



Government of Haryana

**Viksit Bharat – Viksit Haryana**

## Flagging-off of India's first Hydrogen Train between Jind and Sonipat

Fully indigenous and based on hydrogen fuel cell technology, in which the train runs on electricity generated from hydrogen and oxygen (drawn from air), emitting only water vapour

World's most powerful hydrogen train, with 3,200 horsepower

World's longest hydrogen train, with 10 coaches

World's highest passenger-capacity hydrogen train, with a capacity of 2,600 passengers

along with

## Dedication to the Nation and Foundation Stone Laying for Development Projects worth about ₹15,000 crore

### Delhi - Amritsar - Katra Expressway (Cost: approx. ₹9,700 crore)

- Delhi to Katra journey made easier - now takes just 6 hours instead of 14 hours
- Haryana's Jhajjar, Sonipat, Jind and Kaithal districts connected to the expressway

### Ambala - Kala Amb National Highway (Cost: approx. ₹1,200 crore)

- Stronger connectivity between Haryana and Himachal Pradesh
- Reduced transport time and logistics costs for industries
- Safer travel for the public, new momentum for trade

### Pandit Neki Ram Sharma Government Medical College

(Cost: approx. ₹600 crore)

- Bhiwani district hospital upgraded into a medical college
- 630-bedded hospital
- Classes begun following admission to 100 MBBS seats

### Jind - Gohana National Highway (Cost: approx. ₹1,600 crore)

- Jind-to-Gohana travel time reduced from 2 hours to just 40 minutes
- To help farmers reach agricultural produce markets more easily
- Better connectivity to Rohtak-Panipat-Delhi NCR

### Kurukshetra Elevated Railway Track (Cost: approx. ₹400 crore)

- Smoother traffic flow
- Five railway level crossings in highly populated areas removed
- Relief to public from traffic congestion

### Maharishi Chyawan Medical College (Cost: approx. ₹900 crore)

- Treatment capacity increased with a 650-bedded hospital
- Admissions to 100 MBBS seats
- OPD facility started

### Sikh Museum, Kurukshetra (Cost: approx. ₹160 crore)

- Inspiring younger generation with the heritage, life, and cultural significance of the Sikh Gurus

### Hansi - Barwala National Highway (Cost: approx. ₹140 crore)

- Better road connectivity between Hisar and Panchkula
- More economical agricultural production and local freight transport
- Boost to local employment and economic activity

by

**Sh. Narendra Modi**  
Prime Minister

**August Presence**

**Prof. Ashim Kumar Ghosh**  
Governor, Haryana

**Sh. Nayab Singh Saini**  
Chief Minister, Haryana

**Sh. Nitin Jairam Gadkari**  
Union Minister for Road Transport & Highways

**Sh. Ashwini Vaishnaw**  
Union Minister for Railways

Date: 17 July, 2026 | Time: 9:00 AM  
Venue:- HSVP Ground, Sector - 9, Jind, Haryana

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## STRIKES REACH OUTSKIRTS OF TEHRAN

# US expands attacks, Iran calls Hormuz a 'red line', retaliates

Associated Press  
Dubai, July 16

THE UNITED STATES intensified its strikes on Iran on Thursday, hitting targets farther north and firing into a ship the US accused of trying to break its naval blockade on the Islamic Republic. Iran retaliated by launching missiles and drones at US allies in the region, and warned its attacks may escalate.

Iranian officials say US strikes have killed more than 35 people and wounded over 300 others. For the first time in this latest round of violence, strikes also reached into areas around Iran's capital, Tehran, showing a widening set of targets for the Americans.

Col Ebrahim Zolfaghari, a spokesperson for the Iranian military, threatened that Iran could launch widespread attacks on "all the infrastructure in the region" if the US acts on President Donald Trump's repeated warnings that America could hit Iranian bridges and power plants. "Under no circumstances and in no way will we allow America, as a foreign and extra-regional country, to interfere in the Strait of Hormuz," he added. "This is Iran's inviolable red line."

The US strikes early Thursday hit around Tehran, state media reported. It also reported that American attacks targeted Semnan province, home to Iran's ballistic missile production and space program. Iranian media also reported strikes Thursday around the provinces of Hamadan, Hormozgan, Khuzestan, Lorestan, Markazi, and Sistan and Baluchistan, as well as on Iran's Qeshm island, near



A man waves an Iranian flag beneath a billboard reading, "Who is the next one?" an apparent reference to US President Donald Trump, in downtown Tehran on Thursday. REUTERS

## Be ready to 'shut' Red Sea gateway if US hits power network: Iran to Houthis

Dubai: Iran has asked Yemen's Houthi movement to stand ready to close the Red Sea air route if the United States strikes Iranian power infrastructure, three sources told Reuters on Thursday, posing a potent new threat to global energy supplies.

The idea has been discussed within the Islamic Republic's leadership, and the message has been conveyed to Iran's Houthi allies, two senior Iranian sources and a regional

source familiar with the matter said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The sources said the Houthis had been informed recently of Tehran's request, which has not been previously reported. They did not give further details on how it had been conveyed or whether it was after US President Donald Trump's threat to attack Iranian power infrastructure on Tuesday. REUTERS

the Strait of Hormuz.

On Wednesday, the US resumed striking Iran during daylight, further showing the increasing threat of the attacks. An attack on Greater Tumb Island targeted Iranian defense and missile sites, Central Command said. Greater Tumb Island is one of three small rocky

islands that sit at the confluence of the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz and have become a garrison for Iran.

The US military said it disabled a Curacao-flagged oil tanker as it sailed toward Iran's main oil export terminal, firing a missile after the ship "ignored multiple warnings."

## Over 500 feared dead as refugee boats go missing

### UN: Boats carried mostly Rohingya from Myanmar and camps in Bangladesh

Reuters  
July 16

TWO BOATS carrying more than 500 people may have capsized off Myanmar's coast in recent days, UN agencies said on Thursday, as refugees from the war-torn country make perilous maritime journeys in search of safety and better lives.

The two vessels left Myanmar's Rakhine State in late June carrying mostly ethnic minority Rohingya passengers, reportedly including

some from refugee camps in Bangladesh, the International Organization for Migration and the UN's refugee agency said in a joint statement, citing preliminary information. More than 500 were feared dead, it said.

"While the incidents and casualty figures have yet to be officially confirmed, UNHCR and IOM are gravely concerned by the potentially devastating loss of life."

Driven away by violence at home and desperate conditions in crowded refugee

camps in Bangladesh, Myanmar's long-persecuted Rohingya Muslim minority have for years risked their lives on flimsy wooden vessels, hoping to reach safety and the opportunity of livelihoods in countries like Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand.

Nearly 900 Rohingya refugees died or went missing in the Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal last year, making it the world's deadliest maritime route for refugees and migrants, according to the UN.

In the latest incidents, the first boat, with about 250 people on board, lost contact shortly after departure and a second vessel carrying

about 280 people was believed to have sunk off Myanmar's Irrawaddy coast on July 8, the UN agencies said.

"These journeys took place outside the regular sailing season, when maritime conditions are typically more hazardous," the statement said.

The Rohingya exodus from Rakhine started in 2017 after the Myanmar military launched an offensive in the border province, leading to at least 730,000 seeking shelter in neighbouring Bangladesh.

While Myanmar denies committing abuses against the Rohingya, it refuses to recognise them as citizens, claiming the minority group are illegal

immigrants. Their plight has been worsened by a 2021 military coup in Myanmar, which led to a widespread civil war that has included Rakhine, with its Rohingya population caught in the crossfire between government troops and the rebel Arakan Army.

UNHCR and IOM said nearly 300 people are reported to be missing or dead in the Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal this year, including Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi nationals.

In November, a boat carrying members of Rohingya community sank off Langkawi near the Thailand-Malaysia border, with about a dozen survivors.

## ousting of Fedorov, who tried to revitalise Ukraine's forces, sparks public anger

# Zelenskyy dismisses defence chief, triggers unrest; drone warfare deputy commander quits in protest

Reuters  
Kyiv, July 16

RARE PROTESTS erupted in Ukraine Thursday over dismissal of Defence Minister Mykhailo Fedorov as a dispute between the reformer and Kyiv's top general spilled into open during president's second overhaul of his wartime cabinet in a year.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy's reshuffle has fuelled public anger over his exclusion of Fedorov, a 35-year-old tech expert who has aimed to reshape Kyiv's out-manned army into a more efficient fighting force to take on Russia. On Thursday, Zelenskyy appointed acting security chief Yevhen Khmara as acting Defence Minister and asked Parliament to confirm him.

Hundreds of people took to the streets in the capital Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities to demand Fedorov be reappointed and a senior commander of Kyiv's air war resigned.

**Fedorov Vs Army Chief**

Speaking to reporters in Kyiv,

### • WHO IS MYKHAILO FEDOROV?

● A 35-year-old politician and technology reformer from Vasylivka in southern Ukraine, now under Russian occupation.

● The last minister to serve in every government formed by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy since 2019. Appointed defence minister in January 2026.

● Dismissed after six months amid reported tensions with military leadership and criticism over stalled conscription reforms.



Fedorov said he had declined an offer from Zelenskyy to serve as an adviser. In a scathing attack on military chief Oleksandr Syrskyy, Fedorov accused the general of blocking ministry initiatives.

He said he had agreed to make things work with Syrskyy after unsuccessfully petitioning Zelenskyy to replace him, but that Ukraine's top general had taken to deliberately undermining him behind the scenes.

"We hit a situation where all the initiatives we proposed were

blocked, and Syrskyy, considering all problems we discussed today, is not ready to look (me) in the eye and talk openly about the problems," Fedorov said.

He accused Syrskyy of presiding over a dysfunctional culture of lies, poorly organised units and lack of personal responsibility in the military.

Syrskyy, 60, has been in his post since early 2024 but has faced criticism for a rigid command style which some service members have said results in

high troop losses. In a statement, Syrskyy called for focusing on Ukraine's war effort and recalled his role in helping defend Kyiv from Russian forces in the first weeks of their 2022 invasion. "And now in this city, briefing can be held, visions can be developed, and decisions can be made," he said. "The president is not supposed to pick sides in this kind of situation during wartime," Zelenskyy said.

### Drone Warfare Leader Resigns

Pavlo Yelizarov, a deputy commander of Ukraine's air force and a key leader in drone warfare, said he was stepping down in response to Fedorov's dismissal — calling it "a great evil" for Ukraine's defense.

Ukraine is in its best battlefield position since late 2022, striking Russia's oil sector and military logistics in drone and missile attacks that have weakened Moscow's war machine. But Kyiv's forces still face Russian advances amid a critical shortage of ground troops.

## Kremlin says no peace talks possible now

Moscow: The Kremlin said Thursday there is no immediate prospect of resuming peace talks with Ukraine, though it said that Russia remains open to the idea of negotiations.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russia was appreciative of Turkey's willingness to help peace efforts, but no new talks were expected for now.

"We are well aware of our Turkish friends' readiness to continue facilitating a shift toward a peaceful resolution of the situation surrounding Ukraine," Peskov told reporters. "We are grateful to the Turkish side for this. At the moment, however, there are no immediate prospects for resuming the negotiation process; we do not see any such signs. Nevertheless, Russian side certainly remains open to this path."

REUTERS

## US revives rule to deny green cards to immigrants on public benefits

Associated Press  
Miami, July 16

THE TRUMP administration is reviving the rule that could deny green cards to immigrants who use public benefits that could include food stamps, Medicaid, housing vouchers and others.

The policy, known as "public charge," appeared on Thursday in the Federal Register and will be formally published on July 20. The policy was first imple-

mented in February 2020 as one of President Donald Trump's moves to limit legal immigration during his first administration, but it was reversed after Democratic President Joe Biden came to power.

Under the policy, applicants for green cards have to show they wouldn't be burdens to the country or "public charges." Its return comes when the Republican administration is implementing a headline policy to

curb both illegal and legal immigration, and when the cost of healthcare and food is rising.

The federal government "is reaffirming the requirement of self-reliance, protecting public resources and ending policies that encouraged dependency on the backs of hard-working American taxpayers," US Citizenship and Immigration Services said in a post published on its X account.

"Under President Trump,

USCIS is restoring the basic principle that immigrants must be able to support themselves," the post said. The agency said the rule will take effect on September 15. While the administration's crackdown on immigration has an increased focus on deportations and immigration enforcement in cities across country and at borders, it has taken action targeting legal immigrants and mixed status families.

Federal law already requires

those seeking permanent residency or legal status to demonstrate they will not become a public charge. The Trump administration's rule includes a broader range of programs that could disqualify them.

The Trump administration first promoted the rule in 2018 as a way to ensure that only those who were self-sufficient came to the US. Immigrant rights advocates criticized it, saying it amounted to a "wealth test."

## Former Italian motorway boss gets 12-year jail term over Genoa bridge tragedy

Genoa: An Italian court on Thursday sentenced former Atlantic CEO Giovanni Castellucci to 12 years in prison over the deadly 2018 collapse of a motorway bridge in the northwest port city of Genoa.

Atlantia was the controlling shareholder in motorway operator Autostrade per l'Italia at the time of the disaster which killed 43 people when their vehicles plunged from the flyover.

Relatives of the victims packed the court to hear the outcome of a case that has become a search for accountability for the disaster and a symbol of the slow pace of justice in complex Italian criminal proceedings.

Castellucci already in prison, serving a six-year sentence over another fatal incident in 2013 on a viaduct in southern Italy, was not in court to hear the verdict.

Fifty-seven individuals were on trial, including company executives, engineers and transport ministry officials. The most serious charges include multiple manslaughter and criminal negligence. REUTERS

### • BRIEFLY

#### ITALY

## Danny Boyle's Murdoch drama to open Venice Film Festival



Oscar-winning director Danny Boyle. FILE

OSCAR-WINNING director Danny Boyle's latest film, *Ink*, a drama about Rupert Murdoch's acquisition of British tabloid newspaper *The Sun*, will open the 2026 Venice Film Festival, organisers said on Thursday. The film, which stars Jack O'Connell, Guy Pearce and Claire Foy, will premiere in competition at the Sala Grande on the Lido. The 83rd edition of the festival will run from September 2 to 12, with line-up to be announced later July. REUTERS

#### INDONESIA

## 1 dead, 23 missing after passenger boat capsizes

ONE PERSON is dead and 23 are missing after a passenger boat sank on the way to an island in Indonesia, authorities said on Thursday. *KM Nura Safura* was carrying 70 passengers and crew, as well as cows, cattle and motorcycles, when the ship left the port in Jember Island on Wednesday morning, officials said. AP

#### PAKISTAN

## Suicide attack foiled in KPK, 4 militants killed

FOUR TTP militants were killed on Thursday after security officials thwarted a vehicle-borne suicide attack on a security post in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, police said. Personnel intercepted the explosives-laden vehicle before it could reach its target in the South Waziristan district's Wana town. PTI

### • MESSAGING FROM HEGSETH AND OTHERS BLENDS KNOWN SCIENCE ON THE HORMONE WITH BROADER, AND LESS SUBSTANTIATED, CLAIMS

# Hegseth rolls out testosterone screening programme for US military personnel

Konstantin Toropin  
& Matthew Perrone  
Washington, July 16

US DEFENCE Secretary Pete Hegseth announced Wednesday that he is rolling out a new screening program for "testosterone deficiency" among troops, calling it necessary to allow them to operate at their "absolute best."

The screenings will be conducted annually for all active service members' required medical screenings for those 30 and older, he said.

Troops under 30 can volunteer to be tested. In a video on social media, Hegseth said receiving testosterone replacement

therapy would be voluntary.

In the video, Hegseth simply refers to troops, though it appears he is talking about only testing men in uniform for hormone irregularities.

The move comes as other Trump administration officials have begun to advocate for men to have easier access to testosterone replacement therapies, but the messaging from Hegseth and others blends known science on the hormone with broader, and less substantiated, claims.

When asked what conditions Hegseth was looking to address with the new policy, the Pentagon referred to Hegseth's remarks in the video that men-

tioned keeping troops "strong, resilient and capable" and the rigors of the modern battlefield demand "maximum psychological and mental readiness."

Over the past several years, special operations troops — and specifically Navy SEALs — have come under scrutiny for their use of testosterone and similar substances to enhance performance.

The death of a SEAL recruit during training in 2022 led to discovery of substances in his possession, including testosterone, and revealed far more rampant drug use among the elite program than was previously acknowledged.

A year after the recruit's



US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth lifts weights as he interacts with troops at the US naval base at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. REUTERS

death, the Navy said it would begin a drug-testing program to screen for "any hormonal substance, chemically or pharma-

cologically related to testosterone, that promotes muscle growth." Hegseth said his new initiative is "not about artificial

enhancement."

The Pentagon did not respond to questions about what research or academic studies underpinned the move. It also didn't say if female troops would be able to be evaluated for estrogen-based therapy as they entered perimenopause.

Testosterone levels in men decline naturally with age and have long been linked to issues like erectile dysfunction, low libido, mood changes and weight gain. But experts have debated for years how to diagnose those problems and whether they should be treated by replacing the hormone.

Hegseth's announcement comes as Health Secretary Ro-

bert F Kennedy Jr and other Trump administration officials are moving to make it easier for doctors to prescribe testosterone. Last month, the Food and Drug Administration proposed easing prescribing limits on testosterone gels, pills, patches and injections.

The current FDA label specifies that medications are only for men with hypogonadism, a medical condition that causes drastically low testosterone. But many influencers and proponents of Kennedy's "Make America Healthy Again" movement tout testosterone as a way to look younger, build muscle and stay mentally sharp — although those uses aren't ac-

cepted by most medical experts.

Still, recent studies have bolstered the case for testosterone's benefits, for certain conditions, while allaying worries about its safety — particularly concerns about heart safety.

Last year, the FDA removed a boxed warning about possible risks of heart attack and stroke from the drugs.

Separately, a series of studies by the National Institutes of Health in older men found that taking testosterone improved erectile dysfunction, libido and other sexual measures and had small effect on mood. But there was little or no improvement in measures like fatigue, memory or overall well-being. AP

FRIDAY, JULY 17, 2026

# The Indian EXPRESS

JOURNALISM of COURAGE

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## EXPRESS special

## Vessels to and from India among top applicants for Hormuz passage

Three-week data from June 17 shows 40% of vessels seeking to cross Hormuz were to or from India and China

Sukalp Sharma  
New Delhi, July 16

MERCHANT VESSELS to and from India were among the top applicants for passage through the Iran-recommended routes to cross the Strait of Hormuz in the three weeks following the June 17 US-Iran peace MoU, as per Iranian data.

According to Persian Gulf Strait Authority (PGSA), set up by Iran to regulate the flow of maritime traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, over 200 non-Iranian vessels coordinated with it to receive passage permits and insurance coverage during the three-week period.

Among the transit requests to exit the Persian Gulf received by the Islamic Republic's PGSA

## Transit requests

| Origin/destination | West-bound | East-bound |
|--------------------|------------|------------|
| India              | 21%        | 20%        |
| China              | 19%        | 21%        |
| Other Asia         | 20%        | 29%        |
| Intra-region       | 24%        | 22%        |
| Other World        | 16%        | 8%         |

East-bound requests by destination  
West-bound requests by origin



SOURCE: PERSIAN GULF STRAIT AUTHORITY

set up recently by Tehran, those bound for India had a 20% share, second only to China's 21%.

•CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



## Two dead in Puri Rath Yatra

Devotees surround an ambulance during the annual Rath Yatra in Odisha's Puri, Thursday. At least two persons died and several others sustained injuries following a crowd surge. AP

REPORT, PAGE 14

## US latest on immigration: Shrink visa duration for students, media

Shubhajit Roy  
New Delhi, July 16

IN A move that is expected to impact a large number of US-bound Indians, the Donald Trump administration on Thursday moved to tighten the visa duration for foreign students, journalists and cultural exchange visitors.

According to a US government notice, the new final rule from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) creates a fixed time period for F visas for

international students, J visas that allow visitors on cultural exchange programmes to work in the US, and I visas for members of the media. Currently, these visas are available for the duration of the programme or employment in the US.

Under the new regulations, the student and exchange visa periods would be no longer than four years. The visa for journalists — which currently can last years — would be for up

•CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## E. EXPLAINED

## New roadblock

US President Donald Trump has kicked off a wide-ranging immigration crackdown since taking office — revoking student visas over ideological views and stripping legal status from migrants. The latest move will create new hurdles for students, exchange workers and journalists.

## ACTIVIST ON HUNGER STRIKE SINCE JUNE 28

## Govt doctors must monitor Wangchuk health, directs HC

Life of any citizen is precious, notes court; SG says no objection to order

Sohini Ghosh  
New Delhi, July 16

THE DELHI High Court has directed the Centre to ensure daily monitoring of the health of activist Sonam Wangchuk by government doctors, and to "intervene immediately" if required. "The life of any citizen is precious," the court said on Thursday.

Wangchuk has been on a hunger strike at Jantar Mantar since June 28 as part of the protest organised by the activist platform Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) to demand the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over NEET-UG question paper leak.

Advocate R K Saini had petitioned the High Court alleging that the government was treating Wangchuk like a "terrorist", and seemed "apathetic" to the situation. The petitioner sought the court's direction to the government to provide "full, proper and necessary aid" to

•CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal with activist Sonam Wangchuk at the protest site in Jantar Mantar, Thursday. TASHI TORJIAN

## From AAP to Congress, SP to NC, Opp parties rally behind activist

Express News Service  
New Delhi, July 16

AS ACTIVIST Sonam Wangchuk's hunger strike demanding the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan entered its 19th day on Thursday, the Opposition rallied behind him, with Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener and former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal joining Wang-

chuk at Delhi's Jantar Mantar. After maintaining a measured silence on the protest organised by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), the Congress too weighed in, appealing to Wangchuk to end his hunger strike and saying that it shares his "anguish and outrage" on the lack of accountability in the BJP-led Union government. Other Opposition leaders such

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NCP REUNION: TATKARE SIGNALS BALL IN SHARAD PAWAR'S COURT

CBSE 3-LANGUAGE POLICY FOR CLASS 9: SC JUDGE VOICES CONCERN

## Happening today

• PM NARENDRA Modi will flag off India's first Hydrogen-powered train between Jind and Sonapat.

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Business as Usual  
By EP UNNY



The caterer to any party at any resort can surely deliver a glass of fruit juice to Jantar Mantar.

## INSIDE

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ELECTRIC TRUCKS FOR LAST-MILE DELIVERY: DELHI WINTER PLAN

• SPAIN HAVE CLINICAL FORWARDS, STRONG DEFENCE; ARGENTINA CAN'T BE DEFEATED UNTIL WHISTLE BLOWN

## For many in Spain team, meeting Messi in final is a dream — and a nightmare

EXPRESS AT WORLD CUP  
Sandip G  
Atlanta, July 16

LIONEL MESSI smiled when asked about meeting Spain in the final of the World Cup on Sunday. "I have faced many of them, and I still follow them. Several of them play for Barcelona, a club I love and continue to follow."

For nearly 15 years, Messi was the heartbeat of Barcelona, its philosophy distilled into a

## BCCI panel takes call, Lord's ODI may be Rohit Sharma's last for India

Devendra Pandey  
Mumbai, July 16

THE THIRD and final ODI against England at Lord's on July 19 could be Rohit Sharma's last match for India. The BCCI's senior selection committee is learnt to have informed him that they have decided to "move on" from him after the England series.

The panel is learnt to have spoken to Sharma, along with



Rohit Sharma was removed as the ODI captain last year. ANI

coach Gautam Gambhir, last week.

According to sources, the selection committee wants to give youngsters like Yashasvi Jaiswal, who has been waiting in the wings, a chance, and has made it clear that it doesn't see a role for Sharma in the 2027 50-over World Cup.

"The selectors have informed Rohit that he does not figure in their scheme of things

•CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## Nepal protests have a new Gen Z face, this time in anti-Balen Shah govt camp

Yubraj Ghimire  
Kathmandu, July 16

A 25-YEAR-old who died of self-immolation on July 10 is emerging as the face of the discontent against the Balendra Shah government, which swept to power less than four months ago on the strength of Gen Z support. Anticipating that ongoing protests over Ganesh Nepali's death and other issues may mount, the ongoing Parliament Session was adjourned.



25-year-old Ganesh Nepali died of self-immolation on July 10.

Ganesh set himself on fire in an altercation with police after the Kathmandu Metropolitan Council clamped the wheels of

his motorcycle for allegedly blocking passage at a complex of the Department of Passports, suffering 60% burns.

Ganesh was a rider with a ride-sharing app, and the motorcycle his means of making a living. This fanned protests already underway by disparate groups over the Shah government's alleged highhandedness, including the dissolution of trade unions and student organisations, pushing through

•CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

॥ श्री ॥

## Om Shanti

Jai Maharaja Agrasen  
Jai Gau Mata

In Loving Memory of

### SHRI NAND KISHORE JI GOENKA

Life Partner - Late Smt. Tara Devi Ji

**Shanti Baithak (Daily)**

10 am to 1 pm  
4 pm to 7 pm

Venue: Goenka Seva Sadan,  
Devi Bhawan Mandir Parisar,  
Hisar

**Rasam Pagri**  
(26th July 2026)

3 pm to 4 pm

Venue: Maharaja Agrasen Bhawan,  
Old Government College Ground,  
Hisar

**Sons**

Subhash Chandra - Sushila  
Laxmi Narayan - Sulochana  
Jawahar Lal - Sushila  
Ashok - Kaveeta

**Daughters**

Kusum - Late Ramesh Rawalwasia  
Urmil - Ashok Gupta  
Mohini - Deepak Gupta

Entire Goenka Family



# Delhi's winter pollution plan: For last-mile delivery in city, cargo from diesel trucks to be transferred to EVs

Five logistics hubs around NCR to serve as freight interchange points

Sophiya Mathew  
New Delhi, July 16

THOUSANDS OF diesel trucks are stopped at Delhi's borders every winter when pollution curbs under the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) kick in, prohibiting their entry. Now, a proposed network of five multimodal logistics hubs around the National Capital Region (NCR) could allow their cargo to continue its journey.

These hubs would serve as freight interchange points outside Delhi, where long-haul diesel trucks from neighbouring states would transfer their trailers or cargo to electric trucks for the final leg into the capital, *The Indian Express* has learnt. The plan aims to reduce freight emissions while improving logistics efficiency.

Proposed under the Centre's National Highways for EV (NHEV), a PPP initiative, they are planned at Sonapat, Faridabad, Ghaziabad, Greater Noida

and Gurgaon. In the initial phase, it aims to shift nearly half of the long-haul freight entering Delhi to the hub-and-spoke model. Abhishek Sinha, Project Director at NHEV told *The Indian Express*, "The long-term objective is for diesel trucks to stop at the city's edge, with only zero-emission freight vehicles entering Delhi."

Officials said the phased approach addresses a recurring problem logistics operators face during severe air pollution episodes. Under Stage IV of GRAP, entry of diesel medium and heavy goods vehicles is restricted, except for those carrying essential commodities or meeting specified exemptions. This often leaves loaded trucks stranded outside the city and disrupts supply chains. The proposal comes amid growing concern over emissions from interstate freight traffic. A June study by IIT Delhi, TERI and the Air Pollution Action Group (APAG) said nearly 17,000

heavy-duty trucks enter Delhi every day, making them one of the Capital's biggest yet least-addressed sources of transport pollution. While accounting for only a fraction of vehicles on the road, these trucks contribute about 23% of transport-sector Particulate Matter (PM) 2.5 emissions, with their impact rising sharply at night when most are allowed to enter the city.

## Freight interchange

Each hub is proposed to be spread over around six to eight acres, including a core operational area of about five acres and additional space for truck parking. The first phase would involve land acquisition, construction of logistics infrastructure, and installation of charging stations for electric commercial vehicles, with operations expected to begin within the next 18 months. According to project officials, land parcels are currently being identified and earmarked for the facilities.

Officials associated with the project said the challenge is to secure the periphery and ensure no polluting truck enters Delhi through arterial roads. To



fix this, electronic enforcement systems are also being planned along these routes to ensure

Site assessment for hub being carried out at Hapur on Delhi-Lucknow highway. CREDIT: NHEV

that trucks required to use the freight hubs do not bypass them and enter Delhi directly. Unlike conventional transshipment facilities, the proposed model is centred on a trailer-exchange system. This means a diesel tractor unit arriving at a logistics hub would detach its trailer, which would then be coupled to an electric tractor for onward movement at Delhi. Since trailers follow standard dimensions and

coupling systems, they can be handled by tractor units from different manufacturers, such as Ashok Leyland or Tata Motors, without opening the container, officials said.

In cases where the consignee requires cargo to be segregated or delivered in smaller loads, the container can be opened at the logistics hub. These would be segregated and sorted according to destination and loaded onto smaller electric commercial vehicles, such as five-or-six-tonne trucks, for last-mile deliveries, officials said. The project is currently in the planning stage, with officials expecting to submit the proposal to the government in October. This will be followed by a pilot in November to test both the operational and commercial aspects of the model, including trailer interchange, electronic enforcement and the pay-per-use pricing mechanism before wider implementation.

Project documents describe the facilities as integrated freight and energy hubs rather than standalone EV charging stations. Besides supporting trailer interchange and freight

consolidation, the hubs are expected to provide charging infrastructure for electric commercial vehicles, warehousing and logistics support, digital fleet management and other ancillary services.

Site selection is underway along major freight corridors leading to the capital. Earlier this month, officials from the NHEV Greenways project and the National Highways for EV Working Group, along with representatives of logistics company CJ Darc Logistics Ltd, carried out a site assessment at Hapur on the Delhi-Lucknow highway to evaluate its suitability for a future multimodal logistics hub serving freight movement into the NCR.

## Impact on pollution

As per the June study, 16,900 heavy-duty trucks enter Delhi each day, releasing an estimated 52 kg of PM 2.5, three tonnes of nitrogen oxides (NOx) and 2.5 tonnes of carbon monoxide (CO) daily. Older pre-BIS VI trucks, despite accounting for just 38 per cent of truck entries, contribute 62 per cent of PM 2.5 emissions from inter-

state freight, besides 87% of NOx and 95% of CO emissions.

Their impact is far greater during the night, when nearly three-fourths of interstate trucks enter the city because of entry restrictions. Between 10 pm and 7 am, heavy-duty trucks account for nearly 61 per cent of transport-related PM 2.5 emissions, with pollution concentrations further aggravated by lower atmospheric mixing heights during these hours.

The report had recommended establishing Urban Consolidation Centres at the city's periphery where freight from long-haul trucks can be transferred to cleaner vehicles such as electric or CNG trucks for last-mile distribution. It had also recommended deploying automated Weigh-in-Motion payload sensors along with AI-enabled ANPR cameras at toll plazas to improve enforcement, identify overloaded vehicles and ensure compliance with freight regulations. According to project officials, the proposed multimodal hubs are intended to complement such measures by creating an alternative freight ecosystem.

## DRIVE FOR 14-YEAR-OLD GIRLS

# New target for Health Dept: 1.49 lakh HPV vaccinations in 100 days

Vidheesha Kuntamalla  
New Delhi, July 16

MORE THAN four months after India launched its nationwide Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination programme for 14-year-old girls, Delhi has administered roughly 13,500 vaccine doses, prompting the state government to launch a renewed push in schools with an ambitious target of vaccinating 1.49 lakh girls over the next 100 days, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

Officials said the fresh target comes after the Health department reviewed the campaign's progress following its initial 90 days and concluded that deeper engagement with schools would be critical to accelerating coverage. "We decided to re-approach the Education department for its full cooperation at the school level. We are giving this initiative a renewed push since schools have now opened up after summer vacation. We aim to achieve 1.49 lakh vaccinations in 100 days," a Health department official said.

India rolled out its national HPV vaccination programme in February 2025 to protect 14-year-old girls against cervical cancer, aiming to vaccinate nearly 1.15 crore girls annually.

Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer among women in India and remains one of the country's leading causes of cancer-related deaths among women.

While Delhi's coverage has steadily risen from around 11,000 doses reported in May to approximately 13,500 now, officials acknowledged that prog-

## HPV VACCINATION NUMBERS

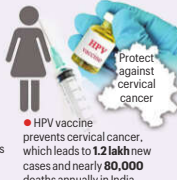
**13,500 GIRLS**

vaccinated in Delhi since the drive began on February 28.

**Target:** 1.49 lakh vaccinations across Delhi in next 100 days.

● Campaign intensified in schools after reopening following summer vacation.

● Doctors, principals and DDEs mobilised to boost awareness and parental consent.



ress has been slower than anticipated, largely because schools were occupied with examinations before closing for the summer vacation.

"We had first written to the Education department in March seeking its cooperation in spreading awareness about the drive. But soon, examinations started in schools and then summer vacation began, creating a gap of nearly over a month. That is why the progress slowed," the official said.

With schools reopening, the Health department has once again reached out to Education authorities, holding both virtual and in-person meetings with deputy directors of education (DDEs) across districts as well as school principals.

"We are personally and virtually interacting with each DDE in every zone and with principals to push the programme. Doctors from our department are visiting schools on the ground to spread awareness about HPV and the vaccine," the official said.

The department has also intensified its communication campaign to counter vaccine hesitancy, which officials continue to identify as one of the programme's biggest challenges. "We are circulating videos explaining the benefits of the vaccine and myth-busting misinformation. Many people have fears, so we are sharing videos of senior doctors explaining why people should not believe rumours," the official said.

The campaign will focus heavily on government schools, with health officials expecting classroom-based awareness sessions, counselling of parents and coordinated efforts between teachers and healthcare workers to improve vaccine uptake over the next three months.

Officials are also using testimonials from women who received HPV vaccines years ago to reassure parents. "We are showing videos of women and their success stories. Many who received the vaccine in 2009 have now given birth and are healthy," the official said.

## Ghaziabad man shoots father dead over property dispute

The deceased owned around 75 bighas of ancestral land, says family friend

Drishti Jain  
Ghaziabad, July 16

A 52-YEAR-OLD farmer was allegedly shot dead by his 32-year-old son following a dispute over ancestral property in Ghaziabad's Modinagar late Wednesday, police said.

Assistant Commissioner of Police (Modinagar) Bhaskar Verma said Hari Om was shot dead at his residence and died at

the scene. Police have registered a case of murder under Section 103(1) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) against Nikhil, his son, who is absconding.

Hari Om owned around 75 bighas of ancestral land, a family friend told *The Indian Express*.

"The family also owned three shops along the Delhi-Meerut Expressway that had been rented out. One of the



Nikhil, the accused on the run

shops was rented for car repair work and the money used to go to Nikhil," the friend added.

In her complaint to the police, Hari Om's wife Meenakshi

(48) alleged that there had been a long-standing dispute between her husband and son over land.

According to police, preliminary investigation suggests that Nikhil had returned home allegedly under the influence of alcohol.

"Around 11 pm on Wednesday, an argument broke out between the two. My son, enraged, opened fire on my husband," Meenakshi said in her complaint, adding that after hearing the gunshots, she reached the spot and saw Nikhil holding a pistol.

"He fired three bullets in front of me, after which my husband fell to the ground. Nikhil then fled."

Police said Hari Om sustained four bullet injuries—two to the face, one to the chest, and one near the genital area. He was declared dead at the hospital.

According to the family friend, Nikhil had also opened fire on his younger brother in 2018. "But the matter was settled. Nikhil had developed a habit of drinking," he added. Three police teams have been formed to trace him, ACP Verma said.

## ACB busts extortion racket operating out of Delhi prisons, 6 jail wardens, asst superintendent among 11 arrested

Express News Service  
New Delhi, July 16

THE ANTI-CORRUPTION Branch (ACB) of the Delhi government said on Thursday that it has busted an alleged extortion and bribery racket operating inside the prisons of the Capital, leading to the arrest of 11 people, including an Assistant Superintendent, six jail wardens, and two advocates.

Joint Commissioner of Police (ACB) Vikramjit Singh said the investigation had revealed "a well-organised criminal syndicate" allegedly involving jail officials, inmates, and advocates who worked together to extort money from the families of undertrial prisoners in return for illegal favours.

The ACB said the accused allegedly took bribes for ensuring the safety of the undertrial prisoners, and giving them preferential treatment.

The case originated from a complaint received on February

**ACB said accused allegedly took bribes for ensuring the safety of the undertrial prisoners, and giving them preferential treatment**

9 in which the complainant alleged that he was being forced to pay money to ensure the safety and comfort of his father and brother, both lodged as undertrial prisoners in a Rohini jail.

The FIR was registered and ACB laid a trap, said officers. Six accused were arrested.

They were Dinesh Dabas, Pankaj Kumar and Ravi Kumar, wardens posted at Rohini Jail; Jogender, head warden at Thakur Jail; advocate Manish and Ashish Rana, a Delhi resident. The agency said it recovered an alleged bribe amount of Rs 11 lakh.

The investigation subse-

quently expanded, with the ACB analysing bank accounts, financial transactions, mobile phone records and digital evidence, according to officers.

Investigators alleged that money collected through extortion was routed through bank accounts before being withdrawn in cash and distributed among syndicate members.

Based on the evidence collected during the investigation, the ACB arrested five more accused—Sunil Kumar, an Assistant Superintendent posted at Rohini Jail; Yogesh and Jagbir, both wardens at Rohini Jail; advocate Harendra Bansal from Baghpat, Uttar Pradesh; and Viplove Khari, a Delhi resident.

Officers said the investigation is continuing to identify other members of the alleged syndicate, trace the complete money trail and establish the full extent of the conspiracy.

No response from the accused or their legal representatives was available.



## Chariot Festival

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh pulls the chariot during the Rath Yatra at Shri Jagannath Mandir Thasyraj Nagar, in New Delhi on Thursday. TASHI TOBYAL

## Rs 700-CRORE MEDICAL SUPPLIES FRAUD

# Key accused flees India, had got anticipatory bail in extortion case days earlier

Nirbhay Thakur & Pragynesh  
New Delhi, July 16

RAJIV RANGILA, a key accused in the Rs 700 crore medical supplies procurement fraud case being probed by the Delhi Anti Corruption Branch (ACB), secured anticipatory bail in an extortion case days before allegedly fleeing India, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

A pharmaceutical trader, as per the ACB, Rangila is a key conspirator in the case pertaining to medical procurement fraud within the Delhi Health department.

On June 30, he was granted anticipatory bail in a case of

personal enmity lodged in East Delhi's Laxmi Nagar police station for offences of voluntarily causing hurt, wrongfully restraining, and criminal intimidation. Days later, according to ACB sources, he allegedly fled the country.

The extortion case pertained to allegations that Rangila and his family called the complainant to their house and wrongfully confined and assaulted him. It was also alleged that the mobile phone, car keys and wallet of the complainant were taken by the accused.

The Investigating Officer (IO) had submitted during court proceedings before a Prevention Judge that offences pun-

ishable under sections 127 and 308 (4) (wrongful confinement and extortion) of the BNS were added in the offence.

While the IO opposed Rangila's pre-arrest bail plea citing that "extortion" charge had been added to the case, the officer opted not to file a reply to Rangila's application seeking protection from arrest.

"...considering that the maximum punishment for which the accused are facing the investigation in the present FIR is punishable up to three years imprisonment only and only allegation of offence punishable under Section 302 (2) of BNS, 2023 (theft) is punishable up to three years in non bail-

able-and other allegations are bailable in nature, the court is of the considered view that... (this) entitles the accused/applicant the protection of anticipatory bail." Vacation Judge (Additional Sessions Judge) Ravindra Kumar Pan of Karkardooma Court said in his order on June 30.

The Judge added, "...the same is also maximum punishable up to seven years and further no record has been produced to show that the allegation of offence punishable under Section 127/308 (4) of BNS, 2023 were added or attracted in the facts and circumstances of the case."

As per the ACB's sub-

missions before a Delhi court, Rangila had multiple cases against him. His role in the medical supplies fraud case pertained to allegedly creating fake companies and firms using fictitious owners. He also allegedly colluded with manufacturers of medical equipment to fix supply rates and the kickbacks that were to be paid back in cash.

Police said Rangila had two cases registered against him in Laxmi Nagar police station. Officers, however, said that the extortion case didn't involve any medical equipment sale as such. It was related to personal enmity and non-payment of some dues, which the other party had "labelled" as extortion.

"These are rumours that he had a similar sale and purchase of medical equipment going on in Laxmi Nagar," a senior officer said.

The primary accused in the alleged Rs 700 crore medical procurement fraud include former Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) chief Dr Vatsala Aggarwal, former Central Procurement Agency (CPA) Deputy Controller of Accounts Neeraj Chopra and Dr Vinod Kumar Ranga, the former Head of Office CPA. They had all been arrested by the ACB last month and are currently in judicial custody.

The case began with a Vigilance Department complaint

that was converted into an FIR on June 2, and revolves around widespread irregularities, manipulated tenders, and the siphoning of public funds meant for medicines, surgical items, and hospital equipment. The first arrest in the case came on June 18, almost two weeks before Rangila allegedly fled.

After the ACB served multiple notices to him and he failed to appear before it, raids and searches were launched across Delhi-NCR and Uttarakhand to locate him. Over eight places, including a small Lakhshmi Nagar shop, were searched during raids on July 2. When the ACB reached his house, they found that it was locked. Rangila

has multiple properties, including a farmhouse in Karnal and one property in Rishikesh, the ACB claimed.

The alleged irregularities in the 700 crore procurement fraud first came to light in May this year when the Vigilance Department conducted raids after receiving complaints at the offices of the CPA, which is the nodal agency responsible for procuring and supplying medicines, vaccines and medical equipment to Delhi government hospitals and healthcare facilities. Tenders specifications and terms were allegedly drafted to favour chosen firms and fake companies were put on records to create confusion.

## FUNDING TO BE RELEASED IN PHASES

## Seed funding of up to Rs 10L for students in new start-up policy

Gayathri Mani  
New Delhi, July 16

IN WHAT has been pitched as a first-of-its kind move on a large scale, students studying in government schools and government-funded colleges and institutions in the Capital will be eligible for seed funding of up to Rs 10 lakh to launch their entrepreneurial ventures under the Start-Up and Incubation policy approved by the Delhi government, officials said on Thursday.

"Our government will invest Rs 400 crore in the policy over the next five years. The policy is aimed to help people launch start-ups, but to transform Delhi's youth from job seekers into job creators," Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said.

The CM said the policy will be implemented across 11 state universities, 13 government-funded colleges, polytechnic institutes, and Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and Delhi government schools.

She added that the policy aims to build a strong innovation ecosystem across the educational institutions of the Capital. The alumni of Delhi government schools will also be eligible to secure seed funding under this policy.

Education Minister Ashish Sood said, "This policy is not for general public...the aim is to help students develop and incubate their ideas at an early level, so that by the time they pass out from schools and college, they become job providers...by handing students the tools, from idea stage to developing prototype till they take patent for their innovation."

Industries Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa underlined that the student-focused policy promotes "Rs 10 lakh fund in different stages of their projects growth."

## Incubation centres, annual fairs

As per officials, this will be a first-of-its kind policy focused

## Key highlights

- To be implemented in 11 state universities, 13 government-aided colleges, ITIs and polytechnic institutions
- Only for students, not general public, says government

₹ 400 cr

Total budget allocation

₹ 40 cr

Budget allocation for incubation centres

on students with the Delhi government investing on a large-scale.

Under the policy, officials added, the government also plans to strengthen incubation centres in schools and colleges. Besides, new incubation centres will be set up at the colleges and school campuses to nurture ideas among students and help them execute it.

The CM said the government will provide one-time financial assistance to eligible institutions for setting up and strengthening incubation centres.

In addition, these centres will receive annual operational support for mentoring, networking, innovation activities and the overall development of the start-up ecosystem.

"Start-ups associated with these incubation centres will receive financial assistance at different stages of their growth. The support will cover various phases, including prototype development, proof of concept, product development, market validation and commercialisation, enabling promising ideas to grow into successful enterprises," she said.

Incubation centres will provide young entrepreneurs with modern infrastructure, expert mentoring, business advisory services, intellectual property support, access to laboratories and testing facilities, as well as opportunities to connect with investors and industry, the Chief

Minister said.

Under the policy, the government will also organise an Annual 'Delhi Start-up Youth Festival' to bring together young innovators, educational institutions, start-ups, investors, industry representatives and policymakers on a common platform to showcase new ideas, build partnerships and inspire entrepreneurship among the youth.

Further, a State Incubation Policy Monitoring Committee (SIPMC) will be set up comprising members from government, educational institutions and industry, to oversee the implementation of the policy.

## Govt attacks AAP

The previous AAP government had also floated a start-up policy but it never took off. However, it implemented Business Blasters scheme in schools for students in 2021 under which students studying in Class XI and XII were to be given Rs 2,000 to start their businesses under Entrepreneurship Mind-set Curriculum.

Later, the AAP government announced in the 2024-25 Budget that this scheme will be expanded to universities and ITIs and allocated Rs 15 crore.

Attacking the previous government, however, Education Minister Sood said, "As per the records and files that we have seen, the previous AAP government did nothing but publicity. Its scheme started in 2021 and ended in 2022. The entire budget allocated for the project was Rs 22 crore, whereas our budget for this policy is Rs 400 crore. It is a full-fledged policy that aims to develop and nurture young minds and their ideas, and help them become future business leaders and entrepreneurs."

He added that students can draw inspiration for innovative ideas related to new age technologies such as Artificial Intelligence and drones will be welcome and the government will support them.

## Govt plans to rope in hotel chains to operate and maintain Kejriwal's former Civil Lines bungalow

Gayathri Mani  
New Delhi, July 16

MOVING FORWARD with its plan to develop former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's official residence at 6, Flagstaff Road, as a state guest house-cum-cultural centre, the Delhi Government has asked the Public Works Department (PWD) to explore plans to rope in top hotel chains to operate and maintain the property, which the BJP had dubbed as 'Sheesh Mahal'.

Officials said the PWD has also been asked to complete the unfinished camp office located next to the bungalow located in Civil Lines.

"The previous AAP government was building a two-storey building as a camp office. The broad structure has been constructed but after a Vigilance inquiry was initiated into the alleged irregularities in relation to the renovation of the former CM's residence, the work remained incomplete," a senior official said.

"Interior works like painting and electrical works, among others, are pending...The PWD



The 6, Flagstaff Road bungalow in New Delhi. FILE

now has been asked to complete the work so that it can be used to host people and hold conferences or meetings as part of the state guest house plan," the official added.

PWD Minister Parvesh Sahib Singh said that instead of handing over the bungalow to any corporation, the government is exploring options to partner with top hotel and hospitality chains that can professionally manage and run the property.

Maintaining that project will help the government generate

revenue, he said, "The PWD has been directed to come up with a plan. Discussions are going on to rope in professional players, so that it can be developed and managed professionally."

"The main residence (bungalow) does not require that much work but the other one (camp office) requires interior work... Also, there are plans to build a conference room, a boarding facility, a restaurant or a cafeteria where visitors from here and abroad can stay and have food...they can also participate in events..."

The final approval to this proposal is yet to be given by higher authorities, the minister said.

Like other state guest houses, the bungalow will be used to house travelling ministers and officials for a fee. According to officials, while international delegates will visit occasionally, the rest of the time, the bungalow could be used as a bed and breakfast facility.

They added that once developed as a state guest house-cum-cultural centre, the bungalow will have rooms for guests, a conference hall, meeting spaces, and an auditorium in which cultural and artistic programmes, exhibitions and official ceremonies can be held.

The incomplete camp office, meanwhile, is coming up on a plot measuring 1,500 square yard. According to information shared by the government earlier in the Delhi Assembly, about Rs 25 crore has been spent on it before the work was stopped. The camp office was allegedly estimated to cost around Rs 60 crore, said an official.

Kejriwal and his family had

lived in the Civil Lines bungalow for almost a decade since 2015.

In 2022, the Delhi Vigilance department had initiated an inquiry on the case of alleged 'irregularities and cost escalation in renovation of the house' by PWD in the revamp of the existing house.

The BJP had dubbed it the 'Sheesh Mahal' to mock the alleged luxurious and controversial renovations to the bungalow. During the 2025 election campaign, it had displayed miniature replicas of the bungalow at its rallies and public meetings.

The renovation of the premises led to its built-up area increasing by more than a third - from 1,397 sq m to 1,905 sq m - and the PWD had revised its preliminary estimates of the cost of renovation four times.

A report by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) put the cost of the renovation at Rs 33.66 crore, more than 340% higher than estimated. Of this, Rs 18.88 crore was spent on "superior specifications, artistic, antique and ornamental" items, the CAG had said.

## Skywatch



Forecast: July 17, 2026

Partly cloudy sky. Hot and humid conditions.

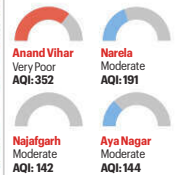
MAX: 38-40

4.8°C above normal

MIN: 28-30

0.8°C above normal

## AQI Tracker



- Good (0-50)
- Satisfactory (51-100)
- Moderate (101-200)
- Poor (201-300)
- Very Poor (301-400)
- Severe (401-500)



## Day 19 of Sonam Wangchuk hunger strike

Samajwadi Party PM Dipendra Yadav interacts with climate activist Sonam Wangchuk during his hunger strike at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on Thursday. Cockroach Janata Party founder Abhishek Dipke, SP MLA Ragini Sonkar and others can also be seen. PTI

## Muslim man assault case: After SC rap, Noida Police invokes hate crime charges

Vineet Bhalia  
New Delhi, July 16

ACTING ON Supreme Court's directions, the Noida Police has filed a supplementary charge-sheet invoking hate crime charges against five men accused of assaulting and robbing a 62-year-old Muslim man in 2021.

During a hearing on July 14, Additional Solicitor General K M Nataraj informed a bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sanjeev Mehta that the investigating officer's report has been forwarded to the state government for prosecution sanction. The court granted the Uttar Pradesh government four weeks to secure this approval.

The supplementary charge-sheet invokes sections 153B, which punishes imputations prejudicial to national integration, and 295A that criminalises deliberate acts intended to outrage religious feelings, of the Indian Penal Code.

It details the statement of Kazeem Ahmad Sherwani, who testified during investigation that he was offered a search for ride to Aligarh from Noida on July 4, 2021. Once inside the car, the accused allegedly locked the doors and beat him.

According to Sherwani, the attackers called him a "mulla", repeatedly pulled his beard, removed his skull cap and slapped him naked. The driver allegedly told an accomplice to "gouge out this Mulla's eyes" with a screwdriver, which struck Sherwani's nose, before they robbed him of Rs 1,200.

The inclusion of these charges marks a reversal for the police. Although the alleged attack took place in July 2021, the police initially did not register a first information report (FIR). This prompted Sherwani to approach the Supreme Court.

## HC lawyers call off strike over jurisdiction concerns

Sohini Ghosh  
New Delhi, July 16

THE DELHI High Court Bar Association (DHCBAR) on Thursday suspended its call for abstention from work even as several lawyers, predominantly practicing intellectual property (IP) law, continued to flag concerns over the proposed encroachment of the pecuniary jurisdiction of Delhi's district courts from the present Rs 2 crore to Rs 10 crore.

Pecuniary jurisdiction refers to the limit on the authority of a court to hear a case based on the monetary value of the matter in dispute. It ensures that a court that is lower in a hierarchy of courts cannot take up a case involving a property of value exceeding a specified ceiling or cap.

Lawyers from the High Court had abstained from appearing before courts for three consecutive days since July 14. The thaw in the abstention from work comes after the members of the association met Union Law Minister Anuram Singh on Thursday. The DHCBAR was also called upon and assured by Chief Justice DK Upadhyaya that their concerns, submitted as a representation, shall be considered.

Several senior advocates also have flagged a lack of in-depth consultation process.

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Several senior advocates also have flagged a lack of in-depth consultation process.

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Interested agencies may refer to the RFP notification and documents available on the website: [www.camia.aerialports.com](https://www.camia.aerialports.com) and obtain the EOI documents. EOI documents shall be available for download till 5:00 pm IST on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2026.

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| S. Name of Transmission Scheme                                                                 | Last Date for seeking clarifications (dd/mm/yyyy) | Last Date for submission of response to RFP (dd/mm/yyyy) | Date of opening of Response to RFP (dd/mm/yyyy) |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Transmission Scheme for establishment of 400/220 kV AIS Malegaon Saundane SS, Dist (Nashik) | 06.08.2026                                        | 18.09.2026 up to 15:00 hrs (IST)                         | 18.09.2026 up to 15:30 hrs (IST)                |

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Phone No. 040-23221705 E-mail: [cettelangana@gmail.com](mailto:cettelangana@gmail.com)  
No: PM-SETU/3427/2024 Date: 07-2026

**REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP) NOTIFICATION**  
(Through e-Procurement Portal)  
Department of Employment and Training invites Request for Proposal (RFP) from Anchor Industry Partners (AIP) interested in Collaborating on the Upgradation of 6 HUB and 24 SPICE ITI Institutions in the State under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme PM-SETU (Pradhan Mantri Skill and Employability Transformation through Upgraded (ITI)-Component: Upgradation of Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs). This Request for Proposal (RFP) is issued in accordance with the Government of Telangana's e-Procurement Portal.  
The Request for Proposal (RFP) document for another three (3) clusters can be downloaded from the Telangana e-Procurement Portal, starting from 13-07-2026. The last date for uploading the completed RFP along with supporting documents through the e-Procurement Portal is 28-07-2026 before 5:00 PM. The corresponding Tender IDs are: 716412, 716415 and 716418.  
For more information, please visit the Website: <https://tenders.telangana.gov.in> For assistance, you may contact: 040-23221705 or visit the office in person during working hours.  
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**Filling up one post of Whole-Time Member in International Financial Services Centres Authority**

The Government of India invites applications from the eligible candidates for filling up one post of **Whole-Time Member in International Financial Services Centres Authority, Gandhinagar, Gujarat**. The Whole-Time Member shall have an option to receive pay as admissible to an Additional Secretary to the Government of India or a consolidated salary of Rupees Five Lakh (Rs. 5,00,000/-) per month.

The particulars of the post and eligibility conditions may be seen on the Ministry's website at <https://dea.gov.in/offering-vacancies> under **Department of Economic Affairs**.

Applications of eligible candidates in the prescribed proforma along with certified copies of required documents may be forwarded, through proper channel (wherever applicable) so as to reach to the undersigned in the **Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Room No. 10042, Kartavya Bhavan-I, New Delhi-110001** on or before **14th August, 2026**. Incomplete applications and applications received after the last date shall not be considered.

Sd/-  
**Deputy Secretary to the Govt. of India**  
Tel: 011-2401 3064  
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## History Lessons

AFTER STAYING silent on Sonam Wangchuk's hunger strike over the NEEC controversy, the Congress on Thursday extended its support to the activist on the 19th day of his fast. Congress general secretary, organisation, K C Venugopal assured Wangchuk that the Congress will confront the Narendra Modi government and demand the resignation of the Education Minister. Sources said it was Sonia Gandhi who wanted the party to back Wangchuk even though a section of Congress leaders was sceptical about joining the activist or the Cockroach Movement on the issue. Gandhi, party insiders said, pointed out that in 1984, the then PM, Indira Gandhi, had flown to Leh to meet Wangchuk's father Sonam Wangyal, who was on a hunger strike seeking Scheduled Tribe status for Ladakhis. India had persuaded Wangyal to end the hunger strike.

## To Err Is Humorous

A SLIP of the tongue during the announcement of Samajwadi Party MP Dimple Yadav's arrival on the stage, where activist Sonam Wangchuk is sitting on a hunger strike, lightened the sombre mood at Jantar Mantar for a moment. As she walked towards Wangchuk with other senior SP leaders, the Mainpuri MP was mistakenly introduced as "yuvva MP Dimple Kapadia", before being corrected by the crowd. The announcer tried to make up for the error by repeating her name several times, eliciting laughter from the youth protesting at the site.

## Catch 'Em Young

UNION JAL Shakti Minister CR Patil has launched a unique initiative to promote awareness about water conservation among school-children. As part of the campaign, notebooks featuring a photo of PM Narendra Modi and a message encouraging water conservation are being distributed to students in villages along the banks of the Ganga in Uttar Pradesh. The notebook focuses especially on Varanasi, which is also PM Modi's constituency. Earlier, the ministry had launched the Jal Sanchay Jan Bhagidari campaign following PM Modi's call for greater community participation in water conservation efforts.

## NCP reunion buzz back: Tatkare says talks halted after Ajit Pawar's death

Alok Deshpande  
Mumbai, July 16

REIGNITING TALK of a merger of the National Congress Party (NCP) and the NCP (SP), the former's state chief Sunil Tatkare said Thursday that the Sharda Pawar-led party had stopped the reunification process after Ajit Pawar's death earlier this year. But that it would express its opinion if the talks restart.

The comments came a day after Tatkare's meeting with Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister and NCP national president Sunetra Pawar. Ajit's wife, ended on a sour note. Sunetra, it is learnt, asked Tatkare why he and NCP working president Pratul Patil didn't inform her about their meeting with CM Devendra Fadnis late Tuesday night. NCP (SP) senior MLA Jayant Patil's presence at the CM's Mumbai home, Varsha, Tuesday night fuelled speculation about the merger being back on the table.

The NCP had split in 2023, when the late Ajit broke away with a majority of MLAs to join the BJP-led Maharashtra alliance. However, since his death in an aircraft crash in January, there has been speculation about the two NCPs reuniting. This has played out amid a buzz about Sunetra facing pushback from the old guard as she and her son try to assert control over the organisation.



NCP state chief Sunil Tatkare

isolation. "Both parties discussed the merger when Ajit Pawar was alive. We would have supported the merger decision to be taken by him. But after his death, the talks stopped. Their (NCP-SP) leaders later, at their state-level programme, announced that the issue of merger is over for them. If the talks start again, only then can we tell our opinion," according to Tatkare.

This is the first time a senior NCP leader has publicly acknowledged that the merger of the two parties was to happen and that Ajit was on board with it. The day after Ajit's death, *The Indian Express* reported that the two NCPs were set to make the reunification announcement on February 8 before the tragedy struck. The talks were at an advanced stage at the time and leaders from the two sides were preparing the ground for a formal reunification following the Zilla Parishad poll results. Asked about the status of the merger talks, Patil said, "We repeatedly

## E. EXPLAINED

## Turbulence in the party

The turbulence in the NCP has been brewing since Ajit Pawar died in an aircraft crash earlier this year. Sunetra Pawar has tried to hold on to the organisation along with her sons. However, this has led to friction between her and the senior leadership. Murmurs among MLAs also indicate that merger could enrage the party, but no one has officially raised the matter with the leadership.

said after the unfortunate death of Ajit Pawar that the merger talks were almost concluded. We were not taken seriously back then. I don't think any proposal has gone from our side."

Patil said he would meet Deputy CM Eknath Shinde Tuesday night to raise the issue of the disqualification of a municipal council chairman in his constituency. He claimed to have raised the matter at the Tuesday meeting with Fadnis.

Asked about the meeting at Varsha, Tatkare said, "We had gone to discuss work related to

our constituency. We did not meet Jayant Patil there." He, however, denied reports of a rift with Sunetra Pawar. "I had a very good equation with Ajit and I share the same with Sunetra vahini (sister-in-law). There is no question of miscommunication or her being upset with me for anything," he said.

Sources, however, said that at a meeting with Tatkare Wednesday, Sunetra expressed unhappiness at being kept out of the loop about the meeting at the CM's home. Tatkare told Sunetra that he and Patel met Fadnis after coming to know that the NCP(SP) might support the Demilitarisation Bill. They wanted to ensure there's no miscommunication between the CM and their party, Tatkare is learnt to have told Sunetra. "She asked why neither of the two thought it was important to let her know in advance about it," a source said.

## Divided into 2 camps

The NCP increasingly looks fractured, with one group clinging on to the Pawars — Sunetra and Eknath — becoming the ones at the helm and in power and the other feeling sidelined after the emergence of Parth Pawar, the Deputy CM's elder son. Sources close to Sunetra have hinted that Parth is looking to replace Tatkare with one of the MLAs from north Ma-

harashtra, while Tatkare has maintained that he will continue to head the party in the state.

The party has also decided it will not respond to the legal notice from its national secretary Sachchidanand Singh challenging Sunetra's appointment as NCP national president. "It is unnecessary to even respond to it. If there is any malafide intention behind sending this notice, let that be out in the open after we decide not to respond to it," said a source close to the Pawars.

The infighting and lack of communication in NCP have left the organisation hamstrung, with several key appointments kept on hold. It doesn't have presidents for the youth and women's wings. It has failed to appoint a new chairperson for the state Women's Commission after Rupali Chakankar's resignation. The finance portfolio that it had been assured of also appears to be out of reach now. Ajit used to hold the portfolio, but after his death the department's responsibility was taken up by Fadnis. Murmurs among the MLAs also indicate that the merger of the two NCPs could enrage the party, but no one has officially raised the matter with the leadership. Sources informed that unless the Pawar family reaches a consensus on the leadership issue, things are unlikely to move forward.



Former Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi at the Congress headquarters in New Delhi on Thursday. ANIL SHARMA

## Cong refuses to blink, Channi says 'will abide by party decision'

Man Aman Singh Chhina  
Chandigarh, July 16

WITH THE Congress refusing to blink on the issue of Punjab leadership, former chief minister Charanjit Singh Channi and former deputy chief minister Sukhinder Singh Randhawa on Thursday professed adherence to the party high command's decision.

"All is well. We are with the party and will obey all the directions of the party high command," Channi said. He was talking to reporters in Delhi after a meeting with AICC general secretary (Organisation) K C Venugopal. Apart from Channi and Randhawa, MLAs Parag Singh and Rana Gurjeet Singh too attended the meeting that lasted around three hours.

Channi, and the others who owe allegiance to him, had been sulking after the high command asked Amrinder Singh Raju Warring to continue as party's Punjab unit chief ahead of Assembly polls in the state early next year. "We were called here today and have put across our point of view. I want to make one thing absolutely clear and that is that we stand with the party. Rahul Gandhi is our leader, we love him and we will live and die with him. Malikarjun Kharge is

our party president and all our workers and leaders stand firmly with the party and will continue to do," Channi said.

He also sought to scotch any speculation on the widening rift within the party in Punjab. "There has been an unnecessary media trial. We had no intention of embarrassing anyone or belittling anyone. We want to take the party forward. The high command heard us and whatever decision it takes, we will accept it and move forward accordingly," he said, adding that when "we held the meeting in Chandigarh, our only intention was to put across our point of view to Bhupesh Baghel ji".

With voices of dissent getting stronger after Warring was retained as PPCC chief, the central leadership had rushed Baghel to Punjab where he stayed for six days, met the leaders, and gave a report to Venugopal in Delhi on Wednesday. Baghel had also indicated status quo in Punjab leadership change "is not a game of puppets". Sources in Congress say that the riot act was read out to the dissident leaders and it was made clear to them that they will have to obey the decisions of the high command. It was also conveyed to them that their public statements were showing party in poor light.

## PM speaks to Amir of Qatar, conveys condolences on passing of the Father Amir

Express News Service  
New Delhi, July 16

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi on Thursday spoke to the Amir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, and conveyed his heartfelt condolences on the passing of the Father Amir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani.

Modi also said the departed leader's enduring legacy will continue to guide the two nations for further strengthening the strategic partnership. Father Amir died on July 12 at the age of 74. After his death, the Central government had declared one day national mourning on July 13 as a mark of respect with the national flag flown at half-mast throughout the country.

"Spoke with H.H. Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, the Amir of Qatar and conveyed heartfelt condolences on the

passing of H.H. the Father Amir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani. He recalled his deep affection for India, his warmth towards the Indian community in Qatar and his steadfast commitment to India-Qatar relations. His enduring legacy will continue to guide our two countries as we further strengthen our Strategic Partnership," Modi said in a post on X.

Recalling the Father Amir's contributions as the chief architect of modern Qatar, "Prime Minister paid tribute to his visionary leadership, and recalled his pivotal role in strengthening India-Qatar relations over the years as well as his deep affection for India and the Indian community in Qatar," the PMO said. It also said the Amir of Qatar thanked the PM for his call and conveyed his appreciation for the words of support in this difficult hour.

## Hydrogen Train rolls out today; leak detectors, auto shutdown, real-time monitoring on track

Express News Service  
Chandigarh, July 16

INDIA'S FIRST hydrogen-powered train, to be flagged off by Prime Minister Narendra Modi from Haryana's rail station Friday, has multiple layers of safety features that can detect gas leak, heat, and smoke, and an automatic shut-off system that will cut off the hydrogen supply, without waiting for manual reaction, in case anything unusual is found.

"The train is fitted with devices that continuously watch for hydrogen leaks, unusual heat, flames or smoke, so any problem is caught within seconds. On top of this, non-stop ventilation keeps air moving through the train at all times, so that even if a tiny amount of hydrogen were to leak, it gets safely carried away and diluted in the open air instead of collecting anywhere," a statement issued by the Ministry of Railways read. "There is also an automatic shut-off system. If anything unusual is detected, it can automatically cut off the hydrogen supply on its own, without waiting for a person to react."

With the launch of the 10-coach train, which will operate between Jind and Sonapat section of Northern Railway, India will join a select group of nations that has adopted the clean technology. "India becomes one of



The train has 10 coaches with a capacity of 2,600 passengers

the select group of nations that have such trains. This will go a long way in ensuring that India adopts clean technology in the railway sector," Modi said.

Unlike electric trains that draw power from overhead wires, the Hydrogen Fuel Cell Train generates electricity on board through a Proton Exchange Membrane (PEM) fuel cell. Hydrogen stored in cylinders reacts with oxygen from the atmosphere to produce electricity for the traction motors, with water vapour and heat as the only direct by-products.

"In a sense, the train carries its own source of power, but instead of burning traditional fuels, generates electricity using oxygen from the atmosphere," as per the ministry's statement. As electricity is generated on board through clean hydrogen technology, the train represents the greenest form of

rail propulsion, powering the future of sustainable mobility. Given hydrogen's highly flammable nature, the train is equipped with multiple layers of safety systems. The loco pilot's cabin has been designed to keep the person safe, with a special mode that allows the train to be moved to safety in an emergency and a screen that shows the loco pilot the real health of the whole system at all times. The dedicated hydrogen storage, compression and dispensing facility established at Jind too has similar safety features, including leak and flame detectors, automatic shutdown systems, fire alarms and water spray arrangements. At the facility, water is split into hydrogen and oxygen through electrolysis and is then stored safely in dedicated storage tanks.

The train has an operational speed of 75 kmph and a design speed of 110 kmph on the 89-km

## Mann to receive PM, skip event

Chandigarh: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann will receive Prime Minister Narendra Modi "as per the protocol" in Chandigarh Friday, but is unlikely to attend an official function in Jalandhar where the PM will lay the foundation stone of rail and road infrastructure projects worth over Rs 5,470 crore.

The ruling AAP's lone Rajya Sabha member from state and environmentalist Balbir Singh Seehwal will, however, attend the PM's Jalandhar event. The PM's helicopter is likely to land at Rajindra Park, Chandigarh, located opposite the CM's house. From there Modi will proceed to the PGIMER before leaving for Jalandhar. "The Chief Minister will receive the Prime Minister at Rajindra Park and fulfil the protocol. Beyond that, however, the Chief Minister is unlikely to travel to Jalandhar," a senior official said. KANCHAN WASDEV

Jind-Sonapat route. The train has 10 coaches with a capacity of around 2,600 passengers, demonstrating the scalability of hydrogen-powered rail transport for high-capacity passenger operations on non-electrified or difficult-to-electrify routes.



Koel Mallick took oath as TMC Rajya Sabha MP on April 6. FILE

## TMC's Koel Mallick resigns from Rajya Sabha, meets Bhupender Yadav

Ravik Bhattacharya  
Kolkata, July 16

AMID THE exodus of leaders from the Mamata Banerjee-led TMC, actor Koel Mallick resigned as the party's Rajya Sabha MP Thursday, three months after being nominated to the Upper House of Parliament.

Shortly after, she met Union Minister and BJP veteran Bhupender Yadav at his home in Delhi, sparking a buzz about her next move. Mallick is the fourth Rajya Sabha MP to quit after Sukhendu Sekhar Ray, Sushmita Dev and Prakash Chik Baraik, who joined the BJP earlier this month. Later, the BJP nominated them for the election to the three seats they vacated.

Reacting to Mallick's resignation, Banerjee, without naming her, said those who are leaving have "pressure of CBI, ED and police cases" and urged that "those who want to leave should do so before July 21 (Martyrs' Day)".

## Channi, Sathuj &amp; ghosts of Punjab's past: A note of pre-poll caution for parties



THE NEERAJ CHOWDHURY COLUMN  
WEEKLY INSIGHT INTO WHAT'S CHANGING IN NATIONAL POLITICS — AND WHY

IN THE past couple of weeks, "Channi" and "Sathuj" have dominated Punjab's political lexicon and are likely to play a role in shaping the poll narrative in the state ahead of Assembly elections early next year. However, amid the churn triggered by the two, there is something that all parties vie to capture power in the state must bear in mind: they are dealing with a sensitive border state at a time when the neighbourhood is unsettled and the global order equally uncertain.

Both may damage the prospects of the Congress in a state that, like Kerala, has been a low-hanging fruit for the party. That is, unless the Congress displays flexibility and brings on board Charanjit Singh Channi, its

wanted former Chief Minister who wants to be the person at the helm of the party leading into the elections.

Channi became Punjab's first Dalit CM in September 2021, only four months before the elections were due. In an assembly to decide who would be CM, his name was virtually pulled out of the hat following Captain Amarinder Singh's resignation. Singh, the Raj of Patiala, had become the target of attacks led by former cricketer Navjot Singh Sidhu that, according to several insiders, were encouraged by the high command.

Thanks to its warring factions, the Congress failed to capitalise on the historic moment of having a Dalit CM. Until Channi came along, the state had seen CMs from only the Jat Sikh community. While Sikhs comprise 88% of Punjab's population, as per the last Census, Dalits number around 32%, the largest number in any state. However, the appointment left the party in disarray and the AAP swept the 2022 election, with Channi losing both the constituencies he

contested. He went into hibernation but resurfaced ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, which he won from Jalandhar.

And now, he has suddenly mobilised several state leaders to stand by him as he tries to push the high command into handing over the party's reins in Punjab once more before elections. Channi's detractors in the Congress see the BJP's hand behind his reallocation to accept the high command's decision not to change the state leadership so close to yet another election. Whether he moves to the BJP or breaks away from the Congress to float a new party, either move will hurt the Congress.

Today's Channi is not what he was five years ago. This time, the Punjab election may hinge on how Hindus (40%) and the Dalits (32%) vote. And that is a constituency the BJP is angling for. To spurn a Dalit in Punjab could also have national consequences. Channi is a Ramdasia — there are other communities such as the Mazhabis and Ravdassias in Punjab — and it could affect the Congress's standing



People at a screening of Sathuj, in Amritsar last week. ANI FILE

with Dalits in other states, particularly when Rahul Gandhi's caste census-driven politics revolves around Dalits and the Other Backward Classes (OBCs).

## Sathuj controversy

The controversy triggered by the decision to pull the Dalit Deshraj star Sathuj from the OTT platform Zee5 may also leave its imprint on Punjab politics in the run-up to the elections. The film is based on an ugly and painful reality of the militancy years of the 1980s and

90s: the deaths in police encounters during anti-terror operations and the disappearance of thousands who were secretly cremated as "Jawaris (unclaimed)". The film's protagonist is Jaswant Singh Khaira, a bank employee who documented these disappearances. He put forward the figure of 25,000 that is disputed by many — and died in police custody himself.

Every filmmaker views events through his or her creative, artistic, ideological lens — or a combination of these —

and an open society is expected to ride the differences of opinion such a work may unleash. Every filmmaker is also selective in the choice of what s/he includes or excludes. In the case of Sathuj, it is the suffering of the other side of the story that stands out. The film does not allude to the cold-blooded killings by the Khalistani terrorists, be it the gruesome death of DIGAS Atwal at the entrance of the Golden Temple in 1983; the gunning down of Ramesh Chander, the chief editor of the Hind Samachar group of newspapers, in 1984; or several instances of the singling out and killing of Hindus travelling in public transport.

The ban on the film, however, has added to its allure and it is being screened in the villages of Punjab and has become a talking point. The AAP has demanded its release on the grounds of free speech, while the Shiromani Akali Dal of the Badals has promised to take it to every corner of Punjab in the hope of winning over the young Jat Sikhs. And yet, if the film resonates with them, they are

more likely to veer towards the pro-Khalistani Akali Dal (Waris Punjab De) headed by Khadoor Sahib MP Amrpal Singh, who is in jail at present. The Congress's discomfiture is apparent even as it has spoken up for freedom of expression, even though the film focuses on police excesses during Congress rule.

By taking down Sathuj, the BJP may hope to get the support of all those who never want Punjab to return to those dark days, particularly Hindus. It is of late that the BJP has turned its attention to winning Punjab, where its standing suffered during the farmers' agitation of 2020-21. It has been quietly attempting to create a village-level cadre, and if a multi-party contest leads to a hung Assembly, it can hope to emerge as the kingmaker.

## The Punjab lesson

The Punjab story is about competitive politics. It was the Congress in the late 1970s that encouraged a charismatic small-time preacher called Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale to counter the Akali Dal. And

when he grew too big, running a parallel government and occupying the Golden Temple, the Congress could not dismount the tiger it had mounted. The Army had to enter the Golden Temple to flush him out.

The chain of events that were triggered led to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's assassination by her own Sikh bodyguards, the anti-Sikh riots and reprisal killings in north India, the strengthening of the insurgency that claimed the life of an incumbent Chief Minister (Beant Singh was assassinated in 1995), a leading editor, senior police officers, and thousands of innocent people. Competitive politics is a tempting proposition for parties. But in Punjab, they must think it through many times before crossing the *lakhshmi rekhas*.

Neeraj Chowdhury, Contributing Editor, The Indian Express, has covered the last 11 Lok Sabha elections. She is the author of *How Prime Ministers Decide*

**The Indian EXPRESS**  
— FOUNDED BY —  
**RAMNATH GOENKA**  
— IN 1932 —

BECAUSE THE TRUTH  
INVOLVES US ALL

## Ahead of the big deal, strike a careful balance

FOLLOWING THE US Trade Representative's proposal to levy tariffs on 60 countries under Section 301 of the US Trade Act, 1974, the government has introduced a new version of the bill. It proposes to levy tariffs of up to 100 per cent on the top five buyers of Russian oil and natural gas — China, India, Slovakia, Hungary and Azerbaijan. Imports from Russia account for a significant share of India's energy basket. Here, too, New Delhi has taken US concerns on board — PSUs have signed a deal to import 10 per cent of LPG requirements from the US.

In the recent past, the Indian government has pushed through trade deals with countries such as the UK and Australia, as well as the EU. A deal with the US — the largest economy in the world — will go a long way in reducing the uncertainty that has marred relations between the countries, while expanding trade. The upside for both countries is significant. On its part, the White House will likely continue to exert pressure on India in order to extract maximum concessions. As Delhi moves ahead to expand its market and protect its interests, it will have to carefully navigate its way, mindful of an unpredictable White House.

## A game bigger than its grand spectacle

AS SPAIN and Argentina face off on Sunday in what will be their first meeting in the FIFA World Cup since 1966, the finale promises a grand spectacle. Spain's near-impenetrable defence will encounter Argentina's potent attack in a game that will see the long-anticipated meeting between Lionel Messi and Lamine Yamal, whom Messi famously cracked as a baby almost 20 years ago. Yet, whatever the outcome at the New York New Jersey Stadium, this World Cup will be remembered for far more than the team that lifts the trophy.

The tournament's expansion from 32 teams to 48 had drawn criticism, particularly in Europe, on the grounds that it would make the competition less compelling. Far from it, the expanded format has not only made the Cup more inclusive, with Africa and Asia enjoying greater representation, but also produced some of its most enthralling encounters, featuring Japan, Senegal, Egypt and tiny and underrated Cape Verde. Technology was a defining feature of the tournament. If FIFA believed that AI-assisted officiating tools, sensor-equipped match balls and semi-automated offside technology would finally settle refereeing disputes, then VAR (video assistant referee) interventions over contentious fouls and strange offside decisions added to the drama. The question is not whether technology belongs in football, but how far its adjudicators should allow it to shape the game's crucial moments. Finally, controversies over immigration, ticketing, the treatment of Iran's national team, and the reversal of Folarin Balogun's red card are a reminder that the World Cup has never been just about football. From Mussolini's Italy in 1934 to Argentina's military junta in 1978, the World Cup has long been a stage on which host governments project prestige and power and legitimacy.

The 2026 edition was no different. Nor are the players immune from it. Following the semi-final victory over England, Argentina now faces the prospect of disciplinary action after its players unfurled a banner backing the country's claim to the Falkland Islands. Yet, for all the debates over inclusivity, technology and politics, the World Cup has ultimately lived up to football's enduring moniker as the beautiful game. Last-minute winners, dramatic comebacks, extraordinary underdog performances and teeming moments of individual brilliance have made sure that the football itself has never been overshadowed. The spotlight now falls on Spain and Argentina.

## The mysterious new cousin in the wild

IF A monkey croaks in a forest, with no humans to hear it, does it even exist? Five million years ago, the recently classified *Colobus congensis* split from the common ancestor of its closest cousin relative. It was only in 2008 that researchers captured blurry photos of the reclusive, yellow-lipped monkey that makes a croaking sound at the Lomami National Park in Congo. People from the Balanga ethnic group call the animal — roughly the same size as a rhesus monkey — Likweli, and after years of study and genetic testing, it has now been classified as a new species.

Its population, habits and social life will likely occupy zoologists for years to come. The question, though, is whether the Likweli monkey was better off "undiscovered". There is, of course, a chance that the classification of the new species will help conserve it, that knowing it's there may prevent hunting and habitat destruction. Human beings, though, don't have the best record in this regard.

Since the age of European colonial expansion, indigenous populations of entire continents have been all but wiped out by the excesses of "discovery". Animals, once classified, enter the language of the creature from the heart of the heart of them. They will be "conserved" till, perhaps, some rare mineral or the strategic imperative of a nation-state — far younger than the five-million-year life of the Likweli as a species — makes them part of a utilitarian calculus in which they are simply a variable on a ledger. Meanwhile, let's hope the mysterious new cousin in the simian family croaks away without interruption or interference from its dominating relative.

# The Editorial Page

## No one did it, it happens: War to exam scandals, pollution to crumbling cities

YESTERDAY, WITHIN minutes, I encountered two statements that seemed to capture the core pathology of contemporary politics: The return of malice — or evil without agents. Sonam Wangchuk, on the 15th day of his fast, was outlining the core of his thinking behind asking for the resignation of Dharmendra Pradhan: It was to fix accountability and agency for an exam fiasco that affects hundreds of thousands of lives. In a completely different context, I encountered this reflection by one of the sharpest contemporary philosophers, Raymond Geuss, in an essay, "Without Causes," published in *New Left Review*. The essay discusses an interview Hillary Clinton gave on Gaza. There is one striking line in the essay, "When Clinton must refer to conditions on the (Gaza) Strip her sentences break down and suddenly lack a grammatical subject: Reconstruction frozen. Investment absent. Civilians trapped in dependency and despair, with reportedly up to 1,000 killed since the ceasefire." We are not told who killed them.

The two examples illustrate the same phenomenon. Across an astonishing range of policy challenges, from war to pollution, exam scandals to crumbling cities, we encounter seemingly causeless phenomena: sentences without subjects. At the international level, our Prime Minister sets the tone. "This is not an era of war," he intones with sagacity, without ever naming who the actors are who start the wars. You might think this is diplomatic finesse. But it turns out to be a full-blown technique of ruling. If there are no agents behind the action, no one needs to

be held accountable. Your success is not stopping the war, condemning aggression, or upholding the law. Your success is that you can immobilise the need for responsibility altogether without appearing immoral.

Now, just think how useful this strategy is domestically. Sentences without grammatical subjects or in the passive voice can easily make passive citizens. Exam leak. Happens. Cities flooding. Happens. Himalayas crumbling. Happens. Stampedes. Happen. Air Pollution. Happens. Just as we know this is not an era of war, but we don't name who starts it, we also know this is not an era of crumbling cities, polluted air and rivers, disenfranchisement and corruption, and any other evil you can mention. But no one makes it happen.

The beauty of the passive voice is that the government can join the citizens in a common language and a common objective. These days, it has become the norm for government ministers, civil servants, or recently retired decision-makers to write about their departments with impressive expertise. They will outline lofty goals, even share citizens' concerns. But the one thing missing in all that writing is the fixing of accountability. You will read hundreds of op-eds on air pollution, including by policymakers. But no one will name or shame, as it were. For example, no one will pointedly say who decided to lead pollution norms for coal-fired power plants and why. Who makes the decisions to give clearances to build roads and buildings in ecologically sensitive zones? I was recently at a meet-



PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

ing where there was eloquent holding forth on "ease of doing business, especially for MSMEs". But not one policymaker could actually name and explain why particular regulations were put in place or even who put them. If you ask a pointed question, all policy, all events, all decisions suddenly become anonymised through invoking "The Bureaucracy" or "The System" or "The Court" or "Norms". As if policy is made by abstractions, if even made at all.

Now you might demur and say, "Isn't this an age of personalised politics, not events without subjects? Don't we attribute all evils to leaders, Vladimir Putin or Narendra Modi, or Donald Trump?" But the cult of personality is one more way in which accountability gets evaded; it's like holding God responsible. When God is responsible, no one is. The personality is meant to disguise the myriad of actions that go into the making of catastrophes. Yes, the person at the top has to shoulder the blame for setting the norms. But that is also a convenient alibi for not fixing individual responsibility. "Modi" and "Trump" become a vast impersonal force that governs everything, so we can stop interrogating actual chains of decisions.

Now, speaking in euphemisms, without a subject, allows a certain civility. Perhaps in the international sphere, it allows for diplomacy. A culture of individual naming and shaming can also be misused and be cruel. There might be something to these concerns. But at the present conjuncture, this really has become a technology for creating a passive world in which everything,

from genocide to environmental destruction, happens. Even well-meaning critiques of policy fall into this trap. The crisis of public policy in India is not the crisis of ideas. Most things that require attention are not rocket science. It is the crisis of accountability. Who will name who actually takes decisions and hold them responsible? Everyone has this knowledge, but we choose to anonymise it. Perhaps this is being done with mass participation: it suits all of us not to blame any specific agents, since that also absolves us of any responsibility. It gives us a kind of freedom. It allows us to defer to power without appearing to do so.

Perhaps this is why Wangchuk's demand is important. His insistence on a resignation is not simply about one minister or one examination. It is a defence of the proposition that democratic politics requires a grammatical subject. Before institutions can be repaired, we must acknowledge who specifically broke them. If you want to stop war, you have to name and shame those who start them.

Raymond Geuss may be onto something profound. In his telling, it is not that Hillary Clinton was denying the truth. What she was making disappear was the subject of the sentence. The artful form of modern governance is to acknowledge the truth and yet evade responsibility. Once a society loses the habit of asking, "Who did this?", it also loses the capacity to ask: "Who should answer for it?" There is no democracy without a grammatical subject.

The writer is contributing editor, The Indian Express

## The woman is out of the building



SUKSHAM TANU

LAST MONTH, the firm Zaha Hadid founded in 1979 and led until her death in 2016 dropped her name. Zaha Hadid Architects became ZHA, in what her successor Patrick Schumacher called a natural brand evolution. What that framing left out was the decade-long legal fight behind it: A licensing agreement under which the firm paid Hadid's foundation a share of its revenue to keep her name on the door, and a court ruling this time that freed Schumacher from that obligation. Frank Gehry's name has stayed on his firm's door for nearly 70 years without a court getting involved. Iraq-born Hadid — the only woman to ever win the Pritzker Prize — didn't get that courtesy.

It is tempting to file the story under "architecture's problem with women", as though the problem is somehow contained to one London firm and one unusually famous case. It isn't. The same instinct — celebrate a woman as an exception, then withdraw the recognition once it stops being convenient — runs through India's own architectural institutions.

In 2023, an architect named Vandana Sehgal came closer than any woman ever to leading India's Council of Architecture (COA), the country's statutory architecture regulator. She lost the presidential election by a single vote. Not once since the Architects Act created the Council in 1972 has a woman held its top job. The closest formal foothold any woman has had is its vice-presidency. The Indian Institute of Architects (IIA), the older and more storied of the profession's two national bodies, does slightly better — but only slightly, and only recently. Founded in 1917, the IIA went 98 years before electing a woman, Divya Kush, as its president in 2015. She served until 2020. Before her and after her, the list of names is a wall of men. This is what happens when institutions built by men, for men, in a profession that has always treated women as guests, are asked to share power. They will let a woman in eventually, symbolically — and then close the door again.

India's architectural establishment likes to imagine that its exclusions belong to a colonial past it has since outgrown. It has not. Consider Perin Jamsetji Mistry, who in 1936 became the first woman in India — and reportedly in Asia — to qualify as an architect. She went on to run her father's

firm for half a century, designing everything from Art Deco bungalows to Salvation Army hospitals across two continents. Ninety years later, her name is barely known. Her male contemporaries are still cited as the architects of modern Bombay.

Or consider Urmila "Eulie" Chowdhury, the only Indian woman on Le Corbusier's team to design Chandigarh in the 1950s. Chowdhury was the crucial link between Corbusier, his cousin Pierre Jeanneret, and the Indian planners on the ground, fluent enough in French to translate Corbusier's writing and trusted enough to be handed sole charge of major buildings, including the Government Home Science College and the Women's Polytechnic. She also helped design the furniture, including the "Jeanneret chair", that made Chandigarh internationally famous. The Victoria and Albert Museum remains one of the few institutions that has bothered to note Chowdhury's role in that design.

The usual defence of institutions like IIA and COA is that once enough women graduate, representation will follow on its own. The numbers say otherwise. A 2023 exhibit at the Delhi Architecture Biennale found that although women make up roughly 60 per cent of architecture students today, they account for only around 20 per cent of practising, registered architects. Most women drop out because the field doesn't build the career ladders, firm partnerships, or institutional leadership to keep them.

There is a temptation to read Sehgal's 2023 loss as a hopeful sign — proof that change is close, that a woman almost got there. It's worth resisting that reading. "Almost" is not a threshold institutions cross by accident; it is a threshold they cross when they decide to. COA's president is chosen by its own sitting members, in a small internal election, not by a public vote of registered architects. A one-vote margin does not mean the institution is one election away from equity. It means the institution came within reach of a different outcome and chose, by the narrowest possible margin, the outcome that kept its record unbroken. That is not a profession in transition. That is a profession that has learned how far it can let a woman go — and where, every time, to stop her.

The writer is a Dubai-based architect. Her work focuses on sustainability and inclusivity



SAKTI PRASAD SRICHANDAN

## NATO's transformation opens possibilities for India

THE 2026 NATO Summit held in Ankara a few days ago confirmed that the alliance is entering a new era of strategic transformation rather than strategic decline. Ukraine remains central, but NATO's ambitions now go much further. It is preparing for a world shaped by long-term rivalry, technological competition and unstable supply chains. This shift matters for India.

The first message from NATO is clear: Russia will remain NATO's primary security challenge. But the alliance's war in Ukraine ends, NATO has decided that deterrence must become permanent. The second message is that Europe is being asked to do much more for its own security. The US remains indispensable, but Washington is increasingly unwilling to carry the burden alone. The third is perhaps the most important. Modern wars are won not only on the battlefield but also in factories and laboratories. The Ukraine war exposed serious weaknesses in ammunition production, missile manufacturing and defence supply chains. Technology is completing this transformation. AI, cybersecurity, quantum computing, autonomous systems and space capabilities are today's strategic priorities.

India is not a NATO member. But its security environment is increasingly shaped by decisions taken far beyond its neighbourhood. Europe's growing investment in defence opens new possibilities for India's defence industry. Indian firms can become partners in supply chains that are being diversified away from dependence on a few countries. India's ambition to become a manufacturing hub fits well with Europe's search for trusted partners. If New Delhi moves quickly, defence cooperation can become part of a broader technology and industrial partnership. Further, NATO's strategic outlook increasingly links European security with developments in the Indo-Pacific, maritime security, critical technologies and supply chains. This reflects a broader reality: Security today is interconnected. For India, this creates both opportunities and dilemmas. The opportunity lies in expanding cooperation with European countries on maritime security, cyber resilience, critical technologies and defence innovation. The dilemma is Russia, which remains one of India's major defence partners and an important energy supplier. At the same time, India has deepened strategic ties with the US and Europe. As NATO's confrontation with Moscow grows more entrenched, balancing these relationships will become more difficult.

This is why India's policy of strategic autonomy remains relevant. It should avoid the temptation to see NATO only through the prism of the Ukraine war. NATO is evolving into an organisation where defence, technology, industry and economic resilience are increasingly interconnected. That evolution will shape global standards, defence innovation and strategic partnerships. Instead of asking whether NATO is relevant to India, policymakers should ask: How can India benefit from Europe's security transformation while preserving its strategic autonomy? Done well, India can gain economic and security advantages from the transatlantic rearmament wave. Handled poorly, the same wave could push New Delhi into costly dependencies and strategic choices that weaken the autonomy it has worked hard to preserve.

The writer is assistant professor, Centre for European Studies, SIS, IIT

## 40 YEARS AGO

July 17, 1986



### PM says UCC Bill ready

THE PRIME MINISTER, Rajiv Gandhi, said that the Government is "ready" with a Bill for a voluntary uniform civil code. Disclosing this during his meeting with the leaders of opposition parties on the eve of Parliament's monsoon session, the Prime Minister, however, did not give any further details about the proposed legislation. Nor did he say whether the Bill would be introduced during the monsoon session.

### China rejects intrusion charge

CHINA REJECTED as "unjustified" a strong Indian protest over an intrusion by Chinese frontier personnel into Indian territory in the

in the Sumerong river valley area in the eastern sector last month. This area has always been in Chinese territory. It is not only well known internationally but also located on the Chinese side of the line of actual control, a foreign ministry spokesman said.

### Sri Lanka to reframe proposal

THE SRI Lankan government agreed to reformulate some of the proposals with regard to the vexed issue of land settlement following talks between a Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) delegation and the Lands Minister Gani Dinanayake. TULF secretary-general A. Amirthalingam, said they discussed with Dinanayake the provisions contained in annexure "C" of the government proposals on land

settlement for resolving the ethnic problem.

### No bomb in Pakistan, says US

THE US insists Pakistan has not done the bomb. Notwithstanding Soviet allegations to the contrary, despite recent American newspaper reports, and despite the refusal of US administration spokesmen to comment on a US newspaper report that stated CIA sources had claimed that Pakistan is very close to possessing a bomb, if it does not have one already. The officials refused to comment on a section of the same report saying Pakistan had enriched uranium at its Kahuta plant in excess of the 5 per cent ceiling, set in 1984 by President Ronald Reagan as a condition for continuing the \$3.2 billion aid package.

# The Ideas Page

FRIDAY, JULY 17, 2026

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**DIS/AGREE**  
THE BEST OF BOTH SIDES

A weekly column, which offers not this-versus-that, but the best of both sides, to inform the debate



ILLUSTRATION: CR SAKSHI KUMAR

Private players are making their presence felt in health and education. What are the implications?

## Remember who real stakeholders are



SHAILAJA CHANDRA

**P**PRIVATE EQUITY in health and education is the welcome creation of mass democracy because of an uneasy relationship with entrepreneurship in general. But this relationship is particularly emotional in the private provision of public goods like education and healthcare, where idealism picks solutions that are moral, simple, obvious, and wrong. Our default position in education should be idealism without illusions for five reasons: Supply, biodiversity, meritocracy, excellence, and honesty.

This only requires hospitals to disclose the relevant information on a public portal. Because healthcare cannot be judged by consumers at the point of purchase, patients cannot assess the necessity or quality of treatment in advance. They remain unaware of which institutions have lower infection rates, better surgical outcomes, fewer readmissions within 30 days, offer shorter waiting times, or show higher patient satisfaction. Hospitals often resist the idea of such transparency, arguing that they already operate under checks such as NABH and JCI accreditation. While these are valuable, they are voluntary. They have no authority to mandate disclosure of standardised data on quality and outcomes.

Hospitals also point to the multitude of laws they already comply with — the Clinical Establishments Act, the National Medical Commission's directives, the Drugs & Cosmetics Act, the Pollution Control Acts, and a host of fire, labour, and environmental regulations. They lament the fragmentation of oversight, but fragmentation is precisely the problem. None of these statutes mandates that hospitals provide patient-centric data in a transparent, comparable format.

Other countries, too, allow private equity investment in the hospital sector, but they regulate outcomes. England's Care Quality Commission inspects both National Health Service hospitals and private hospitals. Its reports are public. In the US, hospital-level information is published on mortality after common conditions and procedures, readmission rates, hospital-acquired infections, complications, patient experience scores and emergency department waiting times. This allows patients to compare hospitals. Investors know that every year their hospitals' performance will be compared with others. Once hospitals know that their mortality, infection rates, readmissions, patient complaints and average charges for common procedures will be publicly compared, market discipline begins to work.

Private equity's demand for high returns can push hospitals to raise charges for common procedures, use aggressive billing practices or restrict access through selective insurance arrangements. Transparency on both costs and outcomes is therefore essential.

The challenge before the government is not to discourage investment but to ensure that patients and students remain at the centre of the health and education systems. Institutions already collect outcome data. Government now needs the resolve to direct that it be made public.

The writer is a former health secretary and former chief secretary of Delhi

## More education entrepreneurs needed



MANISH SABHARWAL

**I**NDIA HASN'T created mass prosperity alongside its magnificent creation of mass democracy because of an uneasy relationship with entrepreneurship in general. But this relationship is particularly emotional in the private provision of public goods like education and healthcare, where idealism picks solutions that are moral, simple, obvious, and wrong. Our default position in education should be idealism without illusions for five reasons: Supply, biodiversity, meritocracy, excellence, and honesty.

**Supply:** Princeton Professor Avinash Dixit's suggestion that life is second-best at best implies a pragmatic acceptance that the most expensive school is no school. Ideological debates over school ownership (private or public), domicile (domestic or foreign), funding (loans, savings, or private equity), and structure (firm, company, or trust) are redundant because India will never have enough good schools. But the only way to discover good schools — those that reconcile the conflicting objectives of cost, quality, and quantity — is massively increasing supply and competition. Only half of our kids are left in government schools; if anything constitutes the infrastructure of opportunity and should be free in a country, it is K-12 education. Yet, the private sector now teaches 120+ million students. Millions of India's poor parents pay something to avoid something free.

**Biodiversity:** Goodhart's Law holds that when a metric becomes a goal, it ceases to be useful. The state's failure to fix government school stems from confusing school buildings with building schools. This obsession with hardware over software, like performance management, organisational culture, and governance, fails to deal with coaching factories, soft skill acquisition, multilingual instruction, exam leaks, nursery-school interviews, entrance exams that eliminate rather than select, seat shortages, uneven teaching quality, and unemployability.

Cracking this complexity requires inspiration from Hayek's discovery principle: Unlike infrastructure, educational quality cannot be mandated; it must be discovered through competition, experimentation, and replication. Entrepreneurs making many independent and diverse tries with differing goals, strategies, and resources will not solve our education problems but will surely catalyse the innovation that could.

**Meritocracy:** India's education regulations prescribe land size, building norms, and legal structures. These make setting up a school or university capital-

intensive, given rising building costs and mispriced land so early in our development (a new Bengaluru or Mumbai school with a reasonable commute will pay more per acre for land than in Chicago). It's unsurprising that most schools are not started by principals, teachers, or education technocrats because regulations are hostile to transparently raising equity capital from financial investors.

This creates an adverse selection among education entrepreneurs — most are politicians or land sharks — because success requires upfront capital and lifelong regulatory skills. First-generation entrepreneurs need financial investors; given my policeman father's frugal savings, I couldn't have become an entrepreneur straight after college without venture capital.

**Excellence:** AI is bringing weaker students to the median while making strong students stronger. The second is accelerating; the power law of 80 per cent of results coming from 20 per cent of the people in technology, innovation, research, and science is shifting to 90/10. Countries that aspire to lead the world will need to complement mass education programmes (that count students) with gifted-student programmes (that weigh them). These programmes are considerably harder and more expensive and often fail in the public sector given the scrutiny of taxpayer funding for uncertain returns and small enrolment. Elite programmes are a better fit for private institutions with risk appetite, diverse objectives, and longer horizons.

**Honesty:** My unscientific survey suggests that 75 per cent of capacity in K-12, engineering, business, and undergraduate education over the last three decades is legally, but not spiritually, non-profit. This massive mislabelling of organisations confuses parents, confounds regulators, and denies the Indian state legitimate tax surplus. The lack of trust around price vs cost also motivates ineffective price controls: private schools need to cover their costs and invent 20 different fee categories. A dishonest legal structure discourages financial investors who bring superior governance, technology, and management, higher accountability for labour law and child safety compliance, and reduced education inflation by funding technocrats.

Educator John Gardner challenged policymakers and entrepreneurs to design education systems that are equal and excellent. The difficulty of this trade-off is dismissed as a lack of idealism by thinkers who don't do a lack of pragmatism by doers who don't think. Historian Thucydides warned us that any army with a big gap between its thinkers and doers will have its fighting done by fools and its thinking done by cowards. The same doer-thinker disease that hurts Indian education has a simple medicine: Idealism without illusions.

The writer is co-founder of Teamless Services and co-author of Made in India

## Dear PM, a thousand days of Gaza, many questions for India



MANOJ KUMAR JHA

**N**OW AND then, we face moments that pose questions whose answers lie beyond notions of nations and borders. Such moments compel us to confront our moral imagination and the choices we make when confronted by unbearable human suffering. Mr Prime Minister, such a moment confronts us now.

A thousand days have passed since the beginning of the tragedy on October 7, 2023. Since then, Gaza has witnessed unprecedented devastation. I have written to you on several other occasions, but this time, I request you to read this letter not as a note from a parliamentarian, but as a message from a fellow Indian who, like you and millions of our compatriots, has inherited a civilisation that has long believed that moral courage is the highest expression of political leadership. This is a moment when the consequences of the Indian state's stance echo far beyond the calculations of diplomacy or the compulsions of statecraft. Experts have discussed military operations, diplomatic negotiations, strategic victories and geopolitical realignments, but I am convinced that future generations will look back at this period as something far more unsettling — as the moment when humanity itself was placed on trial, and much of the world struggled to answer whether its commitment to justice was truly universal or merely selective.

Independent India's greatest strength has been its moral vocabulary. Do we need to remind ourselves that it was Mahatma Gandhi who transformed the language of politics by insisting that the means were inseparable from the ends? This stance was not merely a strategy to achieve India's freedom. Through this insistence, Babu enabled India to possess and offer to the world a philosophy for humanity. When Jawaharlal Nehru spoke of non-alignment, peaceful coexistence, and international solidarity, he was building on this legacy. He consistently positioned India as a conscience-keeper among nations, capable of speaking up to advocate truths and defending human dignity without fear. Realised that when Rabindranath Tagore said, "where the mind is without fear, and the head is held high", he may have been describing not only a moral state that every democracy must strive to preserve internally, but also an ethical condition that should push other nations to accept.

The first casualty of every war has always been truth, but what the world has witnessed over these thousand days shows something even more disturbing. We have witnessed how the powerful calibrate truth according to their strategic convenience and ideological preference. Compassion, which ought to arise spontaneously upon witnessing the suffering of innocent civilians, now appears burdened with political qualifications. Is the value of a child's life determined by nationality, geography or the calculations of power? Surely, these are not the civilisational values that India has



ILLUSTRATION: TANUSHMITRA

peace" while continuing to inflict prolonged humiliation on an entire people.

Mr Prime Minister, the future of humanity will not be determined by technological innovation, military capability or economic might. It will ultimately depend on the moral capacity of societies to preserve the ability to be disturbed by another human being's suffering, regardless of identity or geography. Governments will change, and new international alliances will evolve. But no generation has ever been able to evade the judgment of history.

When future generations ask where India stood during one of the defining moral crises of our age, I am sure they will judge the moral turpidity of our times very severely. Have we been able to ensure that our universities, our media, our intellectuals, and our public institutions remained guardians of independent moral judgment or were they reduced to echoes of political convenience? Above all, Mr Prime Minister, we will be judged on whether India dared to push the world to recognise its reflection when it looked into the mirror of its own conscience during these thousand days. With regards,

The writer is Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha), Rashtriya Janata Dal

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Engage with Wangchuk

THIS IS a cry of rage at the government's unresponsiveness to its citizens' demands ('Government must talk to Sonam, that's its duty', *IE*, July 16). The peaceful protest at Jantar Mantar, seeking justice in the case of the NEET paper leak and the subsequent student suicides, has been going on for almost a month. It is disheartening to see a government elected by citizens, and entrusted with representing their concerns, become completely indifferent. The presence of Sonam Wangchuk lends legitimacy and gravity to the movement, but we must collectively demand a better education system and a more accountable government.

Anangsha Rajguru, Jorhat

SONAM WANGCHUK'S hunger strike is a stark reminder that this government struggles to engage with anyone other than its own. The government must talk to Sonam, that's its duty', *IE*, July 16). Be it farmers, citizenship law protesters, or now an education reformer demanding accountability, its instinct to silence

rather than engage reflects a discomfort with dialogue that is not transactional. Wangchuk's demand resonates with millions of young Indians who have lost faith in a broken system. While the government may dismiss his methods as theatrical, his cause is genuine and his dedication undeniable.

Babu Krishna, Bengaluru

### Ocean health

THE SCOTTISH Association for Marine Science completing 175 years of ocean research is a useful occasion to reflect on how little institutional attention India gives to its own marine ecosystems ("The sea has a seat at the table", *IE*, July 16). India needs dedicated, long-term oceanographic institutions with stable funding rather than short-term project grants that make sustained data collection difficult. Coastal states should also be brought into research planning, since fishing communities often possess generational knowledge about changing sea conditions.

Prakash Paramasivam, Neelambar



DEEP PAL AND SUKANYA THAPLIYAL

RECENTLY, E-RICKSHAWS in Delhi suddenly began stalling in the middle of the road. It turned out that one could use certain Chinese apps to disable their batteries by exploiting their Battery Management Systems (BMS). The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) swiftly had Google and Apple remove the errant apps.

The apps were diagnostic tools for technicians to remotely monitor battery health, diagnose faults, and perform maintenance. Certain BMS units accepted Bluetooth connections with weak or default credentials, allowing unauthorised users to access critical functions. The issue is not where the software originated, but that batteries are now software-defined, connected systems. Vulnerabilities can disrupt operations or disable critical equipment. That is a significant problem: Such systems support power grids, telecom tower systems, warehouses, ports, industrial automation, and defence platforms. India has robust institutions for cybersecurity guidance, including the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) and the National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC) for critical infrastructure. However, a coherent strategy for connected battery systems is missing. CERT-In has expanded its focus to guidance on secure software development, coordinated vulnerability disclosure, Software Bills of Materials (SBOMs), and security requirements for original equipment manufacturers against AI-assisted vulnerabilities. But the guidelines are not binding and offer limited guidance on cybersecurity requirements for connected battery products.

The NCIIPC protects sectors such as power, transport and telecommunications. Grid-scale Battery Energy Storage Systems may fall within their remit when deployed as part of designated critical infrastructure. However, connected battery systems in EVs, commercial storage deployments and consumer BMS remain outside its jurisdiction. Sectoral regulators such as the Central Electricity Authority have sought to address battery risks through fragmented lenses, focussing on organisational cybersecurity or functional safety. The Department of Telecommunications and MeitY have introduced security assurance mechanisms for connected devices. But these mandatory regimes do not specify Bluetooth-enabled BMS and the apps used to manage them. Modern battery systems comprise hardware and software sourced from around the world. Consequently, the security of the battery depends on the integrity of its digital supply chain as much as its physical one. Global regulations reflect the focus on evaluating digital supply chains. The Secure

Software Development Framework and SBOM initiatives in the US, or the Cyber Resilience Act and the Digital Battery Passport in the EU, audit software provenance, firmware integrity, vulnerability management and lifecycle traceability.

India can draw on these principles: CERT-In guidance on secure software development, Software and Hardware Bills of Materials, vulnerability disclosure, and cybersecurity audits can be incorporated into battery standards. These will allow a battery assembled in India to incorporate imported BMS, firmware, or software update infrastructure developed abroad. Imported hardware can be allowed after rigorous testing and verification of secure software development practices. These will ultimately move the conversation from the origin of technology to its demonstrable trustworthiness.

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The writers are policy professionals at Koan Advisory Group

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# Monsoon Session: BJP likely to table 5 new Bills; 'delimitation package' not on its agenda

Jatin Anand  
New Delhi, July 16

THE BJP-led NDA government is likely to table five new Bills, including one aimed at making provisions for registration of births and deaths more stringent, in addition to taking up the contentious Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill in the Monsoon Session, which starts Monday.

The agenda for the session does not include the "delimitation package" of which the Nari Shakti Adhinyam, or women's reservation Bill, is a significant component. The Bill was defeated in the Lok Sabha after the NDA failed to secure the two-thirds majority required for a Constitutional amendment.

Sources said this "package", which requires both total and special majority in the House of the People, will need to be tabled and ratified by the Union Cabinet to be put into motion yet again, which could be taken up

during the session. BJP insiders said the matter was likely to come up for discussion at a meeting to be chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh with NDA leaders on Friday.

The FCRA Amendment Bill, which seeks to amend the FCRA (Regulation) Act, 2010, that governs the acceptance and utilisation of foreign contribution and foreign hospitality to "ensure that such inflows do not adversely affect national interest, public order or national security", was listed for "consideration and passing". The proposed legislation was tabled March 25.

According to the agenda, the "Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025", which was introduced in the Lok Sabha on December 15, 2025 but later referred to a Joint Committee of both Houses, will also return to centre stage with the 31-member committee's report scheduled to be presented and considered during the session.

A Bill seeking to further

amend Section 13(3) of the Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969 (as amended in 2023), in order to make provisions of registration "more stringent", and the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Bill, 2026, which is intended at replacing an existing ordinance in this regard, were among the two new significant legislation proposed to be taken up during the session.

The other proposed legislative business includes the Income Tax (Amendment) Bill, 2026, which aims to "deepen India's sovereign debt market", attracting stable global capital inflows and enhance liquidity.

The other Bills likely to be tabled are Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026, and a Bill which seeks to align the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Act, 2006 with the "changing MSME landscape" and enhance ease of doing business in the sector.

# Cong to raise temple donation row, fuel blending, paper leak issues in House

Express News Service  
New Delhi, July 16

THE CONGRESS will raise the Ram Temple donation theft, ethanol-blended fuels and question paper leaks, among other issues, in Parliament during the Monsoon Session that begins Monday, the party's communication in-charge Jairam Ramesh said.

He said the party would also work to unite the Opposition against any delimitation Bill the government may introduce.

Leader of the Opposition in Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday, demanding an all-party meeting on the delimitation Bill before it is introduced in Parliament.

"I would, once again, request you to convene an All Party Meeting to discuss the Government's revised proposals on delimitation, etc., and give us adequate time to study them in detail before they are introduced in Parliament," Kharge wrote.

Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP) chairperson Sonia Gandhi, Lok Sabha Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi, Kharge and other senior party MPs participated in a CPP meeting in New Delhi on Thursday.

Speaking after the meeting chaired by Sonia, Ramesh said: "The Bill, which is reportedly going to be tabled by the government, we have no prior information about it. We are hoping that we will be informed about it in

the all-party meeting. Although it is just a formality, because in this meeting 35-40 leaders speak, some ministers listen, but those two at the highest position do what they want to do."

"Our stand is clear that we are going to oppose (delimitation Bill)," the MP said, but reiterated that the Congress favours the immediate implementation of the women's reservation Bill.

On the defection of MPs from the TMC and other Opposition parties, Ramesh said: "It is a fact that some parties are now divided. But this is an insult to the Constitution. Still, the BJP won't be able to touch two-thirds majority. Our senior leadership—Rahul Gandhi and Mallikarjun Kharge is in touch with them."

# IMD: Dry conditions to prevail in most parts until month end

Express News Service  
Bengaluru, July 16

DRY CONDITIONS will prevail over large parts of the country for the remaining days of July, except for the east and north-east regions where rainfall will continue, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Thursday.

"Overall, rainfall activity is likely to be normal to above normal over most parts of east and northeast India and below normal over the remaining parts of the country during July 16-22. Normal rainfall is likely over central India during July 22-29," the IMD said in its weekly forecast.

The IMD had forecast below-normal rainfall (about 94 per cent of the long period average) over the country during July. At the end of the first half of the month, the country's rainfall deficit stood at 8 per

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# Wife a suspect as Karnataka doctor is killed, son stabbed

Express News Service  
Bengaluru, July 16

A 45-YEAR-old anaesthetist was allegedly murdered inside his apartment in Karnataka's Dharwad, while his eight-year-old son was left critically injured with multiple stab wounds. The police have detained the doctor's 42-year-old wife, the only other adult present in the flat, who was allegedly found sitting beside her husband's body and looking at her mobile phone when officials arrived on Wednesday night.

The police said they are treating the case as suspected murder and attempted murder and investigating the sequence of events and the motive behind the incident.

The victim, Dr Kiran Honanavar, was an anaesthetist at Chirayu Hospital. His body was found with multiple injuries in-

side a room of the family's sixth-floor apartment at Ranka Apartment, opposite Pawan High School. In another room, the couple's son was found lying in a pool of blood with multiple stab injuries. He was rushed to a private hospital, where he remains in critical condition. According to police, the only occupants of the apartment at the time of the incident were Dr Kiran, his wife, Dr Priyanka Katanahalli, 42, an ophthalmologist, and their son. Investigators said there were no signs of forced entry into the apartment and suspect Priyanka's involvement in the crimes.

Hubbali-Dharwad Police Commissioner N Shashikumar said: "There were only three people inside the house—the husband, wife and child." There are no signs of forced entry. We need to investigate what happened."

# T Srinivasa Kumar appointed Earth Sciences Secy

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T SRINIVASA KUMAR, former head of the Hyderabad-based Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS), has been appointed the new Secretary in the Ministry of Earth Sciences, a government order said on Thursday.

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He succeeds M Ravichandran, who retired in May this year, after a nearly five-year stint in office. Srinivasa is one of the architects of India's tsunami early warning system, having served as its project director.

# 715/720: Panshul Bansal, Aryan Gupta share top NEET-UG rank

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THE NATIONAL Testing Agency (NTA) on Wednesday declared the result of the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (Undergraduate), NEET (UG) 2026, with Aryan Gupta from Punjab and Panshul Bansal from Haryana jointly securing the highest score of 715 out of 720 marks.

Among the State Toppers, Jigmet Yangchan Lamo from Ladakh scored 530 marks, Dhruv Tripathi from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands scored 606 marks, and Fahmida Anees from Lakshadweep scored 573 marks.

State Toppers were recorded across every North-Eastern state as well. Of the State Toppers, 17 scored 700 marks or above, while 26 scored above 690 marks.

Beyond the top scorers, the NTA data showed that 1,492 candidates scored 650 marks and above, 10,160 candidates scored 600 marks and above, and 90,780 candidates scored 500 marks and above.

According to the NTA, a total of 19 candidates scored above 700 out of 720 marks.

The Top 17 rankers who scored more than 705 marks came from eight states—Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana.

In all, 138 candidates scored above 690 marks, coming from 66 cities across the country. Of these top scorers, over 95 per cent appeared for NEET (UG) for the first time, and 99 per cent were between 17 and 19 years of age.

Close to 20 lakh candidates appeared for NEET (UG) 2026, held on June 21, 2026, at 5,440 centres spread across 551 cities in India and 14 cities abroad.



Panshul Bansal at his residence

Of these, 11.21 lakh candidates have qualified for admission to undergraduate medical, dental, AYUSH, and allied programmes.

The NTA said the result was declared in time to keep the medical admission and counselling calendar on track.

Scorecards for all candidates, along with the full list of Top Rankers, State Toppers, category-wise toppers, category-wise cut-off marks, and language-wise participation data, are available on the official website, [neet.nta.nic.in](http://neet.nta.nic.in).

More than 58 per cent of all qualified candidates are women.

The NTA noted that women also qualified at a higher rate than men—56.8 per cent of women who appeared qualified, compared to 55.1 per cent of men who appeared.

As per the NTA, the category-wise break-up of qualified candidates is as follows: General category, 2.91 lakh; OBC-NCL, 5.12 lakh; SC, 1.59 lakh; ST, 63,716; Gen-EWS, 95,026; PwBD, 3,666; and PwD, 303. Category-wise cut-off marks and percentiles have also been published simultaneously.

NEET-UG was conducted in 13 languages

## Driving Infrastructure, Industry, Employment and Growth

# Ghaziabad

## Inauguration/Foundation Stone Laying of 90 Development Projects Worth ₹868 Crore+

Across the Muradnagar and Modi Nagar Assembly Constituencies

Distribution of Laptops/Cheques/Keys/Appreciation Letters to Beneficiaries of Various Government Schemes

by

## Yogi Adityanath

Chief Minister, Uttar Pradesh

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**Inauguration**  
21 Projects worth ₹153 Crore

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42 Projects worth ₹614 Crore+

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**Atul Garg**  
MP, Ghaziabad

**Dr. Rajkumar Sangwan**  
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**Shrichand Sharma**  
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**Dinesh Kumar Goyal**  
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Date: 17<sup>th</sup> July, 2026 | Time: 4:00 PM | Venue: Tejpal Singh Tyagi Kushal Pal Tyagi Memorial Degree College, Rawli Road, Muradnagar, Ghaziabad

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**Vikas Ki Gati Apaar-Double Engine Sarkar**

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**Every Effort, Every Step Towards Development**

# Monsoon Session: BJP likely to table 5 new Bills; 'delimitation package' not on agenda for now

Jatin Anand  
New Delhi, July 16

THE BJP-led NDA government is likely to table five new Bills, including one aimed at making provisions for registration of births and deaths more stringent, in addition to taking up the contentious Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill in the Monsoon Session, which starts Monday.

The agenda for the session does not include the "delimitation package" of which the Nari Shakti Adhinyam, or women's reservation Bill, is a significant component. The Bill was defeated in the Lok Sabha after the NDA failed to secure the two-thirds majority required for a Constitutional amendment.

Sources said this "package", which requires both total and special majority in the House of the People, will need to be tabled and ratified by the Union Cabinet to be put into motion yet again, which could be taken up

during the session. BJP insiders said the matter was likely to come up for discussion at a meeting to be chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh with NDA leaders on Friday.

The FCRA Amendment Bill, which seeks to amend the FCRA (Regulation) Act, 2010, that governs the acceptance and utilisation of foreign contribution and foreign hospitality to "ensure that such inflows do not adversely affect national interest, public order or national security", was listed for "consideration and passing". The proposed legislation was tabled March 25.

According to the agenda, the "Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025", which was introduced in the Lok Sabha on December 15, 2025 but later referred to a Joint Committee of both Houses, will also return to centre stage with the 31-member committee's report scheduled to be presented and considered during the session.

A Bill seeking to further

amend Section 13(3) of the Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969 (as amended in 2023), in order to make provisions of registration "more stringent", and the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Bill, 2026, which is intended at replacing an existing ordinance in this regard, were among the two new significant legislation proposed to be taken up during the session.

The other proposed legislative business includes the Income Tax (Amendment) Bill, 2026, which aims to "deepen India's sovereign debt market", attracting stable global capital inflows and enhance liquidity.

The other Bills likely to be tabled are Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026, and a Bill which seeks to align the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Act, 2006 with the "changing MSME landscape" and enhance ease of doing business in the sector.

# Cong to raise temple donation row, fuel blending, paper leak issues in House

Express News Service  
New Delhi, July 16

THE CONGRESS will raise the Ram Temple donation theft, ethanol-blended fuels and question paper leaks, among other issues, in Parliament during the Monsoon Session that begins Monday, the party's communication in-charge Jairam Ramnath said.

He said the party would also work to unite the Opposition against any delimitation Bill the government may introduce.

Leader of the Opposition in Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge would to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday, demanding an all-party meeting on the delimitation Bill before it is introduced in Parliament.

"I would, once again, request you to convene an All Party Meeting to discuss the Government's revised proposals on delimitation, etc., and give us adequate time to study them in detail before they are introduced in Parliament," Kharge wrote.

Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP) chairperson Sonia Gandhi, Lok Sabha Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi, Kharge and other senior party MPs participated in a CPP meeting in New Delhi on Thursday.

Speaking after the meeting chaired by Sonia, Ramnath said: "The Bill, which is reportedly going to be tabled by the government, we have no prior information about it. We are hoping that we will be informed about it in

the all-party meeting. Although it is just a formality, because in this meeting 35-40 leaders speak, some ministers listen, but those two at the highest position do what they want to do."

"Our stand is clear that we are going to oppose (delimitation Bill)," the MP said, but reiterated that the Congress favours the immediate implementation of the women's reservation Bill.

On the defection of MPs from the TMC and other Opposition parties, Ramnath said: "It is a fact that some parties are now divided. But this is an insult to the Constitution. Still, the BJP won't be able to touch two-thirds majority. Our senior leadership—Rahul Gandhi and Mallikarjun Kharge is in touch with them."

# IMD: Dry conditions to prevail in most parts until month end

Express News Service  
Bengaluru, July 16

DRY CONDITIONS will prevail over large parts of the country for the remaining days of July, except for the east and north-east regions where rainfall will continue, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Thursday.

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# Wife a suspect as Karnataka doctor is killed, son stabbed

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## Ghaziabad

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In the august presence of

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| <b>Sunita Dayal</b><br>Mayor, Ghaziabad                                                      | <b>Mamta Tyagi</b><br>Chairperson, District Panchayat, Ghaziabad                                                                       |
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| <b>Nand Kishor Gurjar</b><br>MLA, Loni                                                       | <b>Ajit Pal Tyagi</b><br>MLA, Ghaziabad                                                                                                |
| <b>Dr. Manju Shiwach</b><br>MLA, Modi Nagar                                                  | <b>Dharmesh Singh Tomar</b><br>MLA, Dholana                                                                                            |
| <b>Sanjeev Sharma</b><br>and other dignitaries                                               |                                                                                                                                        |

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Every Effort, Every Step Towards Development

# SC judge flags Class 9 stress, suggests third language from Class 6

## Remarks came after TN raised concerns over the three-language policy during a hearing on Navodaya schools

Express News Service  
New Delhi, July 16

THE SUPREME COURT said on Friday that the third language should be introduced in Class 6, not Class 9, observing that learning a new language a year before board examinations can be stressful for students.

Presiding over a two-judge bench, Justice B V Nagarathna made the remarks while hearing an appeal by the Tamil Nadu government challenging a Madras High Court direction to facilitate the establishment of Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas (JNVs) in every district of the state. The High Court had held that the state's refusal to permit JNVs curtailed students' right to choose educational institutions and was inconsistent with the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009.

The bench, also comprising Justice R Mahadevan, counselled the state not to oppose every Central scheme merely because they come from the Centre. "You may have your education system, but don't prevent the Central government schools. Don't have this attitude that 'it is the Union government, why should we accept it,'" Justice Nagarathna said.

# 'Beef raid' on house in UP: Police arrest four more after 'encounter'

Manish Sahu  
Lucknow, July 16

NEARLY THREE weeks after it arrested three women after it raided a house in Kaushambi's village, the police on Thursday arrested four more after an 'encounter' with the accused.

According to police, they received information that the accused were hiding in an orchard. When they reached the spot, the suspects opened fire, and a gunfight ensued. One of the accused, Mohammad Arshad alias Cheddan, sustained a bullet injury to his leg. Three other suspects, Sumne alias Ilyas Khan, Nafees and Fakrul, were arrested, while two of the accused managed to escape, police said.

Kaushambi Circle Officer Shivank Singh said a forensic report from a laboratory in Mathura had confirmed that the meat samples seized during the June 24 raid from Arshad's house in Kaushambi were that of beef. The accused have been booked under various provisions of the Uttar Pradesh Prevention of Cow Slaughter Act at Sarai Akil Police Station in Kaushambi.

The three women who were held during the June 24 raid, Shama Parveen, Shaista and Fatima, are related to Arshad, who has six previous criminal cases registered against him, the last of them in 2016. All four

The CBSE's three-language policy has been challenged before the Supreme Court in petitions pending before a bench presided over by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant. While the three-language policy was not a direct issue in the matter heard on Thursday, the Tamil Nadu Government counsel flagged the state's concerns regarding the policy during the hearing. This invited the comments from the bench.

Justice Nagarathna pointed out that per the policy, "The state language has to be taught, English has to be taught and any third language. It doesn't say Hindi." The counsel appearing for the petitioner, on whose plea the Madras HC passed its order, said the National Education Policy (NEP) bars the imposition of any language on any state. This prompted Justice Nagarathna to ask, "You don't want Hindi, but if it's Sanskrit, what is the issue?"

When informed that the third language becomes mandatory only from Class 9, Justice Nagarathna said, "That is very bad. The ninth standard is stressful. Why do you introduce a new language in the ninth grade? You introduce it in the sixth."

"Union of India, please don't have a third language in the ninth standard," she said. "CBSE, ICSE, State Board, then standard is a board exam. From the end of the eighth standard onwards, the pressure starts. Don't start a new language in 9th. Start it in 6th..."

Fixing the matter for hearing next on August 11, the court noted that discussions between the Centre and the state on the issue are still on and that the question of hearing it on merits would arise only if they fail.

# DAYS AFTER ASSAM RIFLES CAMP TARGETED IN SENAPATI DISTRICT

# CRPF redraws SOP for Manipur

## Lays stress on use of bulletproof vehicles, women personnel in troop movement

Mahender Singh Manral  
New Delhi, July 16

DAYS AFTER a mob attacked an Assam Rifles camp in Senapati district of Manipur, the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) has reworked its strategy for troop movement and field deployment in the state.

Sources said the revised instructions place strong emphasis on protected and guarded movement of personnel, both for administrative duties and operational tasks.

Around 100 bulletproof vehicles have been sent to Manipur to strengthen force protection and mobility, officials



Charred remains of a vehicle that was torched by a mob in Manipur's Senapati district, Wednesday.

said. CRPF personnel have been directed to move only in bulletproof vehicles in sensitive areas, said sources. "Administrative movement, which often involves routine deployment, supply,

coordination and movement between camps or duty points, has also been brought under tighter security protocol. Such movement will now have to be well-guarded and planned in advance," an official said.

As part of the revised strategy, women personnel will be included in troop movement teams, as and when required. This decision was taken in view of recent instances when women protesters took the lead in surrounding security forces during operations or movement, an official said.

The CRPF has also deployed two CoBRA (Commando Battalion for Resolute Action) battalions in the state. "One of the key responsibilities of the CoBRA units will be to destroy bunkers allegedly set up by outlawed groups belonging to the Kukli, Meitei and Naga communities. Security forces are also clearing suspected ambush points, particularly along curves, hilly stretches and for-

ested routes, where convoys are considered vulnerable," the official said.

According to officials, around 320 companies of the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs), excluding the Assam Rifles, are currently deployed in Manipur, as part of the Centre's efforts to stabilise the security situation in the state, which has witnessed prolonged ethnic violence.

The CRPF is also working to reduce hostility from Kuki groups with confidence-building measures and careful deployment patterns to prevent further escalation, said officials.

On Tuesday night, a mob targeted an Assam Rifles camp, following a search operation to track suspected armed cadres of the NSCN (IM). The mob resorted to stone-pelting, arson and vandalism, prompting security forces to fire blank rounds and teargas shells to disperse the crowd, officials said.

# • BRIEFLY



Firefighters douse the bus fire in Ramban's Karol on Thursday. EXPRESS

## JAMMU AND KASHMIR

# Narrow escape for 47 Amarnath pilgrims after their bus catches fire

FORTY-SEVEN Amarnath pilgrims, on Thursday had a narrow escape after their bus caught fire along the Jammu-Srinagar national highway near Karol in Ramban district of Jammu and Kashmir. The pilgrims from Rajasthan were on their way home after darshan at Amarnath shrine in South Kashmir Himalayas, officials said, adding the incident took place around 4.15 pm. The police control room at Ramban confirmed the fire incident, adding that all the passengers were evacuated safely. Eye witnesses said the CRPF personnel deployed at Karol noticed the fire and immediately started evacuating the passengers. Teams of Army, SDRF, Fire and Emergency Services, and others joined them. ENS

# 3 minor boys drown in pit in Chhattisgarh

TWO MINOR siblings and another boy drowned in a rainwater-filled pit in Chhattisgarh's Rajnandgaon district, police said on Thursday. A 4-year-old boy and two brothers, both aged 10, went out to play. When they didn't return, their family and villagers launched a search and found the bodies in a water-filled pit at night, a police officer said. The pit was allegedly created after excavation of soil for some work several months back. It got filled with rainwater following recent showers, he said. Villagers alleged the deep pit was left unsecured and demanded stern action against those responsible. The exact cause would be ascertained after an investigation, the official said. PTI

# Mumbai FDA suspends licence of Parsi Dairy

THE MAHARASHTRA FDA has suspended the food licence of Mumbai-based Parsi Dairy Farm Pvt Ltd after finding serious food safety and hygiene violations, officials said on Thursday. It was part of a statewide enforcement drive in which food items worth more than Rs 1.90 crore were seized, they added. The inspection conducted on July 14, found fungal growth on walls of the storage and production areas, raw material stored on the floor and no protected Raw Milk Reception Dock for receiving raw milk. During the suspension, the establishment is barred from manufacturing, storing, selling, or distributing food items, and any violation will invite legal action. ENS

# At least 2 dead, many hurt in crowd surge during Puri Rath Yatra

Sujit Bisoi  
Puri, July 16

AT LEAST TWO men died and over 100 were hospitalised following an "unprecedented rush" of devotees during the Rath Yatra of Lord Jagannath in Puri on Thursday, officials said.

The two men who died were aged 60 and 35. Officials said the 60-year-old collapsed during the rush, after which he was rushed to a hospital, where doctors declared him dead. The exact cause of his death remains to be ascertained. The 35-year-old man suffered a cardiac arrest and died despite receiving immediate medical attention, the officials said.

As many as 100 devotees were admitted to the district hospital in Puri with injuries and other medical issues due to the commotion, officials said, adding that all those hospitalised were in stable condition. The state government had deployed nearly 12,000 police personnel, 19 senior IPS officers and over 100 senior administrative officers, and sought "proper coordination and

seamless communication" among inter-departmental agencies, in an effort to ensure a safe and incident-free Rath Yatra as Puri prepared to welcome lakhs of devotees from across the globe for the nine-day festival that started on Thursday. Nearly 30 lakh devotees from India and abroad are expected to visit Puri during the course of the festival.

Despite persistent rain and inclement weather, an estimated 8-9 lakh devotees had arrived in Puri to witness the Rath Yatra, during which the sibling deities, Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Goddess Subhadra, are believed to embark on an annual sojourn from their 12th-century temples to Gundicha Temple. Devotees pull three large decorated chariots to mark the day. The Bahuda Yatra, scheduled for July 24, marks their return.

A statement issued by the Chief Minister's Office claimed the overall conduct of the festival was peaceful, orderly and well managed. It said there was no stampede incident or any systemic breakdown of crowd management.

# EXPRESS special

# A hospital visit, a forgotten family name: How a murder accused from Kerala was caught after 39 years

Shaju Philip  
Thiruvananthapuram, July 16

WHEN HE slipped into Tamil Nadu 39 years ago after his brother-in-law was hacked to death, Mohanan Pillai from Veliyan village in Kerala's Kollam district hoped to shed all traces of his past. He allegedly changed everything about himself — he slipped into a new identity, married and rebuilt his life.

That, until a tiny slip during a hospital visit led the police straight back to him. This week, Mohanan Pillai Kodyattu was arrested for the murder of his brother-in-law Chandrasekharan Pillai, bringing an end to a four-decade-long search. In the time that passed, much had changed: Mohanan, now 64 and going by Rajan Keshavan, became the father of two children, earned a living through odd jobs at hotels and shops, and had allegedly become an alcoholic.

"We probed into details of Mohanan's family. Our team accidentally stumbled on a person who told us that a few months ago, he had met someone at the Kottayam Government Medical College Hospital asking about the Kodiyattu family in Veliyan," says investigating officer



This week, Mohanan Pillai Kodyattu (left) was arrested for the murder of his brother-in-law Chandrasekharan Pillai (right), bringing an end to a four-decade-long search. EXPRESS

and Pooyappally SHO P Shajimon. According to the police, Mohanan hacked his brother-in-law Chandrasekharan Pillai to death on January 11, 1987. Chandrasekharan, then 35, used to brew illicit liquor and allegedly kept it at Mohanan's house, leading to a violent argument over it at hotels and shops, and had allegedly become an alcoholic.

"While staying at a hotel, Rajan struck up an acquaintance with all of us. He was offered a job by the family at their rubber nursery in Kottayam," Valsa says. "Taking up the family's offer, Rajan went to Kottayam months later and eventually asked to marry Valsa. The couple have two children — a 37-year-old daughter and 35-year-old son.

"My family was poor and my older brother was struggling to marry me off. Hence, the propo-

grimage town of Velankanni in Nagapattinam district. Here, he met his wife Valsa, who worked with a Kottayam-based family on pilgrimage.

"While staying at a hotel, Rajan struck up an acquaintance with all of us. He was offered a job by the family at their rubber nursery in Kottayam," Valsa says. "Taking up the family's offer, Rajan went to Kottayam months later and eventually asked to marry Valsa. The couple have two children — a 37-year-old daughter and 35-year-old son.

"My family was poor and my older brother was struggling to marry me off. Hence, the propo-

# Kandhamal riots investigation reports missing, former CMO officials summoned in Odisha

Sujit Bisoi  
Bhubaneswar, July 16

THE ODISHA Police have summoned two former senior bureaucrats who served in the chief minister's office (CMO) under the previous Biju Janata Dal government as part of an investigation into the alleged disappearance of two inquiry commission reports.

Summons have been issued to retired IAS officer Rajesh Verma and former Indian Railway Traffic Service (IRTS) officer Manoj Mishra as part of the investigation into the alleged

disappearance of two reports — one pertaining to the killing of Hindu seer Laxmananda Saraswati in Kandhamal in 2008, and the other on the fire at SMM medical college in 2016.

The two retired bureaucrats have been asked to appear on July 22. They did not respond to calls and texts for a comment.

"You are requested to bring with you any documents, records, electronic devices or any other material relevant to the investigation that may be in your possession or control," the notice issued to Verma on Wednesday said.

Verma served as principal secretary to former chief minister Naveen Patnaik between 2017 and 2019 and served as secretary to President Droupadi Murmu after joining the central deputation in 2022. Mishra served as secretary of the Electronics and IT Department and as officer on special duty (OSD) in the CMO during the BJP rule. Mishra resigned after the change of government in June 2024.

Police sources said that since the two retired officials appear to be acquainted "with the facts and circumstances of

the case", they were asked to appear for examination and extend cooperation.

The complainant alleged that while several other reports and files forwarded by the home department to the CMO were returned on June 4, 2024, when the Assembly election results became clear — these two are still missing.

The FIR claimed that the "disappearance" of the reports created a reasonable suspicion that they may have been "intentionally removed, retained, concealed, destroyed or otherwise unlawfully dealt with".

# Skyroot to launch Vikram-1 orbital rocket tomorrow

Anonna Dutt  
New Delhi, July 16

INDIAN SPACE-TECH startup Skyroot Aerospace will attempt the first orbital launch of its indigenously developed rocket, Vikram-1, on Saturday, July 18, at 11.30 am, from the country's premier spaceport at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota. The mission, named 'Aagam', meaning 'arrival', marks a milestone for India's private space sector: the nation's first-ever attempt to place a payload into orbit using a completely privately developed launch vehicle.

All necessary airspace and maritime notices have been issued establishing restricted zones during the launch window, according to the company. "We have done everything that could be done to test Vik-

ram-1 on the ground. On July 18, we are eager to see how Vikram-1 performs in a real flight environment for the first time," said Pawan Kumar Chandna, co-founder and CEO of the company.

"This is our first test flight, and we will be getting valuable data from it. This will be foundational to Skyroot's aspirations of establishing launch cadence. We are excited to see this through," he added.

Even in its first flight, Vikram-1 will carry several technology demonstrations from the Indian earth-observation nanosatellite maker Grahax Space, Indian space debris removal company CosmoSense, space component developer DCoBued, and its own SCOPE satellite, which will collect important flight data. Aside from this, Vikram-1 will also carry a



India's first private orbital rocket, Vikram-1, stands fully stacked at Sriharikota for the upcoming 'Mission Aagam' test flight. CREDIT: ANAGRAM/BSKYROOTAEROSPACE

diamond art piece called Cosmic Bloom from Cosmos Diamonds and a micro-art piece.

"This test flight will show us how every technology we have developed over the years performs in real-world conditions. With the in-flight data gathered from this mission, we will return to the shop floor to learn, improve, and build further. This test flight is the first step towards creating a reliable, on-demand launch company for the world from India," said Naga Bharath Daka, co-founder and COO of the company.

## Vikram-1 launcher

Named in honour of Dr Vikram Sarabhai, the father of India's space programme, the launcher stands seven storeys tall. It is engineered to deliver small satellites weighing up to

350 kg to Low Earth Orbit (LEO). For this launch, it is targeting a 450 km orbit at a 60-degree inclination.

Alongside Skyroot's Vikram-1, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)'s own Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV) and Agniuk's under-development rockets are set to expand India's capability to launch satellites in this region of space. This is significant as the increasing number of companies developing small satellites intended for low Earth orbit, such as the fleets by internet providers Starlink and OneWeb.

So far, two Indian launch vehicle developers, including Skyroot, have demonstrated sub-orbital flights — vehicles that take a satellite to outer space but lack sufficient velocity to put it into orbit.

# SEXUAL ASSAULT CASE

# Tarun Tejpal's counsel claims complainant not 'sterling witness', points to 'contradictions'

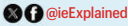
Pavneet Singh Chadha  
Panaji, July 16

WHILE OPPOSING the state's plea challenging his acquittal, Tarun Tejpal, the former editor-in-chief of *The Hindu*, who was accused of sexually assaulting his then colleague in a Goa hotel in 2013, told the High Court of Bombay at Goa on Thursday that the complainant's testimony was not of a "sterling witness", claiming that there were contradictions in her testimony.

A journalist had complained of the complainant's assault during the trial regarding the circumstances and sequence of events in the lift of the hotel on the day of the alleged incident.

Tejpal of all charges, observing that the complainant "did not demonstrate any kind of normative behaviour" that a victim of sexual assault "might plausibly show". The Goa government had subsequently filed an appeal in the High Court of Bombay at Goa, challenging the acquittal, and arguments in the case are ongoing.

Relying on the CCTV footage played in the court, Aabid Ponda, the counsel for Tejpal, told the High Court that there were contradictions in the testimony of the complainant during the trial regarding the circumstances and sequence of events in the lift of the hotel on the day of the alleged incident.



If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to [explained@indianexpress.com](mailto:explained@indianexpress.com)

## DONATION CONTROVERSY

# Vaishno Devi 'silver' row: How the shrine stores, guards offerings

Arun Sharma  
Jammu, July 16

A COURT in Jammu is hearing a plea claiming possible adulteration and misappropriation of silver worth around Rs 550 crore donated by devotees at the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine. The controversy arose from reports that only around 5-6% of the approximately 20 tonnes of the shrine's accumulated silver offerings was found to be actual silver. The complainant sought an investigation into whether devotees had been sold fake silver articles, or whether genuine silver offerings had been diluted and pilfered after their receipt.

## What is offered at the shrine?

Each year, nearly one crore pilgrims visit the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine in the Trikuta hills in Jammu district. They commonly donate cash, and gold and silver items. In earlier years, the gold items donated at the shrine each month would weigh a total of 2-2.5 kg. But as prices increased over the years, donations of the yellow metal dipped to around a kilo each month.

Meanwhile, offerings of 'silver' are at nearly 100 kg each month. This silver is in the form of "chhatras" (umbrellas or parasols), coins or ornaments. These donated chhatras, coins and ornaments have now reportedly been found to contain a very low proportion of the metal.

Shrine officials say they have found no purity issues with the gold items donated at the shrine. They say these gold offerings are found to contain 70-75% of pure gold on testing. But these officials also believe that this purity may also decline in the future owing to the increasing prices of the yellow metal and the circulation of 16 gram (gm), 14 gm and even one gm gold jewellery in the market.

How did the controversy arise? The Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board had reportedly sent around 20 tonnes of accumulated silver, worth around Rs 550 crore, for testing, melting and processing to a government mint outside Jammu and Kashmir. When the melted material was tested to check its purity, it was reportedly found to contain only 5-6% of silver. The rest was cadmium, iron and cheap materials.

Cadmium is a cheap, toxic metal that resembles silver. The question that arises here is this: Were the offerings made by the devotees made of adulterated silver in the first place, or whether any adulteration took place after the donations were made.

How are these offerings tracked at the shrine? Pilgrims place gold, silver and cash in donation boxes within the shrine complex. These boxes are double locked, kept under 24x7 CCTV surveillance and guarded by CRPF personnel and the guards from the shrine board. The boxes get filled, an officer of the rank of Sub Divisional Magistrate (SDM) and a shrine board official open them and count the cash. The gold and silver items are weighed separately and then sealed in packets for safe custody in a strongroom. The entire exercise is carried out under CCTV surveillance. The strongroom, too, is guarded round the clock by CRPF personnel. After five-six months, when an ample quantity of these gold and silver items get accumulated, they are brought down to Katra town, sometimes via helicopter, under the watchful eyes of CRPF personnel, shrine board officials and the SDM. The seals on the packets are checked and weighed again before keeping them in another strongroom at the shrine board office, again guarded by personnel from a Central Armed Police Force.

What happens to the melted material? After deriving gold and silver in their pure form from it, the shrine board gets coins manufactured from the government mint itself with photographs of Mata Vaishno Devi inscribed on them. These coins are later sold by the shrine board to pilgrims with a guaranteed purity of 99.9%.

## THE ODYSSEY RELEASES TODAY

# Nolan's vision and India's screens

Only 41 theatres across the world can project *The Odyssey* in its native 15/70mm format. India doesn't have one



ARAV SHAH

THE RELEASE of *The Odyssey* today marks a landmark technical achievement in cinema — it is the first full length feature film shot entirely on an IMAX camera. Christopher Nolan has advocated that his films be watched on an IMAX screen that projects the analog 15 perforation 70mm film reel developed from the original colour negative (OCN).

While IMAX cameras capture better image resolution and details than others, they are both expensive and inconvenient to regularly handle due to their size and deafening internal motors. To bypass this, Nolan and the IMAX team created a new camera titled the 'Keylley Camera'. This camera is housed inside a novel carbon-fibre casing termed 'The Bilimp', reducing the sound of the motors by 30-50%.

India, however, will only screen digital versions of the film.

## First, the basics

The 15 perforation/70mm film reel refers to the physical reel where the strip's width is 70mm with 15 perforations or sprocket holes punched alongside its edge. These holes advance the film frames during projection. This technique yields an image resolution equivalent to 18K and a towering 143:1 aspect ratio.

This aspect ratio is the proportion between the width and height of the displayed image. A 143:1 aspect ratio essentially means that the projected film appears taller with a square finish as opposed to the standard rectangular images in most films. This set-up results in each frame of the movie being roughly 10 times larger than a standard 35mm film frame.

## Post-production

*The Odyssey's* OCN was spliced together manually. In a conversation with *The Indian Express*, Andrew Oran, Senior Vice President at FotoKem Labs (did Oppenheimer's prints only lab that can do features of this length for 15p/70mm) said: "It is true that the film was spliced together by hand, and that all 70mm 15perf. prints were made from the original cut negative." Once the film is captured on celluloid, the post-production process is what sets apart the analog print of *The Odyssey* from other versions. The process largely followed these steps:

- Once the raw film leaves the movie sets, it reaches the lab where it goes through a processor — running through developer and fixer baths — before hitting the drying rack.

- By the end of production, these reels are digitised and scenes requiring VFX edits sent to the appropriate workshop. After the limited digital edits, these parts of the film are printed back onto the 15 perf./70mm film.

- Then, the negatives are physically cut and glued together by the post-production lab — in this case, FotoKem in Burbank, California.

- The OCN then undergoes a photochemical colour correction process.

- The photonegative is run through a contact printer that projects light through the OCN onto blank positive film stock to create the final print. These release prints are then dried after a final chemical bath.

## Massive image, massive reels

The labour-intensive process involved



Christopher Nolan shoots 'The Odyssey' on an IMAX camera.

## Not all IMAX screens are built the same

The theatre near you may advertise an IMAX screen, but there are multiple variants. The first two, the highest-grade offerings, are not available in India.

**IMAX 15/70 MM:** Christopher Nolan's recommendation. It reproduces the true analog version of the film. The physical film runs horizontally through a projector. The maximum aspect ratio is 143:1 — which provides the biggest image possible. The resolution is between 12K-18K.

**IMAX GT (Grand Theatre) Dual Laser:** The only digital IMAX format capable of achieving a 143:1 aspect ratio. It uses two in-synch 4K laser projectors. The resolution is 4K (4096x2160 pixels).

**IMAX CoLa:** Digital projector used for medium-to-large halls using a single 4K laser. The resolution is 4K & maximum aspect ratio is 1.90:1. Employs dual-lens to project two overlapping images for deeper contrast.

**IMAX XT:** Single lens 4K laser projector. While aspect ratio is 1.90:1, only one image is projected instead of two overlapping ones. An option for smaller/refitted auditoriums.

**IMAX Xenon:** Oldest of the three technologies available in India. The resolution caps out at 2K. Aspect ratio remains 1.90:1.

## What's an IMAX camera?

- A special movie camera that records much larger and more detailed images than a regular camera.

- Nolan shot the entirety of 'The Odyssey' on the novel Keylley camera — named after two top IMAX executives

in preparing the film ensures that the visual data remains purely analog from the lens to the projector.

"The most intense period of the post-production process for FotoKem was when we were creating the master printing negatives in each film format — 70mm/15 perf., 70mm/5 perf. and 35mm — all at the same time," Oran said. This maintains a theoretical resolution equivalent to 18K — up to three times the fidelity of the best digital cinema cameras available today. This enhanced resolution and aspect ratio delivers a final print weighing approximately 240 kilograms (530-600lbs), requiring a specialised 68-inch transport platform just to hold the reel.

"Our (FotoKem) role in relation to the 70mm 15 perf. release of *The Odyssey* was to provide prints of each of the film's 54 reels to IMAX, who QC-screened and assembled the prints for shipping," Oran said.

The official theatrical run-time of 2 hours and 52 minutes comprises more than 17 kilometres of celluloid for a single 15/70mm print.

When taken from standard 35mm film, the 15/70mm film runs horizontally (instead of vertically) through a cinema projector, pulling 15 perforations per frame.

Today, there are only 41 theatres across the globe equipped to project *The Odyssey* in its native 15/70mm format. India doesn't have any such commercial theatre.

## What India gets to see

The Indian IMAX landscape is currently populated by three tiers of digital projection: dual 2K Xenon systems, single-lens 4K Commercial Laser (CoLa) and the 4K XT Laser.

Both IMAX CoLa and XT systems are restricted by their architecture and digital systems to a maximum aspect ratio of 1.90:1. The CoLa projector is utilised for medium-to-large auditoriums and is typically paired with IMAX's 12 channel audio system. The IMAX XT system is a newer

and cost-effective solution deployed in retrofitted multiplex screens (typically under 50 feet wide).

When *The Odyssey* — shot to fill a towering 143:1 canvas — is projected onto India's 1.90:1 CoLa or XT screens, the image is expanded horizontally to fit the screen width, but the top and bottom of the frame are permanently truncated. This does provide an advantage — Indian exhibitors do not receive a 300-kg metal plate containing sensitive film inside; they receive an encrypted, digital hard-drive (known as a key delivery mechanism) that greatly democratises the distribution of the film.

## That one screen in Ahmedabad

Imagine a fully operational, meticulously maintained 15-perforation 70mm IMAX projector and a colossal 143:1 screen (measuring 97 feet by 67 feet) — the likes of which Nolan himself might enjoy watching his creation on.

Located in Ahmedabad, Gujarat Science City (GSC) boasts of exactly such a screen. But GSC, a government-owned venue, has a strictly educational mandate, aimed at fostering a scientific temperament for students and visitors.

Demand and permission issues aside, there are other barriers prohibiting *The Odyssey* from being screened here.

First, the equipment and film prints imported by GSC are likely to benefit from specific customs duty exemptions reserved for educational material. Screening a for-profit feature could violate these import tariffs and breach the institution's charter of focussing on science and education.

Second, the mechanical layout for projection is strictly tailored for short-form content, lasting around 40-50 minutes. Such features require considerably smaller film platters. *The Odyssey's* 172-minute runtime means that the GSC's platter ecosystem is not engineered to support its weight or spatial demands.

# Before watching *The Odyssey*, a primer on the epic



ANAGHA JAYAKUMAR

CHRISTOPHER NOLAN's adaptation of *The Odyssey* arrives in cinemas today, introducing one of the oldest surviving and foundational works of Western literature to a new generation of viewers.

Despite its enduring influence, many readers and filmmakers know *The Odyssey* more by reputation than by its story. Written nearly 3,000 years ago, it is a story of homecoming after war, set in a world populated by gods, monsters and mortals. Its themes, characters and adventures have influenced storytelling ever since.

## What is *The Odyssey*?

*The Odyssey* is one of two epic poems traditionally attributed to the Greek poet Homer, and generally dated to the eighth century BCE. The other is *The Iliad*. Today, "epic" is often used to describe something monumental. In literature, however, an epic is a long narrative poem that typically deals with extraordinary figures, heroic deeds and the intervention of gods or other supernatural forces.

*The Odyssey's* central figure is Odysseus, the king of Ithaca, renowned for his intelligence. The poem follows his long journey home after the war.

Both *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* have sparked debate about their authorship, triggering what is known as the Homeric Question. Scholars continue to debate whether Homer was a historical individual, an anonymous poet, or a combination of both.

**KEY CHARACTERS**  
**ODYSSEUS** The king of Ithaca. Known as Ulysses in Roman tradition. Known for his intelligence and adaptability, rather than brute strength. Played by Matt Damon.

**PENELOPE** Queen of Ithaca, wife of Odysseus. Renowned for her intelligence, patience and resilience while resisting suitors. Played by Anne Hathaway.

**TELEMACHUS** Son of Odysseus and Penelope. Comes of age while searching for news of his missing father. Played by Tom Holland.

**ATHENA** Goddess of wisdom and warfare. Odysseus' divine protector. Played by Zendaya.

**POSEIDON** God of the sea and storms. Odysseus' greatest adversary. No physical actor.

**POLYPHEMUS** The cyclops who changes the course of the hero's voyage. Played by Bill Irwin.

**CALYPSO** Nymph who keeps Odysseus on her island for years. Played by Charlize Theron.

**Odysseus'** decade-long journey home after the war has ended. It is often cited as one of literature's earliest and most influential "hero's journeys". The film, meanwhile, reportedly begins with the episode of the Trojan Horse, in which Odysseus devises the ruse that leads to Trojans dragging a giant wooden horse into their city.

AP reports that the film also includes elements from related stories such as Virgil's poem *The Aeneid* and the play *Agamemnon*, a Greek tragedy by Aeschylus. The film appears to draw on the wider Trojan tradition, rather than being a page-for-page adaptation.

## What's the poem's relevance?

Classical scholar Emily Wilson, in her 2018 translation of *The Odyssey*, says the poem is the story of a man who is "not 'the' man, but one of many men — albeit a man of extraordinary cognitive, psychological and military power". She notes that, contrary to the reader's expectations, *The Odyssey* recounts "the story of a man whose grand adventure is simply to go back to his own home... For this hero, mere survival is the most amazing feat of all."

## SPORT

# Argentina's Falklands banner: Political gestures at World Cups and FIFA's rules

Shuvaditya Bose  
New Delhi, July 16

WHILE CELEBRATING their 2-1 triumph over England in the semi-final of the 2026 FIFA World Cup, Argentina's Lautaro Martínez and Giovanni Lo Celso held aloft a banner that read: "Las Malvinas son Argentinas." The Falkland Islands (Malvinas) are a British overseas territory. Argentina fans had been banned from carrying Falklands flags into the World Cup semi-final. But its appearance has sparked controversy.

## Why is the banner controversial?

The answer lies almost two centuries in the past. The Falkland Islands — or Islas Malvinas, as they are known in Argentina — have remained at the centre of a sovereignty dispute between Argentina and the UK since Britain reassessed control over the islands in 1833. Argentina argues that it inherited the sovereignty of these islands from Spain upon gaining independence in 1816, and therefore regards Britain's occupation as illegal. In 1982, the two countries fought a 74-day war that resulted in 649 Argentine casualties and 255 British deaths. Officially, Britain continues to administer the islands, with the majority of the residents voting to remain a British overseas territory during a referendum in 2013. But Argentina still considers the British protectorate essential to its national identity.

What are the rules on such gestures? FIFA's regulations state that any political banner or flags with political messages are strictly prohibited before, after and during a match in the immediate vicinity of the stadium. International Football Association Board (IFAB) regulations also prohibit players from using sporting equipment with political messaging.

IFAB's code of conduct also says fans cannot "curse or chant in a political, offensive and/or discriminatory manner". The world body is currently reviewing the on-field gesture in Atlanta under its rules prohibiting political messaging.



Argentina's Giovanni Lo Celso holds a banner saying 'The Falklands are Argentine'. AP

## What have Argentina fans said or done at the World Cup on the dispute?

At the 2026 World Cup, Argentina's unofficial anthem has been 'Muchachos' —

En Argentina nació, (I was born in Argentina)  
Tierra de Diego y Lionel, (Land of Diego and Lionel)

De los pilbes de Malvinas, (Of the boys of the Malvinas)  
Que jamás olvidaré (Whom I will never forget)

The last two lines are widely understood to be a tribute to the Argentine soldiers who died during the 1982 war. After the victory over England, the players also celebrated with the chant "Por las Malvinas, por Diego y por el último de Leo (For the Malvinas, for Diego, and for Leo's last one)".

## Have Argentina fans made references to the Falkland Islands earlier?

Something similar took place during Argentina's friendly match against Slovenia in 2014. On that occasion, the players stood behind a banner with the exact wording of the one held up on Wednesday. On that occasion, FIFA had imposed a non-sporting sanction on Argentina. The federation was asked to pay 30,000 Swiss francs.

## Have players made political gestures at World Cups before?

Yes. At the 2018 World Cup, for instance, Switzerland's Xherdan Shaqiri and Granit Xhaka celebrated goals against Serbia by making the Albanian double-headed eagle gesture with their hands. Both players have ethnic Albanian roots linked to Kosovo, whose independence Serbia does not recognise. FIFA imposed a fine of 10,000 Swiss francs on both players.

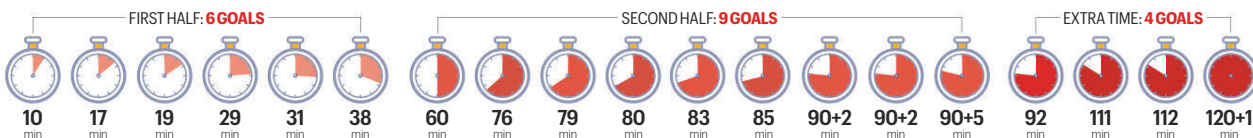
During the 2022 World Cup, meanwhile, Serbia were fined 20,000 Swiss francs for a banner they had hoisted in their dressing room which showed Kosovo as a part of Serbia and read: "No surrender." At the same World Cup, German players had covered their mouths with their hands ahead of a match, in a symbolic gesture to convey that FIFA were forcibly silencing players. The football body had warned teams against using OneLove armbands, celebrating gender inclusivity, with the tournament being held in Qatar, where same-sex relationship is criminalised.

FIFA did not sanction Germany for the protest.



● **AS THE CLOCK TICKS**

Argentina have scored 19 goals in this edition of the FIFA World Cup, 12 of them coming after the 75th minute.



# Messi magic, England tragic

Legend's assists, goals from Fernandez and Martinez script Argentina's 2-1 comeback win



**Sandip G**  
Atlanta, July 16

NEAR THE centre circle, Lionel Messi knelt, prayed, and stared poignantly into the skies through the translucent roofs of the arena. Tears of joy streaming down, his head drooped and he repeatedly punched the air like a judoka's underarm knock.

In 20 years of scaling greatness, he has felt the sport's elusive nirvana, achieved saintliness and experienced every conceivable emotion, suffered heartbreaks and felt disillusioned, and won every trophy football could offer him. But beating England 2-1 with collective courage, via late goals when everything seemed nearly lost, was special. Even for Messi.

With a faint but contented smile, he trudged towards the fans, where his teammates were already celebrating, with drums blaring incoherent beats in the background. Some of them unfolded a huge white flag with a message — "Las Malvinas son Argentinas" ("The Malvinas are Argentina") — a reference to the Falkland Islands, a self-governing territory of Britain over which the countries went to war nearly half a century ago. His teammates tossed Messi in the air, and car-



Lionel Messi didn't score but provided crucial assists for both goals. (R) Enzo Fernandez celebrating Argentina's equaliser in the semifinal. AP

ried him on their shoulders, which is now a ritual.

On his way back to the tunnel, he wrapped his arms around England captain Harry Kane, stopped for a chat with John Stones, and consoled Thomas Tuchel. He could relate with England's pain, he has felt similar torment. It was a poignant frame that captured the undulating emotions of a game that barely roused in the first half.

England couldn't beat Diego Maradona; they wouldn't his Messi either. Harry Kane said he was gutted, but the trauma could live forever. Another game into the alley of heartbreaks.

Yet, it could have been different. Just five minutes remained between a painful end to Messi's career, before he and his indefatigable men pulled off another miraculous escape, scoring two goals in six minutes



to nail their spot in the final. This one would be sweeter than the Egypt heist; the layers of history that underpin the two nations, the angst and acrimony that spilled onto the field, the nerves and the tension that clanged, the possible hollowness of becoming former champions.

But when adversity stares into their eyes, Argentina inevitably find a thread of hope. Perhaps, it's their ignition; they need a slap on their face to wake them up from slumber. A more short-tempered referee would have flicked the cards in his chest-pocket more

often. Players pushed and pulled, tackles flew frequently. A header from John Stones off a Declan Rice cross was the first convincing attempt on goal. That came 33 minutes into the game. Before half-time nudged in, Enzo Fernandez unzipped a curler that soared over Jordan Pickford. The more apt portrait of the game was the 7-12 stat in Argentina's favour, the number of fouls committed.

The second Argentina conceded, through a startling defensive lapse that winger Anthony Gordon pounced upon, they transformed into a different team; they gathered a sense of authority.

When they are pushed to a corner, when the comeback paths are blocked, when all is nearly lost, they throw the carefully-conceived tactical sheets into the wind, eschew structures and formations, and just unlock chaos.

A rhythmic, systematic chaos, like the chorus of their anthem Muchachos. Messi, refined at La Masia, was never a man of chaos. Now, he is an agent of chaos. He defined foot-

ball in his image, now he is redefining it. Before Enzo Fernandez's strike, a curling pearler that swung away from Pickford, Alexis MacAllister had hit the upright (he would slam the post again), Nico Gonzalez induced a low diving save from the England goalkeeper.

Each unfruitful attempt didn't wither them. Messi implored the crowd to raise the volume and keep believing. From a fleeting passage of shock, they picked up their voice. Argentina found their precision and purpose.

When Argentina got a corner, England packed the box, anticipating a wickedly swirling corner. It didn't. Messi took the corner, received it back and recycled it to Fernandez, in vast space. He took a touch and wrapped his foot around it. The ball whooshed past Pickford, who had put in a heroic shift.

Discernible was a shift in mood. One could hear the sound of England's belief creaking, thanks to their own self-destructiveness and defensive tactics.

## Destroying belief

Argentina would now be unstoppable. They tigerishly reclaimed possession; they ravagedly attacked England's box, dismantling their cohesion and destroying their belief.

The dagger through the heart arrived soon. From the foot of Messi, again. He swirled a devastatingly arcing cross over Nico O'Reilly.

Lautaro Martinez was waiting. He strained every sinew of his neck to meet the ball and guide it past Pickford. This was the game; Argentina knew; England knew it too.

England could not beat Maradona; they couldn't beat Messi either. And Messi has one more game to experience the whole spectrum of emotions that he lives for. Perhaps the greatest game of his career; or the cruelest.

## How Scaloni engineered another Argentine remontada

**Shuvaditya Bose**  
New Delhi, July 16

THE GREATEST trick the devil ever pulled off was convincing the world he didn't exist.

There is a touch of Keyser Söze about Lionel Scaloni. There is a reason why Luis de la Fuente's positional organisation or Thomas Tuchel's strategic detail have been minutely analysed. Yet, no manager at this World Cup has slipped through tactical scrutiny quite like Argentina's.

For every time Scaloni has been asked to explain an Argentine *remontada*, his answer has been the same: it is inexplicable, he does not understand it either.

Wednesday's semifinal against England was another case in point. Argentina over-



Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni is in line to be a double winner. AP

turned a deficit to win 2-1. Asked how his team did it, Scaloni offered only a smile.

"My understanding is that when we smile blood, that's when we play our best football."

And yet, footballing dis-

course does not have room for hyperbole. "Smelling blood" cannot account for 12 goals after the 75th minute, seven of them after the 90th. There has to be an explanation.

Against England, there was.

## 64th minute

Substitution & the comeback



Argentina generated only 0.2 expected goals in the first 63 minutes. And then arrived Nico Gonzalez. On paper, a single substitution. In effect, it created three solutions. Gonzalez occupied his usual position on the left wing, allowing Alexis Mac Allister to move back into midfield and restore Argentina's numerical superiority there.

And Lionel Messi, instead of attempting through balls, went direct with aerial deliveries. Before England realised what hit them, Messi had launched a raft of crosses towards Gonzalez.

In the next five minutes, the Messi-Gonzalez diagonal combination knocked on the English doors three times.

## 72nd minute

Tuchel falls for Scaloni's bluff



After selling Tuchel a dummy with Gonzalez on the left, Scaloni strengthened the right wing with a Messi-Montiel-de Paul triangle.

Recognising that Reece James was struggling with Gonzalez, Tuchel reinforced his right flank. Ezri Konsa replaced goalscorer Gordon. Tuchel didn't realise he was walking into Scaloni's trap. As he committed resources to Argentina's left, Scaloni doubled down on his right by introducing Gonzalo Montiel and Rodrigo de Paul — both right-sided players. Messi, who had a central role till then, also switched to the right.

The triangle of Messi-Montiel-de Paul launched 11 crosses. Argentina were knocking. They would soon bring the door down.

## 82nd minute

Tuchel reacts, but still falters

Tuchel, a Champions League winner, realised he had been sold a dummy. He tried to correct it by introducing left-back Nico O'Reilly, but the decision to take Declan Rice out would prove to be costly. For much of the evening, Elliot Anderson's job had been simple: deny Messi space. He had done so with immaculate efficacy. But with Rice withdrawn, he was outnumbered in midfield.

Three minutes later, Argentina worked a short corner. Messi exchanged a pass with De Paul, drawing Anderson towards the pair. What the English midfielder had not spotted was a third Argentine shirt lurking near the D: Enzo Fernandez.

A sublime long-range 1-1. Four minutes before the goal, Scaloni had made another telling substitution. He had introduced another attacker — Lautaro Martinez — by withdrawing left-back Nicolas Tagliafico. This change would prove to be crucial 11 minutes later.

## Argentina players taunt English with Falkland banner

**Express News Service**  
Mumbai, July 16

AFTER ARGENTINA overhauled a 1-0 deficit against England into a statement 2-1 victory in the semi-finals, some of their players made a statement of another kind.

Giovani Lo Celso and Nicolas Otamendi brought a banner onto the pitch of the Mercedes-Benz Arena that said "Las Malvinas son Argentinas" (The Falkland Islands are Argentine). The banner was a reference to the Falkland Islands (as

known in England while in Argentina the island is called *Islas Malvinas*) which had led to a 74-day conflict between the two countries 44 years ago. The conflict had led to over 900 people — 649 Argentines and 255 Britons — losing their lives. England reassured control of the Falklands after that 1982 war with Argentina's military government.

Argentina still considers the British protectorate essential to their national identity. The banner could land the Argentine football team in trouble



Argentina players carrying the banner after the semifinal against England. AP

with FIFA's rules on political messaging. Argentina will take on Spain in the FIFA World Cup final on Sunday hoping to retain their title won in Qatar 2022.

While it was uncertain where the banner had come from, according to a report from *The Associated Press*, Argentina fans had been banned from carrying Falklands flags into the World Cup semi-final.

## Britain complaints

Reuters adds: The British government on Thursday

urged FIFA to investigate Argentina's team after players posed with the banner. UK Business Secretary Peter Kyle said the players' behavior was "entirely inappropriate. I expect FIFA to do its investigation thoroughly."

FIFA can prosecute Argentina's players and soccer federation because its disciplinary code prohibits at stadiums any "message that is not appropriate for a sports event" including those of "a political, ideological, religious or offensive nature."

● **HEARTBREAK HARRY**

## Kane and the World Cup semifinal that ended like all the others for England

**Sriram Veera**  
Mumbai, July 16

HARRY KANE stood with his hands on his hips and looked at the grass. Around him the Atlanta stadium had split into two noises, one of which had nothing to do with him any more.

England had led since the 55th minute. Enzo Fernandez beat one in from distance in the 85th. Two minutes into stoppage time Messi crossed and Lautaro Martinez headed the winner. "It's a similar story to what's happened in previous tournaments," Kane said afterwards. "We'd done so well for that 60 minutes. We scored. We deserved to be ahead. And then, for one reason or another, we struggled to keep the ball."

He has said versions of this sentence in Moscow, at Wembley, in Al Khor, in Berlin. He is 32 and word perfect at it.

In 1999, on his first day at Ridgeway Rovers in Chingford, a coach named Dave Bricknell asked his six-year-olds if anyone fancied going in goal. Kane's hand went up.

"I thought I'd found a goalkeeper," Bricknell says.

The parents on the touchline put him right. Arsenal took him, looked at him, decided he was too chubby, too unathletic, and let him go.

Spurs took another look, then spent years lending him out, Leyton Orient, Millwall, a relegation battle, a forgotten Under-20 World Cup in Turkey. Peter Taylor, who coached that team, says he could not have predicted the career. "You couldn't meet a nicer boy," he said. That is not the same thing as a prediction. "He didn't really care if he missed, because he knew another chance would come along."

The chance came. It always came. That is the part the record books show and the part that tells the least of it.

What the books do not show is the 30th minute in Moscow in 2018, England leading Croatia in a World Cup semi-final and Kane two yards out with a rebound sitting up. He shot. Goalkeeper Daniel Subasic got a hand to it. The ball came back. He shot again. The ball hit the post and ricocheted off Subasic's leg.

Subasic had sprinted back from nowhere and thrown himself along the ground to divert it with his foot, from two yards, at a ball that had already beaten him once.

What the books do not show is the 108th minute at Wembley in 2021, England leading Italy in a European final, Kane crossing from the right, the ball travelling across the six-yard



England's Harry Kane hugs Anthony Gordon after the semifinal AP

**Six goals in six games, England's all-time World Cup record taken off Gary Lineker along the way, at 32, at the age strikers are supposed to be slowing down.**

box, Stones arriving at the far post with his head. Donnarumma came off his line and punched it away with both fists. Two minutes of extra time remained.

What the books do not show is Al Khor, 2022 in Qatar. Level with France, 84th minute, Kane having already scored once from the spot. He placed it the same way he always places it, low, to the right, the corner he owns.

But this time it left his foot

differently, climbing instead of staying down, clearing the bar by several feet.

He knew before it landed. The shirt came up over his face before anyone in the ground had stopped watching the ball.

Last summer, Bayern Munich played a pre-season friendly at Tottenham. Kane walked back into the stadium he had given nineteen years to Bayern won. At the end a small trophy was produced and the team gathered. Kane shook his head, would not lift it, would not hold something in front of the people he had left without one.

His striker coach Allan Kieny sell once drew the distinction that unlocks him. "Is he a nice guy? No. He's a good guy. Nice guys get taken advantage of."

Beneath the mildness is something harder. Six goals in

six games here, England's all-time World Cup record taken off Gary Lineker along the way, at 32, at the age strikers are supposed to be slowing down. The mildness has a source too.

Kate Goodland has known him since they were pupils at the same Chingford school, both photographed with David Beckham in 2005, aged 11 and 12, before either had any idea what the picture would come to mean. He tapes his wedding ring before every match. Four children were watching somewhere on Wednesday night.

Afterwards, asked about his England future, Kane looked across at the man who had just beaten him, still deciding what the picture would come to mean. He tapes his wedding ring before every match. Four children were watching somewhere on Wednesday night.

Afterwards, asked about his England future, Kane looked across at the man who had just beaten him, still deciding what the picture would come to mean. He tapes his wedding ring before every match. Four children were watching somewhere on Wednesday night.

# Death knell: Giving Messi too much space and time

Sandip G  
Atlanta, July 16

THE CONTEMPLATIONS would rage on, for days, months and decades. Those six minutes between glory and despair, those six minutes when England lost their courage and clarity, those six minutes the country could regret forever. Manager Thomas Tuchel's defensive substitutions, perceived as the game's deflection point, would be painted as the fall guy. But it was not his tactics that wrecked England, but the team's incapability to implement those and deal with the in-game tweaks of his Argentine counterpart Lionel Scaloni.

A team defending a lead in a semifinal with abundant baggage is not cynicism but a practical reaction to a situation wherein the opposition rings in attacking changes. England's backline comprises those with knowhow and nous, some are serial winners in club football, who have lived through such situations.

Scaloni repositioned Messi, from a central, free-roaming role to the right side, his hunting zone in the past. Now he functioned as a hybrid winger. The intentions were simple, storm England with crosses, mix the delivery style, the weight, the shape and the bend. Some were long, some short, some floated, some forceful. Some were passes, long, short, mid-range ones. Scaloni deputised Messi because no one else has his range.

England lost the plot there. They made the fatal mistake of giving Messi too much space and time. Messi and space is a combination for calamity. In the build-up to both goals, Messi had the time to pick his men. No one suffocated him, no one ever did him down.

England lost the plot there. They made the fatal mistake of giving Messi too much space and time. Messi and space is a combination for calamity. In the build-up to both goals, Messi had the time to pick his men. No one suffocated him, no one ever did him down.

England were myopic and unimaginative. They were merely inclined to block and defend their way out of



Thomas Tuchel's defensive subs played into Argentina's hands. AP

trouble. Their positioning went off-kilter, with too many operating side by side. For instance, Stones and Dan Burns often found themselves suffocatingly close to each other, intervening in each other's path.

It was not as though England were horribly unused to the formation. Under Tuchel, England has successfully adopted this ploy. Tuchel hinted as much: "Believe that just the nature of the game. As soon as you lose, you get criticised. It's what it is. No one knows what would have happened if we made different decisions." In a sense, adding fresh legs and defensive reinforcements was a sensible decision. England panicked when they should not have. They made individual lapses.

Jude Bellingham, strangely over-emotional, was late to distort the vision and path of Fernandez. Djed Spence, hitherto strong and judicious in every endeavour, emerged second-best from a physical contact with Messi, just before he crossed to Martinez for the second goal. The bigger strategic letdown was substituting Anthony Gordon, sucking pace out of them. Argentina could throw men upfield with the security that England offered little attacking threat.

It's not a complete defeat of Tuchel's tactics, but the broader failure of understanding the nation's sensibilities, their psyche conditioned by episodic failures, stories of pain and curses. As persistent as England have been in advancing to the deep end of tournaments, they have lost two World Cup semifinals in eight years and as considerable aerial prowess and heavy defensive heartbreaks in Euro finals. It takes more than a manager to alter the nation's responses. England could keep on changing managers, but unless the inherent impulse to a setback shifts, they will keep on losing as they did on Wednesday.

# With future in doubt, Rohit struggles for rhythm in 2nd ODI

Express News Service  
Chennai, July 16

IT WAS the over before Will Jacks put an end to Rohit Sharma's struggles for a 47-ball 26. Two deliveries into left-arm seamer Sam Curran's first over of the afternoon – the sort of variety that has troubled the 39-year-old in the past – Virat Kohli walked up to his long time teammate to share a short message: "Take your time." The run-rate was 6.43, with Kohli ensuring the intent shown by skipper Shubman Gill at the top wasn't going to be compromised in Cardiff.

For the second time in this series, the conditions offered an even contest as India were bowled out for 233 with six overs left unused. And the one who was put to the maximum test was Rohit, a batsman who struggled for rhythm.

rarely makes ugly runs. When bowlers test him, he fights it out, but days like Thursday are rare, as he struggled not because he wasn't equipped to handle the questions posed at him. It was more a mental battle, with his future in India colours' beyond Sunday in doubt. Maybe, he was keen on proving something while not being in the best frame of mind.

Kohli's innings was a complete contrast, as he walked in and owned the stage until he threw it away after making 65 off 66. Beyond Rohit and Kohli, it was vice-captain Shreyas Iyer's 66 off 71 that India were thankful to.

With Washington Sundar, Axar Patel and Shivam Dube falling in the space of 31 deliveries, India folded for 233.

**BRIEF SCORES: India**  
233 all out in 44 overs  
(Shreyas Iyer 66, Virat Kohli 65, Jofra Archer 3/47) against England

# England kicked out by God's right foot

Through a crowded box, Messi found a passing lane that shouldn't have existed, and did it with the right foot, which is considered his weaker one

Mihir Vasavda  
Mumbai, July 16

LIONEL MESSI glanced up for barely a heartbeat.

It was stoppage time of the World Cup semi-final. Argentina had already rescued themselves once, and now sensed one last opportunity to avoid extra time. Inside England's penalty area stood a wall of white shirts. One defender rushed out to close Messi down, another threw out a desperate leg to block the cross. Three more occupied the six-yard box, each standing exactly where a delivery ought to land. Jordan Pickford lurked behind them, waiting for anything over it.

The passing lane didn't exist. Or so it seemed.

Messi's right foot clipped the ball into the night sky. It rose over the first challenge, skimmed above the heads of England's defenders by inches, drifted beyond Pickford's reach, left him in a dilemma whether

to commit or leave, and almost impossibly, dipped at precisely the moment Lautaro Martinez arrived at the far post. By the time the Argentina striker nodded home the winner, guiding the defending champions to a second successive final, the ball had travelled over almost the entire England defence before landing gently on his forehead. Zlatan Ibrahimovic, the Swedish great, gushed on Fox: "I had said yesterday that you're going to see the left foot of God. You got to see the right foot of God... beautiful moment."

Football has always celebrated players who beat defenders with feints and dribbles. Diego Maradona's 'Goal of the Century' against England in 1986 remains perhaps the sport's greatest act of individual brilliance. Starting inside his own half, he dribbled past five outfield players, rounded Peter Shilton and rolled the ball into an empty net.

Forty years on, against the



ILLUSTRATION: SUVAV DEY

Lionel Messi's cross found the head of striker Lautaro Martinez in the 92nd minute, resulting in the winning goal for Argentina. REUTERS

same opponents, Argentina produced another moment that belonged in the same conversation. Maradona erased six Englishmen by carrying the ball. Messi erased six with a cross.

## Weaving runs

Messi has made those weaving runs, too. The slalom against Getafe, that run through Athletic Bilbao and countless solo goals for Barcelona belonged to a footballer who bent matches at



his will, with his legs. That version of Messi is gone.

Age takes away the explosive first step, the relentless dribbles and the ability to outrun younger players for 90 minutes. What it cannot touch is vision. If anything, it sharpens it.

At 39, Messi solves football's problems differently. Against England, he wasn't looking at defenders. He was looking beyond them. Where most footballers would have

**Age takes away the explosive first step, the relentless dribbles and the ability to outrun younger players for 90 minutes. What it cannot touch is vision. If anything, it sharpens it.**

seen a penalty area crowded with bodies, Messi spotted a passing route that wasn't through defenders but above them.

The margin for error was microscopic. A fraction lower and it strikes a defender. A fraction longer and Pickford claims it. A fraction slower and the opportunity disappears. The window existed for barely a second.

Messi found the only solution: going aerial. Perhaps even more astonishing was the foot he used.

For nearly two decades, coaches have devised plans around forcing Messi onto his weaker side. Every full-back who has faced him has been told the same thing: don't let him come inside onto his left. England did exactly that. For a fleet-

ing moment, it even looked as though Messi would check back and recycle possession to a teammate waiting outside the box.

Instead, he trusted his weaker right foot. The cross he produced is one many elite wingers would struggle to deliver with their stronger one. As much as the execution, it was the imagination that made it extraordinary.

He saw an angle that didn't appear to exist and a space that revealed itself only after the ball had travelled through it.

This assist deserves to sit alongside the greatest goals Messi has scored. Not just because it was spectacular at first glance, but also because every replay makes it seem even more impossible. Watch it once and it looks like a fine cross.

Watch it again and you begin counting the defenders it clears. Freeze the frame and you wonder how the ball found its way through a corridor that appeared not to exist.

At 25, Messi might have dribbled through six defenders. Now, he simply looks up, trusts his weaker right foot and lifts the ball over them, and Argentina into another World Cup final.

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Vol XCIV-214 Regd. No. DL-21046/03-05 R.N.L. No. 506/1957. Printed and Published by Ramesh Chander Malhotra on behalf of The Indian Express (P) Limited and Printed at The Indian Express (P) Limited Press, A-8, Sector-7, Noida - 201301 and Published at The Indian Express (P) Limited, Mezzanine Floor, Express Building, 9 & 10, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi-110002. Editorial office: The Indian Express (P) Limited, Mezzanine Floor, Express Building, 9 & 10, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi-110002. Phone: 0120-6651500. Advertising office: The Indian Express (P) Ltd., Express Building, B/1, Rammath Goenka Marg, Sector 10, Noida 201301. Phone: 0120-6651291. Chairman of the Board: Viveck Goenka, Chief Editor: Raj Kamal Jha, Editor: Umi Rajen Shanker, Editor (Delhi): Monojit Majumdar \*\* \*Responsible for selection of News under the PRP Act. Copyright: The Indian Express (P) Limited. All rights reserved. Reproduction in any manner, electronic or otherwise, in whole or in part, without prior written permission is prohibited. The Indian Express® epaper.indianexpress.com New Delhi

'NO CENTRAL SUBSIDY FOR LAND ACQUISITION TO SET UP CHIP PLANTS, STATES EXPECTED TO TAKE LEAD'

## Govt not keen to cover land, tech transfer costs in new chip scheme

Soumyarendra Barik  
New Delhi, July 16

UNDER THE next phase of India's ambitious Rs 1.27 lakh crore Semiconductor Mission, the Central government may not offer subsidies to companies arising out of technology transfer costs, with the prevailing thought being that calculating such expenses is complicated, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

The Centre may also no longer offer subsidies for land acquisition to set up chip manufacturing plants, as state governments are expected to take the lead on that, a senior government official said.

Under the first iteration of the scheme, there was a provision for the government to cover a portion of technology transfer costs that approved companies may incur, but a senior government official said that it has been removed under India Semiconductor Mission (ISM) 2.0. Even though the provision existed under ISM 1.0, such disbursements were not made, it is understood.

"The reason we have decided to not offer subsidies on technology transfer costs is because when we were evaluating proposals under the first leg of the scheme, there was a realisation that such transfer costs are quite opaque. It is almost impossible to reliably calculate the exact amount, so we have made changes accordingly," the official said, requesting anonymity.

Technology transfers are an important element in companies setting up semiconductor manufacturing operations in India, because many participants may not have access to such technology in-house. For instance, Tata Electronics, which is setting up a chip fabrication plant in Gujarat, is getting the manufacturing technology from Taiwan's TSMC.

These reconsiderations also point to the broader theme of India's shifting priorities under its new chip incentive scheme. The new policy is expected to place greater reliance on subsidising chip design, and the broader ancillary industry.

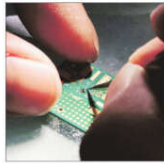
"In terms of our priorities for the new scheme, first would be chip designing, then bringing the broader supply chain

### TECH TRANSFER COSTS

**TECH TRANSFERS** are an important element in firms setting up semiconductor manufacturing operations in India, because many participants may not have access to such tech in-house

**UNDER THE** first iteration of the scheme, there was a provision for government to cover a portion of tech transfer costs that approved firms may incur

**BUT A** senior government official said the provision has been



removed under ISM 2.0. Even though it existed under ISM 1.0, such disbursements were not made

ecosystem to India, and then subsidising building of new chip manufacturing units," a second official said.

On Wednesday, the Union Cabinet approved ISM 2.0 with an outlay of Rs 1.27 lakh crore. Under the first scheme, India managed to attract 12 chip making plants, including a fabrication facility being set up by the Tata Group.

The country's foray into semiconductor production and

packaging has been outlined as a strategic move by New Delhi to insert itself into the global chip supply chain and establish the sector to deepen domestic value addition in its electronics sector. Semiconductors—used to power devices from toasters to fighter jets—have become a critical resource amid heightened geopolitical tensions over the last few years.

By 2029, India expects to achieve the capability to design

and manufacture chips required for nearly 70-75% of domestic applications, and by 2035, the country aims to be among the top semiconductor nations globally.

Compared to the first iteration of the ISM, government incentives for semiconductor manufacturing plants have been slashed in ISM 2.0. For instance, the first scheme carried a uniform capex subsidy of 50% for fabs and assembly plants. However, under ISM 2.0, silicon fabs will receive a subsidy of 40%, and other fabs will get 35%. Similarly, the incentive for advanced packaging has been kept at 35%, and 25% for conventional packaging.

Under the new scheme, the government will offer grants and may also take equity in large companies and start-ups that design semiconductor chips, which rank higher on strategic and commercial parameters. The government's investment will depend on whether these companies are able to raise money from private equity investors.

FULL REPORT ON  
[WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM](http://WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM)

## How a new subsidy plan hopes to build an Indian smartphone brand

Soumyarendra Barik  
New Delhi, July 16

INDIA MAKES almost every smartphone sold in the country. But when it comes to the names on those phones, Indian companies are conspicuously absent. A new Rs 62,500 crore mobile phone manufacturing scheme, approved by the Union Cabinet Wednesday, hopes to change that.

Under the new scheme, a five-year follow-on to the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for smartphone assembly, which helped India successfully localise production, the government is focusing on local sourcing to boost domestic value addition, and on design and R&D by Indian brands, along with incentives linked to the export of smartphones, Union IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said.

For building Indian brands, an additional incentive at the rate of 8% on eligible sales will apply for design and R&D of the product under the scheme.

The push to build an Indian smartphone brand also signals that the government's ambition for the electronics sector is moving beyond simply attracting factories and boosting assembly. Having established India as a major manufacturing base, New Delhi now wants Indian companies to move deeper into the value chain—into product design, research and development, intellectual property, component ecosystems and brand ownership.

Though a long-term plan, what the government is essentially looking to subsidise to help propel an Indian smartphone brand is the immediate cost disability it may have against well-established competitors, particularly from China.

"We expect that four or five Indian companies will be inter-

### India smartphone shipments market share

|         | Vivo | Samsung | Qoppo | Xiaomi | Realme | Others (in %) |
|---------|------|---------|-------|--------|--------|---------------|
| Q4 2024 | 21   | 13      | 14    | 15     | 10     | 26            |
| Q1 2025 | 22   | 17      | 15    | 13     | 11     | 22            |
| Q2 2025 | 24   | 15      | 16    | 13     | 10     | 22            |
| Q3 2025 | 24   | 13      | 16    | 13     | 9      | 25            |
| Q4 2025 | 24   | 13      | 15    | 12     | 10     | 26            |
| Q1 2026 | 23   | 17      | 17    | 12     | 9      | 22            |

SOURCE: COUNTERPOINT RESEARCH

ested in building a mobile phone brand that can compete with others on quality and price. But, they may have a cost disability of 10-15% initially, so through the new scheme, the government is looking to bridge at least 5-6% of that," a senior government official said.

### Why an Indian smartphone brand

The push to build an Indian smartphone brand is rooted in a larger gap in India's electronics story. The country has succeeded in attracting global companies to manufacture mobile phones at scale, but much of the value generated by the industry, from product design and intellectual property to branding and technology, continues to be owned by companies headquartered elsewhere, though Indian companies like Tata Electronics and Dixon are establishing themselves in the contract manufacturing sector.

The government's new mobile phone manufacturing scheme hopes to explicitly address this gap by supporting Indian brands, with the stated objectives of achieving technological sovereignty, capturing a larger share of the economic value generated by the sector and creating Indian patents in design and research

and development. This is important because manufacturing alone does not necessarily translate into control over an industry. A phone assembled in India may still be designed elsewhere, use foreign-owned intellectual property and be sold under a foreign brand. The government now wants Indian companies to move up this value chain. The scheme, with a Rs 62,500 crore outlay over five years, is intended to deepen domestic value addition, strengthen supply chains and improve global competitiveness, while providing incentives on eligible mobile phone sales.

The policy also reflects the limits of the first phase of India's mobile manufacturing push. Production-linked incentives helped attract global manufacturers like Apple and expand India's capacity to make phones, with the country emerging as a major manufacturing and export base. But India has not produced a smartphone brand with comparable scale and global reach. The new scheme is an attempt to fill that gap, to ensure that the next phase of growth is not only about more phones being made in India, but also about Indian companies owning the design, technology and brand behind those phones.

FULL REPORT ON  
[WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM](http://WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM)

## Govt plans tighter fuel-economy norms, credit market from FY28

Sourav Anand  
New Delhi, July 16

THE POWER ministry has proposed a tougher five-year fuel-economy regime for passenger vehicles from April 1, 2027, tightening fleet-average consumption targets while allowing carmakers to use carbon-neutrality benefits, super credits and a compliance-credit mechanism to meet the new standards.

The draft Corporate Average Fuel Economy-III norms, circulated for stakeholder consultation, will cover MI-category passenger vehicles manufactured or imported for sale in India between 2027-28 and 2031-32. The existing CAFE-II norms are likely to expire on March 31, 2027.

Under the proposed framework, the fuel-consumption target will progressively decline from 3.996 litres per 100 km, equivalent to 94.76 gCO<sub>2</sub> per km, in 2027-28 to 3.3273

litres per 100 km, or 78.90 gCO<sub>2</sub> per km, by 2031-32.

Compliance will be assessed against two blocks, comprising an initial three-year period followed by a second block of two years. The phased tightening is intended to provide automobile manufacturers a predictable regulatory path for developing and deploying more fuel-efficient models.

In a significant change, the ministry has proposed Carbon Neutrality Factors for ethanol, biofuel and compressed biogas for the first time. The mechanism will permit specified reductions in declared tailpipe carbon dioxide emissions before a manufacturer's compliance is assessed.

At the current ethanol-blending level, an 8% Carbon Neutrality Factor has been proposed. For compressed biogas and biofuel, the reduction will be linked to the prevailing actual

blending level.

Manufacturers will also be eligible to claim compliance benefits of up to 9 gCO<sub>2</sub> per km for approved fuel-saving technologies, with the benefit capped at 1 gCO<sub>2</sub> per km for each technology.

The draft provides super credits while calculating fleet-average fuel consumption for battery electric vehicles, range-extended electric vehicles, plug-in hybrids, strong hybrids and flex-fuel vehicles, giving manufacturers additional flexibility to expand cleaner vehicle portfolios. It also proposes a credit-and-debit system similar to the mechanism in the recently circulated draft amendment to the CAFE-II norms.

The proposed regime combines steadily tighter fuel-consumption targets with incentives for alternative fuels, electrified vehicles and fuel-saving technologies. FE

### SPECIFIED NON-FINANCIAL ASSETS

## RBI introduces SNFA category, bars banks from selling assets back to defaulters

George Mathew  
Mumbai, July 16

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has introduced the concept of Specified Non-Financial Assets (SNFAs) in the event of loan defaults and mandated that disposal of such assets should primarily be through public auctions under SARFAESI Act principles and prohibited resale to the original borrower or related parties.

SNFAs refer primarily to immovable properties that banks acquire when borrowers fail to repay loans. Such assets typically include residential buildings, commercial properties, industrial land or other real estate accepted by banks in settlement of outstanding debt.

The RBI has issued the Third Amendment Directions, 2026 under its Commercial Banks—Resolution of Stressed Assets Directions, 2025. The new regulations establish a comprehensive framework for how banks should acquire, value, manage and dispose of non-financial assets obtained from defaulting borrowers.

According to the new directions, banks may acquire an SNFA only after a borrower's loan has been officially classified as a non-performing asset. The acquisition must involve either full or partial settlement of the bank's outstanding exposure. In cases where only part of the loan is settled through the transfer of property, the remaining debt



Specified non-financial assets are immovable properties that banks acquire when borrowers fail to repay loans. REUTERS

will continue to be treated under restructuring norms, ensuring that banks maintain appropriate provisioning and risk management standards.

The RBI has introduced strict valuation guidelines to prevent overvaluation. Every acquired property must be recorded at the lower of two values—the net book value of the extinguished loan or the distress sale value determined independently by at least two external valuers.

Banking experts believe this conservative valuation method will reduce the possibility of inflated asset values appearing on bank balance sheets while encouraging more realistic financial reporting. FULL REPORT ON  
[WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM](http://WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM)

## UPI payments over Rs 2k to big merchants may see 0.5% MDR

New Delhi: The Centre may reintroduce a merchant discount rate (MDR) on UPI transactions of Rs 2,000 and above for large merchants to compensate banks and payment service providers for rising operational costs and technology investments, sources said.

The proposed MDR on UPI payments accepted by large merchants won't exceed 0.5% of the monetary value, a source said. However, merchants and businesses with an annual turnover of up to Rs 1.5 crore are likely to be exempt from the levy, irrespective of the transaction amount. A decision on the proposal is expected within a month, the sources added.

Larger merchants are better placed to absorb the MDR or pass on the cost to customers, whereas small businesses have limited ability to do so, the government reckons. FE

### BRIEFLY

## SBI Funds IPO attracts bids worth Rs 3 L cr

Mumbai: The initial public offering (IPO) of SBI Funds Management Ltd witnessed overwhelming investor interest, closing with an overall subscription of 41.66 times on the final day of bidding and generating demand worth nearly Rs 2.97 lakh crore. The issue received bids for 518.93 crore equity shares against the 12.45 crore shares on offer, according to cumulative subscription data available on the BSE and NSE. The IPO was priced in the band of Rs 545-574 per share. ENS

## 'Social protection now covers 100 cr citizens'

New Delhi: India's social protection coverage increased to over 100 crore citizens in 2026, up from 25 crore in 2015, according to Union Labour and Employment Minister Mansukh Mandaviya. The minister, in a post on social media platform X on Wednesday, highlighted the landmark validation of the country's social security landscape by the International Labour Organisation (ILO). "India breaches 1 billion mark in Social Protection Coverage!" Mandaviya wrote on X. PTI

## Tech Mahindra Q1 net profit rises 28.4%

New Delhi: IT services company Tech Mahindra on Thursday posted a 28.4% year-on-year rise in its consolidated net profit for the June quarter at Rs 1,465 crore. The company's revenue rose over five years, is intended to deepen domestic value addition, strengthen supply chains and improve global competitiveness, while providing incentives on eligible mobile phone sales. The next phase of growth is not only about more phones being made in India, but also about Indian companies owning the design, technology and brand behind those phones. FULL REPORT ON  
[WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM](http://WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM)

## I-T Dept adds foreign income data to AIS

New Delhi: The Income Tax Department has started displaying information on foreign assets and income to the taxpayers on the income tax e-filing portal as per information received under the Automatic Exchange of Information (AEOI) framework. The tax department is currently displaying information for 2022, 2023, and 2024 in the Annual Information Statement of taxpayers. Information for 2025 will be visible in the AIS once it is received in September or October, sources said. FE

## Avoid deploying Indian seafarers in Strait of Hormuz: DG Shipping

ENS Economic Bureau  
Mumbai, July 16

IN THE wake of escalating security concerns in the Gulf region, the Directorate General of Maritime Administration (DGMA), under the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, has directed shipowners, ship managers and recruitment agencies to avoid deploying Indian seafarers on vessels transiting the Strait of Hormuz until further orders.

The DGMA advisory, issued

on July 15, comes against the backdrop of a series of attacks on merchant ships and a worsening security environment in the Persian Gulf, raising fresh concerns over the safety of thousands of Indian seafarers employed on international cargo vessels.

The circular said the safety, security and welfare of Indian seafarers, along with the protection of Indian ships, remain central to the mandate of the maritime administration. It noted that recent attacks on merchant

vessels—including Mombasa B, Al Bahyah, GFS Galaxy, MT WEDYAN and AL REKAYAT—have significantly heightened the risks faced by commercial shipping operating in the conflict-affected region.

The advisory said incidents resulting in casualties among Indian seafarers, coupled with the continuing attacks on merchant ships during the ongoing conflict, have made it necessary to adopt enhanced precautionary measures. FULL REPORT ON  
[WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM](http://WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM)

documents, a spokesperson of Anil Ambani-led Reliance Group told this newspaper that there had been a "partial breach" of its data on a server hosted by third-party data

centre service provider Yotta, and the government had been informed about the incident.

In a statement to Reuters, Yotta also maintained that it had noted suspicious activity

on May 29 on a server it hosts that belongs to Reliance Infrastructure. It said the activity was immediately terminated and the suspected ransomware execution was prevented.

Following reports of data breach, state-owned NPCIL, the plant's operator, also clarified that the leaked information does not pertain to any nuclear safety or security systems and the compromised data relates only to the plant's conventional Balance of Plant common service facilities, for which Reliance Infrastructure Ltd was awarded a contract in 2018.

Located in Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu, Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant consists of six units of Pressurised Water Reactors of VVER design, which were established in technical collaboration

with Russia.

The first two units (KKNPP Units-1 & 2) are already in operation, while Units 3 and 4 are still under construction and are due to be operational by 2027. The remaining two units are at different stages of progress.

The leaked dataset is largely related to Units 3 and 4 of the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant and contains documents associated with the EPC contract executed by Reliance Infrastructure Ltd.

From tender documents and invoices to engineering drawings and design files for various structures, the folders appear to be organised according to different aspects of the project.

FULL REPORT ON  
[WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM](http://WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM)

• THE LEAK INCLUDES A 14.3 GB DATASET COMPRISING 18,997 FILES RELATED TO THE KUDANKULAM NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

## Kudankulam files on dark web: Inside the alleged data leak

Pratyush Deep  
New Delhi, July 16

FOR MORE than a month, a large cache of files purportedly linked to the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant have been available on the dark web.

The data, leaked by ransomware group World Leaks, is purportedly linked to Anil Ambani-led Reliance Group, whose subsidiary, Reliance Infrastructure Ltd, was awarded the Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) contract in 2018 for the plant's non-nuclear common service facilities, known as the Balance of Plant (BoP).

The leaked data, accessed by *The Indian Express*, includes a 14.3 GB dataset comprising 18,997 files related to

the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant. These files are part of a much larger cache of 1.2 terabytes containing over 858,000 files purportedly linked to the Anil Ambani-led Reliance Group.

A search in the leaked dataset using the term "KKNPP" an acronym for the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant—retrieves numerous internal documents, including inspection records, engineering design files for various plant facilities, minutes of meetings, and correspondence between Reliance Infrastructure and the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd (NPCIL) on project execution and construction-related matters.

While *The Indian Express* could not independently verify the authenticity of these



The leaked dataset is largely related to Units 3 and 4 of the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant. REUTERS

documents, a spokesperson of Anil Ambani-led Reliance Group told this newspaper that there had been a "partial breach" of its data on a server hosted by third-party data

centre service provider Yotta, and the government had been informed about the incident. In a statement to Reuters, Yotta also maintained that it had noted suspicious activity

### MARKETS

|        | Gold      | US Dollar |
|--------|-----------|-----------|
| Sensex | 77,186.87 | ₹1,41,679 |
| NIFTY  | 24,072.75 | \$96.35   |
| 144    | -5.75     |           |
| 0.00%  | -0.02%    |           |
|        | Silver    | Oil       |
|        | ₹2,17,434 | \$81.62   |

NOTE: GOLD, SILVER RATES AS PER INDIA BULLION AND JEWELLERS ASSOCIATION DATA GOLD PER 100, SILVER PER KG; CRUDE OIL (INDIAN BASKET) AS OF JULY 15, 2026