Yet the central question remains: do these unprecedented measures address the real vulnerabilities of NEET, or merely its most visible component – the physical movement of question papers and personnel?



Intense competition for medical seats, immense social prestige, and the high economic value of a medical degree create enormous academic, financial, and psychological pressure. R. V. MOORTHY

### Recurring anomalies

Since its inception in 2013, NEET has repeatedly faced controversies involving allegations of paper leaks, score inflation, and unusually high-performing candidates emerging from particular centres, rooms, families, and coaching hubs. Concerns have also been raised about the weak correlation between NEET performance, Class XII marks, and subsequent performance in medical education. The repeated occurrence of these concerns warrants closer scrutiny.

The credibility crisis was serious enough to trigger a complete re-examination in 2015 (then AIPMT) and extraordinary interventions following the NEET-2024 controversy. The 2024 episode exposed systemic weaknesses, including an incorrect question paper, grace marks, inflated scores, and an unprecedented clustering of candidates' near-perfect scores.

More significantly, weeks before NEET-2026, highly targeted question compilations reportedly circulated across several parts of the country. Following the examination, many candidates claimed that an unusually large number of questions closely matched the circulated material. Yet no intelligence, cybersecurity, law enforcement, or the National Testing Agency (NTA) appears to have acted on these signals before the controversy surfaced through a whistleblower's FIR, ultimately leading to the cancellation of the examination.

Official submissions before the Supreme Court emphasised compliance with the Radhakrishnan Committee recommendations and the establishment of SOPs, while treating the leak allegations as arising from specific inputs. If the NTA detected no credible abnormality, what justified cancelling NEET-2026 and imposing enormous social, psychological, and economic costs on over two million students?

### Where do leaks really originate?

Most past investigations failed to establish any printed paper leak, yet the NEET-2026 re-test security architecture was overwhelmingly focused on protecting printed question papers. This raises an obvious question: does the primary vulnerability lie elsewhere?

Before printing, question papers pass through question setting, moderation, translation, and digitisation, during which a small group of individuals has privileged access. The recurring appearance of highly targeted, accurate question compilations and coaching material closely resembling examination content points towards possible information flows at these source stages.

The risk increases when the same experts reportedly participate repeatedly across years and examinations while maintaining direct or indirect links to the coaching ecosystem. Such leakages need not involve complete papers; fragments, themes and high-probability questions may be sufficient to create a substantial advantage. If information is selectively transmitted through insider networks, recurring leakages can occur without a single printed question paper ever being leaked or recovered.

### Will isolation of experts prevent leaks?

Keeping question setters, moderators, and translators in isolation assumes that leaks occur only after they are confined. But if their identities and information are already circulating through informal networks, isolation does not address the real source of risk.

The larger concern is the repeated engagement of some experts across years and examinations, often amid allegations of links with coaching ecosystems and other commercial interests.

In such circumstances, information advantages need not take the form of a leaked paper; they may appear as targeted question banks, recurring themes, or unusually accurate predictions.

The real issue, therefore, is not confinement for a few days, but the integrity, independence, and conflict-free selection of experts. Without safeguards against conflicts of interest, repeated engagements, and entrenched networks, isolation may leave the underlying vulnerability untouched.

### Unaddressed vulnerabilities

Despite unprecedented security arrangements, several critical vulnerabilities remain outside the current security framework.

One of the most significant vulnerabilities is the absence of rigorous conflict-of-interest avoidance and antecedent verification for question setters, moderators, and translators. Alleged links between some experts and coaching or commercial ecosystems raise concerns about the integrity of the question-setting process itself. No amount of surveillance or expert isolation can compensate for a compromised source. Stringent background checks, conflict-of-interest scrutiny, and intelligence-based monitoring are therefore essential safeguards.

The National Medical Commission Act, 2019, mandates a single uniform entrance examination, not unlimited participation over decades. Yet NEET imposes neither an upper age limit nor any restriction on attempts, with nearly half of the candidate population reportedly being repeaters. This creates a large pool of long-term aspirants increasingly dependent on coaching ecosystems and susceptible to information asymmetries. While repeated attempts may improve familiarity with the examination, academic ability and professional suitability cannot be expected to improve indefinitely through repeated attempts alone.

The problem is compounded by the fact that the qualifying threshold is fixed at the 50th percentile; the larger the pool of long-term repeat candidates, the lower the effective qualifying score tends to become. Unlimited attempts and a low eligibility threshold encourage repeat participation and create conditions in which unfair practices can thrive.

NEET-2026 also exposed vulnerabilities beyond question papers. A teenager reportedly accessed candidate accounts and attempted to divert refund payments. At the same time, an ethical hacker reported access to super-administrative functions, including observer management, appointment letters, and backend data exports. Meanwhile, AI-enabled surveillance and monitoring systems reportedly failed to detect warning signals associated with the widely circulated "guided papers" controversy, even as portal glitches persisted.

These incidents point to weaknesses in cybersecurity and examination preparedness.

These are only some of the visible vulnerabilities. The bigger challenge is to understand where information advantages come from, who benefits from them, and how they spread through networks of coaching centres, intermediaries, insiders, and commercial ecosystems.

### The way forward

NEET-2026 demonstrated that a high-stakes examination can be conducted under an unprecedented security apparatus. However, securing the physical movement of question papers is only one part of the challenge.

Future reforms must focus on the examination ecosystem itself: rigorous conflict-of-interest and antecedent verification of experts, stronger cybersecurity safeguards, intelligence-based monitoring of organised examination networks, and a review of structural vulnerabilities such as unlimited attempts, the absence of age limits, and the low qualifying threshold for private admissions.

Unless these vulnerabilities are addressed, additional layers of security may relocate the risk rather than eliminate it.

Ultimately, the credibility of NEET will depend not on how securely question papers are transported, but on whether the entire admission ecosystem is transparent, conflict-free, and genuinely merit-driven.

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

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

## *Her knees were knocking before the interview*

The thief prised open the window with a crowbar

S. Upendran

"Come on in! Today is Sunitha's big presentation. Do you think she's ready? Does she..."

"Relax, will you? I'm just coming from her place. You seem to be more nervous than she is."

"That's probably true. I guess I worry too much. Sunitha is always relaxed. She gives the..."

"I'm not so sure about that! This is her first presentation, after all. I wouldn't be too surprised if her knees weren't already knocking."

"Knees already knocking?"

"This informal expression means to shake with anxiety. It is ..."

"In other words, it means you were so nervous that your legs were shaking or trembling."

"Very good!"

"Veena's knees started knocking when she heard strange noises coming from her window."

"That's a good example! Saurabh claimed he was an experienced speaker. There was no evidence of that yesterday. Of all the speakers, I would say, his knees knocked the most."

"Really?"

"He didn't sound confident at all yesterday. During lunch, he was telling me how busy he's been renovating the old house he bought a few months ago."

"He's been having a tough time getting the windows and doors open."

"It's a very old house, and the doors and windows haven't been opened in a while. They have to be prised open. It's prised. P...r...i...s...e...d. It's pronounced like the word p...r...i...z...e."

"I see. I'm sure the two words don't have the same meaning. What does p...r...i...s...e mean?"

"It means using force to get something open. For example, when we are unable to remove the lid from a paint can, what do we do?"

"In my case, I usually place a screwdriver under the lid."

"Apply pressure and prise the lid open. That's how a lot of people I know prise the lid off a can of paint."

"How about this example? The thugs prised the hero's fingers apart and took the key."

"Sounds good. As we got closer to the house, we realised that the front door had been prised open by a crowbar."

"Your friend Ganesh came yesterday."

"I hope it wasn't to borrow money again."

"It was!"

"The next time he comes around, tell him to go jump in the lake."

"Does it mean you're not giving him money?"

"When someone asks you for something, and you respond by saying 'Go, jump in the lake', what you're suggesting is that you want the person to get lost."

"In other words, you're being rude."

"Yes. And you're not going to do what the person wants you to. When Saurabh asked if he could borrow my new car, I told him to go jump in the lake."

"I got so irritated by her silly questions that I told her to go jump in the lake."

"Did she get upset?"

"No, she merely smiled and continued asking questions!"

*upendrankye@gmail.com*

## Word of the day

**Iota:** an extremely small amount

**Synonyms:** bit, particle, hint

**Usage:** *There is not an iota of truth in the rumour.*

**Pronunciation:** newsth.live/iotapro

**International Phonetic Alphabet:** /aɪəʊt/

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

THE DAILY QUIZ

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

## Test yourself on the group phase of FIFA World Cup that concluded on Sunday

V.V. Ramanan

**QUESTION 1**
A total of 215 goals were scored across 72 matches. Apart from France, which other teams netted 10 goals each?

**QUESTION 2**
Three teams progressed with perfect records, of which one had no goals conceded against it. Name the teams.

**QUESTION 3**
Which modern-day great became the first to score in six editions, and who achieved the feat of scoring in seven consecutive World Cup matches?

**QUESTION 4**
Two teams registered three draws and had a goal difference of zero. But thanks to the qualification rules, one made it to the next phase while the other was eliminated. Name them.

**QUESTION 5**
Only one match in the round-of-32 will see two teams who have made the summit clashes before, with one of them having tasted glory. Name the two European sides.

**QUESTION 6**
Which team scored eight goals in the group stage, had a positive goal difference, but still failed to qualify?

**QUESTION 7**
Record attendances were seen despite high ticket prices. Which stadium had the distinction of hosting 80,824 spectators on two separate occasions, as per FIFA?

**Visual Question:**
Identify, and he was one of three to achieve what feat in the group stages? AFP

**Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz:** 1. Who is the only British Prime Minister who was assassinated? **Ans: Spencer Perceval**

2. This statesman's tenure as Prime Minister was overshadowed by his military prowess. He famously defeated a French Emperor in this war in 1815. Name the Prime Minister, the Emperor and the famous war. **Ans: Arthur Wellesley; Napoleon Bonaparte; Battle of Waterloo**

3. This Prime Minister started out as a journalist, specifically a war correspondent for the Morning Post. Name him. **Ans: Winston Churchill**

4. This Prime Minister had the shortest run in Westminster, serving just 44 days. Name the Prime Minister. **Ans: Liz Truss**

5. The Second World War broke out with Nazi Germany invading Poland. Roughly a year back, this British Prime Minister, after talks with Hitler, had declared that "I believe it is peace for our time". Needless to say, he did not last long in office. Name him. **Ans: Neville Chamberlain**

6. Which Prime Minister introduced the Indian Independence Act 1947 in the House of Commons? **Ans: Clement Atlee**

Visual: This is one of the most famous addresses in the world. Name it. **Ans: 10, Downing Street, London**

**Early Birds:** Tamal Biswas | K.N. Viswanathan | Sudhir Thapa | Arun Kumar Singh | K. M. Vikashini