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Happening today

● A HIGH-LEVEL delegation led by Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal will begin its trip to Spain, Belgium and Finland to deepen India's economic engagement with Europe and explore new opportunities for Indian exporters.

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Business as Usual

By EP UNNY



Vietnam boat capsizes: Victims' families seek govt help for return of bodies

Divya A & Sreenivas Janyala

New Delhi, Hyderabad, July 12

A DAY after 15 Indian tourists died in a boat accident near Vietnam's Phu Quoc Island on Saturday, mourning families back home are waiting for more information and for the remains of their loved ones to be repatriated.

The Indian Embassy in Hanoi said on Sunday that the bodies would be transported back to India "at the earliest". "The mortal remains of 15 Indian nationals who tragically passed away in yesterday's boat accident have reached Ho Chi Minh City. After completion of formalities at Ho Chi Minh, the mortal remains will be transported to India at the earliest. The Embassy and the Consulate teams are closely coordinating with the Vietnamese authorities, who are committed to providing all assistance for the earliest transportation of the mortal remains to India," the embassy said in a statement posted on social media. "We continue to pray for the early recovery of the one survivor at Phu Quoc Hospital," it added. Along with the Embassy in Hanoi, India has a consulate in

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THE WORLD PAGE 10



U.S. SENATOR LINDSEY GRAHAM DIES AFTER 'BRIEF, SUDDEN ILLNESS'

● TWO SIDES FACE OFF IN SEMIFINALS, THEIR FIRST BIG-STAGE ENCOUNTER IN 24 YEARS

England vs Argentina: A rivalry forged by war, on-field spats and history of cons



Sandip G

Atlanta, July 12

DIEGO MARADONA never repented his "Hand of God"; not because he thinks he didn't cheat, but because it was scored against England. He wrote in his autobiography, weighing his two goals in the 1986 World Cup quarterfinals, the other arguably the greatest of the century: "I sometimes think I preferred the one with my hand."

U.S. MILITARY ASSETS IN JORDAN, KUWAIT, OMAN, QATAR STRUCK, SAYS IRGC

US strikes Iran; Tehran hits back at Gulf states, says Hormuz shut

Bandar Abbas port and Qeshm Island targeted; prepared to free up navigation, says US Centcom

Steve Holland, Parisa Hafezi & Yonna Ehab

Washington, Dubai, July 12

US AND Iranian forces have exchanged heavy missile and drone assaults, with Tehran targeting US facilities in countries across the Gulf on Sunday and saying it had again closed the vital Strait of Hormuz.

The strikes were the latest in a cycle of attacks and counter-



A video released by the US Central Command Saturday shows a projectile being fired towards Iran, REUTERS

attacks as Iran seeks to assert control over shipping through the strait. However, the barrage marked an escalation in pace

and range. The strikes extended to Qatar, a mediator in ceasefire

• CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Indian seafarer missing as ship hit in Hormuz, MEA condemns attack

Shubhajt Roy

New Delhi, July 12

AS IRAN and the US attacked each other in the last 24 hours, Indian seafarers on a Cyprus-flagged ship transiting the Strait of Hormuz came under fire from Tehran — after which one Indian is missing while 10 have been rescued.

New Delhi on Sunday condemned the attack on the merchant vessel off the coast of

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E. EXPLAINED

Delhi's diplomatic challenge

The fresh strikes impacting Indian seafarers have put Delhi again in a diplomatic high-risk zone. Delhi's engagement with Tehran and Washington is key to towards safeguarding Indian lives in the region.

After verification, Maharashtra cuts 92 lakh beneficiaries from 'Ladki Bahin'

● Why the beneficiaries were removed

e-KYC not completed	62 lakh (67%)
Family income above Rs 2.5 lakh	16 lakh (17%)
Family member a Govt employee	4.42 lakh (4.8%)
Already receiving Sanjay Gandhi Nirdhar Yojana benefits	3.6 lakh (3.9%)
More than two beneficiaries in a family	2.5 lakh (2.7%)
Age above 65 years	1.8 lakh (2%)
Flagged during district-level verification	1.7 lakh (1.8%)
Male beneficiaries	29,000 (0.31%)
Government employees	8,000 (0.08%)



SOURCE: RTI

Removals are 38% of scheme's peak beneficiary base of 2.43 cr women

Vallabh Ozarkar

Mumbai, July 12

MORE THAN 92 lakh beneficiaries of the Mukhyamantri

Majhi Ladki Bahin Yojana in Maharashtra, accounting for nearly 38 per cent of the flagship welfare scheme's peak beneficiary base of around 2.43 crore women, have been removed after the state government's verification exercise — far higher than the around 80 lakh deletions that had been publicly disclosed till now, according to Right To Information (RTI) records reviewed by *The Indian Express*.

The reasons for removal from the state scheme for women include (see chart) beneficiaries exceeding the family limit, being government

employees, already receiving other benefits, being above the age limit of 65, being flagged during district-level verification — and being male in 29,000 cases.

Officials associated with the exercise estimated that the beneficiaries who were removed received about Rs 14,000 crore in all before payments were stopped. On average, officials estimated, these beneficiaries received assistance for around 10 months.

So far, budget allocations and supplementary provisions for the scheme have crossed Rs 60,000 crore since its launch.

According to officials, there was no single cut-off date for stopping payments for those found ineligible because beneficiaries were identified at different stages of the verification exercise. "Some received only five or six instalments before they were flagged. Others continued for more than 10 or 12 months, while some received all 12 instalments before payments were stopped,"

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IDEA EXCHANGE

'National records are being broken again and again. This shows we have bench strength'

ADILU SUMARIWALLA, OLYMPIAN AND WORLD ATHLETICS VICE-PRESIDENT



PAGE 14

Temple 'theft': Police check if 20 people linked to 8 arrested had purchased land

Manish Sahu

Lucknow, July 12

AYODHYA POLICE, which is investigating the alleged theft and embezzlement of cash and valuables donated at Ram Temple, have asked the district revenue department to find out details of land purchases, if any, by 20 relatives and associates of the eight arrested men.

Sources in the police said 20 people were identified as close associates and relatives of the eight accused who were "entrusted with assets or financial dealings on their behalf".

The eight arrested men are Ram Shankar Yadav alias Tinnu Yadav, Ramshankar Mishra, Subhash Srivastava, Avinash Shukla, Lavkush Mishra, Anukalp Mishra, Manish Kumar Yadav and Karunesh Pandey. Except for Ram Shankar alias Tinnu Yadav and Subhash Srivastava, the other six accused were allegedly

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RELATED REPORTS, P. 5

EXPRESS special
Linens stolen from AC coaches in Indian Railways: In 4 years, 1.27 crore bedsheets, towels, blankets, pillows

Among most stolen items: bedsheets in Bikaner, towels in Delhi, pillow covers in Sonpur, blankets in Jodhpur

Dheeraaj Mishra

New Delhi, July 12

EVERY NIGHT, about 8 lakh AC passengers across the Indian Railways network tuck themselves into linen bedrolls, typically two bedsheets, a blanket, a pillow, a pillow cover and a face towel — a service that comes with the ticket. And as every trip ends, some of them, about one in every 1,000 passengers, walk away with at least one bedroll item, an investigation by *The Indian Express* reveals.

The newspaper filed Right to Information (RTI) applications with all 69 divisions of the Indian Railways. Replies were obtained from 54 divisions across 16 of 18 Railway zones, some shared partial information. These records show that from January 2022, when bedroll services had fully resumed after the pandemic, to May 2026, at least 1.27 crore bedroll pieces were stolen — mainly by passengers, officials said. The data, when compiled year-wise, shows a 56% rise in such thefts from 2022 to 2025.

Set against the sheer scale of what the Railways hands out every single day, it's a drop in the ocean. But that's exactly what makes the numbers interesting: call it theft or temptation, the data is less an indictment of the housekeeping staff than a snapshot of passenger behaviour.

The theft has cost bedroll contractors an estimated ₹104.51 crore in the over four-

● DAILY LINEN COUNT 8 LAKH. WHAT RLYS CALLS 'THEFT'

Linen 'theft'

YEAR	TOTAL ITEMS
2022	24.83 lakh
2023	29.67 lakh
2024	31.31 lakh
2025	38.81 lakh
2026*	2.31 lakh
Total	1.27 crore



Railways went back to providing bedrolls after Covid. EXPRESS ARCHIVE

TOWELS TOP LIST OF STOLEN ITEMS (in lakh)

Towels	46.54	Bedsheets	41.13	Pillow covers	23.59	Blankets	12.95	Pillows	2.76
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*UNTIL MAY; TOTAL INCLUDES 7,000 ITEMS FROM 2021; SOURCE: RTI

COACH MITRA APP TO TRACK BOARDING

Rly roadmap to improve passenger behaviour: counselling to CCTVs

Dheeraaj Mishra

New Delhi, July 12

DIVISIONS ACROSS the Railways have adopted a mix of measures to curb the theft of linen items from AC coaches — from counselling bedroll attendants, monitoring linen through CCTV, and using the Coach Mitra app, according to RTI replies received by *The Indian Express*.

The primary response across divisions has been to

counsel bedroll attendants: instructing them to remain vigilant, monitor linen closely, ensure prompt collection, stay alert during duty hours, take proper care of linen items, and undergo sensitisation and special drives.

In a letter to general managers of all zones in September 2015, the Railway Board had prescribed that linen distribution staff advise passengers to hand over used linen at least

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Harry Kane-led England and Lionel Messi's Argentina advanced to the semis after defeating Norway and Switzerland, respectively, AP



Messi's march in Atlanta. David Beckham's red card in 1998 for fouling Diego Simeone, both a regular presence in the VIP box this tournament, has been a metaphor of Argentina practising the dark arts.

Years later, Someone admitted, guilt-free, that he had conned the referee. "I had tackled him, and we both fell to the ground. As I was trying to stand up, that was when he kicked me from behind. And I took advantage of that. And I thought any person would have taken advantage of that in just the same way," he told *Observer Sports Monthly*.

Beckham exacted revenge at their next meeting, in the 2002 edition, with the lone goal of the game. That was the last time they met on the global stage.

The cards themselves were introduced after an ill-tempered game between them in the 1966

quarterfinals, which England won 1-0. Argentina captain Antonio Rattin, who passed away on Friday at the age of 84, was sent off for two offences in the space of two minutes. Here, he refused to leave the ground, pulled the referee's shirt and threatened to "punch him".

After the game, players pushed each other in the tunnel and the local police had to intervene. One of them urinated in the tunnel. Rattin fumed after the game: "It was clear that the referee played with an England shirt on." Roberto Ferrero attacked the referee and Ermindo Onega spat in the face of FIFA vice-president Harry Cavani.

When fullback George Cohen was about to swap his shirt, manager Alf Ramsey shouted, "George, you are not changing shirts with that animal." Later, some of Argentina's players flung chairs at the England dressing room. When a policeman tried to stop them, an orange was thrown at his face. Allegations of referees favouring England was a broader theme of the World Cup.

Fans-clashing is natural, and not just at an England-Argentina game. It's anywhere the fans meet. A video of England and Argentina supporters hitting each other during the Norway-England quarterfinal in

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J&K CM Omar Abdullah at a rally in Jammu, Sunday, AP

'INAPPROPRIATE' BOOKS: J&K POLICE ARRESTS THREE PUBLISHERS

P. 7

Delhi protest will mark 'new method' in push for restoration of status: J&K CM

Express News Service

Jammu, July 12

A DAY after accusing the BJP of trying to topple his government, Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said on Sunday that the National Conference's protest at Delhi's Jantar Mantar to mount pressure on the Centre to re-

store statehood would mark the beginning of a "new method" since "enough time was given to the Central Government to fulfill its promise".

"We pursued the restoration of statehood for nearly two years giving enough time to the Central Government to fulfill its promise made to the people

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[FROM PAGE 1 | FULL REPORTS ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM]

US strikes Iran; Tehran hits back at Gulf states

talks, while the United Arab Emirates, which had not been targeted since early May, said its air defences had engaged missiles and drones from Iran.

Iranian media said there had been missile attacks and explosions around the port of Bandar Abbas, home to military facilities on the strait, and nearby Qeshm Island, on Sunday afternoon, as the US reportedly launched another round of attacks.

Citing a senior US official, Axios reported on Sunday that the US carried out several strikes

on Iranian missile and air defence systems and targeted small speed boats of the IRGC at several locations around the Strait of Hormuz.

The renewed violence casts further doubt on the future of an interim US-Iranian agreement signed last month.

In the past week, US President Donald Trump has said he considers the ceasefire over, while leaving the door open to more talks.

Iran said late on Saturday it had closed the waterway after firing a warning shot that struck

a vessel travelling on an unauthorised route. On Sunday, it said it had disabled a second vessel.

Iran's recently created Persian Gulf Strait Authority said on Sunday that passage through the strait was not currently possible due to "recent illegal movements of the United States military forces in the region". Permits would be issued "as soon as stability and calm are restored," it said.

The US Central Command, however, upped the ante on Sunday asserting that the Strait of Hormuz is open to all vessels

and US forces are "positioned and prepared" to ensure freedom of navigation. The US Navy-led Joint Maritime Information Center reiterated guidance that despite a severe security threat, an "expanded" southern route near Oman was available for two-way traffic.

On Saturday, Central Command said US forces had hit 140 Iranian military targets, and that more than 300 had been struck over three nights this week "to degrade Iran's ability to attack civilian mariners and commercial vessels freely trans-

siting the strait."

Iranian state media reported explosions in several port cities and said an Iranian army officer had been killed.

In response, Iran's Revolutionary Guards said they had destroyed a command-and-control centre and drone hangars in Jordan, targeted a US radar site in Kuwait, attacked US aircraft carrier support and refuelling platforms in Oman and destroyed a jet maintenance centre and command facility in Qatar.

Qatar said three people, in-

cluding a child, had been injured by falling shrapnel. It said Iran was "fully legally responsible" for the attack.

The UAE said it detected missile threats outside its borders. Bahrain said it intercepted several Iranian aerial attacks, Jordan reported missile strikes and Oman reported being targeted with drones. Kuwait's navy reported damage from strikes, and said an attack on an oil drilling platform injured a worker.

On Sunday, Iran's top negotiator Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf posted on X: "The era of one-sided deals is over. We told you: Keep your word or pay the price. Reality is knocking."

Driver's Seat

Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma operates a roller to crush seized drugs in Nalbari. The Assam government on Sunday kicked off a campaign to destroy seized narcotics worth over Rs 400 crore. PTI

Waving 'court order', Ritabrata says his faction 'real TMC', Mamata camp frowns

Tanusree Bose
Kolkata, July 12

REBEL TRINAMOOL Congress leader Ritabrata Banerjee claimed Sunday that the TMC faction led by him, the 'Rita-brata-TMC', is the real TMC, while citing a purported court order. However, the Mamata Banerjee camp said it was only an interim order and the final verdict was still pending.

Making the statement at a press conference here, Ritabrata presented the order said to be issued by the Civil Judge (senior division) Alipore, South 24 Parganas district.

Reading out a portion of the purported order, the Leader of the Opposition claimed that the National Working Committee formed during a special session of the rebel faction on June 22 has been named the "legitimate" All India Trinamool Congress.

The purported court order, a copy of which was shared by the Ritabrata camp, read, "The defendants and their men and agents are hereby restrained from creating disturbances to the National Working Committee elected at the Special Session held on 22.06.2026 constitutes the only lawful executive body and the defendant must administer the affairs of the All India Trinamool Congress, along with the defendants, their agents, servants, associates or any person claiming through them from representing themselves as office-bearers of the party are also restrained, from



Ritabrata Banerjee FILE

interfering with the administration of the party."

Ritabrata said some individuals had attempted to capture party offices and incite unrest, after which a few workers from his TMC faction had filed a case in the Alipore Court.

The court recently issued an order in the matter. Ritabrata claimed that the court clearly ruled that the TMC faction whose session appointed Arup Roy as the party chairperson, while replacing Mamata Banerjee, is the real TMC. Ritabrata claimed the court has now put its seal of approval on their claim.

Meanwhile, Kalighat-TMC Advocate Arka Nag told the media, "Ritabrata Banerjee has claimed that a court order has recognised his faction as the 'real Trinamool Congress'. The case in question was not filed by Ritabrata Banerjee. It was filed by Jul Biswas and several others. Ritabrata and his associates had approached the Election Commission seeking recognition as the 'real Trinamool Congress'."

FULL REPORT ON
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'Ladki Bahin' beneficiaries

official associated with the exercise said.

Launched ahead of the 2024 Assembly elections, the scheme provides Rs 1,500 every month to women aged 21-65 years from families with an annual income below Rs 2.5 lakh. Government employees, income tax payers and beneficiaries of certain other welfare schemes are excluded.

The scheme currently covers over 1.5 crore beneficiaries, down from its peak of around 2.43 crore women before the verification process, which was started in September 2025 with multiple extensions given for its completion.

The latest findings assume significance against the backdrop of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) questioning the financial management of the scheme.

In its audit of the state's finances for 2024-25, the CAG flagged "significant deficiencies in budget estimation, expenditure control and financial management", citing excess expenditure of about Rs 3,541 crore without specific justification, parking of funds worth Rs 15,586 crore in government deposit accounts despite there being no immediate utilisation requirement, and weak financial controls.

The audit also noted a large direct benefit transfer scheme. The RTI records also show a category-wise break-up of why beneficiaries were removed. It estimated that a bad beneficiary removed, the largest chunk — nearly 62 lakh, or about 67 per cent — were deleted for failing to complete the mandatory electronic Know Your Customer (eKYC) process. This requires beneficiaries to authenticate their Aadhaar de-

tails so the government can verify their identity and eligibility.

The next category comprised 16 lakh beneficiaries (17 per cent) who were found to belong to families with annual incomes exceeding the scheme's eligibility ceiling of Rs 2.5 lakh.

Among the remaining categories, 4.42 lakh beneficiaries (4.8 per cent) were found during verification that they or a family member were government employees.

Another 3.6 lakh (3.9 per cent) were already receiving assistance under the Sanjay Gandhi Niradhar Yojana, 2.5 lakh (2.7 per cent) cases involved more than two members of the same family drawing benefits, 1.8 lakh (2 per cent) beneficiaries were above the upper age limit of 65 years, and 1.7 lakh (1.8 per cent) were flagged during district-level scrutiny.

Separately, around 29,000 men and nearly 8,000 government employees were also found to have received benefits despite being ineligible.

Responding to latest findings, Women and Child Development Minister Anit Katkar said the mandatory eKYC process, meant to ensure that only eligible beneficiaries received assistance, could not begin immediately after the scheme's launch because of the Assembly election schedule and the Model Code of Conduct.

The scheme was launched in June 2024 and the first two instalments were released to gether in August 2024. After that there were Assembly elections in November 2024 and the Model Code of Conduct came into force before October, because of which the eKYC exercise could not be started earlier. We decided on the exercise in August 2025 after the new government came in place and repeatedly announced that

payments of beneficiaries who did not complete eKYC would be stopped," Katkar said.

She said beneficiaries were given repeated opportunities, including extensions till December 31, 2025, to complete the eKYC process before their payments were stopped. "It is not that the government removed them. All those who had registered and were eligible received benefits till the eKYC procedure was completed," she said.

On the recovery of payments availed by ineligible beneficiaries, the Katkar said, "Even CM sir (Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis) has announced in the Assembly that except for the male beneficiaries and government staffers, money wouldn't be recovered from any other beneficiaries."

Last month, in a reply to the State Assembly, Katkar had said that recovery proceedings had been initiated against government employees, male beneficiaries and other ineligible recipients identified during the verification exercise under the Revenue Recovery Receipt mechanism — and that district collectors had been directed to recover the amounts.

The state government also reduced the scheme's allocation from Rs 36,000 crore in 2025-26 to Rs 26,500 crore in the current financial year, a reduction of nearly Rs 9,500 crore. The Mahayuti government's poll promise of increasing the monthly assistance from Rs 1,500 to Rs 2,100 has also not materialised.

On October 21, 2025, *The Indian Express* had reported that at least 12,431 men and 77,980 ineligible women had received benefits under the scheme despite not meeting eligibility conditions, resulting in wrongful disbursement of nearly Rs 165 crore.

Omar slams Centre

of Jammu and Kashmir," Omar told the gathering at Maharaja Hari Singh Park in Srinagar. His first major public meeting in the BJP stronghold. "Now, we will start restoring to 'a new method' for it from July 20 on forwards when we raise slogans for restoration of statehood at our dharna in Delhi," he said.

Targeting the BJP for undermining the government's efforts towards statehood, he said, "Let BJP tell us whether we have to go to (US President) Trump for statehood... and hold dharna outside the White House." Until then, he said, "We will hold demonstrations and knock on the doors in our own National Capital seeking J&K statehood."

(PTI adds) Leader of Opposition in Jammu and Kashmir Assembly Sunil Sharma on Sunday accused the National Conference of using the demand for restoration of statehood to shift the political nar-

ative away from governance issues. He said the BJP never asked anyone to seek statehood for Jammu and Kashmir. "The National Conference government is using the statehood issue to conceal its failure to fulfil promises made to the people," Sharma said.

The protest, planned on the first day of Parliament's Monsoon Session, will be the first to be held outside the J&K ruling party against the Centre since coming to power in the UT after the 2024 Assembly elections.

According to K.B. Jandial, ex-member of the J&K Public Service Commission and Professor Hari Om, Jammu University's former History Department HoD, more than a showdown with the Centre, the NC's plans for rallies and dharnas are mainly to counter the state Opposition's criticism accusing it of failing to create employment and ensure development.

Ayodhya

directly involved in counting donations made to the temple.

Earlier this month, *The Indian Express* had reported that police had sought revenue records to determine the money laid and questioned local property dealers to establish whether the arrested accused were involved in any recent real estate transactions.

"We are trying to establish where the accused invested the stolen money... So far, we have recovered cash, jewellery and vehicles that appear to have

been purchased using the stolen money. We are examining whether the accused also used the money to buy any immovable property," a police officer involved in the probe told *The Indian Express*. "We are awaiting the revenue department's report," the officer added.

Sources said property documents seized during searches at the homes of the accused did not, by themselves, establish that the properties had been purchased using the "stolen" money.

Meanwhile, police have sought a local court's permission for seven days' custody

of Srivastava and Yadav.

While the CCTV footage from the counting room captured the six arrested counting staff allegedly concealing cash during the counting process, police are trying to gather more evidence to establish the roles of Yadav and Srivastava. The Shri Ram Jambhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust-appointed supervisor of the donation counting room.

Tinnu Yadav, on the other hand, was a driver of former Trust general secretary Champai Rai, who resigned following the donation "theft" revelations.

incorporated a more physical and pragmatic side to the game, professed by legendary manager Carlos Bilardo. They perceived Englishmen as soft at heart. In a non England-Argentina game, they crooned: "Maradona is a cheater."

Underpinning all the friction is an antithesis of sporting style. The heart of Argentinian football is a style called "criollo", a game based on individuality and flair, rather than the disciplined and regimented style English settlers, the founding fathers of football in Argentina, had imposed on the locals. Juan Peron, when he became president in 1946, would say: "We nationalised the railways, and now we have nationalised football!"

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England vs Argentina

Miami this time is just a sample. After Argentina's 3-1 win over Switzerland, the supporters chanted: "El que no salta es un inglés," translated as "the one who doesn't jump is an Englishman."

Their stadium anthem "Muchachos", originally a song by Argentine band La Mosca "We-Tse", has references to the Falklands War. The blood of Messi and his troops might not boil over the war as much as Maradona's generation, but it still sparks emotional nationalism. The battle over two islands in the Atlantic lasted 10 days, but the symbolic conflict still lives on the football ground, England

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Missing for 2 months in Finland, Hyderabad teen's body found at sea; family seeks probe

Nikhila Henry
Hyderabad, July 12

THE BODY of an 18-year-old student, Manideep Reddy Gujja, from Hyderabad who went missing in Finland in May was recovered from the sea in Helsinki, his family's lawyer, KLB Kumar, told *The Indian Express* on Sunday. The lawyer said the case raised several doubts and alleged that it was not "investigated properly."

The Indian embassy in Finland had communicated this to Manideep's family on July 10, after local authorities informed the embassy that the body was found in the sea in Helsinki.

Manideep was pursuing a Bachelor's programme at Lappeenranta-Lahti University of Technology (LUT University), Lahti Campus, Finland. He was living in Ritanienkatu, Lahti.

The last sighting of the teenager was at a shopping mall in Helsinki, about 100 kilometres from his residence in Lahti. Finland police found CCTV images of him walking along the aisles of the shopping centre on May 5.

His parents, Mamata Reddy and G Muthyam Reddy, had approached the Telangana High Court, seeking directions to authorities to trace their son.

According to his parents, Manideep had asked them for Rs 5,000 on May 5. "He called me to ask for this small amount of money, and I

transferred it," his mother said. Since then, using about Rs 2,500, he travelled for over 100 kilometres by bus and reached Helsinki, Finnish police found.

The reason for the journey remains a mystery. In Helsinki, he was seen having a bite at an eatery and walking into a shopping mall. His phone became unreachable shortly afterwards. "We don't know what happened to him," his mother had earlier told *The Indian Express*.

Manideep had moved to Finland in 2025 to study engineering. "We thought that he would come back and do well in a good job," his mother had said.

The family's lawyer said the case "was not properly investigated" and that the recovery of the body after two months raises several doubts. "We have many doubts. After two months, the body has been recovered. We believe that it is a suspicious death," Kumar said. The parents believe that something untoward happened to him on May 5, the day he went missing, the lawyer said.

The lawyer requested the Union government to help the parents to go to Finland and make enquiries and see the body. "We demand that the death should be investigated properly. Finnish authorities should investigate the circumstances under which the boy disappeared and how the death occurred," the lawyer said.

Ship hit

Oman with these 11 Indian national on board, saying that the targeting of civilian shipping and infrastructure in the region must end.

This last round of attacks have sent Indian lives in danger yet again. The war in West Asia has so far claimed the lives of 11 Indians since February 28, when it started.

The US attacked Iran early Sunday morning on an Iranian strike on a vessel in the Strait of Hormuz that set the container ship ablaze and forced its crew to abandon it.

Confirming that Indians have been caught in the cross-fire, the Ministry of External Affairs said 10 Indian nationals have been rescued while one is reportedly missing. "We condemn the attack on the commercial vessel GFS *Galaxy* off the coast of Oman... Of the 11 Indian nationals on board, 10 have been rescued so far, while one Indian National is reportedly missing," it said in a statement which did not mention Iran.

The MEA said the Indian embassy in Oman is closely monitoring the situation and proactively coordinating with the Omani authorities in the ongoing search and rescue operation. "We thank the Omani authorities for their support." It said the continuing incidents of attacks on commercial shipping in the region are "deeply concerning" and "escalation of tensions" in West Asia.

This latest escalation also comes at a time when External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar visited four countries in West Asia, including Qatar, Oman, Kuwait and Bahrain. He is now headed to the US.

India had sent an official delegation to the Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's funeral earlier this month.

Iran's IRGC said multiple vessels "disregarded our warnings and instructions to correct their course and proceed along the approved route." One of them "was struck by a warning shot and brought to a stop."

India has been careful in not naming Iran, but has condemned the attacks in the past, including on July 8, when it said that Iran's "deeply concerning" over the recent attacks and "escalation of tensions" in West Asia.

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TO SPEED UP IMPLEMENTATION OF PM-UDAY SCHEME

Eye on unauthorised colonies, CM seeks Rs 100 cr Central aid

Devanish Mittal
New Delhi, July 12

WITH AN aim to accelerate the implementation of PM-UDay, a scheme meant to confer ownership rights to the residents of notified unauthorised colonies in the Capital, Chief Minister Rekha Gupta has sought an assistance of Rs 100 crore from Centre in a letter to Union Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Manohar Lal.

In April, the Union government had announced a simplified procedure for granting ownership rights to around 45 lakh residents of 1,511 unauthorised colonies in the city on an "as-is-where-is" basis, while removing the pre-requisite of having an approved layout plan.

The Delhi government's Revenue department was made the nodal agency for the scheme and will set up PM-UDAY cells in all 13 districts, each headed by an Additional District Magistrate.

The funds have been sought for three components — a technology-based land survey and mapping system, the setting up of district-level PM-UDAY cells, and a public awareness campaign, a statement from the Chief Minister's Office highlighted on Sunday.

According to the government, Rs 65 crore will be utilised for the mapping and survey system under an initiative called DRISHTI; Rs 25 crore for

establishing the district and headquarters-level PM-UDAY cells, which the government says are necessary to issue property documents within a stipulated 45-day timeline; and Rs 10 crore for outreach activities, including workshops with Resident Welfare Associations, help desks, and awareness camps.

In her letter, Gupta has requested that the Rs 100 crore package for the first phase be approved under the Urban Development Fund (UDF).

The institutional framework required for implementing the scheme has already been notified and the work has commenced. Timely financial support from the Central Government will help ensure that lakhs of Delhi residents receive the benefits of property rights at the earliest and with greater ease," she wrote.

Slow uptake

Earlier in July, the government had set October 31 as the last date of application for regularisation under the scheme, citing low number of applications as the reason.

Previous attempts have also seen a lukewarm response from the public.

Ahead of the 2020 Delhi elections, the central government had announced the launch of PM-UDAY scheme to regularise 1,731 unauthorised colonies. DDA was the nodal agency to implement the

scheme.

This was different from past attempts at regularisation under which the Delhi government was to coordinate the whole process.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) was in power in Delhi when the BJP-led Central government launched PM-UDAY.

Up to March 31, 2026, however, only around 40,000 conveyance deeds and authorisation slips had been issued under the scheme.

The government said that "it has been observed that even after issuance of conveyance deeds/authorisation slips, residents are unable to get building plans approved or regularise existing structures due to the absence of approved layout plans. These layout plans were to be prepared by RWAs and approved by MCD."

Due to this, the new regulations notified in April stated that 1,511 colonies will be regularised on an "as-is-where-is" basis without requiring approved layout plans, and that land use of all plots and buildings in these colonies will be treated as residential.

Also, the Delhi government's Revenue department was made the nodal agency again, taking the responsibility for implementing the scheme back from DDA.

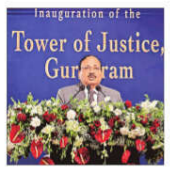
But experts have flagged that such regularisation has its pitfalls in the absence of necessary approval of the plan.

Goal is to establish efficient and impartial judicial system: CJI as he unveils Tower of Justice in Gurgaon

Express News Service
New Delhi, July 12

EVEN AS ensuring speed in delivery of justice is important, it cannot be done at the cost of constitutional values, Chief Justice of India Surya Kant said on Sunday. He was speaking at the inauguration of the New District Court Complex — named "Tower of Justice" — in Gurgaon.

Gurgaon, once known primarily for agriculture, has today emerged as a major hub for industry, innovation, and investment, he said, and pointed out the regional offices of more than half of the Fortune 500 companies, along with over 1,500 Indian companies and start-ups, operate from the city. He added that disputes related to property, technology, contracts, and employment have increased with the expansion of trade and economic activities, underlining that more than 24,000 civil disputes, approximately 1,000 commercial disputes, and over one lakh cases under the Negotiable Instruments Act are pending in the courts of Millennium



CJI Surya Kant at the event.

City. These figures, he pointed out, indicate the growing burden on the judicial system. The CJI said that given this, the "Tower of Justice" is not merely a modern structure but a means to make access to justice far more effective. The true significance of courts, he said, lies not in their grandeur, but in the extent to which they bridge the gap between the citizen and justice and the "Tower of Justice" embodies that vision.

The new complex has a total of 56 courtrooms. It has facilities for video conferencing and a well-organised judicial record room. An International Arbitration

Centre, which will operate under the aegis of the High Court, is also proposed to come up. It has a 'Ladies Bar Room' spanning approximately 430 square meters, for the women advocates and will ensure that they have access to a dignified, adequate, and conducive working environment. Besides, amenities such as a childcare center have also been provided within the premises.

He underlined that the objective of judicial reforms cannot be limited merely to the speedy disposal of cases and priority must always be to establish a judicial system that is both efficient and impartial. The CJI said while the objective is the speedy disposal of cases, it must also be ensured that no citizen feels deprived of justice due to financial, social, or procedural hurdles. He said that the goal is to build a judiciary that is modern yet humane; technologically advanced yet firmly rooted in constitutional values, and a sensitive institution that understands the human lives underlying every case.

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Alok Singh
New Delhi, July 12

BEHIND A tall black iron gate on plot X-57 in Southeast Delhi's Okhla Industrial Area stands a seemingly ordinary three-storey commercial building. The basement houses a curtain warehouse, while the first floor is occupied by a women's garment stitching and embroidery unit run by the building owner. The second floor remains vacant.

But for four years, trucks laden with cartons of chips, soft drinks and fruit juices arrived almost daily at the ground-floor unit. Workers at neighbouring factories watched the consignments come and go, but few knew what happened once they were taken inside.

"They never allowed us inside," said a worker at a nearby factory who had known many of the unit's employees for years. "They would only say it was packaging work and that the goods were being sent abroad — to countries like the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand."

But on July 2, at around 1.30 pm, the mystery surrounding the unit began to unravel.

Acting on a tip-off about suspected child labour, a 12-member joint team comprising Delhi Police personnel, officials from the office of the Sub-Divisional Magistrate (Badarpur), the FSSAI and the NHRC raided the premises.

What investigators say they found was a different serious offence altogether. According to the police, the unit had allegedly been removing the original manufacturing and expiry dates from expired food and beverage products and replacing them with fresh labels before putting them back on the market.

"The products included popular names such as Thums Up, Fanta, Bourvinita, Horlicks, Maggi noodles and Paper Boat beverages, as well as sheep products," a senior police official said.

"We suspect some of the relabelled products were supplied to warehouses operated by e-commerce platforms and may have reached consumers. We have alerted the companies as we probe the scale of the operation," the official said.

The police arrested seven people, including the alleged owner of the unit, Darshan Singh Sachdeva, 70, a resident of Greater Kailash.

How the operation worked

According to the police, the accused followed a deceptively simple method to carry out the alleged fraud.

"They would first use thinner, applied to paper or cotton, to remove the original manufacturing and expiry



(Clockwise from top) The unit busted by police in Okhla Phase-II in Delhi; manufacturing details on the branded product that expired were removed. GAJENDRA VIDYAR

• WHAT FSSAI SAYS

Large-scale seizure and zero-tolerance stance: FSSAI found around 50,000 compromised food packets at the premises and has stated a zero-tolerance policy on adulteration, misbranding and fraud, initiating strict administrative and legal action under the FSS Act, 2006.

Check manufacturing, expiry dates & printing quality: Consumers should inspect manufacturing and expiry dates, label fonts, spelling and print

clarity — inconsistencies or blurred and uneven printing can indicate tampering or relabelling.

Report suspicious products to FSSAI: The FSSAI has urged the public to report counterfeit or suspicious items via the Food Safety Connect mobile app or the FOSCOs grievance portal (foscos.fssai.gov.in), with photos and purchase details.

Vendor responsibility and manufacturer liability: Authorities and NHRC emphasize

that relabelling or altering expiry details cannot be done by godowns or marketing agencies — proper labeling is the manufacturer's responsibility, and intermediaries must not reprint expiry/manufacture information.

Regulatory changes under consideration: Officials are exploring tougher controls on how manufacture information is printed and reviewing disposal procedures for expired products to prevent fraudulent relabelling.

dates printed on the packaging," an officer said.

The workers would then use handheld printing machines to stamp fresh expiry dates, allegedly extending the shelf life of the products by five to six months, depending on the item, the officer said.

If the original date could not be completely erased, workers allegedly pasted similarly sized stickers carrying newly printed dates over the existing labels to conceal them, the officer added.

The investigation has also shed light on the supply network that allegedly sustained the operation.

During questioning, the accused told investigators that

they sourced near-expiry food products from 60 to 70 suppliers across several states, including Punjab, Haryana, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, police said.

"Most of the suppliers were wholesalers. The accused purchased goods from wherever they could secure the steepest discounts," an officer said.

Investigators are now trying to identify all the suppliers linked to the operation and to determine the scale at which the relabelled products may have entered the market.

According to the police, the alleged operation was run by Sachdeva, who had been operating from the Okhla godown under the name Westend Corporation Private Limited for

more than three years. "We are also examining the nature of his business before he shifted to the current premises," an officer said.

Besides Sachdeva, police arrested six employees, including the unit's manager, accountant, operator, warehouse keeper and two supervisors. All seven have been booked under sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita related to the sale of noxious food or drink, cheating, forgery and criminal conspiracy. Police said several other workers were allegedly engaged in tampering with and repackaging the products. "The workers employed at the unit were paid around Rs 12,000 a month and typically worked

eight to ten hours a day," the officer said.

Inside the sealed unit

According to local sources, the building is owned by a Kalkaji resident who had rented out the basement and the ground floor for more than Rs 1 lakh a month each.

The front portion of the ground floor functioned as the office of the alleged repackaging unit, while the godown operated from the rear.

When The Indian Express visited the premises, the ground-floor hall and the godown had been sealed, with some of the seized material still visible inside. At the rear of the godown, several soft drink bottles and cartons of Paper Boat beverages lay in the open.

One neighbouring worker said police had sought his help in counting, sorting and collecting the seized products while sealing the premises. "It was the first time that I had gone so far inside the godown. We were all shocked to see the fraud they were carrying out," the worker said.

Police said the seized products were mostly genuine branded food and beverage items that had crossed their expiry dates and were allegedly being relabelled for resale. "We recovered products worth more than Rs 20 lakh. We also recovered counterfeit labels and stickers, forged nutritional value labels, fake barcodes and batch labels," the officer said.

E-commerce platforms alerted

According to the police, one of the most troubling aspects of the case is the possibility that the relabelled products may have entered mainstream supply chains and reached consumers through e-commerce platforms.

"The products were supplied to warehouses linked to e-commerce sellers in the National Capital Region, from where they may have been distributed to consumers across the country," an officer said.

Investigators are now trying to determine the scale of the alleged distribution network and whether the entities involved were aware that the products had been repackaged.

"We are investigating how these transactions were carried out and whether those dealing in these products knew that the items had been relabelled," another officer said.

"We are also seeking details of the suppliers and the customers to whom these products were sold."

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Southeast) Hemant Tiwari said the investigation is being led by Inspector Anil Malik under the supervision of Assistant Commissioner of Police (Sarita Vihar) Anil Sharma.

• TWO LAWYERS ADD COMFORTING FLAVOURS OF ODISHA TO DELHI'S PLATTER

A seat for Odisha at Delhi's food table

Apart from running a cloud kitchen, the duo also hosts 'intimate sit-downs' for anywhere between 12 and 20 people

Anusree K C
New Delhi, July 12

"DIL WAALON KI DILLI" has always welcomed migrants from across the country — so much so that some neighbourhoods even carry the accent and scents of other states. Punjabi dhabas in some lane, Kerala meals in another, Bengali sweet shops tucked into a third. Anubhuti Mishra and Aditi Mohapatra, however, were of the view there should be more flavours from Odisha on Delhi's platter.

The two women, both lawyers, run their cloud kitchen venture 'Rosei Ghara' — where one is served with homemade Odia food. Aditi and Anubhuti moved to Delhi for work from

Cuttack and Bhubaneswar in 2013 and 2015, respectively.

Over the years, they found themselves missing the "specific mustard-sharp, spicy and unmistakably flavours of home." They started this outlet out of "sheer homesickness."

The two met through a mutual friend in 2021. Aditi recalls it all started with discussions on how they miss Odia food in Delhi. And then we just decided to do it ourselves."

They began with home-kitchen deliveries in October, 2024, and switched to a cloud kitchen by March 2025.

They now host 'super

clubs' — intimate sit-downs for anywhere between 12 and 20 people — at their own or a friend's house, and sometimes in partnership with venues across the city.

They serve dahi bara aloo dum, the quintessential Cuttack street snack made of soft urad dal vadas soaked in buttermilk, served alongside ghugni (a white pea curry) and a spicy aloo dum, finished with raw onion, green chilli and sev.

Then there's the badia piya and nadio aloo bara — smashed onion fritters and coconut-potato cutlets — paired

with ambula rat, made of sundried raw mangoes and a raw mustard-coconut paste, and amba khatta, a traditional sweet and tangy raw mango chutney.

But it is mudi mangsho, which pairs crispy, puffed rice with a mutton curry, an unexpected combination of food that enthralls your senses.

The dishes did not make it to the menu without any trial and error. Neither Aditi nor Anubhuti were trained at a culinary school. They both learned from their mothers and grandmothers — before starting to cook under pressure once they left home.

"The first thing I ever cooked in my life was mutton," Aditi says. Setting up the cloud kitchen required learning everything from scratch: standardising recipes for their chefs to follow, working out the preparation schedules, figuring out what could be frozen and portioned and what they absolutely could

not.

There have been some "mistakes" too. One early experiment saw them plating chenna poda with maple syrup and pistachio. "It tasted very nice to us," Anubhuti said.

Aditi's food memories trace back to her grandmother, who passed away two years ago and who, she says, built the family's reputation one meal at a time. "She fed people amazing food. Anybody who



Clockwise from above: Dahi bara aloo dum prepared at Rosei Ghara; Anubhuti Mishra and Aditi at work.

misses, "but it may have alienated the audience... as that is not how it's traditionally eaten." It taught them where the line sits between authenticity and accessibility.

Aditi's food memories trace back to her grandmother, who passed away two years ago and who, she says, built the family's reputation one meal at a time. "She fed people amazing food. Anybody who

family would know us because of that." Much of what 'Rosei Ghara' serves today comes straight from the recipes she once cooked.

Anubhuti's food memories are less about the kitchen and more about street food. She remembers eating dahi bara aloo dum between tuition classes.

As for what's next, both are wary of scaling too fast. They would rather, as Aditi says, "do it at a smaller scale and do it well" than dilute the idea by becoming a franchise.



For now, the plan is more supper clubs, more collaborations with chefs working on other regional cuisines, and slowly making true their "ultimate dream" of an Odia restaurant in Delhi.

They, however, aren't alone in this. Delhi does have a handful of other spaces serving Odia food. There are 'Dish of Odisha' in Lodhi Colony; 'OnBonning' in Gurgaon; Sushant Lok; 'Odisha Hotel' which has opened in Sainik Farm, and the 'Odisha Bhawan' in Chanakya-puri.



Special Mention In Auckland

UNION MINISTER Hardeep Singh Puri found a special mention in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address to the Indian diaspora in Auckland on Saturday. This was in relation to the sacred Jore Sahib, the footwar of Sikh Guru Gobind Singh and Mata Sahib Kaur, preserved by the former diplomat's family over generations. Inviting the Sikh community to pay homage to the relics at Patna Sahib, the Guru's birthplace where they are currently placed, the PM also underlined their legacy to Delhi and Punjab with his Cabinet colleague's family, until the final handover to the Sikh Sangat.

Hooked and Booked

THE PAWAR family has another reason to celebrate. After the recent wedding of Supriya Sule's daughter Revati, preparations are now on for Rajya Sabha MP Parth Pawar's engagement. Parth, son of former deputy Chief Minister late Ajit Pawar and Anurita Pawar, the current Deputy CM, is set to get engaged to Kanyantra Dhar later this month. Family friends say the match had Ajit Pawar's blessing long before it was finalised. Kanyantra's appearance alongside Parth at Revati's wedding had already set off whispers in political circles. Those whispers are now set to end with a low-key engagement ceremony in Pune. Only close family and friends are expected to attend the function.

True or False

THREE IPS officers of AGMUT cadre, who avoided reporting to their new postings for about a year, underwent medical examinations at AIIMS after the Union Ministry of Home Affairs ordered checks to verify their health claims. A nine-member AIIMS medical board interviewed and examined the three on July 7. The board's findings will now be sent to the ministry. The board's report will determine whether their absence was medically justified or whether they overstated health issues to avoid their postings.

Donation theft: RSS expresses 'grief', says probe will reach a 'decisive turn'

ENS & PTI
Bengaluru, July 12

CONCLUDING THE three-day annual Akhil Bharatiya Prant Pracharak Bathak in Bengaluru on Sunday, the RSS expressed "grief" over the alleged Ram temple donation theft and fund embezzlement while voicing confidence that the ongoing SIT probe and police action would reach a "decisive turn".

The issue came up during the concluding day of the RSS' annual Bathak, where the organisation also reviewed its training activities, centenary year programmes and discussed issues ranging from population imbalance to drug abuse.

According to a statement issued by the RSS: "In the meeting, everyone expressed grief over the incident of irregularities in the counting of the donation box offerings at the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Mandir, and expressed confidence that the ongoing SIT and police action, initiated at the request of the Teerth Koheta Nyas, will reach a decisive turn."

The Sangh said it also expected the Teerth Koheta Nyas "to ensure that no such incident occurs in the future which could hurt the reverence and deep faith of all Ram Bhakts towards the Ram Mandir".

An FIR was registered on June 25 following a preliminary report by the Special Investigation Team (SIT), which was



AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal during the launch of a signature campaign against Ram temple donation theft, in New Delhi on Sunday.

constituted by the Uttar Pradesh government.

The three-day meeting, held from July 10 to 12, concluded in the presence of RSS Sarsangchalak Mohan Bhagwat, Sarkaryavah Dattatreya Hosabale and 226 karyakartas.

According to the release, the meeting reviewed training camps conducted after March 2026, stating that 83 Sangh Shiksha Vargs and 12 Karyakarta Vikas Vargs were organised across the country, training a total of 18,842 swayamseviks.

The training covered subjects — daily shakha (daily camps), Sangh karya paddhati (work system), Gram Vikas (village development), Kutumba

Prabodhan (lecture on family values), disaster management and environment.

The meeting also held detailed discussions on implementing action plans at the shakha level, expanding shakhas during September under the Shiksha Vistar Yojana (Shakha expansion programme), reviewing programs completed as part of the Sangh's centenary year and planning the remaining scheduled events.

The RSS said plans were discussed to actively engage people who came into contact through various centenary year programmes in social work and the Panch Parivartan initiative.

Ram temple trust to decide CEO's powers, no govt interference, says Nripendra Misra

Press Trust of India
Ayodhya, July 12

RAM TEMPLE Construction Committee Chairman Nripendra Misra on Sunday stated that the responsibilities and powers of the first-ever Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Ayodhya temple will be determined by the temple trust.

The primary responsibility of the CEO will be to uphold the faith of the devotees in the trust, he said.

"The new CEO will also oversee financial arrangements," Misra told reporters in Ayodhya, adding that there won't be any "government interference" in the functioning of the trust or its CEO.

Misra added that ensuring that devotees visiting Ayodhya receive all necessary amenities and maintaining their trust in the temple will be among the new CEO's initial responsibilities.

"In a way, the CEO will work as an assistant of the trust, sans government interference," Misra said, noting that a three-

member panel has been set up to recommend suitable candidates for the CEO's post to the trust.

Ultimately, it is up to the trust to determine how much authority to delegate to the CEO, who will be responsible for arranging their own staff, while everything remains under the trust's purview, Misra stated.

On July 6, the trust announced a three-member committee comprising justice (retired) Pramod Kohli, lieutenant general (retired) Vishnukant Chaturvedi and former NIT Raipur chairperson Suresh Haware to screen candidates for the CEO's post.

Misra denied when asked if he would attend the meetings of the committee tasked with recommending names for the CEO post. He also claimed that there have been no complaints from devotees visiting the Ram temple, and that they feel positively about their experience.

Regarding any potential changes in the temple trust, Misra noted, "No decisions were made in my presence." He also clarified he did not attend the trust meeting on July 6.

BANKIPUR BYPOLL

Why BJP candidate switch in Nabin's seat can give ammo to Kishor's bid

Santosh Singh
Patna, July 12

THE BJP's decision to replace its candidate in the high-profile Bankipur seat bypoll has added a new dimension to an already closely watched contest.

While the Jan Suraj Party (JSP) founder Prashant Kishor's decision to enter the Bankipur fray has already drawn attention, the withdrawal of BJP's original nominee over his father's conviction in the fodder scam has provided the Opposition, particularly Kishor, with a campaign issue.

BJP had initially fielded Abhishek Kumar, considered close to the party president Nitin Nabin, for the bypoll. Soon, Kumar withdrew his nomination, citing "family reasons". The party then named Neeharaj Kumar Sinha, a first-timer, who is seen as close to Nabin.

The Bankipur contest has now evolved into a triangular fight with RJD fielding Rekha Gupta, the runner-up in 2025 Assembly election. Kishor has sought to project this bypoll as a "referendum" on the political choices of Bihar's urban electorate. Calling Bankipur "the political and administrative heart of Bihar", he said the constituency should vote beyond caste considerations.

A senior BJP leader acknowledged that the party had "misjudged" its initial candidate selection in Bankipur. "BJP's confidence comes from the fact we have retained this seat since



JD(U) chief Nitish Kumar with BJP's Bankipur candidate Neeharaj Kumar in Patna on Sunday.

1995. Nabin has won it comfortably since 2005. But the party erred in scolding Kumar. His father, Ravindra Prasad, is among those convicted in the fodder scam, and it was only a matter of time before the issue surfaced," the BJP leader said.

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EXPRESS special

Amid negotiations, 10 AIADMK MLAs likely to switch as Vijay's TVK nears majority mark

Arun Janardhanan
Chennai, July 12

WHAT BEGAN IN THE Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay-led TVK in Tamil Nadu as a discreet political exercise — informally referred to by party insiders as "Operation 17" — now appears to be entering its decisive phase.

According to sources involved in ongoing negotiations between TVK leaders and dissident AIADMK MLAs, around 10 MLAs of the Opposition party are likely to resign their Assembly seats and join the ruling outfit before August 15.

If that timetable holds, such resignations may coincide with the Election Commission (EC)'s expected announcement of the next round of Assembly bypolls. "This process will largely be completed before Independence Day," said a senior leader involved in the negotiations.

The objective is to finish the political transition before the bypolls schedule begins."



CM Vijay-led TVK's tally in Assembly stands at 107.

The latest phase follows a steady stream of resignations over past several weeks. Of the 25 AIADMK MLAs who had defied the party whip and backed Vijay's bid to form government in May, nearly half have either crossed over to TVK or are possibly in the process of doing it.

In the 234-member TN Assembly, seven seats are vacant now, reducing its strength to 227. The TVK's tally is 107.

Former AIADMK ministers

C Vijayabaskar and M R Vijayabaskar joined the TVK recently after resigning as MLAs, alongside former ministers MS M Anandan, S Valarmathi and several former MLAs and district-level functionaries.

Earlier, four AIADMK MLAs had resigned and crossed over to TVK, reducing the Opposition's numerical strength and taking the ruling party closer to a majority mark. Senior leaders said the next batch is expected to include MLAs politically aligned with influential AIADMK figures such as S P Velumani and C Ve Shanmugam, both of whom are regarded as among the party's strongest regional power centres.

As per TVK and AIADMK sources, both leaders themselves are expected to join TVK before July end or early August.

The negotiations, sources said, extend well beyond simple defections. Those looking to quit their seats are being assured opportunities to contest upcoming bypolls on TVK tickets. Senior leaders are understood to

have been promised Cabinet positions if re-elected, while others may be accommodated in TVK as district secretaries and office-bearers, sources said.

A senior AIADMK leader, widely believed to be preparing to switch sides, said the exodus reflected years of frustration rather than sudden political opportunism. "It was EPS's wish to remain general secretary until his last day," the leader said. "Many of us waited even after losing district secretary posts. There was no meaningful attempt to resolve the crisis."

The removal of district secretaries loyal to influential leaders, particularly Velumani, had accelerated internal dissatisfaction within AIADMK, several party leaders said.

For many MLAs, the calculations are also practical. With AIADMK reduced to 41 MLAs following resignations and TVK steadily consolidating power, many MLAs fear uncertain electoral prospects if they remain in AIADMK.

A senior TVK functionary said at least five heavyweights from AIADMK are expected to find places in Vijay's Cabinet, including Velumani, Shanmugam, C Vijayabaskar and MR Vijayabaskar. If realised, the exercise would reduce Vijay's dependence on post-poll allies while simultaneously transplanting experienced district-level political machinery into a party that remains organisationally young.

What appears different this time is the scale and sequencing. Rather than attempting a major political coup, the TVK has chosen inductions in phases.

The insistence on resigning before crossing over appears to have been a consistent feature of Vijay's strategy. MDM general secretary Vaiko said Vijay had requested him to persuade party's two MLAs elected on DMK's symbol to resign their seats before aligning with TVK, promising to campaign during bypolls. The MLAs, however, chose to remain with DMK.

Minister says Central Vista should be called Kartavya Bhawan area

Express News Service
New Delhi, July 12

UNION MINISTER for Housing and Urban Affairs Manohar Lal on Sunday said the Central Vista area, which covers the stretch from Rashtrapati Bhawan to India Gate, should now be called the "Kartavya Bhawan area", named after the new secretariat buildings.

Speaking at the CPVD's 172nd foundation day event, he said that like Vice-Regal Lodge and Council House built by the British were renamed Rashtrapati Bhawan and Parliament after Independence, the entire area should now be called Kartavya Bhawan area.

The government is in the process of redevelopment of the area, with 10 new secretariat

buildings proposed. So far, the government has completed three of the buildings and named them Kartavya Bhawan 1, 2 and 3, while also renaming Rajpath as Kartavya Path.

"So far we have been calling it Central Vista, from now on please call it Kartavya Bhawan area," the Minister said, adding that this should be reflected in documents as well.

Speaking of the new transfer policy rolled out this year, he said some officials welcomed it as they did not have to seek references from senior officials and leaders, but there were some at the same post for 30 years who were not as happy. "They started getting *affairs* [references]. But, I said transfers will go through for now, they may get transferred again next year."

"I challenge the producer and director of *Satluj* to place before the people of Punjab the complete documentary evidence, official records, judicial findings and authenticated data that conclusively establish the figure of 25,000 missing or illegally cremated bodies as portrayed in the film," Bittu, MoS for Railways and Food Processing Industries, said in a statement.

"If the figure is based merely on an estimate or allegation, why has it been projected as an established historical fact?" said Bittu, the grandson of Beant Singh, then Punjab CM who was assassinated in 1995. ENS

MILITANCY DID NOT EMERGE IN PUNJAB BECAUSE OF ONE FILM, LEADER OR EVENT, IT GREW ON ACCOUNT OF POLITICAL GRIEVANCES & FAULTLINES

Satluj saga: How a film shining light on a tragedy cannot reignite militancy



NORTHERN LIGHTS

BY MANRAJ GREWAL
SHARMA

A WEEKLY DISPATCH ON THE POLITICS AND IDEAS SHAPING NORTH INDIA

IT TOOK barely two days for the film "Satluj", marking its release and removal on the OTT platform ZEE5, to drag Punjab's "dark decade" back into everyday conversations. In the border belt of Majha, which bore the brunt of both militancy and police action, elders still recall that pain with a single Punjab word: *Santap*. Suffering. That memory, more than any film, explains why Punjab is unlikely to revisit those years.

Militancy did not emerge in Punjab because of one film, one speech, one leader or any one event. It grew over years on ac-

count of accumulated political grievances. The reorganisation of Punjab in 1966 left several contentious issues unresolved — from sharing of river waters and Chandigarh to the question of greater autonomy. These grievances did not automatically produce violence, but they created fertile ground for alienation.

Dark period

This situation worsened with a series of political and administrative missteps. The 1978 Nirankari clash in Amritsar on Baisakhi, in which 13 Sikh protesters — who were led by Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale — were killed and the accused later acquitted. The incident catalysed Bhindranwale, the then newly appointed chief of the Sikh seminary Dhami Taksal, and police action.

Then followed a series of killings, beginning with the assassination of Punjab's first chief Gurbachan Singh in 1980, and then of Punjab Kesari editor Lala Jagat Narain, a fierce critic of Bhindranwale, in 1981. Bhindranwale was a suspect in both the cases but was let off, with then Union home minister Zail

Singh himself telling Parliament that there was no evidence against him. The Congress, then led by PM Indira Gandhi, was trying to build up Bhindranwale as a counterweight to SAD, the regional party that had mounted one of the fiercest resistances to the Emergency with thousands of its activists sent to jail.

Soon Bhindranwale became a law unto himself, running a parallel administration from the Golden Temple complex after he shifted there with an armed band of followers in 1982. Finding themselves on a weak ground, fragmented Akali leaders allied with him to launch Dharma Yudh Morcha to demand greater autonomy for Punjab.

The botched up talk between the Centre and the Akalis proved to be the last straw. The subsequent fortification of the Golden Temple complex in 1983 (DIG A S Atwal was shot dead moments after stepping out of the complex), June 1984 Operation Blue Star, the assassination of Indira Gandhi in October 1984 and subsequent horrific anti-Sikh massacres, transformed a political crisis into a full-blown insurgency.



People attend Satluj screening in Amritsar on Sunday.

Militancy flare-up

Alongside political concerns were intensely personal grievances. Mai Gopal Shabbeg Singh, a hero of the 1971 war who helped Bhindranwale fortify the Golden Temple complex, was dismissed from the Army shortly before retirement on a note that was widely seen as trumped-up corruption charges. Gurbachan Singh Manochahal — who would later become one of Punjab's most dreaded terrorists after fleeing a militant outfit called BTFK — had been dismissed from the army after he broke the nose of an officer who had hurled an abuse at him for coming late from leave.

Once violence had taken root, arms, training and logistical support flowed freely from across the border. The late Kanwar Pal Singh Dhiani, president of Akal Federation, who crossed over to Pakistan after fleeing from the Golden Temple complex during Operation Blue Star, later recounted his shock when an ISI brigadier showed him a model of Golden Temple and its exact location inside it.

The years that followed plunged Punjab into an abyss of violence and fear. Militants unleashed waves of assassinations, bombings, massacres, and Taliban diktats on what to wear and how to celebrate, while the

state's counter-insurgency drew allegations of excesses. Many Hindu traders fled Punjab. Ordinary Punjabis bore the brunt of the conflict as ideologies such as the London-based Sohan Singh exploited the turmoil to advance the cause of Khalistan, aided by the Pakistani networks.

Khalra's arc

It could be argued that the Diljit Dosanjhi-starrer "Satluj", based on the life of human rights activist Jaswant Singh Khalra, does not tell the complete story of Punjab's militancy. It does not, because it never set out to do so. It tells the story of one man, Khalra, who challenged the excesses that marked the state's victory over militancy.

Khalra, a social activist and bank director in Amritsar, was drawn to his cause after he found the body of a colleague who had gone missing, cremated as an unclaimed body. The MLAs, however, chose to remain with DMK.

to look at this ugly reality. After his abduction and killing in 1995, the CBI confirmed 2,097 unlawful cremations at these three Amritsar sites as per its 1996 report, and the NHRC later acknowledged about 2,059 "illegal cremations".

Then Punjab DGP K P S Gill, dubbed "supercop" by the police personnel and his admirers for quashing militancy in the state, often argued that human rights campaigns "undermined" the hard-won peace. Many others believe Khalra reminded the country that the rule of law cannot become a casualty even in the fight against terror. Both perspectives continue to coexist in Punjab's public memory.

To suggest that a film could reignite militancy by opening old wounds is perverse logic. Punjab's tragedy was not born in a cinema hall. It grew from years of unresolved political tangles. The film, said in a statement, cannot be recreated by a film. But they can be forgotten. And to forget history, even a fairly recent one, is to repeat it. That is dangerous.

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The loopholes that led to Maharashtra TET leak

Mohamed Thaver, Manish Kumar Pathak & Pallavi Smart
Bhivandi, Mumbai, July 12

THE QUESTION papers were meant to be "highly secure". Over six lakh teachers were to appear for the Maharashtra Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) 2026 on June 28 at 1,028 centres. The papers had been printed at a press in Agra whose identity was kept confidential, in keeping with the long-standing practice of printing papers outside the state for security.

It all took to defeat this was a shoe.

Between June 15 and 17, an employee at the press slipped copies of question papers under the insole of his shoe and walked past security guards, former Army men who frisked his clothes but never checked his footwear.

The TET has two papers, Paper 1 and Paper 2, and two sets of each had been printed, so that one set could be picked at random and handed over on exam day. Over three days, all four sets were smuggled out, defeating that safeguard too. For this, the employee and two associates were paid Rs 8,000 and promised a plot of land.

"We were shocked to find out that the question papers which would impact six lakh teachers were handed over for as little as Rs 8,000," an offshoot of *The Indian Express*.

Unlike other paper leaks, where paper setters or senior management were found involved, this operation needed no one important. Its alleged mastermind, Bijendra Gupta, a former coaching class teacher, now absconding, had turned the exam system's own safety protocol on its head.

Question papers for Maharashtra's examinations have traditionally been printed outside the state. The logic was that employees at presses in other states would neither be interested nor able to read the contents, helping maintain secrecy. According to senior officials in the state's School Education Department, the press's identity is kept confidential, its name omitted from all official communication.

Gupta's model, as police describe it, made the secrecy irrelevant. Instead of targeting a particular exam, he identified presses across states known to get contracts for printing out-of-state question papers and cultivated contacts there. Whatever



The Agra press where the question papers for TET were printed

arrived for printing, he leaked. "We suspect he did not know which papers would come for printing there. However, when his men at these presses handed him a particular question paper, Gupta tapped into the coaching classes network of that state to get clients," a senior IPS officer from Thane police said.

The Agra press, Mahim Patran Pvt Ltd, has printed question papers for examinations conducted by the Maharashtra State Council of Examination (MSCE) for over two decades, according to education department officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The leak came to light two

days before the exam. Thane City DCP (Zone II) Pavan Bansod received a tip-off from a person in Bhivandi who claimed he had been approached by three people with a copy of the TET paper. A raid was carried out. "When we went dummy cops and conducted a raid a day before the exam, the education department confirmed that these were actual papers that were to be distributed during the exams," Bansod said.

The first three of 12 arrests followed. Rajiv Kumar and Ashish Kumar were arrested from Bihar, Dheeraj Singh from Haryana. Additional Commissioner Ashok Dudhe said a 20-

member SIT had been formed, the case gaining urgency as it came close on the heels of the NEET-UG paper leaks.

"At that point there was no clarity on the source of the paper link and we kept tracking backward linkages," Bansod said. Some accused fled after the initial arrests. Nearly a week later, the trail led police to Agra.

Three men connected to the press were arrested — staffers Naresh Kumar Mahore alias Nikki and Babulal Kushwahay and Sanjay Kumar Sharma, a former employee removed from service two years ago for frequent fights with colleagues.

Bansod said Gupta had reached the employees through a common contact, Sonukumar Kishanlal, an absconding accused, and was aware that the press published question papers of various states.

Police found the employees had been in touch with Gupta for a while, and he would fund their drinking sessions through UPI payments. When the Maharashtra TET paper arrived at the press, police suspect, they informed Gupta.

ACP (Bhivandi division) Vijay Marathe said, "Between June 15 and 17, when the papers

were printed for the June 28 exam, Kushwahay, who was responsible for packing the paper into bundles which would then be transported to Maharashtra in trucks, would hand over one copy to Mahore," he said.

"Mahore would remove the insole pad of his shoe where a folded copy of the paper would be placed. At the exit, there would be checks by former army guys who would frisk his clothes and later allow him to go. His shoes were not checked," the officers said. The papers went from Mahore to Sharma, and eventually to Gupta through the absconding Sonukumar.

There was one more hole in the press's defences. A senior Thane police officer said the CCTV at the press was not working, a lapse the police found shocking. "If the cameras were working, maybe Kushwahay or Mahore could have been captured hiding the papers in his shoes," the officer said.

Once the papers reached Gupta, the selling began. A former coaching class teacher from Bhopal, he tapped Maharashtra's coaching network for buyers.

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• BRIEFLY



Rescue workers at the landslide site in Kalladi on Sunday. ANI

KERALA

5 days after Wayanad landslide, body of construction manager recovered

ONE MORE body was recovered during a massive search operation on Sunday following the July 7 landslide at the tunnel project site in Wayanad, and was later confirmed to be that of the construction manager who had gone missing in the tragedy, officials said. The deceased Vikram Rana (58), a construction manager from Kanara district in Himachal Pradesh, was associated with the tunnel project. The body was found around 350 metres downstream from the Meenakshi bridge, where iron debris had accumulated following the landslide, officials said. With the recovery of the body, the death toll in the landslide has risen to eight. PTI

1-day mourning for former Qatari Emir in India

INDIA DECLARED a one-day national mourning on Monday as a mark of respect for former Emir of Qatar Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani with PM Narendra Modi describing him as a "visionary leader".

Sheikh Hamad, known as Father Emir of Qatar, passed away on Sunday at 74. He ruled Qatar from 1995 to 2013, and is credited with ushering in socio-economic development in the energy-rich Gulf nation. "We feel profound sadness at the death of the Father Emir of the State of Qatar Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani," PM Modi said in social media. PTI

All Crew Module tests completed for Gaganyaan

IN A significant step towards the final preparations for the Gaganyaan mission, ISRO on Sunday said that all major qualification tests for the Crew Module Service module, successfully accomplished. The ISRO is targeting the first Gaganyaan (uncrewed) mission sometime in 2026. On Sunday, ISRO said that Float inflation test for Crew Module Up-righting System, umbilical separation testing of Crew Module Service module Connect and Disconnect System, and Crew Module Structure qualification test for Apex Cover separation loads stand completed. ENS

Activist protesting Kaziranga luxury hotels project detained

Sukrita Baruah
Guwahati, July 12

ASSAM POLICE on Sunday detained activist Pranab Doley, who has been leading protests against proposed luxury hotels near Kaziranga National Park. Doley (42) was detained in Guwahati, where he was staying with a friend. A police officer from Golaghat district said the activist was detained in connection with a case there. The FIR was registered under BNS sec-

tions pertaining to criminal conspiracy, unlawful assembly, and rioting, among others. "The investigating officer is travelling to Guwahati, and he (Doley) will be handed over. It is in connection with some incidents from some time back," said a police officer. Sivasagar MLA and Rajior Dal leader accused the BJP government of "putting tribal people in jail for the sake of capitalists". Assam Congress president Gaurav Gogoi also slammed the detention.



A damaged road is seen near a landslide site following overnight rainfall, in Shilma on Sunday. PTI

HEAVY SHOWER ALERT FOR EAST, N-E

Week-long rain break in most parts of country

Anjali Marar
Bengaluru, July 12

WITH NATIONWIDE rain deficit down to 15% in July from 40% in June, the monsoon rainfall will take a week-long break from major parts of the country, including the south peninsula, northwest and central India regions, the IMD said on Sunday.

On the other hand, with fresh cyclonic circulation expected over the north Bay of Bengal region and adjoining Bangladesh around July 14, east

and northeast India brace for heightened rainfall the week ahead. "The impact of this system will remain limited to eastern and northeastern India regions," said Mrutyunjay Mohapatra, Director General, India Meteorological Department (IMD).

On Sunday, many areas in Meghalaya recorded extremely heavy rain. The Met department has forecast similar intense spells over Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram until Wednesday.

Daughter-in-law says Sena (UBT) leader used black magic on her; 'godman' held

Manish Kumar Pathak
Mumbai, July 12

THE TRIALS of Shiv Sena (UBT) seem to have advanced from the political to the supernatural. Senior party leader and former two-term Lok Sabha MP from the Ratnagiri constituency Vinayak Raut, his wife Shamal, son Gitesh Raut and four others have been booked by the Kapurbawdi police in Thane after his daughter-in-law Gijrija Raut alleged that she was deceived into marriage and forced to undergo "black magic" rituals for over four years.

On Saturday, Piroz Shaikh, a self-styled godman from Sindhudurg and one of the accused, was arrested and remanded in police custody till July 14. Police said Vinayak Raut and other members of his family have moved the sessions court in Thane seeking anticipatory bail. Their plea is scheduled to be heard on July 23.

"We have arrested one accused and are verifying the facts. The process of taking legal action against the remaining ac-



Rejecting the allegations, Vinayak Raut said the complaint was the result of an ongoing matrimonial dispute

cused is underway," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Thane) Prashant Kadam said. The FIR was registered on June 10 on the complaint of Gijrija Raut, 38, at the Kapurbawdi police station, under the Maharashtra Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifice and Other Inhuman, Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Act, 2013, along with sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita relating to cruelty, cheating, causing hurt and criminal intimidation.

According to the complaint,

Gijrija Raut, formerly Nikita Vijay Pawar, met Gitesh Raut through a matrimonial service in 2016 and married him on December 3, 2017. She alleged that between September 2018 and August 2022, she was frequently taken to self-styled godmen in Mumbai, Sindhudurg and Ratnagiri after her in-laws claimed she was under the influence of "evil forces". According to the FIR, in September 2018, her in-laws summoned a self-styled godman from Kuria. The godman chanted mantras and declared that the family's debt had been "bound" — thereby bringing bad luck on the family. The FIR alleges that one of Gitesh Raut's relatives declared that the couple should abstain from physical relations until Gijrija was completely "cured".

Once, as per the FIR, she was later taken to Kolgaon in Sindhudurg where a godman called "Firoz Baba" allegedly poured water over her head, blindfolded her and cut a lemon just above her head while chanting mantras.

In another alleged ritual in

Rajapur taluka of Ratnagiri district, another godman allegedly made cuts on her body with scissors, plucked strands of her hair and forced her to drink a concoction mixed with ashes. Gijrija alleged that she was forced to undergo such rituals for over four years, often with her parents as witnesses — who were told that such ceremonies were needed to rid her of supernatural forces and enable her to conceive.

Rejecting the allegations, Vinayak Raut said the complaint was the result of an ongoing matrimonial dispute. He claimed Gijrija Raut had sought Rs 5 crore, a three BHK flat, an automatic car and Rs 2 lakh a month as maintenance during mediation talks — demands that the Raut family refused. "The allegations are completely false. We will respond in court," Raut said.

Rejecting this, Gijrija said, "My only expectation was to have a happy married life. Instead, I was subjected to harassment and humiliation." She claimed she was forced to quit her job.

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Linen stolen from AC coaches in Indian Railways: In four years, 1.27 crore bedsheets, towels, blankets and pillows

Mumbai; Ahmedabad; Sonpur and Danapur (covering Bihar); and Bilaspur.

The numbers point to telling trends:

- Towels top in stolen items. The face towel, which is the easiest to carry, tops the list of most items stolen overall: 46.54 lakh in four years, followed by bedsheets (41.13 lakh), pillow covers (23.59 lakh), blankets (12.95 lakh) and pillows (2.76 lakh).

- Bikaner, Ranchi are the worst-hit. According to the RTI replies, by sheer volume of total linen theft, the worst-hit divisions are Bikaner with 25.76 lakh items, Ranchi with 9.31 lakh, and Delhi with 8.21 lakh. Next in line: Mumbai with 8.17 lakh, bedroli items, Jodhpur with 8.09 lakh, Ahmedabad with 6.94 lakh and Danapur with 5.72 lakh.

- Scratch the surface further and it gets more interesting. The available breakdown of items stolen from the 10 divisions across seven zones that are worst-hit shows that bedsheets (12.42 lakh) top the list in Bikaner, accounting for nearly half of the division's total theft of items during this period. There's more:

- Towels dominate the theft divisions in a majority of the 10 divisions, including Delhi

(4.78 lakh, 58% of total theft in the division), Ranchi (3.88 lakh, 42%), Mumbai (3.57 lakh, 44%), Danapur (3.37 lakh, 59%), Ahmedabad (3.22 lakh, 46%) and Jaipur (2.52 lakh, 56%).

- Pillow covers top the list in Sonpur (1.58 lakh, 39% of total theft in the division) and Bilaspur (1.55 lakh, 34%).
- Blankets are the primary target in Jodhpur, with over 3.4 lakh pieces taken, or 42% of the total items stolen by passengers in the division.

Now the big picture:

- The Bikaner division leads when it comes to a spike in such thefts since 2022, from 2.99 lakh to 12.34 lakh items, followed by Sonpur, from 36.44 to 30.1 lakh.

- Over divisions with a notable increase: Danapur, up 78,095 items, marking a 91% rise since 2022; Dhanbad, up 55,906 items (91%); Ranchi, up 77,332 items (45%); and Jodhpur, up 94,679 items (46%).

- Delhi leads in theft dip. The capital cut theft by 79% (3.27 lakh to 68,013 items), followed by Ahmedabad, down 83%, and Samastipur, down 86%.

- No theft has been reported from two southern divisions — Tiruchirappalli and Palakkad. The Andhra division of

South Eastern Railway also reported no theft but it's a freight-only division with no AC passenger coaches to lose linen from.

The challenge: 'Additional steps required'

The *Indian Express* reached out to the Railways with an emailed questionnaire identifying key trends from the RTI data, and asking about preventive measures and the challenges such thefts pose.

"Generally linen (items) are collected by linen attendants after de-barring of passengers from trains. The responsibility of account of linens in Railway coaches is of the agency who has been deployed for linen distribution. For any shortage, cost recovery is done from the bills of the agency," the Railways spokesperson said.

The challenge, the spokesperson said, was that "due to theft of linen, additional linen sets are required to meet the shortfall".

Then again, behind these numbers is also a story that isn't quite as interesting for the people who actually pay the price for the theft. While the linen items are the property of the Railways, its divisions en-

gage contractors to manage and supply them in trains.

The *Indian Express* spoke to several contractors who acknowledged the problem, with one saying it had forced them to scrap their contract with the Railways altogether. Attendees said they bore the brunt of the menace since, in most cases, it was their salary the contractors cut to cover the cost of the stolen linen.

"The theft of linen is a real problem for us," said a supervisor of a bedroll distribution firm in the Solapur division of Central Railway.

"A significant portion of the earnings is deducted from the bill for these cases. We had a three-year contract with the Railways, but we had to end it in 14 months due to delay in payment. We had deployed around 60 staff in coaches for the distribution in 5 trains. For every stolen item, they recover Rs 115 for pillow, Rs 198 for bedsheet, Rs 55 for pillow cover, Rs 48 for face towel and Rs 343 for blanket," the supervisor said.

According to a 2015 Rail Board circular, the cost of a "missing" linen item is recovered at 100% of purchase price if it's less than half — the codal life, for instance, of a blanket is two years — 50% if

past that mark, or a flat 75% if the service life can't be determined.

A linen attendant, working on a superfast train in East Central Railway, said that they now provide towels only when a passenger demands it.

"There are seven attendants in this train, with each managing an AC coach. We are paid on a daily basis, and I get Rs 700 for a day's work. So if I work for 30 days without a break, I am entitled to about Rs 21,000 in a month. But that doesn't happen because every month around 2,000-3,000 is deducted for linen theft. During March and April, 17 bedsheets, three blankets, and nine pillows were lost on my watch," the attendant said.

The RTI requests by this newspaper did not cover two of the 18 Railway zones: South Coast Railway (SCoR), a newly constituted zone, and Kolkata Metro, which doesn't run conventional AC trains.

Even among the 54 divisions that did respond, the picture is incomplete: 14 divisions did not provide theft figures for all linen categories, and nine divisions did not provide the cost of the items lost. In other words, the true financial toll is almost certainly higher than the estimated Rs 104.51 crore.

Rly roadmap: counselling to CCTV

30 minutes before deboarding. It also directed that a watch be kept on regular defaulters causing loss of linen, with suitable counselling, training and penalties where required.

RTI replies received by this newspaper show that a total of 1.27 crore linen items — blankets, pillows, pillow covers, bedsheets and towels — were stolen from trains between 2022 and May 2026, across 54 divisions of 16 zones.

The cost of lost items is recovered from the contractor's bill, and the contractor, in turn, recovers the amount from the bedroll attendants deployed in the coaches.

The Ambala division of Northern Railway said, "The material is kept at the safe allocated place to avoid/minimise the theft case. Also CCTVs are being installed in coaches to avoid theft cases." Similarly, South Western Railway (SWR) said one staff member per coach is deployed for linen distribution to ensure proper monitoring.

"Strengthening monitoring and supervision during loading and unloading of linen. Conducting periodic checks and inspections at stations and depots. Initiating disciplinary action against persons found responsible for loss/theft. Periodic review of linen handling procedures to prevent recurrence of such incidents," said the Salem division of Southern Railway.

The Kota division of West Central Railway said it conducts police verification of contractors' employees to curb theft.

towels, bedsheets or blankets is a non-bailable offence. "RPF has been directed to conduct a lawful search of suspicious passenger's luggage within the coach if the linen is not returned. Patrolling on night trains and surprise inspection are other measures," said the division.

The Jodhpur division of NWK said that proper accounting and verification of linens are carried out before the departure or termination of trains. "In addition, all linen attendants are being regularly counselled and sensitized regarding the safe handling and accountability of linen items to prevent theft and pilferage," said the division.

The Bhopal division of Central Railway said coach attendants are counselled for prompt collection of used linen from passengers well before the train's arrival at the destination station. The Sonpur division of East Central Railway said staff are counselled to be vigilant and careful to ensure the security of linen items during the journey.

"We have printed instructions on linen packets for returning used linen 30 minutes before completion of journey by passengers so that the same can be collected and stacked properly before the train reaches destination," said the Ranchi division of South Eastern Railway.

The Mumbai division said instructions have been issued to ticket-checking staff to provide details on the boarding and de-barring of passengers, and attendants have been instructed to remain vigilant.

Iltija Mufti says she and her mother Mehbooba under house detention

Bashaar Masood
Srinagar, July 12

PDPEADER Iltija Mufti Sunday said she and her mother, former CM Mehbooba Mufti, have been put under house detention ahead of July 13, observed in Kashmir as Martyrs' Day.

"As you see, we have been put under house arrest," she claimed in a video message. "A Sub-Inspector Mohammad Rafi is here. We are requesting him to come inside to tell us why we have been put under house arrest, but he is not coming."

"The government makes claims of normalcy. This is the normalcy here; you can count the number of locks on our gates," she said.

Three publishers arrested in J&K for books that 'glorified separatists and militants'

The books were taken off shelves of J&K school libraries earlier this month

Arun Sharma
Jammu, July 12

THE COUNTER-INTELLIGENCE unit of the Jammu and Kashmir Police on Sunday arrested three persons connected to publishing companies over publication and circulation of two books that allegedly glorified separatists and militant leaders.

Earlier this month, the books, 'Personalities and Legends of J&K' and 'Great Personalities of Jammu and Kashmir' were withdrawn from school libraries, and ac-

content" found in the books was under scrutiny.

After the withdrawing of books, the J&K Police had registered a case under BNS sections 49 (abetment of an offence), 61(2) (criminal conspiracy), 152 (endangering the sovereignty, unity, and integrity of India), 196 (promoting enmity, disharmony, or reports), besides section 13 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

Pointing out that counter-intelligence personnel of the J&K Police had conducted searches on premises of both the publication houses on July 6, officials said investigations are in progress. As many as 251 copies of

The action followed objections raised by the B.J.P. Congress, and other political groups, who claimed the books glorified separatism

the books had been distributed in Jammu, Ramban, Udhampur and Baramulla districts of J&K, and all the copies have been "with-drawn".

The government ordered a high-level inquiry into the matter. The action followed objections raised by the B.J.P.

Congress, and other political groups, who claimed the books glorified separatism. One of the books purportedly calls Maqbool Bhat, co-founder of the separatist Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front, who was hanged in Tihar Jail on two murder charges, a martyr.

It also purportedly describes separatist political leader and Jammu and Kashmir Democratic Freedom Party founder-president Shabir Shah as "one of the highest profile campaigners for Kashmiri independence, who campaigned for self-determination in Kashmir since the late 1960s and had spent much of his life in Indian jails".

Army man on leave, father shot dead in Bihar over land row

Himanshu Harsh
Patna, July 12

AN INDIAN Army soldier and his father were shot dead in Bihar's Vaishali district on Sunday following a long-running land dispute that allegedly flared up over the weekend, police said.

Police said, Itendra Kumar, 32, was a jawan in the army and had come home following the death of a relative. His father, Munar Rai, 52, died on spot after being shot at. Kumar succumbed to his injuries at the hospital.

Vaishali Superintendent of Police (SP) Shubhank Mishra said the incident took place in Rajaso village under the Bidupur police station. Investigation is underway and raids are being carried out to arrest the accused. "The killings... are related to the victims and the accused occurred during a dispute over the cutting of bananas on a disputed patch of land," Mishra said.

The local residents said during Kumar's stay an old dispute over land and a village pathway resurfaced. They said, Kumar had an argument with one Jagdish Rai on Saturday. However, to police managed to persuade them to disperse. They said, on Sunday morning, Jagdish returned and opened fire at Munar Rai and Kumar which led to their deaths.

ANDHRA PRADESH CAPITAL REGION DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
Rayapudi, Amaravati (A.P.)

E-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE
NOTICE INVITING TENDERS (NIT FOR HOTELS)

S.No.	NIT No.	Name of the Work
1	NIT No. 16/MAU61-EEED(OTH)/32/2026-ED-01 Dt. 13.07.2026	"Allotment of Plot on Conditional Freehold Basis for Development of a 3-Star Hotel at Amaravati, Andhra Pradesh (Hotel Plot-1)."
2	NIT No. 17/MAU61-EEED(OTH)/32/2026-ED-02 Dt. 13.07.2026	"Allotment of Plot on Conditional Freehold Basis for Development of a 3-Star Hotel at Amaravati, Andhra Pradesh (Hotel Plot-2)."
3	NIT No. 18/MAU61-EEED(OTH)/32/2026-ED-03 Dt. 13.07.2026	"Allotment of Plot on Conditional Freehold Basis for Development of a 3-Star Hotel at Amaravati, Andhra Pradesh (Hotel Plot-3)."
4	NIT No. 19/MAU61-EEED(OTH)/32/2026-ED-04 Dt. 13.07.2026	"Allotment of Plot on Conditional Freehold Basis for Development of a 3-Star Hotel at Amaravati, Andhra Pradesh (Hotel Plot-4)."
5	NIT No. 20/MAU61-EEED(OTH)/32/2026-ED-05 Dt. 13.07.2026	"Allotment of Plot on Conditional Freehold Basis for Development of a 4-Star Hotel at Amaravati, Andhra Pradesh (Hotel Plot-5)."

NOTICE INVITING TENDERS (NIT FOR SCHOOLS)

S.No.	NIT No.	Name of the Work
6	NIT No. 11/MAU61-EEED(OTH)/46/2026-CCDR. Dated: 13.07.2026	RFP for Selection of institution for setting up of day school at Amaravati, Andhra Pradesh (School Plot-1).
7	NIT No. 12/MAU61-EEED(OTH)/46/2026-CCDR. Dated: 13.07.2026	RFP for Selection of institution for setting up of day school at Amaravati, Andhra Pradesh (School Plot-2).
8	NIT No. 13/MAU61-EEED(OTH)/46/2026-CCDR. Dated: 13.07.2026	RFP for Selection of institution for setting up of day school at Amaravati, Andhra Pradesh (School Plot-3).
9	NIT No. 14/MAU61-EEED(OTH)/46/2026-CCDR. Dated: 13.07.2026	RFP for Selection of institution for setting up of Residential school at Amaravati, Andhra Pradesh (School Plot-4).
10	NIT No. 15/MAU61-EEED(OTH)/46/2026-CCDR. Dated: 13.07.2026	RFP for Selection of institution for setting up of Residential school at Amaravati, Andhra Pradesh (School Plot-5).

The Request for Proposal (RFP) document can be downloaded from the Andhra Pradesh e-Procurement Portal from 14.07.2026 onwards.

The bid shall remain open for 14 (Fourteen) days from the date of publication. The last date for submission of bids shall be as specified in the Andhra Pradesh e-Procurement Portal.

For further details, please visit the Andhra Pradesh e-Procurement Portal and the APCRD website.

Sd/- Commissioner, APCRD, Amaravati

BRIC-National Institute of Animal Biotechnology
An Autonomous Institute under the Ministry of Science & Technology, Government of India

Near Gowildoddi, Gachibowli, Hyderabad, Telangana India - 500 032.
Tel: +91 40 2312 0103/115. Email: admin@niab.res.in; Web: www.niab.res.in

Advt. No. 16/2026

BRIC-NIAB, an autonomous institute under the aegis of the Department of Biotechnology, Ministry of Science & Technology, Government of India, is aimed to harness novel and emerging biotechnologies and create knowledge in the cutting edge areas for improving animal health and productivity.

The Institute invites applications from Indian citizens for the following positions:

Position	Technical Officer	Pay Level	No of Post
1	Technical Officer	66	1

For more details, please visit NIAB website www.niab.res.in

Date of commencement of online applications: 13th July 2026
Last date for submitting online applications: 14th August 2026 by 5 PM

Sd/- DIRECTOR, NIAB

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER,
CENTRAL RURAL WORKS CIRCLE, BHUBANESWAR

No. 3985
25061/25062

"e-Procurement Notice for Road Works"
Date: 04.07.2026

Sl. No.	Name of the Work	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost
1	Name of the Work	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost
2	Total No. of works	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost
3	Estimated cost of the work	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost
4	Class of Contractor	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost
5	Period of completion	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost
6	Offered rates by bidder	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost
7	Other details	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost

Further details can be seen from the web site www.odisha.nic.in

Sd/-
Chief Construction Engineer
Central Rural Works Circle, Bhubaneswar

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES,
OFFICE OF THE ADDITIONAL CHIEF ENGINEER
BALANGIR MINOR IRRIGATION CIRCLE, BALANGIR
e-Procurement Notice

Bid Identification No.- BMIC-BI.RG.02/2026-27

The Chief Engineer, Balangir M.I. Circle, Balangir on behalf of Hon'ble Government of Odisha invites percentage rate bids in Double cover only through ONLINE mode for the Construction of works detailed in the table from "B" & "A" Class Contractors registered with the State Government and contractors of equivalent Grade/Class registered with Central Government (M.E.S./Railways) for execution of civil works on production of definite proof from the appropriate authority. The bidders may submit bids in any or all of the following works:

S. No.	Name of the work	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost
1	Name of the work	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost
2	Total No. of works	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost
3	Estimated cost of the work	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost
4	Class of Contractor	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost
5	Period of completion	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost
6	Date and time of Availability of Bid	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost
7	Offered rates by bidder	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost
8	Other details	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost	Estimate of cost

Further details can be seen from the "e-Procurement Portal" tenders.odisha.gov.in

Sd/-
Chief Engineer,
Balangir M.I. Circle, Balangir

NAVI MUMBAI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT
NOTICE INVITING EXPRESSION OF INTEREST
FOR INTEGRATION OF HANGAR NO.1 & 2 AT
NAVI MUMBAI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT OF
NAVI MUMBAI, MAHARASHTRA

Navi Mumbai International Airport Private Limited ("NMIAL") has been granted the right to develop, operate and maintain the Navi Mumbai International Airport ("NMIA") on DBFO basis. NMIAL proposes to undertake the construction of the proposed general aviation (GA) Hangars.

The scope of works includes, but not limited to, the engineering, supply, fabrication, erection & installation, integration, interfacing, testing, commissioning, obtaining all requisite statutory approvals / licenses, warranty support, rectification of defects, obligations during Warranty Period / defect rectification period, of the proposed GA Hangar's at NMIA.

NMIAL invites responses to the Expression of Interest ("EOI") from qualified, experienced and reputed contractors for above mentioned Works for NMIA.

Interested applicants may download and submit their response to the EOI by registering on the NMIAL e-portal: <https://nmiaairport.apbcorpce.com>

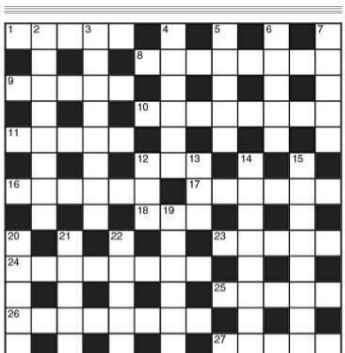
For further details and instructions, please visit the E-tenders section: www.nmiaairport.co.in

The deadline for submission of the response to EOI is 20th July 2026, 17:00 hrs IST.

Note: NMIAL reserves the right to reject any response to EOI or change / cancel the tender process at any time without prior notice or without assigning any reason whatsoever.

NAVI MUMBAI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT PVT. LTD.
Email: nmia.tenders@adani.com
Website: www.nmiaairport.co.in

CROSSWORD



ACROSS
1 Handle without charge (5)
8 Try as he may he just can't settle (8)
9 Where Westphalians may go to eat in Germany (5)
10 Condition written in merely to elucidate things (8)
11 Decree cited wrongly (5)
12 In the main it won't be laughing (3)
16 Projection time for movie equipment (6)
17 The diverts with morning exercises (6)
18 Highwayman on foot (3)
23 Way in which the sentry loses his head (5)
24 Stamps to commemorate a recent birth? (3,5)
25 Bohemian girl goes round a Florida resort (8)
26 Dance around on broken toe? Makes good spinner (5)
27 Girl cotton spinner (5)

DOWN
2 Used rail transport and left (8)
3 They represent people a long time since perhaps (8)
4 Girl in a Polish film (6)
5 Makes out some steps (5)
6 Measure a young animal with it (5)
7 Check part of the rigging (5)
12 Singapore space centre (3)
13 The German comes up depressed (3)
14 Route financed by employers (8)
15 Bank go-between? (8)
19 Mature people possibly saluted out East (6)
20 What we hear to work as a baker (5)
21 May have the lot or about three quarters (5)
22 A team set apart (5)

SOLUTIONS CROSSWORD 6038 ACROSS: 1 Permissive, 6 Arid, 10 Ached, 11 Be careful, 12 Moralist, 13 Steps, 15 Avarice, 17 Shampoo, 19 Spender, 21 Thrills, 22 Atlas, 24 Consorts, 27 Thrashing, 28 Lasso, 29 Rock, 30 Centipedes
DOWN: 1 Play, 2 Rationale, 3 India, 4 Sublime, 5 Vacates, 7 Rifle, 8 Doll's house, 9 Fresh air, 14 Cause a stir, 16 In disuse, 18 Practised, 20 Receive, 21 Tonight, 23 Lyric, 25 Orlop, 26 Boss

JUMBLED WORDS

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective circles below. Select the letters in the shaded circles and jumble them to get the answer for the given quip.

Everyone thinks of ___ the world, but no one thinks of ___ himself. - Leo Tolstoy (8,...8)

INAPT
ANUSCH
ANNUM
LAGGER
LITOLSOY

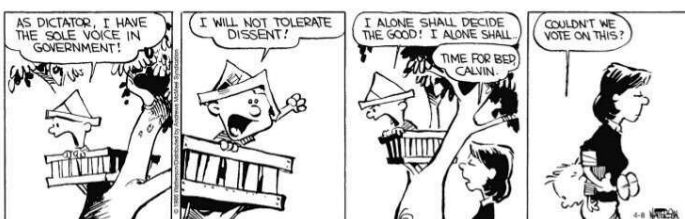
SOLUTIONS: Paint, Unravel, Niche, Cargile

6039

OVER THE HEDGE



CALVIN & HOBBS



MARVIN

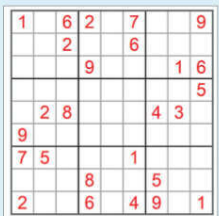


DIFFICULTY LEVEL 2a INSTRUCTIONS

To solve a Sudoku puzzle, every digit from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.

DIFFICULTY LEVEL 1a

1a = Very easy; 2a = Easy; 3a = Medium; 4a = Hard; 5a = Very Hard; 6a = Genius



SOLUTION SUDOKU 6377



BY MICHAEL FRY & T. LEWIS



BY BILL WATTERSON



BY TOM ARMSTRONG



ROYAL STARS

BY GEORGIA NICOLS

ARIES (MAR 21 - APR 20): This might be a challenging day dealing with issues related to home and family, including partners. Mixed-up conversations or incorrect assumptions might get in the way of things. Fortunately, a work-related surprise might please you. Tonight: Relax at home.

TAURUS (APR 21 - MAY 21): Things look worse than they are today. Many will fall prey to negative thinking or believing something that isn't true. Unexpected social plans might delight you. Tonight: Seek out conversations.

GEMINI (MAY 22 - JUNE 21): Be careful about financial transactions today (including shopping). Stock the fridge because surprise company might drop by. Tonight: Take care of your possessions.

CANCER (JUNE 22 - JULY 23): Today the Moon is in your sign, challenged by other planets, which might make you feel gloomy, or cut off from others. This is temporary. Stay light on your feet because something unexpected will occur. (Could be pleasing.) Tonight: You're strong.

LEO (JULY 24 - AUG 23): Some days the glass is half-full, and other days the glass is half-empty. This is a half-empty day. Ignore the paralysis of the negative. A pleasant surprise related to money, wealth, possessions or your salary might catch you off guard. Tonight: Enjoy privacy.

VIRGO (AUG 24 - SEP 23): Today is a mixed bag. A friend or a member of a group might disappoint you. However, Venus is in your sign getting a jolt from unpredictable Uranus, which could be a stimulation of some romance or an argument. Tonight: Be friendly.

LIBRA (SEP 24 - OCT 23): This is a poor day to ask authority figures for permission or approval. However, something unexpected might please you—a little surprise that is private. Tonight: You're noticed.

SCORPIO (OCT 24 - NOV 23): A friend or a member of a group might do something unexpected that pleases you today. Hopefully this is true, because meanwhile, news in the media plus issues related to travel, medicine or the law might get you down. Tonight: Explore and learn.

SAGITTARIUS (NOV 24 - DEC 23): Although you might have disputes with someone about shared property, taxes, or debt that are disappointing, something pleasant will give you a boost today. Tonight: Check your finances.

CAPRICORN (DEC 23 - JAN 20): Don't push your luck talking to partners, spouses and close friends, because issues are tricky and disappointing. However, surprise opportunities to travel might occur. Tonight: Cooperate.

AQUARIUS (JAN 21 - FEB 19): Work might be tedious, boring, disappointing or mildly scary today. However, an unexpected bonus might come your way. It could be a favour, money, gift or boon on behalf of your partner or someone else. Tonight: Get organised.

PISCES (FEB 20 - MAR 20): A pleasant exchange with a partner, spouse or close friend might give a lift to your day. However, social outings, sports events and the arts could disappoint. You might ask yourself if your expectations were realistic. Tonight: Socialize.



The Indian EXPRESS

— FOUNDED BY —

RAMNATH GOENKA

IN 1932

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

On Indo-Pacific, Delhi

must match words, actions

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi's six-day tour of Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand came amid uncertainty over US President Donald Trump's commitment to a balanced Asian order, his talk of a possible US-China "0-2", and the Pentagon's decision to drop the Indo-Pacific label. It underlines Delhi's intent to strengthen its independent role in Asia and its Indo-Pacific waters. It also marks a new phase in India's post-Cold War engagement with the East. The celebrated "Look East" and "Act East" policies broadened India's ties with Southeast and East Asia over the last three decades. Yet India has fallen well short of realising the full potential of these relationships. Consider ASEAN. India's trade with the grouping rose from about \$7 billion in 2000 to around \$25 billion in 2025. During the same period, China's trade with ASEAN expanded from roughly \$40 billion to nearly \$1 trillion. The gap is equally visible in connectivity, technology partnerships and defence cooperation.

The three-nation tour was an effort to narrow that gap by combining economic, strategic and security cooperation. In Indonesia, the decision to accelerate development of Sabang port could strengthen logistics, maritime domain awareness and naval cooperation. Expanded defence cooperation, including the sale of BrahMos missiles, highlights India's growing potential as a defence exporter in Southeast Asia. In Australia, the decision to begin talks on a comprehensive FTA builds on recent trade liberalisation, while the completion of administrative arrangements for Australian uranium exports supports India's ambitious plans for expanding nuclear power generation. Beyond uranium, Australia's vast reserves of critical minerals and energy resources can become an important foundation for India's long-term industrial growth. Enhanced maritime cooperation in the eastern Indian Ocean is an equally important strategic gain. Modi's visit to New Zealand ends a prolonged period of diplomatic neglect. The recently concluded FTA and expanded maritime cooperation provide a platform for greater engagement with the South Pacific, where China's growing strategic presence is attracting attention.

Taken together, the three visits point to a broader Indo-Pacific strategy that links maritime security, defence production, trade, technology and resilient supply chains. Yet, India's principal constraint has not been the lack of diplomatic initiatives. It lies in the failure to implement them. The discussions on Sabang port and Australian uranium began nearly a decade ago. There is too much celebration of the PM's foreign tours and too little attention to what happens afterwards. The significance of this Pacific tour will depend less on the intent behind the agreements than on the actions on the domestic front that facilitate their implementation.

GCC is office success story.

Now, focus on factory

FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT (FDI) in China has gone mainly into manufacturing — initially labour-intensive and then hi-tech. Not for nothing it has earned the moniker of "the world's factory". FDI in India has come, and continues to do so, largely in services, making it "the world's office" for global corporations. According to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, India now hosts 2,100-plus global capability centres (GCC) of over 500 of the Forbes top-2,000 companies. These GCCs together employ some 23 lakh professionals and generate nearly \$100 billion in annual revenue. Moreover, they seem to have evolved beyond being cost-saving "back offices" handling basic IT, finance and customer services for multinational firms. Some of the GCCs have become strategic hubs for MNCs to build technology and enterprise platforms, undertake core engineering research and development, and work on clinical research and accelerated drug discovery using artificial intelligence.

The GCC success story — India is home to half of such centres worldwide and adding one every day — is also reflected in the country's external balance of payments profile. In 2025-26, its exports of services, at \$421.3 billion, was close to the export of goods worth \$446.1 billion. On the other hand, imports of goods (\$783.4 billion) were way above the imports of services (\$204.7 billion). Thus, while India recorded a merchandise trade deficit of \$337.3 billion, it had a surplus of \$216.6 billion on the services account. That's a clear demonstration of where the country's comparative advantages lie — not in factories, but in offices. The GCCs and the traditional Indian IT services companies are in the driver's seat.

There's a flipside to this. The GCCs and Indian IT outposts are concentrated in Bengaluru, Delhi-NCR, Hyderabad, Chennai, Mumbai and Pune. Sitharaman wants them to come up more in Varanasi, Visakhapatnam, Mysuru, Tiruchirappalli and other tier-2 and tier-3 cities. That's not easy. Like all industries, GCCs/IT firms tend to cluster around major metro areas that offer both robust infrastructure (international airports, dedicated office parks, reliable transport, power and utilities) and talent density (skilled engineers, developers and managers). Replicating this ecosystem in smaller centres may not be as feasible, unlike manufacturing clusters that can thrive in semi-urban and rural areas having lower land and labour costs. The constraint there is only physical infrastructure. India cannot afford to give up on manufacturing — whether textiles, leather, agro-processing, gems and jewellery — that alone can absorb the mass of its less-skilled workforce. India needs both factories and offices.

FREEZE FRAME

BY EP UNNY



Population spectres do harm. Managing demographic change is the challenge

VISIONS OF population explosion or implosion seem to provoke strong passions. Three centuries ago, Malthus argued that population growth would, by the end of the 21st century, returning to the present level of about 1.4 billion. However, projections from the Seattle-based Institute for Health Metrics (IHME) suggest it will dip below 1 billion. Unfortunately, IHME projections assume that future college graduates will follow the same path to low fertility as current graduates and that increasing education will further reduce fertility. But between 2015-16 and 2019-21, the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) for women with 12 more years of education held steady at 1.7, while that for women with lower levels of education dropped. A narrowing gap between educated and less-educated women has been observed in many countries, undermining confidence in the IHME methodology.

Second, with an ageing population, will India face a worker shortage? Projections from the Population Foundation of India indicate that the share of the population aged 60 and older will rise from 11 per cent to 28 per cent between 2021 and 2051. However, this will be offset by a decline in the child population, and the working-age population will decline only slightly from 66 per cent to 64 per cent. With an AI-led increase in productivity and the potential to recruit women workers

who are largely outside the formal labour force, even this slight decline should pose no problem. Third, is the population in north India growing faster than that in south India, and if so, will it diminish the power of southern states in the Indian Union? South India experienced a fertility decline earlier than the north. For example, in 1971, Tamil Nadu accounted for 75 per cent of India's population; by 2011, it had dropped to 6 per cent, and it is likely to have declined further by 2026. Consequently, if electoral seat allocation is based on population size in 2026 rather than 1971, the southern states will lose. But it is also important to remember that higher economic growth, driven by low population growth and increased investment in children, has increased productivity in states like Tamil Nadu. Sanjeev Sanyal estimates that Tamil Nadu's share of GDP grew from 71 per cent in the 1990s to 8.9 per cent in 2023-24. Balancing economic and demographic power and ensuring adequate representation of geographic minorities is a challenge that will need to be addressed in the coming years.



SONALDE DESAI

Discussions of population devolve into debates about childbearing and ultimately centre on women's bodies. Modern global discourse emphasises a return to traditional ways of life

Fourth, is the Muslim population in India likely to overtake the Hindu population? Muslim fertility is slightly higher than Hindu fertility, but across the three waves of the National Family Health Survey between 2005 and 2021, both communities have seen a similar decline in TFR of about 0.7, leaving the Hindu-Muslim

lim fertility gap unchanged. Rudimentary calculations suggest that even after 50 years, this fertility differential, if unchanged, would result in a small increase in the share of the Muslim population in India from about 15 per cent to 19 per cent. It seems more likely that Muslim fertility will follow a path similar to that of Hindus, and the increase will be smaller.

The above discussion suggests the need for a cautious, balanced approach to adapting to population change and for avoiding aggressive rhetoric that does more harm than good. Consider the discourse on declining fertility, which has led to political calls for a return to traditional values and for deporting contraception and child bonuses.

India stands in stark contrast to countries like Japan. Faced with an inflexible gender culture and work-family constraints, nearly 30 per cent of Japanese women remain unmarried into their 30s. In contrast, marriage and family remain the linchpin of Indian family life. The NFHS shows that 97 per cent of women are married by age 30. Yet the very importance of family also leads to smaller families. My research with Alaka Basu shows that parents often choose to have a single child so they can invest more in that child's education. Reducing educational costs, improving the quality of education, and easing the burden on parents to supervise homework may do more to increase fertility than a call for higher fertility.

The writer is professor, University of Maryland, and NCAER. Views are personal

Price of water is not about economics, but justice



GURUDAS NULKAR

THE MOODY's water management ratings, published in June, place India in the highest water-risk category. With 18 per cent of the world population, India has access to only about 4 per cent of global freshwater resources. In 2024, the Ministry of Jal Shakti announced that India's per capita freshwater availability is shrinking over the decades. Urban demand, driven by population growth, commercial expansion, and changing lifestyles, continues to outpace supply. Yet one of the most powerful levers for influencing water reuse sits neglected: The water tariff. The low price of water in Indian cities is disconnected from the true cost of supply. At the Centre for Sustainable Development, with the Pune International Centre and Pune Knowledge Cluster, we studied the economics of urban water. The Jal Mulya project delved into the costs and prices of urban water supply and examined consumers' willingness to pay for assured quality of drinking water. The results emphasise the role of tariffs in regulating water use.

Consider this paradox: Grey water, or domestic wastewater from washing, bathing, and kitchen use, can be treated and reused for toilet flushing, construction, gardening and other non-potable applications. However, freshwater is priced much less when compared to the cost of treating grey water. Why would someone invest in grey-water plumbing and recycling when fresh water is cheap?

Freshwater is priced much less when compared to the cost of treating grey water. Why would someone invest in grey-water plumbing and recycling when fresh water is cheap?

Our research corroborates what is already known — water tariffs in cities are set, not on the basis of actual costs of abstraction, treatment, storage and distribution of good-quality water, but on the basis of what is politically tolerable. Part of the problem is ignorance, both among the public and the urban local bodies (ULBs). Few, if any, ULBs undertake a full-cost accounting of their water operations. Non-revenue water (NRW), that is treated and supplied but lost to leakage or theft, routinely exceeds 30 per cent of total supply in many cities. This is water that has been paid for in terms of energy, chemicals, and infrastructure, but generates no revenue. When NRW remains invisible in accounts, there is no incentive to address it. A conversation about rational water pricing is nearly impossible because of the lack of

credible data.

Our study refuted a recurring argument: Raising water tariffs will face consumer resistance. Consumers are willing to pay more for water, provided they are assured of its quality. This is not surprising. Those who buy bottled water for their homes and restaurants already show a willingness to pay more for assured quality. But in many cities, urban water utilities have forfeited the trust of their consumers by failing to deliver potable water on tap. The low tariff and the poor quality are mutually reinforcing: ULBs cannot raise the tariff without improving the service, and vice versa. As a result, households and offices resort to domestic water purifiers. Citizens end up paying twice through water tariffs and in the purchase and maintenance of equipment.

But this cost is not borne equally. Our research showed that the lower economic classes either consume from the tap, risking their health, or spend a disproportionate part of their income in buying water. Moreover, we noted that higher-income groups consume substantially more water than lower-income households.

Urban India turns nearly 80 per cent of its daily water into sewage. A rational water economy would treat grey water as an asset. Collect it separately, treat it to appropriate standards, and price it for non-potable uses that reflect its cost and value. This has a double effect of lowering freshwater demand and reducing the sewage that is released. But for grey water markets to be viable, freshwater pricing must be rational.

ULBs must undertake and publish full-cost accounting of their water operations, so that the embedded subsidy is visible and accountable. Equity goals must underpin tariff structures. Lifetime quantities per capita have to remain subsidised for all, while progressive pricing should discourage frivolous consumption.

A monsoon-based country like India cannot overcome water stress without getting the price of water right. The opportunity to build a circular urban water economy is here already. The price of water is not an economic question. In a water-scarce country, it is a question of justice.

The writer is director, Centre for Sustainable Development, Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune



RAJIV MEHROTRA

Yato mat, tato path does not ask us to pretend that religions have no differences. It asks that we do not make our wounds into theology, or mistake inherited fear for spiritual fidelity

DEMOCRACY should welcome the swing of the political pendulum. That is how republics renew themselves. Anxiety begins when the rejection of appeasement hardens into majoritarian entitlement, and a change of government becomes, for some, a change in who may pray to whom, when and where.

I was still a teenager in Calcutta when my father first took me to hear a Swami Ranganathananda lecture. He would one day become the 13th president of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission; he would also give me my first *diksha*. In the years that followed, I became a student of the Dalai Lama, my root guru for more than 45 years. Each tradition deepened rather than displaced the other.

That tradition has shaped lives beyond the monastery. As a young man, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, sought to join the Mission and was turned away. Its genius lay there too, in redirecting spiritual aspiration towards the world, and then releasing it.

Behind that genius stands 19th-century Bengal. Ram Mohan Roy challenged *sati*; Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar fought for widow remarriage; Rabindranath Tagore gave Bengal its innermost voice. But it was Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda who gave this modernity its spiritual conscience.

Ramakrishna was, above all, a *bhakt*. Yet from that devotion emerged one of the most radical religious testimonies of modern India. In the 1860s, Govinda Rai arrived at Dakshineswar. Kshatriya by caste and Hindu by birth, he had given himself over to Islamic practice with the intensity of a Sufi dervish. Ramakrishna sought initiation from him and entered Islamic *sadhana*. He recited *namaz* regularly, and had "no inclination" even to visit Hindu deities: "I had to practise each religion for a time. Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, I realised that there is only one God toward whom all are travelling; but the paths are different." From this emerged the phrase that would animate a movement: *Yato mat, tato path*. As many faiths, so many paths.

It fell to Vivekananda to carry this into the modern world: Practical Vedanta, grounded in consciousness, and *seva*, the conviction that service was worship. At the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1893, he told his audience that his tradition believed not merely in tolerating other religions, but in accepting all of them as true. In a television conversation I had with Swami Ranganathananda, he said something I have never forgotten: "If you feel your religion is superior, keep it to yourself." That inheritance matters because India's argument with itself is not over. Religion is again asked to declare itself in sharp-edged public forms: As identity, grievance, assertion, boundary, proof of belonging. The civilisational capacity to live with difference without panic is the precondition for everything else. The shallow mind fears difference. The trained mind is enlarged by it.

Yato mat, tato path does not ask us to pretend that religions have no differences. It asks that we do not mistake inherited fear for spiritual fidelity. A Bengali priest demonstrated this by walking away from the temple he served and discovering that the Divine he worshipped was not diminished by another name. The tradition he seeded has not been forgotten. One prays.

The author is honorary secretary, The Foundation of the Dalai Lama. Views are personal

40 YEARS AGO

July 13, 1986



Twenty killed in Gujarat

AT LEAST 20 persons were burnt alive, and three women were killed in Gujarat during the four-day violence in Ahmedabad spread to Baroda, Broach, Bhavnagar, and the Jain pilgrim town of Palitana and other places on Gujarat Bandh day in response to a call given by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and several other organisations. The death toll has now risen to 48. The Gujarat government alerted the army to stand by.

Building communal trust

THE UNION Government does not consider it possible or necessary to formulate any policy to intervene in or prevent con-

licts between religious communities over the identity of holy places. The government feels that such issues are best left to the tradition of religious tolerance in society and the laws of the land. The Union Home Ministry, in a note on the subject, says that conflicts between various religious groups over the identity of places of worship are a product of historical circumstances.

TULF delegation in Sri Lanka

THE FIVE-member Tamil United Front politico that arrived in Colombo from Madras had meetings with Indian High Commissioner, J N Dixit, and exchanged ideas on the current situation in the country,

according to informed sources. They also had meetings with members of their party from the northern and eastern provinces and are expected to engage in direct discussions with the Sri Lanka government on the proposals for the devolution of power through provincial councils.

Jnanpith for Pannalal Patel

VETERAN GUJARATI writer Pannalal Patel has been awarded the 21st Jnanpith Award for 1985 in recognition of his remarkable contribution to Indian literature. The award, which carries Rs 1.50 lakh in cash and a citation, was announced soon after the selection board met under the chairmanship of P V Narasimha Rao.



The Ideas Page

MONDAY, JULY 13, 2026

• **WHAT THE OTHERS SAY**
"Elections are approaching, and new enemies are needed. Netanyahu, decided to refresh the list of enemies and focus on Ankara." — *Huaretz*

State refuses to recognise its own people: This is nihilism, no way to govern



RS SHARMA

CONSIDER A 60-year-old farm labourer in a village in eastern Uttar Pradesh, born at home in the 1960s, who has voted in every election of his life. During the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls, an official asks him to prove his date of birth, his residence and his citizenship. He has no birth certificate, because no one registered his birth. His ration card, he is told, is not proof of residence. His Aadhaar — posted years ago to his very door — proves neither his age, address, nor his citizenship. He never held a passport and never finished school. He stands before the state with empty hands, and the burden is on him to prove that he is not a foreigner.

It is the predictable result of three failures of the state, each of its own making. None of this is the failing of any one government or party. It is the cumulative result of decades of collective neglect — of unglamorous, unfashionable tasks such as registering every birth, which never commanded political attention — for which the system as a whole, across successive governments, bears responsibility.

The Registration of Births and Deaths Act has required, since 1969, that every birth be registered within 21 days; running that system was the state's job, and for decades it did not. Among children under five, only 41 per cent of births were registered as recently as 2005-06, and before the mid-2000s most Indians were born at home — institutional deliveries were under 39 per cent nationally. The reassuring figure that 98 per cent of births are now registered describes today's newborns; it says nothing about the adults already on the rolls.

Registration is also not a certificate in hand — these are two separate acts in law, and for decades, the second often did not happen. If the strictest views right, that only a birth certificate issued at the time of birth

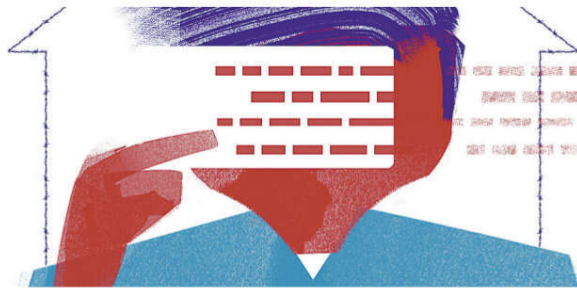


ILLUSTRATION: C R SAKSHIMAR

is genuine proof of date of birth, then perhaps one voter in eight holds one some 85 crore do not. A test that the overwhelming majority of citizens cannot pass is not a test of eligibility. It is a machine for exclusion.

I can speak about this from experience. In Aadhaar's early years, which I led as UIDAI's founding director general, we found that a great many residents simply did not know their date of birth. We recorded it as verified where a document existed, and as declared or approximate where none did in the villages, the majority fell in the latter categories. People would fix their age by an event — the year the great draught happened. It is why so many Indians carry January 1 as their birthday: the date the system assigns when only a year is known. To demand a precise, documented date of birth from such people is not rigorous; it is exclusion.

We also never gave him a citizenship document. There is no citizenship card in India. The passport — held by under 8 per cent of Indians — was clarified this June by the Ministry of External Affairs to be only a travel document, not a proof of citizenship. Aadhaar, by its own statute, is not citizenship, nor are the voter ID or PAN. This is not an oversight. Every attempt to build a citizen's register has failed — the MNIC pilot abandoned, the Assam

Every document in circulation is partial or disowned — the ration card the government itself says is not residence proof, the utility bill in another's name, the rent agreement easily faked

NRC excluded 19 lakh people and resolved nothing, the idea finally diluted into the National Population Register, a register of residents and not citizens, because the Home Ministry found a field test of citizenship impractical. The citizen is asked to prove a status the state has never certified.

And we now disown our own documents. A petition pending in the Supreme Court asks that Aadhaar be treated only as proof of identity — not of age, address or citizenship. On residence the law itself makes the point: A voter must be ordinarily resident, and the Representation of the People Act says that owning a house does not establish it and that temporary absence does not end it. Every document in circulation is partial or disowned — the ration card the government itself says is not residence proof, the utility bill in another's name, the rent agreement easily faked. Aadhaar alone was physically delivered to the holder's door, through Speed Post with acknowledgement due — a deliberate and costly choice that shows the letter was meant to evidence residence — and that is exactly the document the state now says is not proof of address. We disown the one address to which we took the trouble to deliver a letter.

Add the three failures together: The and the citizen is defenceless: The

state recognises neither his age, nor his residence, nor his citizenship, and the Foreigners Act still puts the burden on him to prove he is not a foreigner. Any official can brand almost any citizen a suspected illegal immigrant, certain that he cannot produce papers the state never let him have. There is a name for rejecting every record — including those the state itself created — and so being unable to recognise one's own people: It is nihilism, and it is no way to govern. It is unjust to make the citizen answer for a failure that was the system's, not his own. This is exactly the injustice the Election Commission's SIR now inflicts on crores of ordinary voters — an old, document-heavy, house-to-house method revived, in the digital India age, to solve a problem the country has already solved.

The answer is not more purism, but pragmatism. Aadhaar is among the most successful public projects this country has built — a unique digital identity for every resident, which transformed welfare delivery and accelerated digitalisation. The honest question is not Aadhaar versus a perfect document, but Aadhaar versus what people actually hold. On age, we need only one binary fact — is the person 18 or older? Aadhaar answers it without the date at all. Since a child's biometrics are not captured before the age of five, anyone whose biometrics were taken around 2013 or earlier was at least five then and is 18 now. On residence, ask which document is stronger than the address Aadhaar posted to the door, and how many hold that stronger document. On citizenship, let Aadhaar establish identity, analytics flag the few genuine outliers, and the Home Ministry decide them, as the Supreme Court has held.

India has spent a decade building digital public infrastructure the world now studies. It would be perverse to declare, at the end of it, that none of it can be trusted — and to send officials door to door demanding old papers we never gave, from people the state itself never documented. A republic that takes its duties seriously does not make its people prove, again and again, that they belong to it. It recognises them. We already have the means. We should use them.

The writer was founding DG and mission director of UIDAI. Views are personal

Bring anticipatory statecraft, not reactive diplomacy



SYED AKBARUDDIN

IMMEDIATE ISSUES tend to blur the future. A tariff threat, a war in West Asia, an oil shock and an export control order consume governments. Power, however, often moves quietly. China's white paper, More Just and Equitable Global Governance, released as G7 leaders were meeting, is one such signal. While the old club focused on today's pressures, China staked its claim to tomorrow's rulebook. India needs to take notice. The issue is not only China's ambition. It is also India's preparedness.

This is a challenge of anticipatory statecraft. By the time a crisis is visible, some choices have already been made elsewhere: In standards, lending clauses, technical bodies and diplomatic language. Under Donald Trump, the United States is treating the old order less as a system to defend than as leverage to use. Europe speaks of values, but is distracted by war in Ukraine and concerns about US tariffs and Chinese manufacturing exports. The Global South has grievances, but no common draft. China, meanwhile, has placed its version of the next order on the table.

President Xi Jinping proposed the Global Governance Initiative (GGI), at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in September 2025, a gathering also attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin. The white paper gathers China's earlier initiatives on development, security and civilisation, along with the Belt and Road Initiative, into one larger claim about global governance. China's critique has appeal because many of the complaints are true. The Security Council still looks more like 1945 than 2026. Africa has too little voice. IMF quotas and World Bank shares lag behind economic change. Climate finance is promised faster than it is delivered. The WTO dispute system is weakened. Technology rules are often written by countries that already own the technology. Sanctions outside the UN system are used often, and not always consistently. China has attracted 43 countries as Friends of GGI, including 21 from Africa. The coalition is uneven, but real.

The paper also reveals where Beijing thinks power will move next. It names artificial intelligence, cyberspace, outer space, the deep seas, polar regions, climate governance, public health, trade and international financial architecture. These domains will shape who controls data, who finances infrastructure, who writes AI safety tests and how much choice the Global South actually has.

Several ideas in the white paper overlap with India's own positions: Sovereign equality, international law, multilateralism, making and development as a common purpose.

India too wants UN reform, fairer finance, a stronger Global South and open technology access. It also opposes small groups writing rules for everyone else.

China's record is less tidy than its language. It speaks of sovereignty, but the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor runs through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. It invokes international law, but not always when the law cuts against Chinese claims. While Beijing favours a multipolar world, it baulks at a multipolar Asia. It speaks of UN-centred rule-making, yet uses critical mineral export controls as leverage. China's development offer can create dependence when loans, ports and digital systems lack transparency.

China's white paper is an invitation to debate global reform. More importantly, it is a test of India's capacity to look ahead. AI rules, space governance and health security are not foreign policy files alone. They shape India's development and security too.

India already has the NTI Aayog to think across ministries on domestic transformation. That habit is now needed for changes outside India that will shape its growth, trade, technology and security. Who is making sure India sees these shifts before they become constraints? NTI Aayog's mandate could be widened. MEA's Policy Planning and Research Division could be strengthened. The National Security Council Secretariat could also ensure these issues are treated together across Ministries and not in separate files. The task is clear: Spot proposals early, align ministries, bring in domain experts and think tanks and build coalitions before negotiations begin. The future will not wait for India to finish responding to the present. If Delhi arrives late, it may still get a seat. By then, the choices will have already narrowed.

The writer is former permanent representative of India to the United Nations, and dean, Kaulia School of Public Policy, Hyderabad

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A pragmatic shift

THE FLOW of FDI toward other developing economies only underscores that we are moving too slowly, failing to keep pace with the hyper-competitive velocity of global supply chains ("Easing on China is right move at right time," IE, July 11). While our national security and strategic concerns are legitimate and non-negotiable, blocking capital inflows indiscriminately has historically choked our own domestic capacity. The recent cabinet approvals for manufacturing joint ventures, customs duty waivers on critical electronic components, and permissions for power equipment tenders represent a pragmatic, overdue shift.

Krishan Kumar Chugh, New Delhi

The right priorities

THE BJP officially supported Mamata Banerjee's anti-land acquisition movement during the Tata Nano controversy in Singur. To attract large-scale industrial investment in Bengal, strategic land acquisition is essential ("Direct land purchase policy in Bengal: Don't want another Singur, Nandigram, says CM," IE, July 12). Chief Minister Suvedu Adhikari's decision is considered pragmatic by investors. While land acquisition is necessary to attract large capital, successfully scaling it requires transparent negotiation, fair compensation, and minimal community displacement.

S S Paul, Nadia

End of an era

S JANAKI's passing marks the end of an iconic era in Indian cinematic ("Nightingale of South Indian cinema, who gave voice to over 40,000 songs, falls silent," IE, July 12). Fondly known as the "Nightingale of South India," she was much more than a playback singer. Her ability to breathe life into every song was unparalleled. She effortlessly transcended linguistic barriers and listened through the universal language of music. Though she's no longer with us, her classic songs will continue to resonate across generations.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali



MYTHRI SUDIHAAKAR

YOU WON'T get a 100 per cent match. If 60-70 per cent of your criteria are met, you should proceed." For years, this has been one of the most repeated pieces of advice from a famous "alliance consultant" on the Netflix reality show, *Indian Matchmaking*. To many, it is realistic. Marriage, after all, demands compromise. But compromise is meaningful only when there is a genuine choice. India is today shaken by a series of cases tied to marriage and impending marriages, from the alleged dowry death of a model and actor in Bhopal to the LoHagar Fort murder case. We consume these stories as isolated crimes or evidence of a "changing generation". Instead of asking what happened inside these relationships, we should ask what happens before they begin.

During consultations, I kept hearing versions of the same sentence: "I'm scared my parents will get me married if I don't secure a placement." "My parents said they'll let me continue studying only if I focus on academics. If I get into a college romance, they'll marry me off." "My parents want me married by 25, so I have to settle before then." Marriage, in these conversations, wasn't spoken about as companionship or compatibility. It sounded like a deadline, sometimes even a punishment.

India has built an entire economy around this belief — marriage bureaus, matrimonial websites,

For many young Indians, marriage is compliance

horoscope consultants, and premium matchmaking services. Millions of arranged marriages are no doubt consensual and deeply fulfilling. The problem is when choice is replaced with compliance.

In Martin Seligman's learned helplessness experiments during the late 1960s, animals repeatedly exposed to situations where they had no control eventually stopped trying to escape even when escape became possible. Human beings are infinitely more complex than laboratory experiments. But decades of research have shown similar patterns in people exposed to environments where personal agency is repeatedly undermined. When individuals repeatedly experience situations where saying "no" has no effect, where disagreement is discouraged or treated as disrespect, they may begin to believe that exercising choice is futile.

Many Indian children don't choose their career, whom they date and when they are ready for marriage. Every major life decision is framed as a family decision

Many Indian children don't choose their career, whom they date and when they are ready for marriage. Every major life decision is framed as a family decision

The freedom to say no, to make decisions for themselves, should be the ultimate proof of good parenting. If children grow into adults who can set boundaries, and make informed choices, isn't that evidence that they were raised well? Why then, is hearing a "no" from one's child increas-

ingly seen as a threat to parenting rather than a reflection of it? Perhaps this is why so many conversations around marriage begin with a familiar sentence, "You'll understand after you're married."

By the time marriage enters the conversation, many young adults have spent two decades practising compliance rather than decision-making. This reminds me of Julian Rotter's concept of an external locus of control. People with an external locus of control increasingly perceive that important outcomes in life are determined by forces outside themselves — parents, fate, society or luck. In many households, this worldview is carefully cultivated. Children are taught that elders know best, that family honour outweighs personal preference and that difficult decisions are someone else's responsibility.

None of this suggests that love marriages are inherently healthier or arranged marriages inherently abusive. The distinction is actually between consensual choice and conditioned compliance. Maybe the better question is whether people were ever allowed to understand themselves before they were expected to understand another person. Compatibility isn't merely finding someone who checks 70 per cent of a list. It is also having spent a lifetime believing that your 30 per cent matters as much.

The writer is empanelled as a consultant psychologist at NIT, Andhra Pradesh

In Europe, on migration, far right is mainstream



KHUSHBOO SRIVASTAVA, PULKUT BUTTAN

MIGRATION HAS always had political overtones in Europe. But the story this summer signals the emergence of a new political vocabulary — one centred on "reimigration". The word that once dominated the European far-right's vocabulary has entered the political mainstream, indicating a systemic transformation in how Europe understands ideas of citizenship and belonging.

On June 12, the European Union's Migration and Asylum Pact came into force, introducing stricter return procedures. Its more significant change is political rather than legal. Traditionally, migration referred to

migrants voluntarily returning to their countries of origin. In recent years, however, the term has acquired a very different meaning. Much of the thinking draws on the "Great Replacement" theory advanced by Renaud Camus and later promoted by Austrian actor Martin Sellner. Critics argue that it shifts the basis of belonging from legal citizenship to ethnicity and cultural identity.

The appeal of reimigration lies in its ambiguity. Unlike terms like "mass deportation", which carry immediate legal and moral implications, reimigration can refer to anything from stricter enforcement of immigration laws to the removal of migrants and even naturalised citizens deemed insufficiently integrated. That ambiguity has helped move the term from the fringe into the mainstream as the language of multiculturalism and integration is increasingly giv-

ing way to narratives centred on border control, returns and security. The 2015 refugee crisis, followed by terrorist attacks, economic uncertainty, the pandemic, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and instability in parts of Africa and the Middle East, has deepened anxieties over security, state capacity and national identity. Migration is now debated less in terms of numbers than in terms of control, belonging and political trust.

Indian migrants may not be the immediate targets, but a more restrictive political climate could shape future visa policies, labour mobility and the everyday experiences of immigrants

Irregular border crossings into the EU and asylum applications actually declined in 2025, yet calls for tougher migration policies have only intensified. The new Migration and Asylum Pact reflects this changing mood by placing greater focus on border management and returns. Supporters argue that it will restore confidence in the asylum system, while critics see it as reinforcing a securitised approach to migration.

For India, this debate is not a distant concern. Europe is home to a growing Indian diaspora of students, professionals and entrepreneurs. India and the EU have steadily expanded cooperation on legal migration and mobility. Even as ageing populations and labour shortages increase the demand for skilled workers in Europe, the continent's political discourse is increasingly being framed around security and cultural identity.

Indian migrants may not be the immediate targets, but a more restrictive political climate could shape future visa policies, labour mobility and the everyday experiences of immigrant communities.

Political language often shapes who is seen as belonging to a nation. That is why the rise of reimigration deserves attention. Governments and migration policies will change, but the political imaginary they cultivate is likely to endure. The significance of Europe's reimigration debate lies not only in the reforms it enacts today, but in the changing ideas of identity, citizenship and belonging that it could leave behind.

Srivastava is a political scientist and writes on democracy, political discourse and contemporary governance. Buttan is a PhD Scholar at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences

Sheikh Hamad, former emir who modernised Qatar, dies at 74



Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani oversaw successful bid to host the 2022 World Cup. FILE

Reuters
Dubai, July 12

QATAR'S FORMER emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, a sweeping moderniser who seized power in 1995 and broke with tradition to hand it over to his son 18 years later, has died at the age of 74.

Qatar's top government body, the Amiri Diwan, announced that Sheikh Hamad had died on Sunday morning. It did not mention the cause of his death. The Qatar that the current Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani inherited was already well on its way to being remade by his father.

A forceful, independent-minded personality, he explained in a speech to mark his abdication in 2013 that he wanted a new generation "with their innovative ideas and active energies" to take over. Sheikh Hamad was the architect of Qatar's effort to develop its LNG infrastructure that allowed it to get its vast gas reserves to global market. He established media network Al Jazeera, which gave Qatar an outsized voice in Arab politics. He oversaw the successful bid to host the 2022 soccer World Cup, a move that put Qatar on global stage.

HIS ROLE & HEALTH KEY CONCERNS AMID FRESH U.S. STRIKES

Khamenei absence weakens Iran: 'Need to see there's a leader'

Reuters
Dubai, July 12

THE WHEREABOUTS of Mojtaba Khamenei have been a mystery to Iranians and the rest of the world since his appointment as supreme leader a week after the strike that killed his father at the end of February. His absence from the main funeral ceremonies for former leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was so complete there was not even a written message, leaving people to guess at his plans for Iran at a turbulent time in the Islamic Republic's 47-year history.

Installed with the backing of the powerful Revolutionary Guards, he suffered fatal disfigurement and other injuries in the strike, sources say. They say he has been making decisions but has not yet been well enough to come in public. Now, after hostilities with the US reignited this week, his role and health are of critical — and growing — concern.

"I understand that, from a security standpoint, he should not appear in public. But the country is going through a very difficult time," said Taghi, 47, a shop owner in Isfahan who asked not to give his family name. "There is a need for the Supreme Leader to be seen. Even if he has been injured, people need to see that there is a leader and that he is running the country."

The country's top Thursday's burial, with prayers for the



A man mounts a banner showing Iran's late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and his successor Mojtaba Khamenei ahead of a farewell ceremony in Tehran. REUTERS

late Khamenei conducted over his coffin by his three others at Iran's holiest shrine, underscored the central place of family relationships among the Islamic Republic's leadership.

Mojtaba Khamenei's three brothers are not seen as significant political players in Iran — or likely to become so — though they have all become senior clerics. But Ali Khomeini, a grandson of the founder of Iran's 1979 revolution, will speak on Mojtaba's behalf at a mourning ceremony on Friday, a nod to the way such family ties are used to emphasise continuity in the clerical system.

There had been speculation that Mojtaba Khamenei would

finally appear — if not in person then with a recorded message or even new photographs — when his father was finally buried in the gold-domed shrine.

Senior sources in Iran have attributed the lack of any new image or voice recording since his March 8 appointment by a clerical assembly to health and security considerations.

And as a political, strategic, religious and revolutionary figurehead bearing ultimate authority in Iran, he may need to appear more physically capable than his recuperation yet allows.

While the Revolutionary Guards appear to hold a tight rein over the country for now, it is not clear how long the leader of a theocratic state can remain out of sight.

Lindsey Graham, Republican senator and staunch Trump ally, dies at 71

Reuters
July 12

US SENATOR Lindsey Graham, a key Republican who went from a vocal critic of Donald Trump to one of his most loyal allies on Capitol Hill after Trump became president, has died at age 71.

The South Carolina lawmaker died after a "brief and sudden illness," his office posted on X early on Sunday. US media said emergency personnel had responded to a call for cardiac arrest at his Capitol Hill home on Saturday night.

Graham, just back from a trip to Ukraine, had been scheduled to appear on the "Meet the Press" interview program on Sunday morning, the network said. Shortly after his death was announced, Trump called Graham "one of the greatest people and senators I have ever known" and a hard-working patriot.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he was "deeply saddened," calling Graham "a true defender of freedom and the values that make our world safer."

A defense hawk, Graham "consistently pushed for outcomes in the War on Terror that protect our long-term national security interests," his website



US Senator Lindsey Graham at a press conference after his meeting with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Kyiv. FILE

said. He was a prominent supporter of Israel and Ukraine and an opponent of Iran.

During the 2016 campaign, in which Graham was among many Republicans who lost the presidential nomination to Trump, he posted on social media: "If we nominate Trump, we will get destroyed... and we will deserve it."

Graham told CNN in 2015 that Trump was "a race-baiting, xenophobic, religious bigot," adding, "He doesn't

represent my party. He doesn't represent the values that the men and women who wear the uniform are fighting for."

Later, after becoming a loyal supporter and frequent golf partner, Graham still publicly disagreed with Trump's decision upon returning to office last year to pardon about 1,500 of the president's supporters who attacked the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, saying it could lead to more violence.

TRIBUTES POUR IN FOR GRAHAM



One of the greatest people and Senators I have ever known. He was always working, and was a true American Patriot. Lindsey will be greatly missed"

DONALD TRUMP, U.S. PRESIDENT



Lindsey Graham understood that the security of Israel and America are inseparable. Israel has lost one of its greatest friends. America has lost a great patriot. I have lost a beloved friend"

BENJAMIN NETANYAHU, ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER



Deeply saddened by the news of the passing of US Senator Lindsey Graham. Lindsey was a true defender of freedom and the values that make our world safer."

VOLODYMYR ZELENSKYI, PRESIDENT OF UKRAINE

Ukraine prime minister steps down; offered new and important position, says Zelenskyy

Associated Press
Kyiv, July 12

UKRAINIAN PRIME Minister Yulia Svyrydenko stepped down on Sunday as President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced fresh changes to Ukraine's government, saying he had offered a new and important position to the former premier.

Zelenskyy, who has remained in office under martial law because wartime elections are prohibited, has periodically reshuffled his government in an effort to bring fresh momentum to his administration. Svyrydenko, who has



Ukrainian PM Yulia Svyrydenko

served as Ukraine's economy minister, was named prime minister in July 2025 at the age of 39 after playing a lead role in securing a mineral agreement between Ukraine and the United States, seen as an im-

portant way of tying US interests to Ukraine's security.

In a statement on social media, Svyrydenko said she was "proud to have had the honor of leading the government during one of the most difficult periods in Ukraine's modern history."

She also said she had discussed "next steps" with Zelenskyy, but did not provide further details.

"I remain ready to serve the Ukrainian state and carry out every task aimed at strengthening Ukraine's position, defending our national interests and bringing a just peace closer," she said.

Drone strikes on Russian-controlled Enerhodar kills 4

Moscow: Four people were killed and a further four were injured in a Ukrainian drone attack on Russian-controlled town of Enerhodar, Alexei Likhachev, head of Russian state nuclear corporation Rosatom, said on Sunday.

Enerhodar, home to the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, fell to Russian forces within weeks of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. REUTERS



Horns, Haste, Heartbeats

Revelers run alongside La Palmoilla fighting bulls during the sixth San Fermín festival in Pamplona, Spain on Sunday. The Running of the Bulls, or Encierro, dates back to the 16th century, when fighting bulls were herded through the city's streets to the bull ring. REUTERS

• BRIEFLY

FRANCE

300 evacuated in Paris suburb after car scare

ABOUT 300 people were evacuated from a neighbourhood in Sarcelles, a multicultural Paris suburb with a large Jewish population, owing to a "suspicious" car near the town's synagogue, French Interior Minister Laurent Nunez said on Sunday. Nunez, speaking to French broadcaster BFM, said the incident took place on Saturday evening. Nunez said an investigation was under way and that a "military weapon" had been found in the vehicle and that the motive and suspect had not been identified. REUTERS

PAKISTAN

Cop shot dead in terrorist attack in KPK province

A POLICE constable was shot dead by an unidentified assailant in a terrorist attack in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on Sunday, police said. The incident took place in the mountainous district of Buner. According to preliminary reports, Constable Miskeen Zada was sitting inside a police post when a militant entered the premises and opened indiscriminate fire, killing him on the spot before fleeing the scene. The suspected attacker had reportedly been staying in the area for several days and was believed to have been under surveillance. PTI

2 killed, 5 injured in shooting incident in Toronto festival

Toronto: A shooting near a Toronto street festival killed two people and wounded five on Saturday, prompting police to warn of an active shooter before later saying the scene was secure.

Toronto Police spokesperson Shannon Eames said there were two deceased and five others with gunshot wounds after the shooting near St. Clair Avenue West and Arlington Avenue, where Festival was underway. AP

14 nations and the EU reaffirm 2016 ruling invalidating China's claims in South China Sea

Associated Press
Manila, July 12

THE US, THE UK and a dozen other Western and Asian countries reasserted on Sunday that China's expansive claims in the South China Sea are illegal based on a 2016 arbitration ruling. A joint statement issued by the 14 nations said they rejected "destabilising" actions in the disputed waters that threaten regional stability. The 27-nation European Union reaffirmed a

separate statement, reaffirming the ruling as a "landmark decision in the peaceful settlement of disputes".

The statements commemorated a July 12, 2016, arbitration ruling by a tribunal established in The Hague under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, saying the landmark decision is "is final and legally binding".

China reiterated Sunday that the ruling was "null and void and has no binding force"

and Beijing "neither accepts nor recognises it".

China refused to join the arbitration initiated by the Philippines in 2013 after a tense standoff in the contested waters a year earlier that ended with Beijing effectively seizing a disputed shoal.

Beijing rejected the 2016 ruling and continues to defend its claims to virtually the entire sea passage, a key global trade route that has long been feared as one of Asia's most active flashpoints. REUTERS

• WITH ITS MASS-PRODUCED AND CHEAP A.I.-POWERED WAR MACHINES, THE GERMAN START-UP ILLUSTRATES A SHIFT IN MILITARY SPENDING

Inside the secret factory building AI drones for Ukraine's war—and Europe's future

Vivienne Walt
July 12

AT A secret location in southern Germany, the manager of a drone factory owned by Helsing SE — Europe's most valuable artificial intelligence defence start-up — handed over a lethal killing machine to cradle in my arms. Weighing just 26 pounds, the black, hard-ford attack drone is so light and looks so simple that it is easy to forget its role in a surging multibillion-dollar industry, the Russia-Ukraine war — and maybe even Europe's future security.

For decades, Western governments have ordered supplies like tanks, fighter jets and sub-

marines from contractors such as Lockheed Martin or Northrop Grumman. Those items take years to deliver and are dizzyingly expensive: an F-35 jet can run to over \$100 million.

That sort of multiyear government contract still accounts for a lot of military spending. But the current trend is clear: Defence technology is becoming cheaper and nimbler, with breakthroughs developed by privately funded companies rather than governments.

"There's a transformation in defence economics," said Alexander Blanchard, senior researcher in AI governance at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

Of the Pentagon's \$1.5 trillion budget request for next year, about \$55 billion is earmarked for the creation of a new unmanned, AI-powered arsenal.

On a more modest scale, the European Union is piloting a 115 million-euro program to fund AI defence companies. These budgets are expected to grow, and defence technology has become a booming area for venture capital.

Helsing, like other far smaller defence startups, has already flipped the script on sluggish governments, by harnessing the type of disruptive innovation more common in Silicon Valley, tapping billions in venture capital and hiring top tech talent.



Helsing's aircraft engineers are building the company's first unmanned fighter jet, named CA-1 Europa. NYT

The company, some of whose top ranks migrated from Palantir, Tesla, Apple and Meta,

set out to mass-produce war machines costing as little as \$17,500 euros.

Powered by AI, they require minimal military personnel and barely a week's training. And the drones have been battle-tested under fire in Ukraine. Few companies illustrate the profound shift in the way militaries spend as clearly as does Helsing, the 5-year-old Munich-based startup. This month, the firm allowed DealBook to be the first US journalists inside its drone factory.

Situated in a serene, suburban industrial complex, the factory operates under watertight security. DealBook agreed not to disclose its location, and other tenants in the complex are kept unaware of its existence.

Helsing's name appears no-

where: The company fears the factory could be a prime target for sabotage or attack, given that thousands of the drones assembled here have been deployed against Russian forces in Ukraine.

The factory is able to be dismantled and relocated within a day, in case of a threat. The 100 or so factory workers, many of whom were recently laid off by flagging German carmakers, undergo extensive security vetting and sign nondisclosure agreements. Painted on one wall is a motivational slogan reading, "Protecting our democracies."

When Helsing's three founders started the company

in 2021, with seed funding from Spotify founder Daniel Ek's venture capital firm, they had one mission: to "steal" off Russian tanks, missiles and drones.

"The urgency was clear, or at least clear to us," said the company's co-founder and co-CEO, Gundbert Scherf, who was previously an adviser to Germany's Defense Ministry and a partner at McKinsey. "There was a need to do more in defense and give Europe a stronger footing." Yet with Russia's invasion of Ukraine still a year away, investors were unconvinced. "At the time, it was virtually impossible to raise money for defence in Europe," Scherf said. NYT

IN 2025-26, INDIAN START-UPS RAISED \$11.7 BILLION, DOWN 18% FROM THE PREVIOUS YEAR

US AI giants' IPOs could unlock funding tap for Indian start-ups

Siddharth Upasani
New Delhi, July 12

SPACEX'S \$75-BILLION Initial Public Offering (IPO) last month made it the world's largest listing, well ahead of the \$26 billion or so raised by Saudi Aramco in late 2019 and SK Hynix last week.

What SpaceX's IPO also did was to set the stage for what may be equally gargantuan listings in the artificial intelligence (AI) space: OpenAI and Anthropic. And the returns from these three IPOs could open the tap for thirsty Indian start-ups.

According to data compiled by private market intelligence platform Tracxn for *The Indian Express*, the \$4 Private Equity (PE) and Venture Capital (VC) firms that have backed SpaceX, Anthropic, and OpenAI had collectively deployed \$57.8 billion across 1,376 rounds in Indian technology companies between 2016 and June 2026. Investments in Indian tech firms have been just \$160 million, with 12 of the 54 participating in four rounds.

Apart from validating Elon Musk's confidence in his space-plus-AI company, SpaceX's IPO also made the sort of profits for those PE firms and VCs who invested early enough. Consider, for instance, Peter Thiel's

Founders Fund, whose \$600 million investment in SpaceX was worth more than \$50 billion at the company's IPO price of \$135, according to a *Bloomberg* report, which added that Andreessen Horowitz's return from its investment in SpaceX would be the biggest in its history.

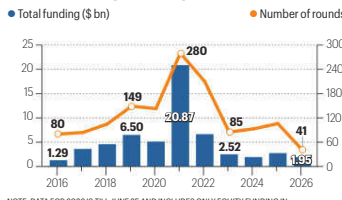
SpaceX's IPO valued it at \$1.8 trillion. In June, both Anthropic and OpenAI had confidentially filed for a listing. While the latter wants to be valued at \$1 trillion in its IPO, Anthropic in May said it had raised \$65 billion at a valuation of \$965 billion.

"Historically, successful exits have strengthened the ability of VC and PE firms to raise larger successor funds," said Neha Singh, Tracxn's co-founder. "Given that India already features in the active portfolios of these 54 firms, a recovery in investment activity is plausible as fresh capital is raised and redeployed."

At the same time, Singh cautioned that it is difficult to estimate how much capital may come to India as IPO proceeds are primarily distributed to Limited Partners rather than directly increasing General Partner deployment capacity.

However, there are "early signs of capital recycling,"

How SpaceX, Anthropic, and OpenAI's PE/VC investors have put money into Indian tech



Take, for instance, Chicago-based VC firm Valor Equity Partners, whose 4% stake in SpaceX was worth around \$70 billion at the IPO price. According to reports, Valor is looking to raise \$2.5 billion by the end of 2026. But whether any of that money will reach Indian shores is up in the air given Valor's focus on deep tech, defence, and late-stage AI infrastructure in the US, Singh of Tracxn said.

"As a result, any meaningful increase in India allocations is more likely to emerge over the medium term as successor funds are raised and deployed,

rather than as an immediate post-IPO outcome," she added. As per private capital data provider PitchBook, liquidity conditions in Asia-Pacific are improving. This suggests "the region's capital recycling cycle is beginning to repair after several years of constrained realisations," it said in a report late last month.

Earlier this year in February, Peak XV had said it had raised \$1.3 billion for its new India Seed, India Venture, and APAC funds.

There are differences in how the SpaceX-Anthropic-OpenAI investors have poured

money into US and Indian firms. In India, while 71% of the investments of these 54 firms have been at the seed or early stage, 93% of the money in firms such as SpaceX, Anthropic, and OpenAI was at the late stage.

This, Singh said, reflects a "deliberate strategy of concentrating capital behind a small number of category-defining companies rather than following their typical investment pattern" which sees them invest just 12% at the late stage across the US portfolio.

Whatever the money and stage, overseas funds will be welcomed not just by the start-ups but even Indian policymakers, with the Indian economy seemingly having sleepwalked into an exodus of foreign capital over the last couple of years as repatriation of past investments piled up rapidly, totalling \$150 billion over 2023-24, 2024-25, and 2025-26. This is equal to 61% of gross FDI into the country, resulting in net FDI over the aforementioned three years being a mere \$18 billion.

In 2025-26, Indian start-ups raised \$11.7 billion, down 18% from the previous year, according to Tracxn. [FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM](http://www.indianexpress.com)

US nuclear firm Holtec's IPO plans could have an India SMR footprint

Anil Sasi
New Delhi, July 12

HOLTEC INTERNATIONAL, an American nuclear firm cleared by the US Department of Energy (DoE) to invest in India's atomic energy sector, has filed with the American securities regulator to go public later this year.

Florida-based Holtec, one of the world's largest exporters of capital nuclear components, is a frontrunner in the emerging small modular reactor (SMR) space and could combine the initial public offering (IPO) with some private placement to raise capital for its upcoming projects, including proposed SMR-based projects in India.

The upcoming issue, billed as one of the biggest IPOs in the global nuclear industry in years, would help fund a \$10 billion plan to enable Holtec pivot from being a supplier of nuclear gear and decommissioning services into a full-scale reactor manufacturer and atomic plant operator.

Some of the upbeat demand projections for the nuclear sector are coming in from the AI data centre boom, but the broader push for lower-emission electricity base-load solutions across the world is seen as a strong driver for growth in the nuclear sector. "And one of the main reasons I'm doing it (public issue) is so that we can go build in India," Kris P Singh, the Indian-American promoter and CEO of the firm told *The Indian Express*.

The country's atomic power sector was opened up through an overarching legislation late last year. The passage of the SHANTI Act, 2005 — that eased the liability framework and paved the way for greater private and foreign participation.

Holtec is learnt to be in talks with NTPC Ltd, India's largest integrated power generator, for a collaboration apart from a handful of other alliances with equipment manufacturers. The company is currently in the process of getting the regulatory clearances across jurisdictions.

BRIEFLY

Goyal to visit Belgium, Finland, Spain this week

New Delhi: Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal will embark on a five-day visit to Spain, Belgium, and Finland to discuss ways to boost trade and investments between India and the three countries, an official statement said Sunday. The delegation comprises leading Indian firms across sectors such as advanced manufacturing, clean energy, food processing, digital technologies, and healthcare, the ministry said. PTI

Employee headcount dips at HUL, Dabur

New Delhi: Top FMCG firms showed a mixed picture on staff strength in 2025-26,

HOLTEC LEADS INDIA RACE

HOLTEC'S LISTING comes in the backdrop of renewed global interest in nuclear power, led by electricity demand from data centres and transition to cleaner energy.

PRIVATELY OWNED Holtec is now the leading contender looking to invest in India's atomic power sector.

THE NUCLEAR company's main pitch centres on fostering a public-private initiative around the US firm's flagship SMR-300



IT ALSO proposes using existing coal plant sites in India to deploy its SMR-based projects, with the possibility of joint manufacturing

for its flagship small modular reactor, the SMR-300.

Holtec is among a handful of American nuclear firms that have been accorded 'specific authorisations' from the US government with respect to a restrictive American regulation referred to as "10CFR810" (Part 810 of Title 10, Code of Federal Regulations of the US Atomic Energy Act of 1954).

This authorisation permits these firms, subject to certain conditions, to transfer technology to entities in countries such as India, which is otherwise barred under 810 regulations.

Alongside the IPO, Holtec may unbundle some parts of the company (Holtec International) and offer these segments to investors through the private market, including sovereign wealth funds and other investors. The firm was learnt to be in talks with Abu Dhabi-based investment fund International Holdings Company for a potential fundraise later this year.

Holtec's planned issue comes at a time of surging interest in nuclear energy from data centres and the clean energy transitions planned by utilities across markets.

For India, Holtec holds special significance. Unlike Westinghouse Electric Co and GE Hitachi Nuclear Energy, the two US nuclear industry flag bearers that were seen as early

frontrunners for an entry into India's civil nuclear sector, the smaller, privately-owned Holtec is now the lead investor in the country's atomic power sector.

The unprecedented regulatory clearance by the US DoE last year potentially sets it on course to leverage the immense potential of the Indo-US civil nuclear deal.

The March 26, 2005 approval from DoE cleared Holtec International's application for specific authorisation with respect to the DoE's restrictive regulation that is referred to as "10CFR810". This specific authorisation (SA IN2023-001) now conditionally permitted Holtec to transfer "unclassified small modular reactor technology" to its regional subsidiary Holtec Asia, as well as Tata Consulting Engineers Ltd, and Larsen & Toubro Ltd in India. Holtec is looking at other partnerships in India, including the ongoing discussions with NTPC.

Holtec's main pitch centres on fostering a public-private initiative around the US firm's flagship SMR-300, to potentially help break this stasis in the nuclear engagement between the two countries. It also proposes using existing coal plant sites in India to deploy its SMR-based projects, with the possibility of joint manufacturing in the future. [FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM](http://www.indianexpress.com)

EPFO invites applications for amnesty scheme

New Delhi: Retirement fund body Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) has invited applications for an amnesty scheme from provident fund trusts to regularise their status.

Employers, stakeholders and the general public are advised to take note of the scheme, which will remain open for six months, a labour ministry statement said.

EPFO, under the Ministry of Labour & Employment, has introduced the Amnesty Scheme, 2026, providing a one-time opportunity for establishments operating exempted Provident Fund (PF) Trusts recognised in NBFC Airtel Money while its data centre Nxtira had raised \$1 billion, about Rs 9,500 crore, as part of its plan to build 1GW capacity. PTI

The Finance Act, 2026, has aligned the Income Tax framework governing recognised provident funds with the statutory and administrative provisions of the Employees' Provident Fund & Misc Provisions Act, 1952.

Recognition under the Income Tax Act, 2025, will be available only to provident funds that have obtained exemption under Section 17 of the Employees' Provident Fund & Misc. Provisions Act, 1952. Amnesty will be granted on a case-by-case basis, retroactively under Section 17 of the Act and Section 143 of the Code on Social Security, 2020.

The scheme applies to establishments that have been operating a Provident Fund Trust recognised under the Income Tax Act, 1961, but do not possess the necessary retroactive notification from the appropriate government — Central government or State government, as the case may be.

The scheme is valid for a period of six months from the date of notification. PTI

Investors expand overseas portfolio through GIFT City

Christina Titus & Anjana Therese Antony
Mumbai, July 12

INDIAN INVESTORS are increasingly expanding foreign equity asset classes such as US stocks and exchange traded funds (ETFs) through Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFT City).

According to data from the Global Access Provider (GAP) platform of the India International Exchange (India INX), the total traded value in the June quarter (till June 26) surged more than 80 % quarter-on-quarter to around \$17.4 billion.

In the March quarter, traded value had risen 34%.

Traded value refers to the total monetary value of all executed transactions.

"I (GAP) gives an opportunity for Indians to invest abroad in international stocks in FATF-compliant jurisdictions, enabling diversification," said Pradeep Ramakrishnan, executive director at the International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA).

He added that both proprietary traders and retail investors are driving the growth. "In June 2026 alone, 16 brokers were registered, which is a testimony to the growing popularity of this model."

An India INX official said the growing appetite for foreign securities is being driven by portfolio diversification, higher retail participation, and the rise of discount brokers.

While domestic benchmark

RBI regulations allow resident individuals to remit up to \$250,000 overseas each financial year under the Liberalised Remittance Scheme

Indices underperformed and the broader market posted a single-digit decline. US markets delivered stronger returns in rupee terms, he added.

Experts said greater awareness and easier access have encouraged more brokers to join the platform.

Many clients are willing to allocate 20-30% of their investable surplus to global markets, said Nishant Dongare, Director and Chief Executive Officer of GIFT City IFSC business at Anand Rathi International Ventures. Interest is also growing among high-net-worth individuals (HNIs), corporates and family offices.

The Reserve Bank of India's regulations allow resident individuals to remit up to \$250,000 overseas each financial year under the Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS).

Equity and debt remittances under the LRS rose more than fourfold to \$1.76 billion in FY26 from \$422 million in FY19, indicating what in-teranal experts described as a structural shift towards global diversification. FE

TCS plans 8,900 AI deployment engineers, seeks acquisitions

Bengaluru: Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) is building a team of up to 8,900 forward-deployed engineers and hunting for AI acquisitions as it bets artificial intelligence (AI) will create new business rather than undermine outsourcing, two TCS executives told *Reuters*.

The strategy emerges amid investor concern that AI could disrupt India's \$315 billion IT services industry by reducing demand for engineering teams, shortening project timelines and squeezing prices as clients seek a sharper productivity gains.

"We would be... ensuring that we have as many as 1% to 1.5% of our associates who could be what you would call FDEs," CEO K Rithivisan said in an interview. Kithivisan's figures would translate to roughly 5,900 to 8,900 employees based on TCS's end-June headcount. Kithivisan did not say whether the firm would hire externally or retrain existing staff.

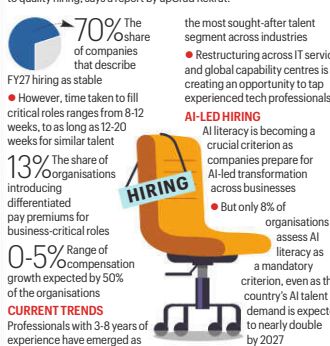
Forward-deployed engineers embed with clients to accelerate AI adoption and tailor tools to business needs, a role that has emerged as a hiring bright spot in a sector grappling with AI-driven efficiency gains.

The plan pits TCS against firms such as OpenAI, Anthropic and Microsoft, which have expanded hiring for forward-deployed engineers to help clients deploy AI tools.

It is also evaluating acquisitions in AI, data security and cybersecurity, after largely shunning them for years and relying instead on organic growth until late 2025. *REUTERS*

Hiring trends reshape workforce landscape

AI readiness and specialised skills are driving a shift from volume hiring to quality hiring, says a report by Upgrad Rekrut.



In an AI-driven economy, sustainable growth will be defined not by how many people organisations hire, but by how effectively they identify, assess and secure critical talent.

HUSAIN TINWALA, CO-FOUNDER & CEO, UPGRAD REKRUT

SOURCE: INDIA AT WORK: FY27 HIRING TRENDS REPORT BY UPGRAD REKRUT/PTI

FM to meet PSB chiefs, review foreign currency deposit drive

New Delhi: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will meet the heads of public sector banks (PSBs) Monday to review the progress of foreign currency deposit mobilisation campaign being undertaken by the lenders.

In a bid to attract foreign currency deposits by Non-Resident Indians, Overseas Citizens of India and Persons of Indian Origin, RBI last month withdrew, till September 30, interest rate ceiling on fresh Foreign

Currency Non-Resident (Bank) deposits of 3-5 years' maturity.

The move came at a time when FCNR(B) deposit inflows weakened sharply, with net inflows dropping to just \$946 million in FY26 from \$7.1 billion in FY25. Sitharaman will chair the meeting of PSBs' chiefs and financial institutions, including IDBI Bank, on mobilisation of FCNR(B) deposits, overseas foreign currency bonds and external commercial borrowings on July 13, sources said. PTI

INVESTORS ARGUE THAT INDIA'S ORGANISED CAFE MARKET IS STILL IN AN EARLY GROWTH PHASE

Coffee chains brew big bets despite losses; investors focus on store economics

Viveat Susan Pinto & S Shanthi
Mumbai/Bengaluru, July 12

INDIA'S NEW-AGE coffee chains are stepping up expansion despite continuing losses, backed by investors betting on the long-term potential of the country's under-penetrated branded cafe market.

Third Wave Coffee plans to open 100 cafes this financial year while targeting company-wide break-even. Blue Tokai aims to expand its network from 240 outlets to 800 by FY30 and is preparing for an eventual public listing. Nothing Blue Coffee (NBC), which has grown to 114 cafes across 45 cities, plans to more than double its footprint over the next two years.

While profits remain elusive, investors are increasingly focusing on store-level economics rather than headline losses, arguing that India's organised cafe market is still in an early growth phase. "The earlier failures in the cafe segment were largely capital-discipline failures, not failures of the category itself," said Vish Narain, managing partner at Pulsar Capital, which is backing Blue Tokai's international expansion.

"Chains expanded store count before proving unit economics. Investors today understand that India's per-capita coffee consumption is still in its early stages. They are reading past shutdowns as wrong execution, not wrong thesis," Narain said. The financials underlie



Consumers use cafes as workplaces, meeting points and all-day dining destinations, prompting chains to diversify. *REUTERS*

the challenge.

According to Tracxn, Hei-sette Beverages, the parent of Third Wave Coffee, accumulated losses of Rs 320 crore be-

tween FY21 and FY25, while its total assets stood at Rs 538 crore at the end of FY25. Muhava Enterprises, Blue Tokai's parent, reported accumulated losses of

Rs 175 crore over the same period, with assets of nearly Rs 370 crore. FY26 financials are not yet available.

NBC accumulated losses of nearly Rs 3 crore over FY24 and FY25 against total assets of Rs 18 crore. Mumbai-based premium chain Subko Coffee, with 16 outlets in India and one in Dubai, posted losses of Rs 45 crore over five years, while total assets stood at Rs 61 crore at the end of FY25. Third Wave Coffee said about 90% of its outlets are Ebitda-positive and expects to achieve company-wide break-even in FY27.

Blue Tokai, backed by Verlinvest, is targeting profitability by March 2028.

NBC declined to specify a profitability timeline but said it

has adopted a franchisee-invested, company-operated (FICO) model to reduce cash burn while retaining operational control. "FICO lets us expand quickly with franchisee capital while keeping operational control," said Ansh Jain, Co-founder and CEO, Nothing Before Coffee.

Industry observers say investor confidence has been strengthened by changing business models. Operators are increasingly moving away from large dine-in cafes towards compact grab-and-go outlets and cloud kitchens, sharply reducing capital expenditure and shortening payback periods.

"These formats materially cut capex per outlet and shrink payback timelines, making the

category venture-fundable rather than just a slow-and-steady, self-funded business," said Krishna Dev Pathak, investment banker and advisor to early-stage startups.

Lower capital requirements have strengthened unit economics, reinforcing investor confidence despite delayed company-level profitability.

Investors are also betting on a broader shift in consumer behaviour. Anuj Kejriwal, CEO and MD of Anarock Retail, said rising incomes, urbanisation and changing preferences are gradually moving India from "a tea economy to a coffee economy". The shift is widening the addressable market for organised coffee chains beyond the metros into smaller cities. FE

{ WEEKLY CAPSULE }

Vitamin A link to vision

A SURPRISING discovery is reshaping scientists' understanding of how humans develop sharp central vision before birth. Instead of blue cone cells migrating away from the retina's centre, a study by Johns Hopkins University found they transform into red and green cones under the influence of Vitamin A-related signals and thyroid hormones. The findings could improve lab-grown retinal tissue and lay the groundwork for future cell therapies to restore vision to age-related eye diseases. The centre of the retina is the first to fail in people with macular degeneration.



Nature's secret for cancer drugs

FOR YEARS, scientists have harnessed bacterial enzymes to create new drug variants through a process known as combinatorial biosynthesis. However, progress has been limited because researchers did not fully understand how the enzymes coordinate their work. Now scientists at the University of Warwick have identified how they do with one another to assemble a family of closely related anticancer compounds. That family includes Romidepsin (istodax), an FDA-approved treatment for certain blood cancers. This finding can also help develop a new strategy for designing future cancer therapies.



Deep sleep and growth hormone

RESARCHERS AT University of California, Berkeley, have identified the brain circuitry that links deep sleep with the release of growth hormone, revealing how the two regulate each other. This feedback loop explains why poor sleep can interfere with growth, muscle repair, fat metabolism and brain function. This could pave the way for new therapies for sleep disorders and diseases, including Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. Since the growth hormone helps regulate glucose and fat metabolism, consistent poor sleep may increase the risk of obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease.



Creatine may help fight cancer

CREATINE is widely known as a supplement used by athletes and bodybuilders to improve strength and performance. Now, new research from UCLA suggests it may have another surprising role: helping the immune system mount a stronger attack against cancer. Creatine boosts the activity of dendritic cells, specialised immune cells that detect tumours and activate the killer T cells responsible for destroying cancer. Many of today's cancer immunotherapies are designed to activate killer T cells, but only about 20 to 40 per cent of patients experience meaningful benefits.



A new weight-loss pill

A NEW, once-daily weight-loss pill called orforglipron delivered better weight loss and blood sugar improvements for people with Type 2 diabetes than the leading oral semaglutide in a major clinical trial. The tablet could offer a more convenient alternative to injectable drugs such as Ozempic and Wegovy because it doesn't require refrigeration or special timing with meals. It's also cheaper to manufacture, which could expand access globally. The participants who took orforglipron also lost more weight — an average of 6.1 kg-8.2 kg, compared with 5.3 kg in those taking semaglutide.



MAXIMS OF METABOLISM
BY DR ANOOP MISRA
CHAIRMAN, FORTIS C-DOC FOR DIABETES AND ALLIED SCIENCES

Weight-loss drugs: The promise, price and pitfalls

Latest evidence raises questions about quality of life and weight regain

THE ARRIVAL of modern anti-obesity medicines has transformed obesity treatment. For the first time, drugs such as semaglutide and tirzepatide can produce weight loss approaching 15–20 per cent in many patients — results previously achievable mainly with bariatric surgery. Millions of people living with obesity, Type 2 diabetes and related metabolic disorders now have genuine hope.

Two major systematic reviews, published recently in *The BMJ*, together provide, perhaps, the most balanced assessment yet of these medicines. One, published only a few days ago, involving nearly 1,00,000 participants across 262 clinical trials, confirms their impressive efficacy and cardiovascular benefits. The second, analysing 37 studies involving more than 9,300 participants, examines what happens after treatment is stopped. Together, they remind us that while these medicines represent a major therapeutic advance, obesity treatment cannot be judged by kilograms alone. For India, where obesity coexists with relatively low muscle mass and limited healthcare resources, the lessons are especially important.

One of the more surprising observations in *The BMJ* review is that despite substantial weight loss, improvements in quality of life were relatively modest. Across more than 45,000 participants, none of the available medicines produced improvements that met accepted thresholds for clinical significance on standard quality-of-life scales. This does not mean patients fail to benefit. It's just that losing weight does not automatically translate into proportional improvements in overall wellbeing for every patient.

An issue of crucial importance is muscle loss. The medicines producing the greatest fat loss also result in measurable reductions in lean body mass. Tirzepatide appears to produce greater reductions in lean mass than most other therapies, while semaglutide also results in significant muscle loss. However, preserving muscle is essential because it determines strength, mobility, metabolic health and healthy ageing. This concern assumes particular importance in India where people possess lower skeletal muscle mass and strength than many Western populations, even at similar body weights. Loss of muscle mass and strength (sarcopenia) is increasingly recognised among older adults and people with diabetes.

Reducing body weight without simultaneously protecting muscle may increase frailty, falls, disability and hospitalisation, particularly among older patients.

The answer is not to avoid these medicines but to prescribe them more intelligently. Every prescription should be accompanied by advice on adequate protein intake, regular resistance exercise and periodic assessment of muscle strength — not merely body weight.

Perhaps, the greatest challenge starts after successful weight loss. The second *BMJ* meta-analysis provides sobering evidence on what happens when treatment stops. Across 37 studies involving more than 9,300 participants, patients regained weight at an average rate of approximately 0.4 kg every month after discontinuing medication. Interestingly, those receiving semaglutide and tirzepatide regained weight even faster, with modelling indicating that most patients returned to their baseline body weight within 1.5–1.7 years. At the same time, improvements in blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol gradually disappeared, with most cardiometabolic benefits returning close to baseline within about 1.4 years.

This means obesity behaves much like hypertension or diabetes, a chronic, relapsing disease requiring long-term management rather than a short therapeutic course.

This raises uncomfortable questions. Can patients remain on these medicines for years? Will they continue injections indefinitely? Can healthcare systems afford lifelong treatment? More importantly, can individual patients?

These questions become even more relevant in India. Generic semaglutide is expected to substantially reduce treatment costs and improve access. Even then, long-term therapy is likely to remain expensive for large sections of the population. Cost-effectiveness, therefore, cannot be ignored while framing India's obesity strategy. India's obesity epidemic will not be solved by injections alone. Healthier food environment, greater physical activity and prevention beginning in childhood and better public awareness remain indispensable. Anti-obesity medicines should complement — not replace — these measures.

The true measure of success is not the maximum weight lost during treatment, but whether healthier weight, muscle strength and metabolic health can be maintained years later. For Indians, who face the dual burden of excess body fat and relatively low muscle mass, this balanced perspective may prove even more important.

A next-generation obesity drug is raising hope, and questions

A doctor went from 120 kg to 89 kg during a clinical trial for retatrutide. His experience tells of the promise and trade-offs in such a treatment

Anona Dutt

THIRTY-NINE-YEAR-OLD Kerala physician Dr Zubair Nabin K had been a chubby child who grew up to be an obese adult. Happiness for him was eating an extra portion of biryani or a pastry afterwards. Eating was never about nourishing the body, rather it was meant to turn a bad day around. Trapped in the cycle of dieting and overeating, his weight climbed to 120 kg. Being a doctor, he knew exactly what obesity could do to his health. He counselled patients about lifestyle diseases every day, yet found himself unable to break free from his own emotional relationship with food. "I had to turn myself around, there was no option," he says.

While he lost a good 10 kg by dieting and exercising, he needed something more to reach closer to the recommended weight for his height, given his family history of obesity. He decided to enrol himself in the trial for a new GLP-1 drug called retatrutide two years ago. The drug is not yet approved for use in patients.

"The weight-loss was phenomenal. While I did not reach the ideal weight of around 70 kg, it was the first time in more than a decade that I saw two digits on the weighing scale," says Dr Nabin. He had dropped to 89 kg. Before taking the drug, he would eat twice what a normal person his age did, predisposed as he was to a stronger appetite and a body that resisted weight loss. Afterwards, he could only nibble on his meals. He started choosing healthier options over fried snacks. "Giving up the biryani did not feel difficult," he says. The changes in his physique — all clothes started fitting him better, his waist size dropped from 44 inches to 36 inches — came with a change in personality as well. "I was bullied as a child, but post-trial, I felt confident. I was not overthinking."

What is retatrutide?

Retatrutide is an experimental weight-loss drug that has flagged the cosmetic products for containing mercury and lead beyond permissible limits and warned consumers against their use.

Although they can cause irreversible damage to the kidneys, brain and skin, questionable skin-lightening products continue to find millions of buyers through social media, influencers and online marketplaces.

Why is mercury added to fairness creams?

The answer lies in the chemistry of skin colour. Melanin, the pigment responsible for skin colour, also protects the skin from ultraviolet radiation. Mercury salts inhibit the enzyme involved in melanin produc-



In 80 weeks, patients on retatrutide 12mg dose lost 28.3 per cent of their body weight but it wasn't without side effect

GLP-1 drugs are incretin mimetics — they mimic the action of certain gut hormones by activating the receptors, helping control blood sugar and suppress appetite. They improve secretion of insulin, inhibit secretion of glucagon that stimulates glucose production in the liver, and reduce appetite by slowing down digestion. While semaglutide targets GLP-1 receptors, tirzepatide goes for GLP-1 along with GIP. Retatrutide has three targets — GLP-1, GIP, and glucagon.

In a Phase 3 clinical trial, at the 80-week mark, participants on the lowest 4 mg dose, lost 19 per cent of their body weight. Those on 9 mg lost 25.9 per cent, and those on the highest 12 mg dose lost 28.3 per cent of their body weight. This is among the largest weight reductions seen with an obesity medication so far. Some participants continued to lose weight beyond the end of the study, suggesting even greater reductions might be possible with longer treatment.

For comparison, semaglutide produces around 15 per cent average weight loss over about 68 weeks and tirzepatide around 20–21 per cent over 72 weeks.

Coming to terms with body image

This sudden, significant weight-loss, however, has had some undesirable social outcomes as well. While the weight loss boosted the doctor's confidence, looking into the mirror was still a challenge. "I could see that I had lost muscles. My shoulders and arms looked smaller. I felt like I was los-



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ing strength," says Dr Nabin, who was a part of the retatrutide trial at Jothydev's Diabetes and Research Centre in Kochi.

Dr Jothydev Kesavadev, chairman and managing director of the Centre, found that the sudden weight loss impacted the body image of all his trial patients in the initial days. He even presented a study at the recent American Diabetes Association, showing that people stopped using GLP-1 drugs not just because of side effects but also negative comments about their bodies. The study, though small involving 167 participants, reported how they received comments such as, "you have become too thin, this does not look healthy"; "are you not eating properly?"; "you look so old"; or "you looked better before."

The study recommended that people must look at actual health parameters rather than perceptions. They should track their blood glucose levels, blood pressure, cholesterol levels and inflammation levels.

"I know several people from my trial who started avoiding social events because people kept asking them whether they were okay, whether they were in good health. They understood that the people were asking them politely whether they had cancer. Most of them were obese at the start of the trial, so the weight-loss was very visible," says Dr Nabin.

While he did not do any strength training before starting on the drug, he started going to the gym to gain back lost muscle mass. Another patient lost more than 25 kg with the widely available GLP-1 drug tirze-

patide. He used to weigh 160 kg and was almost bed-bound. The weight loss has helped him move around. Now, the challenge is the extra skin on his abdomen that hangs like a flap and needs fixing through surgery.

Dr Kesavadev believes that with powerful drugs such as retatrutide, bariatric surgeries would be a thing of the past. "The other weight-loss drugs from this class can already replace nearly 70 per cent of bariatric procedures. With this drug, this proportion can increase to 95 per cent. Only those who cannot tolerate the drug or are unable to take it because of contra-indications would need surgeries," he says.

The battle with side-effects

Throughout Dr Nabin's two-year weight-loss journey, every shot of the drug was followed by a bout of diarrhoea. "Every week, after I took my shot, I knew what was about to come. A bad taste in my mouth was the indicator. While it has never been severe enough to warrant hospitalisation — some patients do need to be hospitalised to prevent dehydration with severe diarrhoea — it affected my work, compelling me to take leaves once or twice every month," he says.

Another side effect that Dr Nabin has learnt to live with is dysaesthesia — an unpleasant or abnormal sense of touch. "I have a tingling sensation whenever I wrap my mundu tightly around my waist. There is a sensitivity around my thighs, when I touch too," he says.

While most of the side-effects of retatrutide are similar to that of other GLP-1 drugs, including diarrhoea, the phase III trial of the drug showed dysaesthesia occurred in 5.1 per cent to 12.5 per cent of the participants.

Dr Kesavadev says several trial participants also reported this unpleasant sensation when there was some pressure on their skin. The theory is that this sensation is a result of the fat loss at the end of the nerves. "This usually happens in those on higher doses but we have seen it even in people on the lower dose. Gastrointestinal side effects like vomiting, diarrhoea and nausea happen with early dosing, dysaesthesia can happen at any time," he adds.

Now that the trial is over, Dr Nabin is on other GLP-1 drugs. "I have started gaining weight. Given my family history, I need medication for a longer period perhaps," he says. As newer drugs such as tirzepatide and experimental agents like retatrutide become available, long-term treatment options are likely to expand. "But none of them will work without the supportive pillars of diet, exercise, sleep and a lifestyle overhaul," adds Dr Kesavadev.

*Name changed to protect privacy

WATCH YOUR OTC BUY

How skin lightening creams damage kidneys and brain

If the mercury content is very high, kidney damage may begin within 10 to 12 days

Purnima Sah

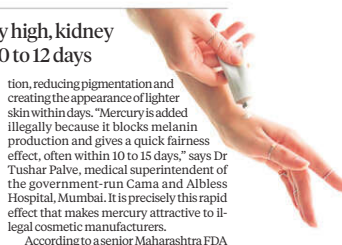
INDIA'S ENDURING obsession with fair skin has long fuelled a lucrative market for skin-lightening products. That's why unscrupulous manufacturers have ended up using heavy metals in unsafe amounts because these suppress melanin or the dark pigment, producing a lighter complexion. Some product makers have now been booked by the Maharashtra Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for safety violations.

The regulator has flagged over 100 cosmetic products for containing mercury and lead beyond permissible limits and warned consumers against their use.

Although they can cause irreversible damage to the kidneys, brain and skin, questionable skin-lightening products continue to find millions of buyers through social media, influencers and online marketplaces.

Why is mercury added to fairness creams?

The answer lies in the chemistry of skin colour. Melanin, the pigment responsible for skin colour, also protects the skin from ultraviolet radiation. Mercury salts inhibit the enzyme involved in melanin produc-



The goal should be healthier skin rather than lighter skin, say doctors

How does mercury affect your health?

Mercury accumulates in kidney tissue, gradually damaging its filtering units. What makes the problem particularly dangerous is that early kidney disease often produces few or no symptoms.

"If the mercury content is extremely high, kidney damage may begin within 10 to 12 days. Even if the quantity is lower, using such creams every day for a few months can

gradually damage the kidneys and other organs. Sometimes symptoms do not appear for years, so patients continue using the toxic cream. They may show signs only when they have reached the stage of requiring dialysis," says Dr Palve. He referred to a case in Nagpur where 18 women reportedly developed kidney disease linked to prolonged use of a cream. Mercury is a potent neurotoxin capable of affecting the brain and nervous system. So prolonged exposure may lead to tremors, memory loss, irritability, anxiety, depression, insomnia and poor concentration. In severe cases, it may also affect hearing and vision.

How does lead induce toxicity?

Unlike mercury, which has been deliberately used in some skin-lightening creams to inhibit melanin production, lead has no recognised skin-lightening function. Its presence in fairness creams is usually the result of contaminated raw materials, poor manufacturing practices or illegal production, making it a marker of unsafe cosmetics rather than an active ingredient.

"There is no safe level of lead exposure," Dr Palve says, noting that the combined exposure to mercury and lead increases the overall health risk. Lead accumulates in the body and can damage the brain and nervous system, kidneys, blood-forming organs (causing anaemia) and the reproductive system.

So, the damage begins with the skin?

Ironically, products marketed to improve appearance may first damage the skin they are meant to beautify. Mercury-containing creams may cause persistent rashes, acne, abnormal pigmentation, skin discoloration and increased sensitivity. Prolonged exposure may lead to the skin and make it more vulnerable to injury. "Persistent pigmentation should be evaluated by a dermatologist because different pigmentary disorders require different treatments. Daily sunscreen use, a proper diagnosis and evidence-based therapy are far safer than unsupervised use of potent depigmenting creams. The goal should always be healthy skin rather than lighter skin," says Dr Usha N. Khemani, associate professor in the Department of Dermatology at Grant Government Medical College and Sir J Group of Hospitals.

Her department OPD is seeing increasing numbers of young patients who have experienced with multiple cosmetic products before seeking medical care. "Teenagers, brides-to-be and regular social media users are among those most influenced by online beauty trends. By the time they come to us, their skin is damaged," she says.

What should consumers look for?

Consumers should ensure that the label carries complete manufacturer details, manufacturing and expiry dates, batch number and a full list of ingredients.

WHY ADILLE SUMARIWALLA

Former 100m national record holder and multiple-time national champion, Olympian Adille Sumariwalla, currently Vice President of World Athletics, has announced his candidature for the organisation's presidency, as the race to succeed British sports administrator Seb Coe gathers pace. One of the few Indian athletes to successfully transition into sports administration, Sumariwalla has driven reforms that have transformed Indian athletics while ensuring the country has a voice at the highest levels of global decision-making

'National records are being broken again and again. This shows we have bench strength'

Olympian and World Athletics Vice-President Adille Sumariwalla on preparing Indian athletes for the upcoming Asian Games, navigating the country's doping crisis and the debate about who makes a good sports administrator. The session was moderated by Nihal Koshie, Associate Editor, *The Indian Express*

Nihal Koshie: Over 25 national records have fallen in four months, unprecedented in such a short span. What is the reason?

After the Paris Olympics, we decentralised camps. Reliance, JSW and state governments such as Odisha and Tamil Nadu are bringing in foreign coaches. Keeping people in a national camp for 300 days, where they are away from home, was not ideal. We said, 'You train wherever you want, except the relays, which is a team event.' Competition has increased between the different training centres. The Neeraj Chopra effect has played an important part. Records are being broken over and over again in the same event. This shows there is bench strength. We also made it mandatory for an athlete to participate in at least two events before the final trial. This helped because Indian coaches have put into the minds of the athletes that they have to protect themselves, otherwise they will get injured. This is one of the biggest problems we have. They say, 'Protect yourself and win a gold medal at the Asian Games and get more money', but you may not get a medal at the Olympics.

ON DOPING AMONG JUNIOR ATHLETES

The parents and coaches of junior athletes are giving them these substances for greed and awards. I have been pushing for criminalisation of doping over the last seven years

Nihal Koshie: This is the year of the Commonwealth Games (CWG) and the Asian Games. Have Indian athletes peaked too early?

I can assure you that our athletes will peak and improve their performances at the Asian Games. Now, they are getting into the system of competing, as they do in Europe. They are still setting records now but, in my view, they haven't peaked. Time will tell whether I'm right or wrong.

Nihal Koshie: Shouldn't the focus be on CWG, given it is a tougher competition in track and field?

All the coaches we spoke to, including foreign coaches, felt that it would be impossible to peak now and peak again in September-October. Sadly, both come in the same year. We have to focus on the Asian Games. Again, the country needs medals. At the Commonwealth Games, most of our sports that are medal hopes are not happening. So, we have to send our athletics squad. If left to the think tank of the athletics federation, we would have just sent a token representation to the Commonwealth Games, focused on the Asian Games, and then prepared for the World Championships in 2027 and the Olympic Games in 2028.

Sandeep Dwivedi: You are in the running for the presidency of World Athletics. What is the one change you want to bring about, globally and in India?

I would definitely bring in a vision statement. There's lots that can be done. Africa is a completely different ballgame; South America is different; the islands of the Caribbean, Oceania and America are different. Currently, I am travelling and listening to people. Being a world organisation, we have to see how we can give equal opportunity to everybody. For India, development is key; like in kids athletics and we need more coaches and trainers. We have 650 districts, so any number of trainers is not sufficient. In India, we need to create an ecosystem; you need athletes, more coaches and qualified technical officials.

Sandeep Dwivedi: There have been interventions, even from the courts, that people who have only played the sport need to be administrators.

Just because you can run fast from point A to point B does not make you a good administrator. Being a good administrator also comes from your education, the work that you have done and your vision. A politician can be a good administrator. The Lodha Committee is wrong, the courts are wrong and the judges are wrong if they believe that being an athlete makes you a good administrator. Today, if I have to go into Mantralaya, I still have to stand outside and cut a *parchi* (token slip). When the AFI (Athletics Federation of India) president was a politician, I walked in with him to go and meet the Prime Minister of India without a *parchi*. So, are they useful? Yes, if they are used properly.

Mihir Vasava: You held the 100m national record for 15 years. Despite recent improvements, why do you think India's 100m record progression has been slow?

For a very long time, we didn't get 5'10", 5'11" sprinters. That was the problem. We had smaller sprinters. I don't think anybody took sprinters seriously. I was one of

those guys fighting for the sprinters. The Indian physique is more akin to middle- and long-distance running, jumps, and, in the case of some women, throws. No country, apart from the USA, is really good at all events.

Today, you have far better tracks and shoes, so there are opportunities. But if you look at the depth in Indian sprinting, my view is: Don't waste your time on individual events at the moment. Spend your time on the relays, like we did in the 400m. We could not win the individual 400m at the Asian Games in the last three, four or five editions. But we could win medals in the relay, including a lot of golds. At the moment, we have a damn good set of sprinters. Focus on the relay and we will slowly graduate into individual events.

Mihir Vasava: When you see these records being broken, what's your instinctive reaction? Are you happy, or are you praying the athlete doesn't test positive?

My reaction is, 'Finally, finally we are getting there.' All the hard work that was done for so many years is now showing results. To me, that's a relief.

Mihir Vasava: From an outsider's point of view, some people view these records with scepticism because of India's doping cases.

Total rubbish. We are number one in

doping? Yes. But look at the athletes breaking the records. Take the 100m guys, for example. They have been tested enough. They have never had a doping problem. Look at pole vault. Records have been broken three, four or five times between men and women. There has been no issue of doping. Look at long jump, high jump. No issue of doping. I'm not worried about my elite athletes training at notified centres. If somebody comes from nowhere and suddenly produces a performance, I would be sceptical. I'm definitely worried about the juniors because I have little control over them. They are training at different centres or at home with their personal coaches.

Mihir Vasava: Since you mentioned juniors, they might not fully understand what they are consuming or how to procure these drugs. Have you identified the source?

Yes and no. There are minors whose own parents are giving them these substances, and they have declared it during hearings. Parents do it for greed — for jobs, marks and admissions. Coaches do it for cash awards or the Dronacharya Award.

The sources? You can't do anything about the source because there was no criminalisation of doping. That's something I have been pushing for over the last seven years. Today, they have realised that what I was saying about criminalising

doping was right. Without law, there is not much you can do. People who distribute these substances or administer them, and especially those who give them to minors, should face criminal action. If it is done to minors, they can even be arrested under the Juvenile Justice Act.

Shivani Naik: Is there a way to incentivise not doping?

Today, with the new championship (Enhanced Games), dopers are being incentivised to go and run a championship where they are fully doped. One of the things we are looking at with the government is to say that if you have a cash award, you don't get your full money upfront. So, if you were going to get three crores, you would get it over the course of three years, one crore each year. And in the meantime, if you get caught for doping, the rest of your money is forfeited. I don't know whether it's an incentive or a disincentive, but we are looking at various things. To me, there are only two things. One is education and the other is a deterrent.

Shivani Naik: After several mistakes at World Relays with baton exchanges, what has been done to remedy this?

It was very, very disappointing at Botswana. We are doing whatever is needed to ensure it doesn't happen again. We have changed some things. After that,

our girls went and did well in Taiwan. These things will happen. It's a relay. USA has dropped the baton as many times as they won the relay. I am not saying that it is a good thing but these things do happen. We have made some changes in the technique and the coaching. A lot of them were overawed because they were running for the first time in a world event. When I talked to them one-on-one, they confided in me, saying, 'Sir, I got scared.' That is why we send them on these smaller trips to Taiwan and other places. There are not too many places where they can run relays. Now we have a national relays competition to get them into that whole thought process. We are creating that ecosystem so our athletes will get more attuned. And I can tell you today that at Los Angeles, if things go as planned, you may get a big surprise.

Amit Kamath: Have you noticed a pattern with certain training centres, coaches or states when it comes to doping?

Yes. There are centres in Haryana, like Sonapat and Panipat, for which we have already given intelligence. There are centres in Tamil Nadu. Some athletes suddenly come to a national, do fantastic timing and then disappear. We have given intelligence for that. There are athletes who travel internationally to avoid the anti-doping agency testers. There was a girl who ran a great 400 metres, she was

taken to meet the Prime Minister. We refused to make her run the relay at the Asian Games in 2018. She went to the chief coach and said, 'I will give you Rs 50 lakh, because if I win a relay gold, I will get Rs 3 crore from Haryana.' Finally, we got two golds without her in the women's 4x400m and the mixed relay. She then tested positive. We would have lost two golds at the Asian Games. You can imagine the pressure put on me to make her run not only from the government but also the media.

Nitin Sharma: Since the Tokyo Olympics, only two athletes have reached the Olympic final, with Neeraj Chopra winning the silver at the Paris Olympics. How do you see that?

You have to understand that far more athletes are qualifying for the Worlds or the Olympics. But there is a problem. They are qualifying at the bottom of the rung. When we start qualifying in the top-15, that's when our chances of running in the finals and winning medals will increase.

ON WHETHER SPORTSPEOPLE CAN RUN SPORT

Just because you can run fast from point A to point B doesn't make you a good administrator. Being a good administrator comes from your education, the work that you have done and your vision

British Raj: India is moving towards hosting big-ticket events. However, at the National Championships in Bhubaneswar, there were multiple technical glitches, including a missing hurdle in the women's heat and multiple false starts. How will such things be rectified?

I apologise on behalf of Athletics Federation of India (AFI). What happened in the hurdles was inexcusable. It was a human error and it shouldn't have happened. We issued a show-cause notice,

and action was taken. The false starts during sprints is something that is due to movement on the starting blocks. I think we need better training so that such things can be avoided.

Prithvi Raj: Carrying sports equipment is a big headache for athletes. Recently, Railways came up with a policy to relax the rules for sports equipment but has excluded poles used in pole vault from it.

AFI doesn't run railways or airlines. What we can do is to push the Sports Ministry to get a solution by talking with other stakeholders. These athletes were mistreated by the Railway officials for tying poles to trains, while we see multiple items carried similarly in trains every day. All we can do is to look for a common solution.

Sriram Veera: When you were a teenager, your father, for years, thought you were going to the library. Then, he read a newspaper that 'my son is the fastest man in the country...'

I got into engineering but chucked it up to do sports. This was in 1975-76; you only did what your parents told you to do. I was a good student. So for them to understand that I wanted to do sport was unthinkable. My mother cried for I don't know how long when I gave up engineering. She used to say, 'My son will beg on the streets to do sports.' My father said, 'You will have to leave home if you don't listen to me.' That is why I took a job with Tata, because that would get me a quarters to stay in if he threw me out of the house.

My passion was strong and I was determined. When something gets into my head, it is very difficult to take it out. Finally, my father was very proud, although, for a long time, he wouldn't admit it.

Sriram Veera: How long did this phase last?

Maybe 10 years or so. I was only allowed to live in the house. Apart from that, I never had anything. It was like a hotel room. I went to college, went to work, went for training. I studied, came home, put my clothes to wash. And got my mother to give me meals. But that is what was my driving force. Again, I don't have a single medal from Juniors because I always kept getting injured. My coach kept overtraining me. Even in the Seniors, I had a lot of injuries. But in the first year I came to the Seniors (level), I won the 100m and was unbeaten 11 times, until I retired.

Sriram Veera: Did you and your father ever make up?

There was no make up as such. My dad's friends used to tell me, 'Your father is very proud.' Later, he really respected me. And I did well for myself. I'm not begging on the streets (*laughs*). We became very close and I was by his side when he passed away in Devlali (Maharashtra).

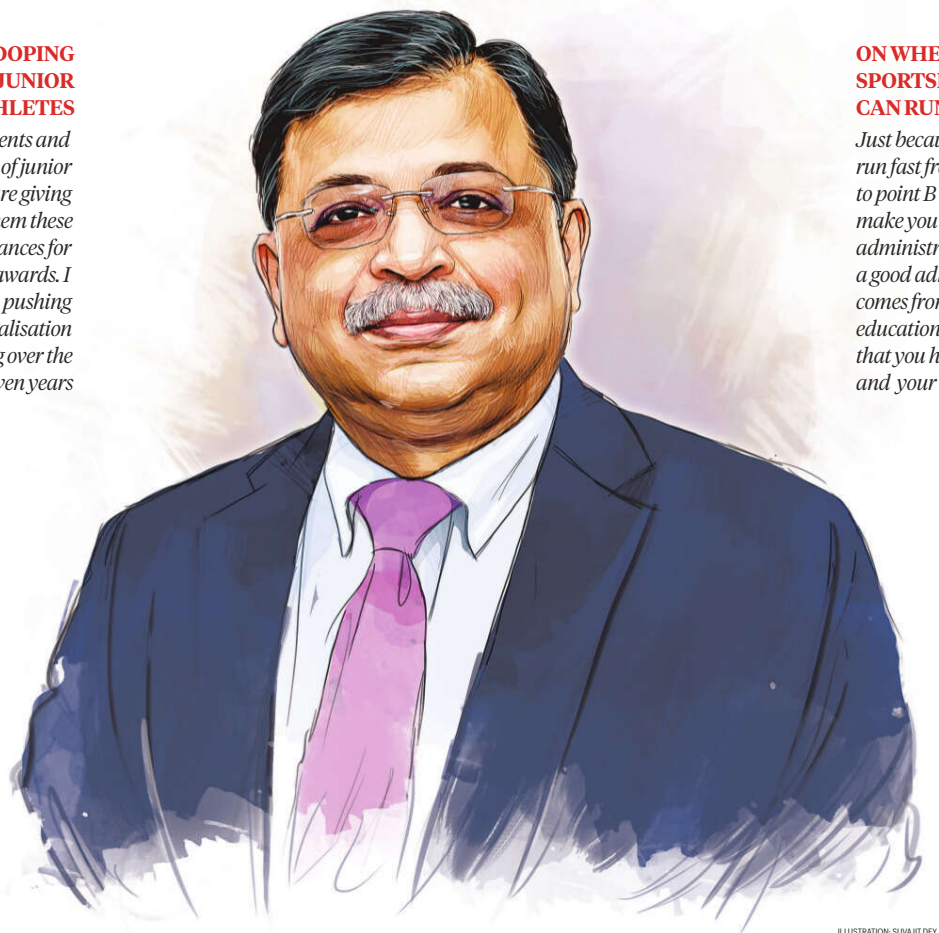


ILLUSTRATION: SUVAJIT DEY

Norway coach claims ball hit cable before England's goal

Express News Service
New Delhi, July 12

ENGLAND'S 2-1 victory over Norway at the FIFA World Cup was marred with controversy after the American broadcaster of the World Cup, Fox Sports, raised doubts over the ball hitting the wire of FIFA's Sky Cam in the build-up to England's equaliser. Norway were leading 1-0 in the FIFA World Cup quarter-final when Jude Bellingham scored an equaliser in the second minute of added time in the first half at Miami.

Fox Sports posted a clip of the sequence leading up to the goal, where it claimed that when Norway goalkeeper Orjan Nyland took his goal-kick the ball seemed to hit the thin wire of the FIFA Sky Cam, which is suspended over the stadium for an aerial overview of the game. The ball then fell to an England player, and a couple of passes later Bellingham scored England equaliser. Erling Haaland was among the players who was seen pointing at the sky after the goal, along with Nyland. Norway coach Stale Solbakken was also spotted having words with the referee Clement Turpin.



Trianda's sensor did not detect a touch from the wire, Reuters

After the game, in a response to social media post, Haaland's father Alf-Inge wrote on X: "Well done Bellingham and referee."

"The ball fell straight down from the sky, so it changed its direction," Solbakken said in his post-match press conference after Norway's 2-1 defeat after extra time. "It caused a mis-understanding among our players, and it was a bad moment for us. But we can't do anything about that. I don't think they will play the game again."

"But the ball drops down straight from heaven. Everyone said, including Orjan, who is the goalie, including the guy who's going to receive the ball. So I think it's pretty clear that it did it. It was a strange thing."

"I will not blame that," he said. "But everybody on the bench reacted spontaneously because the ball just fell down in front of them. So I don't think there's any doubt that it touched something. But unfortunately, we have to live with this. So we will talk about the wire until we are all dead. I hope we can think about and talk about other things. That's my sincere hope. I hope that this will not be the story about this team. It shouldn't be."

FIFA, on its part, tried to dismiss the controversy with a clip it posted on its social media.

"Before England's goal in minute 45+2 against Norway, the sensor in the Connected Ball showed no peak in the 'heart-beat of the ball' when in the air, and therefore no evidence that the ball touched the overhead wire and changed the movement of the ball," FIFA wrote along with the clip.

The maths nerd who solved Argentina's complex problem

Match tied 1-1 after regulation time, the 26-year-old's wonder strike in the 112th minute takes Argentina to the semifinals



Sandip G
Atlanta, July 12

IN SCHOOL, Julian Alvarez never missed his mathematics class. Whether he had a match the next day, or if he had returned from a long tournament, he never skipped the lessons of Luciana Alvarez in the tiny Argentine town of Calchin in Cordoba province. "He had a gift of solving problems, in his own ways, not always as it was in the textbook," she told Argentina outlet *Sports Pulse* last year.

In Kansas, Argentina had a problem. They couldn't beat the cursed red wall of Switzerland, fuelled by the perceived injustice of a red card brandished at their forward Breel Embolo, which distorted the game's equilibrium. Down to ten men, the Swiss fought a battle they were always doomed to lose. Yet they strove, taking the game as deep as possible, annoying Lionel Messi and his troops, who were yet again made to endure a range of vilifying emotions. Both teams were drained, emotionally and physically, before Alvarez found the perfect equation. Only eight minutes remained until the tiebreaker. The game was played on an endless and directionless loop in the Switzerland box.

Suddenly, Alvarez found the ball on his feet, from Magnus Forsberg's pass on the left side of the field. The box was a congregation of red shirts willing to shed blood and blue and white stripes who just wanted the match to end. Argentina would wish they could do without the heart-pounding drama, the hysterical fluctuations of fortune. Alvarez put an end to their labours of the days. He found himself in an unusual space. He eyes lit up, he took a couple of touches and let the ball rip to the top right corner from his right foot.

The improbability of the goal could be measured by the number of people inside the box. Five Argentines and eight Swiss plus the goalkeeper. How the ball flew uncashed and untouched to nestle in the nets is not a mystery, but a reflection of Alvarez's gifts. There was maths in the shot, the weight of the shot, it's made-to-measure angle, the revolutions, the curve and the parabola, and the drop.

Drag force, equation of motion, Magnus force he had ap-

plied all the principles maths and physics could teach. He could feel the gravitational pull too. When all his teammates chattered on him he plunged to the ground. Not every day does Messi plant a kiss on his forehead, as though handing over a legacy. Lautaro Martinez would embellish the goal tally. On cue, the crowd began to croon: "El que no salta es un ángel." The one who doesn't jump is an Englishman. The semifinal match-up with one of their historic rivals, England, cannot wait.

Foremost was how Alvarez tracked the ball's route amidst all the moving objects. The vision and clarity. A flatter shot would have bombed into the traffic, but the ball curled more, the goalkeeper would have saved it. Had the ball been hit more powerfully, it would have hooped over the bar and would not have swerved as it eventually did. The goal was poetic, yet scientific.

The 26-year-old is widely regarded as the brightest spark in the post-Messi era. In Qatar, he reinvigorated Argentina's frontline after the Saudi Arabia shudder, with his pressing, running on the wing, crossing, and overall involvement in the buildup. Yet, you wonder why Alvarez didn't make the next big leap, why he has "un-burdened" Messi from his scoring duties, why he and his colleagues wait for Messi to inspire. Messi has dotted them, like an elder brother in a family.

A match passed without Messi scoring, yet he wielded his clout. He assisted the first goal, Alexis Mac Allister's header from his corner. He had a right-footed shot bounce awkwardly in front of the goal; he created six chances, and four shots. The Swiss game, despite their numerical superiority was a grind. It was their second game in knockouts that stretched to extra time.

Argentina manager Lionel Scaloni confided after the game that they were lucky. "Today we suffered. We knew it was a difficult team, and they put us in real difficulty. We weren't able to get out of certain situations. The truth is luck was on our side today, because they had a player sent off and that's when the team pushed forward," he said.

The ouster of Embolo would be revisited. The incident occurred two minutes after Dan Ndoye scored the equaliser. The referee showed a yellow card to Leandro Paredes for a perceptively heavy challenge on Breel Embolo. But the VAR advised the



Julian Alvarez (C) celebrates his late winner against Switzerland with his teammates. AP

referee to watch the on-field monitor in what is called a check for "Mistaken Identity." Turned out that the referee had indeed brandished the card to the wrong player. Paredes was not only not relieved, but Embolo, who was already on a card, copped another yellow for simulation.

He heard the marching orders, amidst tearful protests. But adversity forged courage. Switzerland fought valiantly, hurling the bodies and stretching their mind's will to repel Argentina's relentless attack. They owed gratitude to Gregor Kobel, who was impenetrable like his predecessor Diego Benaglio, who pulled off stunning saves before being breached in the 118th minute in the round-of-16 clash between them in 2014. Angel di Maria was the saviour then; Alvarez was the hero in Kansas. In his hometown, Calchin, Alvarez would be a proud teacher.

Her student has scored a goal that conformed to the precepts of geometry. And a goal of rare symmetry and significance.



Julian Adams was 25 years old. AP

played his way into head coach Hugo Broos's plans.

On the flight home, teammate Zakhele Lepasa told him he should skip the local giants and move overseas instead. Adams stayed, and joined Ma-

• COMEBACK CONNOISSEURS

The lords of late goals keep on producing dramatic finales. Here's a look at some of Argentina's comebacks:

ARGENTINA 3-1 SWITZERLAND FROM 1-1 (QUARTER-FINAL)

10' ALEXIS MAC ALLISTER gives Argentina an early lead.

67' DAN NDOYE restores parity.

112' Reduced to 10 men in the 72nd minute, Switzerland defended heroically. Then comes the inevitable twist. Julian Alvarez curls a stunner into the top corner, past a flying Gregor Kobel, to give Argentina the lead.

121' LAUTARO MARTINEZ puts the tie to bed with a third.

ARGENTINA 3-2 EGYPT FROM 0-2 DOWN (ROUND OF 16)

15' The Pharaohs draw first blood, as Yasser Ibrahim powers a header past Emiliano Martinez to give Egypt the lead.

67' Mostafa Zico doubles his team's advantage, tucking home a Haisssem Hassan delivery.

92' Lisandro Martinez stonks for his earlier mistake, scoring from almost the exact spot where Messi had opened the scoring.

103' Sidney Lopes Cabral produces a moment of pure magic, curling a shot into the net which should be in the running for the goal of the tournament.

111' Like Switzerland, Cape Verde were also 10 minutes away from forcing a shootout, until Romero's glancing header struck centre-back Diney's arm and rolled into the net. Upset averted.

SHUVADITYA BOSE

79' Lifeline for Argentina. Lionel Messi's inch-perfect cross finds Cristian Romero unmarked, whose header is powerful enough to beat Mostafa Shobier.

83' Another cross from Messi dominates the headlines until now. Bellingham finally claimed the centre stage.

Bellingham's appeal extends beyond his brilliance on the pitch. Born to a white English father and a Black British mother of Ghanaian descent, he has emerged as an articulate, thoughtful voice on race and social issues while carrying himself with a composure rare for his age. The blend of talent, confidence and conscience has made him one of football's defining young personalities.

That personality surfaced again when the match drifted into extra time in the Miami microwave. Even 6,000-kcal-a-day Erling Haaland, Bellingham's close friend, was huffing after every sprint. Everyone craved a conclusion. Bellingham provided it, twisting his knee to steer home the winner and bend the contest to his will.

The goal propelled England into the semifinal and him into the rarefied space of an English great. Debates are non-existent -- Bellingham in 2026 has turned on the most definitive performance by an English footballer since Paul Gascoigne in 1990. The end, Bellingham would wish, won't be cruel.

The strike embodied his supreme intuition of a goal, but more than that, it revealed his force of personality, the raging but controlled fire that decides tournaments, the precise traits that England had longed for in their failed pursuits of the past.

"He is a leader," his former Real Madrid manager Carlo Ancelotti purred when he was barely 20. Another manager,

Lucien Favre, stressed his "playing intelligence." "The ability to not only foresee a move, but plan and execute it. With someone like Bellingham, I don't look at the date of birth. He has a feel for space," he said.

Space he saw, and space he made. The second one was the clincher, the one that would be remembered. But the first one was as consequential and unquestionably more aesthetic. Seconds before half-time, England's heads drooped. Tuchel looking battle-scarred.

Then, Anthony Gordon swept in a cross from the left, in the hope that someone would receive the ball. Bellingham glided in, just ahead of the scarlet red markers, and cushioned the ball with a delightful first touch near the edge of the box. He took brisk strides and, after spotting flying legs, swivelled away from the chasers and slashed his shot across the goal on the move, under Nyland's left leg.

The goal could not have been timelier. The pugnaacious Norwegians were buzzing after Andreas Schjelderup's swerving brute past a bemused Jordan Pickford, who withdrew his hands from the ball's path, presuming it would elude the post. It didn't, and England jittered. Decian Rice, substituted during the interval, suddenly looked ragged. The headline had expertly kept Erling Haaland on a leash left porous like a wall battered by a truck. England needed a hero, and Bellingham put on the heroic act.

It has been his World Cup, as much as it has been of Lionel Messi and Kylian Mbappe. He is clawing at their heels, with six goals in five outings. He is already England's third-highest goal-scorer in World Cups, and he has exhibited the virtues of fight and bravado that English football values more than delirious gifts but a soft heart, tragic flaws that have snapped the nerves of probably more gifted footballers from his country.

He dwelled on those in the post-match interactions: "Character... perseverance... even when things weren't working, we found a way to win." He was humble enough not to say "He found a way," which wouldn't have been an inaccurate self-appraisal either.

He was not just scoring goals, either. He induced three fouls, won seven duels, and was often the focal point of the English press that chained Haaland that England had longed for in their failed pursuits of the past.

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Cometh the crisis, cometh Bellingham



Jude Bellingham is the third player to score a brace in consecutive knockout games after Diego Maradona and Kylian Mbappe. AP

Sandip G
Atlanta, July 12

ARM SPREAD, eyes skywards, applause ringing in his ears, Jude Bellingham soaked in his glory, the exact moment when just another gifted footballer became a legend.

The 23-year-old's two goals led England to a 2-1 win over Norway, thus setting up a semifinal date with defending champions Argentina. After two hours of attritional football, Bellingham pulled at his shirt by the badge, stepped aside after his teammates mobbed and kissed him. He then raised his arms wide, soaking in the adulation. He was England's hero -- again. The inevitable talisman of a schizophrenic contest that swung both ways in spells, before he bent the script to his indefatigable genius.

England, like in past games, had looked broken, but they always had the unbroken spirit of Bellingham to lean on. And in a World Cup where Messi, Mbappe and Haaland had dominated the headlines until now, Bellingham finally claimed the centre stage.

Bellingham's appeal extends beyond his brilliance on the pitch. Born to a white English father and a Black British mother of Ghanaian descent, he has emerged as an articulate, thoughtful voice on race and social issues while carrying himself with a composure rare for his age. The blend of talent, confidence and conscience has made him one of football's defining young personalities.

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{ JAYDEN ADAMS • 2001-2026 }

Humble and Measured: How family and friends remember South Africa midfielder Adams

Sriram Veera
Mumbai, July 12

JAYDEN ADAMS talked to the way he played. Measured. Unhurried. Teammates and reporters both noticed it, a stillness in how he chose his words that thrived on the brevity of his passes; never rushed, always weighted for whoever was meant to receive them.

Adams was found dead on Saturday morning at a property in Schotsekloof, Cape Town. Police say officers responded to the scene shortly before 11am. Police have opened an inquest; the cause has not been confirmed, and sports minister Gayton McKenzie has asked the public to exercise restraint and compassion and refrain from speculation while the family and Adams club Mamel-

odi Sundowns are given space. That request has been honoured. What is known is a life that moved fast and stayed quiet about it.

Adams grew up in Idas Valley, Stellenbosch, the kind of neighbourhood where a football finds a child before anyone hands him one. His father Juanito told Soccer Laduma he used to set up matches in the backyard, pushing him to play up an age group or two. The first time the family gathered to watch him show off at three years old, Juanito said, he shed a tear to touch the ball; at five, he started properly.

His mother, Candice, said in the same interview that he shares her temperament: "Jayden is a very quiet person. [He] doesn't like to speak, he doesn't like the media and that

stuff. I guess I'm also like that." He signed with Stellenbosch FC's academy and, in August 2020, became the club's first academy graduate handed a professional contract, making his senior debut that same month as a substitute in a draw against Chippa United.

The nerves never fully left him. At the 2024 Africa Cup of Nations in Côte d'Ivoire, moments before a scheduled interview, he collapsed to the floor in front of a small group of waiting journalists, overwhelmed, needing water before he could speak.

The moment was recalled afterwards by veteran SABC sport journalist Velle Mnyandu, who was present there. It was the tournament where South Africa won bronze and Adams, then 22,



Jayden Adams was 25 years old. AP

played his way into head coach Hugo Broos's plans. On the flight home, teammate Zakhele Lepasa told him he should skip the local giants and move overseas instead. Adams stayed, and joined Ma-

squid. At his lowest point, he later told goal.com, he went to a teammate's room.

"I'm not gonna mention names," he said, and told him, "I will start every game." He went home to Cape Town after that, and has said he trained alone and sat with the disappointment rather than talk it away. He came back with his hair cut short and his game sharper, forced his way into a Champions League-winning Sundowns midfield, and earned his place back in Bafana Bafana in time for the 2026 World Cup. When Sundowns lifted the trophy in May, he dedicated his winner's medal to Oshwin Andries, a Stellenbosch teammate who had died after a stabbing in 2023.

He started South Africa's opening match, a defeat to co-

hosted Mexico, then started against Czechia and came off at half-time as Bafana Bafana fought back to a draw -- a substitution he later called, in comments to News24, a surprise at the time but ultimately the right call.

It was only afterward, McKenzie has since said, that it emerged Adams had taken the field that day carrying fresh grief. His grandmother, Marianna, had died only hours before kicking off. The minister recalled noticing how unusually quiet Adams seemed on the bench after coming off, not yet knowing why. Adams featured again off the bench, entering in the 80th minute, as South Africa beat South Korea to reach the knockout round for the first time in the country's World Cup history.

He was an unused substitute when Canada ended their run.

He was due back at Sundowns' pre-season camp in Austria within the week. Tributes have used the word 'humble' more than any other. His own mother had used it first, years earlier in a different sentence: a boy who didn't care for attention, who did things his own way and on his own time. "Death has cruelly stolen one of our own. It has robbed our nation of a remarkable footballer," the South African Football Players' Union posted on X.

"We will forever remember his humility, his extraordinary talent and the pride with which he represented South Africa. Rest in eternal peace, Jayden. You will never be forgotten."

Adams leaves a young daughter.

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Adams leaves a young daughter.

Muchova vows to keep chasing maiden Major



Karolina Muchova. REUTERS
Reuters
London, July 12

KAROLINA MUCHOVA said she will need a few days to overcome her second Grand Slam final defeat after going down to fellow Czech Linda Noskova in the Wimbledon title clash but the 29-year-old vowed to keep fighting for her maiden major title. Muchova saved five match points as she fought back from 5-2 down in the second set to stretch the match into a decider but she could not avoid a 6-2-5-7-6-3 defeat.

It was the second time she suffered heartbreak on one of tennis' biggest stages after losing to Iga Swiatek in the 2023 French Open final.

"I'll definitely take me few days (to overcome the loss). But again, I was in the final. It's still a great achievement. It's still something I'd take before the tournament," Muchova told reporters. "I think my game is good. I'm improving. So I feel good on the courts. Yeah, it's a dream of mine, it's a goal of mine to lift that Grand Slam trophy. This is a setback, but as well a motivation."

Muchova said she was determined to fight for her survival as she stood a point away from defeat, not once, but five times during the dramatic second set. "I think this tournament matters to me. I'm like, 'okay, I don't want to lose 6-2, 'okay, I'm going to do everything to break her serve and keep mine,'" Muchova added.

"I was still believing that I can turn it around. So that was in my head," Muchova arrived in the final having saved a match point in her semi-final duel against Coco Gauff, which went to three sets and ended in a gruelling match tiebreak that she won 12-10. "It was pretty tough match. I definitely felt it physically. I was a little more tired after that match with Coco," she said.

"I didn't want to think of it. I was like, 'okay, I'm going to beat it myself.' I think maybe that, definitely. The nerves, as well. I really wanted to win today."

"Maybe it tied my hands a little bit today from the start."

Describing Noskova as a "calm fighter" in the big moment, Muchova said her opponent proved too good on the day. "She'll go after every point, she'll fight for every point, so she's really competitive. It's definitely tough to play her on any surface," Muchova said after her loss.

ANATOMY OF A DISASTER

India's one-gear approach behind batting collapses

England tested the tendency of Indian batters to use the pace of the bowlers, while never adjusting to bounce

Venkata Krishna B
Chennai, July 12

SIX DEFEATS and a washout as Shreyas Iyer's first seven matches as captain, England put the last one beyond doubt in Southampton on Saturday, sweeping the series 4-0. Jos Buttler and Harry Brook added 233 for the second wicket, the highest second-wicket partnership in T20 history, and taking with it the world No. 1 T20 ranking India had held since 2022. The series is over. What it was actually testing, is not.

Two weeks ago, before a ball was bowled at Durham, the argument was that India's batting problem wasn't personnel, it was method. Built entirely around fast speed and boundary hitting, it asks one thing of a batter: commit early, trust the ball to arrive where it's supposed to. Extra bounce or seam movement punishes exactly that predetermined committing. Four matches later, the claim holds up, confirmed by a coach who has taught power-hitting technique for years, and by India's own captain, independently describing the same failure.

Refusal to adjust

Julian Wood, who has worked with T20 batters across several franchise leagues, watched the collapse and diagnosed a refusal to adjust, not a lack of skill. "The key thing playing over here is the bounce. In the IPL, the wickets are very flat, the boundaries are small and the ball sort of sits up waist height. Whereas over here, it is higher than that. One thing the

Indians are very good at, is they know how to use the pace, not fight the pace. The impression I got here was that they sort of tried to fight the pace."

He is specific about why England punished it. "Someone like Jofra (Archer), (Josh) Tongue, they hit the pitch hard, they run in and almost smash the ball into the pitch. On certain pitches, you can't play those cross-batted shots." The stats back it up: England's pace bowlers took 12 wickets across the five matches specifically by going short, not an isolated tactic but the plan, run again and again because it kept working.

This played out match by match. In Manchester, England introduced spin early to remove Vaibhav Soorayavanshi, who worked. He was stumped inside five overs, an over-eager charge down the pitch rather than a shot beaten by pace. "He used the pace, didn't fight against it," Woods says of the one occasion Soorayavanshi did find the adjustment, working a short ball to third man. "You can't criticise him, the experienced batsmen should have done this."

By Bristol, England had widened the trap. Abhishek Sharma and Shivam Dube fell to mis-hits off spin; Tilak Varma and Washington Sundar were both caught off slower-ball bouncers, pace taken off rather than added to. By Southampton, chasing 258, Sanju Samson discovered the same trap from a different angle: recalled to open, he went after Sam Curran's slower ball expecting more pace, and picked out a fielder.

It wasn't one method beat-



Indian batters took the aggressive route but that failed to yield any substantial returns. CREMAS

ing India. It was India's single-gear approach, their only method being tested by several weapons in turn, pace, spin, bounce, the absence of pace, and failing every one of them the same way. Curran nailed the bias after Manchester: "The batters are strong on leg side, Archer was not letting them play there," he said.

Wood calls it fighting the angle instead of going with it. "You set yourself up to hit the ball straight. If it's not right, you go with the angle." Bowler and coach, working independently, reached the same diagnosis.

Wood also has an example of what doing it right looks like, even though the player in question didn't feature this series: Rohit Sharma's pull shot, the technical answer to the exact problem those 12 dismissals describe. "He gets his hands up

very high, gets in good positions, extends his hands through the ball... he gets on top of the ball." Control, not equal force. "Him and Virat (Kohli) know exactly how to play. They've toured England before." The second gear -- this order hasn't built.

The numbers from Bristol show this isn't about India lacking gears entirely, only how narrowly those gears are shared. Iyer made an unbeaten 80 there, 44 of those runs off Adil Rashid alone, 27.85 percent of India's total scored off one bowler by one batter; off everyone else, just 36 from 33 balls. When the batting worked at all this series, it was one player finding that range while the rest kept swinging for the shot the IPL rewards and England had already taken away.

"Nobody's doubting their ability. Nobody's doubting their

talent," Woods says. "You've just got to be a bit smarter when it comes to playing overseas."

After Southampton, without prompting, without a coach's technical language, Iyer described the same problem in his own words, at the end of a tour with no matches left to prove it in. "We lost wickets in a cluster. We were going after the chase rather than building partnerships. We have to target bowlers, take time."

The same sentence, arrived at independently, from the dressing room. India shed one kind of caution in 2023 and became champions playing at only one speed. The question this series was actually asking, and the one the captain answered without being asked directly, is whether the side that built one ferocious gear has any idea yet how to find a second one.

Yastika's ton takes India closer to Lord's win

Shuvaditya Bose
New Delhi, July 12

INDIA WOMEN are in the touching distance of a famous win at Lord's in their first-ever appearance at the iconic venue. Going into the final day on Monday, Harmanpreet Kaur's team is four wickets away from beating England in the one-off Test as the bowlers continued their impressive run after another strong batting effort.

India's batters built relentlessly on the platform laid by their bowlers in the second innings, piling up 371 before finally ending England's misery by declaring. Yastika Bhatia was the centrepiece, becoming only the sixth Indian woman to score a Test century overseas. That innings, though, arrived with a bit of luck. Lauren Bell clipped the stumps with the very first delivery of the day, but the balls were adamant not to be uprooted.

While there was not much wrong about that delivery, there was barely anything right about the one which got her Smriti Mandhana's wicket in the next over. Straying down the leg side, it found an edge and Amy Jones behind the stumps. One wicket invited another. Four overs later, Bell produced an in-swinging beauty that pierced through Jemimah Rodrigues' drive.

It was then Sophie Ecclestone's time to dictate the proceedings. Harmanpreet became her first victim of the day, trapped leg before wicket. Before she could add another to her tally, however, Bhatia recorded her maiden Test hundred. It took her 145 deliveries to achieve the feat, and it took India 24 years to have a female Test centurion on English soil. In 2002, batting great Mithali Raj had scored 214 at Taunton, which was the then highest individual score in women's Test cricket.

Ecclestone broke the 52-run fifth-wicket stand in the immediate next over after Bhatia's century, when Deepthi Sharma misjudged the flight of the ball in her attempt to sweep it to the ropes. Bhatia, meanwhile, had shown remarkable restraint throughout her knock. Her first 157 deliveries did not yield a single six. On the 158th, she tried to change it in search of quick runs. The 25-year-old southpaw danced down the track against Ecclestone and offered a swing, but the ball achieved more vertical elevation than horizontal. Mady Villiers completed the catch at mid-off. Those entrusted with engraving names on the Lord's honours boards earned their wages on Sunday, as after Bhatia, the latest addition was Ecclestone, whose peachy Sneh Rana completely bamboozled and earned her a fourth Test flier. Being the last of the recognised batters, Richa Ghosh threw caution to the wind. Draping an invisible blue cape around her all-whites, she un-



Yastika Bhatia scored 113 to propel India to a big lead. AP

leashed her white-ball version, scoring an unbeaten 52-ball 50, hitting eight boundaries in the process. By the time Kaur called curtains on the onslaught, India had scored 341/7, with their lead being 456 runs.

England required a miracle to even survive. Kranti Gaud had other ideas.

With the very first ball of the innings, she uprooted Tammy Beaumont's stumps in what was the final innings of an outstanding international career. For a batter who has amassed 7,325 international runs, it was an anti-climactic farewell, but Beaumont's legacy will forever rest on the 14 centuries and 36 fifties, and not on this isolated duck. Sayali Satghare's inswinger opened Mady Bouchier's defence all ends up in the next over. Then came Sneha Rana, who needed only three deliveries to bowl Nat Sciver-Brent.

Another farewell followed soon after.

Heather Knight indisposed a Gaud inswinger onto her pads before Ghosh gathered safely at short leg. She departed for just 13, an insignificant number beside 320 -- the number of times Knight had represented her nation in international cricket, more than anyone in England's history.

Indian bowlers were unrelenting. Satghare found the stumps again, sending Alice Capsey back on this occasion. At the time, with England reeling at 59/5, it seemed a fourth day would not be necessary. Any James and Mady Villiers ensured the Test would enter the final day.

The pair constructed a 67-run partnership, before the resilience was finally broken by Rana. The day ended with England's score reading 130/6. India, the latest addition was Ecclestone, whose peachy Sneh Rana completely bamboozled and earned her a fourth Test flier. Being the last of the recognised batters, Richa Ghosh threw caution to the wind. Draping an invisible blue cape around her all-whites, she un-

BRIEF SCORES: INDIA 285 & 341/7 DECL (Yastika Bhatia 113; Ecclestone 5/118) vs ENGLAND 170 & 130/6 (Amy Jones 52 batting; Satghare 2/19).

Dravid, Flower in fray after McCullum quits Test job

Express News Service
New Delhi, July 12

THE ENGLAND and Wales Cricket Board on Sunday said that Brendon McCullum will step down as the head coach of the England Test team. He will, however, continue to lead the white ball teams, a release confirmed. "I've absolutely loved coaching the Test side and I'm incredibly proud of what we've achieved together. There've been some unbelievable highs and a few tough days along the way, but that's all part of taking on a challenge like this. It's been a privilege and an honour, and I'm grateful. Grateful to the players, the staff and the fans who supported us on the jour-

ney," McCullum said via the same release.

"Of course I'm gutted not to be continuing, but I respect the decision. My focus now is on going everything I've got to the White Ball teams and helping England keep moving forward. I wish the Test team nothing but success. There's a hell of a lot of talent in that dressing room and they're a special bunch of lads. I'll always be backing the boys, with a smile on my face, and hoping they keep taking the game on. I know they'll continue to make people proud," he added.

The announcement came two weeks after England's series loss to New Zealand -- its first defeat at home in a series of three Tests or more since 2012.



Brendon McCullum coached England for four years. REUTERS

That came on the heels of a 4-1 Ashes series loss down under in which the England team came under scrutiny for its perceived lack of professionalism.

England's next Test series is against Pakistan starting next month. McCullum has com-

bined his white and red ball roles since January 2025. England's T20 team has just thrashed India 4-0 in a home series to become the No.1 ranked side in the format.

Dravid, Flower in race

Indian gear Rahul Dravid has emerged as one of the contenders to succeed McCullum.

According to a report in The Daily Telegraph, Dravid features among a list of potential candidates including former England coach Andy Flower and ex-England spinner Richard Dawson.

The 53-year-old Dravid, who guided India to the 2024 T20 World Cup title, is seen as an attractive candidate because of

his "meticulous" approach and deep understanding of the game. "Dravid has no desire to coach full-time, but the England Test job would allow him extended periods at home and the chance to help keep alive his favourite format of the game. England, at the very least, should gauge his interest," according to the report.

Flower, England's most successful coach in the modern era, led the side to three Ashes series victories and the No.1 Test ranking. He also enjoyed considerable success in franchise cricket, including consecutive IPL titles with Royal Challengers Bengaluru.

(With PTI inputs)

WORLD BADMINTON CHAMPIONSHIPS 2026

Badminton needs young audience during Worlds

Shivani Naik
Mumbai, July 12

IT WAS Lin Dan's swagger at its best. He walked into a press conference once wearing a Shaquille O'Neal training-tee, and didn't know whose embossed face was grinning from his shirt. It was at Hyderabad in 2009 when he won his third World title, when India last hosted the World Championships. Dan would look utterly befuddled at the Shaq name, then look at his shirt, and then politely nod a nein and indicate he knew not who the man was. It might well have been Mickey Mouse or Fido Dido.

Super Dan had every reason to not know (or feign ignorance) about an American NBA star -- the Chinese superstar absolutely ruled his sport and lived in an insular, high-pressure cocoon where he was only halfway done with glory. It was perfectly possible that as an absolute superstar in China and in the middle of two Olympic titles in 2008 and 2012 in an Asian sport like badminton, he wasn't tuned into the life of a fading basketball legend. Shaq had in 2006, signed up with Chinese sports major, Li Ning, and found his happy mug on the shuttle legend's shirt. For Lin



India is set to host World Championships from 17th August. EXPRESS

Dan, Shaq was a shift change. What Hyderabad missed that Sunday evening where Chinese won 10 of the available 20 medals, including all four in women's doubles, and 3 of 4 in women's singles -- Delhi can do now as it hosts the 2026 edition next month. Take badminton from its predominantly East Asian cauldron, add the Indian tangy spice, and present it on an American diner menu scale -- fries on the side, a hot sauce and a money blighted India's annual SuperSeries Tour event.

The optics -- no matter how humorously waved away -- haunt the upcoming show. The capital's administration machinery -- Sports Ministry and SAI have taken over the World Championship venue to ensure there's no repeat, though executing it seamlessly will be the challenge.

Meanwhile, India has brought colour and splash, dance and music to the leadup. Meant to be wholly digitally driven, the visual identity (social media promo) was out and carried a few pointers. "There is a conscious effort to make badminton popular for Gen Z and Gen Alpha (those born between 2010 and 2024). In India, badminton following was mostly in the 35+ age group. So, even if it may be the second most popular watched sport in India after cricket, the perception, impressions were not there. We had to connect with younger fans," a BAI spokesperson said.

In other words, they were aiming for Gen Z/Jurassic: The 2.0 generation of badminton watchers. So, Insta consumption is considered a merit.

While the BWF came up with an elegant logo -- India Gate with a shuttle unfurling on top, and the silhouette akin to a flame. The 2D visual though adopted the Gen Z pink branding, with Delhi icons like Red Fort, Parliament Qutub Minar incorporated. The centerpiece was a Kathakali face that represent India's expressive eyes, watching the shuttle

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in a rally. Tabla and music accompaniments were created in-house, while the World Championship anthem will be released soon.

Speculated to be a rap song, with a promo video starring all the big names -- PV Sindhu, Satwik-Chirag, Lakshya Sen, Ayush and Treasa-Gayatri was shot over this weekend in Delhi. All indications are that the mascot could include the very Indian elephant or more likely a peacock with shuttle feathers. India fan merchandise is under production, though different fandoms are planning player-name jerseys inspired by football.

Badminton barely focuses on fans who tend to sit in darkened stands, but the surrounding food courts and concourses are expected to be fan zones in Delhi. However, all focus remains on how Indians perform. The likes of Satwik-Chirag, Sindhu, Ayush and Lakshya Sen will need to embrace the home pressure and ensure fans are pulled right until the Finals Sunday. Lin Dan had been indifferent to the broader contours of fame back in 2009. The current stars have all the follower counts and collabs. They need the gold now, before they can strut like a regal Indian peacock.

BRIEFLY



Anand Singh hurled the spear 80.57m to win the gold. AP

Anand wins javelin gold as India finishes with 16 medals

JAVELIN THROWER Anand Singh and the women's 4x400m relay team clinched a gold medal each as India ended their campaign on a strong note at the inaugural Asian U23 Athletics Championships on Sunday. Overall, the Indian team won 16 medals -- 3 gold, 4 silver and 9 bronze -- in the championships. On his way to winning the gold medal, Anand joined the 80m club. His brilliant gold winning throw of 80.57m, a personal best, was achieved

in his last attempt. Shivam Lokhare, the second Indian in the fray, won the bronze medal with a distance of 77.70m. The gold winning quartet of Shrawani Sachin Singh, Sandramol Sabu, Prayalika Narimala and Ananya Khattun clocked 3:33.62 seconds in the women's 4x400m relay. The men's 4x400m relay team also won a silver with a time of 3:04.24 sec as India finished with 16 medals at the inaugural event for the U23 athletes. PTI

India finish with one gold at ISSF Shotgun WC

THE INDIAN mixed trap teams endured a disappointing outing, finishing well down the standings as the contingent signed off from the ISSF Shotgun World Cup here with one gold medal. India's only gold came when Neeru Dhanwa won the women's trap individual gold medal with a score of 27 out of 30 in the eight-shooter final on Saturday. PTI

Recurve archers draw blank at WC Stage 4

INDIA'S RECURVE mixed pair of Dhiraj and Kirti Sharma squandered a promising 3-1 lead to miss out on the bronze medal, losing 3-5 to Italy at the Archery World Cup Stage 4 in Chiraj, the Antalya World Cup champion, it was a disappointing end to the campaign as he returned empty-handed from Madrid despite having won the recurve mixed team gold last month with Kumkum Mohod. PTI