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Happening today

● **TAMIL NADU** Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay will make his first visit to Karur district after the stampede in September last year which claimed 41 lives. He is expected to meet the families of the victims.

● **LORD'S WILL** host the first women's Test match between India and England, 142 years since staging its inaugural men's Test.

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THE WORLD PAGE 14
IRAN STRIKES U.S. MILITARY INFRA IN KUWAIT, QATAR AND SAUDI ARABIA

Think tank CSDS likely to face funding cuts from Centre

After probe, ICSSR 'looks at' suspending its grants which account for 90% of CSDS salaries: Rs 5.8 crore in 2024-25

Vikas Pathak
New Delhi, July 9

THE CENTRE for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), established in 1963 and one of the premier social science research centres in the country, faces deep funding cuts from the government which could cast a cloud over its viability. *The Indian Express* has learned. This action follows CSDS professor Sanjay Kumar flagging discrepancies in voter data in Maharashtra which Kumar himself later said was a misreading and apologised for it.

Another think tank, Centre for Policy Research, had to considerably whittle down its operations following an Income Tax probe and the cancellation of its foreign funding licence two years ago.

CSDS faces the prospect of losing its grants from Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), an organisation under the aegis of the Ministry of Education which grants accounts for over 83% of its income.

Sources said CSDS may also lose its status as an institution. **▶CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

Karnataka: Like other CMs, Siddaramaiah dropped 52 cases related to 'support base'; HC stays

● POLITICAL CASES: THE REVOLVING DOOR

176 CASES DROPPED: In Siddaramaiah's first stint (2013-18)

SINCE MAY 2023 after Congress returned to power:

95 CASES withdrawn through separate orders

— on Oct 15, 2024 & May 27, 2026

WHAT THE HC SAID: On May 29, 2025, HC quashed govt's Oct 15, 2024 order. On July 2, 2026, HC stayed govt's May 27, 2026 order.

Johnson T A
Bengaluru, July 9

LAST THURSDAY, the Karnataka High Court stayed the Congress government's May 27 order to withdraw 52 criminal cases that came days after the then Siddaramaiah Cabinet decided to halt the prosecution of these cases.

On May 28, Siddaramaiah stepped down as the chief minister to make way for D.K. Shivakumar as part of the Congress's exercise for the changing of the guard.

The Siddaramaiah government's decision marked the latest in a series of such moves by successive governments, led by

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EXPRESS AT WORLD CUP

Sandip G
New York, July 9

BEFORE LAST year's mayoral election in New York, Rafael Gomes, a security guard at a Manhattan bank and amateur footballer, was driven to Coney Island's 'Soccer Fest' by his teammates, all crammed into a van. "I thought it's just another

fun tournament," he told *The Indian Express*. After the game, Gomes saw a man in a black suit, "bearded and handsome", near the dugout. "Someone threw a ball at him, and he juggled it beautifully. Lovely touches, he might be a professional, I thought," he said.

Gomes asked who that was; his friends said he was running for mayor. "I don't listen to political stuff and all that. But I thought, 'Wow, cool, we are going to get a mayor who plays soccer,'" he said. Then, he watched the

mayoral candidate's speech on TV and became an instant admirer. "He said something like soccer is a big part of New Yorkers and a unifying force in the boroughs. I was moved because of all the talk of crack-

down on immigrants, and here is someone who talks of soccer and unity," he said.

A few weeks later, Zohran Mamdani, born to Ugandan academic Mahmood Mamdani and filmmaker Mira Nair, assumed office. Within a year, he'd become a hero of the masses,

EXPRESS special

INSTANCES OF VEHICULAR DAMAGE CIRCULATED ON SOCIAL MEDIA OVERBLOWN: MINISTER

E20 affects mileage, but West Asia crisis shows India must explore alternatives, says Gadkari

On conflict of interest allegations, he says personal stake 'too insignificant' to impact government policy

Anil Sasi
New Delhi, July 9

AMID A raging debate over the impact on vehicular performance from the shift to higher ethanol blends, Union Road Transport and Highways Minister

ister Nitin Gadkari reckoned that average mileage can dip as ethanol content increases in the fuel, but said the West Asian crisis has shown India must explore all alternatives to fossil fuel imports.

He told *The Indian Express*



Union Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari. EXPRESS FILE

EXPLAINED
LESSONS FOR INDIA FROM BRAZIL'S ETHANOL PATHWAY
PAGE 13

that the calorific value of ethanol is lower than petrol. "This is a fact," he said, admitting mileage could be hit with higher blending, but added that

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E. EXPLAINED
Why explore fossil fuel alternatives

India imports fuel products, and spends almost Rs 2 lakh crore in forex every year. Blended fuel — ethanol in petrol & methanol in diesel — will help the country reduce dependence on fossil fuels.

INDO-PACIFIC A SYMBOL OF SHARED ASPIRATIONS: MODI

India, Australia ink defence pacts, fast-track trade deal



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with his Australian counterpart Anthony Albanese in Melbourne on Thursday. AP. RELATED REPORT, PAGE 6

Step taken to operationalise 2014 nuclear pact, secure uranium supplies to India

Shubhaji Roy
New Delhi, July 9

SIGNALLING A significant deepening of bilateral ties, India and Australia on Thursday sealed a series of pacts across sectors, from defence and maritime security to energy, including one that paves the way to operationalise their 2014 Civil Nuclear Agreement that secures a stable cor-

ridor for uranium supplies to India for peaceful purposes. With these pacts forming the backdrop, Prime Minister Narendra Modi described both countries as "vibrant democracies", "multicultural societies", and "significant ocean powers".

Modi told Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese that they will together strengthen peace, stability, freedom of navigation, and a

rules-based order across the Indo-Pacific region.

Albanese, in turn, said the two countries are focusing on deepening and diversifying their partnership. "Six years into our strategic partnership, Australia's relationship with India has never been more consequential than it is today. Our partnership has never been stronger," he said.

"We share a focus on deepening and diversifying the relationship between our countries so we can continue to grow from strength to strength. Today, we have done exactly

that across the breadth of our relationship. With new landmark agreements, we are expanding our relationship across defence and security, education, science and technology, and energy security and critical minerals," he said.

The strengthening of ties comes at a time when China's assertive behaviour in the Indo-Pacific region has caused concern among like-minded Quad partners, while the ongoing conflict in West Asia between the US and Israel on one side and Iran on the other has

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Business as Usual
By EP UNNY



Govt clears Dixon (India)-Vivo (China) JV for manufacturing smartphones

Ravi Dutta Mishra
New Delhi, July 9

IN ONE of the first major approvals to Chinese investment in a strategic sector, the Centre has cleared a joint venture between Dixon Technologies (India) Limited and Vivo Mobile India Limited (VMI) for manufacturing electronic devices and smartphones in the country, a BSE (Bombay Stock

Exchange) filing showed.

"We would also like to intimate that VMI has today received approval of Government of India vide letter dated July 8, 2026, in terms of Press Note 3 of 2020 issued by the Department of Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, for incorporation of the JV Co and subscription of shares of JV Co by VMI," the Noida-headquar-

tered Dixon Technologies (India) Limited said in a company filing.

Press Note 3 refers to an April 2020 regulation imposing restrictions on investments from China, making government approval mandatory for investments from countries sharing a land border with India. The move was aimed at preventing opportunistic

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Former TMC MPs Sushmita Dev, Sukhendu Sekhar Ray and Prakash Chik Baraik with Bengal BJP chief Samik Bhattacharya (second from left) in Kolkata on Thursday. EXPRESS

Hours after joining BJP, 3 former TMC MPs fielded for RS bypolls in Bengal

Atri Mitra
Kolkata, July 9

THREE FORMER Trinamool Congress (TMC) Rajya Sabha MPs, who resigned from their posts a month after the party's defeat in the West Bengal Assembly elections, joined the BJP on Thursday. Hours later, the BJP announced them as candidates for the Rajya Sabha bypolls necessitated by their resignations.

Sukhendu Sekhar Ray, Sushmita Dev and Prakash Chik Baraik joined the BJP at the party's office in Kolkata in the presence of state party president Samik Bhattacharya.

"All our leaders, including (Chief Minister) Suvedu Adhikari and I, are happy with their inclusion in the party," Bhattacharya said, adding, "It is a really happy day for us. Like Assam and Tripura, which are moving forward under the

double-engine government, Bengal will also move ahead."

In the months following the West Bengal Assembly election results on May 4, which saw the BJP come to power with a landslide victory, the TMC has faced its gravest internal crisis.

Amid the crisis, on June 8, Ray resigned as Rajya Sabha MP. He was followed by Sushmita Dev on June 10 and Baraik on June 11.

After joining the BJP on Thursday, Ray said the protests following the 2024 RG Kar Medical College rape and murder case had already indicated that the Mamata Banerjee-led TMC would not retain power in the Assembly elections. He also claimed that under the TMC government, Bengal was "moving backwards".

"This was because of repeated opposition to the central government. By always

▶CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

AYODHYA DONATION ROW

Temple CEO must be Ram devotee, huge task to restore trust: Search panel member

'Just keeping money in account doesn't work... has to be invested, used properly'

Maulshree Seth
Lucknow, July 9

FOR THE first Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Trust, the primary requirement is "Ram ke prati shraddha ka bhav" (devotion to Lord Ram), said Suresh Haware.

One of the three members of the committee set up to identify candidates for the post, newly announced as the Ram Janmabhoomi Trust tries to clean its house in the wake of the donation theft row, Haware's list of credentials runs long. He is a retired nuclear scientist who spent 27 years with the Department of Atomic Energy, has headed the Shri Saibaba Sansthan Trust in Shiridi, and is currently the Chairman of the National Institute of Technology (NIT), Raipur, and a member of the Shri



SURESH HAWARE
FORMER NUCLEAR SCIENTIST WITH DEPT OF ATOMIC ENERGY & MEMBER OF AMARNATH BOARD

Amarnath Shrine Board, plus has written a book called *Temple Management*.

Speaking to *The Indian Express* over the phone from Srinagar, as he participates in the ongoing Amarnath Yatra, Haware called his new assignment

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● SOCCER HELPED ME DISCOVER THE BREADTH AND THE BEAUTY OF THE CITY: MAMDANI

This Mayor plays Sunday league — and beat Trump for World Cup spotlight



New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani at the Soccerfest campaign with NYC Footy during his campaign. NYC FOOTY

not just for his politics but also for his love of a sport that bound the city. "Soccer might not be the most popular sport in the US, but it's the identity of immigrant communities in New York, especially in the Queens, where there are Hispanics, Caribbeans and Asians," said Joseph Aguilero, of Uruguay FC, a local club.

Mamdani's charm grew with populist measures, even making the World Cup affordable for many. "He got the pulse of the World Cup, maybe because he is a passionate footballer," Joseph said. When FIFA

chief Gianni Infantino defended ticket prices as "justified in the US market", Mamdani made 1,000 tickets available to the five boroughs at \$50 each. When FIFA banned water bottles in the summer heat, Mamdani objected, and the governing body backtracked. After NJ Transit hiked the Penn Station-MetLife round trip ticket price to \$150, Mamdani and Governor Kathy Hochul rolled out \$20 shuttle buses. "He loves the people and sport so much. We could connect with him," Rafael said.

On Wednesday, at a press

conference to unveil New York's new bus lanes, Mamdani did the math on saved commuting time. "It means agreeing with your friends that Egypt was robbed yesterday (in the 3-2 loss to Argentina)," he said. Pressed on what he would do with those extra six minutes (between the time Egypt scored and the goal was disallowed via the Video Assistant Referee system), he skipped the policy answer. "I would probably just watch the replays of Egypt getting robbed again," he said. "Gotta throw up the VAR."

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

India, Australia

affected maritime traffic in the Strait of Hormuz over the past four-and-a-half months.

Modi, who is in Melbourne for the third annual India-Australia Summit, said they have now decided to "fast-track" work on the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA), which will be beneficial, ambitious, and mutually balanced for both nations. "We will also accelerate progress on the Bilateral Investment Treaty," he said after the bilateral talks.

Following the talks, the two sides signed a joint statement alongside separate statements covering defence and maritime security, energy security, and critical minerals. The statement noted tangible benefits already reaching businesses and consumers under the existing India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA), while emphasising the need to dismantle non-tariff barriers further and coordinate institutional financing to drive private-sector investment.

Another key outcome was the finalisation of the administrative arrangement to operationalise the Civil Nuclear Agreement signed in 2014 and enable supply of uranium from Australia to India. "The arrangement facilitates Australian uranium exports to India to help increase the share of non-fossil fuel power capacity, providing an additional market for the Australian resources sector," Albense said.

Also, to support India's domestic renewable energy push, a joint "Roof-top Solar Training Academy" will be established in Gujarat to build technical capacity among women and youth under the PM Surya Ghar Yojana.

On defence and security ties, Modi said, "The Indo-Pacific is not merely a confluence of two oceans; it is also a symbol of the shared aspirations of like-minded democracies like India and Australia. Today, we have issued an important Joint Declaration to enhance cooperation in

defence and security. Through the India-Australia Defence Partnership Corridor, we will work on connecting defence start-ups and industries." "Our Maritime Security Collaboration Roadmap will lend new strength to our shared efforts in the Indo-Pacific. We will also move forward together in shipbuilding, repair and maintenance."

Modi said, "We will boost strategic coordination, increase the complexity of our defence exercises and further build interoperability between our defence forces," he said.

Reaffirming their commitment to a rules-based order, the joint statement noted that both prime ministers strongly opposed any destabilising or unilateral action to change the status quo and undermine regional peace and stability," and explicitly emphasised adher-

ence to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Addressing international issues, Modi reiterated India's stance against cross-border terrorism. "India and Australia believe that terrorism is a serious challenge not just for any single country, but for humanity as a whole. Therefore, our fight against terrorism is shared, our narrative is common, and our cooperation is continuously strengthening," he said.

On global conflicts, he said, "We also believe that the tensions and conflicts prevailing in various parts of the world can only be resolved through dialogue and diplomacy."

The two leaders also launched the Australia-India Partnership on Cyber, Critical Technologies and Supply Chains. Concluding the summit, Modi said, "Cricket serves as a diplomatic language for the relationship between India and Australia. That is why our meetings often feel like a cricket pitch. The agenda — focused like a one-day match, decisions — swift like a T20 game, and the partnership — long-lasting and deep, like a Test match."

CSDS

receiving ICSSR grants — called "grants in aid" — after a three-member probe committee, submitted a report that makes a slew of allegations regarding the centre's functioning.

The committee, constituted by the ICSSR, includes a former UGC secretary, a former government auditor and a former pro-vice-chancellor of a Central University.

Their report submitted to the ICSSR is learnt to have alleged "irregularities": academic appointments in violation of UGC regulations, requisite qualifications; processing of financial matters without compliance with General Financial Rules; and appointment of non-academic staff without public advertisement.

It has recommended that ICSSR take action against CSDS as per its "grants-in-aid" rules.

This can mean suspension of grants, through which most of the salaries of the staff of CSDS are paid.

ICSSR grants account for roughly 90% of the salary component at CSDS, apart from which it also gives allowances for research and some maintenance activities.

When asked about these allegations, CSDS director Awadhendra Sharan told *The Indian Express*: "We haven't received any report. I see it, how can I comment on it?"

When contacted, Sanjay Kumar declined to comment, saying he was unaware that the report had been submitted.

As per the unaudited ICSSR annual report 2024-25, the total income of CSDS was Rs 75.62 million, of which Rs 62.88 million came from the ICSSR. Rs 57.88 million in salaries and allowances, and Rs 50 lakh under the heads research scheme/programme, non-salary.

The CSDS, on its own, raised from projects, fellowships and consultancy — Rs 12.1 million in 2024-25. Thus, 83% of the total income of CSDS in 2024-25 was through ICSSR grants-in-aid.

Last year, ICSSR withheld its grant to CSDS.

The enquiry committee was set up after controversy erupted in August 2025 when CSDS professor Sanjay Kumar, in a post on X, said that the number of registered voters in Ramtek and Devnagar in Maharashtra had gone down by 36-38 per cent since the 2024 Lok Sabha elections and the subsequent Maharashtra assembly elections. Subsequently, he apologised on X, saying that the research team had misread the data.

Seizing on this, ICSSR sent a show-cause notice to CSDS, asking it to explain within seven days why the Grants in Aid to it, which is discretionary, should not be withdrawn, flagging multiple "irregularities", including data manipulation and shar-

ing with the media, to "malign" the reputation of the Election Commission of India.

The show cause notice also alleged faculty appointments in violation of UGC guidelines, an opaque method of appointment of directors, and not holding elections for the chairman of the governing body. It also said that House Rent allowance was paid to staff members who were staying in government accommodation of their spouses, and that annual accounts of CSDS were not submitted for audits to "hide" misuse of funds.

Two FIRs were also filed against Sanjay Kumar in Nagpur and Nashik, but the Supreme Court stayed criminal action against him.

ICSSR has received a reply to the show-cause notice in which the institute is learnt to have said that its actions, including the appointment of directors, were as per its Memorandum of Association.

Mayor

Before academia, before his job as a foreclosure prevention counselor, before poliscentized him, all Mamdani wanted to be was a footballer. An unpassed on the bug in Uganda: he supported the national team, the Uganda national football team. His love for the English champion club is well-stored. "I've kind of been hopelessly in love from the beginning," Mamdani once said of his commitment to football.

He played youth football on the Upper West Side and Morning Heights, captaining his team at Bronx High School of Science, when a pro career felt unrealistic. The love lingered anyway: Sunday leagues in Brooklyn, shifts as a defender, until the mayoralty got in the way. "Social helped me discover the breadth and the beauty of the city," he said. He had no hang-ups as a Mayor, just like one of us. He was cheering and yelling for his team, but when they lost he was quite calm about it. He was here the other day, too for a (New York) Knicks game.

Gadkari's sons Sarang and Nikhil run Manas Agro and use manure from their own farms to produce ethanol and bio-diesel to oil and health products. Manas Agro incorporated on September 6, 2012, and in which Sarang Gadkari is a whole-time director, produces sugar, power, ethanol, bio-diesel, bio-fertilisers, biomass processing. This company had operating revenues of over Rs 500 crore in 2023-24, according to RoC data collected by ToR. Nikhil Gadkari is the managing director of Ciano Agro Industries & Infrastructure Ltd, an unlisted public company incorporated on September 13, 1988, with revenues in the range of Rs 200-300 crore. The company manufactures oil, spices and health care products.

In the course of its tenure from July 2019 to April 2023 the BJP government issued seven orders to the order to withdraw the prosecution of 385 cases, including 182 cases of communal incidents linked to hate speeches, cow vigilantism, and communal violence, an RTI response by the government to a query by *The Indian Express* had revealed in 2023. According to their details, a majority of communal incidents where the BJP government opted to withdraw prosecution — on the recommendation of the home minister, clearance of a Cabinet sub-committee, and approval of the state Cabinet — pertained to right-wing activists.

45 of these cases pertained to communal violence allegedly involving right-wing activists in Uttara Kannada district in December 2017 over the death of a Hindu youth Paresh Mesta, which was later found to be an "accidental death" by the CBI.

The cases included four incidents of cow vigilantism in Chitradurga, several incidents of violence in Kodag and Mysuru over celebration of Tipu Jayanti, incidents around festivities like Rama Navami and Hanuman Jayanti, Ganesh festival, among others. Among the beneficiaries of the withdrawal of cases were Hindu Jagaran Vedika leader Jagadish Karanth, who was accused of inciting violence in making hate speeches in Dakshina Kannada, Bagalkot, Bengaluru Rural, and Tumkur.

Among the beneficiaries of BJP government cases was BJP member of the House of Representatives Mysuru MP Prathap Simha and then Honnali MLAMP Renukacharya against whom a

Temple CEO

a management challenge "bigger than Tirupati, Shirdi or even many of the country's largest business organisations".

"The challenge before us is very big because it is a question of public trust. Once trust is broken, it takes years to rebuild. Therefore, the system we create has to be transparent. A proper system of temple management has to be put in place," he said, adding that he believes the task starts with finding the right person who can put in place such a system. And "the primary responsibility is Ram ke prati shradha ka bhav".

The trust announced the formation of the search committee for the CEO on July 6, with Haware hearing about his inclusion in it during the Amarnath Yatra. Its other members include retired Justice Pradeep Kohli and Lieutenant General (ret'd) Vishnuram Chaturvedi.

On why Ayodhya requires a different model of administration, Haware said the sheer

number of pilgrims is one aspect of it. "Tirupati receives around 1 lakh to 1.5 lakh devotees every day, while Shirdi sees around 70,000-80,000. Ayodhya is known to draw over 2 lakh devotees in a day, with these numbers increasing manifold on auspicious occasions."

The other aspect, Haware said, are the sentiments attached to the Ayodhya temple. "It is not merely a newly constructed temple, it is associated with a struggle spanning more than 500 years. Every Hindu has an emotional connection with it. ... This is perhaps the biggest temple institution in the country... That makes the responsibility much greater."

The CEO would become "the backbone" of the institution and oversee every aspect of its functioning and management, Haware said. "Managing lakhs of pilgrims every day requires professional systems for crowd movement, disaster preparedness, procurement and human resources, and most of all, financial management. Simply keeping money in the account does not work, it has to be in-

vested and used properly, more so for giving it back to society," he said. Haware added that temple management had evolved into a specialised discipline encompassing finance, investment, banking, accounting, human resource management, material management, crowd and disaster management, and increasingly involves the use of technology, including artificial intelligence.

At the same time, he stressed, professional competence alone is not enough to be the CEO. "A dry professional cannot run a temple like this. The primary necessity is Ram ke prati shradha ka bhav (devotion towards Ram). The second is a spirit of service towards society and respect for devotees. Only after that will we look at experience in finance, HR, material management, institutional administration and temple management."

On the selection process, Haware said the committee will lay down around 10 broad criteria before inviting applications. "Our first task is to decide what kind of person we are looking

for. We will first meet online, followed by a physical meeting. After finalising the criteria, we will invite applications from eligible candidates, scrutinise them, hold interviews, examine their background and finally prepare a panel of names for the Trust."

"I was at the Amarnath Shrine when the Trust took this decision. The other committee members are in Delhi. Given the urgency, we will first meet online and then physically. This concerns the faith of millions and therefore has to be treated as top priority."

Society expects every donation to be properly accounted for and used responsibly, Haware said. "Temples today are expected to support hospitals, schools, old-age homes, free meals and other social initiatives. Financial management, accounting and transparency are integral to temple administration. Our responsibility is to identify the right person someone who combines devotion with professional competence and can build an institution worthy of the faith of millions."

Joint venture

takeovers during the Covid-19 pandemic, and remained in force amid heightened security concerns following the Gwalior clash last year.

It was primarily targeted at Chinese investors, as Bangladesh and Pakistan entities can invest only via government route, while investments from other bordering countries like Nepal, Myanmar, Bhutan and Afghanistan account for a very small share of India's total foreign investment inflows.

However, tense trade ties with the US now seem to be pushing India towards a more balanced economic relationship with China.

Dixon Technologies said the

joint venture has been formed to act as an Original Equipment Manufacturer for electronic devices, specifically smartphones, and would be owned 51% by Dixon and 49% by Vivo Mobile India.

This comes as the Finance Ministry, in a major overhaul on Wednesday, exempted Customs duty on 85 capital goods used in lithium-ion cell manufacturing, as well as components in manufacture of display assemblies, inductor-coil modules for wireless charging in cellphones, until March 2029 to promote domestic manufacturing.

A ministry official said the exemptions are intended to give impetus to domestic manufacturing of display assemblies used in automotive, medical and industrial sectors.

Karnataka

both the Congress and the BJP, to drop criminal cases against individuals and groups that they believed were from their respective support bases.

The withdrawal of these cases — largely involving rioting, unlawful assembly and breaking of prohibitory orders — through executive orders has taken place despite growing judicial scrutiny of these decisions in recent years. During its previous 2013-18 tenure, the Siddaramaiah-led Congress government dropped a total of 176 cases, mainly those linked to activists of the now outlawed Muvatt PFI as well as farmer, Dalit and pro-Kannada bodies.

During its 2019-2023 regime, the BJP government dropped 385 cases, many of which involved party activists allied to right-wing Hinduva outfits like Hindu Jagarana Vedika as well as party legislators, farmer groups and other activists.

Such "politically motivated" moves have, however, faced in-

creasing curbs imposed by the judiciary.

Staying the government's May 27 order, the high court ruled that the state cannot drop cases, order, which stated that the prosecution of selective cases cannot be stopped by the state since individual state prosecutors hold the power under Section 321 of the CrPC to decide on prosecution of a matter.

"In view of the order dated 29.05.2025, the impugned order is stayed till the next date of hearing," the HC bench of Chief Justice Vibhu Bakhru and Justice K S Hemalekha said on July 20 in a plea filed by a right-wing activist Girish Bharadwaj against the government's move.

In one of its last meetings, on May 27, the Siddaramaiah Cabinet approved a proposal "to withdraw a total of 42 cases listed in Annexure-1 registered in various police stations of the state and pending trial in various courts and to obtain the permission of the Hon'ble High Court to withdraw 10 cases in Bangalore."

An analysis of the 52 cases by *The Indian Express* reveals that these included eight cases related to a communal incident that occurred in February, March 2022 under the BJP government in Kalburgi's Aaland, in which many Muslims were booked after communal tensions flared. The cases were booked. A Huttobi-based Muslim organisation Anjuman-e-Islam demanded the withdrawal

of the cases, which was accepted by the government. The other cases the October 2024 order dropped included those against the Aaland farmer groups, Dalit and Kannada activists.

Setting aside the order, a division bench of the HC ruled that "the Government Order in its nature impinges upon the discretion to be exercised by the public prosecutors when it comes to the withdrawal of a case or non-prosecution of a case. It takes away the room for public prosecutor to apply his mind."

"... The respondent itself has claimed that the Ministers and officials were part of the meeting which ended up with the impugned order passed by the government. It could be contended that the government has 'politically taken decision'," the HC said.

The government argued that its orders were its "policy decision" not violative of Section 321 of the CrPC.

On August 31, 2026, the then BJP government decided to withdraw 62 cases. Hearing PIL by People's Union for Civil Liberties, the HC stayed it on October 21, 2026. Citing the SC ruling in Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay vs Union of India case, the court on August 11, 2021 ordered that cases cannot drop cases against sitting and ex-MLAs/MPs without a HC's clearance.

Among the beneficiaries of BJP government cases was BJP member of the House of Representatives Mysuru MP Prathap Simha and then Honnali MLAMP Renukacharya against whom a

total of four cases were dropped.

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After 2024 controversy over rejections, HC clears 85 advocates for 'senior advocate'

Sohini Ghosh
New Delhi, July 9

THE DELHI High Court, in a full court meeting on Thursday evening, approved the designation of 85 advocates as senior advocates, with dissent recorded over one of the 86 names placed before it, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

The designations, which follow a Supreme Court direction to reconsider candidates deferred or rejected in the controversial 2024 process, were preceded by rigorous one-on-one interviews that several candidates described as "a pleasant change" and a sharp departure from the previous round.

The committee this time comprised Chief Justice D K Upadhyaya as chairperson, the two senior-most judges, Justices V Kameswar Rao and Nitin Wasudeo Sambre; Additional Solicitor General Chetan Sharma; Delhi High Court Bar Association (DHCB) president N Hanthra; and senior advocate and former Additional Solicitor General (ASG) Sanjay Jain.

The 85 fresh designations will add to the list of 70 senior advocates designated in 2024, a process that was challenged before the SC. In November 2024, the High Court's Committee for Designation of Senior Advocates deferred a decision on 67 of the 302 applicants, designated 70 and rejected the remaining 165.

The controversy erupted when senior advocate Sudhir Nandrajog, one of the six members of the Permanent Committee, resigned, writing to then Chief Justice Manmohan and the Delhi government that the final list had been drawn up without his assent. The designations were made on the eve of Justice Manmohan's elevation to the SC.

A petition was subsequently moved before the Supreme Court seeking the quashing of the November 2024 decision.

On April 15, 2025, the SC directed the Delhi HC to consider the cases of the deferred and rejected candidates in accordance with the High Court of Delhi Designation of Senior Advocates Rules, 2024.

"The issue prima facie that marks assigned by one member (of the Permanent Committee) have not been considered," Justice Abhay Oka, then hearing the petition, had said. The court also directed reconstitution of the Permanent Committee under the rules, ordering that the deferred and rejected applications be placed before it afresh.

The reconstituted Permanent Committee considered the applications of the 232 advocates deferred or rejected in 2024, and, this time, conducted interviews markedly different in character.

Advocates who appeared before the committee said each candidate was interviewed one-on-one for anywhere between five and 15 minutes, with 10-20 candidates slotted per day. The interview process began on April 28, and it is learnt that questions ranged from "basic questions on principles of law" to "questions on procedural law which may appear simple and straightforward but require logical thinking."

The interviews were interactive, with questions being asked on principles of law. It is a first, and it is a welcome change. "It also helps the judges know what kind of people they are designating," an advocate who appeared before the committee in April said. In contrast, in 2024, advocates said that "groups of 10-12 advocates would be called into the room."

"We already know you and the work you have done. Is there anything more you want to add? This was the conversation in 2024," another advocate said about interviews which were held in groups in 2024. Advocates also said that the interview lasted five minutes, collectively, for the entire group.

A DAY AFTER ROHINI COLLAPSE

'Only face-saving exercises being done': SC raps civic bodies over illegal constructions

Express News Service
New Delhi, July 9

PULLING UP civic authorities over illegal and unsafe buildings in Delhi-NCR, the Supreme Court on Thursday said that "only face-saving exercises are being done" to check the menace.

A bench of Justice A Amanullah and Justice R Mahadevan directed the setting up of a team comprising two senior IIT professors and two draftsmen, along with MCD officials, to assess the extent of unauthorised constructions that have come up in Saket, Lajpat Nagar and Malviya Nagar and submit a report to the court.

Directing officials to be present before it on August 4 — on the next date of hearing — the bench made it clear that there should be "no slackness in giving an honest report".

Referring to news reports that over 93% of Gurgaon establishments had failed fire safety audit, the court asked the Gurugram Metropolitan Development Authority vice chairman to appear before it on August 4 and appraise it on what had been done to address



A status report pointed to a building collapse in Saidulajab on May 30 (left) and a fire in Malviya Nagar on June 3 (right) while slamming authorities over alleged inaction and failures. FILE

the issue.

While hearing the matter related to illegal constructions, the SC had on March 25 taken a serious note of the fact that constructions are frequently undertaken in blatant violation of the applicable norms and regulations, including in prohibited areas and upon completion, and that such lands and buildings are often put to uses other than those for which

sanction was originally granted by the competent authority.

The court accordingly asked municipal authorities across the country "to conduct a comprehensive inquiry within their respective jurisdictions to identify areas that are demarcated exclusively for residential use, but are being misused for non-residential purposes by the persons concerned".

Noting that no effective ac-



A status report pointed to a building collapse in Saidulajab on May 30 (left) and a fire in Malviya Nagar on June 3 (right) while slamming authorities over alleged inaction and failures. FILE

tion has been taken on its directions, the court cautioned on Thursday that it will not hesitate to initiate contempt of court proceedings against those failing to comply with its earlier directions in the matter.

The bench told Additional Solicitor General S D Sanjay appearing for the MCD that it is "particularly concerned with the conduct of" the corporation "with regard to non-com-

pliance of directions issued... in 2024 and specific directions of May 20, 2026, which were issued as to what was required to be done by the authorities".

Meanwhile, in a status report submitted through advocate Ajit Kumar Sinha — appointed by SC to assist it as amicus curiae — slammed the MCD for failing to act on time to stop the construction of the al-

The apex court ordered setting up of a team comprising two senior IIT professors and two draftsmen, along with MCD officials, to assess the extent of unauthorised constructions in Saket, Lajpat Nagar

legedly illegal building that collapsed in Saidulajab on May 30, killing six and injuring 14 others. He also pointed out that a blaze on June 3 at Delhi's Malviya Nagar and June 22 in Lucknow were not the result of any single failure but several.

The court took on record status report. Sinha has been appointed amicus in regard to recent fires in Delhi, Lucknow and action on unauthorised constructions.

It also asked the Commissioner of Lucknow Municipal Corporation and Greater Chennai Corporation to remain present on the next date of hearing.

2 more bodies recovered from rubble, collapse toll 3

Pragynesh
New Delhi, July 9

A DAY after two buildings collapsed in Rohini, killing one person, two more bodies were recovered from the rubble as rescue work continued on Thursday — taking the death toll to three so far, police said.

Police on Thursday said the bodies were of Ram Dua and Kafu. Dua's wife and daughter-in-law are the owners of the plots on which the buildings were being built, while Kafu was a labourer who was working at the site. Kafu's brother was working as a contractor.

A case was registered on Thursday under relevant BNS

sections for alleged culpable homicide and negligent conduct during construction/repair against the owners, police also said.

A relative of Dua Thursday said that his family had been living in a two-storey house, which stood on the same plots, until about two years ago. "They had lived in that house for several years. They decided to expand two years ago and subsequently started the construction of the two buildings," said the relative.

During the course of the construction, Dua's family was living in a rented accommodation in the same area.

Kafu (24), who had come to

Delhi about three months ago, was related to Sadam, one of the survivors of the collapse.

Meanwhile the family of Ram Kishore, whose body was recovered on Wednesday, refused to collect his body from the mortuary and staged a protest demanding compensation for his wife and two children. "He was hit on the head by a huge stone slab. He was breathing heavily when he was pulled out from under the debris. He was declared dead in a hospital," said his twin brother Shyam Kishore.

Two four-storey buildings, which collapsed around 4.20 pm on Wednesday, were being constructed on two adjacent

plots, as per the Municipal Corporation of Delhi. At least five people, including one of the owners, are still feared trapped under the debris, as rescue operations continued on Thursday, police said.

Three persons, including Ram Kishore, were pulled out of the rubble on the day of the collapse after a massive rescue operation was launched.

The incident happened near an MCD school in Rohini Sector 16, coinciding with heavy rainfall across the Capital. Authorities, however, are yet to confirm if the weather contributed to the collapse. With sources saying plumbing work could have led to the mishap.

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IMD FORECASTS CLOUDY SKIES AND LIGHT RAIN, ACCOMPANIED BY THUNDERSTORMS, FOR FRIDAY

Flooded Ghaziabad and Delhi claim lives of toddler, 7-yr-old

Drishai Jain
Ghaziabad, July 9

A THREE-YEAR-OLD girl from Ghaziabad and a seven-year-old boy from Delhi's Samaypur Badli drowned in accumulated rainwater on Thursday as showers lashed both cities.

Police said that when her father, left the house, the girl, Manvi, followed him. "After the family realised the girl was missing, they started looking for her. After 10 minutes or so, she was found drowned in the water outside their home," the officer said.

At the family's home in Sarvodaya Nagar in Ghaziabad, cuddling her elder daughter of five years, Khushboo (26), Manvi's mother, was inconsolable.

Shobhit Kumar (28), her paternal uncle said, "Since it was raining from last night, water had filled the entire house. While Khushboo was cleaning the room after the water receded, the toddler walked outside the door and reached the lane... Soon after, the mother saw a hand peeping out from the knee-deep water that was still accumulated outside."

"We took her to two hospitals. She was declared brought dead," he added.

Originally from Farrukhabad, Manvi's father works as a vegetable vendor.

Assistant Commissioner of Police (Kotwalli Ghaziabad) Upasana Pandey said around 2-3 ft



The mother of the three-year-old victim, Manvi, at their home in Ghaziabad on Thursday. GAJENDRA YADAV

of water had accumulated after heavy rainfall in Sarvodaya Nagar. "The girl drowned in the rainwater around 12 pm. Her body has been sent for post-mortem examination," she added.

According to IMD, Hindon recorded 28.5 mm of rain and Kamlia Nagar 31.5 mm in Ghaziabad on Thursday.

Anil Sharma, a local resident, said that this is not the first incident that such an incident had taken place. "Around four years ago, a school-going boy had drowned in a drain... His body was later found 1.5 km away from where he drowned."

Following the death, family members and local residents held a protest on NH-9.

Meanwhile, seven-year-old Rehan, a Class 3 student residing in Sanjay Colony in Delhi, drowned in a waterlogged va-

cant plot after he reportedly ventured into a deeper portion of the accumulated rainwater while accompanying his five-year-old brother to attend nature's call, police said.

PTI reported that as per Rehan's mother, while her younger son returned home, Rehan did not. "My son had gone out in the morning to attend nature's call. When he did not come back for a long time, we informed our relatives and started searching for him," the mother told mediapersons.

She said the family later found Rehan's bottle placed on the stone boundary of the waterlogged plot.

"When we saw the bottle lying on the stone fence, we feared something was wrong. My brother-in-law and other family members searched the

water. The plot was filled with rainwater, and my son was found inside a pit in the plot. If it were not filled with water, my son would have been alive today," she added.

"After he was found, he was rushed to Burari Hospital, where doctors declared him dead," said a police officer. Police initiated proceedings under Section 194 of the BNSS. A local, Phool Kumar, said, "Every year, rainwater collects here, but no authority takes action. This time, it claimed the life of an innocent child. Such places should have either been filled up or fenced so that children cannot enter."

In another incident, a 26-year-old man allegedly drowned while swimming at the pool of Rholi Ram Public School in Najafgarh on Wednesday evening, police said.

The deceased, Rahul Rai alias Rahul Roy, a resident of Jharoda village, was declared dead at Tarak Hospital.

Police said Rahul had gone to the pool with his friends when he allegedly drowned around 5.30 pm.

"Rahul worked at a company named Interval India, which is engaged in the packaging of cardboard cartons. His body has been shifted to the RTM Hospital mortuary for post-mortem examination," a police officer said.

(WITH INPUTS FROM SAKSHI CHAND IN DELHI)

Why heavy rain brings down Delhi's trees

Sophiya Mathew
New Delhi, July 9

ANOTHER SPELL of heavy rain battered Delhi on Thursday, leaving roads waterlogged, traffic crawling — and a trail of fallen trees.

From a banyan and a pilkhan tree that uprooted a concrete footpath in East Kailash to an Arjun felled in Mount Kailash, a eucalyptus that crashed in Surajmal Vihar and a vilayati kikar blocking a road in Narela, the downpour left its mark across several neighbourhoods as residents lodged complaints with the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). Complaints also included reports of trees collapsing in Rohini Sector 16, DU North Campus in Maurice Nagar.

The extent of the damage is significant as among India's megacities, Delhi has the highest overall forest cover.

It maintains a tree cover of 147 sq beyond the designated forests, accounting for nearly 9.8% of its total landscape, according to the 2023 India State of Forest Report.

Tree cover vulnerable

Trees in the Capital topple easily because a mix of ecological stress and regulatory hurdles leaves them structurally weak.

■ **Concretisation** around trunks chokes roots and cuts off aeration

■ **Trenchless** cabling and shallow watering damage or stunt root systems.

■ **Termites** infestations hollow out trunks

■ **Irregular** or delayed pruning allows canopies to grow heavy and unbalanced.

The vulnerabilities are compounded by staff shortage, fragmented responsibility across civic agencies, and the absence of an updated tree census, NDMC's Horticulture officials told *The Indian Express*.

When high-speed winds and heavy rainfall strike, weakened trees are unable to bear the pressure.



Fallen trees in East of Kailash. EXPRESS & TASHI TORGOYL

The law

As reported by *The Indian Express* on June 16, remedial action can be taken against dead trees and trees vulnerable to falling. On June 6, 2025, the Delhi government had issued a notification for tree removal.

There were some exemptions including a go-ahead for government and developmental agencies to fell, cut, or transplant trees for infrastructure projects without waiting for prior permissions. Civic bodies and individuals did not need permission for "general pruning and light pruning" if the tree branch's girth was less than 15.7 cm.

Last month, the Delhi High Court stayed this notification, saying agencies can no longer rely on blanket exemptions to prune or cut trees during developmental works. Instead, only emergency provisions of the

Delhi Preservation of Trees Act (DPTA), 1994, remain operative, allowing immediate removal when a tree posing danger to life and property.

Experts' take

Experts *The Indian Express* spoke to pointed to a range of factors behind the damage, from unsentimental pruning and concretisation of pavements to enforcement gaps.

Naved Ahmed, a scientific team member at DU's Centre for Environmental Management of Degraded Ecosystems (CEMDE), said, "Trees are suffocating in Delhi. The main reason is construction... others are tree ageing, fungal infections, etc."

Dr Surya Prakash, retired zoologist at the School of Life Sciences, JNU, said, "I just returned from Delhi, having

• Skywatch

**Forecast: July 10, 2026**

Generally cloudy sky. Light to moderate rain
MAX: 32-34
2.6°C below normal

MIN: 22-24

5.9°C below normal

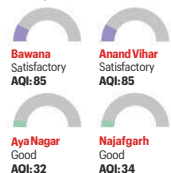
• Sunrise: 5:32 AM (July 10)

• Sunset: 7:22 PM (July 10)

• Moonrise: 1:49 AM (July 11)

• Moonset: 3:14 PM (July 10)

• AQI Tracker



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

covered 100 km of waterlogged roads with huge potholes and RCC pavement. Just imagine how suffocated roadside trees are..." In the name of pruning, the 'shoot apex' is cut so trees expand horizontally... The stumps already surrounded by RCC, can't sustain that horizontal load of branches... and ultimately fall." Chellaihan Sellamuthu, former NDMC Director (Horticulture) earlier told *The Indian Express* that pruning practices are often discouraged due to strict regulations under the DPTA. "There is no distinction between forest and non-forest trees in urban areas. The DPTA needs to treat them differently..."

Northeast Delhi records 160 mm as rain lashes city; 'Good' AQI after nearly 3 years

Express News Service
New Delhi, July 9

HEAVY RAIN lashed parts of Delhi on Thursday, triggering waterlogging, traffic snarls and tree falls across the city.

The city also recorded its first 'Good' AQI day in nearly two years and 10 months on Thursday, with the daily average AQI dropping to 48 at 4 pm — the lowest recorded so far this year.

The Capital had last witnessed a 'Good' AQI day on September 10, 2023, when the daily average AQI stood at 45, as per data from the Central Pollution Control Board.

While rainfall remained uneven across the Capital, Northeast Delhi emerged as the wettest pocket, with Tukrimpur recording around 160 mm of rain during the day, which is comparable to some of the highest single-day July rainfall events recorded at Safdarjung base station.

Although Safdarjung did not witness an extreme rainfall event, the around 160 mm recorded at Tukrimpur is of the same order as the Capital's most intense July downpours. The IMD records show the highest 24-hour July rainfall at Safdarjung remains 266.2 mm (July 21, 1958), followed by 169 mm (July 25, 1982) and 153 mm (July 9, 2023).

Rain also disrupted normal life in the neighbouring Noida while in Ghaziabad, the collapse of a residential road sent a parked car and a scooter plunging into a pit in Vasundhara. Authorities declared a holiday in government schools



Waterlogged roads near Delhi-Meerut Expressway and Noida (below) on Thursday. ASHWINI SAHA



in Ghaziabad.

IMD radar imagery showed highest rainfall activity over Northeast Delhi and North-east Delhi. The second-highest rainfall belt extended across Central and East Delhi, while only moderate rain was recorded over Gurgaon and parts

of Southwest Delhi.

At Delhi's base station, Safdarjung recorded 72.6 mm rainfall in the 24 hours ending 8.30 am on Thursday, followed by another 32.4 mm between 8.30 am and 5.30 pm, taking the day's cumulative rainfall to 105 mm.

Rainfall remained dis-

tributed. For instance, Mayur Vihar in Delhi recorded 43 mm till 4 pm, followed by Ghaziabad's Nehru Nagar station (31.5 mm) and Hindon (28.5 mm).

The cloud cover and rain caused daytime temperatures to plunge well below normal. Safdarjung recorded a maximum of 29.2 degrees Celsius, 74 degrees below normal, while the minimum settled at 24.3 degrees Celsius, 3.6 degrees below normal. Lodi Road recorded an even lower maximum of 28 degrees Celsius.

The weather office has forecast generally cloudy skies on Friday, with very light to light rain at many places and moderate rain at isolated locations accompanied by thunderstorms, mainly during the morning and forenoon.

Abhimanyu Hazarika
Gurgaon, July 9

FOR HUNDREDS of schoolchildren in Gurgaon, the journey home from school stretched by as much as four hours the last few days, as the season's first major monsoon downpour flooded roads and brought traffic to a standstill. Children who would normally be home by around 3.30 pm remained stranded inside school buses until 7 pm or later on Tuesday and Wednesday, returning exhausted, hungry and distressed.

At Suncity Schools, at least five buses were delayed over the two days, director Rupa Chakravarty said.

"Normally, our buses cover a 10-15 km radius and students reach home within an hour. Because of the rain, some buses could only reach by 5-5.30 pm," she said.

While the school has not changed its timings, Chakravarty said one of the conductors brought snacks for children stranded in a bus on Tuesday. Students travelling towards Sector 14, Golf Course Extension Road and Sohna



Students travelling towards Sector 14, Golf Course Extension Road and Sohna Road, were among those worst affected. GAJENDRA YADAV

Road were among those worst affected.

Richa Sareen, who lives on Sohna Road and whose children study at schools on Golf Course Road, said they reached home around 5 pm. "They were exhausted, hungry and rushed to the washroom. Luckily, everything was normal on Thursday," she said, adding that many of her children's classmates got home only around 7.30 pm.

Parents of students from Delhi Public School in Sector 45

and Shikshantar School in Sector 41 also reported delays of up to four hours.

The schools did not respond to requests for comment. "My daughter reached home nearly two hours late and was very tired," Shilpi Verma, whose daughter studied at Shikshantar School, said.

Ruchika Sethi, a resident of Nirvana Country, said schools and authorities should have contingency plans in place for extreme weather.

"Urban flooding in Gurgaon is not unprecedented. We have lived this reality for years. These are foreseeable emergencies. If we cannot yet eliminate the source of the problem, we must at least have robust emergency response protocols in place. Were school disaster management protocols activated? Were emergency response plans followed," she asked.

She called for contingency plans and quicker mobilisation of drinking water and medical assistance for children stranded for hours.

"For a child, being stranded in a school bus for hours means hunger, thirst, anxiety and not being able to use a washroom. We have to do better, not just at preventing such situations but at responding to them when they happen."

"VIP convoys pass through swiftly, why are similar efforts not made for school buses? The Department of Education, the district administration and every concerned authority should take serious note of what our children went through. Things could have been far worse," Sethi said.

• ANUPRIYA ROY'S SHOW 'CAFÉ DECKING' NOW ONGOING AT THE IIC ANNEXE

The café on canvas: A slice of life in the modern metropolis, captured in art

Trisha Mukherjee
New Delhi, July 9

IN A metropolis whose café culture is having a moment currently, it would seem appropriate that this vibrant and flourishing reality is captured in art as well.

Brunch at Khan, a watercolour that zooms in on a corner by the window at an unmistakably Khan Market café, is an apt encapsulation of artist Anupriya Roy's show 'Café Decking', now ongoing at the IIC Annexe.

Roy sees the café as an integral part of the modern city — as

much a refuge for those seeking to escape its loneliness as for those fleeing its chaos. The painting shows art on the wall and trees outside the window, a laid-out table, but no people. You could imagine in that absence a slice of life in the metropolis.

"I didn't start going to cafés with the intention of painting them. They were places for me to people-watch, and over time my sketchbook became a visual diary," Roy said.

In her first café painting was a space in Art, a town in the



Anupriya Roy (left); Brunch at Khan, a watercolor painting by Roy. EXPRESS

Mandi district of Himachal Pradesh, which Roy titled *Aut and About*. The original is now lost — but a digital print is part of

the 40-work exhibition.

Roy said she ventures out about every week to cafés — her favourite spots are The



Grammar Room in Khan Market and Devan's in Lodhi Colony. Her paintings are portraits of lived spaces that are popu-

lated by both people and objects. So, in *The Backpack*, she focuses on a bag whose owner sits across it having a meal, and *The Red Cup* invites the viewer to imagine moments around the titular subject.

Roy's cafés are spaces to pause, even if only for as long as it takes to finish a cup of coffee or a sketch.

Cafés and their precursors — taverns, inns, coffeehouses — have a long pedigree as subjects of art, going back to the 17th century Dutch Golden Age of painting.

The modern café, though, came to occupy a central space in art only in 19th century French modernism, appearing

just as Haussmann's boulevards were transforming Paris and making café-going a defining feature of the French capital's gilded modernity.

The French Impressionists treated cafés not as backdrops but as actual sites of modern life. Edouard Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1882) remains probably the single most analyzed café painting in Western art. Edgar Degas's *L'Absinthe* (1876) shows two isolated drinkers at a café table, and is widely read as a meditation on urban loneliness and dissolution.

The Dutch master Vincent Van Gogh famously chose not to use black in his *Café Terrace*

at Night (1888) because he wanted to capture the warmth of a space illuminated by a "tremendous yellow lantern."

Outside of France, a famous reference to the tradition was the American Edward Hopper, whose *Nighthawks* (1942) is a late-night diner scene that has been seen as translating the Parisian café-as-isolation theme into American urban alienation.

There isn't a serious Indian fine-art precedent for the café — or dhaba — theme as a site of modern urban sociability. As urban India continues to evolve in new and fascinating ways, this is a gap that more artists such as Roy are likely to explore.

Left to die with severed arm in Nuh, Bihar teen to get Rs 10 lakh as compensation

Sukhbir Siwach
Chandigarh, July 9

A YEAR after he was discovered staggering along Taudu Road near Haryana's Nuh with his left arm severed, bleeding and allegedly deserted by his employer, a 16-year-old is set to get Rs 10 lakh as compensation.

The Haryana State Human Rights Commission, which took suo motu cognisance of the matter, awarded him the relief, saying: "The victim-child has suffered not only physical injury but mental agony."

In his village in Bihar's Kishanganj, his family says he has begun adjusting to life.

His father (48), a labourer, worries that the compensation will barely cover the cost of an artificial limb.

"What we really need is enough money to buy a buffalo so that we can have a regular income," he says over the phone.

"An official at an orphanage in Patna told us it (artificial limb) would have to be imported," the father says.

The boy had left home in May 2025 to work on a road construction project in Kangra, Himachal Pradesh.

Every year, 200-300 people from their village alone travel to North India for work. For the teen, it was his first time so far from home. A contractor offered an advance of Rs 2,000, and he left, without informing the family.

"At the construction site, hot tar fell on my body." His mother sensed something was amiss. So, less than a month later, his father went to get him.

On May 27, 2025, they boarded the Delhi-Malda Farakka Express. When the train chugged into Bahadurgarh railway station in Haryana, they got off to get some food and the boy was left behind.

Anil Kumar, a local, offered him help, but instead took him to his dairy and put him to work, allegedly beating him when he resisted, denying any contact with his family.



The boy's home in Kishanganj, Bihar. EXPRESS

On July 27, as the boy was cutting fodder, his left arm got caught in a chaff-cutter machine and was severed below the elbow. His first reaction was to "look for my arm", he says. "But I could not find it."

Authorities recorded that Anil only gave him some medicines at home. "Fearing police, he abandoned him between Rasulpur and Baroli villages near Hasanpur, giving him Rs 10,000 and promising more later," wrote Assistant Chief Secretary Sudhir Rajpal.

That was the only money Anil gave him for his two months of work, the boy says. "I wandered the roads for a day and two nights. A rehri wala gave me food... In the morning, a teacher found me."

Arvind, who belongs to Rewari, told police he spotted the boy, only in his undergarments, on July 29. After the bandage that Anil had tied around the wound bled through, the teen tore up his shirt for a dressing.

The teacher, who took him to Sadar police station in Nuh, told police that when he asked the boy where he was headed, he said, "Bihar".

Police took him to a hospital and it was after two unsuccessful surgical interventions that PGIMS Rohtak stabilised his wound.

Meanwhile, the family had been searching for him frantically.

The breakthrough came when he reached Nuh police

station and told police the name of his village. His eldest brother was in Kailath at the time. "I received a call from home and was told to rush to Nuh police station," the brother recalls.

The hunt for Anil began.

All the boy could tell police was that he was kept at 'Anil Dairy', and the names of Anil's children. IPS officer Nitika Gahlaut says they searched more than 250 villages across states. Three Special Investigation Teams were deployed.

A tip-off from a village sarpanch took them to Greater Gautam Buddha Nagar in UP. Finally, on December 30, 2025, Anil was arrested. His bail applications have since been rejected three times.

The teen, who only studied till Class 5, talks about his limited options, but how he "doesn't want to go anywhere for work anymore".

Work on 12.3-km Metro corridor between Inderlok and Indraprastha begins

Express News Service
New Delhi, July 9

TO ENSURE a smoother connectivity between Outer Delhi and parts of Central Delhi like ITO, Indraprastha and New Delhi, the DMRC has begun construction of a 12.3-km corridor between Inderlok and Indraprastha. The Inderlok-Indraprastha corridor will be a fully underground extension of the Delhi Metro's Magenta Line (Line-8) and it will have 10 underground stations: Inderlok, Daya Basti, Sarai Rohilla, Ajmal Khan Park, Jhandewalan Temple, Nani Karim, New Delhi, Delhi Gate, Delhi Sachivalaya-IG Stadium and Indraprastha.

The work on the corridor was inaugurated by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Thursday. Officials said that construction of a diaphragm wall has been started at Sarai Rohilla Metro station, marking the first phase of this important project.

"Continued expansion of the Metro network is a historic step towards providing citizens with safe, fast, convenient and environment friendly public transport," Gupta said.

Once the work is completed, the Magenta Line will be nearly 89-km long—making it the longest Metro line in the DMRC network. It will also have the highest number of interchange and underground stations, making travel between different parts of the city faster, easier and more

• UNDERGROUND EXTENSION OF MAGENTA LINE

STATIONS: 10 (Inderlok, Daya Basti, Sarai Rohilla, Ajmal Khan Park, Jhandewalan Temple, Nani Karim, New Delhi, Delhi Gate, Delhi Sachivalaya-IG Stadium, Indraprastha)

INTERCHANGE & CONNECTIVITY: 7 Metro lines (Red & Green Lines at Inderlok, Magenta Line at Nani Karim, Yellow and Airport Express (Orange) Lines at New Delhi, Violet at Delhi Gate, Blue at Indraprastha)



Chief Minister Rekha Gupta at the inauguration ceremony on Thursday. AMIT MEHRA

convenient, said officials.

Officials also said that the corridor will connect with the Red and Green Lines at Inderlok, Magenta Line at Nani Karim, Yellow Line and Airport Express (Orange Line) at New Delhi, Violet Line at Delhi Gate and Blue Line at Indraprastha. Besides, it is expected to provide seamless connectivity to several important destinations, including Sarai Rohilla Railway Station, New Delhi Railway Station, Delhi Sachivalaya, Jhandewalan Temple, Arun Jaitley Stadium, Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium, Delhi Gate, Kartavya Path, Indira Gate, the National War Memorial and Central Vista.

The corridor was approved by the Union Cabinet in March 2024, and the foundation stone for the project was laid by

Prime Minister Narendra Modi that same month. Construction work on the priority corridor of the Magenta Line, from Janakpuri West to R K Ashram Marg, is already in progress. Of this, the Janakpuri West to Krishna Park Extension stretch (1.8 km) and the Deepali Chowk to Mallis Park stretch (99 km) are already operational, while the remaining sections will open in phases. Meanwhile, construction work on the Central Vista corridor has also begun.

This corridor is one of three non-priority corridors under Phase IV of the DMRC. Of the other two, work on the Lajpat Nagar-Saket G Block corridor began last month. However, construction on the Rithala-Kundli corridor is yet to begin, even though it received Cabinet approval in December 2024.

Sujan Singh Park North eviction case: Delhi HC refuses immediate stay

Sohini Ghosh
New Delhi, July 9

THE DELHI High Court on Thursday refused to immediately stay eviction proceedings against Sujan Singh Park North Block, an upscale residential complex near Delhi's Khan Market, while hearing a petition filed by Sir Sobha Singh and Sons, the real estate company that built and runs the complex. The court issued notice to the government seeking its response and posted the matter for hearing on August 17.

On June 11, the Estate Officer of the Land and Development Office under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs had issued an eviction notice under the Public Premises (PP) (Eviction of Unauthorised Occupants) Act, 1971, to the firm. The notice stated the company had breached the 1945 lease and the lease had been "re-entered", or terminated, in 1960. The firm has sought to

quash and set aside this notice. Arguing before Justice Harish Vaidyanathan Shankar on Thursday, senior advocate Sudhir Nandraj requested that the court stay the eviction proceedings, noting that a hearing before the estate officer is scheduled for Friday.

The central government's standing counsel, Ashish Dixit, however, contended that the petition is not maintainable, relying on a recent division bench order of the Delhi High Court in the Delhi Race Club case. That judgment had held that eviction of unauthorised occupants under provisions of the PP Act is "statutory vested right available" with the government.

The northern block of Sujan Singh Park, a large government housing project built during the British era, has been caught in a legal dispute for nearly 70 years. The 7.58-acre complex, which overlooks the upscale Khan Market, includes the iconic hotel Ambassador.

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भारतीय वानिकी अनुसंधान एवं शिक्षा परिषद
P.O. New Forest, Dehra Dun - 248006 (Uttarakhand)

विज्ञापन संख्या 03/निदेशक, वनअनुसंधान, जोरहाट, असम / 2026-मागवाओरिफो
Adv. No. 03/Director, RFRI, Jorhat, Assam/2026-ICFRE

भारतीय वानिकी अनुसंधान एवं शिक्षा परिषद (एन सी फो रे ई) के अधिनियम के अन्तर्गत नौ वन अनुसंधान के क्षेत्रों में विज्ञापन संख्या 15 के अन्तर्गत नौ विदेशी, वर्षा वन अनुसंधान संस्थान, जोरहाट, असम का पद प्रतिनिधित्व के आधार पर भरने हेतु आवेदन समिति की जाते हैं।
Applications are invited for filling up the post of Director, Rain Forest Research Institute, Jorhat, Assam in the pay scale at Level-15 of 7th CPC Pay Matrix on deputation basis at Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education, Dehra Dun.
उपरोक्त पद हेतु इच्छुक अर्जियों मागवाओरिफो की वेबसाइट <http://www.icfre.org> में दिने मये विस्तृत विवरण के अनुसार आवेदन कर सकते हैं। आवेदन प्राप्त करने की अन्तिम तिथि 24.08.2026 है।
The interested candidates may apply for the above said post as per detailed advertisement available at ICFRE website <http://www.icfre.org>. The last date of receipt of applications is 24.08.2026.

सचिव, मागवाओरिफो
Secretary, ICFRE

Jodhpur Development Authority, Jodhpur
E-Auction Programme of Residential, Commercial & Farm House Plots in Jodhpur (August - September 2026)

क्रमांक :- एफ46/नीलामी/2026/जुलाई/23284647

दिनांक :- 08.07.2026

भूखण्डों की भव्य ई-नीलामी
दिनांक 03.08.2026 से 24.09.2026 तक

61 आवासीय, व्यावसायिक एवं फार्म हाउस भूखण्ड

गंगा विहार में कुल भूखण्ड (165.06 वर्ग मीटर से 245.35 वर्ग मीटर)	खसरा संख्या-701 ग्राम चौखा में कुल भूखण्ड (72 वर्ग मीटर से 269.99 वर्ग मीटर)	पंडित दीन दयाल उपाध्याय विहार में कुल भूखण्ड (41.82 वर्ग मीटर से 198.99 वर्ग मीटर)
05	05	08
मण्डलनाथ आवास में कुल भूखण्ड (167.29 वर्ग मीटर से 354.08 वर्ग मीटर)	ग्राम उजलिया, फार्म हाउस में कुल भूखण्ड (1500 वर्ग मीटर से 2580.22 वर्ग मीटर)	महात्मा गांधी नगर में कुल भूखण्ड (225.18 वर्ग मीटर से 312.27 वर्ग मीटर)
10	05	03

सुन्दर सिंह भण्डारी नगर में कुल भूखण्ड (83.64 वर्ग मीटर से 462.12 वर्ग मीटर)	विज्ञान नगर में कुल भूखण्ड (83.64 वर्ग मीटर से 679.83 वर्ग मीटर)
05	20

ईएमडी जमा दिनांक
03 अगस्त 2026 से प्रारम्भ

ऑनलाइन बिड
प्रारम्भ तिथि:
03 अगस्त 2026

अंतिम तिथि:
24 सितम्बर 2026

प्रभारी अधिकारी (नीलामी शाखा)
जोधपुर विकास प्राधिकरण
जोधपुर

अधिक जानकारी के लिए
QR Code स्कैन करें

निदेशक वित्त
जोधपुर विकास प्राधिकरण
जोधपुर

फोन:- 0291-2656355, 2656356

- Rera Reg. No.- RAJ/P/2023/2638, RAJ/P/2017/183, RAJ/P/2025/3670
- नीलामी के सम्बन्धित भूखण्डों की विस्तृत जानकारी एवं नीलामी की शर्तें जोधपुर विकास प्राधिकरण की वेबसाइट : joda.rajasthan.gov.in पर देखें या कार्यालय में सम्पर्क करें।
- नीलामी की प्रक्रिया SSOID के जरिये Urban Services के माध्यम से की जाएगी।

TATA CONSULTANCY SERVICES LIMITED

Registered Office: 9th Floor, Nirmal Building, Nariman Point, Mumbai 400 021. Tel: +91 22 6778 5955 Fax: +91 22 6778 9660
e-mail: investorrelations@tcs.com website: www.tcs.com CIN: L22210MH1995PLC084781

Extract of the audited consolidated interim financial results for the three months ended June 30, 2026 (₹ crore)				
	Three months ended June 30, 2026	Year ended March 31, 2026	Three months ended June 30, 2025	
Revenue from operations	72,275	2,67,021	63,437	
Profit before exceptional items and tax	18,612	70,013	16,979	
Profit before tax	17,944	65,487	16,979	
Profit after tax	13,420	49,544	12,819	
Total comprehensive income for the period	13,673	52,204	14,100	
Paid up equity share capital (Face value: ₹1 per share)	362	362	362	
Total reserves (including non-controlling interests)*	1,08,116	1,08,116	95,409	
Earnings per equity share - Basic and diluted (₹)	36.90	136.01	35.27	

* Balance for three months ended June 30, 2026 represents balance as per the audited consolidated balance sheet for the year ended March 31, 2026 and balance for three months ended June 30, 2025, represents balance as per the audited consolidated balance sheet for the year ended March 31, 2025 as required by Securities and Exchange Board of India (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015.

Extract of the audited standalone interim financial results for the three months ended June 30, 2026 (₹ crore)			
	Three months ended June 30, 2026	Year ended March 31, 2026	Three months ended June 30, 2025
Revenue from operations	59,553	2,20,938	52,788
Profit before exceptional items and tax	18,377	66,873	16,186
Profit before tax	17,709	62,806	16,186
Profit after tax	13,642	49,096	12,552
Total comprehensive income for the period	13,937	48,496	12,683

Notes:

- The audited consolidated interim financial results and audited standalone interim financial results have been reviewed by the Audit Committee and approved by the Board of Directors at its meeting held on July 9, 2026. The statutory auditors have expressed an unmodified audit opinion on these results.
- The Board of Directors at its meeting held on July 9, 2026, has declared an interim dividend of ₹12.00 per equity share.
- In April 2019, Computer Sciences Corporation (referred to as CSC) filed a legal claim against the Company in the Court of Northern District of Texas and Dallas Division (trial court) alleging misappropriation of trade secrets and other CSC's confidential information and sought preliminary and permanent injunctive relief, and unspecified monetary damages and disgorgement of profits. A trial before an advisory jury was held and on November 17, 2023, the jury returned an advisory verdict in favour of CSC, finding that the Company misappropriated CSC's trade secrets and recommended compensation of US \$70 million and a further punitive damage of US \$140 million to be paid by the Company to CSC. Subsequently, the parties filed their respective written submissions in the matter. On June 13, 2024, the trial court passed a judgment as follows:
 - The Court ordered that the Company is liable to CSC for US \$56 million in compensatory damages and US \$112 million in exemplary damages.
 - The Court also assessed that the Company is liable for US \$26 million in prejudgment interest through June 13, 2024.
 On November 21, 2025, the Fifth Circuit issued a decision affirming the District Court's rulings on liability and further awarded costs to CSC. On March 19, 2026, a petition for a writ of certiorari from the US Supreme Court was filed, seeking a review of the case. On June 15, 2026, the Supreme Court denied the petition.
- The Company had provided US \$150 million (₹1,352 crore) towards this legal claim in the statement of profit and loss for the year ended March 31, 2026 and disclosed US \$112 million (₹1,010 crore) as "Provision towards legal claim" under "Exceptional items" and US \$38 million (₹342 crore) under "Other interest costs". Pursuant to the denial of the Company's petition by the Supreme Court, the Company has provided for a further amount of US \$70 million (₹588 crore) towards exemplary damages and costs awarded to CSC in the statement of profit and loss for ended June 30, 2026, and disclosed as "Settlement of legal claim" under "Exceptional items". In addition, the Company has provided for US \$7 million (₹59 crore) towards interest paid until the date of settlement and disclosed it under "Other interest costs".
- The above is an extract of the detailed form of financial results filed with the Stock Exchanges under Regulation 33 of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015. The full form for three months ended June 30, 2026, are available on the BSE Limited website (URL: www.bseindia.com), the National Stock Exchange of India Limited website (URL: www.nseindia.com) and on the Company's website (URL: www.tcs.com/investors). The same can be accessed by scanning the QR code provided below.

Mumbai
July 9, 2026

For and on behalf of the Board of Directors

K Krithivasan
CEO and Managing Director
DIN:10106739

'No rebellion in Punjab Congress... there is a spirit of competition'

Man Aman Singh Chhina
Chandigarh, July 9

THE ALL India Congress Committee (AICC)'s general secretary in charge of Punjab Bhupesh Baghel, the former Chhattisgarh CM, has been camped in Chandigarh over the last several days to deal with a crisis gripping the state party unit. Fresh trouble erupted recently in the wake of the Congress high command's decision to retain Amarinder Singh Raja Warring as the state party chief, which has upset ex-CM Charanjit Singh Channi, who has been named the party's campaign committee chairman for the 2027 Assembly polls.

In an interview with *The Indian Express*, Baghel speaks on various issues relating to infighting and factionalism in the Punjab Congress and how he is tackling it. Excerpts:

You have reiterated there is a leadership change in the Punjab Congress despite Channi and his supporters insisting on replacing state chief Raja Warring. What is the middle ground in this situation?

They have not had any conversation with me over this demand. You are informing me about this demand. How do I know what demand is being made? If the party high command has made a decision, then it is final. Such decisions are not changed every now and then.

The Channi camp has accused you of 'favouring' Raja Warring?

Only when you come to meet me can we have any meeting... You may keep sitting in Delhi and then say that you could not meet Bhupesh. It is a very unfair complaint. If you come and I do not meet you, then your complaint is valid.

The Channi camp says that while you are holding daily meetings, 'important leaders' including former ministers and candidates from the 2022 polls are not meeting you.

I came here (the state party headquarters) in the morning and till evening I did not have even a minute's free time. People from various districts, various departments of the party are coming to meet me. There are block presidents, district presidents, people who have fought elections in the past and want to fight elections again, people who have been ministers in the past and want to be ministers again. For me, all are important, no one is big or small in the Congress.

The Channi camp claims that the three-member committee led by AICC treasurer Ajay Maken had recommended Channi's name as the state party chief. Another survey had reportedly recommended a change of leadership. Why was Raja Warring retained?

There is no rebellion. Everyone in the family wants to work for the party. There is a spirit of competition. They feel that if they get a chance, they will work hard. The Assembly elections are extremely important for us and everyone is in a do or die mode.



BHUPESH BAGHEL
AICC GENERAL SECRETARY
IN CHARGE OF PUNJAB

Has Maken sahib's report been made public? When it was presented before the high command, I was present. Whatever they are saying about the report is wrong. There are mere rumours. I can only say this much about the report because I cannot disclose its contents.

How would you describe the current situation in the Punjab Congress?

There is no rebellion. Everyone in the family wants to work for the party. There is a spirit of competition. They feel that if they get a chance, they will work hard. The Assembly elections are extremely important for us and everyone is in a do or die mode.

Is this a repeat of the revolt against Capt Amarinder Singh? The perception is that infighting had damaged the Congress in the 2022 polls.

There is a big difference between the two situations. At that time, we were in government and a change of the CM was asked for. At present, people want to move out into the field as soon as possible. The party workers want to do so and so do leaders and the general public.

How do you view the present situation in the Punjab Congress as compared to other state party units?

Every state has its own dynamics. Punjab is different. This is a border state. The manner of expressing sentiments here is different. People here do not hold back their feelings. Whatever is in their mind, they say it upfront. There is a Chhattisgarhi saying: "Chatkan ko udhaar nahi" (There is no borrowing or lending when it comes to a slap, you repay it immediately). They do not hold back anything in their hearts. It is a good thing.

How big is the role of personal ambition in the ongoing crisis?

Everyone wants the party to come to power. Then there is also a feeling that one should get an important role in it. But the first thing that is important is to come to power.

What message are you giving to the party rank and file in your daily meetings?

I am telling them that they should now get down to prepar-

ing for the 2027 polls. We are already in a better position than the AAP, BJP or Akali Dal even as the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls is in progress. We have already trained our cadres and ventured into the field. This election is different because it involves micromanagement rather than fighting under stalwarts like Capt Amarinder Singh earlier. We are focusing on booths and panna seaks. Therefore, we have to fight through organisational strength and Rahul Gandhi's leadership.

How do you see the BJP's role in the 2027 polls given that they may contest independently this time?

It is not known what elections will be created by (Chief Election Commissioner) Gyanesh Kumar and Amit Shah. Amit Shah came to Punjab and said the party will fight elections alone. And after he left, seven Rajya Sabha MPs of the AAP defected to the BJP.

After reports of internal fissures in the Congress emerged, the AAP appears to be confident of returning to power.

The AAP should focus on saving its own house. There are two "tabu" and "kutu" in the form of Arvind Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia sitting on the head of Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann. This is being watched closely by AAP workers as well as the people of Punjab.

In first visit to Karur post-stampede, Vijay to hand over job letters to victims' kin

Arun Janardhanan
Chennai, July 9

ON FRIDAY, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and TVK president C Joseph Vijay will visit Karur for the first time since the stampede during his election campaign that claimed 41 lives.

Nine months after the tragedy, he will return to the district to hand over government appointment orders to eligible members of the victims' families and launch a major industrial project. Vijay will distribute appointment orders to one eligible member from each of the 41 bereaved families there. Following eligibility verification, 32 appointments have been cleared. The TVK-led government has said it will continue to support the affected families.

The official programme is scheduled to begin at the District Collector's office, where Vijay will meet the victims' families before handing over appointments made on compassionate grounds. He will later lay the foundation stone for a Rs 1,700-crore footwear manufacturing project in Karur, expected to generate around 13,500 jobs, before addressing a public meeting.

The CM's visit seeks to combine the victims' rehabilitation measures with a major development initiative. Karur also holds political significance for Vijay. The stampede occurred on September 27, 2025, during his election campaign at Velusamyapuram, where a large crowd had gathered for his rally. Forty-one people died and more than 100 were injured.

The tragedy, however, did not significantly alter the electoral outcome. Much of the public debate that followed focused on crowd management and administrative preparedness rather than on Vijay personally. The incident also renewed scrutiny of how political rallies in Tamil Nadu are organised, involving coordination between organisers, police, local administration and party workers.



The Tamil Nadu CM will also lay the foundation stone for a Rs 1,700-crore footwear manufacturing project today

One criticism, however, persisted. Rather than visiting Karur immediately after the stampede, Vijay met the bereaved families at a hotel in Chennai, prompting criticism from political rivals and sections of the public, who argued that he should have travelled to the district to express his condolences.

Vijay's Friday visit therefore carries a significance beyond the official programme. Over the past several days, officials have contacted the victims' families, collected documents and processed appointment orders. Transport has also been arranged for the victims' relatives attending the event.

The CM's visit will take place under extensive security arrangements. Authorities have capped attendance at the public meeting at around 5,000 people, with entry regulated through QR code-based passes. More than 5,000 police personnel from Karur and neighbouring districts have been deployed.

BJP state president Nainar Nagendran welcomed the decision to provide government jobs to the victims' families but questioned the timing of the visit. "It is welcoming to see the Chief Minister going to Karur, but it would have been more appreciated had he visited the district immediately after the tragedy to express his condolences," he said, describing the exercise as "politically motivated".

Union minister's son gets bail in POCSO case

Sreenivas Janyala
Hyderabad, July 9

THE TELANGANA High Court on Thursday granted bail to Bandi Bhaghirath, son of Union minister Bandi Sanjay Kumar, in a case of alleged sexual assault of a 17-year-old girl.

The court granted bail in the POCSO Act case on a bond of Rs 1 lakh and two sureties. It imposed several conditions, directing Bhaghirath not to contact or influence witnesses or interfere with the investigation.

The case against Bhaghirath was filed on May 8, and he was arrested on May 16. He had applied for bail several times, and on June 20, the High Court granted interim bail so that he could appear for his BBA examinations, and directed him to return to prison on June 25.

In her police complaint, the mother of the 17-year-old girl alleged that Bhaghirath initiated a relationship with her daughter and sexually assaulted her at parties in farmhouses. Police recorded the girl's statement and filed the FIR under provisions of the BNS, along with relevant sections of the POCSO Act.

The complaint against Bhaghirath was filed after he had filed a complaint in the first week of May, accusing a Hyderabad-based family of blackmail, harassment, and extortion. Bhaghirath claimed in his complaint that he was introduced to the girl by friends, and that on her invitation, he had attended family functions and parties.

INDIA TO ALSO REPATRIATE RELICS OF AN 'AUSTRALIAN FIRST NATIONS' ANCESTOR

11th-12th century antiquities from Tamil Nadu to finally come home from Australia

Divya A
New Delhi, July 9

• All about the three antiquities

THREE ANTIQUITIES from Tamil Nadu, dating back to the 11th and 12th centuries and housed at two museums in Australia, are all set to make their way back to India.

The repatriation of the antiquities is among the outcomes of the India-Australia summit during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ongoing visit to the island nation. For his part, India has committed to the repatriation of the relics of an Australian First Nations ancestor presently held at the Government Museum of Chennai.

The antiquities that will return to India in due course, as per the commitment, include a stone sculpture of sacred Nandi—the vehicle of Lord Shiva (11th to 12th century); a metal trident with the image of Bhadrakali (11th century); and a six-headed Kartikeya statue in stone (12th century), as per the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

These objects have been held as part of the collections of National Gallery of Australia and Art Gallery of NSW (New South

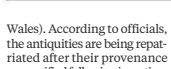
METAL TRIDENT WITH IMAGE OF GODDESS BHADRAKALI: Originated from Sri Kasiviswamy Temple in Kollamangudi, it was crafted in the South Indian temple ritual metal work tradition for religious worship



STONE IDOL OF SIX-HEADED KARTIKEYA: Carved in the Chola-period sculptural tradition, it originates from the Naganathaswamy Temple, Manambadi village of Thanjavur district



STONE IDOL OF NANDI: Sculpted in the Tamil Shaiva temple tradition, it originates from Sri Kasiviswamy Temple, Kollamangudi village in Thanjavur district



Wales). According to officials, the antiquities are being repatriated after their provenance was verified following investigations at the behest of Tamil Nadu Idol Wing CID.

It was, in due course, established that they had been removed from temples in Tamil Nadu and trafficked overseas, sources said. The idols will be handed over to the Indian mission in Australia and subsequently transported back to the country.

During their joint address

following the delegation-level talks on Thursday, both the Prime Ministers welcomed the voluntary return of these cultural artefacts to India.

In a separate statement, the office of Australian PM Anthony Albanese said, "The voluntary returns demonstrate Australia's ongoing commitment to being an international leader in the ethical collection of cultural material and best-practice collection management."

The MEA, in a statement issued after the India-Australia

Annual Summit, said the two PMs "noted the growing cultural exchanges that continue to deepen mutual understanding and welcomed the voluntary return to India of several cultural artefacts held by Australian institutions".

Albanese also "welcomed progress towards repatriating Australian First Nations ancestor (relics) held in the Government Museum of Chennai. The ancestors will be voluntarily and unconditionally repatriated by India to their Traditional Custodians," said the statement by his office.

It is believed that the Government Museum in Chennai received the skull of a First Nations ancestor sometime in 1935, as part of an anthropological exchange. Australia, which is home to the First Nations people, has in recent years focused on the repatriation of the remains of ancestors and their sacred objects.

"The repatriation of First Nations ancestors promotes healing, justice and reconciliation," Albanese said, adding, "I commend Prime Minister Modi for the decision to repatriate Australian First Nations ancestors to their Traditional Custodians."

Ram Temple donation 'scandal' raises the stakes for BJP ahead of UP elections



THE UNPRECEDENTED allegation of "chanda chori", or donation theft, at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya threatens to escalate into an issue which, unless defused, could have a bearing on the outcome of the UP Assembly elections next year.

The election theft is not just about Uttar Pradesh. Having ensured the outright victory of the BJP in 2014 and 2019, as well as the slump in 2024, UP is expected to once again decide the outcome of the Lok Sabha election battle in 2029. It may also determine the contours of a post-Narendra Modi era, helping to decide the fortunes of the Prime Minister's potential suc-

cessors, as and when it takes place.

The political import of UP is widely understood. Eight of the 14 Prime Ministers were from UP. The Nehru-Gandhi family, which gave the country three PMs, are Kashmiri Pandits who made UP their karmabhoomi (place of action). Modi, from Gujarat, but, realising UP's importance, he has chosen to retain Varanasi as his constituency.

An RSS old-timer summed up the concerns of many in the Sangh Parivar today after the alleged theft in Ayodhya, saying, "If UP slips out of the BJP's hands, other states may well start to go out of its control one by one."

The movement for the Ram Temple—the Ram Jannabhoomi movement—enabled the BJP's rise in national politics. The temple is not like any other. It has deeply affected the Hindu psyche in large parts of the country and the move-

ment to build the temple on the spot where the Babri Masjid once existed has symbolised for many an assertion of Hindu identity.

SP sees a chance

The alleged embezzlement of funds has led to many devotees feeling let down, giving the BJP's opponents a leg-up. Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav was quick to seize the opportunity as soon as the information about the alleged theft leaked, demanding the return of the "stolen" money, gold and silver to devotees.

Akhilesh had been looking for ways to give his campaign a newness which goes beyond his PDA—Pichhda (backward class)—Dalit, Adivasiyayak (minorities)—politics. It worked wonders for him in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, giving him 37 Lok Sabha seats and bringing down the BJP's tally from 62 to 33. This result robbed the BJP of an absolute majority



The Ram Temple movement enabled the BJP's rise with the temple itself symbolising, for many, the assertion of Hindu identity. n.r.

in Parliament. But rarely does the same formula work twice over. Akhilesh has been trying to throw his net wider this time. The Brahmin contractive party held recently shows he would like to attract the powerful Brahmin community to his side. In UP, Brahmins are estimated to constitute 9-10% of the population and have exercised an influence far beyond their numbers.

The continuing domination of Rajputs in UP affairs under Yogi Adityanath's stewardship, the recent UGC norms favouring the backward classes, the BJP's decision to agree to a caste census, and now the alleged embezzlement scandal have made the Brahmins and some other upper castes unhappy. And yet, it is also known that the Brahmins, though disgruntled from time to time over the

years, have stayed by the BJP's side since the Ram Temple movement began. Can Akhilesh, with the Congress's help, breach their ranks this time?

To reinforce his Hindu credentials, the SP president is building a Kedareshwar Mahadev Temple in his home turf of Saifai that is modelled on the Kedarnath shrine. The Saifai temple is expected to be opened soon and Akhilesh has said he plans to visit the Ram Temple after that.

All eyes on Adityanath

There is deep concern in the Sangh that the allegations should not lead to a "moh bhang (disillusionment)" about Hindutva itself among the middle classes, said an RSS veteran.

Even though it is the RSS that has suffered a setback and the resignations of Shri Ram Jannabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust general secretary and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP)

leader Champat Rai and trustee Anil Mishra have been accepted, ironically, the stakes may be the highest for Yogi Adityanath.

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newing the call for the "liberation" of the Krishna Jannabhoomi—another disputed site in the middle of judicial proceedings—while facing Akhilesh's attacks. This is something the SP chief may find difficult to navigate as Mathura could divide the Yadavs, his party's core base. The Yadavs are devotees of Lord Krishna and call themselves Yaduvanshis, Krishna's lineage.

The BJP's central leader may not want to give Adityanath too long a rope. And yet, winning UP is of critical importance for the BJP to maintain the momentum for 2029. It's early days yet to say which way the cookie will crumble. Ultimately, it will depend on how effectively the UP CM and the RSS can control the narrative and also the damage.

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

Lawrence gang targeted cultural, political and business leaders in India: US DoJ

Divya A
New Delhi, July 9

NOT ONLY Khalistan separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar, who was gunned down in Canada in 2024, the United States Department of Justice indictment also held the Lawrence Bishnoi gang responsible for other incidents, including shooting at the residence of actor Salman Khan, threats issued to Punjabi actor and singer Gippy Grewal, and "ordering and directing" the murder of singer Sidhu Moosewala (Shubhdeep Singh Sidhu).

"Acts of violence committed by members and associates of the Bishnoi organised crime group, or OCG, often targeted prominent cultural, political, and business leaders in India and diaspora communities outside of India," US DoJ indictment says.

It further stated that "the group had claimed responsibility through an interview with a media outlet for ordering and executing the murder of SSS, a prominent Indian singer and rapper who was murdered on May 29, 2022, in Mansa, Punjab," the US DoJ says.

This is most likely a reference to noted Punjabi singer and Congress leader Sidhu Moosewala (Shubhdeep Singh Sidhu, or SSS).

"Between 2022 and 2026, Bishnoi announced, on multiple occasions, his intention to murder SK, a well-known Indian actor and television personality," the indictment said. According to sources, this is a reference to actor Salman Khan, whose residence was under attack in April 2024, besides the security breach on his film set. The gang has been continuously threatening the actor, primarily due to the 1998 Bhakti poaching case.

Members and associates of the Bishnoi OCG used these "resembling claims to promote the enterprise and instil fear in the public, including to extort members of the public based on fear of the Bishnoi OCG," says the DoJ.

On November 25, 2023, defendant Bishnoi claimed responsibility for the shooting that occurred on November 24, 2023, in Vancouver, Canada, at the residence of RG, a prominent Indian actor and singer, in an online post to Facebook that warned, in Punjabi, "no one can save you from us," it says.

This is understood to be a reference to Punjabi actor/singer Rupinder Grewal, who was shot as he was fired outside his house on the same date in Vancouver.

INDUS RIVER SYSTEM

Rainfall in eastern river basins down 20% since 1951: Study

Amitabh Sinha
New Delhi, July 9

IN THE first-of-its-kind assessment of the impact of climate change on water availability in the Indus river system, a new study has revealed that the catchment areas of the three eastern rivers — Ravi, Beas and Sutlej — saw a 20 per cent decline in precipitation in the period between 1951 and 2024.

On the other hand, rainfall in catchment areas of three western rivers — Indus, Jhelum and Chenab — was largely stable, with only a 6 per cent reduction observed over the same period, "which is statistically non-significant," the study has found.

The findings are relevant in view of India's argument that the Indus Waters Treaty with Pakistan, which governs the sharing of waters of the Indus basin between the two countries, needs to be renegotiated to account for new ground realities created by climate change and other factors like demographic changes. Under the treaty, the waters of the three eastern rivers have been fully allocated to India, while that of the three western rivers are mostly meant for use by Pakistan.

After the Pahalgam terror at-

The findings are relevant in view of India's argument that the Indus Waters Treaty with Pakistan... needs to be renegotiated to account for new ground realities created by climate change and other factors like demographic changes

tack last year, India had declared that it had put the treaty "in abeyance", meaning it no longer considered itself bound by its provisions. It has repeatedly maintained that the treaty would remain "in abeyance" until Pakistan "credibly and irrevocably" abjures its support for cross-border terrorism. But much before this incident, in 2023 and 2024, India had served more than one notice to Pakistan seeking a "review and modification" of the treaty. India had argued that population pressures, changes in water demand, need for accelerated development of clean energy,

and changes in water availability due to climate-induced forces had brought about "fundamental and unforeseen changes in circumstances" that required suitable modifications to be made in the 1960 treaty. Pakistan has not responded to these notices.

The latest study is the first data-based evidence to support the argument that water availability and the flow in the rivers had been substantially altered over the decades due to climate change. The study was carried out by Vimal Mishra, a professor of Civil Engineering at IIT-Gandhinagar and one of India's leading researchers on hydrology and the impact of climate change on water resources, and his colleague Urmil Vagati. It is due for publication in a peer-reviewed international journal.

The study also found significant depletion of groundwater in the Sutlej and Ravi sub-basins. The groundwater situation in the Chenab, Jhelum and Indus basins was found to be relatively better, "possibly reflecting limited agricultural use, lower population density, or higher recharge from snowmelt and precipitation". The study found a "pronounced decline" in annual in-

flow of water in the reservoirs of major dams on the eastern rivers like Pong, Bhakra and Thein. The reservoir of Pong dam, for example, saw a decline of nearly 34 per cent in annual inflows between 1951 and 2020. The major reservoirs in Pakistan, on the other hand, were not substantially affected. Flows into Mangla and Tarbela dams, two of the biggest in Pakistan, both built on the western rivers, remained mostly stable, with very minor declines.

"Most of these changes are due to natural causes. Maybe, groundwater depletion is man-made. But others are all a result of natural variabilities. And these do alter the situation that existed in 1960 when the Indus Waters Treaty was signed," Mishra told *The Indian Express*.

The study says these large-scale changes may make the treaty unsustainable in the long run. "The treaty was designed in the mid-20th century amid hydro-climatic conditions that differ remarkably from the recent period. Since the formation of the treaty, the Indus River Basin has undergone substantial hydro-climatic and geopolitical changes that have led to questions about its long-term sustainability," it says.

21 weeks as Surat gets 30% of season's annual rainfall in one week; 4,100 shifted to camps

Kamal Saied
Surat, July 9

THE HORRORS of the 2006 floods mirrored to Surat with bodies of people who had gone missing following record rainfall earlier this week began to surface when the floodwaters started receding.

According to Surat city police, at least 21 persons died on Tuesday and Wednesday with 11 bodies recovered on a single day from the creek area including that of two brothers and a one-and-half-year-old girl. Police said the numbers could rise.

The city recorded 30 per cent of the season's annual rainfall in a week, Surat Municipal Commissioner M Nagarajan had said. Nearly 3,600 people had been rescued and 4,100 shifted to relief centres since Monday.

Amir Ansari, a resident of Sanjanagar in Unn area of the city, lost his two sons — Harun (21) and Faruk (18) in the floods. Their residential society was submerged and the brothers had gone missing while returning from work on Wednesday night.

"Amir tried to contact them, but it kept getting disconnected



People use a boat to cross a waterlogged area following heavy rain, in Surat, on Thursday.

after which he informed the Sachin police station," said police.

Police carried out a search operation in residential societies near Sanjanagar, but could not locate them. The bodies of Ansari brothers were found Wednesday from the neighbouring society, floating in floodwaters.

Ansari, a property broker, told *The Indian Express*,

Hussain, who replied that Faruk and Harun had left a couple of hours before. I called the police, who carried out a search operation the night, but they failed to locate them..."

"I have lost my two grown up children and I am deeply pained. Harun got engaged and he was to get married next year," an inconsolable Ansari said.

In another incident, Dindoli police teams found three bodies at Gurudutt point on Wednesday evening and sent them to New Civil Hospital.

On Wednesday, police recovered the bodies of two minors, drowned in the Pandesara area in separate incidents.

Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel, along with Deputy Chief Minister Harsh Sanghvi and Union Minister C R Patil, held a meeting at the integrated command and control centre in Surat's Althan to review the flood situation. In a post on X, the CM said, "To prevent the recurring flood situation in Surat, the state government will allocate Rs 500 crore for long-term planning and the permanent resolution of the issue through creek development."

PUBLIC NOTICE

General Public is hereby informed that M/s. Anrhan Urban Space Private Limited has been accorded Environment Clearance from SEIAA, Uttar Pradesh, vide EC Identification No. EC25838130P5770557N, Proposal no. SIA/UP/INFRA2/558358/2025 and File No. 10917-10186 dated 12.06.2026 for Proposed Group Housing Project at Plot No. GH-1, Sector-22, Yamuna Expressway, Gautam Buddha Nagar, Uttar Pradesh by M/s Anrhan Urban Space Pvt. Ltd. Copies of said Environment Clearance letter is available on the website of Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change at www.parivesh.nic.in

TATA MEMORIAL CENTRE
HOMI BHABHA CANCER HOSPITAL AND RESEARCH CENTRE VISAKHAPATNAM, ANDHRA PRADESH
A Grant-In-Aid Institution under Department of Atomic Energy, Government of India

Adv. No: TMC/VIZAG/AD/02/2026 01.07.2026

POSITIONS AVAILABLE

Homi Bhabha Cancer Hospital and Research Centre, Visakhapatnam A unit of Tata Memorial Centre (TMC) invites applications for the following posts: -

S. No	NAME OF THE POST
1	MEDICAL OFFICER "F" (RADIOAGNOSIS)
2	MEDICAL OFFICER "C" (MEDICAL CYTOTOXICOLOGY)
3	MEDICAL OFFICER "E" (NUCLEAR MEDICINE)
4	MEDICAL OFFICER "D" (GENERAL MEDICINE)
5	MEDICAL PHYSICIST "D"
6	SCIENTIFIC OFFICER "D" (QUALITY)
7	SCIENTIFIC OFFICER "D" (PHYSIOTHERAPY)
8	OFFICER-IN-CHARGE (DISPENSARY)
9	SCIENTIFIC ASSISTANT "C" (NUCLEAR MEDICINE)
10	SCIENTIFIC ASSISTANT "B" (INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY - PROGRAMMER)
11	SCIENTIFIC ASSISTANT "B" (RADIATION ONCOLOGY)

Online registration of applications made available from 01.07.2026 to 01.08.2026.

Last date for online application is 01.08.2026 up to 05.30 p.m.

(Indian Standard Time)

For more details visit our website: <https://tmc.gov.in> and click "Careers" Adv. No. 02/2026

It is mandatory to submit Online application only. Any addendum or corrigendum to this advertisement will be uploaded on above website only.

Chief Administrative Officer, HBCH&RC, Visakhapatnam, CMC 48155/11/0003/2627

WILDLIFE PANEL CONSTITUTION HEARING

'Tendency to treat statutory bodies as extension of govt arm': HC pulls up Centre

Sohini Ghosh
New Delhi, July 9

THE DELHI High Court Wednesday pulled up the Centre for "treating every statutory body as an extension of the government's arm" while hearing a petition by former bureaucrats and others, flagging the Standing Committee of the National Board of Wildlife (SC-NBWL) has been constituted in contravention of statutory provisions and has been "stamp approving" proposals at an "alarming" rate.

The PIL, filed by 10 people, including retired Indian Forest Service and IAS officers, wildlife conservationists, and a non-voluntary organisation working in conservation, has flagged that the SC-NBWL "has been recklessly permitting proposals for diversion of Protected Areas" with over 97% of the project proposals considered by the SC-NBWL between 2014 and 2026 receiving approval.

A Bench of Chief Justice D.K. Upadhyaya and Justice Tejas Karia on Wednesday sought response from the government in four weeks' time.

Addressing the counsel representing the government, CJ Upadhyaya orally remarked during the hearing, "If what the (petitioners' lawyer) says is cor-

rect... see the composition of the Board... highest level functioning of the country are members, and if the Wildlife Act provisions) says Standing committee will be constituted by the Board, not the government, can't you differentiate simply between a statutory board and the functions of government?"

He said, "Board is an entity distinct and separate from the government entity. It cannot act as a government department. There is a tendency... treating every statutory body as an extension of the government's arm. That is not the scheme of this Act. There is a purpose behind creating such an autonomous independent statutory body or a board or commission... you cannot use every power. It is alarming..."

According to the petitioners, the statutory requirements for constituting the committee, which is expected to be an independent body, has not been complied with since the government changed at the Centre in 2014. The petitioners also highlighted that the committee, which has a mandate to promote conservation and development, has been taking decisions and passing orders that are "beyond its mandate and jurisdiction under the Act and are

completely contrary to the ethos and rationale behind the formation of the Committee". The PIL also highlighted that the SC-NBWL has approved various projects, "prioritising economic benefits over long-term environmental impacts".

The petitioners cited that the SC-NBWL, reconstituted in 2026, in its very first meeting held on March 21 this year, considered 52 proposals. Of these, 28 were cleared, which is "a poor reflection of the functioning of the SC-NBWL, which should be ensuring that the last remaining Protected Areas of the country are free from all sources of destruction and fragmentation," they added.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi serves as the ex-officio chair of NBWL, the Wildlife Act. More than 10 PMs chaired his first-ever meeting of the NBWL in March this year. Apart from identifying protected areas and eco-sensitive zones, as well as permitting petrochemical and mining projects in such areas, the standing committee, in just 12 meetings held between 2024 and 2026, has recommended 187 proposals for establishing mobile towers in Protected Areas," petitioners have alleged.

Jitu Patwari's brother named in drug probe, political storm erupts

Anand Mohan J
Bhopal, July 9

THE ARREST of two alleged drug peddlers in Indore has triggered a political row after police claimed that one of the intended recipients of the seized narcotics was Nana Patwari, the brother of Madhya Pradesh Congress president Jitu Patwari.

Addressing the media, Deputy Commissioner of Police Narendra Rawat said, "Rajendra Nagar police arrested Irfan Khan alias Golu Chanderi and Rani Bhai, and 10.8 grams of brown sugar was recovered from their possession. The process of registering a case against both accused is underway."

"During interrogation, the accused disclosed that the seized narcotic substance was meant for two persons, one of whom is Nana Patwari. We also examined his criminal record and found that Nana Patwari has nine previous criminal cases registered

against him," the officer said.

The DCP said preliminary interrogation of the accused revealed they were going to deliver the consignment of brown sugar to two individuals named Nana Patwari and Manav Gangwani.

Police have not publicly disclosed whether Nana Patwari has been arrested in the case. Probe is underway to verify the claims made during the accused's interrogation and establish the alleged supply chain.

The police action drew a sharp political response from Jitu Patwari, who alleged that his brother had been taken into custody without prior intimation and accused the BJP government of using law enforcement to settle political scores.

In a post on X addressed to Chief Minister Mohan Yadav, Patwari wrote, "The Indore Police have taken my brother into custody without informing us, sending the political message that the BJP is now taking re-

venge. Anyone who raises their voice against the government or the Chief Minister will be silenced through the use of law."

Patwari further alleged he had anticipated "false legal action" against him and his family because of what he described as government's "personal vendetta." "We will neither be intimidated nor bow before politics driven by legal pressure. Instead, we will continue fight with greater resolve," he said.

Senior Congress leader Vivek Tankha said he was "informed by Jitu Patwari that the Indore Police suddenly arrested his younger brother without informing him of any offence and did not inform the Patwari family where he had been taken."

"I urge the DGP, the Indore Police Commissioner and the Indore Divisional Commissioner not to create a situation that could become troublesome in the future," Tankha said.

Kerala student murdered in Uzbekistan, classmate held; kin allege conversion bid

Shaju Philip
Thiruvananthapuram, July 9

A MEDICAL student from Kerala was killed in Uzbekistan, allegedly by her classmate, also from the state. The victim's family has further alleged in a police complaint filed in Kerala that she was being forced into religious conversion.

The victim was identified as Sawariya Basanth, 21, from Haripradd in Alappuzha district. She was a first-year medical student at Bukhara State Medical Institute in Uzbekistan.

Sadanur Anam, 22, from Pulamantol in Malappuram dis-

trict, is accused of killing Sawariya last Friday and was arrested soon after the incident.

Sawariya's body has been brought back to Kerala, where a second postmortem was conducted Thursday following a complaint from her family. The body was cremated later in the day. Police in Kerala's Haripradd have registered a murder case based on a complaint filed by Sawariya's father, Basanth, who is employed in Kuwait.

Haripradd SHO V Vishnu said, "We have registered a case under section 103 (murder) of BNS. We are yet to get official details of the crime from law enforcement agencies in Uzbekis-

tan. The postmortem conducted in Alappuzha medical college has prima facie indications of physical assault. We will examine the legal standing of the case registered in Kerala for the crime recorded in Uzbekistan."

Basant's relative, Jagneesh, has said that Sadanur had been "forcing Sawariya to convert".

"Her classmates had informed us that she was physically assaulted many times. He had been forcing her to get converted, but she resisted it," Jagneesh said.

Police said the family, in its complaint, had also raised the allegation of an attempted forced conversion.

PROCLAMATION
(Under Section 84 of the Bharatara Nagarak Surakhsha Sanhita, 2023)

Whereas a Proclamation Order has been issued by Sh. Jitendra Partap Singh, Special Judge, NDPS Act, Patiala House Courts, New Delhi, in NCB Case No. VIII/54/DZU/2020, under Sections 8(c), 21 of the NDPS Act, 1985, vide Order dated 25.05.2026, against accused Baser Ahmad Tajik S/o Fazal Ahmad R/o H.N.O. - J-330, Old Seemapuri, Delhi. Whereas the said accused has absconded by concealing himself and has failed to appear before the Hon'ble Court despite issuance of warrants. Whereas the said accused has absconded in concealing himself and has failed to appear before the Hon'ble Court despite issuance of warrants.

Notice is hereby given that the said accused is directed to appear before the Hon'ble Court on or before 03.09.2026, failing which he shall be declared a Proclaimed Offender and proceedings shall be taken against him as per law.

This proclamation is published for general information of the public in compliance with the directions of the Hon'ble Court.

By Order
Sd/-
Jitendra Partap Singh
Special Judge, NDPS
Act Patiala House Courts, Delhi
CNC-19126/11/0004/2627

Minister: Gujarat man provoked lion before attack

Ahmedabad: A lion attack that killed a man occurred after he and his friends provoked the lion when it was mating, according to authorities.

The incident occurred in a reserve forest area outside Gir Sanctuary in Amreli's Liliya taluka on Wednesday. The victim was identified as Sohil Munjawar, 21, from Amreli town. Forest and Environment Minister Arjun Modhwadia said, "There is a reserve forest area outside Gir Sanctuary and near Antaliya village in Amreli. Three youngsters had gone there to see lions illegally. Due to provocation, one of them died following an attack by a lion." ENS

My aunt's funeral showed me that even in death, a woman does not belong to herself. — By Maitreyee Krishna
Log on to www.indianexpress.com



The Editorial Page

FRIDAY, JULY 10, 2026

The Indian EXPRESS

— FOUNDED BY —

RAMNATH GOENKA

— IN 1932 —

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

A global crackdown and a chance for India

THE MULTI-agency operation carried out by federal law enforcement agencies from several countries, with networks spanning continents, against transnational crime syndicates, is welcome. India has actively operated in the investigations. The findings also vindicate Delhi's long-held stand that it had no role in terror cells operating abroad. For years, the Indian establishment had to contend with allegations that it was involved in the assassination of Khalistani separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Surrey in June 2023. The killing, and the public smear campaign by the then Justin Trudeau government, plunged bilateral ties into a deep freeze. Now, public statements by senior officials of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the agency whose investigations were earlier cited to cast suspicion on the Indian security establishment, reflect the maturity of the new Canadian leadership under Prime Minister Mark Carney. He has moved not merely to mend relations between the two countries but to fast-track cooperation in trade and education. Canadian universities were long the preferred destination for many Indian students, but the diplomatic freeze had disrupted the educational exchange. The new signals from Ottawa should provide a fresh impetus to people-to-people ties.

Operation Hard Ball has also exposed the transnational reach of criminal syndicates targeting the Indian diaspora not only in Canada but also in the US, Europe and Australia. Indian security agencies were among the first to point to the emerging nexus between organised crime and terror networks. This convergence enabled separatist groups to finance and sustain their agenda, while forcing security agencies to confront syndicates dealing simultaneously in drugs, terror and separatism. Extortion calls, once associated with Mumbai's underworld of a bygone era, have become the preferred weapon of criminal syndicates to terrorise Indians settled abroad. While victimising fellow Indians, these networks have also tarnished the reputation of the diaspora, often by exploiting vulnerable students as foot soldiers.

The operation offers an opportunity to make the Indian diaspora safer. It is also a chance for India to dismantle the domestic gangs and extortion rackets that are increasingly targeting businessmen across parts of the country. The message should be unambiguous. Youngsters lured by the glamour of gang culture must realise that the path leads not to power or prosperity but to prison or deportation. Syndicates that once appeared untouchable are now being hunted across jurisdictions. India must seize this moment to ensure that organised crime ceases to be a lucrative enterprise, and is seen for what it really is — a high-risk, zero-reward proposition.

Don't let the rowdy politician get away

THE SHIV (Sena [Eknath Shinde]) has done the right thing in admonishing its corporator, Ramesh Mhatre, for the assault on doctors and medical staff of a Thane municipal hospital after a video of the incident went viral. The altercation reportedly arose over the treatment of a patient on Monday. At times, tempers do run high in hospitals with patients and their families contending with overcrowded, and often unhygienic, facilities. But Mhatre's conduct is reprehensible not only because it's an assault on medical professionals but also an abuse of his official position. Residents approach their municipal representatives over a host of everyday civic concerns. Their effectiveness lies in responding with empathy, escalating complaints for redressal, and demanding public accountability. A corporator should never intimidate or browbeat officials when they are discharging their duties. Mhatre's arrest on Wednesday has, therefore, sent the right message — Maharashtra's Mahayuti government, of which the Shiv Sena is a part, will not treat high-handedness with impunity.

For at least three decades since its formation in 1966, the Shiv Sena cultivated a politics that was seen to encourage direct action even at the cost of transgressing the rule of law. While upholding Marathi pride was the party's avowed objective, parochialism often slipped into shows of force and violence. Whether enforcing bandhs, intervening in local disputes or confronting officials, the Sena projected itself as an organisation willing to bypass institutions in favour of a rough politics. However, as the party assumed greater responsibilities in government, it sought to present itself as a mature political outfit capable of administering complex public institutions.

Shiv Sainiks, though, have not completely abandoned their ways of yore. After the party split in 2022, cadres loyal to Uddhav Thackeray reportedly vandalised the offices of the rival Shiv Sena. In March last year, workers of the Shiv Sena ransacked a Mumbai auditorium, where comedian Kunal Kamra had taken a jibe against their leader. The Mahayuti government, which often makes development initiatives its political capital, can afford to allow such acts of intimidation to become normalised. It must ensure that Wednesday's action is not an isolated response but the standard for dealing with the abuse of political power.

The bees and the birds, like us only

AMONG THE elements that constitute the *Homo sapiens* self-definition, there is one that is often ignored. Human beings have an unending capacity for narcissistic conceit. The "inner life", it has long been believed, is the province of very few animals. With reluctance, people acknowledge that a few mammals — elephants, primates, dolphins and some whales — are worth empathy. For lowly insects, though, the fascination is individual. The ant and the bee and the wasp are marvellous for their complexity, but the ant and the bee are merely constituents of a collective.

It turns out that behind their exoskeletons, bees might be a lot more complex than people thought. A paper published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* shows that in certain settings, bumblebees react to certain tastes in seemingly similar ways to some mammals, including human babies — they seem to like sugar water, and retreat from saltiness. Researchers concluded that bees may have a rudimentary "taste" in state.

Bees are ready to join the growing ranks of smart non-mammals. Corvids — crows, ravens, etc. — use tools, have moods and likes and dislikes. Parrots and their kin have a propensity for languages. Perhaps it's tough to see these creatures as close kin because they look so different and are seen only in large groups. But then, as the crow or the bee flies and looks down, it might just look at a crowd of humans and not see people at all.

Lost in India's celebrations of trade pacts, the big deal

IN CASABLANCA, Humphrey Bogart observes that the problems of "three little people don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world". Trade policy is not cinema, but the line applies with some precision to India's current diplomatic enthusiasm for free trade agreements. Its recent trade deals with the EU and the UK and an earlier one with Japan have been widely celebrated, underlining the openness to global commerce. The celebrations are not entirely misplaced. But the arithmetic suggests India may be cheering for the hill of beans while the mountain stands unclimbed.

The mountain is the United States. For the period 2020-25, India's annual goods trade surplus with America averaged approximately \$42 billion. India's combined goods trade surplus with the EU, the UK, and Japan together was approximately \$12 billion. The ratio is roughly 4 to 1 in favour of the US. One country, no trade agreement, nearly four times the commercial benefit of three large partners and three "celebrated" trade deals. This is the number that should be at the centre of India's trade strategy conversation. It is emphatically not.

The US surplus is not an accident. It reflects India's genuine comparative advantages in pharma generics, software-adjacent electronics assembly, and skilled labour-intensive goods. An India-US FTA that zeroes remaining tariffs on these categories would cement demand for Indian exports. A full deal cuts both ways too, opening India's market wider to American agriculture, energy, and defence goods. So the \$42 billion surplus will not simply hold. But

even a partial narrowing of it would dwarf anything on offer from the EU, UK, or Japan deals combined. And the bigger prize is not goods at all. It is market access for Indian IT and professional services — a services negotiation, not a merchandise one.

These numbers cover only merchandise goods trade. India exports \$79 billion in goods to the US annually and imports \$37 billion, generating the \$42 billion surplus. These are not raw commodities but generic pharmaceuticals (India supplies roughly 40 per cent of US generic drug volumes), electronics including Apple's iPhone assemblies now made in India, gems and jewellery, engineering goods, and chemicals. The US is India's most important destination for high-value, knowledge-intensive manufactured exports.

The EU is India's second-largest goods trading partner. The country runs a surplus of around \$18 billion annually with the bloc — real and growing, driven partly by petroleum re-exports after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and partly by pharmaceuticals and engineering goods. The EU-India FTA matters: India pays 9-12 per cent tariffs on textiles and garments entering Europe, while Vietnam, which signed an EU deal in 2020, pays nothing — a legitimate grievance and real opportunity. But even a generous estimate of what the EU FTA adds to India's goods trade — perhaps \$8-10 billion annually at full implementation — leaves the US surplus in a categorically different league.

The UK deal is the one fur-



SURJIT S BHALLA

For the period 2020-25, India's annual goods trade surplus with America averaged approximately \$42 billion. India's combined goods trade surplus with the EU, the UK, and Japan together was approximately \$12 billion

thest along: India and the UK signed the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) in July 2025. It delivers duty-free access for 99 per cent of India's exports to the UK by value — but India's current goods surplus with the UK is only around \$5 billion, a rounding error next to the American number.

The Japan story is more cautionary. India and Japan signed the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in 2011, with a trade target of \$25 billion by 2014. India's goods exports to Japan today — 15 years on — are approximately \$6 billion, and the trade balance has swung from a small deficit at signing to a deficit of roughly \$1 billion now. The CEPA removed most tariffs; what it could not remove were Japan's formidable non-tariff barriers. At the July 2026 Modi-Takaichi summit, the two sides agreed only to review and negotiate a CEPA upgrade — a commitment to talk, not a negotiated reduction in non-tariff barriers.

There is also the China question, which none of these deals addresses but which no serious discussion of Indian trade policy can ignore. India's goods trade deficit with China reached approximately \$99 billion in 2024-25 — a record, on imports of \$113 billion against exports of just \$14 billion. The combined surplus from all three of India's agreements with EU, UK and Japan would not cover an eighth of that deficit.

Which brings us back to the United States. The India-US goods relationship has strengthened every decade since 2000 — a sur-

plus of roughly \$7 billion in the 2000s, \$22 billion in the 2010s, \$42 billion now — with out a single formal trade agreement, a sign of how much more could be achieved with one. An India-US agreement covering goods and services — with stable, near-zero tariffs across pharmaceuticals, electronics, gems, and engineering goods, plus provisions on IT services and professional mobility — would be the most consequential trade agreement India has ever signed, serving its broader ambitions. An economy more reliant on markets than bureaucrats, on the growth path Viksit Bharat requires. In India's trade policy universe, the US relationship is not one deal among several. It is the deal. The others are useful increments, this one a structural shift.

Given this, it's worth asking why the US deal is so difficult to achieve. Political economy supplies part of the answer. The likely losers are inefficient Indian producers who currently enjoy protection, and China, since deeper US-India integration would reinforce the global shift away from Chinese manufacturing dominance.

In the end, Bogart gave up the hill of beans and chose the larger cause. India's trade negotiators face a version of the same choice. Keep celebrating agreements that improve the margin, or muster the political will for the one that changes the game. The arithmetic has been clear for some time. The question is whether the strategy has caught up with it.

The writer is chairperson of the Technical Expert Group for the first official Household Income Survey for India. Views are personal

Acquisition, merger, takeover — corporate talk is BJP'speak



MA BABY

INDIA IS currently witnessing a capture of every institution that was designed to mediate, moderate or constrain executive power. These institutions are now being subordinated to the interests of a specific faction of big capital, which is fused with the ideological apparatus of Hindutva, which pursues the idea of Hindu Rashtra. It is an ongoing project of legal, electoral and territorial engineering which is being materialised through legislation that says one thing and does another. It is also being established through a sustained assault on constitutional firewalls that stand between a secular republic and a theocratic state.

Since 2014, the ruling party's political apparatus has merged with a specific cluster of corporate houses, in a relationship of mutual reinforcement so dense that the boundary between state and private capital has become, in critical sectors, functionally invisible. Corporates that made investments in the BJP are receiving material returns in the form of public-sector disinvestment, rewriting of environmental and land-acquisition clearance norms, restructuring of the banking system to absorb corporate debt, etc. Political power itself is being reorganised as returns on corporate investment.

Acquisitions. Mergers. Hostile takeovers. Terms used in corporate boardrooms have been perfected by the BJP as the quick fix to overcome electoral setbacks. It began with the fall of state governments through the organised poaching and wholesale purchase of elected Congress legislators in Madhya Pradesh, Goa, Karnataka, Manipur etc. Later, the targets shifted to the NCP, SP, AAP and TMC. The "future trading" in political leaders has become so normalised that it now barely registers as a scandal.

To prevent this kind of wholesale political commerce, the Tenth Schedule, also known as the anti-defection law, was introduced in 1985. Despite its loopholes, it represented a constitutional acknowledgment that the buying and selling of legislators goes against the ethos of a multi-party democracy. That acknowledgment has now been rendered ceremonial. The mechanism of "merger" — requiring two-thirds of a legislative party to defect — is being exploited with clinical efficiency.

Speakers, governors and the Election Commission are some of the constitutional positions that were designed as counterweights or referees. However, speakers, who are the constitutional authorities charged with deciding disqualification petitions,

have discovered remarkable reserves of procedural delay whenever the petitions concern their own party's beneficiaries. The partisan functioning of governors in states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, and West Bengal has been documented. The EC is the body on whose independence the very possibility of an electoral democracy rests. It has repeatedly refused to act on complaints against the Prime Minister and the Home Minister for speeches that, by any reading of the Model Code of Conduct, constituted communal appeals.

Now with the SIR exercise, the current EC's lack of non-partisanship lies further exposed. While upholding the legality of the SIR exercise in its May 2026 judgement, citing Article 324, the Supreme Court directed the EC to send the names of those who were deleted on the grounds of doubtful citizenship to the Union government for adjudication under the citizenship laws. This officially linked the electoral roll revision to citizenship determination. The SIR deletes names. The CAA offers a conditional reinstatement to some who belong to the right religion. The NRC is the eventual settling of accounts. The ultimate goal of the SIR is becoming clearer.

The Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991, prohibited the conversion of any place of worship and directed that the religious character of every such place as it stood on August 15, 1947, be maintained. In 2022, the Supreme Court said during the Gyanvapi hearings that though "conversion" of a place of worship is barred by the Act, "ascertaining its religious character" is not. In practice, the distinction between "ascertaining" and "converting" has proved to be illusory. The RSS-BJP project requires an endless supply of "disputes" to sustain communal polarisation as an electoral resource.

Delimitation based on a skewed population data will restructure the arithmetic of Parliament in favour of the BJP's core states. The SIR purges the rolls of those most likely to vote against the BJP — poor, migrant, minority, marginalised. The CAA offers a backdoor for religious sorting. The assault on the 1991 Act generates the communal charge that keeps the Hindutva coalition together.

The CPI(M) and the Left are fighting for the defence of the constitutional framework within which the working class, minorities and democratic forces can still organise, agitate and alter the course of history.

The writer is general secretary, CPI(M)



SUBIMAL BHATTACHARJEE

Lessons from a Chinese supercomputer

ON JUNE 23, at the International Supercomputing Conference, a machine almost no one had heard of vaulted to the top of computing's most-watched scoreboard. LineShine, housed at the National Supercomputing Centre in Shenzhen, clocked 2.198 exaflops on the High Performance Linpack benchmark — more than 20 per cent faster than the United States' El Capitan at 1.809. It's the first Chinese system to top the TOP500 since Sunway TaihuLight in 2017, and the first machine ever to cross two exaflops using only general-purpose CPUs, no GPUs.

That last detail is the story. China did not win by buying the best chips; it was barred from doing so. LineShine runs on a fully domestic stack — custom 304-core LX2 processors built on the Arm architecture, a proprietary Lingqi interconnect, the home-grown LingKun platform and Kylin OS, across nearly 13.8 million cores. China stopped submitting to the TOP500 as the US export controls bit re-entering it is a deliberate signal that the chokehold did not work as intended. The export controls since 2022 triggered a state-backed self-sufficiency drive. Chip self-sufficiency, just 33 per cent in 2024, is targeted at 80 per cent by 2030. TrendForce expects domestic chips to supply half of China's AI-chip market in 2026. Three toolmakers, Naura, AMEC and ACM Research, entered the global top 20 for the first time in 2025. Huawei's AI-chip revenue is projected to jump 60 per cent to \$12 billion.

This is the value-chain ascent in miniature: China climbing from assembly into design, tooling, materials and architecture — the high-margin, hard-to-replicate links where strategic leverage sits. For India, the moment is instructive. Launched in 2021 with a Rs 76,000-crore outlay, the India Semiconductor Mission has approved 13 projects across seven states. The Tata-Power fab in Dholera, a Rs 91,000-crore, 28nm bet on 50,000 wafers a month, anchors the effort, with first silicon due around 2028.

Three lessons can be drawn from this result. First, an ecosystem is not a fab: China's edge came from depth across equipment, materials, interconnects, software and design IP built over a decade. ISM 2.0's refocus on equipment, materials and Indian IP suggests the lesson is absorbed: execution is the test. Second, design is leverage, up to half of value added, and India already hosts the R&D centres of Nvidia, Intel, Qualcomm and Texas Instruments, a fabless strength that may pay faster than chasing leading-edge fabs. Third, patent capital and talent win: With a 700,000-strong skills shortage looming by 2030, the country that trains engineers fastest shortcuts its advantage.

The deepwater takeaway is geopolitical. Washington's denial strategy assumed that withholding technology would preserve its lead indefinitely. China's answer is that denial accelerates substitution, fragmenting the global stack into parallel, incompatible ecosystems. For India, that fracturing is an opening: As multinational seekers alternatives to China-Taiwan concentration, a non-aligned, English-speaking India grows attractive, provided it does not mistake assembly for autonomy.

LineShine's lesson is not that China has won the computing race. It is that a determined state, denied the best tools, can build adequate ones and weaponise the symbolism. Washington must weigh whether controls that curtail a rival's industrial policy are worth their cost. New Delhi should read the result plainly: Sovereignty in silicon is bought with sustained investment, indigenous IP and engineering talent, and not subsidies alone.

Bhattacharjee is a defence and tech policy adviser and author of *The Digital Decades: On 30 Years of the Internet in India*

40 YEARS AGO

July 10, 1986



Violence in Ahmedabad

COMMUNAL VIOLENCE, which claimed 300 lives last year, raised its ugly head once again in the Dariapur-Shapur areas of the walled city during the annual *rath yatra* procession, leaving 11 dead and nearly 80 injured. An indefinite curfew has been imposed in the area. Official sources said the trouble began when the *rath yatra* procession passing through the Chandan Talavi locality in the Dariapur area was subjected to heavy stone-throwing. The processionists had to divert their route.

CS Singh dead

THE UNION Petroleum Minister, Chandra Shekhar Singh, who was undergoing treatment at AIIMS for liver cancer, died. He was 60. Singh, former CM of Bihar, was admitted to the AIIMS on June 30.

200 held as rally turns violent

THE POLICE resorted to a lathi-charge to disperse an unruly mob at a Haryana Sangharsh Samiti meeting. The agitators, who were mainly from the Lok Dal turned viol-

ent and set fire to a state transport bus, two jeeps and a furniture shop. The Express photographer Karter Singh's car was also damaged. The police arrested 200 persons.

21 killed in Sri Lanka

AUTHORITIES CLAMPED a curfew on the northeastern city of Trincomalee after 21 people were reported killed in two incidents. Residents of the port city said that six people, believed to be members of the same Tamil family, were killed.



• **WHAT THE OTHERS SAY**
Right now, too much of the Democratic Party's identity is defined by what it stands against.
— *The New York Times*

The Ideas Page

FRIDAY, JULY 10, 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

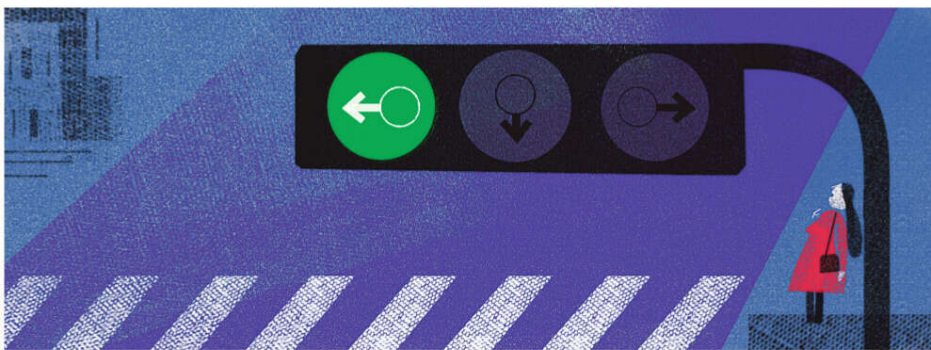


ILLUSTRATION: C R SAKSHI

Cities provide more opportunities for women to work. Why can so few women access them?

Not till cities reduce time, safety, care costs



KANIKA MAHAJAN

THE LATEST PLFS city estimates from the National Statistics Office seem to offer a hopeful story: India's largest cities provide women with better jobs. In the 46-million-plus cities, 65.1 per cent of employed women are in regular salaried work, compared with 50.9 per cent in urban India overall. Yet female labour force participation in these cities is only 25.5 per cent, lower than the urban average of 27.7 per cent. Big cities produce better jobs, but the real question is why so few women can access them.

It should not surprise us that big cities have a higher share of salaried jobs. This is the equilibrium outcome of thicker labour markets. Large cities concentrate firms and utilities such as schools, hospitals and business services, along with more educated workers. Among women, 29.4 per cent in these cities have college- and above education against 25 per cent in non-metro urban India. Once firms and skilled workers cluster together, more salaried work follows.

Not is it surprising that employed women in big cities are concentrated in salaried jobs. Women place high value on non-wage attributes such as predictable hours, formal contracts, paid leave, safety, childcare and transport. Research shows that women's participation rises with the expansion of white-collar work, which offers better terms and social acceptability. Our research similarly finds that larger firms employ more women, likely because they offer amenities like maternity benefits, transport and paid leave.

The salaried-work statistic must therefore be read carefully, since it is conditional on being employed. It tells us only that among the minority of urban women who make it into paid work, many select into better jobs. It does not mean the city has solved women's employment problems. A large where three-fourths of women remain outside the labour force cannot declare success because the one-fourth who work are more likely to be salaried.

The same caution is needed in reading the earnings numbers. On average, women earn 22.7 per cent less than men, an important disparity, but monthly earnings do not account for hours worked. The PLFS data show that women employed in salaried work work almost 12.6 per cent fewer hours

per week than men. In bigger urban cities, this hour gap is slightly larger, at around 14 per cent. A simple accounting exercise shows that fewer hours explain almost 20 per cent of the earnings gap. Adding age, education and occupation raises the explained share to just 30 per cent. The larger point remains that a sizeable earnings penalty for women persists irrespective of city size, pointing to a more general problem of gender discrimination.

The harder question is why female participation is lower in the largest cities than in urban India as a whole. One answer lies in the geography of work, since women's employment is not just a wage decision. Evidence from job-search behaviour shows that women search closer to home and are willing to trade off wages for shorter commutes. Indian evidence on urban mobility points the same way. Women are far less likely than men to step out of the home on a given day, reflecting safety, household responsibility, social norms and weak transport systems. Fewer hours worked reflect similar constraints of care, commuting and safety.

This helps explain why rural India has historically shown higher female work participation. Much rural work is low-paid and informal, but agriculture and allied work is often closer to home and easier to combine with domestic responsibilities. As work moves from farms to firms, non-agricultural growth can exclude women in the absence of safe transport, affordable childcare and quality jobs.

The unemployment data also tell the same story. Female unemployment (ages 15-59) is higher than male unemployment everywhere, but the gender gap is larger in the 46 big cities, at 9.81 per cent for women against 6.49 per cent for men, versus 9.07 and 6.36 per cent elsewhere. Big cities are not merely places where women opt out. They are also places where women looking for work face a harder matching problem.

India's urban agenda cannot treat women's employment as an automatic by-product of growth. Cities need frequent and safe public transport, last-mile connectivity, street lighting, mixed-use neighbourhoods, childcare and regulations that make amenities easier for employers to provide. The real reason from the new data is that even our best labour markets do not work for women. Until cities reduce the time, safety and care costs of taking a job, they will continue to produce better jobs without producing enough women workers.

The writer is associate professor of Economics at Ashoka University and Co-Lead for Employment at the Isaac Centre for Public Policy

Beyond childcare, four other barriers



ROOPA KUDVA

THERE ARE two things worth cheering about in the latest report of the National Statistics Office on India's million-plus cities. First, female labour force participation has climbed from 19.8 per cent in 2017-18 to 27.2 per cent in 2023, showing the sharpest gain of any group. The second is entrepreneurship — in 32 of the 46 million-plus cities, more than 20 per cent of unincorporated establishments are now run by women. Cities have become India's biggest centres of opportunity for women — and increasingly, it isn't only the big metros. In Surat, Vadodra and Pune, 40 per cent of unincorporated establishments are run by women.

Both numbers deserve celebration, but they come with a catch. Female LFPR, even after this gain, is still barely a third of the male rate of 75.9 per cent. Startlingly, despite the shift in aspirations, nearly 70 per cent of women outside the labour force still cite childcare and home commitments as the reason, proof of that this is far from a solved problem.

For the rest, however, four gaps explain why the LFPR gap is not closing faster. Every system that touches a woman's working life — how she gets to work, whether she can occupy public space with the same ease as men, whether she rises once she's in an organisation, whether a bank or an investor will fund her — is designed around a male default.

Mobility: For men, the labour market begins at the workplace. For many women, it begins much earlier — on the street, at the bus stop, at the train station. ORF's Women on the Move study found that over half of women reported experiencing harassment on public transport, and a similar share perceive it as unsafe. Women also rarely have linear commutes — their journeys are "chained", dropping children to school, managing errands, on the way to or back from work — while our transport systems are still built around a simple home-to-office trip. If transport isn't reliable, safe or built for how women actually move through a city, labour supply shrinks before an employer ever sees the candidate.

Public spaces: The deeper problem is beyond the commute. Look at our public spaces — you rarely see women simply sitting in a park alone, lingering in a café, or

spending time on a street without a clear purpose. Women feel they must be doing something legitimate to justify their presence in public space. That's a very different problem from safety alone, and it's one policy can't fix. The answer is designing cities that assume women are full participants in public life — not those who need a reason to be there.

Career progressions: Even women who clear the first two hurdles run into a third: They don't rise at the rate they enter. Only 5 per cent of NSE-500 companies are women-led. For years, the explanation has been maternity breaks and caregiving. That narrative is tired and incomplete — it explains some exits, but not why so many women who stay still don't progress into leadership. A large part of the answer is unconscious bias. Successful women are often less liked than successful men, because traits like assertiveness and driving accountability conflict with longstanding expectations that women be accommodating and nurturing. A firm view from a man reads as conviction; from a woman, as sharp. Women are asked to deliver outcomes while continuously managing tone and perception — and that shapes self-belief and choices, sometimes unconsciously. That is why, as one report showed, men apply for roles when they meet 60 per cent of the qualifications, while women wait until they meet nearly all of them.

This is where the conversation usually runs into a familiar objection — that supporting women somehow means compromising merit. Far from it. Promoting women isn't anti-merit; it's how you actually give yourself the chance to uncover more merit. Organisations that effectively exclude half the workforce aren't protecting standards. They're narrowing them.

Funding: The fourth gap is capital. Women-led MSMEs in India face a credit gap of around 35 per cent, held back by inadequate collateral, lower property ownership and financial literacy. Further up the ladder: Less than 5 per cent of India's VC funding goes to start-ups with a woman founder. Part of the reason is pitch-room dynamics. Studies have shown that investors ask women founders more "prevention" questions — about risk, safety, what could go wrong — while men are asked "promotion" questions, about growth and scale.

Cities have opened a door for women that didn't exist a decade ago. But walking through it still means clearing a commute, a public square, a boardroom and a bank. Until all four are rebuilt for her, closing the gap with men will take far longer than it needs to.

The writer headed Crisis and OMI

From Hormuz to Malacca, Delhi must draw the right lessons



ARUN PRAKASH

AS WASHINGTON finished celebrating America's 250th Independence Day, millions in Tehran, defying predictions, filed past their slain Supreme Leader's remains to pay homage. The Strait of Hormuz, locked in a volatile "strategic pause", has now erupted in a renewed spasm of extreme violence. The tension and uncertainty that have become inherent in the Persian Gulf vividly illustrate how geography can be weaponised to hold the global economy and world peace to ransom.

Violence had returned on June 25, when Iran attacked a Singapore-flagged merchant vessel that failed to comply with its prescribed routing instructions. This was followed by a brief exchange of air and missile strikes with US forces, and a nominal pause in hostilities. The pause was short-lived because each interdiction by Iran of what it considered "errant" merchantmen provoked a retaliatory US strike.

The Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), signed on June 17, was intended to establish a 60-day provisional ceasefire between the US-Israel coalition and Iran. As many feared, the shaky agreement began to crumble soon after its signing under the weight of conflicting interpretations and rigid positions adopted by all parties.

On July 8, shortly after President Donald Trump declared the MoU "dead", US Central Command announced on social media that "US forces completed a new round of offensive strikes against Iran, hitting over 80 targets... as an immediate response to Iran's latest attacks on vessels transiting the Strait of Hormuz". This is a disarming indication that both trigger-happy nations are willing to risk the complete collapse of this fragile agreement.

At the heart of the discord lies Article 5 of the MoU, which mandates that Iran use its "best efforts" to ensure the safe passage of commercial vessels through the Strait. Tehran views the MoU as recognition of its authority to regulate traffic within its territorial waters, while Washington rejects this, insisting the Strait must be governed by the principles of free "transit passage" guaranteed by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Israel had distanced itself from the MoU, maintaining that the ceasefire did not constrain its military operations against Hezbollah, and its forces continued to wreak death and destruction well inside Lebanon. Given that the deeper roots of this whole conflict lie in Tel Aviv and in Israel's underlying aims of eliminating Iran's military and nuclear capabilities as well as its top leadership, Iran's possible response remains an imponderable of intense concern to the world.

For Iran, engaged in a grossly unequal conflict in which it has suffered tremendous devastation, accompanied by extreme economic hardship due to prolonged sanctions, the Strait is the final strategic card left for it to play. A huge chasm persists between Iran's demand for security guarantees and economic relief, and the US stipulations in respect of

uranium enrichment by Iran and freedom of navigation. Unlike the tensions like Pakistan and Qatar can hammer out yet another modus vivendi, the Islamabad peace process may have breathed its last and the region risks sliding back into an open-ended crisis.

These events show how quickly rising tensions can turn maritime chokepoints into geopolitical flashpoints, disrupting shipping lanes and global supply chains. As interstate competition grows, the ability to threaten these critical routes for energy, trade, and commerce undermines economic stability and highlights why a rules-based international order must be urgently restored.

Closer to home, parallels are being drawn between Hormuz and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, situated at the mouth of the Malacca Strait, as a fulcrum of naval dominance in India's eastern waters. Coincidentally, a mega project that envisages a deepwater port, an international airport and a township on Great Nicobar Island — a mere 90 miles from the Indonesian port of Sabang — is awaiting final government approval.

Proponents of this project claim that apart from its economic benefits, the project would bolster India's regional security posture and act as a deterrent for China's maritime ambitions in the Indian Ocean region.

While the absence of military fortification of the Andaman and Nicobar Command has been a long-overdue lacuna, equating India's potential leverage over Malacca to Iran's tight grip on Hormuz could be misleading. Whereas

the Strait of Hormuz is a short passage, dominated by a narrow bottleneck between Iran and Oman, the Strait of Malacca is a 1,100-kilometre-long transit corridor, running between Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, which brook no external interference. Since Hormuz constitutes the Persian Gulf's sole exit, its closure means total maritime isolation of the littoral states. In the case of Malacca, there are three (plus much longer) routes available via the Sunda, Lombok and Ombai-Vietnam Straits, connecting the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

Given the vast ocean areas involved, interdiction or interference with international shipping via Malacca may be a bridge too far, even for a major naval power. And yet there is no doubt that the 800-kilometre north-south geographic spread of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands enables India to dominate the Bay of Bengal, and our naval strategies must draw all the right lessons about sea control, trade-warfare and blockades, from the ongoing Persian Gulf melodrama.

While maintaining a low-key posture throughout this crisis, India has conveyed unmistakable but unwarranted signs of a significant "tilt" in one direction. In anticipation of the coming churn in regional geopolitics, India needs to grasp the earliest opportunity to restore diplomatic balance in its long-term national interest.

Given its cordial relations with all three belligerents, New Delhi needs to shed its diplomatic lassitude and leverage its moral and strategic weight to end the ongoing violence, which could engulf its neighbourhood. India must renounce strongly with all parties to abandon reckless brinkmanship, cease actions that threaten regional stability and world peace, and return to the negotiating table. The Global South is watching us.

The writer is a former Indian Navy chief

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Let people decide

OF LATE, interest in films based on historical episodes has created a market for such films ('Look back at the dark, shine a light on it', IE, July 9). Regrettably, the current administration sees a threat to national security whenever a film does not conform to its ideological agenda. This is why films like *The Kashmir Files*, *The Kerala Story*, and *Dhurandhar* were not only free of such concerns but were also promoted at the highest levels.

The directive to withdraw the film *Satguru* from a limited-reach OTT platform has only ignited public curiosity. Why not let the people be the final arbiters of historical events, however painful they may have been?

Kamal Laddha, Bengaluru

Restoring fairness

PRATAP BHANU Mehta's distinction

between visible corruption and market-shaping favouritism deserves attention ('When corruption does not make a political noise', IE, July 9). Restoring competitiveness requires de-politicised regulatory bodies and stricter disclosure norms governing business-government dealings. Political parties across the spectrum must be held to the same standard.

MBharathi, Bengaluru

Cricket woes

FOUR STRAIGHT losses after a T20 World Cup triumph demand answers that go beyond personnel changes ('Four defeats in a cricket quest', IE, July 9). The real rest lies in tactical change. The IPL has bred power, but Test cricket taught the value of changing gears. Unless Indian teaches both, collapses will recur and "reset" will become routine.

Veda Chandanand, Bengaluru



YASHEE

SBI HAS a new ad. I have multiple questions. The ad says, "Your child will study mechanical engineering and then start a yoga studio. Get ready for life's surprises with long-term SIPs." I duly sat down and thought about long-term SIPs.

The more I thought, the more I felt confused. Am I being asked to plan for my retirement years because the yoga-instructing child won't be able to provide for me? Am I supposed to save so I can fund her yoga studio? Would the mechanical engineer automatically have been the provider type? Turning to the internet for an answer, I searched "SBI mechanical engineer yoga ad". Turns out, other insurance firms have similar offerings, and there is quite a conversation on the subject on social media. From

Spend on your child's future, draw a line

these, some common threads emerged. There is the earnest "dignity and independence in your silver years" framing. There is the rather aggressive "spend on yourself, don't leave a penny for these ingrates" framing. There is the happy "be the win beneath your children's wings forever" framing.

Where will you draw the line on spending money on your child, assuming money is neither unlimited nor so limited as to make such thought experiments unnecessary? Millennial parents are a conflicted lot. We are overflowing with good intentions, but not quite sure where to direct them.

The answer, I realise, is learnt early in parenthood. The same struggles you had about time when your kid was a baby will be repeated with money when they are older. Whatever worked for you then will work in the future.

I tried being the martyr mom when my daughter was born. Every waking moment (and most moments were waking moments)

was to be spent in her service, every recommendation of what is "best" for her to be followed, irrespective of the cost to me. Did not work out great. I wasted, yes. But more than that, I was resentful and bitter.

Thankfully, I soon realised what my kid needed most of all was a happy mother. A mom who could summon genuine enthusiasm for playing with her, not just a sweaty sense of duty. However, I do know friends who can put up with all sorts of hardships as long as they are meeting the standard of "responsibility and dutiful" they have set for themselves or inherited from their parents.

The same approach works for money. Spend on your children till it doesn't make you resentful. Spend on them till the point you can do so without expecting returns. Spend out of duty if it makes you happy, but remember, they have no obligation to feel the same sense of duty. Stop the day you start reminding them of how much you have spent. Instead, tell them that you

need to look after yourself too, and this is all the money you had for them. If that makes them resentful, that is for them to figure out. And you have to make peace with their resentment. Better to deal with someone else's resentment in reasonable comfort than simmer yourself while also worrying about money.

Our job is to educate them, equip them for the world, teach them how to make choices, and then stand back and watch them make those choices. If the choices go wrong, we can shelter them till they feel brave enough to make new ones. Our job is not to fund the choices and then weigh them down with our expectations. I would much rather enrol in my kid's yoga studio than fund an expensive mechanical engineering Master's and expect her to pay for my medical expenses later.

The writer is senior assistant editor, The Indian Express. yashee.s@indianexpress.com

MURDER OF DALIT WOMAN



A screen grab from a purported video showing SSP Avinash Pandey slapping people who had gathered near Meerut Commissionerate Crossing on Wednesday to protest the death of a Dalit woman

They attacked cops, says Meerut SSP on 'thrashing' protesters

Express News Service
Lucknow, July 9

AMID OUTRAGE and demands for action against Meerut Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Avinash Pandey for allegedly slapping people during a protest over the murder of a Dalit woman, and beating one of them inside a police van, the officer Thursday claimed that protesters attacked police personnel.

A 30-second purported video had gone viral on Wednesday, showing the SSP slapping several protesters. He is then seen beating up someone inside the van.

Asked about the video, SSP Pandey said, "We did not even know who this person was when he was held".

He claimed two men had instigated the protest over the woman's killing merely to gain publicity.

There has been no official response from senior police officers or the Uttar Pradesh government. Additional Director General (ADG), Meerut Zone, Bhanu Bhaskar, did not respond to calls or messages seeking comment.

Police Thursday arrested seven people in connection with the protest and registered cases against over 30 others.

Jharkhand unveils plan to adopt AI in governance

Express News Service
Ranchi, July 9

THE JHARKHAND government has launched a roadmap to expand its digital infrastructure and adopt artificial intelligence (AI) in public governance in the state.

The announcement was made on Wednesday, on the inaugural day of the two-day National Stakeholders' Consultation 2026 held in New Delhi. During the consultation, the Jharkhand Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy 2026-2031 was proposed, which aims to integrate AI across different government sectors like healthcare, agriculture, education, mining, environmental management and disaster response.

The state government has proposed an investment of Rs 1,150 crore over the next five years to build AI infrastructure, strengthen digital capabilities, support innovation and accelerate AI adoption across departments.

The Jharkhand government has also proposed the Chief



Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren at the National Stakeholders' Consultation 2026 in New Delhi on Thursday. ANIL SHARMA

Minister Data Intelligence Platform (CM-DIP), an AI-enabled system to monitor government programmes in real time.

It said to strengthen the state's healthcare system and mineral administration, the Health & Nutrition Vigilance System (HNVS) and the Critical Minerals Administration System (CMAS) have been designed using intelligent data analytics. This aims to attract over Rs 10,000 crore in investment by 2050. The State government signed 14 MoUs with a proposed Rs 99,639 crore.

Sometimes, he would allegedly sneak out with valuables from the hotel, such as the Rs 148 lakh laptop he had allegedly slipped into his bag before leaving the Raipur hotel. "John had become so casual about it that he boasts of stealing valuables from

over 300 luxury hotels," a Raipur police officer said. "He told us he spent time in Tihar jail and heard stories of Charles Sobhraj. He liked how cunning he was." Born in Thoothukudi, John studied in a medium school and never married. Investigators said John told them he began working as a tourist guide in Delhi in the 1980s, which helped him get free hotel stays part of his perks.

"He told us that once something went wrong and he was humiliated by the management of a luxury hotel. Since then, he nursed a grudge and began targeting these high-end places," sub-inspector Piyush Baghel, the investigating officer in the case, told *The Indian Express*.

CRACKDOWN ON 'OBJECTIONABLE CONTENT'

'Screen every book': J&K govt to schools & coaching centres

Bashaarat Masood
Srinagar, July 9

THE JAMMU and Kashmir government has directed the heads of all government and private schools and coaching centres in Kashmir to screen books in their libraries, offices, classrooms and staff rooms for "inappropriate or objectionable content".

It has also directed them to submit a certificate to their respective Chief or Zonal Education Officers, certifying that no book on the premises of their educational institution contains any "objectionable material".

The move comes days after the BJP protested against the procurement of books by government schools over the alleged glorification of some separatist leaders. It also comes almost a year after the J&K Home Department, in August

2025, banned the publication of 25 books on Kashmir, including by authors such as Arundhati Roy and A G Noorani, saying they propagate "secessionism".

"All Heads of Institutions of government schools, recognised private schools, and coaching institutions operating within the jurisdiction of Directorate of School Education, Kashmir, are hereby directed to conduct a comprehensive screening of all books available (recently acquired or older publications) in their respective jurisdiction, including offices, classrooms, staff rooms, school library etc," reads an order issued by the Director, School Education, Kashmir, dated July 6.

"The purpose of this screening is to ensure that no book contains inappropriate or objectionable content. This includes material that may violate religious

sentiments of any section, be it inappropriate content for students, content against prevailing laws with the potential to harm national interest, affect educational values, and established norms," it states.

"Any lapse in compliance with these instructions shall be viewed seriously and will invite appropriate disciplinary action against the defaulting officer(s) under the applicable rules," the order reads.

There are 10,787 government and 2,386 recognised private schools in the Kashmir division.

The development was met with criticism from across the political spectrum, including by a Parliamentarian from the ruling National Conference. "The reports of books relating to Kashmir's history and identity being removed from the University of Kashmir, alongside the ongoing

audit of educational institutions, are deeply troubling," said MP Aya Syed Ruhulhul Mehdi. "Liabilities exist to preserve knowledge, not curate political narratives. Erasing books doesn't erase history; it only impoverishes scholarship."

Saying that a society that fears ideas fears the truth, Ruhulhul said the "academic freedom and right to engage with history never becomes casualties of ideological control".

Peoples Democratic Party leader Waheed Parra called it an attempt to "rewrite our collective memory". "This is an attempt to rewrite our collective memory and erase our own history from the curriculum. It promotes selective learning while taking away future generations' ability to question, think critically, and understand their past," Paratold *The Indian Express*.

EXPRESS special

'FTA more than a trade pact... it's choosing cooperation over fragmentation'

AMBASSADOR OF THE European union (EU) to India HERVE DELPHIN said last month that the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and the EU could enter into force in the first quarter of 2027. Earlier, on June 17, following a meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the G7 Summit in Evian-les-Bains, France, the president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, had posted on X: "We will sign the Free Trade Agreement by the end of the year." India and the EU announced the launch of the FTA in New Delhi on January 27 this year. In the weeks that followed the announcement, NIRBHAY THAKUR spoke with six EU Ambassadors to India about the agreement, which has been described by Prime Minister Modi as a "new blueprint for shared prosperity".

What key deliverables can be expected in the coming months?

The overwhelming positive assessment in India, Europe, and many partner countries about the [January] Summit and its outcomes, the joint Comprehensive Strategic Agenda, the FTA and other deliverables, speaks volumes about the strategic significance of our partnership for us and for the world.

We are committed to delivering at speed and scale. Only a few weeks after the Summit, we launched exploratory talks for the Association to Horizon Europe, which is the largest research and innovation programme in the world. Then we had the official launch of the EU Legal Mobility Gateway Office that will facilitate the movement of talent in the information and communication technology sector, followed by our first elevated security and defence dialogue. In the coming weeks, we will see the Trade and Technology Council ministerial in Europe. Every component of the



Ambassador of the European Union to India Hervé Delphin at Idea Exchange at The Indian Express in June 2025. ARCHIVE



NEXT: ANTONIO BARTOLI, ITALY'S AMBASSADOR TO INDIA

strategy is working in synergy with each other. We have managed to combine security, economy, technology, and people in mutually reinforcing ways.

The FTA is supposed to be a strategic hedge for both partners against supply chain vulnerabilities and economic protectionism. Can you explain?

First, it is an enabler for more investment and more business. It is also creating the world's largest single market. The EU has removed or reduced duties on more than 99% of Indian exports and India has fully or partially removed tariffs on close to 97% of EU exports.

The two-way trade in goods and services, worth more than 180 billion Euros, will be accelerated... we could reach double the volume of trade. The FTA will be great for the competitiveness and economies of both the EU and India. Second, EU FTAs are predictable, transparent, generate a level playing

field and mutual benefits, and don't create any potential uncertainties.

Finally, this FTA is more than just a trade pact. It will allow us to build resilient and trusted supply chains between the EU and India. Both sides have made the choice of openness over protectionism, cooperation over fragmentation, and rule-based trade over the unpredictability of one-sided arrangements.

There is concern that EU's "green" standards can become non-tariff barriers. How does the FTA ensure that sustainability goals do not become a regulatory hurdle for Indian SMEs?

I think there is a misunderstanding. These rules apply to everyone, whether EU or non-EU. They are non-discriminatory. They do not put Indian exporters at a disadvantage.

Indian exporters know that the more decarbonised their product is, the more competitive they will be in the European market. We went through an interim transition and consultation period for over two years. We did seminars, explanations on deforestation regulations and CBAM (Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism). We have also been going through a simplification exercise of CBAM so that the reporting requirements are lower for MSMEs.

FULL INTERVIEW ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

Mahadev app kingpin in Oman; ED seeks his extradition

Jayprakash S Naidu
Raipur, July 9

AFTER HE was recently traced to Oman, authorities in India are seeking to extradite Saurabh Chandrakar, the alleged kingpin in the Rs 6,000-crore Mahadev Online Book betting app case.

In March this year, ED attached assets worth Rs 1,700 crore in connection with the case against him. The assets included luxury villas and high-end apartments in some of Dubai's most premium locations, including in the Burj Khalifa.

Since 2023, the Indian authorities have been trying to nab him. Recently, the ED learnt that he was in Oman and the agency is now trying to extradite him.

ED counsel Saurabh Kumar Pandey told *The Indian Express*, "Last month a warrant of arrest and externment papers for Chandrakar were issued by a special court in Raipur. We have sent the papers to the Consulate General of India to get him extradited from Oman."

Apart from Chandrakar, other major names associated with the case who are based abroad are Vikas Chhapra, Ravi Shankar Dibrewal, Amit Agrawal and Ravi Uppal.

"We are trying to get Chandrakar, Uppal and Chhapra declared as fugitive economic offenders under the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act. The application is pending consideration in the Raipur special court," said Pandey.

Originally a clothes salesman from Bihlil in Chhattisgarh, Chandrakar had also run a juice centre and had teamed up with another key accused in the case, Ravi Uppal, to create the betting platform in 2018, according to officials.

Chandrakar also holds a passport of the Republic of Vanuatu, officials said. Sources said Ravi Uppal is believed to be either in Dubai or Vanuatu.

So far, 13 accused have been arrested in the case by the ED. Sources said the Mahadev Betting App racket is still operating under different names.

fluent in speaking English. He also sweet-talked one of the staffers into giving him a laptop. He told the staffer he had good contacts in the hotel industry and would get him a better job," one official said.

At the hotel, he allegedly ordered some foreign-made cigarettes and an expensive bottle of liquor "even though he doesn't drink or smoke".

"After staying for two days, John went to the reception and said he wanted to book another room for his son, who would be coming the next morning. On both days, John left the hotel for 'some work' and returned, which did not raise any alarm," the officer said.

Among the cases against him was his 2016 fraud at the Hotel

BRIEFLY



Choppers on the tarmac as Army Chief General Dhiraj Seth arrives to review security preparedness, in Poonch on Thursday. AN

JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Army chief Gen Seth takes stock of security situation at Line of Control

DAYS AFTER taking over as army chief, Chief of the Army Staff, General Dhiraj Seth, reviewed the security situation, operational preparedness of troops, anti-infiltration grid, and the ongoing anti-terror operations along the Line of Control and across J&K on Thursday. General Seth, who was on a three-day visit to the Union Territory, also visited Poonch. Earlier in the day, he had visited Nagrota-based 16 Corps Headquarters. General Seth had arrived in Srinagar on Tuesday. He also reviewed initiatives towards test absorption, capability enhancement and integrated combat readiness across operations, said officials. He also called on L-G Manoj Sinha and Chief Minister Omar Abdullah. ENS

SUV runs over three migrant workers in Jewar

THREE MIGRANT labourers from Bihar died after a Scorpio allegedly hit them in Jewar, the police said on Thursday. The deceased have been identified as Karan (22), Vishwajeet (24) and Mithun (25), from Araria district in Bihar, who had come for paddy transplantation work. The accident occurred on Wednesday night near Neemka village on the Jewar-Khurja road, said the police, adding that the driver has been booked and the vehicle seized. The bodies were sent for a post-mortem examination. The accused is yet to be arrested. Further probe is underway. PTI

TCS CONVERSION ROW

'No child should face trauma of jail birth like Lord Krishna': Court grants bail to Nida Khan

Sadaf Modak
Mumbai, July 9

INVOKING LORD Krishna's birth in captivity, a special court in Nashik granted bail to Nida Khan, a TCS employee accused in the alleged religious coercion case, observing that no child should have to endure the trauma or social stigma of being born in prison.

"It is not disputed that applicant Nida is five months pregnant. The trauma of taking birth in a prison like Lord Krishna or the social stigma attached to it is not sustainable to anyone. To avoid such a distressing situation, and for the overall well-being of a newborn baby, it would be just and proper to exercise judicial discretion in favour of the applicant," special judge K G Joshi said in the order.

Khan is one of eight employees accused in the TCS Nashik case, in which Nashik city police registered nine FIRs between March 26 and April 3

alleging sexual harassment and religious conversion of colleagues at a TCS BPO office in Nashik. She is accused of hurting religious sentiments and "influencing" a colleague to practice Islamic traditions by allegedly giving her a burqa and religious books and installing religious apps on her phone. She was arrested on May 7 from Sambhajinagar after a sessions court rejected her anticipatory bail plea.

The court set conditions on Khan, including prohibiting her from entering the workplace or residential vicinity of the complainant. It also prohibited her from contacting the complainant, any witness or anyone related to the case, or interfering with evidence. She has also been directed not to leave the country without the court's permission and to inform the court and investigators of her address and contact number. The court warned that any breach of conditions would lead to cancellation of bail.

John had been taking advantage of his age, one investigator said. The police also claim they "didn't treat him like other criminals".

"When we questioned him, he looked apologetic and promised this was his last time. He said he had 10 acres of ancestral land, and that he planned to settle in an old-age home in Goa," City Superintendent of Police (CSP) Ramakant Sahu said. It's a story he had already told other police departments before, the officer claims. "I don't believe him."

Guest who never checked out: How a man spent 30 yrs outwitting luxury hotels

Jayprakash S Naidu
Raipur, July 9

ON THE face of it, he appeared to be the perfect guest—a 69-year-old silver-haired, English-speaking man from Tamil Nadu who was polite and suave, blending in perfectly at a luxury hotel in Chhattisgarh's Raipur. So, when he walked out of the sprawling seven-storeyed hotel on the afternoon of June 27 with two duff bags, he raised no suspicion. That is, until they realised he hadn't paid.

They aren't the only ones. Last week, the Raipur Police arrested Vincent John, a man from Thoothukudi district in Tamil Nadu who claims to have scammed hundreds of hotels over the last 30 years with

exactly the same modus operandi: checking into luxury hotels, enjoying their opulence for days, and quietly sneaking out—without allegedly paying. Police records show that he has cases across West Bengal, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Goa, Jharkhand, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, the Union Territory of Delhi and Chhattisgarh, and has been arrested several times, including once by the Delhi Police in 2016 and again in Navli Mumbai in 2020.

Sometimes, he would allegedly sneak out with valuables from the hotel, such as the Rs 148 lakh laptop he had allegedly slipped into his bag before leaving the Raipur hotel. "John had become so casual about it that he boasts of stealing valuables from

over 300 luxury hotels," a Raipur police officer said. "He told us he spent time in Tihar jail and heard stories of Charles Sobhraj. He liked how cunning he was." Born in Thoothukudi, John studied in a medium school and never married. Investigators said John told them he began working as a tourist guide in Delhi in the 1980s, which helped him get free hotel stays part of his perks.

"He told us that once something went wrong and he was humiliated by the management of a luxury hotel. Since then, he nursed a grudge and began targeting these high-end places," sub-inspector Piyush Baghel, the investigating officer in the case, told *The Indian Express*.



Vincent John began working as a tourist guide in Delhi in the 1980s, which helped him get free hotel stays part of his perks

by the Delhi Police for the first time in 1996. According to the police, he would check in as an English teacher, a tour guide or a yoga instructor. He would allegedly arrive with two bags—

one carrying his belongings, the other stuffed with newspapers or pillows.

"He would never allow the hotel staff to carry his luggage," the officer said. "To evade suspicion, he often left one bag—the one with the newspapers—in the hotel so people wouldn't think he was leaving. He would always smuggle out expensive liquor, cigarettes or valuables like laptops, selling them later."

While he initially used his Aadhaar card to check in, he allegedly later switched to photocopies after the document was confiscated by the Andhra Pradesh Police.

According to investigators, John checked into a five-star hotel in Raipur on June 25 posing as an event organiser. "He is

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If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@indianexpress.com

HISTORY

How Indonesia's iconic Prambanan temple was lost and rediscovered

Nikita Mohta
New Delhi, July 9

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi's visit to Yogyakarta, Indonesia, this week marked the beginning of India's effort to help restore the iconic Prambanan Temple, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Prambanan Temple Complex, located on the island of Java, comprise Prambanan Temple (also known as Loro Jonggrang or Candi Prambanan), Sewu Temple, Buraah Temple, and Lumbung Temple.

The birth of a temple

The Sanjaya dynasty ruled the Mataram Kingdom in Central Java during the eighth and ninth centuries. It is generally associated with the revival of Shaivite Hinduism on the island. Its dominance was challenged by the Sailendra dynasty, a powerful Buddhist royal house.

Following the end of the reign of Samarungga of the Sailendra dynasty, Rakai Pikatan of the Sanjaya dynasty is believed to have married Samarungga's daughter, Pramodawardhani, and ruled between 842 and 856 CE. He commissioned Prambanan as a grand Hindu sanctuary.

In his journal article *Magnificent Prambanan and Borobudur Temples* (2026), researcher Hary Gunarto notes that the construction of Prambanan was intended to mark the return of the Hindu Sanjaya dynasty to power after nearly a century of Buddhist Sailendra dominance.

Although the construction date is uncertain, inscriptions record the consecration of the temple in 856 CE.

Rediscovering Prambanan

Who first rediscovered Prambanan after centuries of abandonment remains a matter of debate. One possible early visitor was the 15th-century East Javanese court poet Mpu Tanakung. He wrote: "A great temple complex from ancient time rose near a mountain stream, and the path there was lonely." Scholars have noted striking similarities between his account and Prambanan.

Another figure associated with the site's rediscovery is Thomas Stamford Raffles, Lieutenant-Governor of Java during the British interregnum (1811-16), who took a keen interest in documenting its ancient monuments. An even earlier European account comes from C.A. Lons, an official of the Dutch East India Company. As Roy E. Jordaan notes in *In Praise of Prambanan* (1996): "Lons was an employee of the Dutch East Indies Company who in 1733, while staying at the court of the Javanese sultan as a member of an embassy made a sightseeing tour of a number of temple ruins and reported on these to his superiors."

Prambanan has since undergone several phases of restoration, many of them interrupted by World War II and Indonesia's independence struggle. "Thus the reconstruction of the main temple, which had been in progress since 1918, was only completed in 1953, under a new national flag. The inauguration ceremonies were conducted by Soekarno, Indonesia's first president," writes Jordaan.



A view of the Prambanan Temple complex.

ECONOMY

Lessons for India from Brazil's ethanol pathway



ANIL SASI

IN THE mid-1970s, faced with surging oil import bills and an imploding global sugar market, Brazil made a bold bet: it would run its cars on alcohol. Half a century later, this Brazilian push to ramp up ethanol use in its auto fuel mix is now a masterpiece in bio-fuel adoption.

There are perhaps three key enabling factors that have made this a success: a graded, spaced-out approach to fuel blending with predefined milestones; the vehicular ecosystem being given enough time to adapt to this transition in tandem with clear guidance to motorists; and offering choice and price incentives for consumers to shift to ethanol that is now enshrined in a national law. This is a contrast to India's rushed efforts to incorporate ethanol into its fuel mix.

Context for adoption

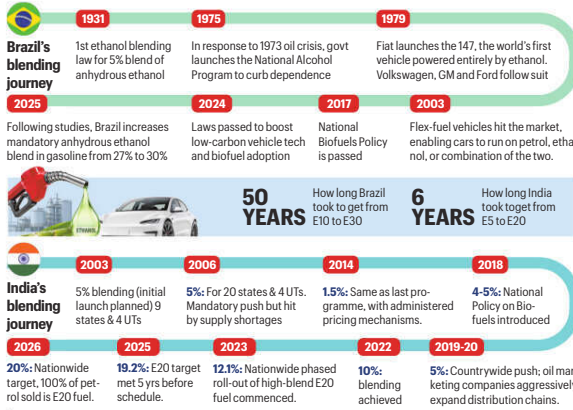
Let's consider the timing. In response to the 1973 global oil crisis, the Brazilian government launched the National Alcohol Program (ProAlcool) in 1975 to reduce petroleum dependence by promoting ethanol additives. But its first ethanol blending law, Brazil's legislation requiring a 5% blend of anhydrous ethanol into petrol, goes all the way back to 1931. This decades-long arc culminated in the 2024 'Fuel of the Future' and 'Mover Program' legislation to boost low-carbon vehicle tech and biofuel adoption, with E30 petrol blend mandated in 2025.

The timeline of India's ethanol-blended petrol programme technically spans 2003 to 2026. Even in that, much of the action is front-loaded. It was only in 2022 that 10% ethanol blending was achieved, with a rapid increase to 20% in just three years.

The government originally planned to dispense petrol blended with 20% ethanol only by 2030, but E20 is now the nationwide standard. Since then, there has been a move to shift to E25 as the base fuel, with a simultaneous push for E85-100 fuels for specialised flex-fuel vehicles (FFVs).

FFVs are essentially internal combustion engine vehicles engineered to operate on more than one type of fuel — typically petrol blended with ethanol or methanol. These

THE DIVERGENT ETHANOL BLENDING ARCS



BRAZILIAN SUGARCANE AND BIOENERGY INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION; MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS; MINISTRY OF ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS

vehicles use a fuel composition sensor to automatically adjust fuel injection and ignition timing based on the blend in the tank, allowing seamless switching between petrol and ethanol and varying degrees of blends.

Getting the infra ready

On the second aspect of freeing the vehicular ecosystem, too, big differences emerge. Brazil started early with its policy to promote FFVs. These vehicles, running for over two decades now, are seen as the drivers of the country's transition to a cleaner mobility model.

It was way back in 1979 that Italian auto major Fiat launched the 147, the world's first flex-fuel vehicle powered by ethanol in Brazil. Volkswagen, GM, and Ford quickly followed suit amid a global oil crisis. That tempo was lost as oil prices fell. The Brazilian auto industry subsequently started producing FFVs at scale from early 2003, when ethanol seemed economically viable again.

On March 23 that year, Volkswagen introduced the first flex-fuel vehicle to the

Brazil's FFV push

Flex-fuel vehicles (FFVs) are engineered to operate on more than one fuel.

FFVs have been driving cleaner mobility in Brazil for around two decades now.

Brazilian market, and other companies — including GM and Ford — followed suit, according to data from consultancy Angus.

Toyota brought in its Corolla flex. FFVs went from selling just 48,178 units in 2003, or under 4% of total light motor vehicle demand, to 1.63 million vehicles last year, or nearly 90% of the Brazilian car fleet. The domestic car industry also reached a milestone of having delivered 40 million flex-fuel vehicles as of February since 2003, according to Brazilian industry body Anfavea.

In India, as E85 fuel dispensing stations are being established nationwide, only a few vehicle prototypes are in the works.

While the flex fuel setup entails an entirely separate vehicle category and a range of fresh vehicle readiness certifications, as of now, India has only a handful of cars in the category: the newly launched WagonR flex-fuel model and the Toyota Hycross hybrid flex-fuel prototype, the Tata Punch and Hyundai Creta flex-fuel versions, alongside some two-wheeler makers including Hero and TVS. Most cars and two-wheelers on

Brazil's first ethanol blending law goes all the way back to 1931. Its success story was built over decades of policy and offering choices to consumers

Indian roads are not geared up for handling higher blends of ethanol in the fuel mix.

Commuter choice

Over the past five decades, Brazil has worked to give the power of choice to its motorists. At nearly every petrol pump in Brazil now, people have an option to choose between blended petrol, which typically includes E27 ethanol, and E100, which is pure hydrous ethanol. Alongside that, since Brazilians got carmakers to switch to FFVs, consumers can fill up with whichever option is cheaper at the pump on a particular day. Often, E100 is cheaper by 25-35% compared to lower blended petrol.

Flex fuel cars were a hit with Brazilian consumers, largely because government price support made the blended fuel cheaper than petrol. Ethanol also improves acceleration and reduces knocking (the sound that occurs when fuel ignites unevenly inside the engine cylinder). By the late 1980s, nine out of every 10 new cars sold in Brazil were capable of running on ethanol alone.

In India, motorists were told that performance would not be affected. But the definition of performance did not include mileage. That has come back to bite the decision-makers, as vehicle owners noticed a sharp dip in fuel efficiency, with the promise of more efficiency less as blending increases. Concerns over vehicle damage appear somewhat overstated, though there are concerns about plastic and rubber parts getting degraded in older vehicles.

All the while, Brazil was focusing on blended fuel and ethanol, implementing policies in a phased manner to ensure that people who had bought vehicles earlier did not feel at a disadvantage.

Questions for India

In India, the push to progressively raise ethanol blending in petrol from the current E20 level to E25, before transitioning towards flex-fuel vehicles and E85-100 fuels, is an integral part of the strategy to reduce dependence on imported fossil fuels.

According to an official, "India's future mobility ecosystem will combine EVs, bio-fuels, hydrogen and renewables in a manner suited to Indian realities". India currently imports nearly 88.5% of its crude oil requirement, making the economy and energy security vulnerable to geopolitical disruptions. "The government is keen to ensure it is opened, without adequate disclaimers or preparation, raises serious questions.

LEGAL

Tabling report on Justice Varma: Accountability after resignation

Vineet Bhalla
New Delhi, July 9

LOKSABHA Speaker Om Birla's decision to table the report of the parliamentary committee probing former Allahabad High Court judge Yashwant Varma puts India's judicial accountability framework into uncharted territory. When Justice Varma resigned in April, it was thought the impeachment proceedings against him had hit a dead end. But experts argue that tabling the report is a crucial step for public accountability, challenging a long-held assumption that a judge's resignation automatically extinguishes a parliamentary probe.

What does the law say about a judge's resignation?

Under Article 217, a High Court judge can resign by writing to the President. In 1978, the Supreme Court ruled that a judge's resignation is a unilateral act that takes effect immediately on the date chosen by the judge, without needing formal acceptance.

Why did previous impeachment probes lapse?

No judge has ever been impeached in India. In 2011, impeachment proceedings

against Sikkim High Court Chief Justice P D Dinakaran and Calcutta High Court judge Soumitra Sen were dropped after they resigned.

Justice Dinakaran had resigned while the committee was in the midst of its probe against him. The Rajya Sabha secretariat reasoned that since the goal of the probe was the removal of the judge, a resignation rendered the process meaningless.

The same rationale was followed when Justice Sen resigned, with Lok Sabha dropping the impeachment vote even though Rajya Sabha had passed the impeachment motion against him before he had resigned.

Legal scholars, however, point out that the law does not explicitly state that an inquiry must lapse upon resignation. Shubhankar Dam, Chair Professor of Public Law and Governance at the University of Portsmouth School of Law, said that the 1978 Supreme Court judgment did not account for the implications of a judge resigning while facing a misconduct probe.

"After the precedent set by Justices Dinakaran and Sen, resignation is the easiest way for judges to evade accountability and retain post-retirement benefits," Dam said. He added that the report matters as parliamentary and public record of a judge's conduct.

The Justice Varma case

• Last year, wads of burnt currency notes were recovered from Justice Varma's official residence.

• An in-house probe by the Supreme Court reportedly found him culpable.

• Over 146 Lok Sabha MPs moved a motion for his removal. The Speaker constituted a three-member committee under the Judges (Inquiry) Act.

• Before the panel could conclude its hearings, Justice Varma resigned.

Was there any resistance to ending the Justice Dinakaran probe?

During the Justice Dinakaran impeachment episode in 2011, jurist G Mohan Gopal, then a member of the panel probing the judge, had written to his fellow committee members urging them to complete the investigation despite the judge's resignation less than three weeks earlier.

In his letter, Gopal drew a distinction between the two parts of the procedure under the Judges (Inquiry) Act: the "investigation and proof" of misbehaviour, and the actual "removal from office" by Parliament. He argued that establishing the truthfulness of the charges is an end in itself.

"If judges are given the de facto power to 'veto' even this narrow sliver of accountability for misbehaviour, the public faith in the system may be ended further," Gopal wrote. He warned that aborting the probe would create an "absurd situation" where a judge could end an investigation at any point simply by resigning.

Ultimately, the Justice Dinakaran probe was wound up, partly because a vacancy on the probe committee made it dysfunctional, and the Rajya Sabha chairman, Vice President Hamid Ansari, felt that after Justice Dinakaran's resignation, the primary

objective of his removal was moot.

What are the implications of tabling the report now?

Tabling the report against Justice Varma would serve two major purposes.

First, it would bring the findings of a constitutionally-mandated, taxpayer-funded inquiry into the public domain. Lawyer and legal scholar Alok Prasanna Kumar said this was an opportunity for the Speaker to "overturn the unfortunate precedent set in the Dinakaran case".

"This is not just a removal process but an accountability process that allows the public to know whether a judge has committed misconduct," Kumar explained. "This is an inquiry conducted on public money under a constitutional process, and we as the public are entitled to know what the committee has found."

Second, the findings could have legal and financial consequences. Upon resignation, a judge is typically entitled to the same pensionary benefits as one who retires normally from service. A formal impeachment by Parliament could stop the judge's pension and other post-retirement benefits, and potentially pave the way for further criminal action.

POLICY

Revamped EPFO portal: Centralised database, with easier claim filing & info access

Aanchal Magazine & Ravi Dutta Mishra
New Delhi, July 9

AS THE Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO), India's retirement fund body, rolls out a revamped portal, members will be able to access all their details on a unified portal along with faster auto-crediting of interest by July 15.

One of the most important features of the Centralised IT Enabled Services (CITES) project under the EPFO 2.0 initiative is the move towards a centralised database. It follows the merger of information from all regional centres, which will allow members to resolve their issues at any regional EPFO office and not necessarily in their city of employment, where Provident Fund deductions may have happened.

"The EPFO has completed the process of migrating its entire database of member records to the new centralised database. Earlier, these services were tied to a particular

Regional Office. Now, a member's service request can be processed from any authorised location across the country," the Ministry of Labour and Employment said in a statement on Wednesday.

Centralised database

The new portal enables automated processes, including crediting of interest, online processing of claims verification, and a facility to view the eligible amount for withdrawals under various claim categories.

A centralised database is a significant measure that will help employees who migrate for work and also the PF members who struggle to find solutions at a particular regional office, as has happened in the past. For instance, if an employee has worked in Chennai and moves back to their hometown in West Bengal, they can access their records and resolve any issues at the EPFO office in West Bengal instead of travelling to the Chennai office.

The new portal will also help expedite

the annual interest crediting process by July 15, which would earlier get delayed to October-November. Labour and Employment Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Wednesday said the annual interest of Rs 1.44 lakh crore for financial year 2025-26 will be auto-processed on the new portal and verified by field authorities before being credited to 34 crore EPFO accounts by July 15. The EPFO has nearly 8 crore contributing members.

Also, under the revised system, interest for the final PF settlements will now be calculated up to the date of payment authorisation. Earlier, interest was calculated only up to the last day of the previous month. "This ensures that members receive the benefit of additional interest for the intervening period," the ministry said.

Pre-validation of claims

Member claims will undergo automated pre-validation before processing at EPFO offices, as per the Ministry statement. In a first-time feature, any deficiencies or discrepancies will be identified and will be communicated to the EPF members through SMS and the portal.

"Wherever additional information or clarification is required during claim processing, EPFO offices will be able to raise queries online through the system. Members can respond online, enabling faster resolution, minimising physical visits to EPFO offices, and further reducing claim rejections," the ministry said.

In another new feature, members will be able to view the eligible amount for withdrawal from their PF account under the different claim categories. These measures are aimed at improving first-time acceptance rates and reducing claim rejections, as high claim rejection rates have been a key concern over the last few years. "Earlier, members did not have clear visibility of the amount they were eligible to withdraw under different withdrawal categories. As a result, claims exceeding the permissible limit were often rejected," the ministry said.

Streamlined claims

Members will have access to a unified digital interface to view their membership details, provident fund balances, claim status, pensionable service records, and benefits available. This is to ensure transparency and access to information about their PF account and submission of claims, the ministry said.

Member claims for advances up to Rs 5 lakh, which are fully KYC-linked and validated, will be processed through an auto-settlement mechanism, it said.

In October 2025, the EPFO announced a slew of changes to its withdrawal norms by streamlining the withdrawal categories from 13 to three — essential needs (illness, education, marriage), housing needs, and special circumstances, along with an introduction of a minimum balance of 25%.

Members can withdraw funds in case of illness of self and family members, up to 100% of the eligible member balance, after completion of 12 months of total member-

ship. The 100% eligible member balance means withdrawal of 75% of the total funds, as 25% is a mandatory minimum balance requirement. The full 100% amount can be withdrawn after remaining unemployed for one year.

Members can also withdraw money for the education of self and family members after 12 months of membership, subject to a maximum of 10 withdrawals during the membership. For marriage of self and family members, members can withdraw up to 100% of the eligible member balance, with a maximum of five withdrawals during their membership.

For housing-related requirements, a member may be allowed partial withdrawal for the purchase of a flat or house; site for construction of a house; construction of a house; repayment of a home loan obtained for purchase, construction of a flat or house or for acquisition of a site; and additions, alterations, renovations or improvements to an existing house or flat.

28 killed in China shoe factory fire, Xi orders 'all-out rescue efforts'

Reuters
Beijing, July 9

AT LEAST 28 people were killed in a fire at a shoe factory in southeastern China on Thursday, state-run *Xinhua* news agency reported, after flames engulfed the multi-storey building, trapping workers on the rooftop.

The fire broke out at around noon local time in the city of Jinjiang in Fujian province at footwear manufacturer Huihui.

A total of 239 people were at the factory when the fire broke out, *Xinhua* said. It said 213 were evacuated, two of whom died after being taken to hospital for treatment. Another 26 people previously reported missing at the scene were confirmed dead.

Videos released by state media in the afternoon showed flames ripping through the building and thick black smoke billowing into the sky. A dozen or so people, apparently trapped by the blaze, could be seen on the rooftop as smoke swirled around them.

Chinese President Xi Jinping issued instructions urging an all-out rescue effort. He said that the fire had "caused significant casualties" and that it came after a number of deadly accidents at production facilities in the country in recent months. Xi called on authorities to hold those responsible strictly accountable.

Firefighting and rescue efforts were still under way, although open flames had largely been extinguished by about 4 pm, a firefighting official told state broadcaster CCTV. Thick smoke could be seen rising from the site, with fire engines continuing to spray water by Thursday evening, *Xinhua* said.

IRGC SAYS ANY FURTHER U.S. INTERVENTION WILL DRAW A 'CRUSHING RESPONSE'

Iran says it hit US military targets in Gulf, lays slain leader to rest

US strikes killed 14, injured 78 in 2 days, say Iranian officials

Reuters
Dubai, July 9

IRANIAN ARMED forces launched attacks on US military infrastructure in Gulf states on Thursday following US strikes on Iran's southern coastal and eastern provinces, putting further strain on a three-week-old ceasefire agreement. The attacks came on the day that Iran buried its slain Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei at a shrine in Mashhad, the culmination of a week of mass funeral processions and rallies. Khamenei was killed in a US airstrike on first day of war on February 28.

Khamenei's body was carried by truck slowly through crammed streets towards the Shrine of Imam Reza. Black-clad mourners waved Iranian flags, photographs of the late leader and red placards with revolutionary slogans.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards Navy said the US attacks and intervention in redirecting shipping through the Strait of Hormuz were disrupting the waterway's gradual reopening. The Guards said the number of vessels transiting the strait under Iranian supervision had recovered to about 50% of pre-war levels over the past two weeks, adding permission was being granted to ships using routes designated by Tehran.

Any further US intervention will draw a "crushing response",



Mourners gather by Imam Reza shrine, on the day of the burial of Iran's slain supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in Mashhad on Thursday. REUTERS

the Guards said. The US military said Wednesday its latest strikes and a local official told state media that a US projectile had hit the perimeter area of the facility. The perimeter had already been hit several times before an April 8 ceasefire.

Iran's army said in a statement released by state media that it had launched attacks at US Patriot systems in Kuwait, an early-warning site in Qatar and a US Army fuel depot in Bahrain. Kuwait said its armed forces had engaged with a cruise missile, three ballistic missiles and 10 drones in its airspace, and that one person had been injured from falling shrapnel.

Sirens also sounded in Jordan after missiles launched from Iran were detected, the state news agency reported. Eight were intercepted, with no

injuries or damage reported. The Revolutionary Guards later said Iran had fired 10 ballistic missiles at Jordan's Azraq military base, which is used by US forces, and also a US military control center in West Asia, without elaborating.

Qatar condemned attacks on commercial shipping but also called for a return to diplomacy. The foreign ministers of Turkey and Oman also stressed the need to avoid further military escalation in separate calls with their Iranian counterparts. Abbas Araghchi, Iran's foreign minister, said in a call with the army chief of Pakistan, which has also mediated in the conflict, Araghchi condemned what he called US "warmongering policies".

"The Strait of Hormuz will be reopened only under Iranian arrangements, not through US threats," said Iran's top negotiator Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf.

New attacks raise questions about what comes next in US-Iran conflict

Associated Press
Washington, July 9

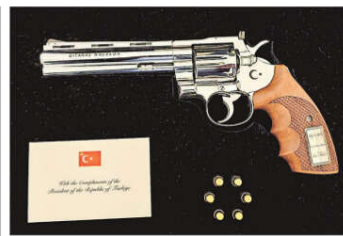
PRESIDENT DONALD Trump says he believes the ceasefire with Iran is over. He says he's not sure he wants a deal anymore and says the US should "finish the job." But he also insists continued attacks do not mean a return to war or long-term action.

The confusion and uncertainty in Trump's mixed messaging and his approval of back-to-back military strikes leave major questions about what comes next in the conflict, just weeks after difficult diplomacy to reach even an initial deal between the longtime adversaries.

The whipsawing rhetoric could be a strategy to increase pressure on Tehran to stop attacking ships transporting oil and natural gas in Strait of Hormuz and bend to US demands on its nuclear program — something Trump has tried before.

Whether it is a negotiation tactic or a signal of an escalation in fighting, mediators are scrambling to save the interim deal and the actions risk further inflaming tensions — which could spell problems for Republicans in November's midterm elections if gas prices stay high.

A regional intelligence official involved in mediation said conflict had reached a critical stage as mutual mistrust rises.



A gun gifted by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda at the NATO summit in Ankara. REUTERS

Turkey's Erdogan gifts NATO leaders a revolver conundrum after summit

Reuters
Madrid, July 9

BELGIUM'S PRIME minister was a little surprised on landing back home from Wednesday's NATO summit in Turkey to find that he had a handgun and ammunition in his luggage.

After NATO leaders gathered for Wednesday's fractious summit in Ankara, their host, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, handed each an unusual parting gift: a vintage revolver, along with live ammunition indicating it was not just for show.

Erdogan wanted to showcase Turkey's defence industry, which has become a key export and foreign policy tool.

Images shared by the office of Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda showed what appeared to be the Gummusay 357 Magnum, a rare six-shooter produced by Turkish arms maker MKE in the 1990s.

It was set in a wooden display box featuring Turkey's flag and the NATO logo as well as a placard inscribed "Gummusay, the first revolver-type handgun produced in our country" in Turkish and English.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's spokesperson said all the leaders had been given the same model, engraved with their own names. The Belgian premier, Bart De Wever, handed his to Brussels airport police to be secured in a safe.

An aide to Polish President Karol Nawrocki told Radio RMF FM that his revolver was awaiting customs clearance at Warsaw Airport and would be kept in an appropriate place "so that it is firstly safe and secondly respected as a gift". "Certainly no one will be shooting it," he added.

The offices of the Dutch and Swedish prime ministers said their revolvers had been taken to their respective embassies in Ankara. The Dutch one was due to be disabled while the Swedish one awaiting import paperwork.

British singer Bonnie Tyler during a rehearsal for 2013 Eurovision finals



British singer Bonnie Tyler during a rehearsal for 2013 Eurovision finals

last night in hospital in Portugal as a result of the illness that she was being treated for," her family said. AP

• BRIEFLY

PORTUGAL

'Total Eclipse of the Heart' singer Bonnie Tyler Dies at 75

BONNIE TYLER, the gravely voiced, Grammy-nominated Welsh pop star whose 1983 chart-topping power ballad "Total Eclipse of the Heart" enchanted succeeding generations with its bombastic charms during solar and lunar eclipses, has died. She was 75. Tyler died unexpectedly in a hospital in Portugal where she was being treated for an illness, her family said Thursday in a statement. She was hospitalized in May in Faro, for emergency intestinal surgery. "Bonnie's family and team are heartbroken to announce that Bonnie unexpectedly passed away last night in hospital in Portugal as a result of the illness that she was being treated for," her family said. AP

ITALY

Two Russian officials expelled in espionage case

THE ITALIAN government has decided to expel two military attaches at the Russian Embassy in Italy who were allegedly involved in espionage activities, Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said on Thursday. Earlier this week, two people were arrested on charges of passing classified information to a Russian agent. Prosecutors said the main suspect was a former officer of Italy's Carabinieri police force. REUTERS

THE BLUE SHARKS' recent heroics. "I want to get to the top where football can take me," said César Alexandre França, 12, who has been training at the academy since he was six. "I like my family and want to make them proud."

Marcelo Pereira Valera, 9, has been at the academy for three years and also dreams of being called up to the national team. "I want to do great things with football," he said.

Bola Pra Prente is one of more than 20 football academies in Praia alone, and there are others scattered across the 10 volcanic islands that make up the archipelago, said Mario Semedo, president of the national football federation. "I believe we have indeed made real investments," he said, adding that this had "played a major part in the development of our national team." The national programme still faces financial constraints, however, prompting many young talents to seek development abroad.

Even before the World Cup started, Nedio was helping put Cape Verdean soccer on the map, securing the women's team's first qualification last year for the Africa Cup of Nations tournament that begins later this month in Morocco.

"From this moment onwards, things can change completely — both in football and in the country." REUTERS

Putin likely to 'escalate' Ukraine war, despite Trump peace push

Reuters
Madrid, July 9

PRESIDENT VLADIMIR Putin is rejecting calls to negotiate peace with Kyiv, three sources close to Kremlin told Reuters, with Ukraine's recent drone strikes on Russia's oil refineries and ports strengthening his resolve to keep fighting for now.

Two of the sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that Putin was instead likely to escalate the conflict, now well into its fifth year. One of them, who meets regularly with the president, described a "high probability" of escalation in the coming months.

The comments came after US President Donald Trump on Monday said that Putin wanted the war to end and that a resolution was "closer than people realize." Trump held separate phone calls with Putin and his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelenskyy last week. He met Zelenskyy at the NATO summit on Wednesday where the Ukrainian president said he discussed "ideas to bring peace closer."

The White House did not respond to requests for comment. One of the people familiar with Putin's thinking said he had

"dug in his heels" to achieve the key objective of capturing the remainder of Ukraine's eastern Donbas region, where Russian advances have slowed this year.

The same source said Putin recently rebuked a group of advisers suggesting a compromise based on a ceasefire along the current front lines. The second source said Putin believes Russia will soon capture the Donbas.

The Russian president publicly rebuffed a call by Zelenskyy in June for a meeting and a ceasefire. "Russia is ready for a peaceful resolution but has enough capability to act independently and continue the

special military operation," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said in response to a request for comment for this story.

In response to a request for comment to Zelenskyy's office, a senior Ukrainian official said Kyiv's intelligence reports in recent months reflected that Putin was preparing for further steps in the war rather than for peace, including new operations in Ukraine or a possible attack on another European country.

Some Western military analysts believe Russia would need a mandatory draft of fighting-age men to achieve the goal of taking the Donbas.

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Some Western military analysts believe Russia would need a mandatory draft of fighting-age men to achieve the goal of taking the Donbas.

Ukrainian drones batter Russian oil facilities, set oil tankers ablaze

Kyiv: Ukrainian drones hit more Russian oil facilities and set two oil tankers ablaze in the Sea of Azov on Thursday, a day after US President Donald Trump pledged to grant Kyiv a license to manufacture the Patriot air defence systems to protect its cities.

A top Ukrainian official, meanwhile, cautioned that it could take a year or more for the country to produce Patriot interceptor missiles.

The Kremlin said the license deal reflected what it called Washington's "ambivalence" but noted it appreciated Trump's efforts to help broker a peace deal to end the war, which Russia launched over four years ago.

Ukraine's drone strikes on oil refineries and other infrastructure across Russia has triggered a widespread fuel crisis with gasoline shortages and rationing in multiple regions. AP

Anti-immigration South African groups drag foreigners from homes

Reuters
Johannesburg, July 9

GROUPS OF anti-immigration South Africans seized foreigners from their homes in Johannesburg on Thursday and handed them to police in a hardening of protests that have sown fear in communities and strained ties with some countries.

In Johannesburg's Alexandra township, protesters were seen breaking down doors and entering houses where they believed undocumented immigrants were hiding.

They escorted the people to police vans where they were

taken away, including a woman and a small child from Malawi. Another man who was apprehended by the marchers told Reuters he was in the country legally. "I am a ZEP holder," said the Zimbabwean national, Todi Mhlanga, referring to the Zimbabwean Exemption Permit which allows tens of thousands of nationals to live and work in South Africa.

In Soweto, anti-immigrant protesters marched through town wielding sticks and flags, with plans to go search for undocumented immigrants.

Several of the flyers for Thursday's protests advertised a

"peaceful march" followed by "door to door".

Another march took place in Durban on the east coast. The most prominent leader of the movement, former radio presenter Jacinta Ngobese-Zuma, said on that day that protests would take place every Thursday until demands were met.

Her group, March and March, has painted undocumented immigrants as the source of South Africa's economic problems and is demanding tighter border controls, mass deportation, and for schools and health centres to serve South Africans first.

Critical US Senate race in doldrums as candidate quits over rape charges

Reuters
Washington, July 9

MAINE DEMOCRATS were scrambling Thursday to find a path forward on a critical US Senate race after progressive candidate Graham Platner dropped out following a string of controversies including an accusation this week of rape.

The seat in the rural northeastern state, currently held by Republican US Senator Susan Collins, is seen as vital for the party's chances of taking control of the Senate in November's midterm elections.

Two Democratic candidates



Graham Platner, Democratic candidate who quit race

who came up short in their runs for the party's nomination for governor have already jumped into the newly reopened race, both laying claim to the populist mantle that gave the winner Platner, an oyster farmer and US Marine Corps veteran.

Nirav Shah, a lawyer and epidemiologist, promised Mainers he would fight to reduce medical bills and make "billionaires

and the biggest corporations finally pay their fair share."

"The past few days have been frustrating and downright maddening for all of us here," Shah said in a video message announcing his renewed candidacy on social media. "And now it's time to focus on the future."

And Troy Jackson, a logger, announced his candidacy on Wednesday night, promising to empower "a powerful movement of working class people."

Both candidates focused their attacks on Collins, an incumbent of nearly three decades, who is running for reelection.

• THE ACADEMY TRAINED SEVERAL MEMBERS OF CAPE VERDE'S 2026 WORLD CUP SQUAD, INCLUDING JOÃO PAULO FERNANDES AND KEVIN PINA, WHO SCORED THE NATION'S FIRST WORLD CUP GOAL AGAINST URUGUAY

At Cape Verde academy, football talents dream big after World Cup debut

Sodiq Adelakun & Julio Rodrigues
Praia, July 9

THOUSANDS OF flag-waving fans gathered in Cape Verde's capital to welcome the returning national soccer team after their stunning debut World Cup performance, mobbing the players as they left the airport.

In downtown Praia, at one of the country's most prestigious training academies, students as young as nine say it was the start of their island nation's transformation into a power-house of the sport.

From their opening group-stage draw against heavyweight Spain to their heart-breaking 3-2

knockout loss to defending champions Argentina, the "Blue Sharks" frustrated some of the world's best strikers and showed off some scoring flair of their own, pushing Lionel Messi's team into extra time.

Supporter Renato Ribeiro said he was overjoyed to see his team, representing a country off West Africa with a population of around 500,000, the least populous ever to reach the World Cup knockout rounds, defy the world's low expectations.

"They only gave us a 1% chance, but I always said that 1% is a lot for us," he told Reuters during a party at a fan zone on Sunday, where the players made an appearance. "My greatest



Young players during a training session at the Bola Pra Frente football academy in Praia, Cape Verde. REUTERS

pride is to see that our national team will leave young people with more desire to play."

The inspirational nature of the Blue Sharks' strong showing is already on display at Praia's

Bola Pra Frente — "Ball Forward" — Academy, which was founded in 2010 and quickly es-

tablished itself as a top national development centre.

"The future of football in Cape Verde, both women's and men's, is strong — it is big," said Silveria Nedio, the head coach at the academy and for the women's national team.

The academy was an early training ground for several players on the 2026 men's World Cup team, including defender João Paulo Fernandes and midfielder Kevin Pina, who notched Cape Verde's first World Cup goal in a group-stage match against Uruguay.

There are currently around 240 players aged between four and 17 training at Bola Pra Frente, all of them plugged into

the Blue Sharks' recent heroics.

"I want to get to the top where football can take me," said César Alexandre França, 12, who has been training at the academy since he was six. "I like my family and want to make them proud."

Marcelo Pereira Valera, 9, has been at the academy for three years and also dreams of being called up to the national team. "I want to do great things with football," he said.

Bola Pra Prente is one of more than 20 football academies in Praia alone, and there are others scattered across the 10 volcanic islands that make up the archipelago, said Mario Semedo, president of the national football federation.

GOVT'S TOP ECONOMIST SAID THE ADVANTAGE BUILT BY INDIA 'CAN ERODE'

GCC costs rising, others are copying India, cautions CEA

Siddharth Upasani
New Delhi, July 9

WHILE THE rise of global capability centres (GCCs) has been "one of the quiet successes" of India, the country can't be complacent as costs are rising domestically and other nations are copying India, the country's top economist said on Thursday.

Speaking at the CII GCC Business Summit, he cautioned that the advantage built by India "can also erode". "Other countries are watching us and copying us. Our costs are rising. In some skills, our talent is already scarce. So, indispensability is not a title we can hold forever. It is a position we have to earn, and then earn again. The moment we believe we have arrived is the moment others begin to catch up," Nageswaran said, warning against celebrating "too early".

India is a global hub of GCCs, with the CEA pointing out that there may be more than 2,000 such centres in the country possibly employing more than 2 million people, with revenue heading towards \$100 billion. On the whole, they account for around 2% of India's GDP.

With more and more global companies — from banks to car makers and semiconductor firms — performing cutting-edge work in artificial intelligence and machine learning in these GCCs, India has become the second-largest base of enterprise AI talent in the world.

Addressing fears that AI may replace Indian professionals such as coders, Nageswaran said that if the value of a GCC lies in "doing simple tasks at low cost, then that value is under real threat". However, he argued that the building, deployment, and governing of AI still requires humans, and that this work is only increasing, with a growing share of the work being done in well-run GCCs. AI only raises the value of each employee.

The CEA said that in such a



CEA V Anantha Nageswaran

• GUARDRAILS

INDIA IS a global hub of GCCs, with over 2,000 such centres possibly employing more than 2 million people, with revenue heading towards \$100 billion. On the whole, they account for around 2% of India's GDP, CEA Nageswaran said.

BUT HE cautioned that indispensability is not a title that can be held forever. It is a position that has to be earned, and then earned again.

In such a situation, the government and industry must work together to ensure GCCs don't stand still and "move up", while asserting that while the government "can help the runway... It cannot fly the plane".

Listing the announcements of the Union Budget 2026-27 that provided tax certainty to GCCs and simplified and expanded the transfer-pricing safe harbour along with a higher threshold, Nageswaran said industry must now help make the "move from cost to capability, from execution to innovation". This includes skilling in the form of day-one ready graduates, which will require universities, industries, and the government to work together at the same time. With the value of GCCs lying in the judgment of the people who run them, the goal according to the CEA is not to make people work like machines but to free staff to do what machines can't do.

FULL REPORT ON
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

FM: Not just host GCCs; maximise innovation, accelerate discovery

ENS Economic Bureau
New Delhi, July 9

MOVING BEYOND minimising cost to maximising innovation, accelerating discovery and strengthening long-term competitiveness should define the ambition for the enterprises for the next decade, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Thursday.

The ambition for the next decade should not simply be to host Global Capability Centres (GCCs), but "to ensure that an increasing share of the world's ideas, patents, products, algorithms, platforms and enterprise capabilities are conceived, engineered and led from India", she said.

"Global enterprises no longer choose countries merely based on costs or incentives. It is ecosystems, not incentives alone, that determine long-term competitiveness," Sitharaman said at the inaugural GCC summit organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).

In her message to the industry leaders, Sitharaman urged them to continue moving decisively up the value chain by creating intellectual property, leading frontier research, and developing AI applications, own product architecture to drive global innovation.

She asked industry to deepen its engagement with knowledge institutions through stronger partnerships with universities, start-ups, and centres of excellence to ensure that innovation moves seamlessly from laboratories to markets.

As Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities are rapidly developing the talent, infrastructure, and innovation capacity required for globally competitive enterprises, Sitharaman said the industry should



The next phase of GCC growth cannot remain confined to a handful of metropolitan centres, the FM said. EXPRESS PHOTO

look at expanding into the emerging cities.

"Encourage industry to engage proactively with state governments, city administrations, educational institutions and local communities to build that awareness and help prepare these cities for the next wave of GCC investment," she said, adding that industry should build partnerships with governments by sharing practical feedback on policy, processes, talent and infrastructure. Urging enterprises that have invested successfully in India to become ambassadors for India's capabilities, she said their success stories are the "strongest endorsement of India's GCC ecosystem".

The finance minister said the next phase of GCC growth cannot remain confined to a handful of metropolitan centres. "If the first 2000 GCCs were concentrated in metropolitan centres, the next wave of India's GCC growth will be geographically far more diverse. The geography of global value creation itself is changing. Tomorrow's breakthrough in artificial intelligence, engineering design or product development could emerge as readily from Varanasi, Chandigarh, Visakh-

patnam, Tiruchirappalli or Mysuru as from Bengaluru, Hyderabad or Gurugram."

"These cities are offering competitive operating costs, but they are also rapidly developing a mature innovation base, emerging as powerful centres of innovation," she said.

The establishment of a GCC in one of these cities has a multiplier impact, Sitharaman said. "It creates demand for advanced skills and specialised training. It supports start-ups, professional services, housing, urban infrastructure and research collaborations. It also encourages stronger partnerships between universities, industry and local institutions, helping cities evolve into vibrant innovation ecosystems. In doing so, GCCs become catalysts for balanced regional development," she said.

The minister said states can develop specialised ecosystems aligned to their own abilities and needs as different states possess different competitive advantages, which will help make India's overall innovation ecosystem more resilient, diversified and globally competitive.

FULL REPORT ON
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

Govt waives import duty on inputs for manufacturing batteries, display assemblies

Ravi Dutta Mishra
New Delhi, July 9

THE UNION finance ministry has exempted customs duty on 85 capital goods used in lithium-ion cell manufacturing, as well as on inputs used in the manufacture of display assemblies and inductor-coil modules for wireless charging in cellular mobile phones, till March 2029.

The items exempted from customs duty include backlight units, frames, anisotropic conductive film, cathode and anode extrusion coating machines, powder dryers and slurry transfer systems.

A finance ministry official said the duty exemptions on specified inputs and parts are intended to provide an impetus to domestic manufacturing of display assemblies used in the automotive, medical and industrial sectors.

The import duty exemption for inputs used in the manufacture of inductor-coil modules for wireless charging in cellular mobile phones will further deepen value addition in mobile phone manufacturing, the official said.

On the duty exemption for capital goods used in lithium-ion cell manufacturing, the official said the earlier exemption was linked to lithium-ion cells used in specific types of batteries, such as those for mobile phones, electric vehicles and energy storage systems.

"This notification merges the existing entries for specified capital goods used in the manufacture of lithium-ion cells and removes the restriction linked to specific downstream battery applications, and this will support lithium-ion cell manufacturing for batteries used across electronics, electric mobility, energy storage and other applications," the official said.

Experts said the government is gradually integrating India into the global electronics and smartphone value chain by ex-

• CUSTOMS RELIEF

THE DUTY exemptions on specified inputs and parts are intended to provide an impetus to domestic manufacturing of display assemblies used in the automotive, medical and industrial sectors.

EXPERTS SAID the government is gradually integrating India into the global electronics and smartphone value chain by extending duty relief to specified components used in smartphone and electronics manufacturing.

THE EXPANDED LIST of 85

tending duty relief to specified components used in smartphone and electronics manufacturing.

The expanded list of 85 exempted capital goods for lithium-ion cell manufacturing is expected to accelerate investments in domestic battery manufacturing, a strategically important segment for smartphones, consumer electronics and electric mobility.

Manoj Mishra, Partner and Tax Controversy Management Leader at Grant Thornton Bharat, said the government's decision to grant duty exemptions is another significant step towards strengthening India's electronics manufacturing ecosystem. "By reducing the import cost of critical components and capital goods, these measures are expected to improve cost competitiveness, encourage greater domestic value addition, and support the localisation of high-value manufacturing in smartphones and other electronic products. The exemption for inputs used in display assemblies for automotive, medical and industrial applications broadens support beyond consumer electronics, while the key for inductor coil modules is used in wireless charging will benefit smartphone manufacturers adopting advanced fea-



exempted capital goods for lithium-ion cell manufacturing is expected to accelerate investments in domestic battery manufacturing.

tures. The expanded list of 85 exempted capital goods for lithium-ion cell manufacturing is likely to accelerate investments in domestic battery manufacturing, an area that is strategically important for smartphones, consumer electronics and electric mobility," Mishra said.

Senior Research Fellow at the Academy of Business Studies (ABS), KS Chalapati Rao, said in a note on Thursday that electronics manufacturing, a key component of the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme and the broader domestic manufacturing push, saw new equity inflows almost halve in FY26 compared with FY25. "Electronics FDI fell from \$2.04 billion (FY25) to \$1.15 billion (FY26) despite record aggregate inflows. One possible interpretation is that the initial investment cycle associated with the PLI programme is moderating. Confirmation, however, requires firm-level evidence," Rao said.

In a Lok Sabha reply last July, Minister of State for Electronics and Information Technology Jitin Prasada said the number of mobile manufacturing units in India had increased to 300 in 2024-25 from just two in 2014-15. Mobile phone production rose 28-34% to Rs 5.45 lakh crore, while exports increased 127-fold to Rs 2 lakh crore.

TCS reports 8.5% jump in net profit for first quarter of FY27

ENS Economic Bureau
Mumbai, July 9

TATA CONSULTANCY Services (TCS), India's largest software services exporter, on Thursday reported an 8.5% year rise in net profit to Rs 13,849 crore for the first quarter of the financial year 2027 (Q1FY27).

It had reported a profit of Rs 12,760 crore in the first quarter of FY26. The net profit, attributable to the shareholders of the company, was down by 2.68% from Rs 13,718 crore in March 2026 and a rise of 4.61% from Rs 12,760 crore in June 2025.

The firm incurred an expenditure of Rs 668 crore due to settlement of a legal claim. Revenue for Q1FY27 rose by 13.9% to Rs 72,275 crore as against Rs 63,437 crore a year ago period. The board of the company declared a dividend of Rs 12 per share.

The company posted a net margin of 19.2%. TCS shares declined by 0.52% at Rs 2,047.75

on the BSE on Friday. TCS shares have fallen by 40% from the 52-week high of Rs 3,416.60 on July 9, 2025 amid the slowdown in global IT spending, West Asia conflict and the disruption caused by the AI developments.

"Q1FY27 reflects continued growth momentum and the strength of our strategic positioning, despite geopolitical and macro-economic headwinds," K Rithivasan, Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director, said.

"We delivered a strong order book of \$9.5 billion, including a marquee AI-led transformation deal with SKF, while continuing to add clients across key revenue bands and scaling our AI business to a \$2.6 billion annualized revenue run rate," he said.

"As customers accelerate investments in AI, modernisation, cyber-security, sovereign cloud and platform simplification, our strong deal conversion, improving client mining

and expanding ecosystem partnerships position TCS well to translate opportunity into sustained growth," Krithivasan said. Aarthi Subramanian, Executive Director - President and Chief Operating Officer, said "Q1 was characterised by strong growth across several services. We won multiple AI-led transformation deals with our dual commitment to AI-led optimization as well as innovation-led outcomes."

"We signed strategic partnerships with Anthropic and Mistral expanding our AI ecosystem," Subramanian said.

The company provided \$150 million (Rs 1,352 crore) towards the legal claim in the standalone statement of profit and loss for the year ended March 31, 2026 and disclosed \$12 million (Rs 1,010 crore) as provision towards legal claim under exceptional items and \$38 million (Rs 342 crore) under other interest costs.

FULL REPORT ON
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

India questions e-comm interim pathway at WTO

Press Trust of India
New Delhi, July 9

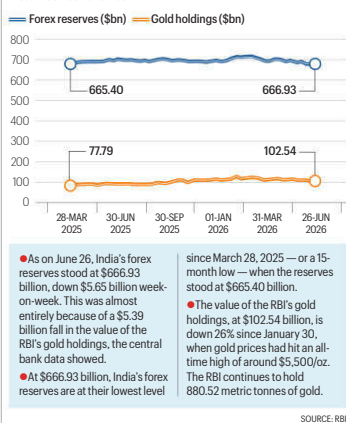
INDIA HAS raised questions in the World Trade Organization (WTO) over an interim arrangement as a pathway for implementation of an agreement on e-commerce, which has been agreed upon by only 66 member countries of the WTO.

According to a communication circulated by the WTO on Thursday at the request of India, on February 18 and December 16, 2025, the General Council (GC) was requested to adopt a decision to add the pact to Annex 4 of the WTO agreements, but there was no consensus on that.

Annex 4 of the pact contains plurilateral trade pacts that are binding only on the WTO members who have accepted them, unlike the mandatory multilateral agreements. But such pacts need the consensus of the member countries. India has opposed the e-commerce agreement.

• Gold price fall drags forex reserves to 15-mth low

The fall in the global price of gold is influencing the level of India's foreign exchange reserves, with Reserve Bank of India data released Friday showing the reserves were down more than \$5 billion as on June 26 compared the previous week. It was in the June 22-26 week that the price of gold had fallen below \$4,000 per ounce for the first time since November.



• BRIEFLY

Dr Reddy's delays semaglutide supply, loses \$678 million

Bengaluru: Indian drugmaker Dr Reddy's Laboratories on Thursday said it will delay supplies of its generic diabetes drug due to an issue with the active pharmaceutical ingredient, erasing \$678 million from its market capitalisation. It told exchanges that certain batches of semaglutide, the key ingredient in blockbuster diabetes and obesity drugs, were found to be "out of specification". The firm said it would probe the root cause. REUTERS

Google appeals India ruling over its ads platform

New Delhi: Google has challenged an Indian court ruling that it infringed on a company's trademark rights by allowing rivals to use its name as an advertising keyword, arguing the decision will hurt consumers, documents reviewed by Reuters show. The May decision could reshape the online ads market in a country where Google last year earned \$4.1 billion in gross advertising revenue but where it is also facing a raft of cases. REUTERS

'India losing fuel worth Rs 4.5k cr annually due to tyre pressure'

New Delhi: India is estimated to be losing over 42 crore litres of petrol worth more than Rs 4,500 crore every year due to low tyre pressure, one of the most neglected aspects of vehicle maintenance, according to a study by ATMA. A large number of passenger vehicles on Indian roads are being driven with tyre pressure below the manufacturer-recommended levels, resulting in substantial fuel wastage, higher vehicle operating costs. PTI

DPIT amends footwear QCOs, deadline to clear stock extended

New Delhi: To boost domestic manufacturing and enhance ease of doing business, the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade on Thursday said it had amended two Quality Control Orders (QCOs) related to the footwear sector. Notified last month, the amendments extend the deadline to July 31, 2027 from July 31, 2026 to clear stocks. ENS

• MINISTRY DISCUSSED STEPS TO BE TAKEN IN CASE OF ADVERSE WEATHER CONDITIONS — PARTICULARLY IF HYDROPOWER AND WIND GENERATION ARE AFFECTED

Power ministry mulls advisory amid El Niño uncertainty

Pratish Deep
New Delhi, July 9

THE POWER Ministry is expected to issue a detailed advisory to stakeholders across the power sector, outlining measures to mitigate the impact of erratic weather conditions due to the effects of El Niño.

At a review meeting held on Thursday, the ministry discussed contingency steps to be taken in the event of adverse weather conditions, particularly if hydropower and wind generation are affected. The Indian Express has learned.

The meeting was attended by the Power Secretary, the Central Electricity Authority

(CEA) Chairperson, representatives of State Load Despatch Centres (SLDCs), state governments, transmission sector stakeholders, among others.

This comes after Prime Minister's Office (PMO) on Tuesday took stock of possible impact of El Niño on various sectors and directed that the overall situation should be continuously monitored and the impact of the monsoon/delayed monsoon on vulnerable districts must be assessed in coordination with states so that remedial action can be taken up when necessary.

According to officials aware of the discussions, the Power Ministry's advisory is expected



Thermal power stations are expected to take preventive maintenance to minimise forced and partial outages. REUTERS

to focus on a few key areas, including ensuring fuel and water availability for thermal plants, preventing outages,

safeguarding critical transmission assets, and shifting more agricultural demand to solar hours. It is likely to stress

the need for thermal power plants to maintain adequate coal stocks and ensure reliable water availability, particularly in the event of deficient rainfall, for which state governments may be asked to facilitate supply. Thermal power stations are also expected to undertake preventive maintenance to minimise forced and partial outages during periods of high demand.

Generating companies and transmission utilities may also be asked to identify critical transmission lines, transformers and other network elements vulnerable to heavy loading or overloading, so that preventive measures can be

taken in advance. The advisory is also likely to encourage states to shift agricultural power demand to solar hours to better utilise abundant daytime solar generation.

Queries sent to the Ministry of Power remained unanswered till the time of filing this report. There are concerns that deficient rainfall could adversely affect both hydroelectric and wind power generation. In such a scenario, if output from these sources declines sharply, the power system may have to rely more heavily on coal-based generation to bridge the gap.

FULL REPORT ON
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

• MARKETS

	SENSEX	NIFTY	GOLD	US DOLLAR
	76,741.82	23,962.80	₹143,656	₹95.39
	238.22	80.75	SILVER	OIL
	0.31%	0.34%	₹23,794	₹66.68

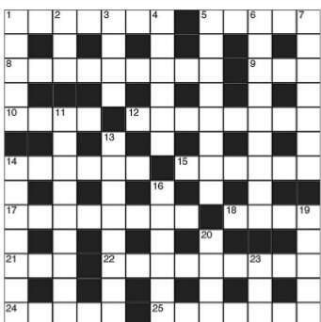
NOTE: GOLD, SILVER RATES AS PER INDIA BULLION AND JEWELLERS ASSOCIATION GOLD PER 100, SILVER PER 1 KG; CRUDE OIL (INDIAN BASKET) AS OF JULY 8, 2026

05.08.2026 अपराह्न 3.30 बजे।
री का नाम एवं पता :- कार्यपालक अभियंता, ग्रामीण कार्य विभाग, कार्य प्रमण्डल,
26-3554757
ईमेल jharkhandtenders.gov.in में देखा जा सकता है।
(26-27)_D
कार्यपालक अभियंता
ग्रामीण कार्य विभाग,
कार्य प्रमण्डल, धनबाद

100

CROSSWORD

6037



ACROSS

1 Trade is bad though up (7)
 5 Many poems need deciphering (5)
 8 Junior seat leads to senior professional post (9)
 9 A well-endowed resort (3)
 10 It's unchanged when returned to me (4)
 12 Saying no to an official getting employment (8)
 14 Support for the head in retirement (6)
 15 Drug addict follows mother with a gun (6)
 17 Bury the hatchet though put in jeopardy? (8)
 18 An indistinct impression of speed (4)
 21 Take part in The Gondoliers (3)
 22 New inn to fail in time of price increases (9)
 24 Claim that is just in name (5)
 25 Objects to Ernest's replacement (7)

DOWN

1 Rests due of burning some trees (5)
 2 Not a static water tower (3)
 3 Peruvian in Spain cannot be understood (4)
 4 Wiped out as deer may well be (6)
 5 Looking round for a letter? (8)
 6 Its recipients are bound to be put out (9)
 7 Rock and roll (7)
 11 Clumsy doll gets involved with Maria (9)
 13 Instruments for a number of sailors (8)
 14 Now is the time to make a contribution (7)
 16 A little lower (6)
 19 They are often closed in the common interest (5)
 20 Girl in glasses (4)
 23 Charged particle of air conditioning (3)

SOLUTIONS: CROSSWORD 6036 ACROSS: 1 Centaurs, 5 Oars, 9 Total, 10 Snowman, 11 Contaminates, 13 Ankara, 14 Abolish, 17 Ghost stories, 20 Awesome, 21 Idaho, 22 Site, 23 Surgeon DOWN: 1 Cuts, 2 Network, 3 Alliteration, 4 Resume, 6 Admit, 7 Sinsister, 8 Sound barrier, 12 Gangways, 15 Average, 16 At rest, 18 Over, 19 Horn

JUMBLED WORDS

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

Readers are ____; thinkers are ___. Harriet Martineau (9,4)

IAER ESULL

EHRT FINPU

SOLUTIONS: Aerie, Thine, Sullen, Puffin

ANSWERS: Readers are **plebeian**; thinkers are **rare**. Harriet Martineau

OVER THE HEDGE



BY MICHAEL FRY & T LEWIS



CALVIN & HOBBS



BY BILL WATTERSON



MARVIN



BY TOM ARMSTRONG



DIFFICULTY LEVEL 3s INSTRUCTIONS

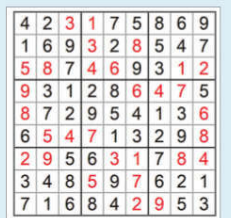
To solve a Sudoku puzzle, every digit from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.

DIFFICULTY LEVEL

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



SUDOKU6375



SOLUTION SUDOKU6374

CORPORATE BRIEFS

POWERGRID Naveen Sivastava, Director (Ops), POWERGRID, has been conferred the prestigious IAM Global McKeown Award for Individual Achievement 2026 by the Institute of Asset Management (IAM), United Kingdom. The award was presented during the IAM Global Conference 2026, held in London, United Kingdom, recently. He was selected winner among the finalists from Turkey, Portugal, UK, Dubai and Qatar. The IAM Global McKeown Award is among the highest international honours in the field of Asset Management and recognizes individuals for their outstanding contributions to advancing the profession globally.

HUDDO The 62nd Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Training Programme on "Leadership Skills for Women" sponsored by the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, was successfully conducted by HUDDO at its HSMI Hostel, Asian Games Village Complex (AGVC), New Delhi, recently. The two-week capacity-building programme brought together 24 women professionals from Iraq and served as a platform for knowledge exchange, leadership development, and cross-cultural engagement. The programme was designed to strengthen participants' leadership competencies by enhancing their understanding of gender equity, developing practical leadership and decision-making skills and equipping them to assume greater responsibilities within their organisations and professional domains.

"VINUBHAI BACHUBHAI NAGRECHA CAMPUS" Sadbhavana Old Age Home has been operating for the past ten years in Rajkot. In this old age home, without any discrimination of caste or religion, needy elderly people are respectfully admitted as per rules and within the admission capacity of the institution, and all facilities are provided free of cost. With a huge cost of 500 crores, in 1400 rooms, 5000 destitute-sick-bedridden elderly will be accommodated in the new Vinubhai Bachubhai Nagrecha campus where they will stay completely free for lifetime.

POWERGRID has acquired the Project Special Purpose Vehicle, Kakinada-1 Transmission Limited, on 29th June 2026 from PFC Consulting Limited (PFCL), the Bid Process Coordinator (BPC), under Tariff Based Competitive Bidding (TBCB) for the project "Transmission System for proposed Green Hydrogen / Green Ammonia Projects in Kakinada Area (Phase-I)". The Kakinada-1 Transmission Limited project comprises the establishment of a new 765/400 kV Gas Insulated Substation (GIS) at Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh, with 3×1500 MVA transformation capacity, along with a 240 MVA Bus Reactor and associated works.

INDIANOIL Arvind Kumar, Director (Refineries), Indian Oil inaugurated Swachhata Pakhwada 2026 at Refineries Headquarters. On the occasion, Mr Kumar felicitated "Swachhata Mitras" from the housekeeping team and presented them with Swachhata Kits, in recognition of their invaluable contribution towards maintaining clean and hygienic work environments. Mr Kumar also administered the Swachhata Pledge and unveiled a thematic poster based on this year's theme, "Swachhata is Everyone's Responsibility".

H.E. ARMANDO PEDRO MUIVANE JÚNIOR, HIGH COMMISSIONER of the Republic of Mozambique to the Republic of India, presented his Letters of Credence to Her Excellency Smt. Droupadi Murmu, President of India, formally assuming his responsibilities as High Commissioner of Mozambique to India.

On the occasion, the High Commissioner stated: "Building on the longstanding friendship and strong bilateral partnership between Mozambique and India, my priority will be to deepen political and economic cooperation, expand trade and investment, and strengthen collaboration in agriculture, energy, healthcare, education, digital technologies, maritime security and the blue economy. I look forward to working closely with the Government of India and all stakeholders to further advance the shared prosperity and enduring friendship between our two countries."

ROYAL STARS

BY GEORGIA NICOLS

ARIES (MAR 21 - APR 20): Financial discussions will go well today; nevertheless, be aware of any restrictions of the Moon Alert. Wait until tomorrow to commit to purchases or decisions. Tonight: An interesting conversation.

TAURUS (APR 21 - MAY 21): This is a good day to explore wrapping up old matters and loose ends, because things will tend to go in your favour for most of today. Nevertheless, there's a Moon Alert in effect, which means restrict spending to food and gas and wait until tomorrow to make important decisions. Tonight: Maintain your belongings.

GEMINI (MAY 22 - JUNE 21): You want to keep a low profile today, nevertheless, with fiery Mars in your sign, you're ready to defend your best interests. Be aware there's a Moon Alert in effect all day, so restrict spending to food and gas. Tonight: You win.

CANCER (JUNE 22 - JULY 23): This is the perfect day to talk. But don't agree to anything important during the Moon Alert, which is in effect almost all day. Enjoy relaxing with others. Tonight: Enjoy privacy.

LEO (JULY 24 - AUG 23): You're noticed today. Be aware there's a Moon Alert in effect all day. Don't volunteer for anything. Chat with others, but commit to nothing. Restrict spending to food and gas. Tonight: Be friendly.

VIRGO (AUG 24 - SEP 23): You need a change of scenery. Enjoy socialising and talking to people from different backgrounds. Because there's a Moon Alert in effect all day, restrict spending to food and gas. Postpone important decisions until tomorrow. Tonight: You're admired.

LIBRA (SEP 24 - OCT 23): Today you might be involved in discussions about inheritances, shared property, taxes or debt. Please be aware there's a Moon Alert all day, which means it's a poor day to make decisions or commitments. Restrict spending to food and gas. Tonight: Explore.

SCORPIO (OCT 24 - NOV 23): Be cooperative with others today, because with the Moon opposite your sign, you will have to go along to get along. Furthermore, there's a Moon Alert in effect all day, so restrict spending to food and gas. Tonight: Check your finances.

SAGITTARIUS (NOV 24 - DEC 22): You're charming to everyone right now because Venus is at the top of your chart. Meanwhile, today you might have to work for the benefit of someone else. Make no important decisions or commitments. There's a Moon Alert in effect all day. Restrict spending to food and gas. Tonight: Cooperate.

CAPRICORN (DEC 23 - JAN 20): Today is a playful day. Welcome any chance to make art or explore your creative talents. Nevertheless, there's a Moon Alert all day, so restrict spending to food and gas. Tonight: Work.

AQUARIUS (JAN 21 - FEB 19): Quiet time at home today will please you and family discussions about old matters might occur. Meanwhile, there's a Moon Alert in effect all day. Restrict spending to food and gas and postpone important decisions. Tonight: Talk.

PISCES (FEB 20 - MAR 20): You have a strong desire to share your ideas with someone today. This is actually a creative, social day; however, there's a Moon Alert in effect all day. Restrict spending to food and gas. Tonight: Relax.



with members of the Refineries Headquarters - Technical (Petrochemicals) team.

PNB GLTS LIMITED celebrated its 30th Foundation Day, commemorating three decades of steadfast contribution to the development of India's debt market and the Government securities ecosystem. The milestone celebration was graced by Ashok Chandra (MD & CEO, PNB), Pareed Sunil (MD & CEO, PNB GLS) along with the Board of Directors, senior management, employees, and distinguished guests. The Company has grown its net worth to approximately Rs.1,700 crore, achieved a Top 10 ranking in Debt Capital Market (DCM) business, and recently completed 25 years of successful listing on the stock exchanges.



Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPWd), Gt. as the Chief Guest. CEO of Torchit, Dr. Homiyar Mobejdi and eminent ophthalmologist Dr. Suraj Senjam (AIIMS, New Delhi).

SCOPE Dr. Jitendra Singh, Union Minister, inaugurated the 3rd Batch of DAKSH, the flagship leadership program by the SCOPE and CBC. Ms. S Radha Chauhan, Chairperson, CBC; K Moses Chalai, Secretary, DPE; Dr. K.P. Mahadevaswamy, Chairman, SCOPE & CMD, NBCC; Dr. Akhila Mittal, Member, CBC; Roop Narayan Sunkar, Member, PESB; Brajesh Kumar Upadhyay, Vice-Chairman, SCOPE & CMD, GSI; Atul Sobti, DG, SCOPE; alongside Senior Govt. officials, PESB members, and CPSE leaders. The third batch of DAKSH entails 70 participants from PSEs across diverse sectors. DAKSH (Development of Aspiration, Knowledge, Succession & Harmony) is a 12-month immersive learning journey, meticulously designed to be future-focused, empowering participants with the strategic, behavioural, and transformational competencies required to navigate the complex and evolving challenges of the Public Sector.

POWERGRID has secured a landmark green loan of JPY 80 billion from Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC), underscoring its pivotal role in India's renewable energy transformation. The loan agreement was signed by POWERGRID and JBIC recently. The facility is intended to support financing of Khavda-Nagpur HVDC transmission project highlighting the strategic collaboration between POWERGRID and JBIC to develop critical infrastructure for renewable energy integration. The green loan emphasizes POWERGRID's continued commitment to supporting India's energy transition goals while adhering to the environmental, social, and governance (ESG) standards.

RWANDANS AND FRIENDS OF RWANDA MARK KWIBOHORA32 IN NEW DELHI

The High Commission of Rwanda celebrated the 32nd Anniversary of Rwanda's Liberation Day (Kwibohora32) in New Delhi, bringing together around 1,000 guests, including senior Indian officials, diplomats and business leaders. The event highlighted Rwanda's remarkable progress, expanding Rwanda-India cooperation, and growing trade and investment opportunities. In her remarks, High Commissioner Jacqueline Mukangira reflected on Rwanda's liberation and transformation over the past 32 years, highlighting achievements in peace, good governance and socio-economic development, while encouraging greater Indian investment and tourism.

IRCTC has introduced a new tourism circuit titled "Divine East Temple Tour" on its Bharat Gaurav Deluxe Tourist Train. The thoughtfully curated 11-day rail-based journey offers devotees and travelers a unique opportunity to visit some of the most revered pilgrimage destinations along with culturally rich heritage sites across Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, West Bengal and Jharkhand. The journey will begin from Delhi Sadarjag and would cover Varanasi, Puri, Konark, Chilika, Bhubaneswar, Kolkata, Gangasagar and Balidyanath Dham before returning back to Delhi. Bookings for the Divine East Temple Tour are open on IRCTC's tourism portal and through authorized IRCTC tourism offices across the country.

IREDA Dr. Bijay Kumar Mohanty, Director (Finance), IREDA, recently assumed additional charge as CMD of Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency Ltd. (IREDA). The M/o New & Renewable Energy has entrusted him with the additional charge for three months, or till the appointment of a regular incumbent, or until further orders, whichever is earliest. Dr. Mohanty has been serving as Director (Finance) of IREDA since October 12, 2023, and as the company's Chief Financial Officer since October 16, 2023. He is a fellow member of the Institute of Cost Accountants of India, and holds a bachelor's degree in commerce along with master's degrees in Philosophy (Commerce) and Public Administration from Utkal University, Odisha.

IRCON Saleem Ahmad has taken additional charge as CMD. He holds a degree in Civil Engineering from Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi and brings over 35 years of extensive experience in the construction sector. His background encompasses the execution of large scale infrastructure projects, with specialized expertise in bridges, tunnels, as well as residential and commercial developments. Currently he is CMD of Rail Vikas Nigam Limited. Earlier, he was working as Director (Project) at NBCC (India) Ltd. Prior to joining NBCC, he served as ED (Civil) at DMRC and previously held a position at Mumbai Port Trust.

BLUE ROSE PUBLICATION Ashutosh Pathak, a distinguished corporate trainer and MORD-certified faculty, presents a refreshing new perspective on success through his inspiring book, From Rookies to Rainmakers: The Ultimate Sales Playbook. Rooted in ancient wisdom, The book is not merely about selling—it is about mastering mindset, building character, leading with authenticity, and achieving excellence with both performance and purpose. Pathak combines the timeless wisdom of ancient Indian scriptures with modern sales strategies to offer a rare and powerful roadmap for purpose-driven success.



Pierluigi Collina defended the officiating at the World Cup. AP

Refereeing chief rejects charges of bias

Reuters
Geneva, July 9

FIFA REFEREEING chief Pierluigi Collina defended the officiating in Argentina's 3-2 victory over Egypt in the World Cup round of 16, dismissing allegations of bias and saying match officials operated with complete independence.

In an interview published on inside.fifa.com on Thursday, Collina said criticism of referees was part of football but he condemned the questioning of the officials' integrity after Egypt complained about the officiating following the defeat.

"Constructive discussion about decisions will always be part of football, but unfounded allegations have no place in our sport," Collina said.

"Nobody can question the integrity of the FIFA World Cup match officials... Nobody can claim that FIFA refereeing can be influenced by anyone, not even by the FIFA president (Gianni Infantino)."

Collina said that such allegations could provoke threats against referees and their families. Egypt exited the tournament but claimed they had been treated unfairly after Argentina overruled a 2-0 deficit to snatch victory with a stoppage-time winner from Enzo Fernandez.

Pressure on referee

Coach Hossam Hassan alleged after the match there may have been pressure on the referee to keep Argentina in the tournament. And the Egyptian Football Association said "several key incidents raised serious concerns and left profound questions about the consistency and fairness of decisions that directly influenced the course of the game."

Egypt argued that Mostafa Zico's second-half strike was incorrectly ruled out for what it described as a non-existent foul in the build-up. Egypt were also incensed that a challenge on Mohamed Salah was not penalised moments before Argentina launched the move that produced the winning goal.

FIFA's Collina said VAR had correctly recommended overturning Zico's goal after identifying a foul by Marwan Attia on Argentina defender Lisandro Martinez during the attacking possession phase.

"We believe that a foul is a foul," Collina said. "Regardless of whether the foul appears obvious, if the referee did not see it on the field of play, the VAR can intervene."



SPAIN'S BACKLINE BULWARK

Pau Cubarsi is the 'leader' of defence in a team blessed with attacking riches and a well-oiled midfield



Sandip G
New Jersey, July 9

ALL EYES were on the curly-haired wonderkind Lamine Yamal during a training session at La Masia.

But the eyes of Barcelona manager Xavi Hernandez wandered to a lean, tall figure with boyish looks. He summoned a youth coach by his side and told him he wanted the boy to train with the senior team the next week. On the day of training, when Xavi entered the training ground, he was there with a warm smile and introduced himself in a firm tone: "Hi, I am Pau Cubarsi." Xavi was impressed. "He had none of the shyness you think of when a teenager called for his first training with the senior team," the manager recalled to Spanish outlet MARCA.

In months, along with the wunderkind Xavi had visited the academy to check out, Cubarsi became a regular in the senior team. After his debut, a Copa del Rey game against Unionistas de Salamanca, Xavi told the media: "With Lamine Yamal, he would mark an era." He was only 16 then, but in Xavi's assessment, he was already a leader. "He doesn't seem 16 when you speak with him." The pass-master's words were not hollow. In only three years, since debuting under a child protection protocol in 2022, he has become the cornerstone of the stingiest defence in the World Cup. Five games on, Spain have the most impregnable defence in the tournament.

In 609 minutes, they are yet to see their nets ruffled. Not only that, they have faced the fewest shots (29), fewest shots on goal (six), and on an average the opponents had only seven touches per game inside their box. Spain are perhaps classical Italians in disguised red shirts — and they defend beautifully and not savagely.

The fixation, unflinchingly, is on Spain's midfield, the disar-

ming passing oeuvre of Pedri, the mechanical grace of Rodri, and the blinding dynamism of Dani Olmo. Or certainly, the impish genius of Yamal. But stealthily, the backline has emerged as Spain's unbreakable armour. At the heart of the resolute is Cubarsi, born in the village of Estanyol that has only 195 residents, in Girona.

He produced a masterclass on defending against Portugal by containing the creative head Bruno Fernandes. Marking Cristiano Ronaldo was stress-free. He possessed a half-a-second advantage over the Portuguese invaders, was always the first to the ball, seldom tackled or lunged in the fine tradition of Barcelona centre-backs. He purred through the game with a vanishingly rare blend of timing, physicality and speed. So much so that his centre-back ally Aymeric Laporte, 33 years his senior, calls him the "leader" of the backline. "In the dressing room, everyone listens to him,

5 SPAIN HAVE kept a clean sheet in all of their first five matches at the 2026 World Cup. Only one other team has done so — Italy in 1990.

609 IT HAS been 609 minutes since Unai Simon last conceded a goal at the World Cup. No goalkeeper has kept a clean sheet for a longer consecutive period.

like he is a senior player," manager Luis de la Fuente observed.

Passing accuracy

His control is impeccable; passing accuracy nearly perfect. Across the tournament, Cubarsi has attempted 449 passes, missing just 17, giving

him an exceptional passing accuracy of 96 per cent. Five of them were key passes. He became the quickest to five clean sheets, striding past Italian metronome Paolo Maldini. "It's not an individual thing, it's a collective effort," Cubarsi deflected the glory to his teammates after the Portugal game.

It's both individual and collective, as all sturdy defences are. Laporte, his sidekick, is as slick as Cubarsi. He defends without violence, without strained sinews. Before he fell out with Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola, the latter would rate him the finest left-footed centre back in the Premier League. "He reads the attackers' intentions even before he (the attacker) had decided his plan of action." He has lost some of his speed to injuries, but is arguably the best around in positional play and in one-on-one situations.

Flanking them are Marc Cucurella and Pedro Porro, the team's metaphorical hitmen,

painting Spain with a nasty streak, streaming through the wings with their purposeful sprints and capacity to make both underlapping and overlapping runs. Both are proven goalscorers and assist-makers, and both are essential to the wide passing triangles. Teams look to overload their midfield, and Spain find an outlet through the wings, the full-backs keeping wingers Alex Baena and Yamal busy. Cucurella assisted two goals in the Australia rout. Porro nailed the third. De la Fuente, a full-back himself, has masterfully used his wide players to unlock defences.

The midfield, certainly, facilitates defensive control with masterful possession. Spain has enjoyed an average of 68 percent possession. But it's not the possession as Spain once advertised. There is less of short, relentless passing, not the death (at times suicide) by a 1000 passes, but a mixture of short, midrange and long passing. De la Fuente also shook the traditional high defensive line fixation of Spain. He often sets up Spain in a mid-block, and has not been averse to the mid-low block either. Each defender can hold on his own, but they isolate their comrades. If Laporte is not with Cubarsi, Cucurella would be, and so and so forth.

The defensive unit has a personality to match their skills. None of them have looked frazzled under the pressure of the World Cup. Belgium free-wheeled against the USMNT; they benched Kevin de Bruyne. Perhaps, they would recommend him to bypass the languidly dogged defence of Spain. The highest praise came from Austria's tactician, Ralf Ragnick. "I cannot remember any unforgotten errors they made. We attacked them and challenged them; we were brave, but we could not always prevent this combination tactic. They are a perfect clockwork," he noted. And at the base and heart of it is a 19-year-old whose voice is most valued in the locker room.

Marc Cucurella (L), Aymeric Laporte (R) and Pedro Porro (C) have helped central defender Pau Cubarsi run the defensive roost at this World Cup. AP

The manager nobody wanted

Rudi Garcia inherited a fractured Belgium squad, which has now reached the last 8



Coach Rudi Garcia's first call to action was to bring goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois back into the Belgium fold for the World Cup. AP

Shuvadipta Bose
New Delhi, July 9

LAMINE YAMAL and Pau Cubarsi had yet to kick a ball. Gavi and Nico Williams had only just joined their local academies. Captain Rodri was on the verge of being released by Atletico Madrid's youth setup for lacking the necessary physicality. None of Spain's 26-member World Cup squad had made a professional appearance when Rudi Garcia won his last trophy, the 2010/11 Ligue 1, and he can be forgiven for knowing little of Belgium's manager. The Belgians didn't know much, either. They do now.

The resentment at his appointment was not baseless. He has won only two titles in over two decades as a manager. His immediate predecessor was Domenico Tedesco: young, new ideas, and the only coach to win the DFB-Pokal with RB Leipzig. Tedesco sold dreams, and then delivered nightmares. Amid rifts and disagreements, Belgium imploded early. Before him was Roberto Martinez. He was entrusted with a cohort of talent ranked first in the world, the famed "golden generation" that promised exactly what its name implied. Gold. Bronze was the closest it came.

Belgium wanted a serial winner, or a nameiconic enough to inspire hope among a fanbase that had already started to desert the national team. Conversations were held with Thierry Henry, Zinedine Zidane and Xavi. Foe-walling royalty. Every pursuit met a dead end. Attention shifted to Michel Preud'homme, a name less famous globally than that trio but a local legend nonetheless. He had personal issues. And then, from the chaos, emerged Rudi Garcia.

Fans were enraged, but barely anyone was more angry than Jacky Mathisen, the former Belgium U-21 manager. He fired off a text to the federation's director, Vincent Mannaert, making his fury plain: "This choice makes no sense."

Before he had fully stepped through the door, there were calls to usher him back out. On Friday, at Los Angeles Stadium, he will try to usher the team past Spain and into what would be only their second World Cup semi-final ever.

The critics have had their Rudi Awakening.

Methodical process

Garcia's rebuild of Belgium has been methodical. The first,

The resentment at Rudi Garcia's appointment was not baseless. He has won only two titles in over two decades as a manager.

and perhaps the most significant, step was restoring Thibaut Courtois to the fold.

A captaincy dispute with Tedesco had driven Courtois into international exile. Garcia was too experienced to let a fractured relationship weaken his team. A call was made, and a flight was booked for Madrid, where Courtois plays his club football. The goalkeeper said at the time that his first impression of the conversation had been positive, and that Garcia would be coming to Madrid himself before long.

Weeks later, Garcia was in Spain. Courtois came away convinced: "Garcia is a winner." The comparison he reached for was his own club manager, Carlo Ancelotti, someone who simply makes players feel good about themselves.

An integral member of the golden generation had returned home. Garcia, however, didn't want the golden generation's imprint on his vision. He wanted to build a team of his own. A team that is young.

Belgium were the fifth-oldest team at Qatar 2022. At this World Cup, they sit almost exactly in the middle, ranked 24th for average age. Centre-back Nathan Aspinall, midfielder Nicolas Raskin and winger Diego Moreira, were all handed debuts by Garcia.

He has also achieved what Martinez could not at Portugal: a system of meritocracy immune to popularity piques. Down two goals in the round of 32 against Senegal, Garcia subbed out Kevin de Bruyne and Jeremy Doku, replacing them with Nicolas Raskin and Dodi Lukebakio. It looked like a mistake until half-time substitute Romelu Lukaku and Youri Tielemans scored twice in three late minutes to force extra time, where Tielemans settled it from the penalty spot.

Neither De Bruyne nor Doku started the next match. Belgium dismantled the USA 4-1 regardless. Against Spain, Garcia will rely on the collective, again, to do the heavy lifting. In his first press conference, he had declared, "I feel 100% Belgian." Should he be best Spain, Belgians will 100% agree.

THE MAN BEHIND THE TOUGH CALLS

Letexier, the referee who officiated Egypt-Argentina, delivers bad news for a living

A World Cup controversy, and a Frenchman who has spent his career knocking on doors nobody wants opened

Sriram Veera
Mumbai, July 9

ON THE days he is not refereeing, Francois Letexier sometimes shows up at a stranger's door with paperwork that makes him unwelcome before he has said a word. This week he is the most talked-about referee at the World Cup, the man Egypt wants removed from the tournament, and the parallel between his two jobs has never been harder to ignore.

He is a huisser de justice: a bailiff, the person the French legal system sends to serve notices and enforce judgments nobody asked to receive. He

specialises in rental disputes and illegal occupation — evictions, mostly, which does not make for easy company at the door. He found the job in law school and liked that it was hands-on. Letexier had not envisaged that it will become the best available description of his other career.

Asked what the two jobs share, he told the French outlet Brut simply: "Football generates some pretty crazy behaviours in terms of emotions, and in my work as a bailiff, often, when I am involved in collection actions, my presence is not always welcome. The situations also generate reactions

to which I must adapt."

He trains five or six times a week for the refereeing, on top of the case files. He has described the arrangement as two careers that complement each other, and there is a simpler justification for keeping it going: French referees aren't professionals, and football, as he put it, is a fluctuating business. The bailiff work is the steadier income. He has also said that it is also a foothold in ordinary life outside a sport he calls extraordinary.

It has not felt normal this week. On Tuesday night in Atlanta, Letexier disallowed an Egyptian goal for a foul in the



French referee Francois Letexier came under fire for the decisions he and the VAR team took during Argentina vs Egypt. AP

build-up, waved away Mohamed Salah's penalty appeal in stoppage time, and sent off a member of Egypt's coaching

staff, all before Argentina scored three times in the final minutes to win 3-2. At one point Hossam Hassan, Egypt's man-

ager, crossed his arms at Letexier, the gesture FIFA uses to report racial abuse. What happened in that moment is disputed. What is not disputed is that Argentina went through.

By Wednesday, Egypt's federation president had filed a formal complaint demanding Letexier's removal for the rest of the tournament. Letexier deactivated his Instagram. L'Equipe reported that FIFA would review his performance before deciding whether he takes charge of another match, though there is a simpler reason he might not: FIFA must assign referees from countries still alive in the competition, and France are still alive.

Backing aplenty

FIFA's refereeing chief, Pierluigi Collina, went further

than promising a review. He called the criticism baseless, said nobody could question the World Cup's match officials, and warned that doing so exposes referees and their families to threats. "Nobody can question the integrity of the FIFA World Cup match officials," he said.

The story followed him into someone else's press conference. Asked on Wednesday about Thursday's quarter-final against Morocco being held to an all-Argentine crew led by Facundo Tello, Didier Deschamps did not duck the question much as set it down carefully. "Let's hope our officials are as good as Monsieur Letexier was," he said.

There is a precedent for what happens next, and it is not encouraging. At the 2002 World Cup, Ecuador's Byron Moreno

was blamed by Italy for their exit to co-host South Korea, and although FIFA never said so directly, he did not referee again that tournament.

He is 37. The IFHHS, the sport's own historians, named him the best referee in the world in 2024, the first Frenchman to hold the title since Michel Vautrot in 1989. None of that is in question this week. FIFA has spoken up for him. What it has not is to clarify whether he referees again in this tournament, and that is the part that will actually decide things. He has been here before, in a small way: a disputed penalty and two red cards at Nice against Nantes in 2022 brought him death threats. He knows what it is to knock on a door and have it not matter, to anyone inside, that the paperwork is correct.

