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Will be CM for five-year term: Siddaramaiah

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37 bodies found in Telangana factory blast

HYDERABAD

The body of one more worker was recovered at the Sigachi Industries blast site on Wednesday afternoon, taking the number of recovered bodies to 37. The company told the NSE that 40 of its workers were killed. » PAGE 3

Phone taps 'not allowed as crime fighting measure'

CHENNAI

In a significant verdict on a plea filed on behalf of the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, the Madras High Court refused to expand the scope of Section 5(2) of the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885, to permit the Central and State governments to resort to phone tapping as a covert measure for crime detection. » PAGE 2

Uddhav urges SC to hear plea on Shiv Sena name

NEW DELHI

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Uddhav Thackeray urged the Supreme Court on Wednesday to hear an application to let his faction to use the 'Shiv Sena' name, with its reserved symbol of 'bow and arrow', saffron flag with two horizontal conical ends' with the emblem of 'roaring tiger' for the upcoming Maharashtra polls. » PAGE 4

Bihar voter roll revision to affect two crore people'

NEW DELHI

The Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls currently under way in Bihar could disenfranchise at least two crore voters in the State, especially the migrant population, a delegation of leaders from the Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance said on Wednesday. » PAGE 5



Toll rises to 11 as heavy rain batters Himachal's Mandi

CHANDIGARH

At least 11 people have died in incidents of cloudburst and flash floods triggered by a heavy spell of rain in Mandi district of Himachal Pradesh between the intervening night of June 30 and July 1. At least 40 people are missing across the State. » PAGE 4

BRICS will create a balanced 'multipolar' world order: PM

PM lands in Ghana as he begins his five-nation trip; he says the visits will strengthen cooperation within Global South; Modi will also attend the BRICS summit in Brazil and hold meetings; he will receive state honours of Ghana, Trinidad and Tobago

Kallo Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

India and Brazil will discuss ways to advance the priorities of the Global South in the coming days, said Prime Minister Narendra Modi ahead of his five-nation visit beginning on Wednesday.

Mr. Modi, who will attend the BRICS summit to be held in Brazil's Rio De Janeiro during the trip, said the summit will help create a "balanced multipolar world order". He further said the five-nation visit will help strengthen cooperation within the Global South. The Prime Minister is expected to hold several bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the summit as well.

Argentina on itinerary

"As a founding member, India is committed to BRICS as a vital platform for cooperation among



Pleasant ties: Prime Minister Narendra Modi being welcomed by Ghana President John Mahama in Accra on Wednesday. ANI

emerging economies. Together, we strive for a more peaceful, equitable, just, democratic and balanced multipolar world order," said Mr. Modi in a departure statement as he boarded the official aircraft that landed in Ghana for a bilateral visit.

The Prime Minister will also visit Trinidad and Tobago, Argentina, and Na-

mibia, before concluding the trip on July 9.

According to Ghanaian news outlet *Graphic.com.gh*, the Foreign Minister of Ghana Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa had announced that Mr. Modi will receive the country's highest state honour, the Companion of the Order of the Star of Ghana, during the visit. Previous recipi-

ents of the honour include the late French President Jacques Chirac, King Mohammed VI of Morocco, President Luiz Inácio 'Lula' da Silva of Brazil, former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, and former Namibian President Sam Nujoma.

Mr. Modi will hold talks with President John Dramani Mahama in Ghana. "Ghana is a valued partner in the Global South and plays an important role in the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)," said Mr. Modi, adding that his visit will build on India's historic ties with Ghana and help in opening up areas like investment, energy, health, capacity building and development partnership.

Mr. Modi will also address the Parliament of Ghana during the visit. Mr. Ablakwa has said that Ghana plans to emerge as the "vaccine hub" for Africa

and talks would be held with Mr. Modi during the visit regarding vaccine production in Ghana.

From Ghana, Mr. Modi will fly to Trinidad and Tobago where he will be hosted by Prime Minister Kamla Persad Bissessar.

"This visit will provide an opportunity to rejuvenate the special bonds of ancestry and kinship that unite us," said Mr. Modi. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has announced that Mr. Modi will be conferred with the Order of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the highest state honour of the Caribbean nation.

Following the BRICS

summit, Mr. Modi will proceed to Brasilia for a state

visit. On the way back home, Mr. Modi will stop at Namibia. Mr. Modi will meet President Netumbo Nandi Ndaitwah and address the Joint Session of Namibian Parliament.

Bring perpetrators of Pahalgam attack to justice, says Quad



QUAD FOREIGN MINISTERS' JOINT STATEMENT

Suhasini Haidar

NEW DELHI

The Quad Foreign Ministers have condemned the Pahalgam terror attack in the "strongest terms" and called for the perpetrators of the attack to be brought to justice "without any delay".

The reference to "relevant" authorities, not "Indian authorities" in the statement was also made in the UNSCR passed in April 2025, after the attack.

Speaking ahead of the meeting, Mr. Jaishankar had said he "expected" the Quad partners to understand and appreciate that India will exercise its right to "defend its people against terrorism".

The four Ministers had held a meeting in Washington after attending the inauguration of U.S. President Donald Trump in January this year. However, this is the first formal Quad FMM since the Trump administration took over. In a significant departure from previous Quad Foreign Ministers' statements, most notably under the previous U.S. administration under Joe Biden, the latest joint statement dropped references to the Russia-Ukraine war and the Israel-Gaza conflict, indicating a more narrow geographical focus than before, with greater emphasis on the Indo-Pacific region.

Without directly naming China, the grouping expressed "serious concerns" over the situation in the East China Sea and South China Sea.

The Quad Ministers said they strongly opposed "any unilateral actions that seek to change the status quo by force or coercion" in the Indo-Pacific.

Iran halts cooperation with nuclear watchdog

Agence France-Presse

TEHRAN

Iran on Wednesday officially suspended its cooperation with the UN nuclear watchdog, a move triggered by the unprecedented Israeli and United States strikes on its nuclear facilities.

Last month's 12-day conflict between Iran and Israel has sharply escalated tensions between Tehran and the International Atomic Energy Agency.

FULL REPORT

» PAGE 14

Special cells to reopen cases of militancy victims in J&K

The Hindu Bureau

SRINAGAR

The Jammu & Kashmir Police on Wednesday started circulating special phone numbers to reopen cases of victims of militancy in the Union Territory and identify the perpetrators currently working in government departments.

According to the J&K Police, dedicated grievance-cum-helpline cells have been set up in Anantnag, Awantipora, Budgam, Baramulla, and Sopore in the Kashmir division. Similar helplines are being set up in the Jammu region with Doda district already establishing one such cell.

The police said affected

The police said affected individuals, or their families, can contact the helpline number

individuals, or their families, can contact the helpline number by voice call, SMS and WhatsApp on all working days between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m.

The move came a day after J&K Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha discussed the cases where the victims were "brutally killed by Pakistan-backed terrorists". He also directed police officials to reopen cases, "file an FIR and ensure jobs are provided to next of



Pilgrims' progress: Devotees arrive at Baltal base camp in Ganderbal, Jammu and Kashmir on Wednesday ahead of the Amarnath Yatra starting Thursday. IMRAN NISSAR

Kashmir opens arms to first batch of Amarnath pilgrims amid tight security

Peerzada Ashiq

SRINAGAR

The first batch of around 5,485 pilgrims undertaking the annual Amarnath Yatra reached the Kashmir Valley on Wednesday under a multi-tier and revamped security arrangement, which included facial-recognition systems and designation of yatra routes as no-fly zones, while local people extended a warm welcome.

The annual pilgrimage will officially kick off from Thursday.

The first batch arrived in 299 vehicles at the base camps of Baltal in central Kashmir's Ganderbal district and Nunwan in south

Kashmir's Anantnag, for acclimatisation ahead of the pilgrimage, which requires trekking to an altitude of over 14,000 feet.

Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant-Governor Manoj Sinha, who flagged off the first batch of devotees from the Bhagwati Nagar Base Camp in Jammu, said: "The administration, people of J&K, the Shri Amarnath Shrine Board, J&K Police, and security forces have made elaborate arrangements for the pilgrims. Undeterred by terror incidents, devotees of Bhole Baba [Lord Shiva] are arriving in huge numbers, demonstrating their immense faith. I hope that this year's yatra will be even more his-

toric than previous years." The unprecedented security cover comes in the wake of the Pahalgam attack that left 26 civilians dead in the Baisaran meadow, which falls near the traditional Nunwan-Chandanwari yatra route in Anantnag.

"Pilgrims were greeted with flowers. Let us walk together in the spirit of peace and brotherhood. We will not allow those who intend to disturb Kashmir to win," Mushtaq Pahalgami, who heads the civil society group Pahalgam Alliance, said.

To deter "any iminical elements from entering the yatra route", officials said

facial recognition systems have been set up at the entry point of Pahalgam. The systems are connected to a database of militants and their alleged supporters in the Valley.

Also, the twin routes of the yatra – Pahalgam-Chandanwari-Pissu Top-Sheshnag-Panchtarini-Holy Cave and the Baltal-Domail-Barari-Holy Cave – were designated as no-fly zones.

Enthusiastic devotees expressed satisfaction over the security measures put in place for the yatra. J&K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah extended his "heartfelt wishes to all devotees embarking on the sacred journey".

The police said affected

kin on priority".

The Lieutenant-Governor also directed the Deputy Commissioners and Senior Superintendents of Police to take immediate measures to free properties of the families of terror victims and land grabbed by terrorists or their sympathisers. "Identify those elements from the terror ecosystem who were involved in killing of common Kashmiris and currently working in government departments. Financial assistance under MUDRA and handholding must be extended to the terror victim family members who want to start their self-employment venture."

IN BRIEF



Mohali court extends remand of Majithia by four days

A Mohali court on Wednesday extended by four days the vigilance custody remand of Shiromani Akali Dal leader Bikram Singh Majithia, who was arrested in a disproportionate assets case. Majithia was produced before the court amid tight security after his seven-day vigilance remand ended on Wednesday. Public prosecutor Ferry Sofat told the media that the court extended Mr. Majithia's remand by four more days after the Vigilance Bureau filed an application. The Punjab Vigilance Bureau arrested Mr. Majithia on June 25 in connection with allegedly laundering of ₹540 crore of "drug money". On June 26, Mr. Majithia was remanded to seven days of vigilance custody. PTI

NHRC notice to Odisha govt. over assault of two persons

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on Wednesday said it had issued notices to the Odisha government and the State's police chief over reports that two people belonging to the Scheduled Caste were allegedly beaten up, forced to eat grass, and drink drain water on suspicion of illegal cattle smuggling in Ganjam district. Their mobile phones were reportedly snatched and their heads were also forcibly tonsured by the people belonging to another community, it said. The NHRC has taken "suo motu cognisance of a media report revealing that two persons were beaten up, forced to eat grass and drink drain water, on suspicion of illegally smuggling cattle by people belonging to other community on June 26," it said in a statement. PTI

Phone tapping cannot be allowed for crime detection, says HC, rejecting MHA plea

Indian Telegraph Act of 1885 sets out the *Lakshman Rekha* for resorting to phone tapping and the role of the court is confined to see whether it is crossed or not, says Justice N. Anand Venkatesh

Mohamed Imranullah S.
CHENNAI

The Madras High Court on Wednesday refused to expand the scope of Section 5(2) of the Indian Telegraph Act of 1885, and permit the Central and State governments to resort to phone tapping as a covert measure to detect crimes.

Justice N. Anand Venkatesh rejected such a request made on behalf of the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). "This court is unable to accept this submission since the boundaries for invasion of a fundamental right through the medium of enacted law is a function of the legislature and not of the court," he said. Section 5(2) sets out the *Lakshman Rekha* for resorting to the extreme measure of phone tapping, which amounts to invasion of the right to privacy, a right that had been recognised as an integral part of the fundamental right to life and personal liberty guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution, the judge said.

Two contingencies
As per Section 5(2), the Centre or the State governments could authorise



However noble and well-intended the objective may be, the tapping of phones in this instance cannot be justified, says judge. REUTERS

phone tapping only in case of two contingencies: on the occurrence of any public emergency, or in the interest of public safety. "The role of the court is confined to seeing as to whether this threshold is crossed or not," the judge said.

Declining to expand the scope of the legal provision any further, he said: "As sentinels on the *qui vive*, the courts are gate-keepers of fundamental rights. Gate-keepers cannot become gate-makers to reposition the gates as and when the executive requires, without the intervention of the legislature."

Tracing the history of the right to privacy since 1604, the judge said it finally came to be recognised as

stipulated in Section 5(2) of the Act, cannot be legally justified as the law presently stands," the judge said, while allowing a 2018 writ petition.

P. Kishore of Chennai-based Everonn Education Limited had filed the petition to quash an authorisation issued by the Union Home Secretary on August 12, 2011, for the CBI to intercept his phone calls. The intercepted calls led to the arrest of Additional Commissioner of Income Tax Andasus Ravinder for allegedly receiving a bribe of ₹50 lakh.

Holding that there was absolutely no question of 'public emergency' or 'public safety' in the present case, requiring the tapping of the petitioner's phone, the judge ordered that the intercepted calls should not be used for any purpose, not even as evidence in the criminal trial against the petitioner.

Justice Venkatesh held the Home Secretary's order to be unconstitutional, since it had been passed in violation of Section 5(2) of the 1885 Act. Further, the procedural requirement of placing the Secretary's authorisation before the review committee had not been followed, he said.



Tamil Nadu Minister K.R. Periyakaruppan handing over the job appointment order to Ajith Kumar's brother Naveen Kumar.

T.N. custodial death: victim's brother given government job

The Hindu Bureau
SIVAGANGA

Acting on Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin's orders, Minister for Co-operation K.R. Periyakaruppan and Sivaganga Collector K. Porkodi handed over a job appointment order and a *patta* (bond) to B. Naveen Kumar, 27, the brother of Sivaganga custodial death victim B. Ajith Kumar, at his house in Madapuram on Wednesday.

Mr. Stalin on Tuesday spoke with the family over the phone and assured them of assistance. The appointment order for the post of technician at the Sivaganga District Co-operative Milk Producers' Union, Karaikudi, was handed over to Mr. Naveen Kumar. Besides, the bond for three cents of land at Theli revenue village was given to the family.

Mr. Periyakaruppan also handed over a ₹5 lakh a cheque to the family. The cheque was given to Ajith Kumar's mother on behalf of the DMK. Manamadurai MLA A. Tamilarasi Ravikumar was also present on the occasion.

Ajith Kumar, a security guard at Bathrakaliamman temple in Madapuram village, was taken into police custody last week, after a woman lodged a complaint that gold jewellery and cash were missing from her car when she returned after *darshan*. Ajith Kumar had helped her park the vehicle, police sources said. He was reportedly tortured, and died in police custody.

The appointment order for the post of technician at the Sivaganga District Co-operative Milk Producers' Union, Karaikudi, was handed over to Mr. Naveen Kumar. Besides, the bond for three cents of land at Theli revenue village was given to the family.

On Tuesday, the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court, directed the Fourth Additional District Judge, Madurai, S. John Sunderlal Suresh, to conduct a thorough inquiry into the case and submit a report on July 8.

Maharashtra Opposition stage walkout over plight of farmers

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

Opposition legislators staged a walkout from the Maharashtra Assembly on Wednesday, raising concerns over the deepening agrarian crisis, including alleged irregularities in soybean procurement, non-payment of dues, and rising farmer suicides.

Congress leader Vijay Wadettiwar led the charge, highlighting the plight of soybean farmers who have not received payments under the Minimum Support Price (MSP) scheme. "Anandata has been betrayed," he said, accusing the government of making false promises and delaying rightful payments.

Mr. Wadettiwar said that in just the past three months, 767 farmers have died by suicide, with 200 cases declared ineligible for compensation and inquiries still pending in 194 cases. He moved an ad-



Vijay Wadettiwar accused the government of making false promises and delaying rightful payments to farmers. FILE PHOTO

journey motion seeking a detailed discussion on the matter.

Cooperation and Marketing Minister Jaykumar Rawal claimed soybean procurement was conducted on a record scale across 562 centres, involving more than 51,000 farmers.

The Minister assured the House that efforts were ongoing to ensure affected farmers receive their dues.

Dissatisfied with the government's response and the rejection of the adjournment motion, Opposition members staged a walkout from the House.

U.P. school merger plan anti-poor, should be dropped: Mayawati

Mayank Kumar
LUCKNOW

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) president Mayawati on Wednesday described the Uttar Pradesh government's plan to merge or consolidate primary schools with low student enrolment as "anti-poor and unfair", saying that it will "deprive" crores of children from economically weaker backgrounds of accessible and affordable education near their homes.

"The decision taken by the Basic Education Council to close down many schools under the guise of pairing or integration of primary schools appears unfair, unnecessary and anti-poor at first glance. It is an appeal to the government to immediately withdraw this decision in the larger interest of the poor students," wrote Ms. Maya-

U.P. govt. is planning to merge schools having enrolment of less than 50 students, with nearby school

wati, on X.

The U.P. government is planning to merge schools having enrolment of less than 50 students, with nearby educational facilities to make the education system "more functional and viable". As a part of the consolidation plan, students from these schools will be accommodated in nearby facilities to ensure their continued education.

'Will withdraw it'

The former four-time U.P. CM said if the school merger plan is implemented, she will withdraw it and bring in the old system whenever her party forms the government.

Odisha civil servants plan mass leave after attack on colleague

Satyasundar Barik
BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha Administrative Service Association (OASA), the largest body of State-level civil servants, has announced a mass leave protest, demanding the immediate arrest of Bharatiya Janata Party leader Jagannath Pradhan, who allegedly orchestrated a violent assault on a senior bureaucrat.

The protest comes in the wake of the brutal attack on Ratnakar Sahoo, Additional Commissioner of the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation, who was dragged from his office and beaten by BJP workers.

The OASA condemned the incident and issued an ultimatum, declaring their demand for Mr. Pradhan's arrest as "urgent and non-negotiable."

"This heinous act is a stark reminder of the risks and vulnerabilities faced by our members in the line

of duty. It is not just an assault on an individual, but a direct attack on the dignity and sanctity of public service in the State," said OASA president Jyoti Ranjan Mishra.

Dangerous precedent
The association warned that unless swift and strong action is taken, such incidents could set a "dangerous precedent" and further endanger the lives and dignity of officers working under difficult circumstances with limited protection. They also demanded increased security for all field-level executive officers.

"All officers will remain on leave until the demands are met," the OASA said. A delegation of officers met Chief Secretary Manoj Ahuja to express their resentment and is expected to meet Chief Minister Mohan Majhi to seek assurances on action against the accused.

The assault has drawn condemnation. Former Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, without naming Pradhan, urged CM Majhi to take action against the BJP leader. Mr. Pradhan who narrowly lost the 2024 Assembly election met senior BJP leaders at the party office for over two hours on Wednesday. "Party president Manmohan Samal summoned me. I have discussed the matter with him. Now I am going home," he said after the meeting.

While earlier speculation suggested that Mr. Pradhan might surrender to the police, his meeting has fueled perceptions that the BJP is backing him.

Hathras stampede: one year on, families mourn as trials continue

Press Trust of India
HATHRAS

One year after the Hathras stampede that claimed 121 lives, families of the victims continue to grapple with grief as the legal battle drags on.

"If Baba really had any powers, he would have shown a miracle that day," says Vinod, who lost three generations of his family – his mother, wife, and daughter – in the deadly stampede during a religious gathering on July 2, 2024.

Vinod, 46, runs a shop in Sokhana village of Uttar Pradesh's Hathras district and cares for his three sur-



Grief-stricken: Relatives mourn the death of stampede victims in Daunkevi village in Hathras. FILE PHOTO

viving children. But the sorrow weighs heavily. "Kuch nahi, bas mitti kharab ho rahi hai (There's nothing left, just my life crumpling)," he says.

The tragedy occurred when over 2.5 lakh followers gathered for a *satsang* by self-styled godman Surya Pal, also known as Bhole Baba, in Mughal Gar-

hi village. Although permission had been granted for 80,000 people, the turnout far exceeded expectations. After the event, chaos erupted as devotees rushed toward Bhole Baba's vehicle, reportedly to touch his feet and the ground he walked on. Among them were Vinod's mother Jaywati, wife Rajkumari, and daughter Bhoomi.

Justice elusive

Jugnu from Navipur, who lost his mother Munni Devi, says the trauma haunts him daily. "She did not deserve to die like that." Investigations revealed glaring lapses in planning and

crowd control. Exit routes were inadequate, and no effective security arrangements were in place.

"I miss her every day," says Rekha from Sokhana village, who lost her mother-in-law, Naina Devi from Navipur echoes the sentiment, breaking down as she recalls her own loss. A year later, the pain remains fresh. Court proceedings continue in Hathras' Additional Sessions Court-1, but for the bereaved, justice still seems out of reach. Although Bhole Baba was questioned once by a judicial panel in Lucknow, he was not named as an accused. Police instead filed charges

against 11 of his aides, including event organiser Devprakash Madhukar. All are currently out on bail.

The judicial commission, which submitted its report on February 21, 2025, gave Bhole Baba a clean chit, citing a lack of direct evidence linking him to the incident. Senior Supreme Court advocate A.P. Singh, representing Baba's followers, called the tragedy a conspiracy. "The police hurriedly filed a false chargesheet," he claimed, noting that 31 hearings have been held so far, with the next scheduled for July 19. Four judges have presided over the case during its course.

Goa govt. combines two schemes, widows to get ₹4,000 monthly

Press Trust of India
PANAJI

The Goa government on Wednesday said widows with children under the age of 21 in the State will get a financial assistance of ₹4,000 per month as it has brought under one roof two different women-centric schemes.

Mr. Desai said now both these women-centric schemes have been "brought under the social welfare department" and the widows will get ₹4,000 per month.

SC directs A.P. govt. to file inquiry report in illegal mining case

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI



The Bench directed the State to submit the inquiry report in a sealed cover.

Vigilance and Enforcement Department. The illegal activities allegedly took place between 2019 and 2024 across Gannavaram, Bapulapadu, and Vijayawada Rural mandals.

The State submitted that Mr. Mohan, during his tenure as MLA, had misused his office and conspired with associates to orchestrate a sophisticated racket involving the fraudulent procurement and misuse of temporary mining permits.

The petition claimed that mining permits were obtained using forged documents of unsuspecting civilians who had been misled into submitting their identity proofs under the pretext of enrollment in government welfare schemes.

"The total wrongful loss to the public exchequer due to these fraudulent mining activities has been calculated to be ₹195.04 crore," the State's petition noted.

The Bench agreed to hear the State's petition in detail on July 17.

Senior advocate Siddharth Luthra, appearing for the State, submitted that the government had not been granted a proper opportunity to present its case. He said Mr. Mohan was the "kingpin" of a "large-scale mining scam" and that his custodial interrogation was necessary, citing allegations that he had threatened witnesses.

When Justice Sundresh observed that the complainant appeared "bare-bones" and lacked material particulars, Mr. Luthra responded that the inquiry report prepared by the State's Vigilance and Enforcement Department was exhaustive. The Bench then directed the State to place the report on record in a sealed cover.

According to the State's petition, the large-scale illegal mining scam was uncovered through a comprehensive inquiry by the

Siddaramaiah asserts he will be CM for full five-year term

Statement comes a day after AIIC chief Kharge's remark that the party high command will take a call on change of guard; Shivakumar says he will 'stand by and support the Chief Minister'

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Amid claims by a few Congress MLAs that Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister and KPPC chief D.K. Shivakumar will be at the helm of the government later this year, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah firmly asserted on Wednesday that he will serve his full five-year term.

The statement, apparently aimed at asserting himself and garnering the support of party MLAs, comes after AIIC chief Mallikarjun Kharge's remark that the party high command will take a call



Leadership talk: Chief Minister Siddaramaiah with his deputy D.K. Shivakumar at Nandi Hills on Wednesday. K MURALIKUMAR

on the change of guard in the State government. On the other hand, AIIC general secretary-in-charge of Karnataka Rajdeep Surjewala, on Tuesday, said that talks on change of guard

was not on the agenda.

In response to a question by reporters whether he will be the Chief Minister for five years, Mr. Siddaramaiah shot back, "Yes, I will be. Why do you have

the doubt?"

Meanwhile, Mr. Shivakumar, knowing well that he cannot become the Chief Minister by challenging the authority of Mr. Siddaramaiah, made a measured statement and said he has "no objection" and that he will "stand by and support the Chief Minister". Mr. Shivakumar, who is nursing the ambition of becoming the Chief Minister is largely banking on the support of the party high command.

Mr. Shivakumar responded to Mr. Siddaramaiah's assertion, "What option do I have? I have to stand by him, support him".

Devotee booked for making 'false claims' on laddu prasadam

The Hindu Bureau
NANDYAL

The Srisailam police have registered a case against a devotee from Kavali for his alleged false claims of finding a cockroach in the laddu prasadam given at the Sri Bhramaramba Mallikarjuna Swamy temple at Srisailam.

On June 29, the devotee, K. Saran Chandra, and his friends picked up an argument with the staff, alleg-

ing they found a cockroach in the prasadam they purchased from the counter.

An inquiry by the temple officials revealed that the devotee had intentionally placed a locust in the laddu and made false claims that he found a cockroach in it.

"We have received a complaint from the temple authorities and have a registered case," Srisailam circle inspector G. Prasada Rao said.

Karnataka HC allows CBI to expand probe into Valmiki scam

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The High Court of Karnataka has permitted the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to investigate the allegation of diversion of funds of the Karnataka German Technical Training Institute (KGTTI) by allowing the agency to expand the scope of the probe into the existing fraud case involving misappropriation of over ₹89 crore of the State

run Karnataka Maharshi Valmiki Scheduled Tribes Development Corporation Ltd through the account maintained in the Union Bank of India (UBI).

Meanwhile, the court also directed the Special Investigation Team (SIT) and the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to hand over evidence seized by them in the case.

Justice M. Nagaprashanna passed the interim order on July 1.



Novel initiative: Essential commodities being delivered at the doorstep in Velachery on Wednesday. B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

T.N. govt. begins trial for door delivery of essential commodities

Deepa H. Ramakrishnan
T. Ramakrishnan
CHENNAI

73-year-old R. Rajeswari, a senior citizen residing in Velachery of Chennai, was spared a walk to the fair price shop as a truck brought the essential commodities to her street on Wednesday afternoon.

The initiative is part of a pilot project by the Tamil Nadu government to provide essential commodities to beneficiaries of the public distribution system (PDS).

A total of 10 vehicles attached to as many shops in south Chennai went to the residences of senior citizens and persons with disabilities (PWDs) on Tuesday. A shopkeeper was travelling on each of these trucks with the commodities, a weighing machine and a palm reader.

A.N. Valli, another senior citizen who benefited from the initiative, said she was told that the mobile shop would visit her locality the following day, too. "Even though the shop I normally visit is only two

streets away from my residence, this arrangement of door-delivery will be very convenient for me and other senior citizens. I appeal to the government to continue the measure," Ms. Valli said.

The mobile shops are expected to cover parts of north Chennai on Thursday.

Further course

"The idea is to ensure that those aged 70 or above, PWDs, and persons in need get essential commodities at their doorstep," a top government official said, pointing out that it was the State government's own initiative. Around 5,000 beneficiaries are likely to be covered during the ongoing drive.

Apart from Chennai, the pilot project covers Cuddalore, Ranipet, Tirunelveli, Erode, Sivaganga, Nagapattinam, Dharmapuri, Dindigul, and the Nilgiris.

After assessing the pilot project, the government will take a call on further course of action, the official said.

Hands-on session



Key lessons: Personnel from the National Disaster Response Force train an SDRF team from Telangana on rescuing drowning victims, in Vijayawada on Wednesday. K.V.S. GIRI

Telangana blast: 37 bodies recovered, search continues

Naveen Kumar
HYDERABAD

The body of one more worker was recovered at the Sigachi Industries blast site on Wednesday afternoon, taking the number of recovered bodies to 37. The company informed the National Stock Exchange (NSE) that 40 of its workers were killed in the explosion at its Pashamylaram facility.

Srinivas Reddy, superintendent of the Patancheru government hospital – which is handling the autopsies – confirmed that they had been informed about the latest recovery. "The total number of bodies brought in from the blast site stands at 37 as of Wednesday afternoon," the superintendent said.

Two days after the de-



Blood sample collected from family member of a worker for DNA test to identify charred human remains.

vastating blast that tore through the Pharma manufacturing unit, the site remains sealed off, with combing and search operations still in progress.

Families of the workers still missing or unidentified waited outside, some clutching photographs, others simply hoping for a

word. A makeshift tent was set up half a kilometre away to collect DNA samples from relatives in an effort to identify human remains charred beyond recognition.

As of 8.30 p.m. on Wednesday, of the 143 individuals reported to have been working at the site during the incident, 60 have been traced and confirmed safe, though some sustained injuries. A total of 35 persons are currently undergoing treatment for various injuries. Eighteen deceased individuals have been identified. Ten individuals are still reported missing.

Teams from the State Disaster Response Force (SRDF), the Fire department, and Sangareddy police are leading the recovery efforts.

Kerala Tourism hopes to cash in as grounded U.K. fighter sparks curiosity on social media

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM



tense media interest, a social media post shared by Kerala Tourism on X (formerly Twitter) on Wednesday says: "Kerala is a destination that you will never want to leave," against the background of a picture of the grounded F-35B.

Netizens were quick to lap it up with a flood of trolls on social media plat-

forms. One post said: "The grounded jet now refuses to start without coconut oil."

Another post advises the U.S.-based Lockheed Martin, which manufactures the F-35B, to "never let your jets get near Kerala." The post was apparently mentioning the damage happened to the reputation of the globally acclaimed jet manufacturer in the U.S.

This is not the first time that Kerala Tourism has leveraged the popularity of headline-grabbing incidents or people for brand building.

In 2023, a day after celebrated Hollywood pair

Zendaya and Tom Holland visited Mumbai, their fans in Kerala were left baffled when a photo of the couple enjoying a trip in Munar was posted by Kerala Tourism on its social media platform. Kerala Tourism added the caption "Guess who we spotted far away from home?" with the photograph. However, netizens were quick to spot that the Hollywood stars did not visit Munar, but the photo was from Boston in the U.S., taken a year ago.

According to statistics, the U.K. and the U.S. consistently rank as the top two countries for foreign tourist arrivals in Kerala.

Techie allegedly films women colleagues in washroom, arrested

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The Electronics City police on Wednesday arrested a 30-year-old software engineer for allegedly filming his women colleagues in the Infosys campus washroom on Monday.

Based on a complaint, the police arrested Swapnil Nagesh, a technical analyst, charging him under Section 66e (violation of privacy through capturing, publishing, or transmitting of images of a private area of a person without their consent) and Section 77 (offense of voyeurism).

The incident came to light when the victim, working as a technical test lead at Infosys, went to use the washroom on June 30. While waiting to use the washroom, she saw a girl coming out of a cubicle and caught a man's reflection in the mirror, filming from the adjacent washroom. She allegedly caught him red-handed trying to record her too on his mobile phone.

Following the arrest, Infosys released a statement assuring a zero-tolerance policy and extending full support to the investigation.

Janaki title row: Kerala HC to watch film on July 5

The Hindu Bureau
KOCHI

The Kerala High Court is set to watch the Malayalam film JSK - Janaki Vs State of Kerala starring Union Minister Suresh Gopi, for which the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) has not issued censor certificate yet, on Saturday. The court said on Wednesday that it would first watch the movie before passing any orders.

Justice N. Nagareesh will watch the movie at 10 a.m. at Lal Media, Palarivattom. The production company Cosmos Entertainments, which is the petitioner, had requested that the court watch the film.

The court had on Monday termed the CBFC's revising committee seeking a change of the name 'Janaki' in the title and of the protagonist "a challenge to the freedom of creative expression."

Justifying the demand for the change of name, the board's counsel had contended that the character Janaki in the film is sexually assaulted.

To this, the counsel for the petitioner argued that the character Janaki who is portrayed in the film is "a fighter for justice." He said the CBFC had not cited any problem with 'Janaki' in the title earlier this year when its trailer was released.

The court observed that "the character is a victim who is fighting for justice, and is not an accused. Moreover, In India, a good share of names are either of gods and goddesses or have similarities with their names."

The case has been posted for hearing on July 8.

Capitalising on the popularity of Hollywood stars Tom Holland and Zendaya, co-stars of Spider-Man movies, Kerala Tourism is now making headlines, thanks to the popularity of an F-35B fighter jet of the Royal Air Force (RAF) of the United Kingdom.

The fighter jet that made an emergency landing at the Thiruvananthapuram international airport on the night of June 14 remains grounded, generating much hype and speculation on online platforms.

Capitalising on the in-

Monsoon session from July 21 to August 21

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The government on Wednesday said the Monsoon session of Parliament will begin on July 21 and continue till August 21, a week longer than planned earlier, signalling a heavy legislative agenda.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said President Droupadi Murmu had approved the government's proposal to convene the session from July 21 to August 21.

"In view of Independence Day celebrations, there will be no sittings on the 13th and 14th of August," Mr. Rijiju said in a post on X.

Earlier, the session was to conclude on August 12, but now it has been extended by a week.

The longer duration of the session comes amid the government's plans to bring in key legislations, including one to facilitate the entry of the private sector in the atomic energy domain. The government is planning to amend the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act and the Atomic Energy Act to implement the announcement in the Union Budget to open up the nuclear sector for private players.

SC lets real estate developer to swap attached property

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI



The order came on a petition filed by property developer M3M India Pvt. Ltd.

tion to be ₹317 crore.

The Central agency had agreed to the substitution with certain riders, including that the property offered for substitution in place of the attached asset must have a 'no encumbrance certificate' to establish clear and marketable title along with the petitioner's (M3M) undisputed ownership.

The company must disclose the source of acquisition of the assets.

Further, the court directed the petitioner to provide a notarised undertaking that the substituted property will not be sold, transferred or alienated in any manner. The Bench directed the submission of the original title documents of the substituted property.

The ED had engaged the services of a valuator and assessed the total fair market value of commercial units offered for substitu-

SC to hear Uddhav's petition on July 14 to use 'Shiv Sena' name, symbol for local polls

Maharashtra Deputy CM Eknath Shinde and his group must be restrained from using party name, the reserved symbol and party flag, says Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray's counsel

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI



Uddhav Thackeray had challenged the poll body's decision to allot the party name to Eknath Shinde's faction in 2023. FILE PHOTO

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Uddhav Thackeray asked the Supreme Court on Wednesday to urgently hear an application to let his faction use the party name 'Shiv Sena' with its reserved symbol of 'bow and arrow' and the 'saffron flag with two horizontal conical ends' with the emblem of 'roaring tiger' for the forthcoming Maharashtra local body elections.

Making an urgent oral mentioning before a Vacation Bench of Justices M.M. Sundresh and Vinod Chandra, senior advocate Devadatt Kamat, for Mr. Thackeray, said Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and his group must be restrained from using the party name, the reserved symbol and the flag with the emblem.

'Pious' markings
Mr. Kamat submitted that voters in the State consider

these emblems as the "pious" markings of the 'original Shiv Sena' party.

"The symbols 'bow and arrow', 'saffron-coloured flag' and the 'roaring tiger' are the very identity of the original Shiv Sena party from 1985... Shiv Sena in its original form has been consistently elected by voters," the application by Mr. Thackeray said.

After Mr. Shinde and a group of his loyalists broke away from the undivided party then led by Mr. Thackeray, the Election Commission of India (EC) had ruled in his favour and

Mr. Kamat even suggested an alternative.

He referred to how the top court had intervened in the case of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), by allowing the breakaway faction of Ajit Pawar to use the party's original 'clock' symbol, provided that they issued a public notice.

The notice, widely circulated in the media, must clarify that the dispute over the EC's allocation of the symbol to Mr. Ajit Pawar was still *sub judice* in the Supreme Court.

The senior counsel said the court could come up with an identical order in the case of the Shiv Sena too for the local body elections.

Mr. Thackeray had challenged the EC's decision and the case has been pending in the top court for two years.

On Wednesday, Mr. Thackeray's application urged the top court to direct the EC to allot a different party name and symbol to Mr. Shinde's group for the upcoming elections to 27 municipal corporations, 232 municipal councils and 125 naga panchayats in Maharashtra.

The top court had declined to entertain a similar request from Mr. Thackeray's camp earlier on May 7, he countered.

The Vacation Bench listed the case for July 14.

Khalistani separatist's kin in U.K. seek inquest

The Hindu Bureau
LONDON

The family of Avtar Singh Khanda, a Khalistani separatist who died of acute leukaemia in June 2023, has repeated its request for an inquest into the death, according to a report in *The Guardian*. He had been accused of being part of the protests outside the Indian High Commission in March 2023. Mr. Khanda had applied for asylum in the U.K. in 2016.

The Guardian report said that Michael Polak, a lawyer for the deceased's family, had written to West Midlands coroner Louise Hunt, saying samples were not tested for "nerve agents, biological agents or nuclear agents", which could have induced an aggressive form of cancer.

Mr. Polak had included in his letter a copy of the report from a forensic pathologist hired by lawyers for the Khanda family, which had said that while the initial toxicology reports did not reveal anything unusual, it could not rule out poisoning, especially by means of "exotic substances".

Friends and family of Mr. Khanda deny he was part of the March 2023 protests.

Toll rises to 11 in Mandi district as rain, flash floods leave Himachal Pradesh battered

The Hindu Bureau
CHANDIGARH

At least 11 people have died in separate incidents of cloudburst and flash floods triggered by a heavy spell of rain in Mandi district of Himachal Pradesh between the intervening night of Monday and Tuesday, even as the rescue and search operations continued on a war footing. At least 40 people are missing across the State in which 34 are in Mandi district alone, which has been among the worst hit, a government report said.

The relentless monsoon has brought the hill State to its knees as several rivers and rivulets are in spate, disrupting normal life, with as many as 16 incidents of cloudburst, three flash floods and one major



Nature's fury: A view of the cloudburst-affected areas of Seraj Valley, in Mandi on Wednesday. ANI

landslide having occurred across the State.

Since June 20, following the onset of the monsoon in Himachal Pradesh, at

least 28 people have lost their lives in rain-related incidents, which include flash floods, cloudbursts, drowning, and electrocution,

till Wednesday, according to the State's emergency response centre.

Mandi, Chamba, Hamirpur, Kinnaur, Kullu, and

Shimla districts have been badly affected. Considerable damage to life and property has been reported from these places. The rains have damaged several roads, including national and State highways, bridges, vehicles, and various kinds of buildings, causing losses of crores of rupees.

Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu visited the disaster-hit Syathi village in Mandi, where he met and interacted with families, assuring them that the government would extend all possible assistance.

"There is a need to do an in-depth study to ascertain the reasons for landslides even at places having solid strata. Never before have there been 8-10 cloudbursts in a single night," Mr. Sukhu told presspersons.

The accident took place

3 killed, 18 injured as truck carrying Kanwar Yatra pilgrims falls into gorge

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

A truck ferrying *kanwariyas* (pilgrims who undertake Kanwar Yatra) overturned in Tehri district of Uttarakhand on Wednesday, leaving three dead and 18 injured.

A group of over 60 *kanwariyas*, from Bulandshahr district of Uttar Pradesh, were going towards Uttarkashi district to set up a Kanwar camp near Gangotri and Yamunotri temples, said police.

They were travelling in three trucks, which were moving behind each other. One of the trucks, in which some 21 people were travelling, turned turtle.

They managed to save a four-year-old child trapped in the front part of the truck while three pilgrims

in the afternoon, and the police, State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), along with health teams, were rushed to the spot immediately.

They managed to save a four-year-old child trapped in the front part of the truck while three pilgrims

– Vicky, Sunil Saini and Sanja – were declared dead at the hospital.

Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami condoled the deaths of the pilgrims and instructed the Tehri District Magistrate to provide all possible help to the injured *kanwariyas*.

Congress leaders involved in fake transactions in *National Herald* case, ED tells court

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Wednesday submitted in a Delhi court that the Congress wanted to usurp around ₹2,000 crore assets of the now-defunct *National Herald* newspaper.

The Central agency probing a money laundering case in the matter added that several Congress leaders were involved in 'fake transactions' made to Associated Journals Limited (AJL), the publisher of the paper. The submissions were made in the court of Special Judge Vishal Gogoi of the Rouse Avenue Court who started hearing arguments on cognizance of the ED's prosecution complaint in the case in which Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha

Agency says party leaders were looking to usurp assets worth ₹2,000 crore of the newspaper

owned by the AJL were provided by the Union government and various State governments for newspaper printing and publishing after Independence.

The ED's counsel also submitted that close associates of the Gandhi family were appointed as directors of AJL and they had done 'fake transactions' to funnel money.

The agency had filed the prosecution complaint in the matter on April 15. The hearing will continue on Thursday as well.

The case stems from the assignment of a ₹90 crore loan advanced by the Congress to AJL, to Young Indian for a consideration of ₹50 lakh. It has been alleged that there was misappropriation of assets of over ₹2,000 crore in an equity transaction.

PDP asks why J&K still has no Advocate General

The Hindu Bureau
SRINAGAR

The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) on Wednesday raised concern over the "failure" of the elected government in Jammu and Kashmir to appoint an Advocate General for the Union Territory, nine months after assuming office.

"Nine months into an elected government, J&K still has no Advocate General. At a time when critical constitutional matters stemming from August 5 are in courts, this vacuum is deliberate," PDP leader and MLA from Pulwama Waheed-ur-Rehman Parra said.

In several instances, courts in J&K have remarked "it would be essential to hear the learned Advocate General" to adjudicate upon key matters pending before them.

Kolkata Police transfer law college gang rape case from SIT to Detective Department

Moyurie Som
KOLKATA

The Detective Department of the Kolkata Police is set to take over the investigation into the South Calcutta Law College rape case, a high-ranking police official said.

Earlier, a nine-member

Special Investigation Team (SIT) was probing the case.

New sections added

Additionally, the Kolkata Police have added new sections of law to the case, including those of kidnapping, causing grievous hurt with a dangerous weapon, and criminal intimidation.

The victim, a student of the college, was allegedly gang-raped in the guard room on the campus on June 25. A former student, Monojit Mishra, two students of the college, Pramit

Mukherjee, and Zaib Ahmed, and a guard on duty, Pinaki Banerjee, were arrested by the police in the case.

A first information report (FIR) was filed on charges of gang rape and wrongful confinement against the three key accused. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) carried out protest marches in Kolkata on Wednesday against the incident. Protest rallies were also held by the Students Federation of India.

Court allows pipeline in 'protected coastal zone'

Purnima Sah
MUMBAI

The Bombay High Court has allowed Reliance Industries Limited to proceed with laying its proposed ethylene dichloride and effluent pipelines through areas classified as Coastal Regulation Zone-IA (CRZ-IA) in Maharashtra, subject to strict compliance with environmental conditions and court-mandated safeguards.

A Division Bench of Chief Justice Alok Aradhe and Justice Sandeep V. Mariné passed the judgement on July 1, 2025, while disposing of three writ petitions filed by Reliance seeking permission to execute its proposed ethylene dichloride pipeline project. The judges observed that "the project in question is a public utility project".



BJP members march in a protest rally in Kolkata on Wednesday demanding accountability for the crime. DEBASISH BHADURI

of Police Manoj Kumar Verma had said that a "lot of evidence had been collected and is currently being analysed".

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) carried out protest marches in Kolkata on Wednesday against the incident. Protest rallies were also held by the Students Federation of India.

Bihar electoral roll revision will affect two crore voters: INDIA bloc leaders

Leaders from 11 Opposition parties meet EC to convey their objections regarding the exercise ahead of the Bihar Assembly election; Singhvi says delegation raised concerns about the necessity, timing, and feasibility of the revision exercise; he also questions why Aadhaar has been abandoned

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls currently under way in Bihar could disenfranchise at least two crore voters in the State, especially the migrant population, a delegation of leaders from the Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance said on Wednesday.

The comments came after a nearly three-hour-long meeting with the Election Commission.

Twenty leaders from 11 INDIA bloc parties met the poll body to convey their objections regarding the SIR exercise ahead of the Bihar Assembly election. Drawing a parallel with the 2016 demonetisation exercise, which was colloquially referred to as *notebandi*, the Opposition termed the revision “*votebandi*”.



Raising concerns: Congress MP Abhishek Manu Singhvi and other leaders of the INDIA bloc addressing the media after meeting the Election Commission officials in New Delhi on Wednesday. PTI

Citing the EC's own estimate that at least 20% of Bihar's population comprises migrant workers, they expressed fears that such individuals could be arbitrarily removed from the rolls.

Speaking at a press conference after the meeting, Congress leader and senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi said the delegation raised three primary concerns: the necessity, timing, and feasibility of the

revision exercise. “Firstly, we asked if the last revision was in 2003, for 22 years, four or five Bihar Assembly polls have happened – were all those elections faulty and imperfect?” Mr. Singhvi said. He

also asked if the EC had “jettisoned and abandoned” the Aadhaar card, which has previously been used to confirm voter identities. He raised concerns over the lack of transparency, noting that parties were not informed in advance about the revision. “The EC seems completely disinclined to consider our submissions,” he said.

Mr. Singhvi also ques-

tions why the EC had “jettisoned and abandoned” the Aadhaar card, which has previously been used to confirm voter identities. He raised concerns over the lack of transparency, noting that parties were not informed in advance about the revision. “The EC seems completely disinclined to consider our submissions,” he said.

In contrast, this revision, which affects the second largest electorate in the country with over eight crore voters, is being carried out in just two months,” he said. “We believe that migratory persons, who travel to work, cannot be at the beck and call of the enumerator.”

‘Grave attack’

Mr. Singhvi further stated that “disenfranchisement” is the gravest attack on the Constitution’s basic structure. “We have said that upwards of 2.5 or three crore persons – let us assume the minimum two crore – may be disenfranchised by this exercise. Why choose to do this at the cusp of the elections?” he asked.

Mr. Singhvi also ques-

NDA has broken old image of ‘jungle raj’ in Bihar, says Rajnath

Amit Bhelari
PATNA

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Wednesday launched a scathing attack on the Congress and the Rashtriya Janata Dal, alleging that they sought to remain in power by any means.

He was in Patna to attend the Bihar BJP State Working Committee meeting.

He alleged that the RJD and the Congress would “fuel the politics of division”. “When the Opposition talks about the politics of hatred, we have to answer it with the politics of service. When they talk about pushing Bihar behind, we will show the road map to a bright future. When they engage in the politics of division, we have to talk about connecting people. When they distract the people of Bihar from the real issues, we should talk about educating Bihar,” Mr. Singh said.

He also referred to the previous RJD governments as “jungle raj” and said the BJP was determined to not only retain power, but retake for the historical injustice that Bihar suffered for decades.



Rajnath Singh

Mr. Singh said that under the leadership of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, Bihar had made unprecedented progress and the old image of “jungle raj” had been broken.

Mr. Singh exuded confidence that the National Democratic Alliance would again form the government with two-thirds majority in the election due in October-November.

‘Chirag Paswan can fill gap in Bahujan leadership’

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

In a bid to cast its net wider in the Bihar Assembly election scheduled later this year, Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) is attempting to rebrand itself as a “Bahujan” outfit.

In an interview to *The Hindu*, the party’s Lok Sabha MP and strategist Arun Bharti said that “Chirag Paswan is a Bahujan leader and LJP(RV) is a Bahujan party”.

On June 29, the LJP(RV) hosted a Bahujan Bhim Sankalp Samagam in Nalanda, which is Chief Minister Nitish Kumar’s constituency. This was the first time that the party, formed three-and-a-half years ago after a split in the LJP founded by the late Dalit



Union Minister Chirag Paswan has said that he will contest the Bihar Assembly polls. ANI

and specified that he will pick a non-reserved seat. Mr. Bharti explained, “Chirag Paswan or LJP(RV) is not a political outfit of one caste, creed or community. We speak for one and all.”

Barring two Assembly polls in 2005 (February

and October), the erstwhile LJP never got a double-digit vote share in Bihar since its formation in 2000.

To a question on whether repeated remarks by Mr. Paswan and the party on the need to rise above the caste divide ignored the State’s reality, Mr. Bharti said that fragmentation in the electorate into various groups suits certain parties. “Yes, caste is a truth of the society. But we must also remember that poverty or illness does not differentiate between various castes or religions,” he added.

Asked if Mr. Paswan is a Dalit leader and his party a Dalit outfit, Mr. Bharti said, “We would have been in the past... Right now, Chirag Paswan is a Bahujan

leader and LJP(RV) is a Bahujan party and going ahead it is going to be our endeavour to make this party a national party so that we can raise the voice for caste or class.”

LJP(RV) will hold another round of rallies in south Bihar. The focus on the region is deliberate, said Mr. Bharti. “There are certain regions in Bihar – Shahbad and Magadh – where the NDA did not perform well. For example, in Shahbad, out of 22 seats, the NDA got only two seats (in the last Assembly election). If you are a responsible ally, you have to show strength in the areas where you can make the NDA stronger. We have seen that Chirag Paswan’s presence here brings in greater turnout for the NDA,” he added.

“India imports 80% speciality fertilizers from China. But now they have suddenly stopped supply,” the Congress leader said, shar-

Rahul targets Modi govt. over supply of specialised fertilizers

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Citing news reports that China had stopped the supply of “specialised fertilizers”, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, on Wednesday criticised the Narendra Modi government.

“India is an agrarian country and our farmers are the backbone of the economy. But this backbone is now bending because of foreign dependence,” Mr. Gandhi said in a post on Facebook.

“India imports 80% speciality fertilizers from China. But now they have suddenly stopped supply,” the Congress leader said, shar-



Rahul Gandhi

ing a news report that claimed China had stopped supplying fertilizers, affecting Indian farmers.

China crisis
Farmers were already battling shortages of essential fertilizers, including urea

and diammonium phosphate (DAP), and now they had to deal with the “China crisis” in speciality fertilizers, Mr. Gandhi claimed.

“Prime Minister can get his photo printed on fertilizer sacks while farmers are becoming dependent on ‘Made in China’. There was no preparation despite knowing that these supplies can stop anytime. When there was a need to encourage domestic production, no plan was prepared,” he said.

“Will farmers now become dependent on others even in their own land?” the Congress leader said, adding that farmers were “drowning in losses and frustration”.

Mechanism for ELI scheme to be in place soon, says Mandaviya

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Centre will form a “perfect mechanism” to implement the Employment Linked Incentive (ELI) scheme approved by the Union Cabinet on Tuesday to support employment generation.

Union Labour Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said the new mechanism would be implemented soon and added that the mechanism would be perfect and would function based on the payroll addition in the Employees’ Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO). He said all employers enrolled under the EPFO would be eligible for the scheme.

Mr. Mandaviya said the Centre would learn from the past and make corrections based on the experience in implementing the Production Linked Incentive scheme in 2020. Under the new ELI scheme, first-time employees registered with the EPFO would get one-month EPF wage up to ₹15,000 in two instalments. “Employees with salaries up to ₹1 lakh will be eligible. The first instalment will be payable after six months of service and the second instalment will be payable after 12 months



Mansukh Mandaviya

of service and on completion of a financial literacy programme by the employee,” the Centre said on Tuesday.

Social security net
Mr. Mandaviya said the Centre’s efforts to widen the social security net had paid off and the International Labour Organisation had approved that more than 90 crore Indians had one or the other social security at present. He added that the Union government was trying to sign social security agreements with more countries so that Indians working abroad could also avail themselves of the social security schemes in India.

Trade union Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh welcomed the scheme and said it would help in employment generation.

ELI is a ploy to transfer funds to corporates, says CPI(M)

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Opposing the Employment Linked Incentive (ELI) scheme announced by the Union Cabinet, the Left parties on Wednesday called it yet another attempt to favour the big corporates and demanded that it be withdrawn immediately.

“The ELI scheme is another deceptive scheme of transferring public funds to the corporates veiled in the promise of enhancing job creation, employability and social security to delude the youth,” the CPI(M) Polit Bureau said.

It promotes fragile and precarious jobs, subsidising investment cost, production costs, labour costs and statutory liabilities of both domestic and foreign employers from the public exchequer, it added.

The All India Forward Bloc said it was not the first time that the government was introducing such a scheme. “Earlier, the Production Linked Incentive scheme and the Capital Expenditure Incentive scheme were introduced, both disproportionately benefiting employers,” AIFB general secretary G. Devarajan said.

Top Prada officials to meet Kolhapuri chappal artisans and industry body

Vinaya Deshpande Pandit
KOLHAPUR

The top leadership of Italian luxury fashion house Prada is expected to hold a meeting next week with artisans engaged in the traditional craft of Kolhapuri chappal-making, as well as representatives of the Maharashtra Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture (MACCIA), to explore potential avenues of collaboration, including the possibility of co-branding the iconic footwear.

The meeting, proposed by MACCIA, is aimed at initiating dialogue for the formation of a joint working group comprising Prada representatives, local artisans, and members of the industry body to examine the scope of preserving and promoting the 800-year-old legacy of Kolhapuri chappals through global partnerships.

According to communication received by MACCIA, Prada has proposed a video call meeting on either July 11 or July 15. The session will be attended by Lorenzo Bertelli, Head of Corporate Social Responsibility, Prada Group, and son of the brand’s majority owners; Christopher Aaron Bugg, Global Director of Communication; Robert Massardi, Chief Business Development Officer; and



Nearly one lakh artisans in Maharashtra and Karnataka depend on the traditional craft of making Kolhapuri chappals. REUTERS

Francesca Secondari, Group General Counsel.

“We will send them a list of participants from our side. That will include a few local artisans and the representatives of MACCIA,” MACCIA president Lalit Gandhi told *The Hindu* on Wednesday.

Response to letter

The upcoming meeting is a response to a letter sent by MACCIA on June 27, in which the body proposed the establishment of a task force to explore collaborative efforts.

This task force may focus on: developing co-branded limited edition collections rooted in traditional Kolhapuri designs; skill development and training programmes for rural artisans aligned with global standards; establish-

ing a cultural exchange programme to foster design innovation between Italian and Indian artisans; exploring the possibility of setting up a ‘Prada Artisan Excellence Lab’ in Kolhapur or Mumbai; and supporting a fair trade value chain that brings sustainable economic benefit to the artisan community,” the letter, a copy of which is with *The Hindu*, stated.

Nearly one lakh artisans in Maharashtra and Karnataka depend on the traditional craft of making Kolhapuri chappals – hand-crafted leather sandals made without glue or nails. The leather, tanned using natural vegetable dyes, gives the chappals their unique properties, including a natural cooling effect.

The proposed engage-

Veteran Samik Bhattacharya is new Bengal BJP president

The Hindu Bureau
KOLKATA

Senior Bharatiya Janata Party leader and Rajya Sabha member Samik Bhattacharya was on Wednesday unanimously elected president of the West Bengal unit of the BJP.

Mr. Bhattacharya filed the nomination papers for the post of BJP president accompanied by outgoing State president Sukanta Majumdar and Leader of the Opposition in the West Bengal Assembly Suvendu Adhikari.

As no other candidates filed nomination for the post by Wednesday’s deadline, Mr. Bhattacharya was unanimously elected to the post.

The 62-year-old BJP leader is a party loyalist and has been associated with the party for over four decades.

Mr. Bhattacharya has been a Rajya Sabha MP from West Bengal since April 2024. A prominent face of the party on television news channels, he is also the chief spokesperson of the party for the State.

The elevation of Mr. Bhattacharya comes ahead of the Assembly polls in West Bengal scheduled in 2026.

IN BRIEF



HC asks Centre to update RTI rules for digital formats

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday directed the Union government to consider amending the existing Right to Information (RTI) Rules to facilitate the provision of information through modern electronic formats such as email, pen drives, or cloud-based platforms. A Bench comprising Chief Justice D.K. Upadhyaya and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela asked the competent authority to take an appropriate decision on the matter in three months. The court was hearing a PIL filed by Mr. Aditya Chauhan, who highlighted that Rule 4(d) of the RTI Rules, 2012 continues to refer to obsolete mediums like diskettes and floppies to provide RTI responses.

Look into representation over weight-loss drugs: HC to DCGI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday asked the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) to consult experts and stakeholders in deciding a plea over drug combinations sold in the market for weight loss. A bench asked petitioner Jitendra Chouksey to give a representation to the DCGI, which was asked to decide the matter in three months. Mr. Chouksey's plea alleged that licenses issued for the use and sale of such drugs were not based on adequate data. The court, however, said the plea's concerns have to be first looked into and addressed by the DCGI. It allowed Mr. Chouksey to move the authority and bring relevant material and documents to its notice.

Multi-agency probe busts international drug cartel

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI
Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday congratulated the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) and other law enforcement agencies for busting an international drug cartel that operated in over 10 countries across four continents.

While the NCB's inputs have also led to crackdowns in the United States and Australia, eight alleged syndicate members have been arrested so far.

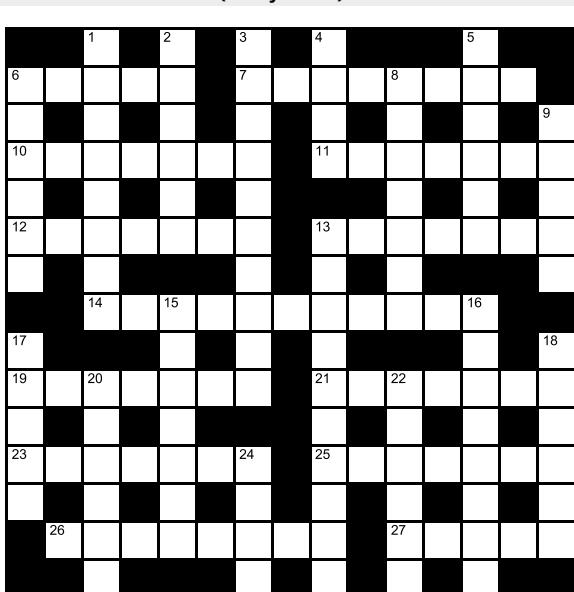
In a post on X, the Home Minister said, "The probe set a stellar example of multi-agency coordination, resulting in eight arrests and seizures of five consignments while triggering crackdowns in the U.S. and Australia against the ring that operates across four continents."

"Direct radiocarbon dating of the remains aligns with the archaeological context corresponding to the third to fourth dynasties, marking the beginning of the Old Kingdom," Adeline Morez Jacobs from the School of Biological and Environmental Sciences, Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool, U.K., and the first author of the paper said during a virtual press conference.

Genetic results showed that a majority of his ancestry, about 78%, hails from the ancient North African populations, spec-

TH CROSSWORD + 14527
(set by Arden)

To solve this puzzle online, get access to our crossword site.
<https://qrgo.page.link/jjpTn>



Across

- 6 Exult as the ultimate champion bags final medal (5)
- 7 Fancy yachts carrying it is seen as a virtue (8)
- 10 Reason it's said to make one laugh in hell (7)
- 11 Activity protects America flooding (7)
- 12 Fought over how the woman was dressed overall (7)

Debt burden of Indians has increased, says Congress

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Targeting the Narendra Modi government over the rise in per capita debt of individual borrowers, the Congress on Wednesday alleged that the government was constantly trying to hide its real shortcomings by taking the help of statistics and experts.

"Debt of 'Achhe Din'! The Modi government has ruined the country's economy in the last eleven years. No effort was made to improve the lives of the people, all the policies were made only for the capitalist friends, the losses of which are being suffered by the people of the country today," Congress general secretary (communications) Jairam Ramesh said on X.

Asserting that this truth was coming out every day in some way or the other, he said the latest report of the Reserve Bank of India had revealed a worrying picture of India's economy. "The government is constantly trying to hide the real shortcomings by taking the help of statistics and experts, but no one can deny the truth that the debt burden on the country is at its peak in Modi Raj," Mr. Ramesh said.

No link between COVID-19 vaccines and sudden deaths'

Sudden cardiac deaths can be from a wide range of factors, including genetics, lifestyle, pre-existing conditions, and post-COVID-19 complications, says Union Health Ministry

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

There is no direct link between COVID-19 vaccination and reports of sudden deaths in the country, the Union Health Ministry said on Wednesday. The Ministry added that this conclusion was reached following investigations conducted by multiple agencies.

The Ministry said that studies conducted by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) found no major changes in the patterns of causes of death when compared to previous years. In the majority of unexplained cases, genetic mutations were found to be a likely contributing factor.

"Sudden cardiac deaths can result from a wide range of factors, including genetics, lifestyle, pre-existing conditions, and post-COVID complications," the Ministry said in a statement.

The Ministry noted that both ICMR and NCDC have been working together to determine the causes behind sudden unexplained



Fact check: COVID-19 vaccination does not increase the risk of unexplained sudden deaths in young adults, says study. VIJAY SONEJI

deaths, particularly among young adults aged between 18 and 45 years.

To investigate the phenomenon, two complementary studies were undertaken. The first, conducted by the ICMR's National Institute of Epidemiology (NIE), was a retrospective multicentric matched case-control study. Titled "Factors associated with unexplained sudden deaths among adults aged 18-45 years in India", it was conducted between May and August 2023 across 47 tertiary care hospitals in 19 States and Union Territories.

The study reviewed cases of individuals who ap-

peared to be healthy but died suddenly between October 2021 and March 2023.

Its findings confirmed that COVID-19 vaccination does not increase the risk of unexplained sudden deaths in young adults.

The second study, titled "Establishing the cause in sudden unexplained deaths in young," is a prospective investigation currently underway at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi. The study is being conducted in collaboration with the ICMR.

Preliminary findings from this study suggest that myocardial infarction

(heart attack) continues to be the leading cause of sudden death in this demographic.

"Together, these two studies offer a more comprehensive understanding of sudden unexplained deaths in young adults in India. It has also been revealed that COVID-19 vaccination does not appear to increase the risk, whereas the role of underlying health issues, genetic predisposition and risky lifestyle choices does play a role in unexplained sudden deaths," the Ministry said.

Scientific experts have reiterated that claims linking COVID-19 vaccination to sudden deaths are "false and misleading" and not supported by scientific consensus.

"Speculative claims without conclusive evidence risk undermining public confidence in vaccines, which have played a crucial role in saving millions of lives during the pandemic," the Ministry said. "Such unfounded reports and claims could strongly contribute to vaccine hesitancy in the country, thereby adversely impacting public health," it added.

Baseless claim will hamper vaccinations: NIE Director

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
CHENNAI

COVID-19 vaccination does not increase the risk of unexplained sudden death among young adults, Manoj V. Murhekar, Director, Indian Council of Medical Research-National Institute of Epidemiology, said on Wednesday.

He said their research indicated genetic make-up, binge drinking, COVID hospitalisation, and vigorous physical activity as some of the contributing factors. "Past COVID hospitalisation, family history of sudden death, and certain lifestyle behaviour increased the likelihood of sudden deaths," he said, adding that research had indicated a positive effect of vaccination.

On booster doses, he said, "As of now we aren't seeing any major spikes in cases and there are no trends indicating the need for booster doses. We also know that newer variants are escaping vaccination cover so we need not rush into getting booster doses as of now."

He said the baseless linking of COVID-19 vaccination to sudden deaths can hamper the vaccination programmes for other diseases.

Researchers sequence whole genome of ancient Egyptian for the first time

R. Prasad
CHENNAI



Pottery vessel in which the Nuwayrat individual was discovered. MOREZ, A.

Researchers have sequenced the first whole ancient Egyptian genome from an individual who lived 4,500-4,800 years ago – the oldest DNA sample from Egypt to date. The body belongs to an adult male who died during Egypt's Old Kingdom. The ancient Egyptian is predicted to have had brown eyes, brown hair, skin pigmentation ranging from dark to black skin, with a lower probability of an intermediate skin colour, was 157.4-160.5 cm tall, and lived up to the age of 44-64 years. The body was buried in a large ceramic pot within a rock-cut tomb at a site named Nuwayrat, a village 265 km south of Cairo. The results were published on July 2 in the journal *Nature*.

"Perhaps the genes were transferred over time through other ancient Levantine populations (modern-day Israel, Jordan, and Syria)," says Dr. Niraj Rai from Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeosciences (BSIP), Lucknow, who is not part of the study.

Genetic results showed that a majority of his ancestry, about 78%, hails from the ancient North African populations, spec-

ifically from Neolithic groups from present-day Morocco. About 22% of his DNA is a close match to early farmers from Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq, western Iran, southern Syria, southeast Turkey), one of the eastern Fertile Crescent.

About 22% of the genetic makeup of the individual suggests historical cultural exchanges and interactions between Egyptian and Eastern Fertile Crescent. Though this Neolithic Mesopotamian connection is evident, the authors are quick to point out that this heritage may not have been direct.

"We hypothesised that a combination of pot burial together with a rock-cut tomb in which the pot burial was placed provided a stable environment. While the overall climate is hot, a key factor for long-term DNA preservation is the stability of the temperature," Dr. Linus Girdland-Flink from Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool, U.K. and one of the corresponding authors said during the virtual press conference. "Also, we took DNA samples from the teeth root tips. The root tips get locked into the lower jaw, which might have helped preserve the DNA. That kind of dental tissue is very good for DNA preservation."

Axiom-4 trip to the ISS will provide valuable inputs for Gaganyaan mission: ISRO

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU



Shubhanshu Shukla is carrying a selection of the finest Indian handicrafts to ISS, says ISRO.

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) said the Axiom-4 (Ax-04) mission to the International Space Station will provide valuable inputs for India's upcoming Gaganyaan mission. Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla is part of the Axiom mission.

"The Ax-04 mission will provide valuable inputs for ISRO's upcoming Gaganyaan mission. It offers hands-on experience about the nuances of international crew integration, medical and psychological preparation, real-time health telemetry, experiment execution, and crew-ground coordination," the ISRO said. It added that these insights will directly influence mission planning, safety validation, and

It added that the first crewed flight of the Gaganyaan mission is expected by the first quarter of 2027.

The ISRO said that as a tribute to India's rich cultural heritage, Mr. Shukla is carrying a selection of the finest of Indian handicrafts to the International Space Station. "These symbolic items, designed by students of the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad, reflect the diversity, craftsmanship, and timeless beauty of India's traditional art forms, carefully curated to represent different regions and materials. These pieces serve as cultural ambassadors in space."

"This is one small step in orbit, but a giant leap in India's pursuit of human spaceflight and scientific discovery," it added.

The

ISRO said preparations are in progress for abort missions of the Gaganyaan mission and the first uncrewed test flight is targeted for the fourth quarter of 2025.

FAITH

Ambal shows the way

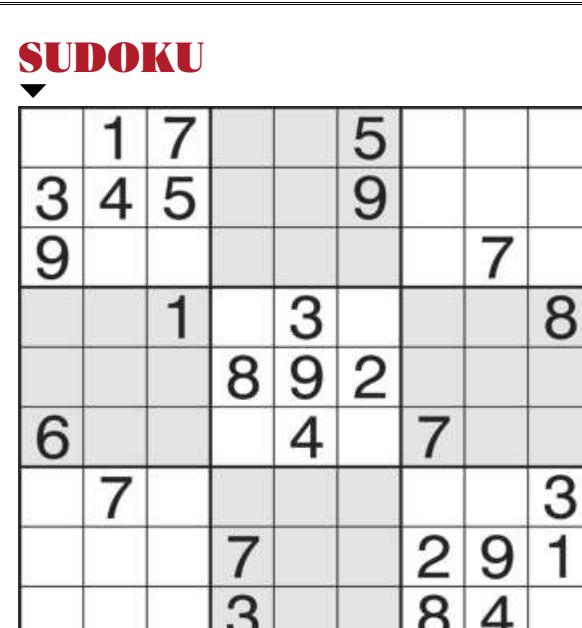
Faith is nurtured. Our elders teach babies to eat first, and as they grow, they are shown the correct way to eat healthy. Similarly, the Vedas are the primary source material for guiding all in the spiritual journey of one's life, which runs concurrently with the pursuit of earthly goals. People may pray to Vishnu, Siva or Subrahmanya, Surya or others as ordained in the Vedas; however, Sakti is the goddess that the ordinary people worship. She is sometimes given shape to, in villages, merely by stacking a couple of bricks, with full faith in Her power. While She is celebrated throughout the year, the grand Patabhishikham of Sarva Jagan Mata at Ambaji Saktipeet in Gujarat, during the Ashada Navratri (falling between June 25 to July 4 this year) is one of the most significant ones, said Damodara Dikshitar.

The Lalita Sahasranamam says, "Rajat Krupayai Namaha; Raja Peeta Niveshita Nija Shritayai Namaha," signifying the importance of receiving Her divine grace when one is caught in various life situations.

Those visiting the shrine in Ambaji cannot fail to observe the richness and fertility of the land, with Ambal looming majestically over the place, held to be the heart of the 51 Sakti Peetams, bestowing Her blessings on those who pray to Her. She embodies not only spirituality but also sets a remarkable code of conduct for all to follow, helping everyone to lead a sinless life.

As an embodiment of Durga, Saraswati and Lakshmi, the Jagan Mata's Patabhishikham, conducted with various homams and pujas, attracts both the rich and the poor.

SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

Solution to previous puzzle

L	A	T	T	I	C	E	B	R	D	G	O
E	C	A	L	R	D	O	G	C	R	A	K
C	R	A	C	O	P	E	R	A	S	T	A
R	E	D	E	U	A	H	O	A	N	M	S
D	E	E	N	A	T	I	C	R	P	I	N
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E	L	E	C	T	A	R	E	N	R	E	A
C	R	E	T	N	A	L	E	T	N	A	L
E	T	N	A	L	E	T	N	A	L	E	A

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

SCIENCE

Sinhalese migrated from Southern India, mixed with Adivasis: study

The formation of the Sinhalese genetic pool is dated to about 3,000 years ago, falling within the range of dates displayed broadly by Indian and other Sri Lankan populations, and around the time of the proposed migration date of Sinhalese to their present homeland in the Sinhala chronicles

R. Prasad

Analyses of whole-genome sequence data of urban Sinhalese and two indigenous Adivasi clans in Sri Lanka, which live in geographically separated regions in the country, have shed light on the migratory history of these populations and their genetic relationship to each other and to many Indian populations.

The study, published recently in the journal *Current Biology*, found that Sinhalese and Adivasi are genetically closest to each other and to South Indians, but at a regional and fine-scale level, the two Adivasi clans are genetically distinct.

For the study, whole genomes of 35 urban Sinhalese individuals and 19 individuals from two indigenous Adivasi clans were sequenced. Of the 19 genomes of Adivasi clans that were sequenced, five were from among Interior Adivasi and 14 were from among Coastal Adivasi.

A genetic perspective

The sampling and data generation were possible due to the outreach efforts of Sri Lankan collaborator Ruwandi Ranasinghe, from the University of Colombo. In addition, the whole genome data of 35 Sri Lankan Tamils sampled in the U.K., which were already sequenced as part of the 1,000 Genomes Project, were included in the analyses.

Sinhalese chronicles and previous genetic studies had proposed that the Sinhalese people had migrated from northern or northwest India around 500 BCE, though their exact origins and migratory history are still debated. That the Sinhalese speak an Indo-European language, Sinhala, whose present-day distribution lies primarily in northern India, further supported the idea of their migration from northern India. But the current study contradicted the findings of the previous studies from a genetic perspective.

"The genetic ancestries and their proportions in the Adivasi and Sinhalese are most similar to Dravidian speaking populations, which live in Southern India today," Niraj Rai of the Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeosciences (BSIP), Lucknow, and one of the corresponding authors of the paper, told *The Hindu*.

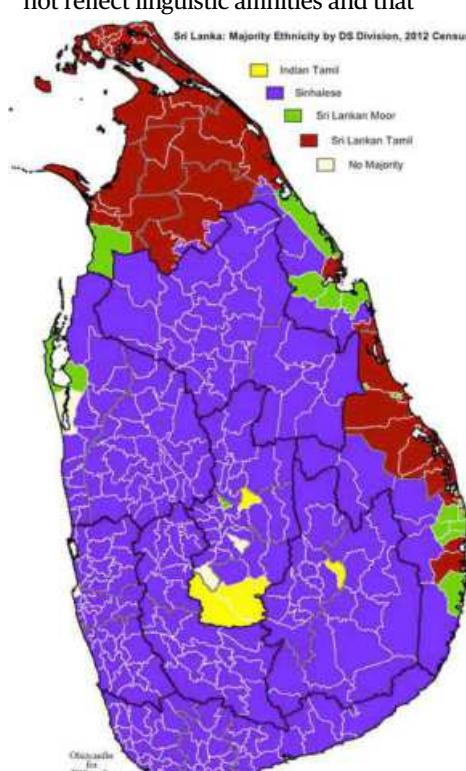
"Even among South Indian populations, we find that the Sinhalese are genetically closest to those communities that have higher proportions of the so-called ASI or Ancestral South Indian ancestry," Maanasa Raghavan, assistant professor at the University of Chicago and a corresponding author of the study, said.

"In contrast to many North Indians, these populations generally have lower levels of a genetic ancestry related to ancient groups from the Eurasian Steppe, proposed to have carried Indo-European languages into South Asia and that are today spoken widely in northern regions of India."

Genes and linguistic affinities

But how does one reconcile the fact that the Sinhalese people speak a language that is classified as Indo-European, which today is spoken mostly in North India?

The authors explained that genes do not reflect linguistic affinities and that



A map of Sri Lanka showing the majority ethnicity by DS Division according to the country's 2012 Census. Yellow: Indian Tamils; purple: Sinhalese; green: Sri Lankan Moor; maroon: Sri Lankan Tamil; white: no majority. DEPARTMENT OF CENSUS & STATISTICS, SRI LANKA



Genes don't reflect linguistic affinities and biological and cultural evolution can have different trajectories. Representative image. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

biological and cultural evolution can have different trajectories. They have speculated that this genetic-linguistic discordance may have been caused by the Sinhalese population having migrated from somewhere in North India geographically, but genetically speaking, the migration may have come from a group that resembles more South Indian Dravidian speakers today.

An alternative explanation is that a small group of Sinhalese people, perhaps representing the elite, might have migrated to Sri Lanka and transmitted the language but not the genes.

"If the Sinhalese were derived from a North Indian genetic cluster with higher Steppe-related ancestry, mixing had to have happened with ASI populations to dilute their genetic ancestries and pull them genetically closer to South Indian populations in our analyses. More anthropological studies are needed to fully understand these differing genetic and cultural affinities of the Sinhalese," Raghavan said.

Support from anthropological studies
The time of formation of the Sinhalese genetic pool was dated in the study to about 3,000 years ago, falling within the range of dates displayed broadly by Indian and other Sri Lankan populations and around the time of the proposed migration date of the Sinhalese in the chronicles (500 BCE).

"The date our analysis reveals is interesting. It implies that the Sinhalese ancestors migrated to Sri Lanka fairly close in time to the dynamic genetic mixing events that were occurring about 2,000-4,000 years ago in India that created the ANI-ASI genetic spectrum we see in today's populations," Rai explained. (ANI stands for 'ancestral north India' and ASI for 'ancestral south Indian').

Sinhalese chronicles also say that when the Sinhalese people migrated from India to Sri Lanka about 3,000 years ago, the Adivasi were already living in Sri Lanka. This is also supported by anthropological studies that propose that the Adivasi are descended from early hunter-gatherers in the region. The Adivasi are in fact traditionally hunter-gatherers and the Indigenous peoples of Sri Lanka.

"At a broad scale, Adivasi today look genetically very similar to the Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamil. This must mean that the Sinhalese, Sri Lankan Tamils, or other groups migrating from South India must have met the Adivasi, mixed with



The genetic ancestries and their proportions in the Adivasi and Sinhalese are most similar to Dravidian speaking populations, which live in Southern India today

them heavily, and contributed to what is the present-day genetic structure of the Adivasi," Raghavan said.

The Sinhalese and the Adivasi are close to each other and share broad-level genetic similarities. On a finer-scale demographic resolution, however, the study found that the two Adivasi clans are a bit different from the Sinhalese. The Adivasi have slightly higher levels of ancient hunter-gatherer ancestry than the Sinhalese and the Sri Lankan Tamils, and have maintained smaller population sizes over the course of their history, both of which support their traditional hunting and gathering lifestyle.

The Adivasi genomes also display signatures of endogamy, which appear as long stretches of DNA inherited from a common ancestor. The study further reported that a consequence of the low population size and endogamy is that the genetic diversity among the Adivasi is lower than that in the urban populations, which may have an impact on their health and disease status.

While both Adivasi clans have maintained lower population sizes compared to the Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamils, the authors found that the Interior Adivasi clan seemed to have undergone a stronger reduction in their population size compared to the Coastal Adivasi, leading to a greater loss of their genetic diversity.

"We find the two Adivasi clans – the Coastal Adivasi and the Interior Adivasi – also have some differences in their genetic ancestry arising due to distinct geographic separation between them," Rai said.

This, according to Raghavan, indicated that the Interior Adivasi clan must have undergone stronger pressures, perhaps societal or environmental, to keep the population size lower compared to their Coastal counterparts. Explaining how the two Adivasi clans are more similar to each other, but still have genetic differences at a fine scale, she said that this basically means at some point in time, due to geographic separation, the genetic and

lifestyle attributes of the two clans started to drift apart.

Capturing the population history

In fact, the fragmented nature of the Adivasi clans also impacted the study sampling strategy. While 35 individuals representing the two large groups – Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamils – have been included in the analyses, the numbers for the two Adivasi populations were small: five from among the interior Adivasi and 14 from among the Coastal Adivasi. Though it would be ideal to keep matched sample sizes of different populations for genetic analyses, the reason for including only small numbers for the two Adivasi clans was because the Adivasi communities today are very fragmented.

"Historical, anthropological, as well as our genetic results all suggest that these communities live in small sizes and practice endogamy," Raghavan said. "Because of endogamy, a lot of these individuals tend to be quite related to one another. Having really high relatedness in a group impacts the genetic analyses because then everybody's going to look like each other. So that's why our sample sizes were lower for the two Adivasi clans."

Despite the number of individuals representing the two Adivasi clans being small, the researchers were able to recapture the entire population history of these two groups. The study was able to address the questions that the researchers set out to do despite the Adivasi sample sizes being small, according to Raghavan.

"Since every individual's genome is a mosaic of their ancestor's genomes, even a small number of individuals can represent their population's genetic histories. Moreover, we didn't find any genetic outliers within the Adivasi clans. So, all the sampled individuals fit into the model that we propose," Rai clarified.

"This is the first time that high-resolution genome data have been sequenced from multiple populations in Sri Lanka, including the Indigenous Adivasi and urban Sinhalese, to understand the deeply rooted ancestries and their population histories," Rai added.

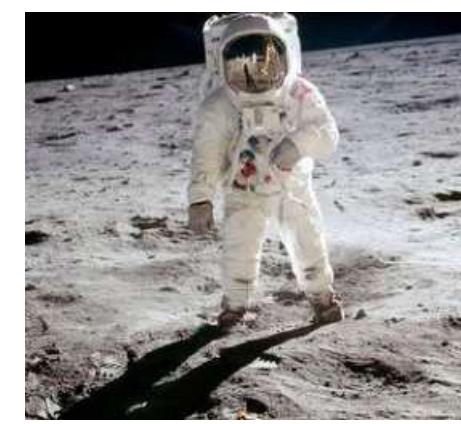
Broadly, the study has important implications for how humans moved across South Asia and highlights the high degree of interconnectedness between India and Sri Lanka over millennia.
(prasad.ravindranath@thehindu.co.in)



A photograph of a Sinhalese family, c. 1880-1899. PUBLIC DOMAIN



A group of Adivasi men photographed in Sri Lanka c. 1870-1904. PUBLIC DOMAIN



Neil Armstrong on the surface of the moon on July 20, 1969. NASA

Moondust is less harmful than earth's dust — but don't take a deep breath

Priyali Prakash

You wake up, brush, shower, dress up, grab breakfast, put on your shoes, and step out. It's a new morning and the sun is up, so you take a deep breath – and the city air serves you a gross reminder of why it's become a terrible idea to take deep breaths. Suddenly you're coughing, tearing up, and sneezing. Your nose rapidly becomes blocked.

This is perhaps the least of what city dust does to the human body. The particulate matter smaller than 2.5 micrometres, or PM2.5, in particular has been linked to a variety of medical conditions, including those affecting newborns and reducing human lifespan.

Unfortunately for you, even if you move to a moon base in the future, you'd be ill-advised to take a deep breath of your cabin's air if it has moondust suspended in it.

According to a study published recently in *Life Sciences in Space Research*, moondust is less harmful than the particulate matter we frequently encounter on the earth. However, both our urban dust and moondust seem capable of damaging certain lung cells.

The study's authors, from institutes in Macquarie Park, Sydney, and Ultimo in Australia, used two laboratory-generated versions of lunar dust – called LMS-1 and LHS-1, mimicking dust from the moon's mare and highland regions, respectively – in their experiments.

Large particles from LMS-1 and LHS-1 moondust were toxic to high concentrations. Smaller particles were less toxic to bronchial cells than PM2.5 particles are known to be

During NASA's Apollo missions from 1969 to 1972, astronauts complained of lunar dust sticking to their spacesuits and irritating their eyes and lungs. Lunar dust is statically charged, so it tends to stick to surfaces the same way a balloon rubbed against hair will cling to a wall right after.

The researchers used two groups of cells to represent the bronchial and the alveolar parts of human lungs. The bronchi transport air into the lungs while the alveoli are the sacs where the air exchanges oxygen with the blood.

The researchers found that large particles from both LMS-1 and LHS-1 moondust were toxic and inflammatory only at extremely high concentrations. The smaller particles in both dust types that a human could breathe deep into the lungs were found to be less toxic to bronchial cells than PM2.5 particles on the earth are known to be.

This said, both the moondust simulants and earth dust caused alveolar cells to die.

The study is important because space agencies like NASA in the U.S. and CNSA in China are planning to send astronauts to the moon. NASA's Artemis II mission is currently scheduled for 2026 and will carry four astronauts in a lunar flyby mission as an early step to "long-term return" to the natural satellite.

In future, as the human population on the moon builds up, both engineers designing and operating lunar habitats and medical workers expected to attend to the people inhabiting them will gain by understanding how moondust affects the human body.

(priyali.prakash@thehindu.co.in)

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



Under fire

The state must enforce compliance of regulations in the fireworks industry

An accident is, by definition, both unexpected and preventable. But the numerous fireworks industry blasts that dot the summer months with stunning regularity in the firecracker manufacturing belt of Tamil Nadu in Virudhunagar challenge this definition. A total of 26 people have died and 20 others injured in eight accidents that have occurred in the first six months of 2025. According to official data, 17 accidents were reported in fireworks units in the State in 2024 and claimed the lives of 52 people. Of these, 42 people died in 12 accidents in Virudhunagar, which has roughly 1,000 fireworks units and 3,000 cracker shops. In 2023, 79 workers were killed in 27 accidents in the State, including 28 workers in 15 accidents in Virudhunagar. In the latest episode, eight persons died and five others were injured in an explosion at a fireworks factory in Sattur, near Sivakasi this week. Preliminary reports said friction caused during the process of filling chemicals that are used to make special fireworks may have caused the explosion. Investigations are on to pinpoint the exact cause. But whatever the cause, there is unlikely to be any new learning from this kind of post mortem.

Temperatures in the rather dry, hot belt of Virudhunagar often soar unbearably during the day. It is also common knowledge that firecracker units store chemicals that are highly inflammable, and can ignite and burn easily when exposed to an ignition source such as a spark, flame, or high heat. And yet, unerringly, the summer months, usually, have unfortunate accidents resulting in the death or the disability of people who are already vulnerable, socially and economically. While the laxity of manufacturers is condemnable, there is also a big role for the state in regulating these fireworks units, since all of them require a licence from the Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organization to function. The Explosives Rules, 2008, which govern fireworks units, specify that packages containing explosives shall not be allowed to remain in the sun or exposed to excessive heat, and all due precautions ought to be taken to prevent accidents by fire or explosion. Following the rules is essential to retaining the licence to operate and manufacture explosives. Clearly, here is a situation where the heft of the state can be utilised to ensure compliance, but a better way of handling it is to involve manufacturers in an effort to ensure there are no further accidents, no further lives lost as a result. Such cooperation has produced results in the past in curbing the employment of child labourers in the industry. It will now have to be leveraged to save precious lives. A preventable tragedy that repeats itself makes a farce of state regulation and enforcement.

Away from the edge

The incineration of toxic waste from the Bhopal tragedy took time and effort

The Madhya Pradesh Pollution Control Board has confirmed that officials had incinerated 337 tonnes of toxic waste moved to a private waste treatment facility in Pithampur from the defunct Union Carbide facility in Bhopal. The event closes a single, but important, chapter in the sordid history of the 1984 Bhopal disaster, the state response to which pushed the city and its people to the edge. The successful incineration is illustrative in that it demanded interventions from the Madhya Pradesh High Court, the Supreme Court of India, and the Union Environment Ministry, among other stakeholders, over more than a decade. In the end, the State government was able to arrange for the waste to be safely disposed of – including an outreach exercise to assuage public anxiety over the emissions – within six months at a cost of ₹126 crore. Evidently the means have always existed; the political initiative to effect them has been wanting. This is an important detail: waste, once it has entered the environment, has a tendency to be converted to different forms; it seldom goes away. The toxic waste incinerated thus far has yielded more than 800 tonnes of ash and residue that officials will have to landfill in a scientific manner. Like solid waste landfills around the country, this new facility will require regular upkeep, monitoring, and funds of its own. The site of the Union Carbide plant also retains several more tonnes of contaminated soil and other hazardous artefacts, plus contaminated subsurface resources in the area.

Crucially, much of the impetus for positive change in the matter, including waste removal, has come from victims' families, survivors, and activists rather than from the state. Survivors' groups have filed petitions arguing that deaths and injuries continue to be undercounted and that they are owed inflation-adjusted damages. Since the Supreme Court closed the door on the curative route, also in dispute is whether a new valuation of losses can be forced on The Dow Chemical Company, notwithstanding the fact that it remains a proclaimed offender. Long-term surveillance has been patchy, with activists and survivors alleging that the advisory committee appointed by the top court has met only sporadically and that local hospitals continue to suffer a shortage of specialist medical workers to attend to survivors. In the final analysis, Dow must account for all remediation activities. Both the State and the Centre must close pending settlement claims and attend on a self-motivated basis to the survivors' well-being, if required with the assistance of a new statutory body to unify health, relief, and remediation goals. Ultimately, the families must be able to move on.

India's development cooperation with the Global South has been showing a rising trend for the last several years. India has made consistent efforts to expand the facets of these engagements and has also almost doubled the flow of quantum – from around \$3 billion in 2010-11 to around \$7 billion in 2023-24. While capacity building programmes and the initiatives for technology transfer and duty-free access to India markets have been important modalities of this engagement, the main instrument has been the extension of lines of credit (LoC) under the Indian Development and Economic Assistance Scheme (IDEAS).

If budgetary provisions for 2025-26 are any indication, the red flag from the Ministry of Finance on credit lines, as modality of engagement, is absolutely clear. At the G-20, India expressed serious concerns over rising sovereign debt levels across the Global South. During the third Voice of Global South Summit (VoGS) in 2024, Prime Minister Narendra Modi articulated the concept of a Global Development Compact (GDC), thereby implying a harmonious balance between all the modalities of engagement with the Global South. It is worth noting that there are five modalities of engagement, *viz.*, capacity building, technology transfer, market access, grants and concessional finance. This balanced approach on modalities may be supplemented by India by having wider and deeper partnerships with countries that can work across third countries.

In this backdrop, under the modalities of engagement, India has to refocus on LoCs as an instrument of engagement. India was largely borrowing from global capital markets and providing the resources to the partner countries at a concessional rate of interest. The difference in the rates of interest was being absorbed by the Government of India. With a rising global liquidity crisis, such schemes have lost their relevance as capital market predictability and the repaying capabilities of partner countries have become severely constrained. India should take full advantage of this new reality.

Shrinking ODA and debt crisis
The traditional official development assistance (ODA) providers are going through their own budgetary crisis while the partners of the Global South have challenges in coping with the debt



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crisis. With rising geopolitical complexities, the flow of global development finance in any case is witnessing a profound decline. The collapse of USAID and the decline of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) have highlighted the emerging crisis in development finance. The availability and leveraging of resources have been hampered further by the declining trend in ODA, which is likely to be close to \$97 billion. This proposed slashing of foreign aid is a near 45% reduction from the levels of ODA in 2023, which stood at around \$214 billion. At the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), its Development Assistance Committee (DAC) has been an elite club for ODA providers, dictating the terms and conditions for the economic and political programmes for the South.

Shrinkage in the resource flow is likely to affect several development programmes, across least developed economies, particularly at a time when several of them are passing through an unprecedented debt crisis. Over the last 20 years, a series of overlapping crises and major geopolitical and economic transformations have reshaped the global financial environment, leaving many developing countries struggling to access funding. This has posed a risk to development progress at risk and jeopardised achievements.

The investment needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) by 2030 has also surged from \$2.5 trillion in 2015 to over \$4 trillion in 2024. Without a major increase in financing, progress toward the SDGs (already derailed by the COVID-19 pandemic and other global shocks) will remain elusive. Simultaneously, borrowing has become costlier and less predictable.

Rationale for triangular cooperation
A ray of hope lies in the possibility of evolving a new mechanism of pooling resources with like-minded countries. The flows from the 19 non-DAC countries that report to the OECD rose from \$1.1 billion in 2000 to \$17.7 billion in 2022. Some of these countries such as Indonesia and Brazil have evolved a rich global experience with Japan and Germany of working in third countries. Japan and Indonesia have worked together in several Association of Southeast Asian Nations

(ASEAN) economies to implement development projects. Similarly, Germany and Brazil have worked together in Mozambique in multiple development areas. Triangular Cooperation (TrC) has emerged as a powerful mechanism to bridge the divide between the Global North and the Global South.

The beauty of the TrC is that it brings together a traditional donor from the Global North, a pivot country from the Global South, and a partner country (often from the Global South), creating inclusive platforms for shared learning, mutual respect and the co-creation of solutions tailored to local needs. Comprehensive TrC data is still being compiled at the global stage. However, the efficacy and the success of the model has been well established. Some preliminary data collection suggests TrC to be between \$670 million to \$1.1 billion.

Partnerships with results

The TrC has shown that addressing physical infrastructure can advance social progress. For instance, improving regional energy grids expands digital connectivity and provides access to opportunities in education and health. In this context, in 2022, Germany and India signed a Joint Declaration of Intent on the implementation of TrC projects in third countries (during the sixth India-Germany Inter-Governmental Consultations), with a focus on Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Since then, TrC projects are being implemented in several countries which include Cameroon, Ghana and Malawi in Africa, and in Peru in Latin America.

These offer clear examples as to how to rephase global development finance in a manner that ensures assured and efficacious outcomes in a cost-effective manner. Engagement in TrC was further emphasised during India's G-20 presidency, with expanded collaborations involving countries such as Germany, the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union, and France. These partnerships span a variety of sectors and modalities, from grant-based projects to investment-driven initiatives such as the Global Innovation Partnership (GIP) with the U.K. These efforts illustrate how leveraging technical, financial, and human resources can deliver results in third countries.

The views expressed are personal

Integrating compassion, prioritising palliative care

In India, millions endure unnecessary suffering, making it imperative to integrate palliative care into its health-care system. Palliative care plays a crucial role in providing comfort and ensuring dignity to those navigating terminal conditions. Despite its proven impact, palliative care remains critically underfunded and underutilised in India, leaving millions without the support that they desperately need.

Palliative care, which is a form of specialised care addressing a person's physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs, remains a critical, yet underappreciated, component of health care. Unlike curative treatment that is aimed at eradicating disease, palliative care focuses on alleviating pain, reducing suffering, and improving quality of life – for patients and their families.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), an estimated 40 million people globally require palliative care each year, with 78% of them living in low and middle-income countries. However, only 14% of those in need receive such care. In India, where an estimated seven million to 10 million people require palliative care annually, only 1%-2% have access to it. This gap underscores the urgency for systemic intervention and policy prioritisation.

The demand for palliative care is increasing constantly due to the global rise in non-communicable diseases such as cancer, diabetes and chronic respiratory conditions. India's health-care system, which is already strained, faces increasing pressure, making it essential to integrate palliative care to reduce unnecessary hospitalisations and ease the emotional and financial burden on families.

The challenges in India
The inclusion of palliative care in the National Health Policy of 2017 in India marked a pivotal step in addressing the gap. Subsequent efforts in capacity building, community outreach and collaboration with global organisations have fostered growth in this field. However, even today, access remains uneven, especially in rural areas, and primarily among economically



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This form of specialised care remains underfunded and underutilised in India, leaving millions without the support they need

disadvantaged populations. Each year, approximately 7.2 million Indians need palliative care, yet systemic inefficiencies hinder its effective delivery.

One of the primary barriers is the shortage of trained professionals. Many doctors lack specialised training in palliative care, limiting their ability to provide comprehensive pain management and end-of-life care. While India's doctor-population ratio of 1:834, surpasses the WHO recommended norm of 1:1000, the availability of medical practitioners specialising in palliative care is disproportionately low.

Limited funding and lack of proper infrastructure further exacerbate the challenges. While palliative care is included in the primary health sector, its integration into tertiary care remains incomplete. Additionally, public awareness of palliative care remains limited, leading to misconceptions and late-stage access to these critical services.

Linking it with medical education

Strengthening the capacity of doctors to deliver this care, particularly in underserved regions, is imperative. In order to equip medical professionals with the skills and the empathy required to address end-of-life care, integrating palliative care into the core MBBS curriculum is crucial. The projects on pain and palliative care by the Indian Council of Medical Research and the All India Institute of Medical Sciences exemplify gradual progress in this area.

Given the limited availability of palliative care specialists, task-shifting (delegating responsibilities to trained allied health-care workers) emerges as a viable solution.

India has a huge base of 34.33 lakh registered nursing personnel and 13 lakh allied health-care professionals. Empowering this workforce through targeted training can help bridge the gap, ensuring holistic care, particularly in rural areas and underserved regions.

Policymakers must recognise the long-term benefits of investing in palliative care, from improving patient outcomes to reducing the overall burden on the health-care system.

Governments should allocate dedicated funding for palliative care programmes, ensuring that public and private health-care facilities are equipped with the necessary infrastructure.

Insurance schemes such as Ayushman Bharat should expand coverage to include palliative care, making these services more financially accessible to patients and families. Partnerships with non-governmental organisations and private institutions can also accelerate the expansion of these facilities.

Raising public awareness

Public awareness campaigns can demystify palliative care and encourage early access to services. Many patients and families are unaware that palliative care extends beyond end-of-life support and includes pain management, psychological support, and improved quality of life at any stage of a serious illness. Educating communities about these benefits can drive demand and policy changes.

The United States has a well-established palliative care system that is driven by robust funding mechanisms, insurance coverage, and hospice care models. Most importantly, in the U.S., there is an emphasis on end-of-life care, which involves substantial and progressively rising health-care expenditures – an indication of how robust funding and insurance systems support comprehensive, patient-centered care, offering a model that India can learn from while balancing costs and dignity.

India can study and adapt these practices while considering its unique cultural, demographic and economic context. Continuous research and the adoption of evidence-based practices are essential for improving care delivery and patient outcomes.

Integrating palliative care into India's health-care framework has become inevitable. A multi-pronged approach of prioritising capacity building, embedding palliative care in medical education, empowering allied health professionals, and addressing systemic challenges can transform the landscape of end-of-life care in the country.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Safety is a forgotten word

Back-to-back fire explosions, in a pharmaceutical unit near Hyderabad and in a cracker unit near Sivakasi, pose a common question. Were these premises constructed to manufacture pharmaceuticals and firecrackers, respectively, or were the constructions improvised or converted to suit the requirements? Explosions in cracker units seem to be recurring accidents.

V. Lakshmanan,
Tirupur, Tamil Nadu

The government departments concerned must inspect factory premises at frequent intervals. Any non-compliance with safety rules should result in heavy fines and even the suspension of operations. The focus seems to be on making profits using cheap labour and curtailing expenditure on safety. India needs to follow standard operating procedures when it comes to safety – as it is in the developed world.

K. Chellappan,
Seattle, U.S.

There is hardly any information on whether precautionary and safety measures were in effect at the sites in Telangana and Tamil Nadu. The victims hailed from the lower strata of society. When will India start to value its human resources?

C.G. Kuriakose,
Kothamangalam, Kerala

The accident in Tamil Nadu, just a day after an explosion at a plant in Telangana, exemplifies the bitter reality – of unending compromises made by

industrial and commercial enterprises in the country in ensuring a safe workplace for millions of workers. That a majority of them are unorganised, with no say in the matter, and are struggling to survive, makes it even sadder. All directives about improving safety appear to evaporate as quickly as the ink used to print them.

Kamal Laddha,
Bengaluru

Interrogation and training
That abhorrent incidents such as custodial torture

and death continue to occur in this digital era, when there is significant awareness of human rights among various sections of society, are a matter of serious concern. No law permits the adoption of third degree methods or high-handedness in respect of an investigation by the law enforcement agency in a civilised society. What one can infer from the case of custodial torture in Sivaganga, Tamil Nadu, is the lack of interactions, guidance and motivation by the supervisory-level

officials. All the ranks need to be exposed to the nuances of law and order and scientific methods of investigation through sensitisation, refresher courses and workshops and seminars at regular intervals. The process of interrogation should be transparent and undertaken under the personal supervision of higher officials.

V. Johan Dhanakumar,
Chennai

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

AI in India: strategy must precede mission

India has declared its ambition to be a global leader in Artificial Intelligence (AI) governance. As the world's largest democracy and a tech-savvy nation, it is well-positioned to champion an inclusive and human-centric approach to AI. But this aspiration risks being undermined by the absence of a comprehensive, democratically anchored national AI strategy.

India's current AI initiatives centre on the IndiaAI Mission, led by a bureaucrat and housed as an independent unit within a Section 8 company under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology. The Mission cannot substitute for a national strategy. Missions are vehicles for executing priorities, but only after priorities have been clearly defined.

In India's approach to AI, fundamental questions remain unresolved. What are our national priorities? Which governance values should guide us? How should institutions be structured? Moving forward without answering these questions poses two risks: it may compromise India's ability to lead and maintain strategic autonomy; and it may embed an AI governance model that is technocratic, opaque, and lacking democratic legitimacy.

The many risks
This is not an abstract concern. Several pressing risks are already visible. AI technologies are becoming increasingly embedded in India's defence, intelligence, and critical infrastructure systems. Recent developments – military conflict, weaponisation of financial infrastructure, strategic technology competition – have demonstrated how technological dependencies can be leveraged to achieve geopolitical objectives. Without an indigenous, coordinated AI strategy, India faces the risk of strategic dependencies on foreign technologies. Safeguarding India's strategic autonomy requires developing a whole-of-government

**Ruchi Gupta**

Executive Editor of the Future of India Foundation and an Aspen Global Leadership Fellow. This column is based on the Foundation's report 'Governing AI in India: Why Strategy Must Precede Mission'. Vandita Gupta contributed to the research

AI strategy aligned with national security priorities and focused on building resilient, sovereign capabilities.

Data is the raw material of AI. As India builds public data platforms, how this data is curated, accessed, and governed will shape innovation and market power. Without transparent, democratically debated data governance frameworks, these ecosystems risk reinforcing corporate concentration and undermining public trust.

Nowhere is the governance gap clearer than in employment. Automation is already transforming India's labour market. In 2024 alone, India's top three IT services firms – TCS, Infosys, and Wipro – shed nearly 65,000 jobs. The International Monetary Fund estimates that 26% of India's workforce is exposed to generative AI, with 12% at risk of displacement. Despite this, national AI initiatives do not sufficiently address employment transition, workforce planning, or social protections. The absence of structured input from labour economists, civil society, and workforce experts has limited the ambit of deliberation to technocratic concerns. Addressing these gaps will help ensure that AI adoption supports economic resilience and social stability.

AI is extraordinarily energy-hungry. The International Energy Agency projects that global data centre electricity demand will double by 2030. This poses challenges for India. Eleven of India's 20 largest cities face acute water stress. Groundwater levels are rapidly declining in Bengaluru and Hyderabad – both emerging AI and data centre hubs. Yet policy discussions on AI in India have scarcely addressed the energy implications of scaling AI.

AI will profoundly reshape work, education, and the social contract. It will determine which skills are valued, influence how citizens are trained, and shape who benefits from economic gains. These shifts cannot be left

to market forces or technical experts. They demand national dialogue involving industry leaders, parliamentarians, educators, civil society, and labour representatives, to chart a just and equitable path forward.

As AI gets integrated in sensitive domains – healthcare, policing, welfare – the risks of bias, discrimination, and lost accountability grow. Without clear regulatory frameworks, public trust in AI governance may erode.

India has rightly positioned itself as a voice for the Global South in international AI governance forums, notably through its leadership in the Global Partnership on AI. But global credibility depends on coherence at home. Without a transparent, democratically grounded national strategy, India's ability to shape global AI norms will remain constrained.

Strategy must precede mission. Harnessing AI for national leadership and public good requires proactive, strategic, and coordinated governance. Managing this transition demands inclusive, forward-looking, and democratically accountable governance anchored in a national strategy shaped through open public deliberation.

What is the path forward?

First, India needs to publish a Cabinet-endorsed national AI strategy and present it to Parliament. Second, it must constitute a dedicated Standing Committee on AI and Emerging Technologies in Parliament to oversee executive initiatives, ethical risks, and public consultations. Third, it needs to commission a national impact study on AI-driven employment disruption, particularly in entry-level white-collar roles, with granular data on sectors, demographics, and regions.

Taking the time to build democratic consensus and institutional architecture is a difficult road to take, but it will make India a genuine AI leader.

Without a transparent, democratically grounded national strategy on AI, India's ability to shape global AI norms will remain constrained

Deaths in the sanctuary

Death of tigers leaves environmentalists alarmed, raising conservation concerns

STATE OF PLAY

R. Krishna Kumar
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The recent death of an adult tigress and its four cubs – due to poisoning at the Male Mahadev Hills (MM Hills) Wildlife Sanctuary in Karnataka – has not only shocked conservationists but has raised pertinent questions on the wildlife protection machinery and environmental governance prevailing in the State.

In the immediate aftermath of the preliminary investigation, three people were arrested and a few officials were sent on leave – actions aimed at conveying the administration's resolve to act decisively.

Besides, two investigations are currently under way, one by the Karnataka Forest Department and another by a committee constituted by the National Tiger Conservation Authority. Both committees have been given 14 days time to submit their reports.

It is being argued that they should not only investigate the immediate lapses that led to the tiger deaths, but also take a broader view of the systemic and administrative issues that resulted in such a tragedy, which is reflective of a deeper malaise within the department.

Multiple concerns need to be addressed, including whether there was a larger network of poachers at work, shortage of manpower for protection duties, delay in release of wages to the frontline staff, which may impact jungle patrolling, delay in release of compensation to the victims in case of conflict with wildlife, among others.

Experts also point to another gaping flaw in the system: it



is the failure to secure the conviction of those responsible for killing wild animals. The conviction rates are so poor that the law does not act as a deterrent anymore to prevent "revenge killings" or even poaching.

For instance, in February 2023, a tiger was found poisoned, its limbs tethered to a stone and its body dumped in a tank in Bandipur. However, more than two years later, the case has seen no progress. In fact, elephant deaths due to electrocution in Karnataka are more rampant than tiger deaths.

According to official statistics, of the 291 elephants that died in the State between 2021-22 and August 2024, as many as 30 were electrocuted and six were poached. Reports of wild animals being trapped in snares have emerged from the MM Hills, Bandipur, Nagarhole, and other regions in recent times. Yet, in most cases, authorities have hit a dead end and have made little progress to result in convictions.

It is true that human-animal conflict is intensifying across Karnataka, with crop depredation by elephants and livestock killings by tigers or leopards on the rise. But these conflicts have also been exacerbated by flawed policies – delays in compensation being a clear indicator.

According to statistics from

the Karnataka Forest Department, 35,580 conflict cases were reported during 2024-25. Compensation was approved in only 20,147 cases, while 14,245 cases remained pending. In addition, 918 cases were denied compensation.

Karnataka takes pride in its tiger and elephant populations as markers of the success of conservation initiatives. With an estimated 563 tigers, according to the 2022 census, Karnataka also harbours nearly 6,400 elephants as per 2023 data, the highest in the country. But conservation cannot be about numbers alone while ignoring the inherent contradictions in policies that undermine the environmental gains.

The reversal in the government's stance on Goa-Tamnar power transmission line that cuts through Kali Tiger Reserve – a project which the forest department had rejected in 2024; the Sharavathi storage project which threatens to fragment the Western Ghats ecosystem, clearances to mini hydel projects in sensitive areas, linear projects cutting through areas where human-wildlife conflict is high are a few examples that cast doubt on the State's commitment to environmental protection.

This is because such projects inevitably lead to habitat encroachment, fragmentation, and disturbance, forcing wildlife to stray into human landscapes, aggravating conflict situations. The deaths of five tigers in the MM Hills should be viewed against the backdrop of such policy inconsistencies, which reflect a deeper malaise in environmental governance.

Now that committees are probing the incident, it remains to be seen whether they will merely assign blame or work to fix the system.

Custodial deaths: police convictions remain zero in T.N. and beyond

Dalits are disproportionately targeted for police brutality in Tamil Nadu

DATA POINT

Sambavi Parthasarathy
Devyanshi Bihani
Vignesh Radhakrishnan

Even a murderer would not have caused this much injury to a person", observed the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court on Tuesday during the hearing of a batch of Public Interest Litigation petitions over the custodial death of Ajith Kumar, a security guard who died in police custody in Sivaganga district last Saturday.

Kumar's death is not an isolated incident but part of a broader picture in Tamil Nadu and even in the rest of the country. The pattern is clear: a significant number of custodial deaths take place, of which a considerable number of them are reported, a few of the policemen are arrested, and none of them are convicted. Kumar's death is definitely not the first instance to spark public outrage in Tamil Nadu. The Ambasamudram custodial torture in 2023 and the Sathankulam custodial torture case that led to the death of a father-son duo in 2020 are still fresh in memory.

Data show that Tamil Nadu has a long history of police brutality. According to data from Parliament, 490 deaths were reported while suspects were in judicial or police custody between 2016-17 and 2021-22 (up to March 31, 2022), as shown in **Map 1**.

In the past six years, Uttar Pradesh reported the highest number of fatalities (2,630) in judicial/police custody among all the States, while Tamil Nadu reported the highest number among the southern States. In total, 11,656 deaths were recorded in India in the period considered. It is important to note, though, that not all custody deaths are due to police excess.

While the five constables involved in Kumar's death were arrested, data show that no police of-

ficer has been convicted for custodial deaths between 2017 and 2022. Not just in Tamil Nadu, but across India, no police officer has been held accountable for such deaths in this period.

In India, 345 magisterial/judicial enquiries were ordered into the deaths of persons in police custody/lockup between 2017 and 2022 (**Chart 2**). And in these five years, 123 policemen were even arrested while such deaths were investigated. Moreover, over 79 were also charged. However, not a single policeman was convicted.

Data also show that convictions of State police personnel have been rare, not just in the case of custodial deaths, but also in any human rights violations case.

Chart 3 shows that 74 cases of human rights violations related to illegal detention, deaths in custody, and torture/causing hurt/injury were filed against police in India between 2017 and 2022. Forty-one police personnel were charged. However, only three were convicted.

Importantly, policemen arrested for human rights violations is disproportionately low compared to the actual cases. Those convicted form a negligible share of those few arrested.

Worryingly, those belonging to Scheduled Castes (SCs) often bear the brunt of custodial torture in Tamil Nadu. A disproportionately higher share of detainees – persons held lawfully in custody under preventive detention laws, distinct from regular suspects charged with specific crimes – in Tamil Nadu belong to the SCs. In 2022, 38.5% of the detainees in Tamil Nadu were SC, while the community's share in the State's population was 20% (**Table 4**). This problem is mostly unique to Tamil Nadu and as can be seen from the table, the State police also take in a much higher number of people in detention. As on December 31, 2022, Tamil Nadu had 2,129 detainees – almost half of India's number.

No accountability for custodial deaths

The data for the charts were sourced from the National Crime Records Bureau, the Parliament Questions and Answers, and the 2011 Census

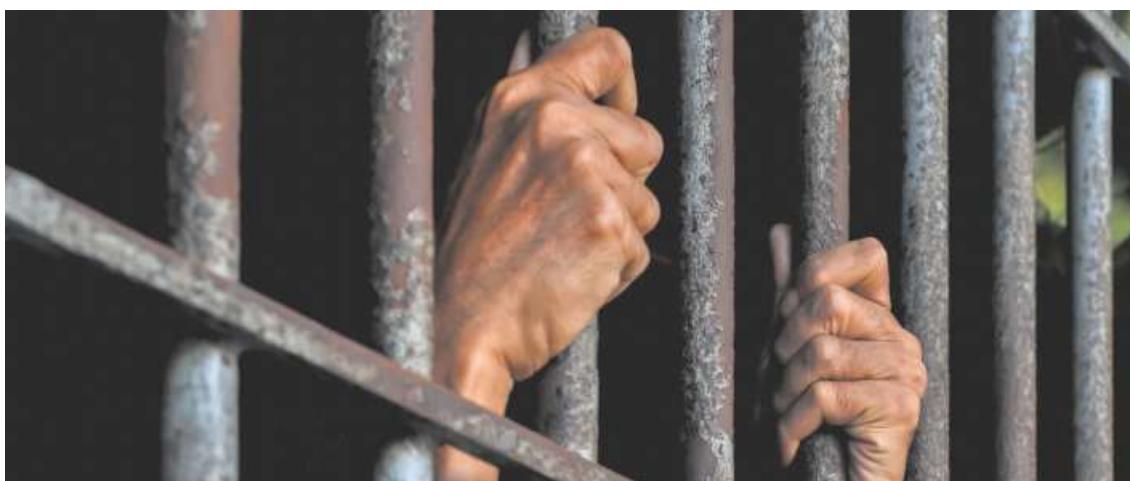


Chart 2: The magisterial/judicial enquiries ordered into the deaths in police custody/lock up, policemen charged/arrested/convicted (2017-2022)

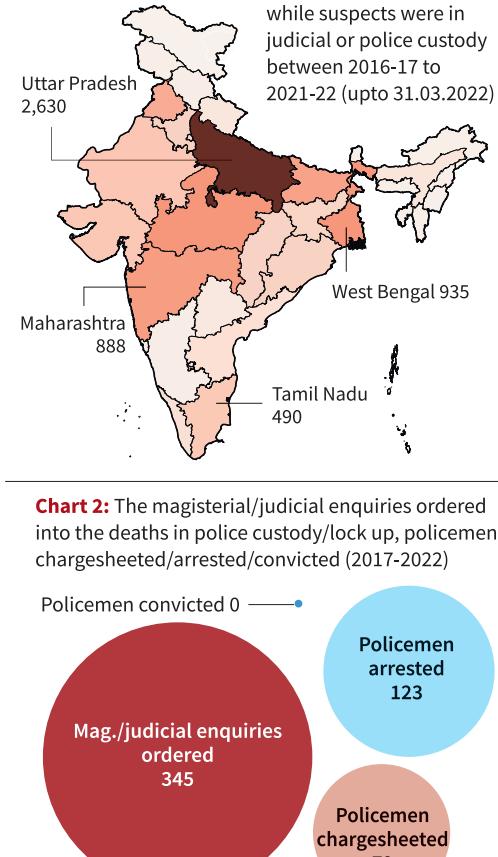


Chart 3: Cases registered against police personnel for select human rights violations filed between 2017-2022 in India



Table 4: The share of SC in detenues among States with a high number of detenues as on December 31, 2022

State/U.T.	Total detenues	% of SC in detenues	% of SC in total population
Tamil Nadu	2,129	38.5	20.01
J&K U.T.	546	1.1	7.38
Gujarat	334	9.6	6.74
Haryana	235	1.3	20.17
Uttar Pradesh	172	7.6	20.7

Tamil Nadu had 2,129 detenues – almost half of India's number

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FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO JULY 3, 1975

60 p.c. of Foreign Doctors fail in tests by council

London, July 2: Sixty percent of the foreign doctors who took Britain's first tests in English and clinical knowledge have failed, the General Medical Council (GMC) announced yesterday.

Dr. Abdul Sayeed, Chairman of the Overseas Doctors Association, criticised the examinations and said he was not surprised that so many candidates had failed.

Only 27 out of 68 doctors passed the two-day tests held in Edinburgh last week. Dr. Sayeed remarked, "The question paper was such that many doctors could not understand it."

The candidates came from 70 countries whose citizens are eligible for the tests.

Doctors from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the West Indies are not required to sit for the examinations because their degrees are recognised in the UK. However, this year's graduates from India, Pakistan, and non-Commonwealth nations must undergo the tests.

The two-day assessments evaluated an applicant's ability to understand colloquial expressions that might arise in a doctor's office, in addition to testing their clinical knowledge.

Dr. Sayeed commented, "On the multiple-choice question, many doctors spent 20 minutes deciphering it because it was very bizarre and badly produced."

They were asked how they would cope with a pregnant woman with an infectious disease who had been in a road crash, and what they would tell the woman's mother-in-law. "It is not the sort of situation that a medical practitioner is likely to encounter very often," Dr. Sayeed said.

"All these put together in one question was a bit too much. The doctors were not expecting that type of question."

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JULY 3, 1925

Centenary celebrations.

London, July 2: The Duke and Duchess of York attended the Railway Centenary Celebrations at Darlington where a quarter million people witnessed the six-mile long procession of locomotives and rolling stock showing the various stages of evolution from old "Puffing Billy" and "Dandy Coach" to the latest high-speed mammoth engines and luxurious carriages and restaurant saloons.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Number of private sector jobs lost in the U.S. in June 2025

33,000 As per ADP chief

economist Nela Richardson, a slowdown in hiring and reluctance to replace departing workers led to job losses, particularly in professional services, education, and healthcare. AFP

Civilians killed in South Sudan in first three months of 2025

739 This figure marks a 110% increase from last quarter (352 deaths), with Warrap State recording the most casualties. The surge follows intensified clashes between President Salva Kiir and Vice President Riek Machar, whose detention in March escalated tensions. AFP

Number of Bangladeshi nationals held in Delhi

18 Bangladeshi nationals, including seven women and six children were apprehended near the Panchsheel flyover in south Delhi for residing illegally in India, the police said on Wednesday. Most were engaged in informal jobs like rag-picking and daily-wage labour. PTI

Number of deaths in Europe due to early summer heatwave

8 People died as an early summer heatwave swept across Europe. France hospitalised 300 people, Italy issued red alerts in 18 cities, and Switzerland shut down a nuclear reactor due to overheated river water. In Spain, wildfires destroyed farms, while 50,000 people were evacuated in Turkey. REUTERS

Tariffs to be paid by Vietnam on exports to the U.S.

20 In per cent. U.S. President Donald Trump claimed that Vietnam will also pay a 40% tariff on transhipped goods, under a new trade deal. In a Truth Social post, Trump said Vietnam would open its market to U.S. products at 0% tariff. REUTERS

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Are gig workers a part of India's labour data?

Though gig work is technically included under economic activity in the Periodic Labour Force Survey, without a specific classification, the survey fails to offer visibility into the unique nature of digital labour, characterised by multiple job roles, dependence on algorithms, lack of formal contract and absence of safety metrics

ECONOMIC NOTES

Durga Narayan

The 2025 Union Budget took several measures to formally 'recognise' gig and platform workers, and extended various social protection schemes to this growing workforce. Despite this recognition, the revised Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), 2025 does not include substantive changes to account for the diverse forms of gig and platform work.

Gaps in labour classification

Gig workers were first incorporated into the legal framework through the Code on Social Security, 2020. Under Chapter I, Section 2(35), a gig worker is defined as "a person who participates in a work arrangement and earns from such activities outside of a traditional employer-employee relationship." Platform work, as defined in the Code, is "a work arrangement outside of a traditional employer-employee relationship in which organisations or individuals use an online platform to access other organisations or individuals to solve specific problems or to provide specific services or any such other activities which may be notified by the Central Government, in exchange for payment."

While this definition separates gig workers from both formal and informal categories, it doesn't clearly define who a gig worker is or the nature of gig work. According to NITI Aayog's 2022 report 'India's Booming Gig and Platform Economy,' the gig workforce is expected to reach 23.5 million by 2029-30. Despite such projections and efforts to define gig work, India's primary labour statistics source, the PLFS, continues to subsume gig work under vague categories such as 'self-employed', 'own-account workers', or 'casual labour'. This statistical invisibility has direct consequences.

Clause 141 of the Code on Social



On the periphery: Gig workers prepare to deliver orders in New Delhi, in 2024. REUTERS

Security, 2020, "seeks to provide that the Central Government shall establish a Social Security Fund for social security and welfare of the unorganised workers, gig workers and platform workers." Similarly, the National Social Security Board, constituted under Section 6 of the Code on Social Security, 2020, is tasked with framing and overseeing welfare schemes for gig and platform workers. Such welfare boards and policymakers rely on the PLFS for 'evidence-based policy,' but the absence of a distinct category for gig and platform workers undermines its very intent. When classification itself is unclear in primary datasets, access to schemes becomes uneven and exclusionary.

How the PLFS falls short

In response to a Rajya Sabha query on whether the government had updated PLFS methodology to capture the rise of

gig work, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation stated, "No update in the PLFS Schedule has been undertaken with the objective of specifically identifying persons engaged in the gig economy. However, all market activities i.e. activities performed for pay or profit which result in production of goods and services for exchange are included under the domain of economic activity considered in PLFS. The activity situation of a person who is found to be working or being engaged in economic activity during a specified reference period is associated with employment in PLFS. Hence, even the persons engaged in 'gig economy' for pay & profit are covered in PLFS."

Though gig work is technically included under economic activity, without a specific category or classification, the survey fails to offer visibility into the unique nature of digital

labour, characterised by multiple job roles, dependence on algorithms, lack of formal contract and absence of safety metrics. In the survey, while the question on the type of job contract provides an option for 'no written job contract', it doesn't capture the hybrid nature of work.

Unlike traditional self-employment, gig work is shaped by platform algorithms, performed across multiple apps and are mostly task-based rather than time-bound. Workers have no stable contracts, and often rely on digital reach. Many lack access to benefits or protections available to formal workers, and don't fully own their work processes, making the "self-employed" label misleading. Employment uncertainties, income volatility and algorithm governance remain invisible within PLFS classification. A food delivery person working across platforms like Swiggy, Zomato, for instance, will be flattened into a category that does not reflect entirely on their employment conditions or social security needs.

Recognition without representation

Recent policy efforts like the e-Shram registration, the issuance of digital ID cards, and health coverage under the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana indicate the state's recognition of the gig and platform workforce. But unless statistical systems like the PLFS evolve, the data meant to support and monitor these interventions cannot be considered inclusive.

The 2025 PLFS revision introduced some important updates: a larger sample size, monthly estimates, and better rural representation. However, it still does not address the issues of how gig work is defined and understood. For inclusive policy making, India must update PLFS classification codes or introduce survey modules that distinctly capture gig work.

Durga Narayan is a policy researcher affiliated with the Indian Institute for Human Settlements (IIHS) and the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), Mumbai.

THE GIST

Gig workers were first incorporated into the legal framework through the Code on Social Security, 2020.

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How did Indian universities fare on the QS ranking list?

What are the parameters on which universities are judged? How can Indian universities improve?

Somak Raychaudhury

The story so far:

For the first time, in the international ranking of universities published by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), a company specialising in higher education analysis based in the U.K., Indian universities have more than 50 spots in the top 1,500. The highest rank among Indian universities goes to IIT Delhi (Rank 123), closely followed by IIT Bombay, IIT Madras, IIT Kharagpur and IISc Bengaluru. This number has increased from 11 in 2015 to 54 in 2026, with eight universities, including Ashoka University in Haryana and Shiv Nadar Institute of Eminence in Greater Noida, getting featured for the first time.

What are the parameters?

The 2026 ranking is based on a whole range of parameters which include the

learning environment on campus, academic reputation (30%), impactful research (citations for research papers count for 20%, and international research network 5%), diversity (student diversity, international faculty and students count for 10%), student outcomes (employer reputation counts for 15%, while student placements 5%) and campus sustainability (5%).

Has higher education improved? These rankings reflect how Indian universities are increasingly adapting to the norms followed by universities worldwide, and are thus becoming comparable to international universities.

For instance, the average undergraduate student to faculty ratio in Indian universities is 19. In order to be internationally competitive, this number needs to be between 10-15. At Ashoka University, for instance, over the last year for about 3,000 undergraduates, the ratio

was 11.5. These undergraduates come from 20 countries, which enhances the score for international diversity. Most universities in India have few international students, and most public universities cannot employ international faculty, which results in low scores in these categories.

Moreover, over the last few decades, Indian universities have not put much emphasis on original research carried out by faculty and students. For STEM subjects especially, the research is traditionally done in research institutes. This is in sharp contrast to global practices, as universities are the primary institutions where creation of knowledge takes place, in addition to its transmission to students, worldwide.

However, this is now changing. More and more universities, particularly IITs/IISERs and new private sector universities, are paying particular attention to research. With the advent of

the National Education Plan, 2020 (NEP), which emphasises on research in universities, more and more Indian institutions will take their place on international ranking lists.

Public universities used to pay very little attention to the employment opportunities of students, but professional institutes such as the IITs and IIMs have always had placement cells and employers' fairs. Now, even for large central universities, this is an important consideration. All this is crucial to international ranking lists such as the QS.

How can universities fare better?

As more and more universities begin to build research networks across the world, and hire quality faculty who can do research along with the necessary teaching of students, we will see the rise of Indian universities in these ranking lists. India needs to encourage international students and faculty to become part of its educational institutions and to closely work with industry in identifying potential employment destinations for students. Particular attention to environmental aspects and sustainability in campuses will also earn points for universities aspiring to be among the top educational institutions.

Somak Raychaudhury is Vice-Chancellor and Professor of Physics, Ashoka University, Delhi-NCR. All opinions are personal.

THE GIST

The highest rank among Indian universities goes to IIT Delhi (Rank 123), closely followed by IIT Bombay, IIT Madras, IIT Kharagpur and IISc Bengaluru.

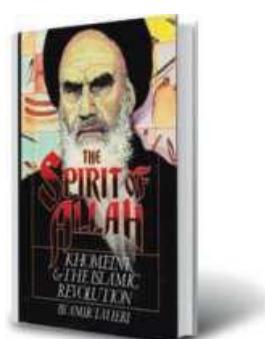
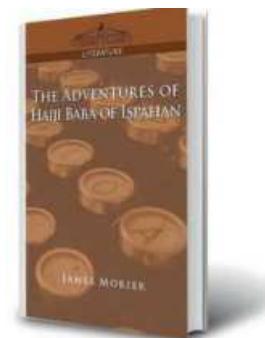
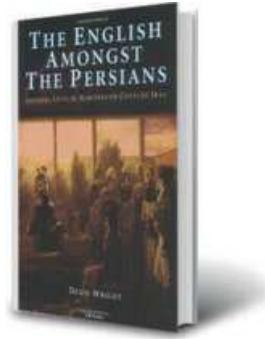
These rankings reflect how Indian universities are increasingly adapting to the norms followed by universities worldwide, and are thus becoming comparable to international universities.

India needs to encourage international students and faculty to become part of its educational institutions and to closely work with industry in identifying potential employment destinations for students.

BIBLIOGRAPHY



Hues of history: A carpet seller stands near his shop at Tehran's old main bazaar in Iran, on May 5. AP



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know Your English

K. Subrahmanian
S. Upendran

“How is Sundar’s leg?”

“It’s getting better. He consulted a specialist yesterday and the doctor said...”

“... did you say ‘consulted a specialist?’”

“That’s right! Why do you ask?”

“Well, a couple of months ago, Sujatha and I had an argument. She said we should say ‘consult with a doctor’ and not ‘consult a doctor’. And I said it was just the opposite. We don’t consult with a doctor, but consult a doctor. Now you tell me, I’m right. That’s great.”

“I’m glad you’re happy. But I didn’t say Sujatha was wrong.”

“What? You mean ‘consult with’ isn’t wrong?”

“No, it isn’t. ‘Consult with’ is acceptable. In fact, it’s used quite a lot in American English. For example, O. J. Simpson consulted with his lawyers.”

“But I could say ‘O. J. Simpson consulted his lawyers,’ right?”

“Right! Both ‘consult with’ and ‘consult’ are acceptable. Why don’t you consult your grammar teacher on this?”

“I’m afraid I can’t consult with her. She had an accident on Saturday.”

“An accident! What happened?”

“She hit a pot hole and was thrown off her scooter. She broke her right arm.”

“Ooh, that sounds bad.”

“I know. Yesterday, the Municipal authorities came by and filled all the pot holes with sand.”

“Their usual quick fix solution.”

“A what solution?”

“A ‘quick fix’ solution. It means a temporary solution to a problem. For example, Ramesh put some tape over the hole in the mosquito net as a quick fix to keep the insects out.”

“Can I say our politicians are not interested in finding a permanent solution to our water problem. They are only interested in a quick fix?”

“That’s a very good example. Our politicians are masters of the quick fix. Here’s another example. Our economy needs more than a quick fix to get back on track.”

“So a ‘quick fix’ is a temporary solution to a problem. Is it the same as a band aid solution?”

“Yes, it is. For example, you can either say, ‘I don’t want a band aid solution to this problem’, or ‘I don’t want a quick fix’.”

“I see. But we all seem to be interested in band aid solutions. I guess it’s easier to find a quick fix than a permanent solution to a problem.”

“That’s true. And perhaps that’s why we are hooked on band aid solutions.”

“Hooked on! What does that mean?”

“When you say you are ‘hooked on’ something or someone, it means you are addicted to or obsessed with someone or something. For example, Shyam is hooked on chocolates.”

“Meaning he is addicted to chocolate?”

“That’s right.”

“Can I say, I am hooked on Madhuri?”

“I think the whole world knows by now that you are hooked on Madhuri.”

“You’re probably right. Many people in India are hooked on Star TV.”

Published in *The Hindu* on February 11, 1997.

Geeta Doctor

Iran has been in the news for all the worst reasons in recent times. It's as if the echoes of Paul Erdman's sensationally titled study, *The Crash of '79*, that heralded the fall of the short-lived Pahlavi dynasty is still being felt today. It was written in the context of who controlled the surge of the oil economy while waiting for the Iranian Revolution to begin. At that time, it was clear enough to Iran watchers that it was in the marketplace of Tehran, that the Bazaaris, sipping their glasses of black tea with lumps of crystallised sugar, were stirring the narrative of revolt.

Being in the crosshairs of history the land has attracted countless invaders. It is rich in stories linked often to other cultures, as it is in the silk, gemstones, artefacts, dried fruits, prayer rugs, magnificent carpets and pelts of rare animals that are exchanged in its bazaars. Iran is an emporia of ideas and beliefs exchanged and exported through the centuries by its merchants, mercenaries and storytellers.

Lightning strikes

While travelling through the deeply ridged and folded countryside you might see the black robed vultures circling the mountain tops. They could be waiting to feast on the charred bricks and bones of yet another famous city on the plain of Pars attacked by the Mongols. Just as frequently armies of warriors have crossed across to loot and pillage their distant neighbours and return with the

spoils.

Who can forget Nader Shah taking over the Persian throne and first dismantling parts of the Ottoman Empire in the West and then turning his attention on north India. In lightning strikes and a reputation for a ferocious barbarity including the slaughter of women and children, he defeated the Mughal army in the Battle of Karnal in 1739.

As a peace offering in exchange for further attacks, he demanded and received the peacock throne and the world-famous Golconda diamonds, one of which, the Darya-i-Noor, is at the Gulistan Palace Museum in Tehran.

Rustam and Sohrab

In the poet Ferdousi's epic poem in 50,000 rhyming couplets, the *Shahnameh*, published in 1010 CE, it's the warrior kings of Persia that are celebrated. The most famous of these is the meeting between Rustam and his estranged son Sohrab on the battlefield. The image is one that has been reproduced in Persian style miniature paintings, on painted tiles and woven wall hangings. His poem stops with the last of the hereditary rulers Khosrow II leaving the throne; that is to say before the Arab intervention.

Ferdousi introduces us to a land of djinns and poets with links to the early Zoroastrian priests tending their fire temples. The winged symbol of the "Faravahar" with a figure of a man at the centre of a disc appears on the wall of the Fire Temple at Yazd in Iran; as it does at the Fire Temples of the Zoroastrians in

India who fled from there across the seas with their sacred fire.

Like the mythical fire bird, the Simorgh, the Parsi community of the Indian subcontinent kept their promise to add their special lustre to the country of their adoption, while keeping their faith alive.

When the British came on the scene, the two cultures blended with an ease that is best described in the satirical *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan*. It was written in English by James Justinian Morier, who lived in Qajar Iran as the British envoy. In his capacity as Hajji Baba, a Bazaar with a yen for travel, this is what he tells us: "By the time I was sixteen it would be difficult to say whether I was most accomplished as a barber or a scholar. Besides shaving the head, cleaning the ears, and trimming the beard, I became famous for my skill in the offices of the bath. No one understood better than I the different modes of rubbing or shampooing, as practised in India, Cashmere, and Turkey; and I had an art peculiar to myself of making the joints to crack, and my slaps echo."

British entry

There was an almost instant recognition between the scholars of the two nations that is explored in the two companion volumes by Sir Denis Wright who served as British Ambassador to Mohammed Reza Shah of Iran during his glory years. *The English Amongst the Persians* and *The Persians Amongst the English* are a glorious recapitulation of what was always a formidable relationship. As Wright

mentions in his preface, "nowhere in the world is British cleverness so wildly exaggerated as in Iran, and nowhere are the British more hated for it". One of the reasons advanced for this analysis is that the British considered Iran as a decoy for India, against Russian advancements in the area; a Cold War thesis that we may now ignore.

One of the most chilling accounts of what happened to Iran after the installation of "Khomeini and the Islamic Revolution" is by Amir Taheri in his 1985 book *The Spirit of Allah*. As editor-in-Chief of *Kayhan*, the national newspaper of Iran in the 1970s, Taheri, an academic now in exile, has written several books since then. However, inexorable the trajectory of events that have led to the rule by the Ayatollahs, Taheri includes a ghazal by Khomeini written perhaps in the 1930s.

"It's spring and there is blossom on the almond tree/The bride in the garden is verily, the almond tree." And yet after such gentle beginnings, the conclusion is abrupt and terrifying.

One can only return to an earlier poet and the twelfth century Attar of Nishapur and the enchanting vision that he offers in *The Conference of Birds*.

It's in the form of a journey, a quest through many different forms of attachment in search of the marvellous Simorgh, the female spirit of rebirth who rises repeatedly through several revolutions. It's a reaffirmation of life through fire.

The journey starts within.
Geeta Doctor is a critic and cultural commentator.

THE DAILY QUIZ

This is a quiz on longstanding records in various sports

Srinivasan Ramani

QUESTION 1

This gentleman, who was born on July 3, 1851, played in the first-ever Test cricket innings and scored a century. In doing so, he set a record for the highest individual share of runs in a completed team innings that remains unbroken to this day. Name him and his country.

QUESTION 2

Name this Czechoslovakian athlete who set a world record in the women's 800-metre race in 1983. Her phenomenal time has held for over four decades, making it the longest-standing individual world record in athletics.

QUESTION 3

This behemoth basketball player,

nicknamed "The Stilt," scored an unbelievable 100 points in a single game for the Philadelphia Warriors on March 2, 1962. In the modern era, the late Kobe Bryant came closest to this mark in 2006. Name the record-holder and the number of points Kobe Bryant scored.

QUESTION 4

This English cueist was the undisputed king of early snooker, winning the first 15 World Snooker Championships held from 1927 to 1946. He was undefeated in the tournament before his retirement from the event. Name him.

QUESTION 5

This French football striker holds the seemingly unbreakable record for the most goals in a single FIFA World Cup tournament, scoring 13 times at the 1958 event. Name him and his sport. GETTY IMAGES



Visual question:

At the 1968 Olympics, this American athlete redefined his sport with a single, breathtaking performance nicknamed "the leap of the century." His world record stood for 23 years before being broken by Mike Powell, but his Olympic record from that day has never been beaten. Name him and his sport. GETTY IMAGES

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz:

1. The Civil Rights Act was signed by this U.S. President. **Ans: Lyndon B. Johnson**
2. This American jurist was the Supreme Court's first African-American justice. **Ans: Thurgood Marshall**

3. This American comedian-writer is best known for his show *Seinfeld*. **Ans: Larry David**

4. This American Nobel Laureate is known for his works, *A Farewell to Arms* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. **Ans: Ernest Hemingway**

5. This American businessman developed the Ford Mustang, Lincoln Continental Mark III, and Ford Pinto cars. **Ans: Lee Iacocca**

Visual: Identify this American aviator.

Ans: Amelia Earhart

Early Birds: Siddhartha Viswanathan|

Erfanly Oosmany|Tito Shiladitya|

Arun Kumar Singh|Parimal Das|

Word of the day

Pugilism:

fighting with fists

Synonym:

boxing

Usage: When their pugilism took on a dangerous character, he decided to intervene.

Pronunciation: newsth.live/pugilismpro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /pjju:dʒɪlɪzəm/

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

IN BRIEF



Daimler India unveils trucks for construction, mining

Daimler India Commercial Vehicles (DICV), a wholly owned subsidiary of Daimler Truck AG, on Wednesday unveiled a range of BharatBenz trucks for construction and mining applications. While the HX series is for construction, Torqshift is for mining, and are priced from ₹56 lakh (ex-showroom), the company said. Introduction of HX and Torqshift follows extensive real-world validation, with more than 150 trucks deployed on customer trials, the company said.

Indian Bank, PNB drop minimum balance charges

Indian Bank has announced a complete waiver of minimum balance charges across all savings bank accounts effective July 7. Effective July 1, Punjab National Bank, too, has decided to waive penal charges for non-maintenance of minimum average balance (MAB) in all savings accounts. Indian Bank also announced a reduction of 5 basis points (bps) in its one-year marginal cost of funds based lending rate (MCLR), bringing it down to 9.00%, effective July 3, 2025.

SEBI mandates common contract note with VWAP

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has mandated a common contract note with single volume weighted average price (VWAP) with effect from June 27. "The reform will simplify the post-trade reporting process by consolidating trades executed across multiple exchanges into a single, harmonised document, eliminating the need to process multiple contract notes," the regulator said in a statement on Wednesday.

‘Mini U.S.-India deal possible but likely symbolic’

Mini Tejaswi
BENGALURU

While a mini trade between India and the U.S. still seems possible before July 9, such a deal would likely be a ‘symbolic one’ centred on “low-hanging fruits”, according to some industry captains.

Such a deal, they added, would be a small beginning in a long journey for the world’s largest democracies.

According to Atul Keshap, former Ambassador and president, U.S.-India Business Council (USIBC), a mini trade deal would be the first step in the two countries’ journey towards achieving the ‘Mission 500’ target of \$500 billion in bilateral trade by 2030.

“There is great promise in building deeper energy and technology ties, in electronics and IT, which will remain strong pillars of our bilateral trade,” Mr. Keshap told *The Hindu*.

Steadfast partnership

He added clinching an initial agreement would reaffirm the steadfast partnership between the two governments and show both parties were committed to trade as a tool for enhancing economic progress and building new commercial opportunities.

Responding to a query on likely key sticking points, Mr. Keshap said, “The more trade between two countries, the higher the chances for disagreements over trade policy. In the end, we need a deal that enables the private sectors of both countries to deliver on the promise of free enterprise and



Atul Keshap

entrepreneurship.”

Kami Viswanathan, president of Middle East, Indian Subcontinent and Africa (MEISA), FedEx, said she was hopeful of seeing a mini deal out by the expected time.

“It’s due for some time now, and I hope it comes soon. I hope there will be something happening within the timeline itself. That will do good to businesses, trade, and to both countries,” she anticipated.

Kumar Deep, Country Director-India, Information Technology Industry Council, a Washington DC-based apex body for global tech firms, said, “There is an ever-changing geopolitical situation. We are not sure as to what is going to come out by July 9, will there be a formal trade announcement by that time or not. But it is heartening to see that both governments are closely engaged in having some concrete trade negotiations.”

Shashi Shekhar Vempati, ex-CEO, Prasar Bharati, said, “It is only a logical extension we deepen ties across technology, supply chain and other areas and minimise barriers. Things are looking very positive.”

SBI classifies RCom loan account as fraud, reports Anil to RBI

The report has mentioned about significant irregularities, including fund diversion and violations of the terms and conditions of the loan

Lalatendu Mishra
MUMBAI

In a major setback for Reliance Group chairman Anil D. Ambani, the State Bank of India (SBI) has decided to go after him by classifying its loan account of Reliance Communications Ltd. (RCom) as fraud.

The country’s largest public sector lender has also decided to report Mr. Ambani, the erstwhile director of RCom, to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) seeking appropriate action as per the central bank’s guidelines.

The move follows a forensic audit by the bank and exchange of show-cause notices and responses for a year. REUTERS



Anil D Ambani

In the dock: The move follows a forensic audit by the bank and exchange of show-cause notices and responses for a year. REUTERS

tem. Mr. Ambani is expected to face regulatory and legal action including civil and criminal proceedings and the case might be handed over to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) for further investigation. RCom, which had turned a non-performing asset (NPA), was admitted to the IBC process in May 2018, and as of March 2025, had a total debt of ₹48,216 crore.

Under Section 32 A of the IBC, the company is protected from any action but its promoter faces liability and criminal proceedings. SBI’s FIC on June 13, 2025 identified a consistent pattern of financial misconduct and found that RCom and its subsidiaries were engaged in fund diversion and opaque transactions. The forensic audit had revealed large scale diversion of the bank’s

funds which were channelled through related entities, temporarily parked in mutual funds and fixed deposits and cycled via day to day transactions. Mr. Ambani’s lawyers have denied the allegations.

“SBI has not even responded to Mr. Ambani’s communication about the invalidity of the Show Cause Notice (SCN) for almost a year, and has not even provided the information forming the basis of their decision despite being repeatedly requested by Mr. Ambani, to enable him to respond to the SCN,” she said.

“SBI has not even responded to Mr. Ambani’s communication about the invalidity of the Show Cause Notice (SCN) for almost a year, and has not even provided the information forming the basis of their decision despite being repeatedly requested by Mr. Ambani, to enable him to respond to the SCN,” she said.

Centre gives green signal for bike taxis; Rapido hails move

Jagriti Chandra
NEW DELHI

The Centre allowed inclusion of “non-transport motorcycles” by ride-hailing apps in its revised guidelines for taxi aggregators at a time States like Karnataka have banned bike taxis.

The guidelines issued by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) on July 1 provide a regulatory framework for State governments to issue licences and regulate aggregators. It says State governments may adopt these revised guidelines

within three months. Bike-hailing app Rapido welcomed the move. “By recognising non-transport motorcycles as a means of shared mobility, the government opened the door to more affordable transportation options for millions, especially in underserved and hyperlocal areas,” it said in a release.

Ind-Ra says MFIs will return to normalcy only in H2 of FY26

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

Microfinance institutions (MFIs) will return to normalcy only by the second half of fiscal 2026, credit rating agency India Ratings said in a report. The organisation has given the sector a ‘deteriorating outlook’.

Ind-Ra cited the recent ordinances by the Tamil Nadu and Karnataka governments creating repayment anxieties as one of the reasons for low profitability. The two State governments had brought in ordinances to curb coercive practices of collection

agents. This is expected to impact the sector’s return profile in the medium term, and the normalisation to FY24 levels would be difficult due to the rising operating expense and rationalisation of lending yields,” Ind-Ra said in the report. Banks that lend to MFIs have started factoring in non-MFI loans exposure, it added.

MARKETS

MARKET WATCH

	WEDNESDAY	% CHANGE
Sensex	83,410	-0.34
US Dollar	85.62	-0.03
Gold	99,170	0.50
Brent oil	67.12	0.00

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Enter.	2630.20	8.40
Adani Ports.	1443.90	-3.10
Apollo Hosp.	7441.00	-55.00
Asian Paints	2419.40	-49.90
Axis Bank	1175.30	2.00
Bajaj Auto	8356.50	-42.50
Bajaj FinServ	2007.90	-45.90
Bajaj Finance	923.00	-13.65
Bharti Airtel	2033.30	13.90
Cipla	1497.60	-18.10
Coal India	386.90	2.85
Dr Reddy's Lab.	1270.80	-6.00
Eicher Motors	5722.50	7.00
Eterna Ltd.	259.75	-1.25
Grasim Ind.	2849.80	1.70
HCL Tech	1718.60	0.30
HFDC Bank	1986.00	-26.10
HFDC Life	789.70	-20.20
Hero MotoCorp	4243.70	17.70
Hindalco	698.35	4.05
Hindustan Unilever	2307.10	11.60
ICICI Bank	1427.80	-4.20
IndusInd Bank	857.65	-21.45
Infosys	1610.50	3.70
ITC	412.95	-2.15
Jio Financial Services Ltd.	326.70	2.90
JSW Steel	1059.90	30.30
Kotak Bank	2169.10	-14.50
L&T	3596.80	-69.90
M&M	3165.20	-10.90
Maruti Suzuki	12622.00	180.00
NestleIndia	2388.00	-22.10
NTPC	333.75	1.15
ONGC	241.07	-2.30
PowerGrid Corp	294.85	-2.70
Reliance Ind.	1518.80	-9.60
SBI Life	1856.80	5.70
State Bank	812.90	-7.40
Shriram Finance Ltd.	676.90	-19.55
Sun Pharma	1677.50	10.30
Tata Consumer Products Ltd.	1095.80	0.20
Tata Motors	688.55	4.75
Tata Steel	165.88	5.82
TCS	3423.30	-6.40
Tech Mahindra	1677.10	5.90
Titan	3708.00	7.50
Trent Ltd.	6222.50	78.50
UltraTech Cement	12436.00	226.00
Wipro	267.00	2.45

EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	85.50	85.82
Euro	100.52	100.90
British Pound	117.06	117.50
Japanese Yen (100)	59.31	59.53
Chinese Yuan	11.93	11.97
Swiss Franc	107.79	108.21
Singapore Dollar	67.09	67.36
Canadian Dollar	62.65	62.89
Malaysian Ringgit	20.22	20.32
Australian Dollar	56.06	56.28

Source: Indian Bank

Raising a toast



Unique flavour: The photograph shows Clos Vougeot castle, France. This vineyard, known as a ‘Climat’, was listed as an UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2015. On July 4, Burgundy will celebrate the 10th anniversary of inclusion of ‘Climats’ in World Heritage List. These are vineyard plots with an unique identity defined by soil, sunshine and rainfall, embodying the spirit and soul of this wine-growing region. AFP

Infosys ‘reminds’ employees to ensure work-life balance, better productivity

Mini Tejaswi
BENGALURU

At a time when N. R. Narayanan is holding firm about Indian workers logging in at least 70-hour work weeks, Infosys, the company he co-founded and later retired from, is sending out reminders to employees to ensure they maintain a good work-life balance.

The country’s second-largest tech firm wants its employees to work only 9.15 hours, five days a week, on average. And, if anyone is found working



The country’s second-largest tech firm wants its employees to work only 9.15 hours,

all employees working from home and from various offices of the company.

“We reach out to employees who are spending more time at work very proactively to ensure proper work-life balance and encourage them to focus on holistic well-being,” the source said further.

Infosys is currently in a silent period and therefore did not comment officially. “Our commitment to mental and physical wellness is supported by a wide range of health initiatives and resources. Through our

award-winning Health Assessment and Lifestyle Enrichment (HALE) programme, we continue to foster a culture of health, safety, and overall wellness,” the source said further.

According to information available with *The Hindu*, HALE, since its inception, has done pioneering work in the area of employee health (physical and mental), employee safety, encouraging leisure and creating and sustaining a healthy workforce, which can balance work life and is productive.

Starlink steps into Sri Lanka, its third market in South Asia

Aroon Deep
NEW DELHI

Starlink, the SpaceX-operated satellite Internet service, is now available in Sri Lanka, the third market to allow the service in South Asia after Bhutan and Bangladesh. Elon Musk, SpaceX’s founder and CEO, announced the service’s availability in the country on his social media platform X, formerly Twitter.

Parnil Urdhwareshe, Starlink’s top executive in India, played a role in at least two of the launches the company has managed in neighbouring countries: he had met Sri Lanka’s Presidential Adviser on Climate Change Ruwan Wijewardene last July. In 2023, Mr. Urdhwareshe also met the then State Minister for Information and Communication Technology Zulnaid Ahmed Palak in Bangladesh, shortly before trials for the service started in

Intel's new CEO eyes big shift in chip making



Chipping away: Intel posted a net loss attributable to the company of \$18.8 billion for 2024. REUTERS

Reuters
SAN FRANCISCO

Intel's new chief executive is exploring a big change to its contract manufacturing business to win major customers, two people familiar with the matter told *Reuters*, in a potentially expensive shift from his predecessor's plans.

If implemented, the new strategy for what Intel calls its "foundry" business would entail no longer marketing certain chipmaking technology, which the company had long developed, to external customers, the people said.

Since taking the company's helm in March, CEO Lip-Bu Tan has moved fast to cut costs and find a new path to revive the ailing U.S. chipmaker. By June, he started voicing that a manufacturing process that prior CEO Pat Gelsinger bet heavily on, known as 18A, was losing its appeal to new customers, said the sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

To put aside external sales of 18A and its variant 18A-P, manufacturing processes that have cost Intel billions of dollars to develop, the company would have to take a write-off, one of the people familiar with the matter said. Industry analysts contacted by *Reuters* said such a charge could amount to a loss of hundreds of millions, if not billions, of dollars.

Intel declined to comment on such "hypothetical scenarios or market speculation." It said the lead customer for 18A has long been Intel itself, and it aims to ramp production of its "Panther Lake" laptop chips later in 2025, which it called the most advanced processors ever designed and manufactured in the United States.

Persuading outside clients to use Intel's factories remains key to its future. As its 18A fabrication process faced delays, rival TSMC's N2 technology has been on track for production. Mr. Tan's preliminary answer to this challenge: focus more resources on 14A, a next-generation chipmaking process where Intel expects to have advantages over Taiwan's TSMC, the two sources said. The move is part of a play for big customers like Apple and Nvidia, which currently pay TSMC to manufacture their chips.

Mr. Tan has tasked the company with teeing up options for discussion with Intel's board when it meets as early as this month, including whether to stop marketing 18A to new clients, one of the two sources said. The board might not reach a decision on 18A until a subsequent autumn meeting in light of the matter's complexity and the enormous money at stake, the person said.

Turning around business

Intel declined to comment on what it called rumor. In a statement, it said: "Lip-Bu and the executive team are committed to strengthening our roadmap, building trust with our customers, and improving our financial position for the future. We have identified clear areas of focus and will take actions needed to turn the business around." Last year was Intel's first unprofitable year since 1986. It posted a net loss attributable to the company of \$18.8 billion for 2024.

The Intel chief executive's deliberations show the enormous risks – and costs – under consideration to move the storied U.S. chipmaker back onto solid footing.

They tried Made in the USA – it was too expensive for their customers

Tariffs force manufacturers to choose between tariffs or higher U.S. production costs; retailers resist pricing increases, squeezing small and mid-size manufacturers; companies explore alternative manufacturing locations amid tariffs; it's not just start-ups but even established firms are struggling

NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters
NEW YORK

When Plufi co-founders Yuki Kinoshita and Noah Silverman pitched "dog beds for humans" prototype to *Shark Tank* in 2022, they envisioned making the plush, snuggly, memory foam beds in China and selling them at retail in the U.S. for \$299.

Mark Cuban and Lori Greiner invested \$20,000 jointly for 20% of the company, which went on to make over \$1 million in sales in 2023, selling beds on Amazon and their own website.

After U.S. President Donald Trump slapped a 145% tariff on items imported from China in April, Mr. Kinoshita and Mr. Silverman sprung into action, investigating if retailers would be interested in selling a U.S.-made version of their human dog beds.

The retail price might go higher, but they thought a "made-in-the-USA" label might be an attractive selling point and help ease some U.S. retailers' concerns about the impact of China tariffs.

Mr. Silverman and Mr. Kinoshita had previously toured a factory in Las Vegas that could make the memory foam beds for \$150 per unit compared to



Not cosy: Silverman and Kinoshita pose with China-made 'human dog bed' in a store. VIA REUTERS

the \$100 overall cost to make the beds in China. But that \$150 manufacturing cost didn't include the faux fur lining for the cover, which would still need to be imported from China – adding \$100 per unit.

They pitched a sub-\$500 made-in-the-USA version to Costco, which it turned down, saying it couldn't stock the product this year and might revisit the idea next year. Costco did not respond to a request for comment.

Deep dilemma

The duo behind Plufi are among tens of thousands of American small and mid-size manufacturers facing the choice between paying steep tariffs on Chinese imports or taking on

growth and drive investment throughout the supply chain," he said in an emailed statement.

raising additional cash from investors and looking to cut costs.

"Even in the short term a 20% price hike is huge and is going to wipe out all your cash," she said.

Baby tariffs

It's not just start-ups that are struggling. Bugaboo, the Netherlands-based maker of expensive baby gear, owns its own factory in China and would seem to be well-prepared to weather tariffs.

The company's popular "Fox 5" stroller, which retails for about \$1,500 in the U.S., is made at its factory in Xiamen, China, where 97% of strollers and car seats imported to the U.S. are made, according to ImportGenius, which tracks U.S. import, export records and shipping manifests.

But when Mr. Trump's tariffs hit, Bugaboo started to re-evaluate that strategy. The company had begun studying moving production to other countries in Asia to have more regional production flexibility as well as the U.S., but any move would be years away.

It took Bugaboo a number of years to establish Xiamen operations. If it had to build a similar setup in the U.S., it would take the same time. "Even if we start now, it would take several years to set up operations," said chief commercial officer for North America, Jeanelle Teves.

ta and Mr. Silverman decided to stay the course manufacturing human dog beds in China and maintain the \$299 retail price.

"We're absorbing costs in a number of ways, such as finding shipping efficiencies by shrinking the box down more and also taking some hit on our margin," Mr. Kinoshita said. White House spokesperson Kush Desai said the Trump administration remains committed to reviving U.S. manufacturing, citing provisions in the Big, Beautiful Bill, which passed on Tuesday with a slim majority in the Senate, such as allowing businesses to fully expense equipment investments.

"These complementary policies will turbocharge

significantly higher domestic production costs. Even those willing to pay more to make goods in the U.S. are confronting another reality: retailers set prices for consumers and have been largely unwilling to budge in the face of tariffs.

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"These complementary policies will turbocharge

After Prada, Indian brands tap heritage pride

Reuters
MUMBAI/MILAN

Indian footwear sellers and artisans are tapping into nationalist pride stoked by the Prada 'sandal scandal' in a bid to boost sales of ethnic slippers with history dating back to the 12th century, raising hopes of reviving a struggling craft.

Sales are surging over the past week for the 'Kolhapuri' sandals that have garnered global attention after Prada sparked a controversy by showcasing similar designs in Milan, without initially crediting the footwear's origins.

After viral photos from a fashion show drew criticism from Indian artisans who make the sandals - named after a historic city in Maharashtra state - Prada was forced to acknowledge

that its new open-toe footwear was inspired by ancient Indian designs.

"Prada O: Kolhapur 1," said an Instagram post by e-commerce website Shopklop, whose founder Rahul Parasuram Kamble's open letter to Prada pointing out the footwear is "soaked in tradition" was reshared

ledge that its new open-toe footwear was inspired by ancient Indian designs.

"I saw the controversy as a way to promote Kolhapuri," said Mr. Kamble, 33, who has seen sales of sandals he sources from local artisans touch ₹50,000 in three days, five times the average.

Social media has been

abuzz in recent days with criticism and sarcastic memes, with politicians, artisans and a trade body demanding due credit to Indian heritage. Prada said it will arrange follow-up meetings with artisans. In a statement to *Reuters*, it added the Italian group intends to make the sandals in India in collaboration with local manufacturers, if it commercialises them.

Ads, discounts

India's luxury market is small but growing, with the rich splurging on Lamborghini cars and pricey watches. Prada does not have a single retail store in India and its products are usually reserved for the super rich - its men's leather sandals start retailing at ₹844, while Kolhapuris can be priced as low as ₹12.

But linking of the Prada name to the Kolhapuri sandals, which are made by around 7,000 artisans, is providing a business opportunity for some.

Social media

Mumbai-based Ira Soles is running new Facebook and Instagram advertisements which proclaim its ₹32 "Tan Handcrafted Kolhapuris just walked the ramp at Prada ... Limited stock. Global spotlight. Own a piece of what the world is applauding".

E-commerce website Niira is offering up to 50% discounts on its Kolhapuri slippers it says are "rooted in tradition". Its sales of ₹18 sandals, that looked like the one Prada showcased in Milan, have tripled, founder Nishant Raut said.

"Why can't an Indian

Kolhapuri brand become as big as a Birkenstock," he said. Handmade in small factories, Kolhapuri sandals, or chappals as they are called in Hindi, are often paired with Indian attire. Similar designs are sold in big outlets of Bata India and Metro Brands, and also on Amazon and Walmart's Flipkart.

In 2021, India's government said the sandals could achieve ₹1 billion a year in exports. Though latest estimates are not available, artisans say the business has struggled as consumers increasingly opt for more fashionable, upmarket footwear.

Still, the Prada controversy is breathing new life into a craft that Lalit Gandhi, president of Maharashtra's main industry lobby group, says is "a dying art".

Terra firma: In 2021, India's government said the sandals could achieve ₹1 billion a year in exports. REUTERS

36,000 times on social media.

I saw the controversy as a way to promote Kolhapuri," said Mr. Kamble, 33, who has seen sales of sandals he sources from local artisans touch ₹50,000 in three days, five times the average.

Social media has been



Dollar is king: The dollar remains the world's reserve currency, so the U.S. has more room for fiscal profligacy than most. REUTERS

tional arrangements in 17th century England.

The country was able to borrow significantly more, they argued, after putting in place effective institutions intended to assure investors that Parliament could, and check

the monarch's temptation to expropriate. And that, in turn, helped England become a global superpower, they had said.

Trump premium? So what about the United States? Since January, Do

nald Trump's administration has challenged many domestic institutional norms long considered key constraining mechanisms on the executive.

And then, there are the numerous international agreements the administration has backed out of or undermined, including the Paris Agreement on climate change and the World Health Organization. Moreover, the announcement of broad-based "reciprocal tariffs" challenges the foundation of the modern trade system as regulated by the World Trade Organization. Put all of the foregoing together, and we would have expected to see a significant move upward in U.S. Treasury yields.

But that hasn't hap-

pened. There have certainly been some signs of discontent among bond investors, including after Trump's "Liberation Day" tariff announcement and following his musings that Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell's termination "cannot come fast enough." In both cases, the bond market moves were notable but not earth-shattering. They did appear to have the desired effect, as the administration responded by either softening its language or postponing controversial policies, and these pivots led to market recoveries. But given the stakes, jumps of less than 75 basis points in the 10-year Treasury yield seem rather contained. It's also true that the term premium on the 10-year U.S.

Treasury note - a measure of compensation investors demand for holding longer-dated U.S. government debt - hit a 10-year high in May, though that's far from elevated by historical standards.

Why are the infamous bond vigilantes holding back? There are several possible explanations. First, the theory about the link between institutional strength and borrowing costs could be wrong. Ultimately, bondholders care about one thing: getting paid.

And the risk of a U.S. default remains low. While investors have been getting antsy about the potential for Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill to add around \$3.3 trillion to the deficit over the next decade, according

NEWS ANALYSIS

**Ugo Panizza
Mitu Gulati**

A core tenet of sovereign debt investment is that strong institutions keep down a country's borrowing costs and vice versa. So then why has the bond market's response to U.S. President Donald Trump's institutional norm-busting been so tame?

Sovereign borrowers are hard to sue and harder still to enforce claims against. And because they are sovereign, they can do things that private companies can't, like pass laws and inflate their currencies. Investors, and particularly foreign investors, therefore, should naturally be

wary of lending to sovereigns. And yet, in many cases, they do.

For example, roughly a third of U.S. Treasuries were held in foreign hands as of March. Why take the risk? The answer given by academic theory is that investors typically lend to sovereign borrowers when the country has institutions in place to protect against the threat of expropriation. Conversely, if a country's institutions are weak, or weakening, creditors will significantly increase the sovereign's borrowing costs to compensate for the rising risk. The classic academic article on this topic was written by Douglas North and Barry Weingast in 1989. It considered the issue by examining constitu-

to the Congressional Budget Office, the dollar remains the world's reserve currency, so the U.S. has more room for fiscal profligacy than most. Indeed, U.S. Treasuries' long-held role as the global risk-free asset may be why yield spikes have been contained. The \$28 trillion U.S. Treasury market remains a key pillar of the global financial architecture, and there is no ready substitute with the same size, liquidity and depth. So it's understandable why investors are loath to flee.

(The views expressed here are of Ugo Panizza and Mitu Gulati, professors, Geneva Institute (International Economics and the University of Virginia (Law). Views are personal. Via Reuters.)

WASHINGTON

Paramount to pay Trump \$16 mn over *60 Minutes* Harris interview



CBS parent Paramount has agreed to pay \$16 million to settle U.S. President Donald Trump's lawsuit over the contents of an interview with then Vice-President Kamala Harris. This resolves Mr. Trump's \$20 billion lawsuit against the network over its *60 Minutes* interview with Ms. Harris during the 2024 presidential campaign. AFP

WASHINGTON

Vietnam to face 20% tariff from U.S. under 'great' deal, says Trump



Donald Trump announced he struck a deal with Vietnam under which the country would face a minimum 20% tariff and open its market to U.S. products. Imports of Vietnamese goods will face a 20% U.S. tariff, while goods that pass through Vietnam from other countries — so-called "transshipping" — will see a 40% tariff. AFP

ISLAMABAD

Pakistan flash floods and heavy rain kill 64, injure 117 in a week



Flash floods and heavy rain in Pakistan have killed 64 people and injured 117 in a week, a government agency said. The highest toll was in northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, with 23 dead including 10 children. Officials said the risk of heavy rain and possible flash floods will remain high until at least Saturday. PTI

JERUSALEM

Israel claims to have detained an Iran-linked 'terrorist cell' in Syria



Israel's military said on Wednesday it had apprehended members of an Iranian-backed "terrorist cell" in southern Syria, where state TV reported three arrested by Israeli troops. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor reported an operation which "resulted in the arrest of three citizens of Palestinian origin". AFP

Bangladesh court sentences Hasina to six months in jail

Press Trust of India

DHAKA

Bangladesh's deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was on Wednesday sentenced to six months in prison in a contempt of court case by the International Crimes Tribunal, while it now tries her on a major charge of committing crimes against humanity in absentia.

A three-member panel of the tribunal-1 (ICT), led by Justice Golam Mortaza Mozumder, simultaneously sentenced to two months a fugitive leader of the Bangladesh Chhatra League, Shakil Akanda Bulbul, in the same case.

First conviction

It marks the first time that 77-year-old Ms. Hasina has been sentenced in any case



the tribunal which earlier declared her a "fugitive" while her trial was opened on Monday initially over the murder of student protester Abu Sayeed.

Inflection point

Sayeed's killing in north-western Rangpur University during a demonstration escalated a nationwide violent protest that ultimately ousted her nearly 16-year-long regime on August 5 last year, when she secretly left the country on a military aircraft.

Three days later Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, 85, flew from Paris to take charge of an interim government as the nominee of the protesters who were waging the movement under a platform called Students against Discrimination (SAD). State me-

since she left office in August last year.

"According to the verdict, the sentence will come into effect from the day of her arrest or surrender before the court," chief prosecutor Mohammad Tajul Islam told reporters after the verdict was handed down.

A state-appointed lawyer is defending Ms. Hasina, now staying in India, in

Iran halts cooperation with nuclear watchdog after strikes by Israel, U.S.

Following the move, the work of the IAEA inspectors, who had access to Iran's nuclear sites, remains suspended; Guardian Council, President Masoud Pezeshkian formally enact the suspension after parliament voted to severe relations with IAEA

Agence France-Presse
TEHRAN

Iran on Wednesday officially suspended its cooperation with the UN nuclear watchdog, a move triggered by the unprecedented Israeli and U.S. strikes on its nuclear facilities.

Last month's 12-day conflict between Iran and Israel has sharply escalated tensions between Tehran and the International Atomic Energy Agency.

On June 25, a day after a truce took hold, Iranian lawmakers voted overwhelmingly to suspend cooperation with the Vienna-based IAEA. State me-



Ground zero: The overview of the Fordow enrichment facility in Iran on Tuesday following strikes by Israel and the United States. AP

dia confirmed the legislation had now taken effect.

The law aims to "ensure full support for the inherent rights of the Islamic Republic of Iran" under

the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, with a particular focus on uranium enrichment, according to Iranian media.

While IAEA inspectors

have had access to Iran's declared nuclear sites, their current status is uncertain amid the suspension.

On Sunday, Iran's Ambassador to the United Nations, Amir Saeid Iravani, said the inspectors' work had been suspended.

He said the "inspectors are in Iran and are safe", but "their activities have been suspended, and they are not allowed to access our sites". The law did not specify exact steps following the suspension.

The ISNA news agency cited lawmaker Alireza Salimi as saying the inspectors now needed approval from Iran's Supreme National Security Council to

access nuclear sites.

Separately, the Mehr news agency cited lawmaker Hamid Reza Haji Babaee as saying Iran would stop allowing IAEA cameras in nuclear facilities.

After parliament passed the Bill, it was approved by the Guardian Council and President Masoud Pezeshkian formally enacted the suspension on Wednesday.

Israel's response

In response, Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar urged European signatories of the 2015 nuclear deal to trigger the "snap-back" mechanism and reinstate all UN sanctions on Iran.

Sweltering Berlin



People shelter from the sun with umbrellas and hats as they visit the Brandenburg Gate on a hot summer day as a heatwave hits Berlin on Wednesday. Germany's national weather service warned of "exceptionally high" temperatures reaching close to 40°C in places. REUTERS

The line will continue after me, no other authority can interfere, says Dalai Lama

Suhasini Haidar

NEW DELHI

The succession plan for the next Dalai Lama, the highest spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism, will be decided by a trust, not the Chinese government, asserted the 14th Dalai Lama in Dharamshala, making it clear for the first time that he believes he will be reincarnated. Releasing a widely anticipated statement during a convention of the leaders of many Buddhist traditions who have gathered for celebrations of the Dalai Lama's 90th Birthday, the spiritual leader, born as Tenzin Gyatso, said the process by which future Dalai Lama will be recognised would now begin with consultations with leaders, members of the Tibetan Government in Exile, and other stakeholders.

The statement sparked a response from Beijing, which has said any succession must be "approved" by the Central government, and has passed a law in Tibet in 2007 mandating its authority over the issue, although this has not been accepted by the Tibetan community.

Neither the MEA nor other government officials reacted to the statement from Dharamshala. India has maintained that the Dalai Lama is an "honoured guest" and a spiritual leader in the country and the Prime Minister sends greetings to him on his birthday each year.

The company, which is advancing in its plans to deploy AI across all its products, said it was working to "empower employees to spend more time focusing on meaningful work by leveraging new technologies and capabilities."



Buddhist monks watch a recorded video message by Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, in Dharamshala on Wednesday. AP

In a recorded video speech and translation released on Wednesday, the Nobel Peace Laureate said the responsibility for the succession "will rest exclusively with members of the Gaden Phodrang Trust, the Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama" — a trust he set up in 2011.

"They should consult the various heads of the Tibetan Buddhist traditions

and the reliable oath-bound Dharma Protectors who are linked inseparably to the lineage of the Dalai Lamas. They should accordingly carry out the procedures of search and recognition in accordance with past tradition," he said referring to the tradition of recognising a Dalai Lama through reincarnation or rebirth, or "emanation" since the First Dalai Lama was ordained in 1411.

The Chinese government, which has long staked a claim over choosing or "approving" the next Dalai Lama, Beijing also claims that the practice of approving high lamas was in line with a Qing dynasty tradition where high lamas were decided by drawing their name from a "golden urn". On Wednesday, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs rejected the Dalai Lama's statement, and said any succession plan would have to "comply with Chinese laws and regulations as well as religious rituals and historical conventions".

Hamas is open to Gaza truce but refrains from U.S. offer

Associated Press
CAIRO

Hamas suggested on Wednesday that it was open to a ceasefire agreement with Israel, but stopped short of accepting a U.S.-backed proposal announced by President Donald Trump hours earlier, insisting on its longstanding position that any deal bring an end to the war in Gaza.

Mr. Trump said on Tuesday that Israel had agreed on terms for a 60-day ceasefire in Gaza and urged Hamas to accept the deal before conditions worsen in the Strip.

Imran Khan held in 22-hour solitary confinement daily'

Press Trust of India
LAHORE

Pakistan's former Prime Minister Imran Khan is being held in solitary confinement for at least 22 hours daily, in 'blatant violation' of prison rules and human rights, his party claimed on Wednesday. The 72-year-old has been behind bars since August 2023 after he was booked in multiple cases.

Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) patron-in-chief Imran Khan is being held in solitary confinement for at least 22 hours a day with restrictions on his move-



ment," PTI senior leader Moonis Elahi said. Mr. Moonis further said Mr. Khan is being denied access to adequate food and medical care, and there are concerning reports of significant weight loss.

Microsoft says it is planning to lay off 4% of global workforce

Agence France-Presse
SAN FRANCISCO

Microsoft on Wednesday said it was slashing a little less than 4% of its global workforce as it seeks to cut layers of middle management and leverage new technologies.

Organisational changes
"We continue to implement organisational changes necessary to best position the company and teams for success in a dynamic marketplace," a Microsoft spokesperson said in an email.

The cloud computing

tech giant did not disclose the total amount of lost jobs but as of June 2024 it employed 2,28,000 people, bringing the latest layoffs to about 9,000 people.

Culling in May

The job cuts follow a round in May that saw about 6,000 positions culled from its global workforce.

The company, which is advancing in its plans to deploy AI across all its products, said it was working to "empower employees to spend more time focusing on meaningful work by leveraging new technologies and capabilities."



Long-awaited: EU climate chief Wopke Hoekstra addresses the media on the 2040 climate target in Brussels. REUTERS

EU unveils overdue target to curb green house gas by 2040

Agence France-Presse
BRUSSELS

The EU on Wednesday unveiled its long-delayed target for cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 2040, but with contested new flexibilities built in to win over the most sceptical member states.

After months of tough negotiations with EU states, Brussels announced it would stick to the objective announced last year of cutting emissions by 90% by 2040, compared to 1990 levels.

The proposal comes as much of Europe roasts in an early summer heatwave, which scientists say are becoming more intense, frequent and widespread due to human-induced climate change.

The 2040 target – which needs the sign off from the European Union's member states and Parliament – is a key milestone towards the bloc's goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2050.

Brussels says the EU has cut climate-warming emissions by 37% relative to 1990 but its green agenda faces mounting pushback with a rightward shift and rising climate scepticism in many European countries.

EU climate chief Wopke Hoekstra acknowledged the "sensitive" debate, saying Brussels was keeping an "ambitious" goal while being "pragmatic and flexible on how to achieve it".

To sway resistant capitals, the European Commission proposes that from 2036, the bloc's 27 countries can count carbon credits purchased to finance projects outside Europe, for up to three per cent of their emission cuts.

However, Climate groups are fiercely oppose such a measure.

Pro-Tibetan groups lodge plaint against Paris museum

Agence France-Presse
PARIS

Four pro-Tibetan groups in France have lodged a legal complaint against a popular Paris museum, accusing it of wanting to "erase the existence of Tibet", documents seen by AFP showed on Wednesday.

The state-run Guimet Museum recently renamed its Nepal-Tibet room as "Himalayan world", which the groups say is "sowing confusion about Tibet's cultural distinctiveness with the political aim of erasing Tibet's existence".

They also accuse it of removing references to "Tibetan art" in its collection, with the traditional Buddhist identity of the region an object of intense struggle between pro-Tibetan groups and Beijing.

Lawyers representing the plaintiffs, Lily Ravon and William Bourdon, said it was "hard not to see a political undertone and a deliberate choice by the Museum to align itself with Chinese lobbying efforts."

The museum denied any intention to "render a culture invisible, let alone deny Tibetan identity", and said the use of "Himalayan world" was meant to "highlight the richness of cultural interactions across this vast and complex region". The Guimet Museum specialises in Asian art.

Beijing is extremely sensitive about the issue of Tibetan identity and anything seen as challenging its sovereignty over the strategic Himalayan plateau that borders India, Nepal and Bhutan.

The French associations argue in their legal complaint that the changes at the Guimet Museum "lack any scientific or historical basis".

Frozen feast



Polar bear cub Mika and his mother Nuka are fed with so-called ice bombs that contain fish and vegetables during a European-wide heatwave, at the Karlsruhe Zoological Garden, in Karlsruhe, Germany, on Wednesday. REUTERS

Agence France-Presse
GENEVA

The threat from espionage is high in Switzerland as global insecurity increases, with the main threats emanating from Russia and China, the country's Federal Intelligence Service warned on Wednesday.

"The security situation around Switzerland is deteriorating year by year," the FIS said in its annual overview.

Direct implications

"A global confrontation is emerging, with the U.S. on one side and China and Russia on the other. This has direct implications for Switzerland: the threat of espionage is high and proliferation activities are

Azerbaijan standoff challenges Russia's post-Soviet influence

Relations soured after a 2024 jet crash near Aktau and worsened after Russian police raided ethnic Azerbaijanis in Russia; Baku's criticism of Putin signals a shift, while for Moscow, the row highlights its weakening hold over former Soviet region

Agence France-Presse
BAKU

Azerbaijan and Russia are locked in an escalating diplomatic standoff that has underscored Moscow's weakening supremacy in the Caucasus, a strategic region where major powers are vying for influence.

For Azerbaijan, once wary of alienating Moscow, the standoff has snowballed into one of the sharpest public rifts in years and a potential turning point in its balancing act between Russia and the West.

Deadly crash

The downturn in relations started when an Azerbaijani Airlines passenger jet crashed near Aktau, Kazakhstan, killing 38 of the 67 people on board in December 2024.

The aircraft had been en route to the southern Russian city of Grozny when it is widely reported to have been hit by Russian anti-aircraft defences that were trying to thwart a Ukrainian drone attack.

In a rare public clash with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev demanded an apology, admission of guilt, and also punishment for those found responsible for the "criminal" downing



Fiery row: Russian President Vladimir Putin with his Azerbaijani counterpart Ilham Aliyev in Moscow. AP

of the plane.

Further angering Azerbaijan, Mr. Putin acknowledged that Russian air defences were operational in the area at the time of the crash but did not admit Russia shot down the plane by mistake, instead only apologising for the fact that the "incident" occurred in Russian air space.

The relationship deteriorated further after Russian police on June 27 targeted ethnic Azerbaijanis in Yekaterinburg in raids authorities said were related to a years-old criminal case. Two people died and six were arrested.

Baku has accused Russian police of "torture" and deliberately killing them, while Moscow said one man suffered a heart attack during the raid and the second death was under investigation. The incident unleashed a storm of public anger in Azerbaijan, with media and officials denouncing what they described as "systematic brutality" against Azerbaijanis in Russia.

Journalists detained
Days later, Azerbaijani police raided the Baku office of Sputnik, Russia's state-run news agency, detaining three Russian journalists with the footage broadcast on pro-state TV.

Bureau chief Igor Kartavyykh and editor-in-chief

Yevgeny Belousov were later ordered into four months of pre-trial detention on charges of fraud and money laundering.

Azerbaijan had officially banned the bureau from operating in February, but it had reportedly continued its operations. Russian officials denounced the detentions as "unlawful" and politically motivated.

In a separate case, pro-Baku media outlets on Tuesday broadcast images of beaten-up Russians, with bloody and swollen faces in a court hearing, where they were ordered into pre-trial detention on charges of drug trafficking.

Both Moscow and Baku

have already summoned each other's ambassador for dressing downs.

Russia criticised Azerbaijan's "highly emotional response", accused it of "deliberately dismantling bilateral ties" and "growing hostility".

Baku cancelled all Russian cultural events due to what it called "systematic acts of violence" against its citizens. The state-run AzTV broadcaster aired a programme denouncing political repression in Russia and comparing Mr. Putin to Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin.

Call with Zelensky

Azerbaijan is testing its decades-old reliance on Russia with the most open criticism in years of Moscow, including personal attacks on Mr. Putin in state media – a sign of Baku's increasing assertiveness and confidence on the world stage.

For Moscow, the row highlights its weakening grip on a region it ruled for decades, with its ongoing invasion of Ukraine having spooked its ex-Soviet partners across the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Amid the escalating row, Mr. Aliyev held a phone call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Tuesday – drawing ire from the Kremlin which accused Kyiv of pouring fuel on the fire.

Germany's Merz under fire over gay pride gaffe

Agence France-Presse
BERLIN

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz faced criticism on Wednesday for saying a rainbow flag should not be raised at the Bundestag for Berlin's annual pride parade because the parliament is "not a circus tent".

Julia Kloeckner, the new conservative president of the German Parliament, announced in May that the rainbow flag would not be raised during the July 26 event, known as Christopher Street Day (CSD). The rainbow flag would now only be raised once a year at the building, for the International Day Against Homophobia, she said.

Under Kloeckner's predecessor from the centre-left Social Democrats, a rainbow flag had been raised for Berlin's CSD parade since 2022.

The decision has provoked protests from LGBTQ rights campaigners, as well as opposition politicians from the Greens and the far-left Die Linke.

But Mr. Merz on Tuesday defended the decision, saying the German Parliament was "not a circus tent where any flag can be hoisted".

LSDV, a major German queer rights organisation, accused Merz of insulting the LGBTQ community with his "blunder".

"The rainbow flag is a universal symbol of diversity and human rights," said a board member.

N. Korea opens massive beach resort: state media

Agence France-Presse
SEOUL

North Korea opened a massive resort area on its east coast, state media said on Wednesday, with the tourism project of leader Kim Jong Un reportedly set to welcome Russian guests later this month.



Big project: A view of the massive beach resort in the Wonsan Kalma Coastal Tourist Area, in North Korea, on Tuesday. AP

Dubbed "North Korea's Waikiki" by South Korean media, the Wonsan Kalma Coastal Tourist Area can accommodate nearly 20,000 people, according to Pyongyang, which previously described it as "a world-class cultural resort".

Mr. Kim showed a keen interest in developing North Korea's tourism industry during his early years in power and the coastal resort area was a particular focus.

The tourist zone was made open to domestic

visitors on Tuesday, Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency reported. North Koreans of all ages from across the country flocked to the site this week "filled with joy at experiencing a new level of civilization", it added.

According to South Korea's Yonhap news agency, a group of Russian tourists is set to visit the zone in North Korea for the first time on July 7.

South Korea's unification ministry, which manages relations with the North, said the site's operations are "expected to gradually expand", including to Russian tourists.

Mr. Kim said last week the construction of the site would go down as "one of the greatest successes this year" and that the North would build more large-scale tourist zones "in the shortest time possible".

Citing Russia and China, Switzerland says foreign spying threat high

Agence France-Presse
GENEVA

increasing."

The global context has direct implications for Switzerland, a militarily neutral country which hosts multiple international organisations.

The confrontation is "increasing pressure" on the wealthy Alpine nation, making it a "key target for foreign intelligence services", the FIS said.

The report said several countries had posted undercover intelligence officers in Switzerland.

"They pass themselves off as diplomatic personnel, business people, media representatives or tourists, for example," it said.

"The greatest espionage threats come from Russia and China, both maintaining a strong intelligence presence in Switzerland. They are interested in federal authorities, companies, international organisations, and research institutions."



Mounting pressure: The FIS report said several countries had posted undercover intelligence officers in Switzerland. ISTOCKPHOTO

– China and Russia have sufficient resources to pursue other targets, according to the FIS.

They are also going after police forces, foreign diplomatic missions, journalists and universities, the Switzerland's Security 2025 report said.

Russia and China have "undercover personnel at diplomatic missions", it noted.

Swiss Defence Minister Martin Pfister said Switzerland's security environment had "deteriorated drastically" since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

The report said Moscow and Beijing would continue conducting intelligence operations in Switzerland against Western states, including preparatory activities for hybrid warfare.

Abductions, sabotage
– Switzerland faces an increasing risk of being used illicitly for the preparation or perpetration of abductions, sabotage and assassinations.

The FIS also said the intensifying competition among major powers made Switzerland a preferred target for sanctions evasion attempts and proliferation.

"Russia, Iran, and North Korea are increasingly attempting to procure dual-use goods and technologies for their military and nuclear programmes through Switzerland," it said.

Furthermore, the agency said the terror threat was elevated in Switzerland, primarily from individuals inspired by jihadist ideology.

"A major challenge is the online radicalisation of youth, which can happen quickly, making early detection critical," it said.

IN BRIEF

**Atletico Madrid ropes in Ruggeri from Atalanta**

Atletico Madrid signed Italian left back Matteo Ruggeri from Atalanta on Tuesday. The 22-year-old defender will arrive on a five-year contract, Atletico said. Financial details of the transfer were not immediately disclosed. Atletico said Ruggeri is a left back "with good crossing ability and great stamina."

Srikanth moves to the second round of Canada Open

K. Srikanth progressed to the men's singles second round with a thrilling 18-21, 21-19, 21-14 win over compatriot Priyanshu Rajawat at the Canada Open Super 300 badminton tournament in Calgary on Wednesday.

Liverpool defender Quansah signs for Leverkusen

Jarell Quansah has joined Bayer Leverkusen from Liverpool for a reported club record fee, the Bundesliga side announced on Wednesday. British and German press said the transfer fee for the 22-year-old could go up to €40 million.

**Coimbatore to host Equestrian Champions League**

The Equestrian Champions League will be held in Coimbatore from July 4. The three-day league will feature six teams – Chennai Bulls (Tamil Nadu), Pegasus Sports (Kerala), Bengaluru Knights (Karnataka), Golconda Chargers (Telangana), Quantum Reigns (Goa) and Elite Equestrians (West Bengal). The event will be held in two categories: showjumping 110cm and 120cm.

Karan beats qualifier Medus, enters second round

TENNIS

Sports Bureau

NEW DELHI

Top seed Karan Singh beat qualifier Andres Medus of Argentina 6-3, 6-4 in the first round of the \$15,000 ITF men's tennis tournament in Monastir, Tunisia.

The results: €91,250 Challenger, Brasov, Romania: Doubles (pre-quarterfinals): Siddhant Banthia & Alexander Sonski (Bul) bt Prijwal Dev & Nitin Kumar Sinha 5-7, 6-2, [10-7]. €91,250 Challenger, Modena, Italy: Doubles

(pre-quarterfinals): Sergio Gómez (Esp) & Vijay Sundar Prashanth bt Jiri Barnat & Filip Duda (Cze) 6-4, 6-4.
\$30,000 ITF men, Marburg, Germany: Singles (first round): Lucas Gerch (Ger) bt Aryan Shah 3-6, 7-5, 1-1 (retired).
\$30,000 ITF men, Hillcrest, South Africa: Singles (first round): Luc Koenig (GBR) bt Digvijay Pratap Singh 3-6, 6-4, 7-5; James Beaven (GBR) bt Ishaque Eqbal 6-3, 6-3.
Doubles (pre-quarterfinals): Ishaque Eqbal & Thando Longwe-Smit (RSA) bt Anton Chekhov & Ivan Zaytsev 6-3, 7-5; Gerard Henning & Philip Henning (RSA) bt Alexey Aleshchev & Aditya Balsekar 6-3, 5-7, [10-7].
\$15,000 ITF men, Monastir, Tunisia: Doubles (pre-quarterfinals): Karan Singh bt Andres Medus (Arg) 6-3, 6-4.

\$100,000 ITF women, Cary, USA: Doubles (pre-quarterfinals): Ayana Akli & Abigail Rencheli (USA) bt Arianne Hartono (Ned) & Prarthana Thombare 6-4, 6-3.
\$60,000 ITF women, Bucharest, Romania: Doubles (pre-quarterfinals): Riya Bhatia & Sada Nahimana (Bdi) bt Carole Monnet (Fra) & Sara Saito (Jpn) 3-6, 7-5, [10-5]; Rutuja Bhosale & Wushuang Zheng (Chn) bt Nuria Brancaccio (Ita) & Julia Riera (Arg) 6-1, 6-2.
\$15,000 ITF women, Getxo, Spain: Doubles (pre-quarterfinals): Juliana Giaccio & Cristina Sierra (Esp) bt Delia Gaillard (Fra) & Madhurima Sawant 7-5, 6-2.
\$15,000 ITF women, Los Angeles, USA: Doubles (pre-quarterfinals): Gabriella Lindgren (Can) & Bella Payne (USA) bt Sophie Luescher (Sui) & Prathyusha Rachapudi 6-3, 5-7, [10-6].
\$15,000 ITF women, Hong Kong: Singles (first round): Miho Kuramochi (Jpn) bt Bela Tamhankar 6-0, 6-1; Mayuka Aikawa (Jpn) bt Laalita Kalluri 6-3, 6-1.
Doubles (pre-quarterfinals): Jiaying He & Dan Ni Wang (Chn) bt Georgia Kalamari (Fra) & Laalita Kalluri 6-1, 6-4; Ashmitha Eswaramurthy & Yuhan Liu (Chn) bt Kei Cheung & Jane Wong (Hkg) 7-6(1), 7-5.

Minakshi and Pooja assured of medals

BOXING

Press Trust of India

ASTANA

Minakshi (48kg) and Pooja Rani (80kg) guaranteed India two medals by progressing to the semifinals in their respective categories on the third day of the World Boxing Cup here on Wednesday.

Minakshi sealed her place in the semifinals with a dominant 5-0 win over

Chinese Taipei's Guo Yi-Xuan, while Pooja followed with a gritty 4-1 split decision victory over Kazakhstan's Gulysaya Yerzhan.

Composed
Earlier in the day, Anamika (51kg) moved into the quarterfinals with a composed performance against Turkey's Aysen Taskin.

In the men's draw, Jaduman Singh lost a close contest against Philippines' Jay Bryan Baricuatro.

100m hurdler Jyothi suffers injury

ATHLETICS

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI

my season," Jyothi, who holds the national record of 12.78s, posted on her Instagram story on Wednesday.

"I'm working with my medical team to assess my options and take a decision on the way forward," said the 25-year-old.

Her coach James Hillier told PTI that the injury was "pretty bad".

"Unfortunately, she picked up a freak injury to her knee in training. It's pretty bad," he said, without elaborating.

The Indian women's football team produced another commanding performance in the AFC Women's Asian Cup 2026 Qualifiers, thrashing Iraq 5-0 here on Wednesday.

India led 2-0 at half-time.

First-half goals from Sangita Basfore and Manisha set the tone before a dominant second half saw Karthika Angamuthu, Phanjoubam Nirmala Devi, and Nongmaithem Ratanbala Devi add to the scoreline, taking India's goal tally to an impressive 22 from three games, all without

conceding a single one.

With this result, the Blue Tigresses remain unbeaten. India is currently atop Group B with nine points and a goal difference of +22.

High-stakes clash

With Thailand, currently second in the group with six points, the stage is set for a high-stakes showdown between India and the hosts on Saturday.

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First-half goals from Sangita Basfore and Manisha set the tone before a dominant second half saw Karthika Angamuthu, Phanjoubam Nirmala Devi, and Nongmaithem Ratanbala Devi add to the scoreline, taking India's goal tally to an impressive 22 from three games, all without

high on confidence and wasted no time in asserting their authority.

Crispin Chettri's side played with fluency and control, showcasing impressive cohesion across all areas of the pitch.

From the opening whistle, India seized control and used the full width of the pitch to stretch the Iraqi defence.

The midfielders dictated the tempo with intelligent passing and quick transitions.

The result: India 5 (Sangita Basfore 14, Manisha 44, Karthika Angamuthu 48, Phanjoubam Nirmala Devi 68, Nongmaithem Ratanbala Devi 80) bt Iraq 0.

several games in the blazing afternoon sun during the group stage, Dortmund was grateful to be at the air-conditioned Mercedes-Benz Stadium and played at a faster pace.

Karim Adeyemi set up both of Guirassy's goals as the Guinea international reached 37 for the season across all competitions.

A booking for Jobe Bellingham means he will be suspended for the clash against his brother Jude's Real Madrid side.

The results

(pre-quarterfinals): Real Madrid 1 (Gonzalo Garcia 54) bt Juventus 0; Borussia Dortmund 2 (Guirassy 14, 24) bt Monterrey 1 (Berterame 48).
Quarterfinal line-up: Fluminense vs Al-Hilal, Palmeiras vs Chelsea, Paris Saint-Germain vs Bayern Munich; Real Madrid v Borussia Dortmund.

Real Madrid ousts Juventus, sets up quarterfinal date with Dortmund

Youngster Garcia heads home for the Spanish giant which also welcomed back Mbappe; Guirassy stars for the German side with a brace



Cool strike: Monterrey's defence watches on helplessly as Guirassy scores Dortmund's opener. AFP

CLUB WORLD CUP

Agence France-Presse
ATLANTA

Spanish giant Real Madrid beat Juventus 1-0 on Tuesday to set up a Club World Cup quarterfinal clash against Borussia Dortmund, which edged Mexican side Monterrey.

Serhou Guirassy struck twice for the German outfit as it scraped past Sergio Ramos's side 2-1 in a tight last-16 clash in Atlanta.

Youngster Gonzalo Garcia headed home his third goal of the tournament to help Madrid edge Italian side Juventus at the Hard Rock Stadium in Miami.

It was an impressive display from Xabi Alonso's Madrid side, unbeaten un-

der the new coach, and it was further boosted by Kylian Mbappe's return from illness as a substitute.

The first half was a finely-balanced contest with Igor Tudor's Juventus starting brightly before Real ended on top.

Los Blancos kept turning the screw and found its goal when Trent Alexander-Arnold crossed for Gonzalez to head home after 54 minutes. Alonso decided to introduce Mbappe but the striker did not find any clear openings as Juve pushed for an equaliser.

In Atlanta, Guirassy netted a first-half double but German Berterame pulled one back for the Mexican side which came close to an equaliser when a late Ramos header span just wide.

After grinding through

Four athletes get reduced three-year ban for evading dope tests

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI

The four-year ban on track and field athletes Pooja Ranji, Kiran, Pankaj and Chelimi Pratyusha for evading dope tests has been reduced by one year after they accepted their offence within 20 days of being charged.

The quartet was among several athletes who were suspended by National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) earlier this year.

The maximum ban period for a first offence is four years but Article 10.8.1 of the NADA Rules allows athletes charged with a four-year ban to benefit from a one year reduction if they admit the violation and accept the penalty within 20 days of being charged.

Pooja's three-year ban period began on August 13, 2024, the same as that of Kiran and Pankaj. Pratyusha's three-year ban period, however, began on February 6.

India's cricket tour of Bangladesh could be rescheduled

Agence France Presse

DHAKA

India's white-ball tour of Bangladesh in August could be rescheduled, because it needs clearance from the Indian government, a senior Bangladesh cricket official said on Wednesday.

The series, including three ODIs and three T20Is is due to start here on August 17.

However, the BCCI did not comment on the tour yet.

The tour is part of the FTP, so cancellation is not an option. But it may be rescheduled to a mutually convenient time," BCB's Iftekhar Rahman said.

Bangladesh toured India in September-October 2024 for two Tests and two T20 matches.



Moment of the match: Karthika's stunning lob from over 25 yards out beat the goalkeeper who was off her line. X@INDIANFOOTBALL

Indian women rout Iraq, nudge closer to Asian Cup qualification

Press Trust of India

CHIANG MAI (THAILAND)

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ATHLETICS

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI

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"I'm working with my medical team to assess my options and take a decision on the way forward," said the 25-year-old.

Duckett – redefining the rules and re-establishing himself

The England opener's approach has drawn comparisons with the swashbucking Sehwag; the second innings hundred in a sizzling chase in the opening Test against India in Headingley is the latest in the southpaw's resurrection



REUTERS

Tarun Shastry

When the bell rings, it's not the size of the fighter that matters – it's the precision of the blows, the ability to absorb them, and the will to hit back harder.

835 runs in total – five centuries from the opposition. Every sign pointing towards collapse and defeat in a fourth innings chase. But in walked Ben Duckett – fearless and unfazed.

In the opening round of the five-Test clash against a transitioning Indian team at Headingley, Duckett stepped in not merely to survive, but to counterpunch with fearless intent, flair, and nerve.

While Jasprit Bumrah was doing Jasprit Bumrah things: testing techniques and rattling nerves, Duckett stood tall.

He didn't flinch. He fired back, landing clean, decisive strikes – 149 of them – each one shifting the momentum in England's favour.

A mammoth 371 stared England down. Duckett didn't just hang in. He fought. He scored. He played with purpose. And how.

There's always been a certain grace to left-handers – a quiet elegance, even in the way they leave a ball outside the off-stump. Think of David Gower's liquid timing, Alastair Cook's monk-like patience or Andrew Strauss' measured balance at the crease.

A different kind of southpaw

Duckett doesn't belong to that school. He's a different kind of southpaw – one built for tempo, not tradition.

He rarely leaves anything outside off and when the ball enters his zone, his instinct isn't caution, it's to attack. Every swing he takes is charged with aggression.

"He is now England's answer to Virender Sehwag," wrote former England player-turned-commentator-turned-coach David Lloyd in his *Daily Mail* column. It's hard to argue with that sentiment.

Sehwag's arrival in Test cricket was thunderous. Handed a debut in the middle order against South Africa, he announced himself with a 105 before earning a promotion to the top.

It was an inspired move by captain Sourav Ganguly and coach John Wright. They gave him what most players only dream of: freedom to play and to learn on his own terms.

With that came the destruction of bowlers and, consequentially, of tradition.

That elevation gave him the licence to attack, to play on instinct and, most importantly, to fail without the fear of being dropped.

All-out aggression

Sehwag didn't just score runs; he dismantled attacks, instilled fear in bowlers and reshaped the way openers were viewed in the sport. He imposed himself, series after series.

For Duckett, the journey to open for



GETTY IMAGES

England began long before current head coach Brendon McCullum and skipper Ben Stokes entered the picture.

It all started in 2016 with a stroke of bold 'intuition and chance' at Northamptonshire. The county side was then searching for an opener and coach David Ripley took a 'chance' by promoting Duckett, then a middle-order batter, to the top.

The transformation

This move would eventually transform his career.

That same bold belief has come from 'Baz' McCullum and Stokes.

In Duckett, they saw a disruptor – a player with the mindset to break patterns, not adhere to them. And like Ganguly and Wright did for Sehwag, they handed Duckett the keys to the top order. No overthinking, no axe hanging – just a license to play.

The result? A left-hander who's now attacks just like what Sehwag once did.

"I didn't think I'd be an opening batter, but I'm enjoying the role", Duckett was quoted by *ESPNcricinfo*.

"I started my career batting lower down where you can get away with playing a bit loose. But I've batted better since I began opening, so I'm going to keep playing this way. I'm still trying to

learn to play as straight as I can early on in my innings.

"If I'm going to the next step, I'm going to need to be technically better as an opener and maybe a bit more patient. But I've made things work so I'll try and carry it on", he added.

Trial by fire

It's hard to believe how it all began for the 30-year-old back in 2016 – a debut in Test cricket that was as fleeting as it was unforgiving. Thrown into the subcontinental furnace, he started brightly in Bangladesh, scoring two half-centuries in the ODI series.

But that early promise quickly faded once he put on the Test whites.

Facing India its backyard is an entirely different ball game and a fledgling Duckett was left overwhelmed.

His tendency to rock back deep in the crease and play across his pads became a glaring flaw, one the Indian bowlers, particularly the spinners, exploited ruthlessly. Ball after ball, they exposed the glitch, reducing Duckett to a walking wicket.

He was dropped just two Tests into England's eventual 4-0 series defeat – his final act, a 16-ball duck in Vizag. Vulnerable technique and the brutal reality of Test cricket had left him

exposed. The door that once opened for him with enthusiasm shut just as quickly.

As if his on-field struggles weren't enough, Duckett's behaviour beyond the boundary only added to his woes.

Tempering expectations

During the 2017-18 Ashes tour of Australia, he found himself at the centre of a bizarre incident in Perth. He allegedly poured pints of beer over England's all-time leading wicket-taker James Anderson.

What could have been shrugged off as immature banter quickly spiralled, with Duckett eventually sent home midway through the tour.

For many, that would have been the end. Duckett, though, wasn't wired to disappear. He dug in. He rebuilt. He refined himself and let his bat do the talking.

It taught him resilience, perspective, and the hunger to grab every chance that came his way.

So when 'Bazball' and England called again in 2022, he returned, ready to rewrite his story and, this time, on his terms.

A blistering 107 off 110 balls against Pakistan in Rawalpindi announced his arrival. It was a statement of fearlessness, it set the tone not just for his second coming but also for England's bold new era under McCullum.

That knock came on Day 1 of a historic 506-run blitz – the most runs ever scored in a single day of Test cricket. Duckett's innings was a masterclass in pacing: sweep, reverse sweep, glide and repeat. Spin was dismantled, rhythm destroyed.

The old Duckett was gone; this one is here to dominate.

Just the beginning

Then came Rajkot, 2024. In a dust bowl, Duckett countered with audacity, smashing 153 off 151 balls enroute registering fastest Test century by an Englishman on Indian soil.

Reverse sweeps off Ravichandran Ashwin, front-foot drives through cover and an innings played at a strike rate that left even the most seasoned spinners scrambling. Cook called it "out of this world".

And now, there's Headingley 2025. Chasing an imposing 371 against India, Duckett once again stepped in and turned up the heat. Bumrah was breathing fire as usual but the 30-year-old did not flinch.

His innings wasn't built on recklessness; it was built on clarity. It tilted the balance and gave England the upper hand in round one of a five-Test saga.

From being discarded in 2016 and being sent home in 2017 to now standing tall as one of England's most fearless Test openers, Duckett has seen it all. And if Headingley is any indication, the Nottinghamshire batter isn't done just yet.

He doesn't just play the Bazball way – he is its very definition. Dynamic. Defiant. And nowhere near done.

THE GIST



From being discarded from the national side in 2016 and being sent home mid-tour on disciplinary grounds in 2017 to now standing tall as one of England's most fearless Test openers, Duckett has seen it all



He is not your quintessential elegant left-hander. Duckett was built for tempo, not tradition



A gamble to promote him to the opening slot first attempted at Northamptonshire became a blueprint the senior England side would adopt, to much success