Hindust

# Master Plan lays ground for skyscrapers in Delhi

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**NEW DELHI:** Delhi's Master Plan 2047 has laid the groundwork for more skyscrapers in the Capital by notifying a regulatory framework for buildings taller than 100 floors, making density and floor area ratio (FAR) norms more flexible for large chunks of the city, and removing height restrictions on several categories of construction.

MASTER PLAN 2047

The MPD-2047 – which envisions a city with a population of 32 million by 2047 and requiring nearly four million additional houses, triple the current power generation capacity and double the current solid waste management capability – was notified by the Union housing and urban affairs ministry on Thursday.

"We have relaxed norms in various categories providing more flexibility. Apart from the areas like the Lutyens' Bungalow zone, low density area and areas around the airport, we have removed density and height restrictions from most areas," said Union urban development minister Manohar Lal Khattar.

The regularisation of 69 affluent colonies in the city will be undertaken in line with a court observation, he added.

Addressing a joint press conference along with Delhi lieutenant governor TS Sandhu and chief minister Rekha Gupta, Khattar said the Metro network will be expanded to 695km by 2047, six new regional rapid transit system corridors will be built, and 180 sq km of the Yamuna floodplains and the Ridge area will be preserved.

The plan moved away from uniformity in urban planning by tagging various areas and building categories separately, and drafting separate policies for them. Key among these was the framework for taller buildings – or more vertical patterns of development to trim the urban sprawl.

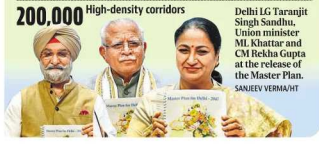
For the first time, the document explicitly defined structures of more than 100 floors as "tall buildings" and classifies them as "landmark developments". It envisaged such buildings in areas with adequate infrastructure, particularly along mass-transit corridors

continued on →9

## Housing the Capital

DDA estimates Delhi will need four million new houses to meet the needs of a surging population. Here's how they will be distributed

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1.8mn | Transit-oriented development | 700,000 | Redevelopment |
| 1.2mn | Land-pooling | 400,000 | In-situ rehab of JJ clusters |
| 200,000 | High-density corridors | | |



Delhi LG Taranjit Singh Sandhu, Union minister ML Khattar and CM Rekha Gupta at the release of the Master Plan. SANJEEV VERMA/HT

# Lko man kills wife at work, shoots sister, himself dead

Aakash Ghosh and Zuheb Alam Khan
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**LUCKNOW:** A 37-year-old bank employee allegedly shot dead his estranged 33-year-old wife, also a banker, outside her office in Lucknow on Thursday and later killed his sister before shooting himself dead, police said.

The man, identified as Manas Bajpayee, an assistant manager at a regional business office of the State Bank of India, assaulted and shot dead his wife, Divya Mishra, at around 12.05pm outside the ICICI Bank Gomti Nagar branch after asking her to step out of her car. Bajpayee then fled the spot. "The woman's co-workers at the bank identified the attacker as her husband," said DCP (east) Deeksha Sharma.

Around 12.30pm, Bajpayee reached his home in Husadiya, about 2km from the bank. Police said Bajpayee then uploaded a WhatsApp status in which he purportedly confessed to killing his wife, saying she had "betrayed" him. He wrote that he intended to kill himself and his sister. Police said Bajpayee was subsequently traced to Husadiya area. The bodies of Bajpayee and his sister were found at his house, police said. "CCTV footage is being checked to piece together the sequence of events. We have sent the bodies for post-mortem examination and further investigation is under way," DCP Sharma said.

→P6

An ambulance outside the man's residence. DEEPAK GUPTA/HT

## MP'S SON DRIVING ASTON MARTIN KILLS WOMAN, BOOKED

**HYDERABAD:** Andhra Pradesh Rajya Sabha MP Lingamaneni Ramesh's son was booked for running a woman over while driving his Aston Martin sports car, said police.

Bharati Mukhi (26) died after the car driven by Lingamaneni Sanjush (23), allegedly at high speed, hit her when she was crossing the road on August 16. The accused has been booked under section 106(1) (causing death by negligence) of BNS. →P8

## S.I.T. TO RE-EXAMINE POLICE PROBE IN RAM TEMPLE CASE

Rohit Kumar Singh
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**LUCKNOW:** A Special Investigation Team (SIT) set up by the Supreme Court to probe allegations of irregularities in accounting for donations at the Ram Temple is likely to re-examine the criminal investigation conducted by the Ayodhya Police, which resulted in the arrest of eight people, police officials said on Thursday. →P6

## CONSIDER REPRIEVE ON 3-LANGUAGE RULE, SC TELLS CBSE

Utkarsh Anand
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**NEW DELHI:** The Supreme Court on Thursday asked CBSE to consider giving a one-time reprieve to students currently in Class 6 from the third-language requirement so that they do not face a mandatory board examination in that language when they reach Class 10, while also protecting existing foreign-language combinations during the transition. →P5

# Sajjan Kumar, convicted for role in '84 riots , dies

Saubhadra Chatterji
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**NEW DELHI:** Sajjan Kumar, the controversial former Congress member of Parliament who was serving a life term for his role in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, died in a New Delhi Hospital on Thursday. He was 80.

Safdarjung Hospital, where he was taken from jail on Thursday morning after exhibiting signs of "altered sensorium", said in a statement that he died at 12.30 pm despite medical and life-support measures being provided. It noted that he had a history of high blood pressure and Parkinson's disease and had multiple hospital admissions in the past.

Kumar is survived by his wife, two daughters and one son, according to his profile on the Lok Sabha website. The Supreme Court had been sched-

continued on →9

Sajjan Kumar

## CHINA SENTENCES PROPERTY GIANT EVERGRANDE'S FOUNDER TO LIFE

**BEIJING:** China sentenced the founder of embattled property giant Evergrande, Hui Ka Yan, to life in prison and fined the group more than $2 billion on Thursday for offences including fraud, five years after a high-profile default. The Shenzhen Intermediate People's Court's decision marks a milestone in Evergrande's saga after it defaulted on more than $300 billion in liabilities when Chinese authorities cracked down on excessive borrowing in the real estate industry in 2020. →P2

{ INQUIRY BEGINS }

# 6-yr-old Vizag boy dies after teacher slaps him for unfinished homework

Srinivasa Rao Apparasu
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**HYDERABAD:** A six-year-old boy died after allegedly being slapped by his teacher for not completing his homework at a private school in Visakhapatnam on Thursday, police said.

The incident took place at Little Garden School in the One Town area. The boy was studying in upper kindergarten (UKG).

A purported CCTV video from the classroom, which surfaced on social media, shows the boy holding a slate and standing in front of the teacher. He appears to be crying and pleading with her not to beat him. The teacher is seen adjusting his uniform before slapping him on the cheek. Within seconds, the boy collapses onto the teacher. HT could not independently verify the authenticity of the video.

The school staff rushed him to a hospital where doctors declared him dead on arrival.

The cause of death will be confirmed once the post-mortem examination report is released, hospital officials said.

The Visakhapatnam district education department initiated an inquiry. The boy's parents, alleged that the teacher's assault directly led to the tragedy. →P6

A purported CCTV video from the classroom shows the boy standing in a line in front of the teacher. The teacher is seen pulling the boy closer and slapping him on the cheek.

## INDIA, SINGAPORE EXPAND TIES; INK FOOD SECURITY, TELECOM PACTS

Rezaul H Laskar
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**NEW DELHI:** India and Singapore on Thursday concluded agreements for cooperation in telecommunications and food security, and explored ways to enhance collaboration in small modular reactors, semiconductors, space, and cybersecurity at a meeting of a special bilateral ministerial mechanism. "Our discussions explored deeper ties in advanced manufacturing, semiconductors...," said external affairs minister S Jaishankar. →P7

intwinbook
New 3-judge apex court bench to hear PMLA review
Farmlands face rainfall deficit despite late spells
Consider plea to curb kids' social media access: HC

Hindustan Times
BENGALURU
FRIDAY
AUGUST 21, 2026

# NUMBER THEORY

# How does the world see India?

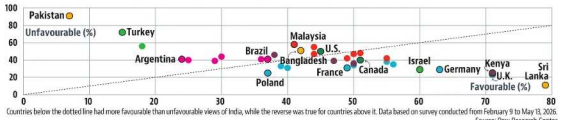
By Sreedev Krishnakumar

**Seventy-nine years after Independence, India carries far greater economic and geopolitical weight than it once did. But soft power asks a different set of questions. Where is India actually liked? Where does it struggle to leave an impression? Does its claim to speak for the Global South travel beyond diplomatic forums? And does one of the world's largest diaspora communities buy any goodwill? Data from a recently released survey by Pew Research Center offers some clues.**

## 1 India's reputation changes with the map

Pew Research Center's latest 2026 survey finds a median 45% of respondents across 36 countries viewing India favourably, compared with 41% who see it unfavourably. Opinions vary across countries, as expected. Pakistan is the obvious outlier, and hardly a surprising one, with 91% holding an unfavourable opinion of India. But what's more interesting is how sharply the opinion differs elsewhere. Sri Lanka is overwhelmingly positive at 79%, while Kenya and the UK are at 71% and Europe generally leans favourable. However, in every Latin American country surveyed, unfavourable views of India outweigh favourable ones. Asia is even harder to summarise, ranging from Sri Lanka's warmth to Malaysia's skepticism. To be sure, the takeaway here is not that India is unpopular, but that India's reputation changes dramatically depending on where in the world you ask.

**India's global image is far from uniform** (Share of respondents with favourable and unfavourable views of India)



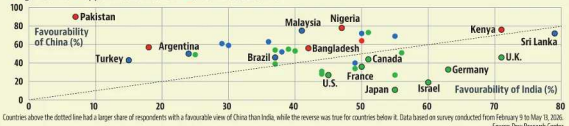

Countries below the dotted line had more favourable than unfavourable views of India, while the reverse was true for countries above it. Data based on survey conducted from February 9 to May 13, 2026.
Source: Pew Research Center

## 2 The Global South paradox

India has always attempted to position itself as a voice of the Global South. However, public opinion does not always follow diplomatic branding. In Pew's 2026 survey, China is viewed more favourably than India in every lower-middle-income country for which survey data is available for both the countries, including Bangladesh, Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria. Even among upper-middle-income countries, China leads in most cases—this includes Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Turkey, South Africa and every Latin American country surveyed. India's relative advantage shows up much more often in richer countries such as Germany, Sweden, Japan, Israel and the UK. To be sure, there are exceptions as well. Sri Lanka is warmer towards India than China, and the Philippines also gives India an edge. However, the larger pattern is awkward for India as China appears to command broader public favour across much of the Global South we have data for.

**China has an edge over India in most middle-income countries**

Share of respondents with a favourable view of India and China across countries, by World Bank income group



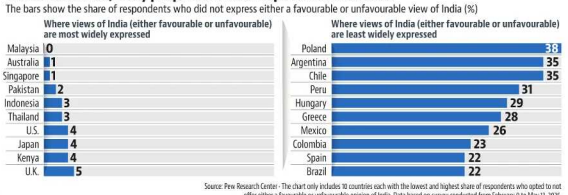

Countries above the dotted line had a larger share of respondents with a favourable view of China than India, while the reverse was true for countries below it. Data based on survey conducted from February 9 to May 13, 2026.
Source: Pew Research Center

## 3 India's quieter soft-power challenge

Soft power can fail loudly, when people dislike a country, or more quietly, when they do not express much of an opinion at all. For India, Pakistan, is an obvious example of the first. Almost everyone surveyed in the country had a view of India, and it was overwhelmingly negative. Malaysia, Australia and Singapore also had virtually no respondents without an expressed opinion—only Singapore had more respondents with a favourable opinion of India among them. On the other hand, in Poland, as much as 38% did not offer either a favourable or unfavourable view of India. The share was 35% in Argentina and Chile, 31% in Peru and more than a fifth in Mexico, Colombia and Brazil. To be sure, the survey data does not tell us whether these respondents know little about India, have yet to form a firm opinion or simply chose not to answer. But the contrast still matters. A country can suffer a reputation deficit when people know what they think and dislike what they see. But India's challenge in parts of Latin America and Europe may also involve something more basic, getting enough people to form a view in the first place.

**In some countries, many people still do not express a view of India**

The bars show the share of respondents who did not express either a favourable or unfavourable view of India (%)

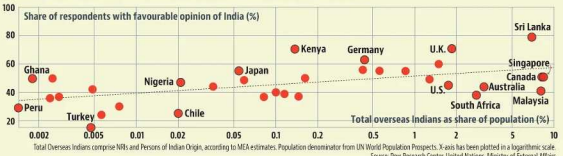



Source: Pew Research Center - The chart only includes 18 countries each with the lowest and highest share of respondents who opted to not offer either a favourable or unfavourable opinion of India. Data based on survey conducted from February 9 to May 13, 2026.

## 4 The diaspora dividend is real, but patchy

India's vast diaspora is often touted as soft power in reserve. The numbers suggest there is something to this claim, but hardly a guarantee. Countries with larger overseas Indian populations generally tend to view India more favourably, but the exceptions are hard to miss. Canada, Malaysia and Singapore all have overseas Indians (and people of Indian origin) who account for around 8% of the population, but India's favourability ranges from 41% in Malaysia to 51% in the other two. In Sri Lanka, where the share is nearly 7%, the favourability is 79%. Meanwhile, the UK and South Africa offer another useful contrast. Indians make up 1.8% of UK's population and 2.8% of S Africa's, but favourability towards India is 71% in the former and just 38% in the latter. In Kenya, where 71% respondents had a favourable view, overseas Indians account for barely 0.1% of the population.

**India's global diaspora delivers an uneven soft-power dividend**




Total Overseas Indians comprise NRIs and Persons of Indian Origin, according to MEA estimates. Population denominator from UN World Population Prospects. X-axis has been plotted in a logarithmic scale.
Source: Pew Research Center, United Nations, Ministry of External Affairs

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Friday, August 21, 2026

# Hindustan Times

FIRST VOICE. LAST WORD.

## 2 VESSELS WITH 22 INDIANS ON BOARD HIJACKED OFF YEMEN, SOMALIA

**MUMBAI:** Pirates hijacked two commercial vessels carrying a total of 22 Indians in separate incidents off Yemen and Somalia, officials said Thursday. Six armed pirates hijacked the Eritrea-flagged oil tanker MT Sibu 1 in the Gulf of Aden, about 30 nautical miles off the Yemen coast. It was carrying 16 Indians among its 20 crew members. In the second incident, pirates seized the Cameroon-flagged cargo vessel MV Lutuf, which was carrying six Indians among its crew, off Somalia. **HTC**

## TOP COURT REFINES 'INDUSTRY' TEST BUT PROTECTS PENDING DISPUTES

**Utkarsh Anand**
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**NEW DELHI:** The Supreme Court on Thursday, by a 5:4 majority, refined the expansive test laid down nearly five decades ago to determine what constitutes an "industry" under the now-repealed Industrial Disputes Act, while unanimously protecting all pending disputes from the impact of the new formulation. →P7

# Wide mandate for July 20 probe panel

**Utkarsh Anand**
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**NEW DELHI:** The Supreme Court on Thursday constituted a five-member committee headed by its former judge R Subhash Reddy to conduct an independent inquiry into allegations of violence during the July 20 student protests while looking into far-reaching issues such as pellet gun use, mandatory uniforms for law enforcement personnel during crowd control, blanket prohibitory orders, the legality of police surveillance, and whether a BNS provision was stifling dissent.

A bench, comprising Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and justices Joymalya Bagchi and V Mohana, said the competing allegations made out a prima facie case for an independent and impartial investigation into allegations of excessive and disproportionate use of force by police and security personnel during the July 20 student protests, while also examining claims of violence against police personnel and damage to public property.

The committee comprises continued on →9

### Key issues under examination

- Police use of pellet guns, electric batons, lathi charges and tear gas without adequate warning or proportionality
- If prohibitory orders under BNSS Section 163 are being used routinely, not just when needed
- If BNS Section 152, on acts against India's sovereignty, is being used to stifle dissent
- Whether police response during protests struck a balance between public order and the right to peaceful dissent
- Whether pellet guns fired from pump-action rifles should be banned
- Whether police should wear uniforms and nameplates during arrests and crowd-control operations, for accountability
- Inquire into surveillance of protesters and whether it violated privacy and assembly rights
- Give priority to allegations of targeted violence, harassment and molestation of women protesters

## HC stays Soren govt order cancelling JPSC, FSO exam

**Raj Kumar**
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**RANCHI:** The Jharkhand High Court on Thursday stayed the notifications cancelling the 11th to 13th Jharkhand Public Service Commission (JPSC) Combined Civil Services Examination and the Food Safety Officer recruitment examination, along with related appointments.

The interim order brought relief to around 400 successful candidates — 342 under JPSC and 54 under the Food Safety Officer recruitment — affected by the cancellation. →P5

## 3 CONG-RULED STATES TO MOVE SC AGAINST MINES LAW AMENDMENT

**Saubhadra Chatterji**
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**NEW DELHI:** Three Congress-ruled states—Karnataka, Kerala and Telangana—are set to appeal in the Supreme Court against The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment law that was cleared by Parliament this month. The law prohibits states from imposing levies over mineral rights or mineral bearing lands. →P8

## CENTRE ALLOWS DUTY-FREE RAW SUGAR IMPORTS TO CURB PRICES

**Pallavi Singhal**
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**NEW DELHI:** In another attempt to contain surging sugar prices, the Centre on Thursday allowed 1 million tonnes of raw sugar to be imported duty-free under a tariff-rate quota (TRQ) until October 31. The last time India allowed the import of raw sugar was during the 2016-17 season. The move comes as supplies tighten ahead of India's peak sugar-demand period from August to November. →P2

# South CMs talk water, delimitation with Shah

**S Vijay Karthik**
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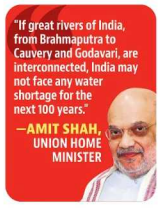
**CHENNAI:** Chief ministers of southern states on Thursday discussed regional water disputes, parliamentary delimitation demands, and more devolution of funds in proportion to their central tax pool contribution in a regional council meeting chaired by Union home minister Amit Shah.

At the 31st meeting of the Southern Zonal Council in Mahabalipuram, Karnataka chief minister DK Shivakumar backed the controversial Mekedatu project, Tamil Nadu CM C Joseph Vijay underlined the rights of lower riparian states, Kerala CM VD Satheesan said his state would fund the Mullaiperiyar dam, Telangana deputy CM Bhatti Vikramarka Mallu called for resolving Krishna river water dispute with Andhra Pradesh, and Andhra Pradesh CM Chandrababu Naidu proposed a Godavari-Cauvery river-linking project. continued on →9

"If great rivers of India, from Brahmaputra to Cauvery and Godavari, are interconnected, India may not face any water shortage for the next 100 years."
—AMIT SHAH, UNION HOME MINISTER



## UGC equity rules under review: Centre tells SC

**Abraham Thomas**
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**NEW DELHI:** The Centre on Thursday told the Supreme Court that it is reconsidering the University Grants Commission's (UGC) 2026 regulations on promoting equity in higher educational institutions, which the court had kept in abeyance in January after finding them "vague" and capable of "misuse".

The submission was made before a bench headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant, which was hearing a batch of petitions challenging and supporting the regulations. The court directed the Centre and UGC to file a composite affidavit addressing the concerns raised in the petitions. Solicitor general Tushar Mehta told the bench that the government was taking a relook at the regulations. →P5

## SHAH SLAMS CONG MOVE TO NOT SING NAT'L SONG IN FULL

**NEW DELHI:** Union home minister Amit Shah on Thursday launched a scathing attack on the Congress over its decision to sing only the first two stanzas of Vande Mataram at party events, calling it "anti-national" and accusing the party of pursuing vote-bank appeasement. "...In 1937, the Congress Party, for the sake of Muslim appeasement, split Vande Mataram...laying the foundation for the country's partition," Shah said. →P5

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NISSAN FINANCE

# PAGE ONE PLUS

{ SPORT } AFTER 4-MONTH LAYOFF

## Alcaraz to return at US Open after injury

**Carlos Alcaraz will return to competitive tennis** at the U.S. Open, ending a more than four-month absence caused by a wrist injury, in a bid to defend his title in New York. The seven-times Grand Slam champion confirmed on Thursday that he will play the August 30 - September 13 tournament after withdrawing from the Barcelona Open in April and missing the French Open, Wimbledon and the North American hard-court events in Toronto and Cincinnati. New York holds particular significance for Alcaraz. He won his first Grand Slam title at Flushing Meadows in 2022. REUTERS

{ WORLD } VETERAN BNP LEADER

## Alamgir elected as president of B'desh

**Bangladeshi lawmakers elected veteran** Bangladesh Nationalist Party leader Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir as the country's new president on Thursday, making the longtime opposition figure the head of state after his party came to power in a major political transition. Alamgir, 78, defeated Oli Ahmed, a retired army colonel and chairman of the Liberal Democratic Party and candidate of the Jamaat-e-Islami-led 11-party opposition alliance, in a parliamentary vote. AGENCIES

{ MY INDIA } IN MEETING WITH GOVT SECRETARIES

## Modi calls for greater youth engagement by government

**Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday called for greater** engagement between government departments, universities and young people to bring fresh perspectives in policymaking. Chairing the third high-level meeting with Secretaries to the Government of India, Modi also sought effective use of AI while ensuring human intervention and judgement. He urged the secretaries to think with a long-term perspective on how the country's future should be shaped, a statement issued by the Prime Minister's office said. PTI

{ WORLD } COMPLIES WITH U.S. CURBS

## Nvidia to ship AI chip for China by year-end

**Nvidia plans to start shipping small volumes of** an AI chip designed for Chinese customers by year-end, The Information reported on Thursday. Several Chinese customers have already ordered the chip, a version of Nvidia's language processing unit, which uses technology licensed from Groq and works alongside Nvidia's graphics processors to speed up AI chatbot responses, the report said. The chip complies with US export controls, it said, though it remains unclear whether Beijing will approve sales. REUTERS

{ WORLD } IN SOKOTO

## 50 killed after boat capsizes in Nigeria

**At least 50 people, mostly children, died after an** overloaded boat capsized on Thursday in Nigeria's northwest Sokoto state, witnesses said. The accident took place near Gorau in Goronyo local government area and rescue efforts are continuing, said Abdulkadir Yusuf, an area manager at the National Inland Waterways Authority. A Reuters witness saw 50 bodies lying in the forecourt of a community mosque ahead of their burial in Gorau later on Thursday. Nasiru Adamu, a lawmaker at the Sokoto state legislature, said that those onboard were mostly aged between 10 and 15 years old. REUTERS

# China sentences property tycoon Hui to life in jail

**Agence France-Presse**
letters@hindustantimes.com

Hui Ka Yan

**BEIJING:** China sentenced the founder of embattled property giant Evergrande to life in prison and fined the group more than $2 billion on Thursday for offences including fraud, five years after a high-profile default.

Evergrande Group was once the face of Chinese real estate, surfing a decades-long property boom as it peddled home-ownership dreams.

But its access to credit dramatically narrowed when the government introduced curbs on excessive borrowing and speculation.

The company defaulted in 2021 after struggling to repay creditors.

On Thursday, a court in southern China fined the firm and its real estate arm a total of 15.82 billion yuan ($2.4 billion).

It issued a life sentence against founder Xu Jiayin, also known as Hui Ka Yan in Cantonese, for crimes including "large-scale financial fraud", the Shenzhen Intermediate People's Court in Guangdong province said in a post on its WeChat account.

"Xu Jiayin was sentenced for multiple crimes and fined, received a life sentence, with political rights revoked for life and all his personal property confiscated," it said.

Between 2016 and 2021, Evergrande and Xu as its boss "violated national laws by engaging in continuous, large-scale financial fraud and other means to inflate assets and conceal liabilities", the court said.

It added that the parties "gained control of financial institutions" through bribery, without naming the institutions.

Xu pleaded guilty in April to charges that also included embezzlement and bribery, the court said at the time.

The verdict caps 67-year-old Xu's spectacular fall from grace.

He was once one of China's richest billionaires and a member of the Communist Party's top political advisory body.

On Thursday, a before-and-after photomontage was being widely shared on social media — the older image, taken years ago, shows Xu beaming as he was chased by reporters, sporting jet black hair and wearing a gold Hermes belt. It was contrasted with a picture released by the court on Thursday, in which a worn, white-haired Xu stood unsmiling, flanked by two police officers as he faced a panel of judges.

Xu and Evergrande's actions "seriously disrupted the socialist market economic order... and undermined the integrity of official conduct by state personnel", the court said. "The circumstances were particularly egregious, causing particularly serious economic losses and causing particularly serious social harm," it added.

# A royal reunion?

**Prince Harry and his wife, Meghan, will return to the United Kingdom, seemingly marking the end to a yearslong rift between them and the royal family. Here is a timeline of recent events involving Harry and the British royal family.**

**July 2016:** Prince Harry and American actor Meghan Markle meet on a blind date set up by a mutual friend.

**Nov 8, 2016:** Harry confirms Markle is his girlfriend and condemns press coverage of her.

**Nov 27, 2017:** Harry and Meghan announce their engagement.

**May 19, 2018:** Meghan and Harry get married in a grand ceremony at Windsor Castle.

**2019 onwards:** Harry launches lawsuits against three newspaper groups - Rupert Murdoch's News Group, the Mirror Group and Associated Newspapers.

**May 6, 2019:** Harry and Meghan's son Archie is born.

**Jan 8, 2020:** Harry and Meghan announce they plan to "step back" as senior royals and become financially independent. The decision soon becomes a major rift, and the couple moves to Meghan's native California.

**February 2020:** The committee that oversees royal security decides Harry will not receive the same level of taxpayer-funded protection as he did when he was a full-time royal. Harry later launches legal action against the UK government.

**June 4, 2021:** Meghan and Harry's daughter Liilibet is born.

**Sept 8, 2022:** Queen Elizabeth II dies, aged 96, after 70 years on the throne. Her eldest son becomes King Charles III.

**Jan 10, 2023:** Harry's ghost-written memoir "Spare" is published and becomes a bestseller. It recounts Harry's grief at the death of his mother when he was 12, his frustrations in his royal role and anger at his father, brother, stepmother and the media, among others.

**May 6, 2023:** King Charles is crowned at Westminster Abbey. Harry attends without Meghan or the children.

**Dec 5, 2023:** A court hearing begins on Harry's claim over his security.

**Feb 5, 2024:** Buckingham Palace announces that King Charles has cancer and will receive treatment.

**Feb 7, 2024:** Prince Harry arrives in the UK from California to visit his father.

**Feb 28, 2024:** The High Court dismisses Harry's security claim. He appeals the decision.

**Jan 22, 2025:** The publisher of tabloid newspaper The Sun settles a lawsuit, offering Harry "a full and unequivocal apology" for intruding on his private life between 1996 and 2011, including incidents of unlawful activities.

**May 2, 2025:** Three Court of Appeal judges dismiss Harry's case, saying the security decision was "sensible."

**Sept 10, 2025:** Harry joins King Charles for tea in London, marking the first time they've met in more than a year.

**July 10, 2026:** King Charles hosts Harry and meets with his family for the first time in years as they try to repair the rift.

**Aug 19, 2026:** Plans are revealed that Harry and Meghan will return to the UK, but they won't resume their roles as working members of the royal family.

Princess Catherine, Prince William, Prince Harry and Meghan Markle after the passing of Queen Elizabeth II in 2022.

# India's domestic air passenger traffic down 4.8% in July

**Neha LM Tripathi**
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DESPITE THE JULY DECLINE, PASSENGER TRAFFIC DURING THE FIRST SEVEN MONTHS OF 2026 REMAINED SLIGHTLY HIGHER THAN IN THE CORRESPONDING PERIOD LAST YEAR

**NEW DELHI:** Domestic air passenger traffic fell 4.8% to 12 million in July from 12.6 million last year, with most major airlines also reporting lower passenger load factors, according to Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) data released on Thursday.

Despite the July decline, passenger traffic during the first seven months of 2026 remained marginally higher than in the corresponding period last year.

Indian airlines carried 98.4 million passengers during January-July, compared with 97.78 million a year earlier, an increase of 0.64%.

IndiGo, India's largest airline, carried 8.08 million passengers in July, down from 8.92 million in June. The Air India Group, comprising Air India and Air India Express, carried 2.88 million passengers, compared with 3.22 million in June.

Akasa Air carried 665,000 passengers in July, down from 861,000 in June, while SpiceJet carried 187,000, compared with 263,000 in the previous month.

Despite the fall in passenger numbers, IndiGo's market share rose to 67.4% in July from 66.3% in June, while the Air India Group's share edged up to 24% from 23.9%.

Akasa Air's market share fell to 5.5% from 6.4%, while SpiceJet's declined to 1.6% from 1.9%.

The passenger load factor — the proportion of available seats occupied — declined for IndiGo, the Air India Group and Akasa Air during the month. SpiceJet was the exception, with its load factor rising to 74.7% in July from 73.2% in June.

The overall cancellation rate of scheduled domestic airlines was 0.62% in July. Technical issues accounted for 39.9% of cancellations, followed by operational reasons at 27.4% and weather-related disruptions at 22.7%, according to the DGCA.

IndiGo recorded the highest on-time performance (OTP) among scheduled domestic airlines at 10 major airports, at 91.2%, followed by Akasa Air at 90.8% and the Air India Group at 88.5%.

Alliance Air recorded an OTP of 76%, while SpiceJet had the lowest at 34.6%.

The airports covered in the OTP assessment were Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Chennai, Ahmedabad, Cochin, Guwahati and Lucknow.

# Rupee exports get equal footing with dollar, euro

**Rajeev Jayaswal**
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**NEW DELHI:** The government on Thursday put export earnings received in Indian rupees on the same footing as those received in freely convertible currencies such as the US dollar and euro for availing benefits under the Foreign Trade Policy (FTP), in a move that could encourage greater use of the rupee in international trade.

The change means eligible exporters receiving payment in rupees through approved banking channels will be able to claim FTP benefits and count those receipts towards their export obligations, as they would with eligible foreign-currency earnings.

The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) amended the FTP 2023 with immediate effect, aligning its provisions with the Reserve Bank of India's Foreign Exchange Management (Manner of Receipt and Payment) Regulations, 2023.

The facility for rupee-denominated export transactions was first introduced in November 2022. Thursday's notification expands its scope and aligns it with the FTP introduced in April 2023.

The move could make rupee settlement more attractive for Indian exporters by reducing currency-conversion costs and exchange-rate risks. It could also help expand trade with countries facing shortages of dollars or difficulties accessing established international payment systems.

**The move could make rupee settlement more attractive for Indian exporters and help expand trade with countries facing shortages of dollars.** AFP

Ajay Srivastava, founder of the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI), said the notification "removes uncertainty" and "places eligible rupee export receipts on par" with foreign-currency earnings.

"Earlier, exporters receiving rupee payments through an RBI-approved banking channel were not always certain whether such receipts would qualify for FTP benefits or count toward their export obligations. The new rules remove this uncertainty by placing eligible rupee receipts on par with foreign-currency earnings," he said.

The broader significance is that Indian exporters and overseas buyers now have greater scope to settle transactions in rupees rather than relying on the dollar or another freely convertible currency, Srivastava said.

But the policy change by itself will not lead to large-scale rupee trade, he cautioned.

"Foreign buyers must be able to obtain rupees easily, while overseas banks need practical options to use, invest, convert or repatriate their balances," he said.

India would need country-specific settlement arrangements, simpler banking procedures, affordable hedging, rupee-based export credit and export-credit insurance to make rupee settlement commercially viable, Srivastava said.

"Without this supporting system, rupee invoicing may remain a useful facility rather than becoming a widely used trade option," he added.

The rules continue to provide separate treatment for countries covered by the Asian Clearing Union (ACU), as well as Nepal and Bhutan.

For ACU members, contracts generally have to be denominated in an ACU-approved currency, subject to applicable RBI directions.

The latest notification brings the trade-policy framework in line with the RBI's 2023 foreign-exchange regulations, which widened the scope for using the rupee in cross-border trade.

# Govt allows duty-free import of raw sugar to curb surging prices

**Pallavi Singhal**
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**NEW DELHI:** In another attempt to contain surging sugar prices, the Centre on Thursday allowed 1 million tonnes of raw sugar to be imported duty-free under a tariff-rate quota (TRQ) until October 31. The government's notification, however, allows only raw sugar to be imported, which must first be refined before it can reach the market as white sugar.

The last time India allowed the import of raw sugar was during the 2016-17 season.

The move comes as supplies tighten ahead of India's peak sugar-demand period, which runs broadly from August through November, when festivals such as Ganesh Chaturthi, Dussehra and Diwali lift demand from households, sweet shops and food companies. The order comes on the heel of sugar prices surging to new peaks. Sugar prices in key Karnataka markets rose to as much as ₹7,100 per 100kg on Thursday.

The import decision comes after a series of government interventions that have so far failed to prevent prices from climbing. The Centre banned sugar exports in May until September 30, after allowing mills to export up to 2 million tonnes during the season. It then imposed a 4,000-quintal stock limit and a 30-day holding limit on dealers from August 1, while setting the August sales quota for mills at 2.25 million tonnes—the same as a year earlier, even though the market had expected a larger release to meet rising festive demand.

**The last time India allowed the import of raw sugar was during the 2016-17 season.** REUTERS

On Wednesday, the government tightened the rules further, saying bulk consumers using more than 10 tonnes a month will from September 1 be allowed to hold no more than 15 days' requirements until November 30. The latest move therefore marks a significant escalation: instead of only trying to force more of the existing stock into the market, the government is now seeking to add to domestic supply.

The government, in a statement, said the move "will immediately dispel speculation and ensure adequate supply to consumers at reasonable and stable prices over the coming year".

However, the imported raw sugar will not reach consumers immediately.

According to GK Sood, chairman of KN Agri Resources Ltd, the process itself means imported sugar cannot reach the market immediately. "The government would first need a few days to allocate the TRQ among mills willing to take the raw sugar. The mills would then have to scout the market, sign contracts and make payment arrangements. This would be followed by finding a vessel and securing a loading slot in Brazil, with the voyage alone taking at least a month. Once the sugar arrives in India, unloading can take about 25 days for a 50,000-tonne shipment, if operations are not disrupted by rain. The sugar then has to be transported to mills, where refining capacity is typically only 500-700 tonnes a day. So it is a slow process," he said, adding that these steps together determine the lead time before imported sugar can reach the domestic market. He sees only 200,000- 300,000 tonnes of sugar entering the market by the end of the allotted import window.

Raw sugar from Brazil is estimated at around ₹45 per kg and could cost about ₹52 per kg after refining in India, according to Praful Vithalani, chairman, All India Sugar Trade Association. "This will kill the fear and speculation if any," he said.

The urgency in government steps reflects a supply issue that has become considerably tighter than the government's earlier projections. About 3 million tonnes of sugar was diverted to ethanol production during the current season, while around 800,000 tonnes was exported, although the government had allowed a total export quota of 2 million tonnes. The Centre eventually stopped exports in May as domestic availability became a concern.

# Govt hands over illegal drug racket case to SIT

**THE SIX-MEMBER TEAM WILL BE HEADED BY C VAMSHIKRISHNA, JOINT COMMISSIONER OF POLICE, WEST, BENGALURU CITY, THE ORDER SAID**

**Coovercolly Indresh**
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**BENGALURU:** The Karnataka government on Thursday ordered a special investigation team (SIT) probe into a suspected interstate illegal drug racket allegedly involved in repackaging and relabelling medicines under the names of reputed multinational brands, officials said.

The decision comes days after officials from the Drug Enforcement Wing of the Karnataka Food Safety and Drug Administration department raided an unauthorised pharmaceutical facility at Kurubarakeranahalli near Bidadi in Bengaluru South district.

The six-member team will be headed by C Vamshikrishna, joint commissioner of police, West, Bengaluru city, they said.

According to an order, the other members are Shiva Prakash Devaraju, superintendent of police; Lokesh B Jagalasur, superintendent of police (CID); Manjunath Reddy, assistant drugs controller (Bengaluru); Namrata Hallur, assistant drugs controller (Bengaluru South District); and Neha Murugi, drugs inspector (Bengaluru South District).

The team will submit periodic progress reports to the ADGP, Law and Order, who will forward them to the DG and IGP, the order said.

The SIT will conduct a comprehensive investigation into the case and any other cases that may be registered across the state in connection with the matter. It will submit its investigation report to the competent court and send a copy to the government through the DG&IGP, it added.

The raid reportedly uncovered a large-scale operation involving the illegal repackaging and relabelling of medicines. Four people have already been arrested in connection with the case, while investigators suspect that the alleged kingpin is currently hiding abroad. The team has been tasked with conducting a detailed investigation into the network, its financial transactions, supply chain and those allegedly involved in manufacturing and distributing the counterfeit medicines.

Health minister UT Khader and home minister G Parameshwara had earlier indicated that the government was considering an SIT investigation following the discovery of the racket.

Khader had said the authorities were particularly concerned over the alleged manufacture of counterfeit injections, including medicines used in intensive care units.

"Medicines from other states and countries were allegedly brought here and labels of multinational companies were put on them before they were sold. Even ICU medicines have been counterfeited. We need to find out which hospitals and medical stores received these products and whether patients were affected," he said.

According to officials, the Drug Enforcement Wing conducted the raid on August 18 at an unlicensed pharmaceutical manufacturing facility located at No. 34, Kurubarahalli village, near Bidadi.

During the operation, officials allegedly seized counterfeit medicines, bulk stocks, packaging machinery, empty vials and fake labels. The total estimated value of the materials seized has been put at around ₹5.05 crore.

The investigation has raised serious concerns because the alleged racket was reportedly supplying fake injections and tablets using the names and packaging of reputed multinational pharmaceutical companies.

*With inputs from PTI*

# Committed to protect interests of TN on Mekedatu issue: DKS

**Press Trust of India**
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**CHENNAI:** Karnataka chief minister D K Shivakumar on Thursday said that he has given a commitment in the presence of Union home minister Amit Shah here that the interests of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry will be protected in the proposed Mekedatu dam issue.

Speaking to reporters after taking part in the southern CMs meeting at Kovalam near here that was chaired by Shah, Shivakumar said he has favoured a separate meeting to amicably settle water-sharing issues. The meeting was attended by CMs C Joseph Vijay (Tamil Nadu), VD Satheesan (Kerala) and N Chandrababu Naidu (Andhra Pradesh) among others.

Except for using five TMC (thousand million cubic ft) for drinking water requirements, the rest of the water stored in the proposed Mekedatu dam will be for Tamil Nadu, he said.

"I have given a commitment to the state of Tamil Nadu before the home minister that whatever Mekedatu dam water is there, even if there is a single drop of water; except for five TMC for drinking water, the rest of the water will be left to Tamil Nadu itself from the Mekedatu dam; so Tamil Nadu and Puducherry shall be rest assured, the dam will be built only for you not for us," the CM said.

Earlier, addressing the Southern Zonal Council meeting, Shivakumar flagged the issue of the Mekedatu project, stressing that it is an important initiative not only for Karnataka, but for Tamil Nadu as well.

"While walking to the meeting, senior leader and Andhra Pradesh chief minister Chandrababu Naidu ji told me that we need to solve the Cauvery water issue between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Let me assure you, every drop of water from the Mekedatu project will help farmers in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. Help us to help you," he said.

**CM DK Shivakumar with Tamil Nadu CM Joseph Vijay in Chengalpattu on Thursday.** PTI

Shivakumar said rivers such as the Cauvery, Krishna, Tungabhadra, Pennar and Palar were the lifelines of the southern peninsula and called for a shift from "water sharing to water cooperation".

"Our rivers do not recognise political boundaries," he said.

"Water must unite us, not divide us. The time has come to move from water sharing to water cooperation. Karnataka has shown what that cooperation looks like," he said.

Referring to the June 25 meeting involving Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, he said the three states had demonstrated that interstate water issues could be addressed through dialogue.

The three states then discussed resolving the water sharing issue between them amicably, and decided to find a permanent solution to the water crisis with the involvement of Union minister for Jal Shakti C R Patil.

"We accept that every riparian state has legitimate needs. And our stand rests on three principles: equity, transparency, cooperation," he said.

At the same time, Shivakumar said, the cooperation must be reciprocal and Karnataka's lawful share under tribunal awards and timely completion of projects benefiting its farmers must be protected. Mekedatu is a multi-purpose project proposed by Karnataka, which involves building a balancing reservoir near Kanakapura in Ramanagara district.

Tamil Nadu has been opposing the project, raising apprehensions that the state would be affected if the project takes shape.

The project, once completed, is aimed at ensuring drinking water to Bengaluru and neighbouring areas (4.75 tmcft); it also can generate 400 MW power, and the estimated cost of the project is Rs 9,000 crore (2019 rates), according to Karnataka officials.

Terming the meeting involving Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana in June as a "historic landmark" in inter-state water relations, Shivakumar said the three states had demonstrated that interstate water issues could be addressed through dialogue.

"Chandrababu Naidu and Revanth Reddy, the chief ministers of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, sat with me at that table, and we spoke as partners, not as competitors. That is the Karnataka approach," he said

## Festive cheer in the city

**Crowd thronged KR Market in Bengaluru on Thursday to buy fresh flowers and fruits ahead of Varamahalakshmi festival.** AFP

# No cases of foreigners getting Aadhaar: Min

**Press Trust of India**
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**BENGALURU:** Karnataka home minister Priyank Kharge told the legislature that no cases of Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, or Iranians obtaining Aadhaar cards, ration cards, or other government benefits have been reported during the ongoing SIR of the electoral roll in the state.

The minister said this in a written reply to a question by expelled BJP MLA Basanagouda Patil Yatnal.

"During the ongoing SIR (of electoral roll) process in the state, no cases have been reported of Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, or Iranians obtaining Aadhaar cards, ration cards, or other government benefits," Kharge said.

Yatnal had asked whether the serious issue of Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Iranian nationals allegedly possessing Aadhaar cards, ration cards, and other government benefits and being registered as voters has come to the government's notice during the ongoing SIR process in the state? If so, how many such cases have been reported across the state?The SIR enumeration process concluded on August 17, with the draft electoral rolls scheduled for publication on August 24. As many as 1.07 crore voters have been categorised under Absent, Shifted, Dead, Duplicate and Others (ASDDO).

Meanwhile, in a reply to a question in the Legislative Council, the Home Minister said the exact number of foreigners who have illegally entered the country and are residing in the state is unavailable. However, over the past three years, a total of 911 illegal immigrants have been identified in the state.

# 'State to recommend rejection of draft on Kasturirangan report'

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**BENGALURU:** The Karnataka government will recommend rejection of the draft notification based on the Kasturirangan report on the Western Ghats, forest minister Ramalinga Reddy told the Legislative Assembly on Thursday.

The issue was raised during a discussion under Rule 69 by Virajpet MLA and chief minister's political secretary AS Ponnanna, who highlighted concerns among farmers and residents of Kodagu and other Malnad districts over the latest draft notification issued by the Union ministry of environment, forest and climate change on July 26.

Ponnanna said the proposed notification had created anxiety among thousands of families living in the Western Ghats and urged the government to adopt a clear stand against its implementation.

Reacting to him minister Ramalinga Reddy said the Kasturirangan report would have implications for 39 taluks across 10 districts in Karnataka. He said the state had earlier opposed the recommendations and would once again recommend their rejection. The state has 60 days to submit its objections to the draft notification.

The Kasturirangan committee was constituted after widespread opposition to the Gadgil report on protecting the Western Ghats. The Gadgil committee submitted report on August 11, 2011 while Kasturi Rangans committee submitted report on April 15, 2013.

**Ramalinga Reddy**

Kasturi Rangans committee recommended identifying ecologically sensitive areas and restricting activities such as mining, quarrying and certain large infrastructure and industrial projects.

The proposed restrictions have triggered opposition from residents and elected representatives in several Western Ghats districts, who fear that stringent environmental regulations could affect agriculture, construction, infrastructure development and livelihoods.

The Karnataka government's decision to recommend rejection is expected to strengthen its stand against implementation of the report in the state.

Speaking to reporters , Ponnanna said the issue should have been treated as a matter concerning farmers and residents rather than being politicised.

## STIR INTENSIFIES IN CAUVERY BASIN OVER RELEASE OF WATER FROM KRS

**Press Trust of India**
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**BENGALURU/MANDYA:** Protests intensified in the Cauvery basin, especially in Mandya on Thursday, as farmers alleged that a huge amount of water is being released from the KRS dam to Tamil Nadu.

The Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA) had upheld the Cauvery Water Regulation Committee's (CWRC) recommendation of releasing 12,000 cusecs of water for 15 days starting from August 12. The Tamil Nadu government has approached the Supreme Court seeking a direction for Karnataka to respect the CWMA's order, sources said.

At Sanjay Circle in Mandya, farmers staged sit-in demonstration. Kannada Sena activists extended support to the farmers' organisation's protest and blocked the old Bengaluru-Mysuru highway. The protesters charged there was only 109 feet of water in the dam and questioned the decision to release water to Tamil Nadu despite this. Leading the protest, Kannada activist Vatal Nagaraj appealed to people of Karnataka to unite and support the agitation to send across a strong message all over the country. Mandya MLA Ravi Kumar Gowda (Ganiga) demanded that the release of water to Tamil Nadu be stopped.

Speaking at the Cauvery Irrigation Advisory Committee meet held on Wednesday, Gowda questioned how water could be denied to Karnataka's farmers.

# HC reserves order on plea by Siddaramaiah, DKS seeking to quash defamation case

**THE CASE RELATES TO NEWSPAPER ADS ISSUED BY THE CONGRESS IN 2023, A DAY BEFORE POLLING, ACCUSING THE BJP OF CORRUPTION**

**Coovercolly Indresh**
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**BENGALURU:** The Karnataka High Court on Thursday reserved its order on the petitions filed by chief minister DK Shivakumar and former chief minister Siddaramaiah seeking quashing of a defamation case registered against them over advertisements published by the Congress ahead of the 2023 Assembly elections.

Justice M Nagaprasanna, who heard the petitions, reserved the order after completing arguments from both sides.

The case relates to newspaper advertisements issued by the Congress on May 5, 2023, a day before polling, accusing the then BJP government of large-scale corruption.

During the hearing, counsel representing the complainant BJP argued that the advertisements amounted to a deliberate campaign to damage the party's reputation before voters. The advertisements allegedly contributed to the BJP losing 40 Assembly constituencies and resulted in around 10% of its votes shifting away, the counsel submitted, urging the court not to quash the proceedings.

Senior advocate Shashikiran Shetty, appearing for the petitioners, argued that the complainant had not obtained the required authorisation from the party's national unit before filing the private complaint.

He also pointed out that proceedings against Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in the same matter had already been quashed and sought similar relief for Shivakumar and Siddaramaiah.

The dispute dates back to the 2023 Assembly election campaign, when corruption was a major issue raised by the Congress against the BJP government.

The Congress published front-page advertisements titled "corruption rate card", alleging that bribes had been fixed for various government works.

The advertisements alleged that commissions ranging from 25 to 30 per cent were being collected in areas including supply of Covid-19 materials, Public Works Department contracts, grants to religious institutions, supply of eggs to schools and road projects.

## THREE F.I.R.s OVER UNAUTHORISED POSTERS OF MIN

**Press Trust of India**
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**BENGALURU:** Three FIRs were registered for allegedly pasting unauthorised posters featuring Greater Bengaluru Development Minister Krishna Byre Gowda on public walls, police said on Thursday.

The cases were registered following complaints filed by civic authorities under the Greater Bengaluru Authority on August 19, they said. Two of the three FIRs were registered against a person identified as Shivakumar within the limits of Vidyaranyapura and Kodigehalli police stations for allegedly pasting posters on walls along public roads.

# Officials crack down on illegal chemical banana ripening units in Udupi village

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**MANGALURU/UDUPI:** A team of officials led by the assistant commissioner of the Kundapur subdivision in Udupi district raided multiple locations in Alevoor village following reports of an illegal chemical banana-ripening network on Thursday morning.

During the raid, authorities seized 5,000 kg of raw banana bunches valued at ₹4 lakh, along with chemicals, artificial colours, and equipment used for artificial ripening. Police registered a ca. Action was initiated following specific intelligence that chemically treated bananas were being supplied to local shops, weekly markets, and daily vendors in and around Udupi, they said. The joint team targeted three warehouses belonging to banana traders and stockists simultaneously in Kemthur (Alevoor village) and the nearby Duggili area near Manipal. The raiding team included assistant commissioner Rashmi SR, food and health inspection officer Vivek Thirumala.

**Authorities seized 5,000 kg of raw bananas valued at ₹4 lakh.** HT

Rashmi said that the raid started simultaneously in three locations on Thursday morning. During the operation, authorities discovered that traders were using harmful chemicals and artificial colouring agents to artificially ripen bananas. Officials seized ripening chemicals, colouring substances, processing equipment, and vehicles utilized in the illicit operation.

When asked if their conscience allowed them to compromise public health, one worker responded that they had been carrying out the same operation for the past 20 years. She explained that the illegal operation utilized two primary methods: dipping raw banana bunches into drums filled with chemical solutions or spraying chemicals directly onto the produce. These chemicals reportedly cost between ₹2,000 and ₹4,000 per liter. The chemical application causes raw bananas to ripen overnight or within two days before distribution.

**Usage since 2016**

In 2016, the Principal Civil Judge Court in Udupi issued an injunction against an illegal banana storage warehouse operating near residential homes on Rampura-Kemthur Road for using banned calcium carbide. Local resident M Sharath Kumar had filed a lawsuit in the Udupi court citing severe health issues among neighborhood residents. However, despite the court order a decade ago, the illicit trade has continued.

**SOPs for ripening**

Prof Iddya Karunasagar, adviser at Nitte University, and former food safety officer at the FAO of the UN, based in Rome, explained that highly perishable fruits like mango, papaya, banana and others cannot be stored and transported over long distances so traders generally harvest raw fruits and ripen them artificially. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) permits the use of ethylene gas for artificial ripening. However, due to its high cost and scarcity, traders often resort to unsafe and banned ripeners like carbide gas, which can be harmful to health, officials said.

## EXPIRED GOODS, FUNGAL GROWTH FOUND AT RAILWAY STATION EATERIES

**Press Trust of India**
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**BENGALURU:** A special inspection conducted by the Food Safety and Drug Administration department of Karnataka at food establishments in 36 railway stations on Thursday revealed the suspected use of non-permitted colours in sweets, expired dairy products and food items, and fungal growth in vegetables.

The inspection was conducted at 112 food establishments at Bengaluru City Railway station (KSR), Yeshwanthpura, Krishna Raja Puram, Yelahanka, Kolar, Mysuru, Haveri, Udupi, Koppal, Gadag, Davanagere, Bagalkote, Karwar, Yadgiri, Berur and Kadur junction, Ballari, Hospet, Hubaballi and Mangaluru, a statement from the food safety department said.

The teams inspected the railway pantry, hotel and food served on the train. The team found that Vande Bharat trains were maintained clean. There was, however, 'suspected use' of non-permitted colours in food.

# Assembly passes 3 bills amid Oppn protest seeking minister's removal

**ALL THREE BILLS WERE PASSED AMID PROTESTS BY THE BJP AND JD(S), DEMANDING THE RESIGNATION OF N NAGENDRA OVER CORRUPTION ALLEGATIONS**

**Press Trust of India**
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**BENGALURU:** The Karnataka Legislative Assembly on Thursday passed three Bills, including the Bangalore Development Authority (Amendment) Bill, 2026, which cuts by up to 50 per cent the fee for regularising properties in BDA-notified areas.

The other two Bills passed by the Assembly were the Nadaprabhu Kempegowda Heritage Area Development Authority (Amendment) Bill, 2026, and the Karnataka Town and Country Planning (Amendment) Bill, 2026.

All three Bills were passed amid protests by the BJP and JD(S), which demanded the resignation of Minister N Nagendra over corruption allegations against him.

Piloting the Bangalore Development Authority (Amendment) Bill, 2026, for consideration by the House, Greater Bengaluru Development Minister Krishna Byre Gowda said several residential layouts had been formed through the BDA.

"Although land for these layouts was acquired several years ago, some unauthorised layouts and properties have since come up on the acquired land. We are currently unable to remove the residents from these properties, but at the same time, they are unable to obtain proper legal documents for their properties," he said.

The land had come under the control of the BDA, preventing residents from obtaining khata certificates and completing property documentation, he said. "We need to provide relief to these people and enable them to obtain permanent documentation and full ownership rights over their properties. With this objective, we had previously introduced amendments and provided certain concessions. Now, we have brought another significant amendment to further reduce the applicable rates and charges by 50 per cent," Gowda said.

According to estimates, around 1,11,560 unauthorised houses have been constructed on land acquired by the BDA, he said. Earlier, sites measuring 20x30 ft were subject to a charge equivalent to 10 per cent of the guidance value. The amendment reduces this to 5 per cent, Gowda said.

Similarly, for sites measuring more than 20x30 ft and up to 30x40 ft, the charge has been reduced from 25 per cent to 12.5 per cent of the guidance value. For sites measuring more than 30x40 ft and up to 40x60 ft, it has been reduced from 40 per cent to 20 per cent.

For sites measuring more than 40x60 ft and up to 50x80 ft, the charge has been reduced from 50 per cent to 25 per cent of the guidance value, he said.

# SOUTH REGION

## Row erupts as Vijay seeks govt 'assurance' over delimitation

S Vijay Karthik
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Union home minister Amit Shah with Tamil Nadu chief minister C Joseph Vijay in Chengalpattu district on Thursday. @CMOTAMILNADU

**CHENNAI:** A row erupted in Tamil Nadu over the delimitation exercise after chief minister C Joseph Vijay on Thursday urged the Centre to provide a "clear legislative assurance" that no State will suffer a reduction in its percentage of representation in Parliament.

The chief minister did not repeat the resolution passed in the assembly on August 12 which demanded permanent freezing of the 543 seats in the Lok Sabha or for permanently retaining the existing state wise allocation.

In his speech at the 31st meeting of the Southern Zonal Council in Mahabalipuram, Vijay said, "I urge the Union government to provide a clear legislative assurance that no State will suffer a reduction in its percentage of representation in Parliament on account of its success in population stabilisation." "Such an approach would uphold the principles of equity, preserve the federal balance envisioned by our Constitution, and reinforce the confidence of all States in our democratic institutions," he said.

The DMK slammed Vijay over the comments. "Chief minister C Joseph Vijay flip-flops on the constituency delimitation issue," DMK spokesperson Saravanan Annadurai said.

The AIADMK also attacked the TVK government, stating that it has pulled off a complete "U-Turn" on the Delimitation issue. "What are you saying now is the exact same thing the Union government said. And that is why the AIADMK supported the delimitation bill when it was introduced," the AIADMK IT Wing said on social media.

"Why conduct such a resolution drama just to flip-flop like this?" the party asked.

Meanwhile, the IT wing of the TVK said, "In the speech delivered by the Chief Minister... a broad visionary perspective was presented to protect the current representation of Southern states that have successfully implemented population control. The resolution passed in Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly on August 12, articulates this in actionable terms," it said.

"Despite this, misleading opinions are being spread about constituency delimitation without even a basic understanding of the issue.", it added.

Talking to reporters outside the venue of the meeting, minister for energy resources and law, CTR Nirmalkumar said, "There is no change in TVK's stance on the delimitation issue. There is no change in our position that the number of Lok Sabha seats should remain at 543."

## Shah seeks backing of states to combat drugs

S Vijay Karthik
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**CHENNAI:** The Centre has prepared a three-year roadmap towards eradication of narcotics as a drug-free India is a necessity for every government and society, Union home and cooperation minister Amit Shah said on Thursday.

"It is the responsibility of all of us to contribute towards building an educated and healthy India," Shah said in his address at the 31st meeting of the Southern Zonal Council in neighbouring Mahabalipuram.

The roles of several departments of the Union government and the States have been defined in the roadmap, he said. "Until all the departments of the central and state governments join this movement, we will not be able to save the coming generation from this evil," he said.

Shah highlighted South India as a vital driver of the country's overall development, praising the region's consistent contributions across key sectors — literature, research and development, space, IT, AI and agriculture.

"South India has played a very major role in all areas of the country's IT, automobiles, pharmaceuticals and infrastructure development, and that is why a large amount of foreign direct investment has also come to the South," he remarked.

Shah said the entire development journey of South India has been based on three pillars — high literacy rate, trained manpower and technical expertise in the utilisation of deep seas.

"These three pillars have made South India the biggest contributor to the country's development. The people of South India and the governments have also established many excellent traditions in the fields of innovation and revenue generation. The whole of India should learn from South India in these two areas," Shah said. He emphasised that malnutrition and stunting should be closely focused on and that the fight against malnutrition was initiated by Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh which was eventually accepted across the country.

## 6-yr-old dies allegedly after teacher slaps him

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**HYDERABAD:** A six-year-old boy died after allegedly being slapped by his teacher for not completing his homework at a private school in Visakhapatnam on Thursday, police said.

The incident took place at Little Garden School in the One Town area. The victim was studying in upper kindergarten (UKG), and the accused has been identified as Anuradha, a language teacher.

A purported CCTV video from the classroom, which went viral on social media, shows the boy holding a slate and standing in a line in front of the teacher. He appears to be crying and pleading with her not to beat him. The teacher is seen adjusting his uniform before pulling him closer and slapping him on the cheek. Within seconds, the boy collapses onto the teacher in the purported video, the veracity of which could not be independently verified by HT.

"The teacher apparently alerted the other teachers, who rushed there and tried to do CPR on the student. Later, the school staff rushed him to a nearby hospital, but doctors declared him dead on arrival. Apparently, the boy had suffered a cardiac arrest out of panic," Visakhapatnam revenue divisional officer (RDO) Sadhu Dileep Chakravarthy told reporters.

OFFICIALS SAID A CASE HAS BEEN REGISTERED AND IT IS SUSPECTED THE STUDENT HAD A CARDIAC ARREST DUE TO PANIC

The boy's body was later shifted to King George Hospital (KGH), the same day, for a postmortem examination. "We shall order an inquiry into the matter," the RDO said.

King George Hospital superintendent Dr I Vani told HT that the boy had already died by the time he was brought to the hospital around noon. "We cannot immediately say whether the boy suffered cardiac arrest due to panic or any other reason," she said.

"We will complete the postmortem procedure by tonight. Only after the report comes out, we shall be able to tell the exact cause of death," Vani added.

The Visakhapatnam district education department has initiated an inquiry to determine the circumstances surrounding the boy's death and whether there was any negligence on the part of the school, people familiar with the matter said.

The boy's parents, who work in catering, and their relatives gathered outside the school on Thursday evening after learning about his death. They staged a protest and alleged that the teacher's assault directly led to the tragedy.

"Our family went on a pilgrimage last week for a few days and returned only on Wednesday. That was the reason why he had not done the homework. He had no health issues at all," the boy's father said. "How can the teacher behave so rudely with a UKG student?" he added.

The boy's mother alleged that the school management did not inform them about the incident. "Without informing us, they directly took my son to the hospital, where he was declared dead," she alleged.

"We want strict action against the teacher and the management of the school," the mother added.

HT reached out to the school authorities and could not elicit a response by the time of going to print.

A police officer at One Town police station said, "A case of suspicious death has been registered based on the boy's family's complaint in the matter. The investigation is underway."

"Stringent action will be taken against the school management and teachers responsible for the incident. The government stands firmly with the victim's family," said state education minister Nara Lokesh in a post on X.

## Min: Stay on shunting of teacher not setback

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N Samsudheen

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM:** Keralam general education minister N Samsudheen on Wednesday said the stay on suspension of a teacher, for framing a "wrong question" with regard to Hindutva ideologue VD Savarkar, was not a setback for the government.

The minister said that grant of interim stay was nothing extraordinary and was done in the normal course for such matters. The government will explain in court its stand on the matter and the alleged wrong committed by the teacher," he told a TV channel.

The Kerala High Court on Wednesday stayed for a month the suspension of the teacher -- Guruprasad Rai K -- saying that it was not required for the proper conduct of the enquiry against him in view of the nature of allegations he was facing.

At the same time, the court said that taking into consideration the allegation against Rai, the enquiry shall continue.

Samsudheen also referred to the recent murder of an elderly man in Alappuzha district allegedly by teenagers as an isolated incident.

In order to curb such incidents, the education being imparted to children in schools includes advise and directions avoid violence and criminal acts.

Such activities will be increased going forward, he added.

Four teenagers, including a 13-year-old girl, have been apprehended for allegedly killing an elderly man for money.

The accused girl, an eighth-standard student, was a close relative of the deceased man, 65-year-old Sivankutty of Karuvatta in Alappuzha district.

The three other minors, friends of the accused girl, hailed from Paravur in Kollam district, police had said.

According to the police, Sivankutty was found dead inside his house on Monday morning while his wife and daughter were away at a hospital at the time.

The chain he was wearing and the gold kept in the house were reportedly missing.

Police said that they suspect the accused wanted to steal money to buy a high-end mobile and a bike and the murder occurred during the theft attempt.

## 4 OF FAMILY KILLED IN T'GANA AS CAR FALLS INTO WELL

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**HYDERABAD:** Four members of a family, including two children, died after the car in which they were travelling plunged into an open well on the roadside in Telangana's Siddipet district in the wee hours of Thursday, police said.

The accident took place on the outskirts of Appannapalli village of Dubbak mandal. The deceased were identified as Dandugula Raju (35), a sand businessman from Balwanthapur village, his wife Bhagya (25), their four-year-old son Nihansh and two-year-old daughter Shanvika, police said.

According to a police officer from Dubbak, the family had travelled to Siddipet on Wednesday to attend the rituals of a close relative who died recently.

"After the programme, they left for their native village in their car at around 9 pm. However, when they did not reach home even late at night, their family members became worried and alerted the Dubbak police station," he said.

The four bodies were shifted to the regional hospital in Dubbak for autopsy. "The exact cause of the car losing control and plunging into the well is yet to be established. We have launched a probe into the circumstances that led to the accident," the police officer added.

## Jagan challenges CM to order CBI probe into APPSC Group-I exams

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YS Jagan Mohan Reddy

**HYDERABAD:** YSR Congress Party president and former Andhra Pradesh chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy on Thursday challenged chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu to order an inquiry by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) into the allegations of irregularities in the conduct of Group-I services (main) examinations by the Andhra Pradesh Public Service Commission (APPSC) during the previous regime.

Speaking to reporters at the party office, Jagan demanded that the Naidu government, at the same time, should also order a CBI probe into the alleged irregularities in the conduct of teachers' recruitment through district selection committees (DSC) in 2025. "We are asking for the CBI investigation into the allegations on the APPSC Group-I services examination during our regime, because we had not committed any mistake. Does Naidu have the courage to order the CBI probe into the DSC-2025 examinations?"

Reacting to the allegations made by the chief minister during the discussion on APPSC Group-I (Mains) examinations in the state assembly on Wednesday, the YSRCP chief said the entire process was held in a transparent manner and as per the court directions, giving no room for any misappropriation.

He said the Group-I preliminary examinations were held in 2018 when Chandrababu Naidu was the chief minister in his earlier stint. "By making allegations of irregularities in their selection, the chief minister is putting the future of these 163 candidates in jeopardy," Jagan alleged.

"The allegations that the evaluation was done by non-qualified persons at Haailand Resorts or elsewhere are rubbish. It was done in the glare of CCTVs in the APPSC office and in educational institutions. It was done in a jumbling method and bar code was used and there is no scope of the evaluator knowing the aspirant," Jagan said.

## Telangana Cong issues notice to leaders over 'anti-CM' statements

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Konda Surekha

**HYDERABAD:** The rift within the Telangana Congress intensified on Thursday as the party's disciplinary committee took action against several of its leaders over their "anti-party" and "anti-chief minister" remarks, people familiar with the matter said.

According to Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) chief B Mahesh Kumar Goud, a show-cause notice was issued to state endowments minister Konda Surekha, holding her responsible for her daughter Konda Sushmita's disparaging remarks against the party and chief minister A Revanth Reddy.

On Wednesday, Sushmita's remarks made during her mother's birthday celebrations at Parkala in Warangal district, triggered an uproar in the state Congress unit. Sushmita claimed that the Konda family had played a key role in projecting CM Revanth Reddy for the TPCC president's post and introducing him to the Congress high command. "After becoming the chief minister, power has gone to his head and he has forgotten those who supported him during his political rise," she alleged.

The PCC disciplinary committee headed by Nagarkurnool MP Mallu Ravi, who condemned Sushmita's comments, also issued show-cause notice to former minister and Telangana state planning board vice-chairman G Chinna Reddy for allegedly accusing the state Congress leadership of selling tickets in the last assembly elections.

Besides, the PCC on Thursday suspended senior Congress leader Jakkidi Prabhakar Reddy, the father of Telangana Youth Congress president Jakkidi Shivacharan Reddy for allegedly making personal and caste-related remarks against several party leaders.

The committee also issued show-cause notices to Adilabad assembly constituency party in-charge Kandi Srinivas Reddy and party leader Sanjay over alleged objectionable remarks made against party leaders during a DCC Political Affairs Committee meeting in Utnoor.

"These leaders have been asked to submit their explanations within three days. The Congress high command has taken serious note of the rising voices of rebellion within the Telangana Congress in the recent past. The party views these comments as a violation of the party line," Mahesh Kumar Goud told reporters in Nizamabad.

Later in the day, Surekha submitted her explanation, saying that the remarks made by her daughter were entirely her personal views. "Holding me responsible for my daughter's statements is contrary to the principles of natural justice," she said in her explanation.

## Pocso court awards pastor 4 death sentences for sexual assault of girls

S Vijay Karthik
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**CHENNAI:** A special Pocso court on Thursday awarded four death sentences to a 47-year-old pastor for sexually assaulting four girls in Tamil Nadu's Tirunelveli district, police said.

Judge Suresh Kumar at the Tirunelveli district Pocso special court found all charges against the accused proven beyond doubt. The court handed over four separate death sentences to pastor S Abraham alongside a fine of ₹52,000. To assist the victims, the judge also ordered the government to pay compensation of ₹10 lakh each to the victims.

According to the police, a formal complaint was lodged by the mother of one of the victims at the Tirunelveli All Women Police Station in July 2022 against pastor S Abraham.

"A case was registered under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act on July 5, 2022 and following an intensive investigation, the accused was arrested," police said.

Tirunelveli superintendent of police Vishwesh B Shastri commended the key personnel responsible for securing the conviction which include additional superintendent of police M Shanmugam, deputy superintendent of police (Tirunelveli rural sub-division) Raghupathi Raja, inspector Rajakumari (Tirunelveli Rural All Women Police Station) and investigating officer Radha currently serving in Chennai.

## Kerala child rights panel seeks transparency in contest judging

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SCPCR DIRECTED AUTHORITIES NOT TO TAKE MONEY FROM STUDENTS OF CLASSES 1 TO 8 OR THEIR PARENTS IN THE NAME OF SCHOOL ARTS FEST

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM:** The Keralam child rights panel has directed that the marks awarded by judges to contestants and groups at school arts festival competitions be displayed on electronic screens on the stage to ensure greater transparency in the judging process.

The State Commission for Protection of Child Rights also directed authorities not to collect money from students of Classes 1 to 8 or their parents in the name of the school arts festival, according to a statement on Thursday.

The directions were issued by a full bench of the Commission comprising Chairperson K V Manoj Kumar and members B Mohankumar, K K Shaju and Dr F Wilson on complaints related to the conduct of school Kalolsavam (arts festival).

The Commission said it had noticed widespread collection of money in the conduct of the festival from the school level to the state level. It directed that the Kalolsavam manual be revised by including people with expertise in the field. The names and mobile phone numbers of programme convenors and committee members should be displayed at venues so that contestants and the public can easily access them, the commission said.

It also directed authorities to make suitable arrangements for children with disabilities by identifying events in which they can participate and providing accessible classrooms and other facilities.

The commission said eligible judges from the panel of the Cultural Affairs Department should also be considered while appointing judges.

Criteria should be framed for selecting judges and their names and their educational qualifications, and expertise should be displayed on screens during competitions from the sub-district to state levels, it said.

It also directed that judges of various competition events should remain in their allotted seats throughout the event and should not move away or sit together while judging.

Judges should not communicate with one another or use electronic devices such as mobile phones, tablets and smart watches for any form of e-communication until they complete their duty, it said.

On appeals, the body said orders should be issued within three days of the competition, and the reasons for the decisions should be clearly stated.

The appeal committee should show contestants the video of their performance to help them understand the mistakes and compare the performance of the contestant who filed the appeal with that of the first-prize winner using video recordings, it said.

Contestants should also be given sufficient time to approach courts, if necessary, against an appeal committee order.

The commission directed that there should be a gap of at least 10 days between sub-district and district-level competitions and at least 15 days between district and state-level competitions.

It also ordered that venues used for artistic performances should obtain fitness certificates from the Public Works Department to ensure safety. The commission directed to take steps to implement these directions during the 2026-27 school Kalolsavam.

## TN announces initiatives to modernise consumer, food protection systems

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**CHENNAI:** The Tamil Nadu government on Thursday announced 24 initiatives for the Food and Consumer Protection Department for 2026-27, focusing on supply chain modernisation through AI, GPS tracking and infrastructure expansion.

Presenting the demand for grants in the Legislative Assembly, Food and Civil Supplies Minister P Venkataramanan outlined measures ranging from high-tech supply chain monitoring to consumer protection initiatives targeting women and Gen Z.

The minister said the Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation would construct 15 warehouses across 13 districts, with Chengalpattu, Coimbatore, Thanjavur and Salem among them, with a combined capacity of 31,000 metric tonnes at Rs 81.60 crore.

In addition, the Tamil Nadu Warehousing Corporation would construct three modern warehouses, each with a capacity of 3,400 MT, in Ariyalur, Namakkal and Mettupalayam at Rs 13.50 crore, he said.

In a move to curb leakage and ensure quality, the department would introduce QR code tagging for every bag of Custom Milled Rice, enabling end-to-end traceability from rice mills to Fair Price Shops, Venkataramanan said.

The supply chain would be integrated with a Vehicle Location Tracking System using Geographic Information System mapping and GPS, at Rs 2 crore, he said.

Similarly, an AI-powered Automatic Stock Monitoring System using existing CCTV networks would be introduced at Rs 50 lakh, while a dedicated AI mobile application would be developed at Rs 1 crore to continuously monitor stock levels and assess food grain quality.

## Bleaching powder purchase gaps to be probed in detail: Kerala min

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**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM:** Kerala health minister K Muraleedharan on Thursday said a detailed probe would be conducted into alleged irregularities in the purchase of bleaching powder by the state-run KMCSL, and that he had sought a Vigilance investigation into the matter.

Muraleedharan wrote to Home Minister Ramesh Chennithala seeking a Vigilance probe after media reports alleged that Kerala Medical Services Corporation Ltd's (KMSCL) purchase of bleaching powder between March 11 and May 6 this year resulted in an unnecessary expenditure of Rs 7.32 crore.

Responding to reporters, Muraleedharan said the Vigilance will investigate the matter in detail and there was no reason to fear the probe.

He said the bleaching powder was procured during the Assembly election period.

"What was the hurry to purchase bleaching powder even after the results were out? Wouldn't it have been done after the new government takes charge? Did business have to be done in between? That is why there is suspicion," the minister said.

Regarding fresh revelations in the Enforcement Directorate (ED) probe against former chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan's daughter Veena T, Muraleedharan said the state government had no connection with the federal agency.

"Because the ED is actively investigating Congress ministers and Chief Ministers. How are we going to exert pressure using that ED? Let the law take its course; we are not offering an opinion on this case," he said.

Asked about the CPI(M)'s claim that the ED probe was political witch-hunting, Muraleedharan said there was no such aspect as the agency was under the Central government.

"We have never, at any point, agreed with the ED's investigation. So let this investigation take its course. We are not interfering here," he said.

The money laundering case relates to Keralam-based mining company Cochin Minerals and Rutile Ltd (CMRL) and Exalogic Solutions, a company promoted by Veena and now defunct.

The ED, in a press release on Wednesday, alleged that it had seized some "handwritten" notes during searches at Veena's premises in May, which contained details of certain fund transfers to Dubai.

Regarding alleged irregularities in organising a football match featuring Lionel Messi-led Argentina team proposed during the previous LDF regime with the support of a sponsor, Muraleedharan said there would be a full-scale investigation.

"Anyone who made a profit by claiming that Messi will come to Keralam will be brought before the law. There should be no doubt about that," Muraleedharan said.

# HC stays J'khand govt's order cancelling JPSC examinations

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**RANCHI:** The Jharkhand High Court on Thursday stayed the notifications cancelling the 11th to 13th Jharkhand Public Service Commission (JPSC) Combined Civil Services Examination and the Food Safety Officer recruitment examination, along with related appointments.

The interim order passed by Justice Deepak Roushan brought relief to around 400 successful candidates — 342 under JPSC and 54 under the Food Safety Officer recruitment — whose career prospects were left hanging after the state government's sudden decision to scrap the recruitment processes.

The high court passed the interim order while hearing a batch of four writ petitions challenging the state's notifications. The petitions were filed by aggrieved candidates — Deepmala, Sonam Kumari, Saurabh Singh and Ashutosh Kumar — who argued that the government's blanket cancellation was arbitrary, unjust and violated the well-established principles of natural justice.

During the hearing, senior advocates Indrajeet Sinha and Amritansh Vats, appearing for the petitioners, strongly opposed the state's sudden administrative decision.

"The Honorable Court stayed the operations of the state government's notifications cancelling the JPSC 11th to 13th Civil Services and Food Safety Officer recruitment exams," advocate Sinha submitted.

On Tuesday, the state government issued eight notifications cancelling 22 recruitment examinations. TDPL, a private firm under the scanner of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), which is probing irregularities in recruitment examinations conducted by the Jharkhand Public Service Commission and the Jharkhand Staff Selection Commission (JSSC), was involved in these examinations.

**Job aspirants and students during a protest in Ranchi on Thursday.** PTI

The notification cancelling the JPSC 11th to 13th Civil Services and Food Safety Officer examinations also included the cancellation of the Child Development Project Officer (CDPO) examination.

When asked about the fate of the other notifications, Sinha clarified that they had not been stayed and said a hearing on them was expected on Friday.

Besides staying the cancellation order, the court directed all parties, including the state government, to file affidavits and listed the matter for hearing on September 15, counsel Amritansh Vats said.

Senior additional advocate general Achyut Keshav, who appeared for the state, said, "The High Court has stayed the cancellation notifications for the time being. A detailed order copy outlining the court's complete observations and specific directions will be uploaded on the official website by late tonight."

The legal battle stems from the state government's late-night notifications on Tuesday annulling several competitive examinations following allegations of paper leaks and institutional irregularities involving a blacklisted third-party examination management agency.

The notifications were issued following sustained protests by students demanding proper action over alleged irregularities in recruitment examinations conducted by the JPSC and Jharkhand Staff Selection Commission (JSSC).

Meanwhile, the students who on Wednesday had put their protest on hold for two months accused the state government of "deceiving" job aspirants after the high court's stay order. They alleged that the government failed to effectively defend its decision before the high court.

"Neither the advocate general nor any senior advocate appeared in the high court on Thursday to defend the government's stand of cancelling the recruitment exams. The lawyers who were present did not utter a single word in defence. This clearly shows that this was a trap — a trap to end the protest," student leader Kunal Pratap Singh alleged. Another students' representative Ravindra Paswan said: "The government has deceived thousands of job aspirants."

{ 3-LANGUAGE POLICY }

# Give 1-time relief to class 6 students, SC tells CBSE

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**NEW DELHI:** The Supreme Court on Thursday asked the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) to consider giving a one-time reprieve to students currently in Class 6 from the third-language requirement so that they do not face a mandatory board examination in that language when they reach Class 10, while also protecting existing foreign-language combinations during the transition.

The court also asked CBSE to examine whether the third language should in fact be introduced from Class 6 or whether the implementation should begin from Class 3 or 4, while seeking a road map for ensuring adequate teachers, course material and other infrastructure before the policy is rolled out.

A bench, comprising Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and justices Joymalya Bagchi and V Mohanna said that the concerns over the sudden implementation of the policy, preparedness of schools and availability of qualified teachers and learning resources warranted a reconsideration of the transition for the current Class 6 batch.

The bench asked additional solicitor general Aishwarya Bhati, appearing for the CBSE, to return with three clarifications -- whether the current Class 6 students could be given an additional academic year to decide and prepare for the third language; how adequate human-resource infrastructure and other resources would be created; and whether the starting point for the third language should be Class 6 or Class 3 or 4.

"If the standard is six for you, give them a reprieve for the current sixth standard so that the issue of retrospective operation also gets obviated and their immediate issue gets resolved too," said the bench.

The court also made clear that while it was not questioning the roll out of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, its implementation could not adversely affect students' rights.

**The CBSE's June 29 guidelines already provided relief to students in Classes 7, 8 and 9.**

"With regard to the NEP, the roll out can be done and it is their discretion. However, that discretion doesn't have to impact the rights," remarked the bench, asking CBSE to "go back to the drawing board" on the immediate application of the policy to Class 6 students. The court's intervention came amid petitions by parents challenging CBSE's decision to introduce a three-language formula, under which students are required to study three languages, with two being Indian languages.

The CBSE's June 29 transitional guidelines already provided relief to students in Classes 7, 8 and 9 already studying two non-native languages. Such students were permitted to retain their existing combination and add an Indian language as the third language. The additional language would be assessed through internal school-based assessment and would not have a CBSE board examination when the students reached Class 10.

However, the June 29 guidelines provided that students entering Class 6 in 2026-27 and subsequent batches would be subject to the policy in full. They would study three languages, of which at least two would be Indian languages, and would eventually take the Class 10 board examination in the third language.

Senior advocate Anand Grover, appearing for one of the petitioners, argued that the issue was particularly acute for Class 6 students because CBSE did not have statutory authority to frame the curriculum for Classes 6 to 8, which, he submitted, falls within the domain of the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT).

He also stressed the need for qualified teachers, pointing out that Indian languages would have to be taught from the basics while Class 6 students would already be expected to deal with more complex words and sentences.

The bench, however, emphasised the importance of learning Indian languages and questioned the reluctance to introduce an additional language. "Learning any new language is a big asset and invaluable. There is no compulsion for examination, why should there be a reluctance? And there is no embargo for you to continue with the foreign language," it observed.

At another point, the bench said it was "something good for the nation that children learn different Indian languages" and asked, "What can be the harm if a person North India chooses to learn a language from South India."

It also cautioned against treating Indian regional languages as inferior merely because they may not offer the same perceived employment opportunities as foreign languages. "Let us not treat with inferiority the regional languages. They all must get due respect," said the bench, while indicating that implementation issues could be examined by an expert committee if necessary.

The petitioners, however, maintained that the issue was not merely one of choice. Grover argued that learning a foreign language could open employment opportunities and that schools must have qualified teachers to teach the newly introduced Indian languages.

The bench itself raised concerns over the availability of qualified teachers, including whether there were sufficient teachers possessing the required B.Ed qualifications to teach languages such as Sanskrit.

"If you see even with regard to Rl language, there are not adequate number of qualified B.Ed teachers. How many Sanskrit teachers are qualified with B.Ed? They may be well versed with Sanskrit," said the bench, asking whether this aspect could be reconsidered.

# UGC equity regulations under review, says Centre

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**NEW DELHI:** The Centre on Thursday told the Supreme Court that it is reconsidering the University Grants Commission's (UGC) 2026 regulations on promoting equity in higher educational institutions, which the court had kept in abeyance in January after finding them "vague" and capable of "misuse".

The submission was made before a bench headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant, which was hearing a batch of petitions challenging and supporting the regulations. The court directed the Centre and UGC to file a composite affidavit addressing the concerns raised in the petitions.

Solicitor general Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, told the bench that the government was taking a relook at the regulations.

"The 2026 Regulations are being reconsidered. Till this exercise is complete, the court may defer hearing on these petitions."

The bench granted four weeks for the affidavit to be filed and two weeks thereafter for the petitioners to respond. It posted the matter for hearing after six weeks and said, "Since the regulations are under consideration before this court, it will be appropriate that a decision is taken by the Centre before the next date of hearing."

On January 29, the top court had stayed the University Grants Commission (Promotion of Equity in Higher Education Institutions) Regulations, 2026, soon after they were notified on January 13. The court had described the framework as "prima facie vague" and capable of "misuse", and had flagged concerns over its potentially sweeping consequences.

**IN JANUARY, THE SUPREME COURT HAD DESCRIBED THE FRAMEWORK AS 'PRIMA FACIE VAGUE' AND CAPABLE OF 'MISUSE'**

The regulations had also triggered protests and discontent among some student groups, including general category students who claimed that the rules were unfair to them.

Some petitions challenging the regulations objected to the definition of "caste-based discrimination", which they said excluded discrimination faced by general category students. They also questioned the absence of a mechanism to penalise false complaints made by members of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes.

The Supreme Court had earlier questioned the need for a separate definition of "caste-based discrimination" under Regulation 3(1)(c) when another provision already provides a broad definition of "discrimination".

It had also questioned why ragging was excluded from the scope of the regulations despite being a common form of harassment in educational institutions.

The regulations were framed following a petition filed in 2019 by the parents of two students who died by suicide after facing alleged caste-based discrimination. Rohith Vemula, a PhD scholar at Hyderabad Central University, died on January 17, 2016, while Payal Tadvi, a student at TN Topiwala National Medical College, died on May 22, 2019 after she was allegedly subjected to caste-based discrimination by three doctors at her college.

The petitioners had urged the court to address caste-based discrimination on campuses, claiming that although the UGC had issued Equity Regulations in 2012, they had not been implemented effectively.

# Rahul suggests 4 steps for states in edu sector

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**NEW DELHI:** Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi has asked the chief ministers of all Congress-ruled states to prepare a report on the academic and vacancy calendars, create a fool-proof system to stem paper leaks in state-level examinations and roll out the Rohit Vermula bill, which has been cleared by the Karnataka government, against caste discrimination in a bid to create an alternative education model.

During a meeting of the Congress Working Committee (CWC), Gandhi—backed by general secretary Kanhaiya Kumar—suggested four key areas to focus on in the state-level education sector in the wake of the student protests that led to the resignation of Dharmendra Pradhan as the Union education minister.

"Gandhi, who has launched the Chhatron ki Goonj programme to reach out to the students, wants the states to create an academic calendar for more academic clarity to help the students and the administration. He also asked the states to come up with their own plan to check paper leaks for state-level exams and the CMs have also been told to enact Rohit Vemula Act," said senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh. The Congress-led Karnataka government has approved the Rohith Vemula (Prevention of Discrimination, Exclusion or Injustice) (Right to Education and Dignity) Bill, 2026 in April this year.

On Thursday, the Congress also attacked the government over the NCERT's decision to include four members linked with the RSS in its reconstituted Textbook Development Team for class 11 and 12 political science. The Opposition party said that on one hand, the BJP-RSS are doing "shuddhikaran (purification) which is a sin," and on the other hand they are doing "sanghikaran of textbooks which is a curse".

## CORE INDUSTRY GROWTH SLOWS TO 5.4% FROM 6%

Shreya Khandelwal
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**NEW DELHI:** India's output in nine core infrastructure industries, as measured by the Index of Core Industries (ICI), grew 5.4% year-on-year in July, easing from an upward-revised 6% growth in June, data released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry on Thursday showed.

Fertiliser output contracted 8% in July, worsening from a 3.3% contraction in June. "Fertiliser output has contracted for the fifth consecutive month, reflecting the impact of the West Asia conflict," said Aditi Nayar, chief economist at ICRA.

The sector's dependence on imported natural gas and other raw materials leaves it exposed to disruptions arising from the conflict. Fertiliser production had contracted sharply by 24.6% in March, the first full month after the West Asia war began.

July was the second monthly release under the revised ICI series with a 2022-23 base year, following the revision of the broader Index of Industrial Production (IIP) to the same base year.

# Vande Mataram row: Shah calls Cong 'anti-national'

HT Correspondent
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**NEW DELHI:** Union home minister Amit Shah on Thursday launched a scathing attack on the Congress over its decision to sing only the first two stanzas of Vande Mataram at party events, calling it "anti-national" and accusing the party of pursuing vote-bank appeasement.

Shah's statement came a day after the Congress Working Committee (CWC) decided to abide by its 1937 resolution on Vande Mataram and sing only two stanzas of the national song, instead of its full rendition, at all party events.

In a statement on X, Shah said the Congress decision was an "open defiance of the law" and linked the 1937 decision to the sentiments that eventually led to Partition in 1947. "...The CWC has taken a surprising and anti-national decision. Following their party's 1937 Resolution, they have decided to sing only two stanzas of the great Vande Mataram song. I want to remind the entire country that in 1937, the Congress Party, for the sake of Muslim appeasement, split Vande Mataram...laying the foundation for the country's partition, and from there, the two-nation theory gained strength," Shah said.

The home minister also said Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government had corrected the "historic mistake" in the 150th anniversary year of Vande Mataram by deciding that the song would be sung in full at government programmes. He said the decision had also been given legal backing.

**Amit Shah**

"...A decision was made to sing it completely in all government programs, and this decision has also been given legal backing. The Congress Party made the decision yesterday to disregard exactly this. This decision of the Congress only confirms their extreme policy of appeasement," Shah said.

"For the sake of vote banks, they have not only insulted Bankim Babu's immortal creation but also insulted those millions of martyrs who went to the gallows for the country's freedom while chanting the slogan of Vande Mataram...Under Rahul Gandhi's leadership, the Congress Party is once again vigorously advancing the politics of appeasement," he said. Shah also appealed to people not to allow themselves to be divided over the issue, saying the country had already suffered the consequences of the decision to divide Vande Mataram.

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh hit back, calling Shah's statement "fake and untruth nationalism". He said the law did not prevent political parties from singing the original version of Vande Mataram.

"Party chief Mallikarjun Kharge has clarified what is our stand vis-a-vis Vande Mataram. It is a non-issue and a desperate attempt of the BJP to divert attention. We will stick to our narrative of students' issues and people's issues," Ramesh said.

# Govt approves Ladakh HC bench; reaffirms constitutional safeguards

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**NEW DELHI:** The Union Cabinet has decided to establish a high court bench in Ladakh, a move aimed at improving access to justice in the Union Territory, Union home minister Amit Shah said on Thursday, reaffirming the Centre's commitment to ensuring constitutional safeguards and the all-round development of the region.

Ladakh Lt Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena welcomed the "historic decision" and expressed sincere gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the home minister.

Shah announced the decision in a post on X, saying the bench of Jammu and Kashmir High Court would significantly enhance access to justice for people living in the remote and geographically challenging areas of Ladakh by reducing the time required to get legal services.

"The Union Cabinet, under the leadership of the PM Shri @narendramodi Ji, has decided to set up a bench of the High Court of Jammu and Kashmir in Ladakh. This will significantly enhance access to justice for citizens living in remote areas of Ladakh by reducing the time required to avail themselves of the legal services they are entitled to," Shah said.

Responding to the announcement, Ladakh Lt Governor Saxena said the establishment of the high court bench would not only ensure speedy justice but would also reaffirm the government's commitment to the all-round development of the UT.

"Sincere gratitude and heartfelt thanks to Prime Minister and Home Minister, for this historic decision!," he said in a post on X.

Sajjad Kargili, co chairman of the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) said: "This is a welcome decision by the Government of India, and we appreciate it. However, I request Hon'ble UHM @AmitShah ji to kindly ensure that both Leh and Kargil regions are given equal consideration and representation. The bench should be established on a rotational basis between the two regions like 'central administrative tribunal' pattern , ensuring equitable access to justice for the people of both Leh and Kargil."

## FIRs against 35 of 87 quashed in Sept 2025 violence in Leh

**JAMMU:** The Ladakh administration, headed by lieutenant governor VK Saxena, on Thursday announced the withdrawal of first information reports (FIRs) against 25 of the 87 people booked in connection with the September 24, 2025, violence in Leh, which left four men, including a retired soldier, dead and 100 others injured.

The move came a day after representatives of the Leh Apex Body (LAB) and Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) met officials of the ministry of home affairs to discuss demands for statehood with a legislature and constitutional guarantees under the Sixth Schedule.

Addressing the media in Leh on Thursday, Ladakh chief secretary Ashish Kundra said, "In total, 87 FIRs were lodged, of which nine were charge-sheeted. However, following yesterday's meeting, we discussed the matter with the LG and, with his permission, decided to withdraw FIRs against 25 people."RAVI KRISHAN KHAJURIA

# Mehul Choksi's lawyer arrested in London on sexual assault charges

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**NEW DELHI:** The Metropolitan Police in London on Thursday confirmed that criminal lawyer Vijay Aggarwal, who has represented fugitive businessman Mehul Choksi and several other accused in India, has been charged with four counts of sexual assault and was taken into custody on August 11 in London's Mayfair, an officer said, adding that he was remanded in custody until the next hearing in the matter at Southwark Crown Court on September 10.

In a reply to an email sent by HT, the Metropolitan police said, "On 11 August, officers visited a property in Brick Street, Mayfair in connection with reports of sexual assaults at the site. A 57-year-old man and a 41-year-old woman were arrested in relation with the incidents, which reportedly occurred on May 26 and August 9."

Besides Aggarwal, the other accused has been identified as his assistant Manpreet Kaur.

The statement said that both the individuals were charged on Thursday, August 13 and appeared at Westminster Magistrates' Court later that day.

**THE POLICE SAID AGGARWAL HAS BEEN REMANDED IN CUSTODY UNTIL THE NEXT HEARING ON SEPTEMBER 10**

"They were remanded in custody to appear at Southwark Crown Court on Thursday, September 10," it added.

On specific charges against Aggarwal, the Metropolitan police said he was "charged with four counts of sexual assault". Kaur, the police said, was "charged with two counts of intentionally encouraging or assisting the commission of an either way offence, namely sexual assault".

It further said that two other individuals, a 23-year-old man and a 43-year-old woman, who were arrested on August 11, in connection with this investigation have been bailed pending further enquiries.

"Two women who reported the sexual assaults continue to be supported by specialist officers," the Metropolitan police added in its statement. HT contacted a close family member of Aggarwal on specific charges of the UK police but there was no response.

# Mere mention of caste no offence under SC, ST Act, rules high court

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**PRAYAGRAJ:** The Allahabad high court has held that mere use of a caste name like 'Chamar' does not automatically attract provisions of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act unless there was an intent to humiliate the victim.

Allowing a criminal appeal filed by one Vegraj Singh and another person, justice Santosh Rai quashed a Bareilly court's summon order issued under Section 319 of CrPC (replaced by Section 358 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita) dated March 21, 2025, which allows a trial court to summon and add any person as an accused who is not named in the police charge sheet, if the evidence during an inquiry or trial shows they committed an offence.

In its August 13 order, the high court observed, "Mere use of the word 'Chamar', however, would not, by itself, establish that the appellants used the said word with the intention or knowledge of insulting or humiliating the victim on the ground of her belonging to an SC/ST community."

In this case, a first information report (FIR) was registered in 2024 at Izzatnagar police station of Bareilly involving allegations of rape and intimidation. After investigation, the police filed a charge sheet against the main accused Himmat Singh. His father Vegraj and elder brother Daulat were initially exonerated by the police.

During the trial, the victim claimed the appellants, Vegraj and Daulat, had used the word Chamar against her, after which the trial court summoned them to face trial. The appellants challenged this summoning order in the high court, arguing that the victim had not assigned them any specific role during her earlier statements regarding casteist remarks.

The court relied on the Constitution Bench decision of the Supreme Court in Hardeep Singh v. State of Punjab, where it was held that the power under Section 319 CrPC is extraordinary, to be exercised sparingly, and requires evidence stronger than the prima facie case applied at the stage of framing the charge.

"In the absence of any reliable, sterling material or evidence pointing unmistakably towards the complicity of the appellant, the trial court erred in law by summoning the appellant under Section 319 Cr.P.C. in a casual and cavalier manner," the high court said.

# Lucknow bank employee kills wife and sister; dies by suicide

**Aakash Ghosh and Zuheb Alam Khan**
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**LUCKNOW:** A 37-year-old bank employee allegedly shot dead his estranged 33-year-old wife, also a banker, outside her office in Lucknow on Thursday, and later killed his sister before shooting himself, police said.

According to police, at 12.05 pm, the wife, Divya Mishra, reached the Gomti Nagar branch of ICICI Bank , along with her colleague, in her car. Divya worked there as a relationship manager. Her husband, Manas Bajpayee, an assistant manager at a regional business office of the State Bank of India, was waiting nearby in an auto-rickshaw.

Bajpayee asked Divya to step out of the car, assaulted her when she did, shot her, police said, adding he fled the spot in his car.

Deputy commissioner of police (east) Deeksha Sharma, who reached the spot after the incident, said the woman had worked there for three to four years. "The woman's co-workers at the bank identified the attacker as her husband," the DCP said.

Around 12.30pm, Bajpayee reached his home in Husadiya, about 2 km from the bank. His tenant, Luvkush, who has been running a restaurant on the premises for nearly a decade, told reporters that he saw Bajpayee rush into the house, sweating profusely. "I asked him, 'Bhaiya, what's the matter? You appear stressed.' But he told me it was nothing and that there were some office issues. Then he went inside," Luvkush said.

Restaurant employees said Bajpayee locked the door after entering the house and played Hanuman Chalisa at a high volume.

Police said Bajpayee also uploaded a WhatsApp status in which he purportedly confessed to killing his wife, saying she had "betrayed" him. He also wrote that he intended to kill himself and his sister, and claimed that Divya's sister, Pragya Mishra, a journalist and YouTuber, and her husband, Bharat Yadav, knew everything about his wife's alleged "betrayal".

Police, however, cautioned that the alleged WhatsApp message was still being verified.

Around 1.26 pm, Pragya posted on social media that she had received information that her sister had been shot.

Police said Bajpayee was subsequently traced to the Husadiya area in Gomti Nagar, where he allegedly shot his sister before shooting himself.

Commissioner of police (CP) Tarun Gauba reached the crime scene and said investigation was underway and forensic teams were examining evidence from the sites linked to the shootings.

"CCTV footage is being checked to piece together the sequence of events. We have sent the bodies for post-mortem exam and recovered three unlicensed murder weapons," DCP Sharma said.

The couple had married about 10 years ago, police said. "Family members told us that the couple had not been living together since November 2025. Divya would sometimes stay with her family and at other times with her in-laws. Their dispute had intensified since November," Gauba said.

Divya had recently filed a divorce petition in the family court, seeking compensation and the return of dowry given during the marriage. The two, however, reportedly remained in contact.

Divya had recently observed a Teej fast for Bajpayee, a detail that made the violence all the more "unexpected", Pragya said.

"Bajpayee's sister was mentally ill and he thought that after his death, there would be no one to take care of her, so he decided to kill her," Luvkush told reporters.

HT reached out to ICICI and SBI for a comment but did not get a response till going to press.

*(With inputs from PTI)*

## Sequence of the crimes

**12:05pm:** Relationship manager Divya Mishra reaches her workplace (ICICI Bank) in Lucknow's Gomti Nagar in her car with her colleague

**12:05-12:20pm:** Her husband, Manas Bajpayee, waits outside the bank in an auto. He asks Mishra to step outside her car, assaults her, shoots her and flees in his car. Police is alerted

**12:30pm:** Bajpayee returns home in Husadiya, 2 kms from incident and uploads a WhatsApp status, purportedly confessing to the murder and accusing his wife of "betrayal"

**1:26pm:** Journalist and YouTuber Pragya Mishra posts on X that she has received news about the attack on her sister

**1:30pm:** Police get another call that a man shot himself and his sister in Husadiya

PTI

**1:40pm:** Police reach the second spot where neighbours say that Bajpayee, after reaching home, played Hanuman Chalisa at a high volume

**1:45pm:** Police identify the man who died by suicide as Manas and recovers three unlicensed murder weapon

**THE BREAKDOWN OF MARRIAGE** Police said Bajpayee and Mishra had not been living together since November 2025. Mishra had filed for divorce in a family court, seeking compensation and the return of dowry given during their marriage. Police are treating the matter as a family dispute and are examining the circumstances that led to the shootings

# U.P. BEOs PROHIBIT YOUTUBERS' ENTRY INTO SCHOOLS; NO GOVT ORDER, SAYS ADDL CHIEF SECY

**Rajeev Mullick**
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**LUCKNOW:** Basic education officers (BEOs) across multiple districts in Uttar Pradesh have issued orders prohibiting entry of outsiders, including YouTubers, and video recording inside state-run primary and upper primary schools without permission "to ensure smooth teaching and learning activities in schools".

Additional chief secretary, basic and secondary education, Partha Sarthi Sen Sharma, however, said no such order was issued by the state government.

While the first such directive came in Farrukhabad district on April 17, when basic education officer Vishwanath Pratap Singh issued an order barring outsiders from entering schools on April 17. In a circular, seen by HT, he accused "certain individuals or groups of individuals" claiming to be journalists of entering schools without permission, photographing children in classrooms, attempting to inspect records and demanding information to tarnish the education department's image.

Similar orders have since been issued in Agra, Azamgarh, Ballia, Basti, Ambedkarnagar and Ayodhya.

The development has sparked a row at a time when the online collective Cockroach Janta Party has launched a nationwide "SchoolThikKaro" campaign on social media, and amid protests by students at multiple places over poor school facilities in the state over the last two weeks.

Over the last few weeks, a series of videos purportedly showing poor quality midday meals being served to students in some government schools was widely shared on social media.

Reacting to the development, Samajwadi Party spokesperson Abdul Hafiz Gandhi said: "The recent orders are a matter of concern, particularly from the perspective of freedom of press and democratic accountability..."

Defending the directives, state BJP spokesperson Rakesh Tripathi said: "Whether it's a private or government school, you need to take permission to enter the school premises."

# New SIT to review police probe in Ram Temple 'theft' case

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**LUCKNOW:** A Special Investigation Team (SIT) set up by the Supreme Court to probe allegations of irregularities in accounting for donations at the Ram Temple is likely to re-examine the criminal investigation conducted by the Ayodhya Police, which resulted in the arrest of eight people and the seizure of nearly ₹80 lakh from their premises, police officials privy to the investigation said on Thursday.

Constituted on July 26 following the SC's direction, the second SIT is headed by inspector general of police (Lucknow range) Kiran S and includes deputy inspector general (Ayodhya range) Somen Barma, Ayodhya senior superintendent of police Gaurav Grover and additional superintendent of police (Barabanki) Ritesh Kumar Singh.

The first SIT, set up on June 13 by the UP government, had submitted its final report to the state government, who later forwarded it to the temple trust, flagging "gross lapses" in the functioning of the trust that managed the shrine but exonerating two top former functionaries of the body. The SC-mandated SIT is expected to submit its report to the apex court.

A key question likely to be examined by the court-mandated SIT is whether the eight arrested men represent the entire chain involved in the alleged theft. Investigators are expected to examine who had access to the donation-counting area, who handled the cash, who could have known about alleged discrepancies and whether anyone facilitated the removal, concealment or subsequent movement of the stolen amount.

"It would be premature to say that the case is confined to the persons already arrested. The SIT will examine the evidence and individual roles. Any further action will depend on what emerges during the investigation," a senior officer said.

Senior police officers privy to the investigation said the SIT will independently examine the evidence already collected by the local police and assess whether it established the complete sequence of the alleged theft -- from the counting of donations to the suspected removal and subsequent movement of cash or valuables. "The material collected during the earlier investigation will be examined afresh. The arrests made so far will also be assessed individually on the basis of the evidence available against each accused. The second SIT will not proceed on the assumption that the earlier investigation has established the complete chain of events," a second senior police officer said.

**The first SIT flagged "gross lapses" in the functioning of the trust that managed the shrine.**

The first SIT's preliminary findings on June 25 had resulted in registration of an FIR and the subsequent arrests.

The local police began the criminal investigation after the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust lodged an FIR at the Ram Janmabhoomi police station on June 25 against eight named accused and other unidentified people under BNS sections 306, 316(5), 317(4), 317(5), 61 and 3(5), relating to offences of criminal breach of trust, cheating, theft and criminal conspiracy, and Section 13(1)(a) of Prevention of Corruption Act.

The SC-mandated SIT is expected to correlate CCTV footage with donation-counting registers, cash-handling records and statements of personnel involved in the counting and handling of offerings, said the second police officer. Investigators are likely to reconstruct the movement of cash during the period under scrutiny and identify the precise stage at which discrepancies allegedly occurred, said a local police officer.

# 6-year-old dies allegedly after teacher slaps him

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**HYDERABAD:** A six-year-old boy died after allegedly being slapped by his teacher for not completing his homework at a private school in Visakhapatnam on Thursday, police said.

The incident took place at Little Garden School in the One Town area. The victim was studying in upper kindergarten (UKG), and the accused has been identified as Anuradha, a language teacher.

A purported CCTV video from the classroom, which went viral on social media, shows the boy crying and pleading with the teacher not to beat him. The teacher is then seen adjusting his uniform before pulling him closer and slapping him on the cheek. Within seconds, he collapses onto her. HT couldn't verify the authenticity of the purported video.

"The teacher apparently alerted the other teachers, who tried to do CPR on the student. Later, the school staff rushed him to a nearby hospital, but doctors declared him dead on arrival. Apparently, the boy had suffered a cardiac arrest out of panic," Visakhapatnam revenue divisional officer (RDO) Sadhu Dileep Chakravarthy said.

> Stringent action will be taken against school management
> **NARA LOKESH,** minister

The boy's body was later shifted to King George Hospital (KGH), the same day, for a post-mortem examination. "We shall order an inquiry into the matter," the RDO said.

King George Hospital superintendent Dr I Vani told HT that the boy had already died by the time he was brought to the hospital around noon. "We will be able to ascertain the exact cause of death after the post-mortem examination."

The Visakhapatnam district education department has initiated an inquiry into the matter, people familiar with the matter said. The boy's parents, who work in catering, and their relatives gathered outside the school on Thursday evening and staged a protest. "Our family went on a pilgrimage last week for a few days and returned only on Wednesday. That is why he had not done the homework. He had no health issues at all," the boy's father said. "How can the teacher behave so rudely with a UKG student?" he added.

The boy's mother said, "Without informing us, they took my son to the hospital, where he was declared dead. We want strict action against the teacher and the management of the school." HT reached out to the school authorities and could not elicit an immediate response.

A police officer at One Town police station said a case of suspicious death has been registered in the matter.

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# SC 5:4 order refines 1978 'industry' test

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**NEW DELHI:** The Supreme Court on Thursday, by a 5:4 majority, refined the expansive test laid down nearly five decades ago to determine what constitutes an "industry" under the now-repealed Industrial Disputes Act, while unanimously protecting all pending disputes from the impact of the new formulation.

A nine-judge Constitution bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant also upheld, by a majority, the maintainability of the reference that had brought the 1978 landmark Bangalore Water Supply & Sewerage Board Vs A Rajappa judgment back for reconsideration.

However, in a significant safeguard for workers and employers involved in existing litigation, the bench unanimously directed that all pending disputes under the 1947 law shall be adjudicated on the basis of the "triple test" laid down in the 1978 judgment. The bench also made it clear that its ruling would have no bearing on the interpretation of the corresponding provision in the Industrial Relations Code, 2020.

The judgment came on a reference concerning one of the most consequential questions in Indian labour jurisprudence — the scope of the expression "industry" under Section 2(j) of the Industrial Disputes Act.

In his judgment, for himself and justices SC Sharma, Alok Aradhe and Vipul M Pancholi, the CJI held that the test evolved in Bangalore Water Supply required "refinement and reformulation". "All matters presently pending under 1947 Act may be adjudicated in terms of the triple test," he said.

The CJI added that the court was refraining from commenting on the definition of "industry" under the new law. The previous interpretation, he said, could not be treated as a "sheet-anchor" for interpreting the definition under the new code.

Justice PS Narasimha agreed with the CJI, making the majority five on the question of refining the definition. He held that the procedure by which the reference was made was valid and justified, particularly as it sought to bring certainty to an area of law that had remained unsettled.

**ALL PENDING DISPUTES UNDER THE 1947 LAW WILL BE ADJUDICATED ON THE BASIS OF THE 'TRIPLE TEST' LAID DOWN IN THE 1978 JUDGMENT**

At the same time, he noted that the determination of "industry" had effectively become redundant with the repeal of the old law and its replacement by the Industrial Relations Code.

### Four judges differ

Four judges, however, took a different view on the substantive question and held that the 1978 judgment had correctly laid down the law.

Justice BV Nagarathna said the reference itself was unnecessary and that the previous judgments could have been reconciled with 1978 verdict. She held that the expansive definition of "industry" was imperative and that the triple test remained correct.

She stressed that the nature of the activity, rather than the identity of the entity carrying it out, should be the determining factor. "Merely because the State performs an activity or is done as a sovereign function will not be a blanket immunity," she held, adding the "dominant nature" of the activity would be the key.

She also held that the enactment of the new labour code meant there was no need for the court to pronounce upon the correctness of the old judgment in a manner that could create uncertainty and affect industrial peace.

Justice Dipankar Datta, writing for himself and Justice Ujjal Bhuyan, held that the 1978 judgment had laid down the correct test and that the earlier decisions in Maruti and Parmar did not conflict with each other in a manner requiring reconsideration by a larger bench.

Justice Datta said the reference served "no jurisprudential purpose" and no public interest could be served by disturbing settled principles. Institutional credibility, he said, lies in finality.

Justice Joymalya Bagchi also concurred with the CJI that the reference itself was validly made, but disagreed on the need to refine the 1978 definition.

Justice Bagchi gave particular emphasis to charitable and social institutions, holding that unless law is enacted to exempt such institutions, the State cannot seek exemption merely by invoking "sovereign" functions in a manner that would deny workers the benefits of labour legislation. He held that an amendment which was never notified could not become the basis for refining the definition under the previous judgment.

### What was the 1978 test?

The dispute centred on the sweeping interpretation given to Section 2(j) in Bangalore Water Supply, where a seven-judge bench evolved a three-fold test for determining whether an activity constituted an "industry". The test broadly required a systematic and organised activity involving cooperation between employer and employee and the production or distribution of goods or services to satisfy human wants and wishes.

Governments and employers criticised the verdict for blurring the distinction between industrial activity and the state's sovereign or welfare functions. The issue eventually reached a seven-judge bench, which in 2017 referred the question to a larger bench.

### Why the ruling matters?

The case had pitted the Centre, several states and public entities against labourers and workers over the consequences of retaining the broad interpretation for government departments, research bodies, charitable institutions and other non-traditional workplaces.

Attorney General R Venkataramani had argued that the government should not be viewed as anti-labour but cautioned that treating departments such as forests and irrigation, as well as research bodies, as "industries" could have serious consequences.

The workers' side, represented by senior advocates Indira Jaising, CU Singh, Vijay Hansaria and Gopal Sankaranarayanan, among others, defended the 1978 ruling as a worker-oriented precedent under which employees had enjoyed protection for more than four decades.

# India, Japan sign framework to bolster naval ties

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**NEW DELHI:** India and Japan on Thursday signed a memorandum of arrangement to deepen maritime security cooperation, focusing on closer ties between the Indian Navy and the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force—the latest in a series of steps to bolster bilateral military ties—during talks between defence minister Rajnath Singh and his Japanese counterpart Shinjiro Koizumi in Delhi.

"The arrangement provides a framework for information sharing in the field of maritime domain awareness (MDA), and enhanced cooperation in areas such as search and rescue (SAR) and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR)," the two sides announced in a joint statement.

The two ministers also agreed to advance reciprocal access to ship-repair facilities, with a formal arrangement expected to be concluded soon.

Another outcome of the delegation-level talks was the two leaders agreeing to set up a working group to boost cooperation in a raft of areas including operations, intelligence, equipment, technology and industrial cooperation. "The working group will maximise synergies among the various areas of cooperation, and accelerate their implementation," the statement said.

Singh and Koizumi met weeks after India and Japan unveiled measures to expand cooperation in defence, energy security, rare earths and AI, and finalised a roadmap on economic security at the 16th India-Japan Summit, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Japanese counterpart Sanae Takaichi stressed the importance of mutual trust in a world order facing growing uncertainty.

**Defence minister Rajnath Singh with his Japanese counterpart Shinjiro Koizumi.**

Singh and Koizumi reaffirmed their commitment to boosting defence cooperation to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific. Singh described the meeting as "a milestone for Indo-Pacific stability".

"An important step towards stability in the Indo-Pacific region! We exchanged views centring on strengthening maritime security cooperation, promoting defence technology cooperation under the Make in India initiative, and expanding strategic trust," he wrote on X. The two leaders agreed to strengthen bilateral coordination for protecting sea lines of communication through mutual visits by warships and naval units, joint exercises, personnel exchanges and logistics support, including the use of ports, maintenance and repair facilities.

"With a view to further advancing cooperation among the services of the two countries, the two ministers concurred on promoting exchanges between their respective special operations forces and pursuing cooperation with India's integrated theatre commands following their establishment," the joint statement added.

This marks a rare, and possibly the first, reference to India's planned theatre commands in a joint statement. The mention comes at a pivotal moment as the country takes steps to advance theaterisation, a long-awaited reform designed to integrate the military's resources for future conflicts.

Koizumi later called on Modi, who posted on X: "Our Special Strategic and Global Partnership is an important anchor for peace, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. "

# India, Singapore finalise telecom, nuclear pacts

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**NEW DELHI:** India, and Singapore on Thursday concluded agreements for cooperation in telecommunications and food security, and explored ways to enhance collaboration in small modular reactors (SMRs), semiconductors, space, and cybersecurity at a meeting of a special bilateral ministerial mechanism.

The fourth meeting of the India-Singapore Ministerial Roundtable (ISMR), hosted by Singapore, focused on cooperation in areas such as advanced manufacturing, digitalisation, skill development, healthcare and medicine, connectivity and sustainability.

The ministers witnessed the exchange of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India and Singapore Food Agency for cooperation in food safety and a letter of intent between the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) and Singapore's Info-Communications Media Development Authority for cooperation in telecommunications and broadcasting.

External affairs minister S Jaishankar, part of the Indian delegation, described the meeting as "very productive" and said on social media, "Our discussions explored deeper ties in advanced manufacturing, semiconductors,

**Leaders at the 4th India-Singapore Ministerial Roundtable (ISMR).** ANI

connectivity, digital, fintech, skilling, green economy and clean energy domains."

Singapore's deputy prime minister and trade minister Gan Kim Yong told reporters that the two sides discussed cooperation in nuclear technology, including SMRs. "We also discussed how we can share our experience and knowledge about SMRs," he said.

Although Singapore has not decided whether to adopt nuclear energy, it is important to keep pace with technological developments in this area, Gan added.

In the field of semiconductors, Singaporean companies that have invested in India are looking at bringing in their suppliers to create an ecosystem in India, Gan said. "We discussed with India how we can make their (Singaporean SMEs) relocation or entry into India smoother," he said.

The two sides are exploring collaboration in cybersecurity, a very important part of the digital infrastructure, Gan said.

# 45 PROJECTS TO EXPLORE CRITICAL MINERALS IN BASTAR CLEARED

**Ritesh Mishra**
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**RAIPUR:** Chhattisgarh has cleared 45 mineral exploration projects for 2026-27, including blocks containing lithium, graphite, rare earth elements and other critical minerals, as the state looks to expand its mineral resource base and step up exploration in southern Bastar.

The projects were finalised at the 26th meeting of the State Geological Programming Board (SGPB), chaired by Mineral Resources Department Secretary P Dayanand.

Of the 45 projects, 35 are related to critical and strategic minerals, four involve deep-seated mineral deposits and six are bulk mineral exploration projects. The Geological Survey of India's (GSI) Raipur unit will undertake 25 of these projects. The Directorate of Geology and Mining has separately finalised 11 exploration proposals for the current financial year.

The development comes after the state established resources of 2,590 million tonnes of limestone and 32.26 million tonnes of iron ore through exploration during 2025-26, officials said.

"These are important achievements in the direction of mineral exploration in the state," Special Secretary and Director, Geology and Mining, Rajat Bansal said.

# Structures near visa section of Pak high commission removed

**HT Correspondent**
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**NEW DELHI:** Indian authorities removed queue management barriers and unauthorised structures outside the Pakistan high commission in a tit-for-tat action following the removal of certain structures outside the Indian mission in Islamabad, people familiar with the matter said on Thursday.

Authorities used heavy machinery on Wednesday to demolish the structures near the visa section of the Pakistan high commission, located on a small road outside the mission's compound, the people said on condition of anonymity.

The action was taken two days after authorities in Islamabad removed some barricades and parking poles on a road outside the Indian high commission within the high-security diplomatic enclave located a short distance from the foreign ministry, the people said. Pakistani authorities went ahead with the action despite a formal protest from the Indian side, contending that it was part of a project to widen the road.

On Wednesday, Indian authorities brought down a shed-like structure and queue management barriers outside the main wall of the Pakistan high commission on Shantinath in Chanakyapuri, the people said. They also removed some traffic bollards and barricades outside the mission. At the time, Pakistani officials in New Delhi and Islamabad had sought to stop the demolition by saying that no more action will be taken in the Pakistani capital, they said.

**Encroachments cleared near the building at Shantipath.** ANI

Footage showed rubble, including twisted metal frames and railings, tin sheets and chunks of concrete lying outside the visa section of the mission.

This was yet another instance of the two sides resorting to tit-for-tat actions amid a total freeze in bilateral relations. Bilateral relations, already at a low since the Indian government scrapped Jammu and Kashmir's special status in 2019, were further downgraded after the Pahalgam terror attack last year.

Both sides have reduced staff at their missions, and the Indian side suspended the Indus Waters Treaty and shut the main land border crossing.

# TEJPAL MOVES SC, CHALLENGES HIS CONVICTION, JAIL TERM IN RAPE CASE

**HT Correspondent**
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**NEW DELHI:** Two days after the Goa government moved the Supreme Court seeking enhancement of former Tehelka editor Tarun Tejpal's 10-year jail term to life imprisonment, Tejpal on Thursday approached the top court challenging his conviction and sentence in the 2013 sexual assault case involving a junior colleague.

Tejpal's petition, filed on Thursday morning, assails the August 6 judgment of the Bombay High Court at Goa which overturned his acquittal by the trial court and convicted him of two counts of aggravated rape. He is also challenging the 10-year sentence imposed by the High Court.

The plea is likely to be mentioned for urgent listing as Tejpal is required to surrender in the first week of September following the high court's direction.

Tejpal's appeal, while denying the allegations, questions the circumstances surrounding the complaint and the conduct of the complainant after the alleged incidents. It seeks to build a case that the prosecution allegations were fabricated.

The appeal also raises questions about the circumstances in which the allegations emerged and contends that the case against him was the result of political and institutional pressures.

# HC STEPS IN AFTER CRPF DEPLOYED IN TENSE SHILLONG

**David Laitphlang**
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**SHILLONG:** The Meghalaya high court took suo motu cognizance of the violence during the Khasi Students' Union (KSU) black-flag bike rally in Shillong hours after the Centre approved deployment of deployment of four companies of CRPF and one company of Rapid Action Force (RAF) in the state till August 25, officials said.

The court directed the state government to take immediate steps to restore peace and directed it to submit a detailed action-taken report by August 24, when the matter will come up for hearing.

Protesters vandalised and set ablaze vehicles, including those with Assam registration numbers, and damaged a glass panel of a statue of philosopher Swami Vivekananda, officials said. Three KSU leaders arrested on Wednesday night were remanded in 14-day judicial custody on Thursday. "31 vehicles were vandalized, people walking on the streets were beaten up without any reason, and a bus ferrying children was also affected during the protest. One vehicle was set ablaze," East Khasi Hills SP Vivek Syiem said.

East Khasi Hills deputy commissioner Abhilash Baranwal said a petrol bomb was allegedly hurled at security personnel during a raid on the KSU office in Jaiaw, following which tear gas and a stun grenade were used.

The district administration has revoked permission for the KSU's proposed agitation on Friday.

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# 3 southern states to move SC against new mines law

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### THE CONG-RULED STATES ARE OPPOSED TO THE LAW AS IT PROHIBITS THEM FROM IMPOSING LEVIES

**NEW DELHI:** Three Congress-ruled states — Karnataka, Kerala and Telangana — are set to appeal in the Supreme Court against the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment law that was cleared by both Houses of Parliament earlier this month. The President approved this on August 18. The Congress-ruled states are opposed to the legislation because it prohibits state governments from imposing levies over mineral rights or mineral bearing lands, provisions that the Congress believes are against the financial interests of the states and federalism itself.

Announcing the step, Congress general secretary for communications Jairam Ramesh said on Thursday, "The three south Indian states ruled by the Congress—Kerala, Karnataka and Telangana—have decided to challenge the law in the Supreme Court. We have prepared the petitions."

The new law said "No tax, cess or such other levy (by whatever name called) shall be imposed by the State Government on— (a) mineral rights; or (b) mineral bearing lands, either based on mineral quantity or mineral value or royalty payable or otherwise, except in accordance with such conditions or restrictions as may be prescribed by the Central Government."

It added that "Notwithstanding anything contained in any other law for the time being in force, or in any judgment, decree or order of any court, the imposition of any such tax, cess or other levy by the State Government on— (a) mineral rights; or (b) mineral bearing lands either based on mineral quantity or mineral value or royalty payable or otherwise, which is not deposited with the State Government or recovered by it before the commencement of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2026, shall be deemed to be invalid at all material times."

The law was aimed to offset a 2024 ruling by the Supreme Court that allowed states to levy tax on mineral rights.

The law said that any such tax, cess or other levy on mineral rights or on mineral bearing lands, already deposited with the State Government or recovered by it before such commencement, shall not be liable to be refunded.

The government argued in the bill that "any regional disparity in fiscal impositions on minerals impacts public interest. Unbalanced imposition of steep taxes and levies will prompt the industry to completely bypass local supply lines, leading to sub-optimal development of markets, increased transportation costs and the resultant pollution load. There is also a risk of an increase in imports of minerals despite having sufficient local mineral resources as domestic mineral supply becomes expensive."

"The uneven imposition of taxes or other levies on mineral rights and mineral bearing lands by the State Governments in the absence of reasonable limitations have resulted in various issues, such as— (i) heavy tax burden in the sector; (ii) unpredictable introduction of tax, cess and other levies, even after commencement of mining operations; (iii) multiple taxes, cess and other levies on production or dispatch of minerals; (iv) non-uniformity of rates of tax and other levies among States; (v) imposition of tax, cess or levies with retrospective effect," Union mines minister G Kishen Reddy argued in the bill.

G Parameshwara, Karnataka deputy CM, said in a Facebook post that the bill "raises a serious question about the future of India's federal structure." "Karnataka cannot be expected to bear the costs of mining...This is particularly unfair when States already shoulder enormous responsibilities..." he added.

## SC: POLICE CAN'T FILE F.I.R, PROBE CHARGES UNDER PRE-NATAL ACT

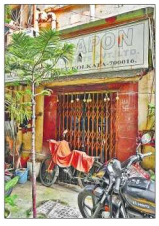
**BENGALURU:** The Supreme Court on Thursday held that police cannot independently register FIRs or investigate offences under the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act (PCPNDT Act), even though such offences are classified as cognizable and non-bailable.

A bench of justices Sanjay Karol and N Kotiswar Singh said the Appropriate Authority (AA) constituted under the Act is responsible for investigating complaints. Police can play only a supplementary role when required by the authority and under its supervision.

"The police cannot be the main investigating authority. At best, the police may play a supplemental role, as and when required by the AA under its supervision," the apex court said. The court also held that a magistrate cannot take cognizance of a PCPNDT offence based on a charge sheet filed following a police investigation.

The judgement came on a reference from the Allahabad high court, which had sought the Supreme Court's opinion on the scope of police powers under the Act. AYESHA ARVIND

# Dusty hydrants, dead detectors: Inside Kolkata's fire-trap hotels



(Clockwise) A fire exit at Hotel Gulistan; a narrow passageway inside Hotel Royal Palace; and an abandoned view outside Hotel Japon on the Mirza Ghalib Street. SAMIR JANA/HINDUSTAN TIMES

**Joydeep Thakur**
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**KOLKATA:** Siraj Us Saleekeen, 52, the manager of Hotel Royal Palace in central Kolkata's Mirza Ghalib Street, leads the way through a three-foot wide corridor with rooms on both sides. Smoke detectors were found to be fitted on the wooden false-ceiling while a fire extinguisher is kept at a corner of the corridor.

The 30-year-old hotel is located just opposite to the headquarters of the state fire and emergency services. The hotel is among around 13 guest houses and restaurants on Mirza Ghalib Street slapped with a show-cause notice by the fire department on Thursday for lacking fire safety. They have been asked to respond within 24 hours or face closure.

The manager of Hotel Royal Palace, however, denied any violations and lapses at the establishment.

"We have a fire licence. There is an emergency exit at the end of the corridor. There are smoke detectors, fire extinguishers and fire hydrants. You can check it," Saleekeen said. "But still we have been served a show cause notice by the fire department. We have been asked to produce documents failing which the hotel would be closed down."

The fire department served the notices after nine people, including a child, were killed when a fire broke out in Hotel Shikha Inn on the Mirza Ghalib Street. Police have arrested Abu Zafar, the lease holder of the hotel, while two more people have been detained for questioning. The building, where the fire broke out, is located diagonally opposite to the building housing Hotel Royal Palace.

West Bengal fire and emergency services minister Kaushik Chowdhury said more such hotels in other cities will gradually be brought under the scanner. "We have started with Mirza Ghalib Street. Gradually, we will take up the hotels in other areas of the city, including Siliguri, Asansol, Howrah and Rajarhat-New Town, and check their licences and NOCs (no objection certificates)," he said.

HT visited the hotel and found that the fire licence was last renewed in 2019; the smoke detectors were turned off; the fire extinguisher was placed on the floor in a corner on one end of the corridor; and the 4ft X 4ft emergency exit through a room, used by the hotel staff, was shut. The dust and cobweb on iron-grills of the emergency exit and the rusty lock indicated that it has not been used for several years. A layer of dust had settled on the nozzle and hose of the fire hydrant revealing that it was not operated in many years.

"We had applied for fire licence renewal but it wasn't issued. We sometimes switch off the smoke detectors as guests smoke cigarettes in the rooms. I am sorry, the emergency exit was closed. But we can always open it if there is a fire. I am not sure when was the hydrant checked but the fire extinguishers have been refilled and is valid till 2027," said Salekeen.

A visit to the other hotels that were served notices also revealed a similar picture with multiple lapses and violations.

At the Gulistan Guest House, located on the same floor in the building that housed Hotel Royal Palace, a staffer said most of the guests at the establishment are Bangladeshis.

"We have non-AC rooms starting from ₹500 a night and AC rooms from ₹900 per night. They are little cramped. But most of the people who come here are Bangladeshis and they prefer to stay in cheap hotels," said Abdul, a hotel staffer.

The cramped room measuring around 8' X 10' had two single beds. There was no ventilation visible in the room and the false ceiling, made of plywood, could almost be touched.

Hotel Japon, in the same building, wore a deserted look. The reception was abandoned and staff nowhere to be seen. Most of the rooms were empty and open. A walk through the corridors revealed the same picture — cramped rooms with a small opening or no ventilation at all, turned off smoke detectors and corridors with low false ceilings, enough to turn the premises into a deadly trap in the case of an inferno. The collapsible gate of the emergency exit was locked and a motorcycle was parked in front of it.

# HC questions Centre on delay over same-sex medical rights

**Shruti Kakkar**
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### RECOGNITION OF LIVE-IN SHOULD BE ACCOMPANIED BY CORRESPONDING RIGHTS, OBSERVED THE BENCH

**NEW DELHI:** The Delhi High Court on Thursday questioned the Centre over its delay in responding to a plea seeking recognition of same-sex partners as medical representatives who can make decisions for each other during medical emergencies.

A bench of Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma observed that recognition of live-in relationships should be accompanied by corresponding rights, including in medical situations.

"When you allow people to enter into a live-in relationship, then accordingly you have to change these things. The law recognises a live-in relationship between a man and a woman so, why will it not allow a live-in relationship between a man and a man? It will be very interesting in what they (Centre) have to say. Whenever a person chooses a path that is not a path that is taken by the majority, they will be targeted or looked down upon or not accepted," the bench said.

The court was hearing a plea filed by Arshiya Takkar, a queer individual, seeking guidelines allowing same-sex partners to give consent in medical situations and emergencies. The court had issued notice to the Centre and National Medical Commission (NMC) in July 2025.

Senior advocate Saurabh Kirpal, appearing for Takkar, said that although the SC did not recognise same-sex marriage, it had acknowledged the fundamental right of such couples to enter into and sustain relationships.

He said medical decisions were among the most important choices an individual should be able to make. As per the petition, Clause 7.16 of the Indian Medical Council (Professional Conduct, Etiquette and Ethics) Regulations, 2002 mandates consent for medical procedures or treatment from a "husband or wife, parent or guardian in the case of a minor, or the patient himself."

The court granted the Centre and NMC one week to file their response in the matter.

# MP's son booked in fatal Hyd accident

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**HYDERABAD:** Andhra Pradesh Rajya Sabha MP Lingamaneni Ramesh's son was booked over the death of a woman after a car allegedly driven by him hit her, police said on Thursday.

Bharati Mukhi (26), who worked as a saleswoman at a local mall, died after an Aston Martin car driven by Lingamaneni Sanjush (23) allegedly at high speed and in a negligent manner hit her when she was crossing the road in front of the mall on August 16, police said.

The woman, who suffered a severe injury to her head, was shifted to a hospital in the same car. However, doctors declared her dead on arrival at the hospital, police said.

Based on a complaint, a case was registered under section 106(1) (causing death by negligence) of BNS at Madhapur Police Station against Sanjush, and further investigation was underway. The section mandates imprisonment of up to five years and a fine.

The accused was not arrested as it was a bailable section and a notice was served to him, a police officer said.

Lingamaneni Ramesh belongs to Janasena Party (JSP). There was no immediate response from the MP on the matter.

According to police, the accident occurred when the woman was returning to the mall after collecting food from a nearby hotel along with her colleague.

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## SC-PROTEST PROBE

justice (retired) R Subhash Reddy, former Supreme Court judge, as chairperson; justice (retired) Ravi Shankar Jha, former chief justice of the Punjab and Haryana high court; justice (retired) Shalinder Kaur, former Delhi high court judge; Rishi Kumar Shukla, former Central Bureau of Investigation director; and L R Bishnoi, retired director general of police, Meghalaya.

Justice Reddy served in the apex court between November 2, 2018 and January 4, 2022; justice Jha served as the Punjab and Haryana HC chief justice between October 6, 2019 and October 13, 2023; justice Kaur served as a Delhi High Court judge between October 20, 2023 and September 7, 2025; Shukla served as CBI chief between February 4, 2019 and February 3, 2021, and Bishnoi served as Meghalaya DGP from May 20, 2022 to May 19, 2024.

The July 20 protest came during a movement headed by the Cockroach Janata Party (CJP) targeting inefficiencies in the conduct of the NEET exam for admission to medical colleges, and seeking the resignation of the Union education minister. The fallout of the clashes during the sprawling protests eventually pushed the education minister to quit last month.

CJP spokespersons Saurav Das and Ashutosh Ranka did not respond to HT's request for comment.

The court said the composition took into account the expertise and experience of the members as well as the need for diversity in the panel.

The committee was given a wide-ranging mandate. It will examine allegations that police and other security agencies used pellet guns, electric batons, lathi charges and tear gas without adequate warning or proportionality, causing grievous and lasting injuries to protesters.

It will also examine whether police responses during protests and public gatherings were proportionate and adequately balanced the maintenance of public order with the constitutional right to peaceful dissent.

Significantly, the committee will consider whether the use of metallic kinetic projectiles or pellets fired from pump-action or projectile-action guns should be banned, given the grave and sometimes irreversible injuries allegedly caused by their deployment against protesters. Such guns have been used for almost a decade in Jammu and Kashmir and HT reported that at least five people alleged that they were hit with pellets during the July 20 stir.

The panel will further examine whether police and security personnel should be required to wear proper uniforms and visible nameplates while making arrests or using force during crowd-control operations, to ensure that individual officers can be identified and held accountable.

The committee will also inquire into allegations concerning the monitoring and surveillance of protesters and whether such measures were consistent with their constitutional rights to privacy and peaceful assembly.

The court asked the panel to give priority to allegations of targeted violence, harassment, molestation and secondary victimisation of women protesters. It will also examine the medical and other support extended to victims of alleged police abuse and consider the question of interim compensation for injured protesters.

Another area of inquiry will be the use of blanket prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023. The committee will examine whether such orders are being used routinely or pre-emptively to foreclose peaceful assembly rather than as a proportionate response to a real and imminent threat to public order.

It will similarly examine the invocation of Section 152 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, which criminalises acts endangering the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India, and whether the provision is being used to stifle political dissent and peaceful protests. This provision mirrors the now-scrapped sedition clause in the now-retired Indian Penal Code.

At the same time, the Supreme Court made clear that the inquiry would not be one-sided.

The authorities had alleged that antisocial elements with serious criminal antecedents masqueraded as aggrieved students and indulged in violence, resulting in clashes in which police personnel suffered grievous injuries.

The committee therefore was also directed to examine the alleged use of force and violence by protesters against police and security personnel, damage caused to public property, including government installations and vehicles, and injuries suffered by police personnel as well as the mental and emotional trauma caused to their families.

The court said all these issues merited examination and permitted the HPEC to consider any other issue incidental to them. The panel can enlist forensic, technical and domain experts wherever necessary.

The court specifically directed the committee to examine the chain of command behind alleged police excesses, identify those responsible and determine whether existing laws, rules or norms were breached in the use of force. It will also examine interim compensation for injured persons on both sides.

The inquiry will not be a one-time exercise. The court directed the committee to undertake a continuous and periodic assessment and submit interim findings so that the Supreme Court can take appropriate measures and issue directions as warranted.

The first interim report -- dealing with alleged grievous injuries caused by police and security personnel and allegations of targeted violence, harassment and molestation of women protesters -- was sought at the earliest.

The court, however, cautioned that the broader constitutional questions arising from the case would be decided by the Supreme Court itself after hearing the rival contentions. The HPEC would primarily assist the court by examining factual aspects.

The order also gave protesters and other affected persons a direct avenue to approach the committee. Parties may submit documentary evidence, relevant material and suggestions to the HPEC. Complaints and representations can also be made anonymously to protect the identity of complainants and witnesses.

The police, paramilitary forces and investigating agencies were directed to preserve and hand over to the committee all CCTV footage, drone footage, body-worn camera recordings, videography, wireless communication records and PCR call logs relating to the protests.

The court also clarified that constitution of the HPEC would not prevent police or security authorities from taking administrative or disciplinary action against officers found to have violated conduct rules.

The order follows the Supreme Court's July 28 intervention, when it found a prima facie case for an independent investigation into allegations of violence during the protests and directed authorities to release detained or arrested children below 18 years, subject to an exception for those accused of grave and heinous offences or having serious criminal antecedents.

The court also directed authorities to preserve the personal information and digital data of protesters collected during the demonstrations and barred its disclosure or publication in the public domain.

The Delhi Police has claimed that more than 240 police and uniformed personnel and around 200 protesters were injured on July 20, with around 5,000 police personnel deployed to manage a gathering it estimated at over 30,000 protesters spread across nearly three kilometres.

## SOUTH CMs MEET SHAH

Shivakumar also urged the council to adopt a resolution calling upon the Union government to honour the 1971 census as the basis for delimitation, retain the Lok Sabha's existing strength of 543 seats for the next 25 years, and accommodate women's reservation within these existing seats – a view the Karnataka chief minister said was supported by Satheesan and Bhatti Vikramarka Mallu. All three states are ruled by the Congress. Vijay urged the Union government to provide a clear legislative assurance that no state will suffer a reduction in its percentage of representation in Parliament.

Shah said the foundation of India's progress was development of southern states, which rested on three pillars – high literacy rate, trained manpower and technical expertise in utilisation of the deep sea – while their progress depended on water.

"We have succeeded in making water-related issues dispute-free across entire North India; we will also have to think afresh on issues of water sharing in South India...If great rivers of India, from Brahmaputra to Cauvery and Godavari, are interconnected, India may not face any water shortage for the next 100 years," Shah said.

"There is nothing wrong with protecting one's own state's interests, but if protecting those interests means that states do not get water for years, then no one's interests are truly being protected," he added.

The meeting was attended by Vijay, Naidu, Shivakumar, Satheesan, Puducherry lieutenant governor K Kailashnathan, Andaman and Nicobar Islands lieutenant governor Admiral (retired.) D.K Joshi, Lakshadweep administrator Praful Patel, and Bhatti Vikramarka Mallu. Chief secretaries, advisers and other senior officers of the state governments, as well as senior officers of the central government, also attended the meeting.

"That (delimitation) is the main agenda. I think Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Telangana and myself we all have come to the same agreement, the majority of the southern states," Shivakumar said.

His comments came against the backdrop of a push by the Union government to pass constitution amendment bills that implement the 33% women's reservation in state assemblies and the Lok Sabha through delimitation. In April this year, the constitution amendment bill to increase the maximum number of Lok Sabha seats from 550 to 850 and link the women's quota with the last published census failed to garner the required two-thirds majority.

Vijay took a relatively softer stance, only asking for the proportion of representation of the southern provinces not to be shrunk – unlike the Congress-ruled states that asked for a freeze.

"Such an approach would uphold the principles of equity, preserve the federal balance envisioned by our Constitution and reinforce the confidence of all states in our democratic institutions," Vijay said.

Shah said that five out of the eight issues related to river water-sharing in north India were persisting since the pre-British era. "A final agreement was reached five months ago, and by resolving 100% of the issues, spanning from Kashmir to Uttar Pradesh, a dispute-free north India has been achieved," he said.

He emphasised the need for the early resolution of pending water-related issues concerning southern states, through joint meetings involving the ministry of jal shakti, the ministry of home affairs, the inter-state council, and the respective states.

The southern states agreed with the Home Minister's suggestion to resolve these pending water disputes expeditiously through mutual dialogue and constructive solutions, the Press Information Bureau said in a statement. "Regarding issues concerning the division of assets and liabilities between Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, both states agreed to resolve these matters in consultation with the ministry of home affairs," the statement added.

Shivakumar spoke about benefits of the Mekedatu dam – on the Cauvery – for farmers in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, adding that water sharing should be based on "equity, transparency and cooperation" while protecting Karnataka's lawful share and the rights of lower riparian states on the Cauvery, Krishna, Tungabhadra, Pennar and Palar rivers.

He also requested the home minister to call a separate meeting to resolve water sharing issues "amicably" and added that he had assured the home minister that except 5 TMC (thousand million cubic feet), all water from Mekedatu will flow into Tamil Nadu. "So, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry will be rest assured and a dam will be built for you and not for us," he said.

Vijay said that the legitimate rights of lower-riparian states and the livelihoods that depend on assured river flows must be fully protected. "On the Cauvery issue, the timely implementation of the Supreme Court's judgement and the decisions of the Cauvery Water Management Authority remains essential. On the Mullaiperiyar, the safety must continue to be guided by judicial decisions for increasing the water level to 152 feet. Any upstream intervention with the potential to affect the rightful share of another State must proceed only within this legal and institutional framework," Vijay said.

Satheesan said Mullaiperiyar dam – opposed by Tamil Nadu – would ease water problems in the neighbouring state. "Keralam is willing to provide Tamil Nadu with its full share of water from a new Mullaperiyar dam...Tamil Nadu will manage the design, location and construction of the new dam, while Keralam will bear the entire cost," he said.

Bhatti Vikramarka Mallu, who attended the meeting as CM Revanth Reddy is in the US, called for resolving Krishna river water dispute with Andhra Pradesh, terming it as its "legitimate entitlements" and the protection of downstream rights through established legal frameworks.

Naidu called for coordinated effort by all southern states to resolve water sharing disputes. He also proposed diversion of over 500 TMC of water through the Godavari-Cauvery river-linking project to Tamil Nadu. He also called for coordinated efforts by Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu on the river water issues.

The home minister also also spoke about the early disposal of rape and POCSO cases through fast track special courts, adding that after the introduction of the new criminal laws, many tools became available for accelerating the process.

Shah informed the CMs that the home ministry prepared a three-year road map for the Drug Free India campaign, in which the roles of several departments of the states and the Centre were defined.

Vijay asked the Centre to strengthen the regulatory framework governing the online sale of medicines to effectively address emerging substance abuse among the youth. Satheesan sought more intelligence sharing to crack down on drug syndicates and spoke about the joint efforts of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka against drug trafficking.

The CMs also raised the issue of southern states' significant contribution to India's growth. Shivakumar said Karnataka was a key driver of India's growth, contributing 9% of the country's GDP, with 5.5% of its population, 42% of its software exports and hosting 1,100 Global Capability Centres (GCC). He demanded immediate release of ₹5,495 crore special grant and ₹6,000 crore state-specific grants recommended by the 15th Finance Commission, along with additional central support for projects such as the Bengaluru-Mumbai high speed rail, Satellite Town Ring Road Project, AIIMS at Raichur, among others.

Underlining that the southern states contribute over 30% of India's GDP, Vijay said, "We are at the forefront of the country's manufacturing, exports, service and innovation. By addressing our shared challenges and leveraging our collective strengths, we can unlock even greater opportunities."

Vijay stressed greater flexibility for states in GST-rate determination.

"Such an approach would uphold the principles of equity, preserve the federal balance envisioned by our Constitution, and reinforce the confidence of all states in our democratic institutions," he said.

Vijay requested the Centre to allow Tamil Nadu to fill all state-quota medical and dental seats based on marks obtained in the class 12 examinations.

Naidu called for a bullet train corridor connecting Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu through Kuppam, and suggested a transport network connecting Amaravati, Bengaluru and Chennai.

Satheesan said the financial architecture of central schemes was increasingly "inequitable" to states.

## SAJJAN KUMAR DEAD

uled to hear a plea for parole by his lawyers on Thursday.

He was sentenced to life imprisonment by the Delhi High Court in 2018 for leading a mob that killed five Sikhs and the burning of a gurdwara in Raj Nagar near Palam Colony, though he was initially acquitted in the case in 2013. Later in 2025, he was convicted again in another murder case related to the riots and was sentenced for life. He was acquitted in another riots case earlier this year, but continued to serve his sentence in the other cases.

The riots broke out following the assassination of Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, on the morning of October 31, 1984, by two of her Sikh bodyguards.

For four days between November 1 and 4, the carnage claimed the lives of thousands of Sikhs across Delhi. Thousands more died across the country.

Kumar started his legislative journey as a municipal councillor from Nangloi in Delhi in 1977 and later rose to become the general secretary of Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee. The prominent Jat leader represented the erstwhile Outer Delhi constituency in the Lok Sabha in three separate terms spread across three decades. He was elected to Lok Sabha in 1980, 1991 and 2004.

But the continuing controversy over his role in the riots cost him his seat — the Congress fielded his brother from the South Delhi Lok Sabha constituency for the 2009 elections.

A year later, he was named in charge sheets filed by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), which had been probing his role since 2005, in two cases related to the riots.

After his conviction in 2018, Kumar resigned from the primary membership of the Congress.

The party had long distanced itself from him. In 2005, Manmohan Singh, the first Sikh Prime Minister of India, apologised in Parliament for the riots. "What took place in 1984 is a negation of what is enshrined in our constitution and on behalf of my country I bow my head in shame for what has happened," Singh said.

Few from the party reacted to the news of his death. Congress's media department head Pawan Khera offered his "deepest condolences to his family" while general secretary for Karnataka Randeep Singh Surjewala tweeted, "The news of Chaudhary Sajjan Kumar's passing has left me deeply saddened. His grassroots connection, recognition of workers, and simple nature will continue to evoke the fragrance of the soil associated with him. My heartfelt condolences to the family members, all colleagues, and well-wishers."

Shiromani Akali Dal MP Harsimrat Kaur Badal said, "Sajjan Kumar's name has been written in Sikh history in black ink. His death should have come through a hanging sentence."

*(With inputs from PTI and Neeraj Chauhan)*

## DELHI MASTER PLAN '47

and in major commercial and mixed-use centres.

"Tall buildings, i.e. structures having more than 100 floors, shall be designed as landmark developments that strengthen the imageability and identity of Delhi's skyline. Their design shall respond to the surrounding urban context, improve the quality of public spaces and contribute to a distinctive skyline," the plan said.

"Their development shall support compact urban growth, reduce urban sprawl, and promote efficient use of land," it added.

According to the plan, tall buildings must maximise open space at the ground level to create public plazas, landscaped areas, pedestrian streets, community facilities, and green infrastructure for walkability.

"Delhi's skyline shall develop in a planned manner while respecting the city's historic landmarks, ceremonial avenues, heritage areas, and important view corridors," it said.

Their design, the plan recommended, will have to account for the Capital's heritage — its historic landmarks, ceremonial avenues, heritage areas and important view corridors. The plan also specified that tall buildings should use compact footprints to maximise open space at ground level, including public plazas, landscaped areas, pedestrian streets, and green infrastructure.

Delhi currently has no building with 100 floors. Its tallest building is residential complex called Amaryllis Iconic tower in Karol Bagh which has around 50 floors.

The plan permitted an FAR of 200 for group housing, 300 for affordable rental housing complexes, 375 for hotels on roads of 30 metres width or more, 300 for government offices, and 500 for in-situ rehabilitation of slum clusters. Earlier, the FAR for group housing was around 150-200 (with 30% ground coverage which has now been increased to 40%). The FAR for hotels and government offices was 150, and 400 for in-situ rehabilitation.

FAR is the ratio of a building's total combined floor area across all floors to the total area of the plot it sits on. It effectively caps the height of a building based on the plot size.

The plan's development-control norms removed height restrictions on many categories – subject to statutory clearances.

This included areas with in-situ rehabilitation, godown plots, group housing, affordable rental housing complex, studio apartment, state bhawan/state guest house, hostel, shopping centres, informal bazaars, wholesale markets, hotels, service apartment, industrial plots, townships, amusement park, sports centres, golf courses, government offices, healthcare facilities, educational institutions, police and fire offices and socio-cultural facilities, among others.

Limits remained for areas with environmental, heritage, security and other statutory considerations. Lutyens' Bungalow Zone and Civil Lines bungalow areas, for instance, will continue to follow approved plans and central government guidelines.

Around 150 sq km along the border of the National Capital Territory will be exempt from this policy of densification and vertical growth, and here at least 50% green cover will be maintained.

Gupta said that the plan reduced complexities, and trimmed 133 categories of different uses and premises to 45.

"The Master Plan looks at simplifying processes and has made space for new economic activities such as data centres, integrated industrial parks, co-working spaces, startup hubs and cloud kitchens to prepare Delhi's economy for future needs. It is essential to create new opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship in a changing economy. Master Plan-2047 will provide an important foundation for positioning Delhi as a major centre for new technology, innovation and modern industries," the CM said.

The flexible FAR and height norms are expected to facilitate vertical redevelopment in areas where infrastructure can support greater intensity of development, instead of relying predominantly on horizontal expansion.

The plan also allowed commercial activities in residential areas on ground floor of roads having a width of 30 metre or more.

The existing norms allow commercial activities only on mixed use streets and commercial streets already notified by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD).

"Commercial activities in residential plots abutting streets and roads having width 30 metre right of way (ROW) and more, in all categories of colonies, which are neither notified as mixed use nor as commercial streets, shall be permitted on ground floor or first lower floor, in case of stilt (parking), subject to payment of charges," the MPD said.

All types of commercial activities are permitted on such residential plots except activities involving any kind of obnoxious, hazardous, inflammable, non-compatible and polluting substances or process, only on the ground floor or first lower floor (in case of stilt), it said.

"This is the highest FAR being provided in the city along with various other incentives. We have already received much interest in TOD projects since we revised the norms in April," said Delhi Development Authority vice-chairman, N Sarvana Kumar.

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## HOOCH TRAGEDY TOLL RISES TO 7 IN GUJ, 13 ARRESTED

**AHMEDABAD:** The death toll in the Bhavnagar methanol-laced liquor case rose to seven on Thursday, as State Monitoring Cell arrested 13 of the 21 accused named in the FIR and detained one Raees from Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh, who has been listed as accused number one in the FIR.

Bhavnagar collector Manish Bansal said 32 people were undergoing treatment and nine had been discharged. State Monitoring Cell SP Mayur Chavda said Raees was detained in MP and brought to Gujarat. **HTC**

# 4 killed as two trucks collide in HP's Mandi

**Press Trust of India**
letters@hindustantimes.com

**SHIMLA:** Four people were killed and six others injured after two trucks collided head-on inside the Hanogi Tunnel in Himachal Pradesh's Mandi district on Thursday, police said.

Mandi superintendent of police (SP) Vinod Kumar said police have launched an investigation to ascertain the cause of the accident.

The deceased were identified as Shakeel (20), Vishal (21) and Ravi Kumar (22), all residents of Uttar Pradesh, while the fourth victim, Meghnath Sharma (39), was from Bihar.

The injured were identified as Deepak, Aijat, Deepak, Sahzad, Bhagirath and Mukesh Kumar, police said.

A case has been registered under Sections 281 (rash driving), 126(a)(wrongful restraint) and 106(1)(causing death by negligence) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, they said.

## DISABLED MAN PUSHED TO DEATH FROM MUM LOCAL

**MUMBAI:** A 62-year-old physically challenged man died on Thursday after allegedly being pushed out of a moving local train in Mumbai by a fellow passenger following an argument, police said, adding that the accused has been arrested.

The victim, identified as Kejitan Pal Denis Piris, was allegedly pushed off the train by 48-year-old Amjad Safriddin Shaikh following an argument over sitting in the coach dedicated for physically-challenged passengers, the police said. **PTI**

The Hindustan Times
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{ OUR TAKE }

# A bolder India on China border

Tranquillity on the LAC alone will ensure the full normalisation of the bilateral relationship

Days after the external affairs ministry tacitly acknowledged a face-off between Indian and Chinese forces in the Arunachal Pradesh sector this month, Union minister Kiren Rijiju has spoken about confusion arising from differing perceptions of the boundary and increased Chinese military activity on high ridges along the frontier. Rijiju also dismissed reports that Chinese troops had intruded into Indian territory. An opposition party and a civil society group in Arunachal Pradesh had claimed that Chinese troops were expanding their presence in the area and denying Indian troops access to the Shera 5 patrolling point. China and India continue to disagree on the next steps to normalise the situation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). Withdrawal of troops to peace-time positions is yet to happen despite the two countries reaching an understanding on disengagement in October 2024. Even an agreement between the Special Representatives on the border issue in August 2025 on creating an expert group under the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC) has been unsuccessful in exploring an "early harvest in boundary delimitation". New Delhi has unequivocally asserted that the state of border affairs has ramifications for the overall India-China relationship, and the two sides should avoid misunderstanding and miscalculation.

Rijiju mentioned that China has "cast an eye" on certain areas because of the lack of border demarcation, and that locals are concerned due to increased Chinese military activity on the high ridges. This specifically challenges China's repeated assertions of desiring better relations with India that lead to a win-win situation for both countries. India is correct in maintaining that peace and tranquillity on the LAC alone will ensure the full normalisation of the bilateral relationship, despite Beijing's calls to put the border issue in its "appropriate place". China's use of gray zone and salami slicing tactics in other territorial disputes is well documented. The focus in ongoing efforts to normalise bilateral relations must now turn to the border issue so that both sides can advance the demarcation exercise in good faith wherever feasible. An unsettled boundary will always leave India at a disadvantage, widen the trust deficit between the two countries, and allow China an edge in setting the terms for engagement.

# What Gor did not say in Kashmir

India and Pakistan are at it again — and the immediate cause remains a country in the West. Coinciding with US Ambassador Sergio Gor's visit to Jammu and Kashmir where he made a statement that many see as affirming India's territorial integrity, a separate spate of tit-for-tat diplomacy has been playing out between the neighbours. In Islamabad's removal of parking poles from the Indian High Commission and New Delhi's reciprocal act of removing the queueing lines outside the Pakistani High Commission, what is being ignored is the import of Gor's statement *per se*.

To begin with, rather than calling J&K an integral part of India, the US ambassador chose to designate the region as "an important part". This taxonomical distinction ought to be sobering for both sides. Gor has merely continued the US habit of keeping the neighbours vying for the White House's unambiguous support on their respective positions on the Kashmir issue. In choosing to visit the Union Territory and making encouraging statements about tourism at a time when New Delhi is less than pleased about Islamabad's strengthening rapport in Washington DC, Gor may be making an attempt to assuage India's concerns. Additionally, an obfuscation of tensions surrounding the ongoing trade issues and sanctions between India and the US may also be on the agenda. Predictably, Pakistan lodged a "strong demarche" over what it calls the "factually incorrect" statement of Gor. While Pakistan's reaction may bolster the weight of Gor's words, it's important to see them for what they actually achieve. In policy terms, almost nothing changes. Even the faith in the signalled India-US bonhomie may turn out to be short-lived, given the unpredictability of US foreign policy in general and Donald Trump in particular.

# Trump may escape the consequences of his mess

The US president's obsessions may have exacted serious costs and turned off sections of the electorate, but two factors may shield his party in the mid-term elections

**In the past, a president who showed so little concern for the welfare of the American people would pay a price in the mid-term elections.** SHUTTERSTOCK

From multiple mainstream news sources, a disturbing picture has emerged of how President Donald Trump spends his time. He remains fixated on a narrow set of concerns: quickly building monuments to his own "greatness", such as a giant arch to remake the skyline of Washington, DC; clamping down on immigration and pursuing his vain quest to end birthright citizenship; pressuring congressional Republicans to pass his SAVE act designed to make it harder for American citizens to vote; securing a more restrictive nuclear deal with Iran than the one achieved by Barack Obama; and his own sagging popularity, which he insists is vastly understated by public opinion polls.

In the past, a president who showed so little concern for the welfare of the American people would pay a steep price in the mid-term elections. But Trump may escape this reckoning because of the political conditions that now define the electoral landscape.

Let's start with his obsessions. One striking fact is that most have nothing to do with the issues that concern the broad public. High prices remain a worry for most Americans, even though the rate of inflation has slowed in the years since the Covid pandemic. Trump has made things worse with his war on Iran. Gas prices have surged, but he has dismissed popular complaints and shows little empathy for those struggling to manage. For years, polls have shown that Americans trust Republicans to better manage the economy (an oddity in itself, because the data show generally better economic performance under the Democrats), but Trump has dissipated this partisan advantage.

Tariffs were intended to be the cornerstone of his second-term economic project. They were to accomplish multiple goals — revive American industry by increasing the cost of imports, especially from China and low-wage countries; yield a surge in federal revenues that would allow tax cuts without increasing the federal deficit; and hold down prices because the cost would be paid by foreign manufacturers without being passed along to American consumers. Most economists scoffed at this agenda, questioning how its various goals could be reconciled in practice. Then, Trump decided to use tariffs as a foreign policy tool, raising and lowering rates according to his whims to compel other nations to accede to American demands.

As a result of the inconsistent application of tariffs, it is difficult to say whether they might have achieved any of his economic goals. Certainly there has been no significant industrial resurgence during his second term. Manufacturing jobs have barely increased. Despite pleas from fellow Republicans to focus on the economy, Trump shows little interest.

At the outset of Trump's second term, he enjoyed widespread public support for an immigration crackdown. His predecessor, Joe Biden, had been slow to recognise that lax border controls troubled a majority of Americans, even if they were sympathetic to the plight of immigrants who had entered the country and lived here as law-abiding, taxpaying residents for years.

The second term crackdown, directed by Trump's trusted aide Stephen Miller, soon became a political liability, however. Excessive force and violence by federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents turned opinion against the administration's heavy-handed methods, much as they did in Trump's first term.

Andrew J Polsky

Although the president's loyal supporters in the Make America Great Again (MAGA) ranks continue to stand by his restrictive immigration policy, those who gave it their conditional blessing have been alienated by its implementation.

Trump also took aim at the longstanding legal status of birthright citizenship. He hoped that a conservative US Supreme Court would adopt the administration's assertion that the Fourteenth Amendment did not extend to those who had entered the country illegally. The Court ruled against him. But even that outcome has not put an end to his obsession as he continues to seek to curb birthright citizenship through executive orders.

Ever since he lost the 2020 presidential election, Donald Trump has insisted he was cheated out of victory by fraud, with many ballots cast by ineligible voters. Election denialism has become a central MAGA tenet. The president has thrown his support behind the SAVE legislation, which would require prospective voters to provide official documentation of their citizenship status. In fact, numerous studies have demonstrated that voter fraud is exceedingly rare in the US. The measure would disenfranchise millions of voters who lack the required documentation.

Republicans in the US Senate have refused to put the bill up for a vote, knowing it cannot meet the 60-vote threshold needed to overcome a filibuster. None of this has deterred Trump, however, as he has urged them to end the filibuster and vetoed or threatened to veto other legislation until the Senate approves the SAVE Act.

Finally, he has ensnared himself in a conflict with Iran from which he has no clear exit. In February 2026, he joined Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in a reckless attempt to overthrow the entrenched Iranian revolutionary regime by attacking its leadership, while also again targeting the Iranian nuclear programme that the US and Israel had claimed to eliminate the previous year. Trump's war goals have shifted over the course of the conflict (regime change has disappeared from the list, while he now has to resolve access to the Strait of Hormuz since the Iranians have effectively gained control). But the president is most insistent that the US achieve tighter restrictions on the Iranian nuclear programme than the deal Obama negotiated in 2015, from which Trump withdrew during his first term.

The picture for Donald Trump and the Republicans appears bleak. Why, then, might they escape a political backlash in the upcoming midterm elections? Two factors stand out.

First, Republicans have shielded themselves from electoral repercussions by redrawing congressional districts in states they control. Today, there are many fewer competitive seats in the House of Representatives than two decades ago. While it remains likely that the Democrats will reclaim the House, Republican losses will be limited and thus leave Democrats with a slim majority. Add to this the difficulty that Democrats face as they seek control of the Senate, where the bulk of seats contested this fall are in reliably Republican states.

Second, the Democrats have not agreed on a programme or message to take advantage of Trump's weaknesses. Unhappy though voters are with the Republican brand, they continue to express low approval of the Democratic Party, too. Most of the energy in its ranks is in its progressive wing.

But whether the party's leftist candidates can win in key battleground states and House districts remains very much in question. If they cannot prevail, President Trump will escape the consequences of his peculiar obsessions.

*Andrew J Polsky is professor emeritus, department of political science, Hunter College, CUNY. The views expressed are personal*

# All of us should have the right to age with dignity

This August, the first children of free India turn 79; lakhs more are older than India's independence itself. Lakshmi, born in the monsoon of 1947, has lived the entire arc of independent India, from ration cards to UPI. She now inhabits a country transformed in every respect but one: Its laws still assume that a joint family will catch her when she falls. That household, in much of India, no longer exists in the form the law imagines.

The Sample Registration System's latest report puts India's total fertility rate at 1.9, i.e., below replacement levels. India has roughly 150 million people over 60 years of age; by 2050, that number will touch 347 million. And the transition is geographically uneven. The states that led India's fertility decline are ageing first: in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, the 18-29 cohort is barely 17% of the population; in Karnataka, just over 19%. The question is who now stands in the middle.

As economist Amarendu Nandy recently wrote, India's welfare State has long been hidden inside the household — the joint family, co-resident children, and unpaid female care quietly caring for the elderly. That arrangement is dissolving under urbanisation, migration, and women's rightful entry into paid work. Its costs have not disappeared; they are just being borne by the next generation. Lakshmi's daughter, at 48, manages a career, a teenager's board examinations, and her mother's medication chart. The "sandwich generation" is trying to balance it all — and within it, long-term care falls disproportionately on "her". Every gap in the eldercare ecosystem that the State fails to close, is plugged — mostly unacknowledged — by the time and earnings of India's working-age women.

What does the State provide? More than we realise, and much less than what is needed. There is now health insurance for every citizen over 70, a national helpline, tax concessions, and an old-age pension whose central contribution — ₹200 a month, for the poorest elderly between 60 and 79 — has not been revised since 2007. States top it up, unevenly, which means an elderly widow's monthly income depends on her PIN code.

The problem is not that schemes do not exist. It is that they are schemes: fixed at discretion, revised at will, fragmented across ministries, received as benevolence, and enforceable by no one.

And money is the narrowest of the gaps. There is no regulated caregiving profession: Anyone may call themselves a caregiver, with no qualification, standard, or register to answer to, and no binding quality framework governs the care homes or agencies to which more families must now turn. India has fewer than 500 practising geriatricians for its 150 million elders. The Indian Academy of Geriatrics' own benchmark of one specialist per 6,000 older adults implies a need of over 27,000. Our public spaces are built for the young. And the newest predator is digital, with the elderly being the primary targets for fraudsters. Each of these gaps is absorbed, privately and invisibly, by families.

THE SUPREME COURT HAS READ DIGNITY INTO THE HEART OF ARTICLE 21 — AND DIGNITY DOES NOT EXPIRE AT 60. ARTICLE 41 OF THE CONSTITUTION DIRECTS THE STATE TO MAKE EFFECTIVE PROVISION FOR PUBLIC ASSISTANCE IN OLD AGE

Barkha Deva

The courts have begun to say what the legislature has not. In July, the High Court of Karnataka, hearing the case of a 74-year-old woman suffering from gangrene and abandoned by her family, observed that the State should examine a comprehensive legislative framework for "senior citizens in need of care and protection", modelled on the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015. The court is saying the elderly need an Act that addresses the need for rescue, shelter, health care and protection — and that the only existing law for the elderly does not provide it. The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, is a maintenance-enforcement statute: It treats old age as a family dispute to be adjudicated, not as a stage of life to be lived with dignity. The Madhya Pradesh High Court recently took *suo motu* notice of a video showing elderly women assaulted at an unregistered Indore shelter home. No central law mandates the registration of such homes, and none recognises institutional elder abuse as a distinct offence.

The Supreme Court has read dignity into the heart of Article 21 — and dignity does not expire at 60. Article 41 of the Constitution directs the State to make effective provision for public assistance in old age. Parliament knows how to honour such a directive: it made a child's education an enforceable right in 2009, and food a legal entitlement in 2013. Ageing with dignity is the promise that is still waiting its turn. The scaffolding exists. What is missing is the political and legislative will to say that dignity in old age cannot be a favour the State extends, or a scheme it announces, but a right that the citizen holds.

What would such a right contain? The Karnataka court's order outlines the floor: rescue, protection, shelter, health care and community-based care — owed as entitlements, not extended as schemes — and a forum where an older citizen can claim it. A right for the mother is time returned to the daughter.

The generation that built the institutions the rest of us inherited is ageing differently from every generation before it — living longer, more urban, more alone. It has asked for little, and its silence has been mistaken for an absence of need. What it needs now is a framework that secures agency and independence, not one that adjudicates dependence. A scheme can be withdrawn; a right must be enforced.

It is often said that India will grow old before it grows rich. The real question is whether it can afford to grow old before it builds the guardrails for dignified ageing.

*Barkha Deva works on policy on ageing and social legislation. The views expressed are personal*

{ ABHIJEET DIPKE } CONVENOR, COCKROACH JANATA PARTY

**When political leaders are not doing anything for students, why should people vote for them?... People should see in what conditions their children are studying. The dogs of these ministers get better facilities than this**

# IndiGo's transition plan has one risk too many

In April 2024, IndiGo generated a lot of buzz when it placed an order for 30 A350-900 — a twin-engine, long-range aircraft — to begin transitioning from a no-frills carrier to a network carrier. In October 2025, the airline added another 30 aircraft to its order. Deliveries, as per the latest update, are likely to begin in mid-2028.

When the airline first announced plans to become a network carrier, the market reacted with caution. As the deadline for the induction of the long range aircraft draws nearer, experts and industry insiders remain sceptical about the plan. This piece will elaborate a few reasons behind the scepticism, some internal to IndiGo and some external and/or structural factors.

Anjuli Bhargava

Let's start with the internal constraints. First, IndiGo, with its 430 aircraft in operation, over 500 ordered, and 68,000 employees, is already a large operation that is required to deliver consistently, every day of the year. Airline experts believe keeping it going in present form is challenging enough, without adding new verticals — IndiGo still has plenty of opportunity in its present niche and should not give in to "unrealistic ambitions", they maintain.

Second, the airline faced a crisis of delays and cancellations in December 2025 — that became a national embarrassment — due to personnel management issues; as a result, the airline had to rebuild its core team. CEO Willie Walsh has only recently assumed charge, as have a new HR chief, chief financial officer, and chief of strategy, among others. A big new challenge at this stage might be biting off more than it can chew.

Moreover, airlines get built with a certain DNA and changing that mid-course doesn't always work out. Jet Airways was structured and operated as a full-service airline from its inception in 1993. As the environment around it changed, Jet tried to adapt, reinvent, and reboot in every manner possible, but to no avail. In the end, it had to shut shop. As one observer said at the time, selling Oberoi rooms at OYO rates simply wasn't viable in the long run.

But the bigger hurdles for Indigo's plans are likely structural or external. Even if it were to surmount internal challenges and smoothly transition from a no-frills airline to a full-service one, there are at least three or four factors outside its control.

One is the existing competition. In one direction, there's Lufthansa, British Airways, Air France, Emirates, Etihad and Qatar Airways to joust with and, in the other, there's Singapore Airlines, JAL, Korean Air and a clutch of other Thai and Malaysian carriers. Several have been in the business for the last 50-70 years. None of them are going to concede any traffic. If the competition can make life difficult, it will.

Even if fear of competition will not deter a resolute new entrant, experts point out that Indian airports are not geared to facilitate the kind of hub-and-spoke operations that network carriers are structured around. Many of the metro airports, for instance, require fliers to arrive at one terminal and then make their way — often by road, via connections outside the airport premises — to another terminal to board an international flight, which in all likelihood will not take you to your final destination if it is Buenos Aires or Botswana, for instance.

Compare this with what Emirates — which picks up fliers from nine different Indian cities headed to diverse destinations — offers. Pick-up from the nine cities, arrival at Dubai and, within a 1.5-2 hour window that one can spend shopping and eating in the transit zones, boarding for one's end-destination.

Moving into long haul also makes the airline lose some of its current cost advantage since the costs of operating an A350 doesn't vary dramatically between operators — while the unique geography and spread of metropolises and Tier 2 and 3 cities in India allows IndiGo to use its A320s aggressively through the day. This lets it beat the competition by better utilising an expensive asset while reducing ground handling and others costs since the same staff handle multiple flights in a day.

While the industry gives the planned foray the benefit of doubt — well earned, with admiration for its current operations (glitches notwithstanding) — wishes IndiGo luck, the risks continue to weigh on the minds of the aviation-sector watchers.

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A Russian missile strike in Kyiv on Thursday.

### Russian strikes kill at least 16 in Kyiv region

**KYIV:** Russia pounded the Ukrainian capital Kyiv and the surrounding region with scores of missiles and drones in a nighttime aerial attack that lasted for hours and killed at least 16 people, officials said on Thursday. Russia's overnight barrage also included cruise missiles and fast-flying jet-powered drones that put further strain on air defences, the Ukrainian air force said. **AP**

### 'North Korea may have up to 120 nuclear weapons'

**SEOUL:** North Korea may possess as many as 120 nuclear weapons, South Korea's defence minister Ahn Gyu-back said, more than twice the 57 warheads cited by US President Donald Trump, who is seeking to revive diplomacy with its leader Kim Jong-un. **BLOOMBERG**

### Germany: 14,000 heat-related deaths in summer

**FRANKFURT:** Germany registered a record of around 14,000 heat-related deaths this summer as Europe struggled through a series of punishing heatwaves, official data showed on Thursday. **AFP**

# Trump: US waging economic warfare against Iran, its allies

**Bloomberg**
letters@hindustantimes.com

**WASHINGTON/TEHRAN:** US President Donald Trump threatened Iran and its trading partners with economic isolation after months of military strikes and a maritime blockade failed to force Tehran to capitulate.

Trump didn't specify what measures he would take or which countries would be targeted, but his threat put an immediate focus on China, which buys the bulk of Iran's oil. Brent crude prices advanced for a fifth day to about $94 a barrel, reaching the highest this month.

US sailors work on the flight deck of USS George Washington as the aircraft carrier transits the Arabian Sea on Thursday. The George Washington Carrier Strike Group is operating in West Asia during a scheduled deployment after arriving in the CENTCOM theatre. U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND-X

### China, Iran react

In its first reaction to Trump's comments, Beijing said sanctions and pressure wouldn't work and called for a diplomatic resolution. Iran, meanwhile, said Trump's threats were a "diversion" from America's own crises of unprecedented debt and surging interest costs.

"Doubling down on failed policies will only bring further defeat — and enmity of Iranians," Iranian foreign minister Abbas Araghchi said on X. "US economic terrorism threatens global economy and sovereignty worldwide."

It's unclear what new economic punishment the US could impose, if any, that Tehran hasn't already endured. Targeting Iranian oil sales would also risk fresh confrontation with China, the buyer of almost all Iranian crude exports.

That would complicate Trump's bid to extend a tariff truce with President Xi Jinping, who is set to visit the US next month.

"I don't think there's a magic bullet," said Daniel Fried, a former US ambassador to Poland, told Bloomberg TV. "Is there more leverage we could apply against the Iranian economy? Probably. But I think they've got the workarounds pretty much in place right now. Our leverage is not great in the short run."

### Munitions shortages

Trump's comments signal how the US, beset by munitions shortages and rising costs, wants to pivot from a military campaign that's eliminated most of Iran's top leaders and battered its economy, but has so far failed to bring about its surrender.

China doesn't recognise unilateral sanctions, but its state entities generally stay away from blacklisted oil. Its biggest state banks also have a history of complying with US sanctions against Iran, North Korea and even top officials in Hong Kong, in order to avoid losing access to the US dollar-clearing system.

Washington has already sanctioned some independent Chinese teapot refineries and firms since the US launched the war against Iran in late February. But so far, the US has stopped short of targeting the major Chinese banks that finance the trade.

In May, China ordered domestic companies not to comply with US sanctions on five refiners, while its biggest banks were caught between Beijing's directive and the risk of losing access to the US financial system.

"Sanctions and pressure will not help resolve the issue," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian told reporters at in Beijing on Thursday. "China calls on relevant parties to take responsible measures and sought to solve the issue through diplomatic and political means."

Trump demanded that all countries stop giving Iran access to exchange houses, cash transfers, swap lines, ship registries, front companies and avenues to smuggle out its oil.

He also sought to rally other nations that have so far declined to support his war on the Islamic Republic, saying the US needs all its allies to help "isolate, and defeat, the Iran threat".

### UAE boost

The US got a boost on Tuesday, when the United Arab Emirates severed economic ties with Iran after accusing it of firing two ballistic missiles at its territorial waters. Iran denied responsibility for the attack.

The UAE ranked as Iran's top trade partner last year, with Tehran relying on the relationship for access to foreign goods and hard currency, followed by China, Turkey and India.

Trump's aim is to force Iran into fresh negotiations meant to end the war for good, force Tehran to abandon its nuclear program and release its chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz.

Those goals were spelled out in a memorandum of understanding the two sides signed in June, but later collapsed amid a flurry of tit-for-tat strikes.

# Ruling party veteran elected as Bangladesh's new president

**Reuters**
letters@hindustantimes.com

**DHAKA:** Bangladeshi lawmakers elected veteran Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leader Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir as the country's new president on Thursday, making the long-time opposition figure the head of state after his party came to power in a major political transition.

The BNP returned to power in February in the long wake of the fall of Sheikh Hasina's Awami League government in 2024. While the presidency is largely ceremonial, Alamgir will serve as head of state and commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Executive authority remains with the prime minister and cabinet in the South Asian nation of about 173 million people.

Alamgir, 78, defeated Oli Ahmed, a retired army colonel and chairman of the Liberal Democratic Party and candidate of the Jamaat-e-Islami-led 11-party opposition alliance, in a parliamentary vote.

Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir

Chief Election Commissioner A.M.M. Nasir Uddin declared Alamgir the winner after the 255-to-88 vote.

The BNP and its allies hold a two-thirds majority in parliament after winning the February 12 general election, which returned the party to power after years in opposition and brought Tarique Rahman to the office of prime minister.

The resignation last month of Mohammed Shahabuddin on health grounds before the end of his five-year term triggered the presidential election. A former Awami League politician and close confidant of Hasina, Shahabuddin was elected president in 2023 when her party was at the height of its power.

Hasina has been living in India since fleeing Bangladesh after a mass uprising ousted her government in August 2024 and has said that she intends to return in December this year.

One of the BNP's longest-serving leaders, Alamgir served as the party's secretary-general from 2016 until his nomination for the presidency.

# 2 Khalistan supporters warned by Canada police about threat to their lives

**Anirudh Bhattacharyya**
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**TORONTO:** Two pro-Khalistan separatists in Canada have received letters from Canada police warning them of a potential threat to their lives.

While the secessionist group Sikhs for Justice (SFJ) has blamed India for being the source of the threat, the letters, or duty to warn notices, pointed to a possible criminal angle.

Citing the letters from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), the agency Canadian Press said they stated, "You may be putting yourself at risk if you spend time in any residence, vehicle or location frequented by those who engage in a criminal lifestyle."

According to the news outlet Globe and Mail, the recipients of the letters include SFJ's coordinator in Canada for the so-called Khalistan Referendum Inderjeet Singh Gosal from Caledon in Ontario and Manjinder Singh from Abbotsford in British Columbia. In interviews with Canadian media, Gosal linked the threat to the next phase of the "referendum" to be held in Edmonton, capital of the province of Alberta, on October 18.

Gosal replaced Hardeep Singh Nijjar as SFJ's Canadian coordinator after the latter was killed in Surrey, British Columbia, on June 18, 2023. That murder led to the cratering of relations between India and Canada after then PM Justin Trudeau stated in the House of Commons three months later that there were "credible allegations" of a potential link between Indian agents and the killing.

## NASA MISSION TO RESCUE SATELLITE ENDS IN FAILURE

**WASHINGTON:** A complicated mission to save a Nasa satellite from burning up in the atmosphere has failed, the US space agency said on Wednesday, as the rescue spacecraft could not be controlled. The Swift space telescope, which studies the most powerful explosions in the universe, will now likely plunge back to earth and disintegrate along the way later this year.

The $30 million dollar mission attempted to send a robot to grab the telescope and move it farther into orbit. "This is not the outcome we were working towards, but it does not change why this mission was worth attempting," Nasa administrator Jared Isaacman said.

"The team moved with extraordinary speed to give Swift a chance to carry out more science while advancing capabilities America will need for satellite servicing in the future," Isaacman added. **AFP**

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# India Inc's Q1 performance conceals a widening divide

Abhinaba Saha
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India Inc delivered a stronger-than-expected earnings performance in the June quarter of FY27. But the recovery had a clear divide: large and mid-sized companies pulled ahead, while smaller firms struggled to keep pace.

Nifty 50 profits grew nearly 18% year-on-year (y-o-y), roughly twice the Street's 9% estimate, marking a sharp improvement in headline earnings momentum.

Large and mid-sized companies gained from the global commodity upcycle, strong credit growth, exports, a weaker rupee, pricing power, operating leverage, and low-cost inventories. A favourable base also amplified the gains. Volume growth accelerated too, suggesting the recovery was not purely price-led.

Yet experts note that the quality of incremental profits remains uneven, with commodities and a handful of large companies accounting for a disproportionate share of the gains. Higher raw material costs, weaker pricing power, and limited operating leverage squeezed the margins of smaller companies and held back their earnings growth.

Large and mid-sized companies pulled ahead in Q1, while smaller firms struggled with rising costs. REUTERS

The result is an earnings season that looks broad-based on the surface, but becomes increasingly uneven on closer examination.

*Mint's* analysis of 2,774 non-financial companies shows that India Inc.'s topline recovery in Q1 FY27 was unusually strong. Nominal revenue surged 21% y-o-y, while real revenue (inflation-adjusted) growth accelerated to nearly 17%—both recording their strongest growth in three years. The gap between the two implies that, alongside a sharp pickup in volumes, pricing and realization gains provided a significant lift to reported revenue growth.

Much of that lift came from non-ferrous metals and upstream oil companies like Hindalco and Oil and Natural Gas Corp. (ONGC), which benefited from a global commodity upcycle. Hindalco's revenue rose 26% y-o-y, helped by a sharp rise in aluminium prices amid supply deficits and strong renewable-energy demand. ONGC's revenue jumped nearly 46% as the West Asia conflict pushed crude prices to $90–100 a barrel during the quarter. As a result, profits at Hindalco nearly tripled and doubled at ONGC from a year ago, significantly boosting the Nifty 50's earnings growth.

But the topline recovery was not driven by pricing alone. India Inc also saw a sharp pickup in volumes, aided by an improving domestic consumption, which continues to benefit from the government's FY26 consumption stimulus.

Consumer tech platforms, jewellers, durables, and quick-service restaurants saw strong demand throughout the quarter, said Lokesh Manik, senior analyst at Vallum Capital.

Meanwhile, manufacturing and capex-linked sectors saw volume growth, owing to government infrastructure spending, said Pranay Aggarwal, director and chief executive officer of Stoxkart. Export-oriented companies also benefited from resilient overseas demand for niche goods, he added.

While topline growth appears broad-based and volume-led, India Inc's profit growth remains uneven. Companies with scale, differentiated products, strong brands or niche export markets are better placed to protect margins and deliver profit growth as costs rise, said Aggarwal.

That helps explain why large and mid-sized companies are recovering faster than smaller firms. Mint's analysis of a 3,271-company universe, which includes the 2,774 non-financial companies covered, shows that large companies, with revenue above ₹10,000 crore, saw revenue growth hit a three-year high of 17%, while profits rose just 2%, partly due to OMC losses. OMCs incurred a ₹18,100 crore loss in Q1 FY27, swinging from a ₹16,200 crore profit a year ago.

A Motilal Oswal Financial Services report highlights that large names such as ONGC, Hindalco, Reliance, JSW Steel, and Bharti Airtel accounted for 60% of incremental Nifty profit accretion.

Medium-sized companies with revenue of ₹1,000–10,000 crore saw their revenue grow 16%, while profits surged 24% to a six-quarter high.

# Bonds recover as US Treasury comes to rescue

Reuters
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**SINGAPORE:** Global bonds rebounded on Thursday after the U.S. Treasury stepped in to stem a rout in its debt market, soothing investor nerves and sending the dollar lower while stocks climbed.

The U.S. Treasury said it will double buyback sizes for long-duration debt, as it sought to stanch an upward march in yields that sent the 30-year Treasury yield to its highest level since 2007 earlier this week.

The 30-year yield was a touch lower at 5.1869% in Asia trading, having slid 9 basis points in the previous session, while the benchmark 10-year yield stood at 4.6427% after a 5-bp fall on Wednesday.

"Clearly, we've reached a threshold in long-term Treasury yields that's made the U.S. Treasury extremely uncomfortable," said Eric Robertsen, global head of research and chief strategist at Standard Chartered.

In Tokyo, yields on Japanese government bonds (JGBs) fell from multi-decade highs.

The yield on the 40-year JGB was down 9.5 bps at 4.055%, while that of the 30-year JGB slid 8.5 bps to 3.995%.

Germany's bund futures and French OAT futures ticked higher, implying lower yields.

Growing investor unease over mounting government debt sparked a steep bond sell-off from the U.S. to Germany and Japan this week, exacerbated by heavy AI-related borrowing by technology companies and elevated oil prices.

While the U.S. Treasury's announcement appeared to put a floor under falling bond prices for now, investors said the support was likely to be temporary.

"The more the (U.S.) Treasury department wants to intervene, the more selling from institutional holders it will induce," said Cusson Leung, chief investment officer at KGI.

The 30-year yield was at 5.1869% in Asia trading. REUTERS

"At the end of the day, we know that the Treasury department is the one which needs to raise debt from the bond market. It doing a buyback now is like a company doing a share buyback first, followed by more share placement. The market is unlikely to fall for that."

The pickup in market sentiment lifted stocks on Thursday, with MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares excluding Japan rising 2% and Japan's Nikkei adding 1.4%.

Nasdaq futures advanced 0.4%, while S&P 500 futures edged 0.15% higher. EUROSTOXX 50 futures eased 0.2%.

The retreat in U.S. yields weighed on the dollar, which languished near a 2-1/2-month low against a basket of currencies at 98.87.

### Investors dump India bonds after RBI minutes

Meanwhile, a hawkish tone in the Reserve Bank of India's policy minutes jolted domestic bonds on Thursday, compounding pressure from rising oil prices and knocking the liquid 10-year benchmark to a two-month low.

The yield on the benchmark 6.94% 2036 bond climbed 5 basis points to 6.8709%, its highest since June 15.

Bond yields move inversely to prices.

# NEARLY 72% PETROL PUMPS FALL UNDER OPEN CATEGORY

Rajeev Jayaswal
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**NEW DELHI:** Of India's 1.03 lakh petrol pumps, nearly 72% are in the open category, while the remainder are allocated across various reserved and special categories, according to official data.

As of April 1, 2026, India had 103,023 retail fuel outlets, of which 93,503, or 90.76%, were operated by public sector oil companies and 9,520, or 9.24%, by private companies, according to data compiled by the Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC), the oil ministry's data agency. The open category also includes retail outlets operated by private oil companies.

Among the reserved categories, the Scheduled Caste (SC) category has the largest share, with 10,812 outlets, followed by the Other Backward Classes (OBC) with 8,250 and Scheduled Tribes (ST) with 5,035.

The allocation also includes 1,417 outlets, or 1.4% of the total, for persons with disabilities and 771, or 0.7%, under the defence category. Another 341 outlets, or 0.3%, have been allocated to unemployed graduates; 269, or 0.3%, to freedom fighters; 213, or 0.2%, to paramilitary personnel; and 101, or 0.1%, to outstanding sportspersons. Another 1,715 outlets, or 1.7%, fall under the "others" category. This includes dealerships given to social workers, on compassionate grounds or under the discretionary quota, as well as two- and three-wheeler outlets, pumps allocated under Operation Vijay and company-owned, company-operated (COCO) outlets.

Private oil companies had no retail outlets until April 2003. Following the dismantling of the petroleum sector's administered pricing mechanism (APM) from April 1, 2002, private companies began entering the fuel retail market. By April 2004, they had 27 outlets, according to PPAC data. The number of private outlets rose steadily to 2,910 by April 2011, before declining marginally to 2,882 by April 2014.

# AB Capital enters into gold loans

Press Trust of India
feedback@livemint.com

**MUMBAI:** Aditya Birla Capital on Thursday joined non-bank lending peers who are either entering or ramping up presence in the lucrative gold loan business.

Unlike some entities which have taken the acquisition route to enter the business, the Aditya Birla group's financial services arm seems to be focusing on building its gold lending business by itself and announced a target of 1,000 gold loan branches in three years. It will start with opening up to 300 gold loan branches by the end of FY27 across high-potential markets, an official statement said.

"Gold loans are witnessing strong structural growth in India, and our entry into this segment is a natural extension of our secured lending strategy," said Rakesh Singh, executive director and chief executive - NBFC, Aditya Birla Capital.

It can be noted that lending against gold has seen a massive surge in the recent past with an increase in the prices of the precious metals.

Outstanding credit extended by non-banking financial companies against gold jewellery surged nearly 69.3% year-on-year in June, marking the fastest growth among all major lending segments. The overall portfolio loans against gold jewellery stood at ₹3.42 lakh crore at the end of June 2026, up 69.3% from ₹1.44 lakh crore a year earlier.

# India's infrastructure output rises 5.4% in July

Reuters
feedback@livemint.com

**NEW DELHI:** India's infrastructure output expanded 5.4% year-on-year in July, slowing a tad from the previous month, according to the second release under a revised series, as iron ore and electricty output moderated.

With 2022-23 as the base year, the new series released last month by the government replaces the 2011-12 base year and expands the core sector basket to nine industries from eight, including iron ore.

Infrastructure output had grown a revised 6% in June from a year earlier, according to comparable data released by the government.

Cement output rose 13.1% in July from a revised 9.9% increase in June.

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# NIVA BUPA BARRED FROM OPENING BRANCHES DUE TO EXPENSE BREACH

Reuters
feedback@livemint.com

India's insurance regulator has barred Niva Bupa Health Insurance from opening new places of business for six months because of the breach of business expense limits, the health insurer said on Thursday.

The insurer failed to comply with limits on expenses of management, which comprises operating costs and commissions paid to agents and distributors, during fiscal year 2024-25, as per the statement. Niva Bupa, backed by UK-based international healthcare group Bupa, said it complied with the expense rules for fiscal 2025-26 and was on track to remain compliant in the current fiscal.

Intensifying competition in India's insurance sector has pushed up distribution costs, with commissions rising across the industry. IRDAI is seeking to reform how distributors are paid in an effort to curb mis-selling of policies and reduce high distribution costs in one of the world's fastest-growing insurance markets, *Reuters* reported last month. Expenses for health insurers should not exceed 35% of gross written premiums in a financial year. Shares of Niva Bupa extended losses to close 1.3% lower.

## { FROM PAGE 1 }

### RAIN SHORTFALL

ing flowering and pod formation can hurt tur, urad and moong yields in parts of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Odisha, as well as Kurnool in Andhra Pradesh, where rainfall is 20% below normal.

Groundnut in Devbhumi Dwarka, meanwhile, faces an 86% rainfall deficit during a critical crop stage, while Kodarma and Hazaribagh in Jharkhand are 49% and 32% deficient, respectively, raising concerns for maize and coarse cereals, Behera said.

Puruliya in West Bengal (-29%) and Sri Satyasai in Andhra Pradesh (-36%) also illustrate the vulnerability of rain-dependent farming areas, where limited irrigation leaves farmers with little ability to withstand prolonged dry spells.

The agriculture ministry did not respond to questions sent by HT until press time.

## { THE CROSSWORDS }

### CRYPTIC CLUES

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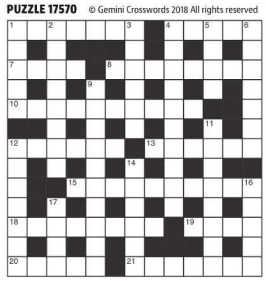


**ACROSS**

1 Producer of a graceful child (7)
4 Rise and dress (3,2)
7 Fairly big orderly (4)
8 Went and made good (8)
10 Very poor description of how one fell unconscious (4,3,3)
12 A boss without a place to feed (6)
13 Run out of clothes (6)
15 Prime trees doomed (5,2,3)
18 Used by a boxer without a ring? (8)
19 A soldier with small feet is present (4)
20 Were upset about a point but start again (5)
21 Children's playthings? (7)

**DOWN**

1 Carried to a man (5)
2 Willing to finish in debt (8)
3 Bears show dividends (6)
4 Marking a successful examination result (10)
5 Word used to describe schooldays (4)
6 Key man uses it as a hanger-on in security work (7)
9 A violinist may do this before and after playing (4,3,3)
11 Annul even in court? (3,5)
12 Turn or intend to turn communist (7)
14 Good man in a new role looking after horses (6)
16 Loud note from flutes in the string orchestra (5)
17 The final word in a lament (4)

### QUICK CLUES

**ACROSS**

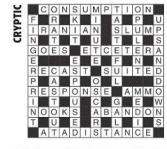
1 Small amount (7)
4 Stringed musical instrument (5)
7 Complain pettily (4)
8 Be conspicuous (5,3)
10 Occupation, calling (4,2,4)
12 Summon by gesture (6)
13 Split in church unity (6)
15 Physically fit and strong (4-6)
18 Pass away without effect (4,4)
19 Put into common fund (4)
20 Give special care to (5)
21 Frugal (7)

**DOWN**

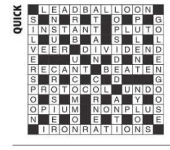
1 A long-tailed parrot (5)
2 Run-down and abandoned (8)
3 Natural ardour (6)
4 Provider of financial support (10)
5 Secluded corner (4)
6 Most favourable (7)
9 Risk all in single effort (2,3,5)
11 Get on well together (3,2,3)
12 An American whiskey (7)
14 Flaw (6)
16 Waste time (5)
17 A round of visits (4)

### YESTERDAY'S SOLUTIONS (17569)

CRYPTIC



QUICK



## { SUDOKU }

DIFFICULTY LEVEL ★★★★★

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

Fill in all the squares in the grid so that each row, column and each of the 9X9 squares contains all the digits from 1 to 9.

GAME ZONE: Scan the QR code for more daily puzzles and brain teasers

## { WEATHER }

TEMPERATURE ■HIGH ■LOW

**FRIDAY** Generally cloudy sky with light rain 30°C | 21°C

**SATURDAY** Generally cloudy sky with light rain 30°C | 21°C

**SUNDAY** Generally cloudy sky with light rain 30°C | 21°C

**ALMANAC**
Today is 21st August 2026
07 Rabi ul Awal, 1448
24, Shravana, Shukla Paksha, 09
Samvat 2081
Sunset: Friday at 06:37 p.m.
Sunrise: Saturday at 06:08 a.m.
Moonrise: Friday at 01:26 p.m.
Moonset: Saturday at 12:53 a.m.

**TEMPERATURE IN METROS**

Delhi 34°C | 25°C
Mumbai 32°C | 26°C
Kolkata 32°C | 27°C
Chennai 36°C | 28°C
Bengaluru 30°C | 21°C

# Sindhu's valiant stand ends in agony as doubles pairs shine

Sandip Sikdar
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**NEW DELHI:** The Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium was a roaring cauldron of emotion on Thursday as the BWF World Championships delivered a rollercoaster of breathtaking badminton.

It was a day where thundering cheers from a passionate home crowd met the cruel, razor-thin margins of elite sport. At the centre of it was India's PV Sindhu, whose quest for a historic sixth World Championships medal ended in an agonisingly close 88-minute marathon.

With Ayush Shetty also losing, India's singles campaign ended but a wave of hope emerged from doubles as Satwiksairaj Rankireddy/Chirag Shetty and Treesa Jolly/Gayatri Gopichand kept the hosts' podium aspirations alive by reaching the quarter-finals.

The marquee matchup of the evening pitted Sindhu against China's third seed Wang Zhi Yi. Going into the match, Sindhu carried an aura of invincibility against Chinese opponents at the World Championships, having never lost to them in eight prior meetings. But Thursday's encounter proved to be a test of endurance, tactical astuteness, and willpower as Sindhu struggled to find her rhythm in the opening game. Wang capitalised on the tentative start, moving with lightning speed and dictating the pace to wrap up the first game 21-11.

But champions of Sindhu's calibre are not easily dismissed. With her back against the wall, the Indian star raised her level in the second game. The turning point arrived at 15-15 when she suddenly tapped into a higher gear, winning six consecutive points with a barrage of precise crosscourt smashes and aggressive net play to force the finale.

The decider was a classic battle of attrition, unfolding into a gripping spectacle. Sindhu quickly established an 8-4 advantage. Even when a few unforced errors allowed Wang to level the score at 9-9, Sindhu seized the initiative once again to go up 13-10.

But the immense physical toll of the rallies began to show. Sindhu's tentative pushes found the net as Wang found her second wind, stringing together five straight points to reclaim the lead.

What followed was an extraordinary display of endurance. Both athletes engaged in brutal, exhausting rallies, frequently exceeding 30 shots. The climax arrived with Sindhu trailing 15-16.

A wide shot from the Indian forced Wang to lunge and she crashing to the floor, clutching her left thigh. Following a medical timeout, Wang returned to the action, 17-17.

At 17-18, the crowd watched in breathless silence as the two engaged in a mind-boggling 54-shot rally. It ended in heartbreak when Sindhu's lift sailed just long. Wang, now clutching her right thigh, somehow summoned the strength to continue. A netted smash from Sindhu handed the Chinese star three match points. Moments later, Wang let out a scream of victory before collapsing onto the court, sealing the decider 21-17.

"I should have stayed patient," said Sindhu. "It was going well. I am disappointed. I should have converted the advantage. You learn. When you lose, you need to deal with it."

Asked about Wang's medical timeouts and whether they disrupted her rhythm, the former world champion said: "Maybe that is her style or her strategy, but for me, it is just that I need to focus and play every point. At 17-17, every point matters, and I should have been a little more patient. The last three points just changed the game," Sindhu said.

Wang, however, defended her struggles. "I had to push myself hard, that's why I suffered cramps," she explained via an interpreter. "I understand she (Sindhu) might have thought it at that moment, but I was really injured that time. It was such a tough match. She is a very strong opponent. I just told myself to keep going, never give up."

While the singles dream faded, India's doubles pairs ignited the arena. Treesa and Gayatri engineered a magnificent upset, outclassing the seventh-seeded Japanese duo of Rin Iwanaga and Kie Nakanishi 21-16, 21-12. Becoming the first Indian women's pair to reach the quarters in 11 years, their aggressive play sealed the match in just 44 minutes.

Later, Satwik and Chirag showcased nerves of steel, fighting back from a 16-18 second-game deficit to defeat Malaysia's Junaidi Arif and Yap Roy King 21-23, 21-19, 21-17.

Earlier, Shetty, who had ousted defending champion Shi Yu Qi on Day 1, lost to Indonesia's Alwi Farhan 19-21, 11-21.

Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty entered the quarter-finals on the day India's singles challenge ended. SANCHIT KHANNA/HT

## India-born Ishika charts her own path

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**NEW DELHI:** Nozomi Okuhara may be in the twilight of her career, but even then picking her slices and drops requires special skill. Ishika Jaiswal not only sent everything back to Okuhara but also displayed the kind of grit that the 2017 Japanese world champion is known for.

Okuhara was relieved to have come through a tough, close-to-an-hour-long round of 16 match at the World Championships.

Ishika was born in Alwar, Rajasthan, but moved to the US early because of her father's job. She has been representing the US.

With her relatives still in India, Ishika uses the opportunity to travel and spar with Indian players whenever she comes here to play in tournaments. "It's been a difficult journey because we don't have as many resources for a badminton player in the US as they do here, but we also get the advantage of figuring things out on our own, so it's been hard but challenging," Ishika told HT.

Ishika Jaiswal. HT

She doesn't have sponsors to support her and often travels to tournaments on her own. "I just ask any coach who is available at the time of my matches to sit behind me. It's difficult, but that's the way it is."

The 23-year-old was competing in her second World Championships and was proud of her feisty display against Okuhara, especially the way she fought back after losing the first game. Okuhara, who won 21-11, 13-21, 21-12, called her a "fighter."

"Definitely, it is the best I have played at this level because we don't get many opportunities to play top players," said Ishika.

Ishika is ranked 61st in the world, but her game showed that, at least on this day, she belonged in the top rung. Having lost the first game, she fought back with patience, showing good defence and deceptive craft. It's not for nothing that she considers Ratchanok Intanon her inspiration.

"I have always been a runner, rally and consistency have always been kind of part of my game. I used to be an attacking player, but when I realised my smashes can't kill, I developed my overall game. I was inspired by Saina Nehwal, when I started to play, but I really like Ratchanok and the skill she has."

She was happy to meet her role model Ratchanok in an earlier round here, with the Thai retiring midway due to an injury.

Ishika picked up a racquet when she was 10 and based in California. She trained under former Indian doubles player Shlok Ramchandran. Her father was a cricket fan, but her love was badminton.

She now trains in Texas, where her father has started a badminton club to help his two daughters and other shuttlers, most of whom are of Indian origin. Her sister Mihika recently won the U-15 girls' singles title.

"I train at our own academy — Velocity Badminton Club in Texas, under coach Nagendra." Ishika says the number of players of Indian origin picking up the racquet sport has increased. Before that, it was more Chinese-origin children playing badminton.

"The junior circuit is not very competitive. Several junior players are seeing me perform well at the world level and want to be successful. There are a lot of Indians in your academy and a lot of new kids are of Indian origin. Before, you would see a lot of Chinese-origin kids in the US."

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## India Open locked in winter window despite criticism

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**NEW DELHI:** Badminton World Federation (BWF) secretary general Thomas Lund has appealed for understanding and support from players as the governing body continues to grapple with the scheduling of India Open amid the national capital's notorious winter pollution.

Speaking on the sidelines of the BWF World Championships, Lund acknowledged the logistical headaches of hosting the Super 750 event during the capital's peak pollution period. While the BWF has attempted to push the event slightly later into the year to mitigate health risks, Lund admitted that an overhaul of the calendar remains a complex challenge.

"There's obviously a lot of logistical things when you do these things. For now, it hasn't been possible to totally move out of the first quarter," Lund said on Thursday. "It is documented that pollution will go down a little bit further into January, February... Right now it hasn't been possible due to domestic, local (commitments) to actually move it totally around in the calendar."

India Open has been scheduled from February 2-7 next year and from January 25-30 in 2028.

Danish star Anders Antonsen has been the most vocal critic, opting to pay BWF fines and skip the tournament rather than play through January's hazardous Delhi smog, and has publicly urged organisers to shift the event to a different season.

Compatriot Mia Blichfeldt, Canadian Michelle Li and Thai Ratchanok Intanon have been critical of the cold conditions in the past, adding that the conditions force athletes to warm up in winter coats and gloves, making match preparation difficult.

The BWF has implemented some structural calendar changes, including starting the overall World Tour later in January to give players a longer off-season recovery period. However, Lund recognises this may not satisfy all critics. "Some players may not feel it's enough, but we just hope for the players' understanding that we live in a world where everything cannot be set up," added Lund.

"We hope for their continuous support because obviously this is a super important tournament, a super important market... we continue to present here in India at the very highest level."

"India is probably, if not the fastest-growing badminton market. We have a slight distance to the cricket religion that you have in this country. But we're getting there, and that's our objective," added Lund.

**ROUND OF 16 RESULTS (INDIANS ONLY)**

**Men's singles:** **Ayush Shetty lost** to Alwi Farhan (INA) 19-21, 11-21

**Women's singles:** **PV Sindhu lost** to Wang Zhi Yi (CHN) 11-21, 21-15, 17-21

**Men's doubles:** **Satwiksairaj Rankireddy/Chirag Shetty beat** Junaidi Arif/Yap Roy King (MAS) 21-23, 21-19, 21-17

**Womens doubles:** **Treesa Jolly/Gayatri Gopichand beat** Rin Iwanaga/Kie Nakanishi (JPN) 21-16, 21-12

**Mixed doubles:** **Dhruv Kapila/Tanisha Crasto lost** to Guo Xin Wa/Chen Fang Hui (CHN) 16-21, 5-21

### Sinquefield Cup: Pragg finishes 2nd

**BENGALURU:** R Praggnanandhaa finished second in the Sinquefield Cup after Wesley So won their Armageddon playoff. Both players were tied for first at 5.5/9 after the classical games, but So prevailed after two drawn rapid games. Pragg had White in Armageddon with five minutes to So's four, but the American had draw odds. Pragg came close to winning but ran short on time, later saying he would have found the win had he paused to think. So's draw secured him a second straight Sinquefield Cup title and third overall.

### Root and Cox hit 50s, England 239/4

**LEEDS:** Joe Root and Jordan Cox struck fifties in a 150-run stand before being dismissed in the space of five balls as England powered into a first-innings lead over Pakistan on a weather-hit Day 2 of the first Test. England reached tea on 239/4 with Harry Brook (15) and Dan Lawrence (22) in the middle and stretching the lead to 68.

### Bagan set up derby final in Durand Cup

**SHILLONG:** Vishal Kaith turned hero, pulling off two crucial saves in the penalty shootout, to send Mohun Bagan into the final of the Durand Cup with a 4-3 win over NE United. Both teams had converted their first three penalties. Mohun Bagan will now face East Bengal FC in a Kolkata derby final on Sunday.

# Resilient India hold England, advance to the second round

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**MUMBAI:** With seconds left on the clock, Tessa Howard found some space inside the circle. If there was a player England wanted in that position, it was her.

Howard is a 27-year-old who was part of the England team that won the gold medal at the 2022 CWG. At the ongoing FIH Hockey World Cup, she had two goals to her name. In that moment, in the 59th minute of play, she looked poised to get her third. A well-connected reverse hit sent the ball towards goal. It was her moment. But the moment wasn't hers alone.

It was also Bichu Devi Kharibam's time to shine. The Indian goalkeeper dove to her left and palmed the ball away. A few seconds later, the final hooter sounded.

Through most of the last decade, the Indian women's hockey team has punched above its weight in major tournaments. On Thursday, at the Wagener Stadium in Amstelveen, Netherlands, they did it again. Needing at least a draw against world No. 7 England, India kept the match goal-less to secure passage into the second round of the World Cup. In doing so, India ensured a Top 8 finish at the competition for the first time since they finished eighth in 2018.

"We had decided that we will fight for everything," captain Salima Tete said after the match to the FIH. "We defended really well, we did not stop."

The reflection was succinct, but accurate. Pool D in the tournament was the Group of Death, with world No.4 China, England and world No.9 India being three top 10 teams fighting for the top two spots along with No.18 South Africa.

HOCKEY WORLD CUP
AUGUST 15 TO 30

China, the reigning Olympic silver medallists, were always going to be tough one. Yet India began their campaign with an impressive 2-2 draw. The 6-1 win over South Africa that followed meant India needed only a draw against England, who had lost to China.

England needed the win and would have been quietly confident having beaten India 2-0 in the final of the World Cup Qualifiers in Hyderabad in March. But India started as the more aggressive of the two teams.

After half-time, though, England started pushing for the win. Their passing was swift and precise. But India's staunch defence held firm. Sushila Chanu marshalled the backline ferociously. Nikki Pradhan was just as resilient. As were youngsters Ishika Chaudhary and Shilpi Dabas.

There was also help all-around: Baljeet Kaur made a few diving interceptions. Neha Goyal used her experience to cover gaps at the back, the pacy Tete and the quick-footed Lairemsiami also charged back to add numbers in defence while Navneet Kaur (who also made a crucial goal-line clearance) and Deepika Kumari threatened on the break.

Just as in the 59th minute when England had an opening to take a shot at goal (they took 20 compared to India's 12), the veteran goalkeepers Savita Punia and Bichu (who swapped places after each quarter) cleared the danger without much fuss.

England, did their best to create chances and earned an incredible 12 penalty corners. But they became predictable in their approach — playing the same routine of passing towards the second castle with Sophie Hamilton taking a shot. The Indian defence lapped it all up, albeit with a few moments of scrappy yet effective defending.

Reaching this far in the World Cup is admirable for an Indian team that has a packed schedule ahead. In September, the team will be in Japan for the Asian Games where a gold medal will ensure a spot at the 2028 Olympics.

England's Sophie Hamilton is being stopped by India's Navneet Kaur. GETTY IMAGES

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# The veteran and his understudy

KL Rahul and Devdutt Padikkal already look like a partnership India could nurture

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**KOLKATA:** No one watching the Galle Test missed that big, warm hug KL Rahul gave Devdutt Padikkal out of relief after the review that he almost didn't take went his way. Nor did anyone following that broadcast closely miss that peck Rahul almost planted on his cheeks. It spoke of gratitude, but also of the affection that grows among players who are on the road year-round.

For Rahul and Padikkal, it's a bond that goes deeper because they turn out for Karnataka as well, churning runs while putting on massive partnerships together. So maybe it's not bad after all that Padikkal is batting at No 3, lending India a top-order stability that they don't have to work on for a change.

Rahul and Padikkal put on 150 for the second wicket in the first innings, then another 65 in the second. Padikkal made 167, the defining innings of India's 165-run victory; Rahul made 82 and 35. Across their two partnerships they contributed 227 runs. But the numbers do not quite explain why it looked so natural.

Rahul is 34, a veteran of 69 Tests, and has spent years learning the peculiar demands of international batting while not being assured of a particular position for a long time. Padikkal, 26, is still an understudy. Yet he didn't look overawed by the senior partner. Nor did Rahul appear to be managing him. They simply seemed to know what the other was doing.

The way Rahul was almost goaded into taking that review reflected that chemistry. Rahul had been given out lbw in India's second innings in Galle and was already walking away.

But Padikkal, at the non-striker's end, wasn't convinced. He told Rahul that the ball might have been high. Rahul, reluctantly, went upstairs. Replays showed the ball was missing the stumps.

The embrace that followed was a small celebration of something India rarely gets to manufacture—a batting partnership whose understanding exists before the players arrive at the crease.

Padikkal was confident enough to challenge Rahul, and he trusted him enough to listen. That isn't just friendship, that's trust. "I felt like it was out," Rahul said afterwards.

"The only doubt that I had was, did I get outside the line?" Padikkal's response was simple but practical. "When you get chances like that as a batter, it's a gift, it's a second chance," Rahul said.

Beyond the winnings of this Galle Test, India may have stumbled upon something more valuable than a hundred from a No 3. This could be the beginning of a relationship at the top of the order, based on a familiarity built in Karnataka, through domestic cricket, India A and, increasingly, at the top level. There is something particularly useful about that history when the two are batting together.

"He understands the way I bat, the tempo in which I bat, and I do the same as well," Padikkal said. "When you have that kind of chemistry, I think it helps in stitching that partnership and really pushing the limits of how far we can go."

That last part matters since partnerships are essentially about knowing how far the other player can be pushed.

Rahul's natural game, particularly in Test cricket, is built around time. Padikkal brings a different tempo. His 167 in Galle was not a frenetic counterattack but an innings of calculated pressure, particularly against spin. He could absorb the quiet overs before suddenly finding a boundary. Rahul could then settle into the rhythm alongside him. The result was complementary rather than competitive.

There were other benefits as well. Rahul's presence appeared to give Padikkal the security to play his own game. He had been waiting for this opportunity, having last played a Test in 2024 and returning only because Sai Sudharsan was ruled out. He didn't arrive in Galle as an established No 3. He left with the strongest possible argument that he should remain there.

Rahul understood the significance. He called Padikkal's innings "the defining part" of the Test, praising both the tempo and the ability to turn a start into a substantial score.

"Hopefully he carries this confidence into the next game and into his Test career as well," Rahul said. There is, therefore, a temptation to describe this as a small but crucial subplot in India's Test transition: the experienced player shepherding the youngster, getting a hundred and significant partnerships along the way.

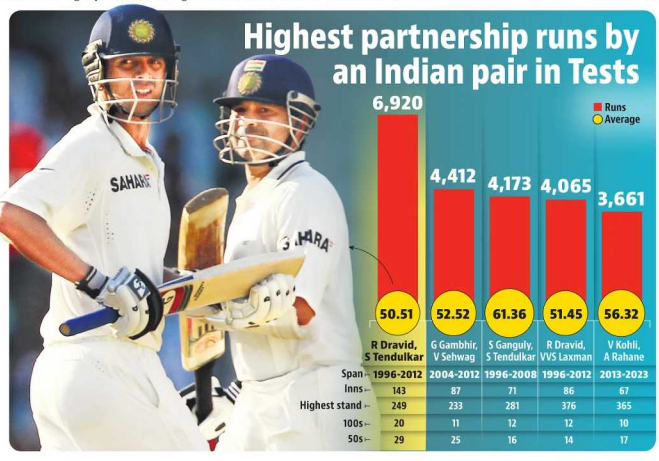
There could be more to this. If Rahul remains at No. 2 and Padikkal at No. 3, the distinction between veteran and understudy could become an advantage rather than a hierarchy for India.

As the emotional anchor, Rahul provides the knowledge to play out different conditions. Padikkal provides the freedom of someone whose international career is still in the early stages. And, crucially, they communicate all the time.

The best partnerships in Test cricket are often built on precisely that invisible currency. Sometimes it produces a valuable partnership, sometimes it simply stops a batsman from walking back to the pavilion. Either way, the team benefits.

> He (Rahul) understands the way I bat, the tempo in which I bat, and I do the same as well. When you have that kind of chemistry, it helps in stitching that partnership and really pushing the limits of how far we can go.
>
> **DEVDUTT PADIKKAL,** on his partnership with KL Rahul

India's Devdutt Padikkal (L) and KL Rahul during Day 1 of the 1st Test against Sri Lanka at the Galle International Stadium. BCCI




## NEERAJ-PATHIRAGE BATTLE YET AGAIN IN LAUSANNE DIAMOND LEAGUE

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**LAUSANNE:** The budding rivalry between rising Sri Lankan star Rumesh Pathirage and Indian ace Neeraj Chopra will once again hit the headlines when the two square off in the Lausanne Diamond League on Friday with a spot in the DL grand finale in Brussels at stake.

The duo will be up against each other three weeks after Pathirage clinched the gold and Chopra finished with a silver in the Glasgow Commonwealth Games.

The 23-year-old Pathirage has been in the form of his life this season, having also won the Doha and Rome Diamond League meetings, besides clinching gold in Glasgow with a throw of 89.75m. He also breached the coveted 90m mark with a season-leading throw of 92.62m in Rome in June. In fact, the Sri Lankan has won eight of the nine competitions he has participated so far in the season.

Chopra, on the other hand, is on a comeback trail after recovering from a lower back injury that has troubled him since September last year. The injury delayed his return until the Diamond League in Doha. He was not 100 per cent fit in Glasgow but was able to win a silver with a season's best throw of 85.83m.

"I can't say my fitness is there like before. But I'm getting there," the 28-year-old Chopra had said at the CWG.

After the CWG, Chopra has gone back to his base in Biel, Switzerland, where he is continuing his rehabilitation-cum-training with childhood coach Jaiveer Chaudhary and physio Ishan Marwah. One of the most consistent javelin throwers ever, two-time Olympic medallist Chopra has finished outside the top-two in just two competitions in the last five years.

AFI selection committee chairman Adille Sumariwalla has warned against writing off Chopra, saying the superstar Indian should not be scrutinised too harshly for winning a silver at times.

Neeraj Chopra. PTI

# Maresca, City and the shadow of Guardiola

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**MUMBAI:** The Etihad Stadium has had some work done over the off-season. The North Stand in particular received much attention. An additional 7,000 seats were fitted in. And once the work was complete, the section was rebranded the 'Pep Guardiola Stand.' Some proposed changes are still in progress, including a statue of Guardiola.

These are the tributes the club bestowed upon its greatest manager, who quit at the end of last season after 10 years at the helm. Under the 55-year-old Spaniard, City won six Premier League titles, three FA Cups, five League Cups, three Community Shields, the Champions League in 2022-23, the UEFA Super Cup in 2023 and the 2023 FIFA Club World Cup.

It is into the shadow of such a prominent figure at City, and in world football, that 46-year-old Enzo Maresca steps as the club's new manager. "It's fantastic, nice and exciting, and for me, a privilege," Maresca said, as quoted by The Guardian.

More than anything though, this will be a challenge at a club whose bar for success has been pushed to great heights. This is especially true given that City are going through a phase of transition.

A number of key players have moved on, starting with star-midfielder Rodri, who captained Spain to the World Cup title last month.

Rodri's performance in the US earned him the Golden Ball and may put him in with a good chance of winning his second Ballon d'Or. His departure to Barcelona will leave a void in the midfield. Then there are the departures of John Stones, Nathan Ake, Manuel Akanji and Bernardo Silva.

So far, City have managed to secure the services of Nottingham Forest's Elliot Anderson, who came in for a club-record £116 million. That's a big price tag for a 23-year-old who will be expected to fill Rodri's role. Anderson did show he is capable of putting in those performances after impressing with England during the World Cup.

Also on the radar is Argentina's wantaway Enzo Fernandez from Chelsea, but there is a chance that City will need to break the bank once again. The West London club has reportedly set an asking price of £120 million for the midfielder, if he is to reunite with Maresca.

The City midfield has also been bolstered by the arrival of Ayyoub Bouaddi, an 18-year-old Moroccan who dictated play for his team against Brazil at the World Cup.

This is not to say that City does not already have strong players in the ranks. Rayan Cherki is there, as is the flair of Omar Marmoush. And with Maresca — a manger who likes his wingers to run wide and deep — Jeremy Doku and Antoine Semenyo would relish the opportunity.

One who may benefit the most from that wing-play is a certain Erling Haaland. Having ended last season as City's premier striker, he returns for the new season as a cult hero. His exploits at the World Cup with Norway, which saw him score seven goals and take his team to the quarter-final, earned him favour among fans. It also saw Haaland turn into an internet sensation and a meme favourite.

The direct approach City might employ under Maresca seems to be tailor-made for Haaland.

There will also be some expectations from Phil Foden. Once a star midfielder under Guardiola, he has been a shadow of himself in the past few seasons. But as Maresca looks to rebuild the midfield, Foden might be keen to make his mark for the new manager.

Maresca taking over from Guardiola has a certain symmetry to it. After all, Maresca was Guardiola's assistant during the treble-winning campaign of 2022-23. Maresca also guided City's U-23 to the Premier League's developmental league title in 2020-21, before helping Leicester City win the EPL Championship in 2023-24.

At Chelsea, he helped the London-club win the Conference League in 2024-25, followed by the Club World Cup in 2025.

His first assignment for City however, did not go according to plan, as the team was beaten 3-0 by Arsenal at the end of an underwhelming performance in the Community Shield last week.

Not much should be read from that one-off match however, as the new Premier League season usher's in a new period of English football.

This will be the first time since the 1985-86 season in which England's top-tier of football does not have a team managed by Sir Alex Ferguson, Arsene Wenger, Jose Mourinho, Jurgen Klopp and Guardiola – winners of 26 of the Premier League's 34 seasons.

Could Maresca etch his own name to Premier League history?

## Premier League's appeal

Three different champions across the last three seasons

Nine Premier League clubs competing in Europe in 2026-27

Five clubs competing in the UEFA Champions League

**142** Matches decided by a single goal

**115** Goals scored in the 90th minute or later

**41,753** Record average attendance

**98.7%** stadium capacity

**46%** of the world's top 100 players playing in the Premier League

**128 nationalities** represented across Premier League history

**67 countries** represented across the 20 clubs last season

**144.5 million** Premier League followers in India

**111 appearances** for Haaland to reach 100 Premier League goals

**21 assists** for Bruno Fernandes, a new single-season record

**9.04 billion** minutes of Premier League watch time in India

**2.4x growth** in combined linear TV and digital reach in India over five years

Man City's Erling Haaland (L) vies with Arsenal's Gabriel Magalhaes during the Community Shield match in Cardiff on August 16. AFP

# Refs boss Webb wants monitoring of set-piece fights

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**LONDON:** Premier League clubs have been warned to expect a tougher stance from officials on grappling and holding at set-pieces in the new season.

Howard Webb, English football's chief refereeing officer, believes there were too many instances last season of defenders dragging attackers to the ground that went unpunished during corners and free-kicks.

Arsenal won the Premier League title in part due to their expertise at set-pieces, with rival managers and fans complaining about the Gunners' habit of wrestling opponents prior to the ball being delivered.

Webb is keen for referees and VAR officials to be more vigilant over the issue, starting with Arsenal's clash against Coventry at the Emirates Stadium in the opening game of the season on Friday. "I think fans can expect less warnings from referees (before fouls are given) than they might have seen previously, and I know (those warnings were) a source of frustration," he said on Wednesday.

"Fans can expect to see more situations being penalised, but not only in August or September, throughout the season."

A change for the coming season is the ability for VAR to check for attacking fouls at set-pieces and order them to be retaken, where a goal, penalty award or disciplinary sanction follows afterwards.

But Webb, a former Premier League and FIFA referee, doesn't want the flow of the game ruined by endless stoppages for fouls at set-pieces. "I'm not going to commit to say we're going to go from here to penalising lots of contact. Contact's still part of the game," he said. "We still maintain a high threshold, but I would imagine we'll be sat here this time next year and we'll be able to reflect on a season where more offences have been penalised."

> Fans can expect less warnings from refs than they might have seen previously, and I know (those warnings were) a source of frustration
>
> **HOWARD WEBB,** chief ref

Webb is also concerned by the aftermath of FIFA's decision to overturn United States forward Folarin Balogun's ban for a red card during the World Cup. Webb fears there is growing belief in refereeing conspiracies among supporters following the Balogun controversy, which included US president Donald Trump admitting he told FIFA president Gianni Infantino to review the incident. "I was really troubled by it," Webb said. "We know that there was pressure placed by a politician on to FIFA, because that was admitted.

"And we know that the suspension was taken away for that particular tournament and suspended through a process which seemingly didn't exist before the tournament started. "Decisions were previously viewed as correct or incorrect, based on your judgement. Far too often now decisions are viewed as correct or corrupt by people who want to type all over social media."