



Business as Usual
By EP UNNY



Happening today

UNITED STATES TRADE Representative (USTR) Jamieson Greer will arrive in Delhi to give final touches to the India-US interim trade agreement.

PRESIDENT DROUPADI Murmu is scheduled to interact with members of Sahariya tribe and Cheetah trackers at Kuno National Park in MP.

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POLITICS PAGE 6



PM LEADS YOGA DAY CELEBRATIONS

IDEA EXCHANGE



We will never allow China to affect our ties with India, which remains a high priority in our foreign policy
DENIS ALIYOV
RUSSIAN AMBASSADOR TO INDIA
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Andhra IT Minister Nara Lokesh is guest at Express Adda today

Express News Service
Hyderabad, June 21

THE ANDHRA Pradesh government has been strongly pushing for global IT companies to invest in the state, especially positioning Visakhapatnam as an IT hub. Leading the push is Nara Lokesh, National Working President of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), who is in his second stint as the state's IT Minister.

Lokesh will be the guest at

Over 20 lakh take NEET retest



Candidates enter a NEET re-examination centre in Thane, Maharashtra, on Sunday. DEEPAK JOSHI

IAF to Central forces, all step in for smooth exams at over 5,400 centres

Express News Service
New Delhi, June 21

AMID HEIGHTENED security measures, the NEET-UG retest was conducted for over 20 lakh candidates Sunday, over a month after it was cancelled on May 12 on the grounds of an alleged paper leak.

The National Testing Agency (NTA), in a statement, said the retest, a pen-and-paper exam, was conducted at 5,440 centres nationwide, and 14 centres abroad, through a

“whole-of-government effort”, with the involvement of over 7 lakh officials including police and security personnel, and exam staff.

Sources in the NTA said changes were necessitated in the agency's processes to ensure that preparation for the exam was completed in 37 days, as opposed to the regular timeline of five to six months.

One layer where changes were introduced was transportation, where the Indian Air Force

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Some nervous, most relieved: For students and parents, end of an ordeal

Express News Service
Mumbai, Kolkata, Guwahati, Jaipur, New Delhi, Ahmedabad, June 21

THE RE-EXAMINATION for the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (Undergraduate) was held across the country on Sunday, with those who took the test expressing a mix of anxiety and relief at the culmination of a tumultuous period

following the cancellation of the exam held on May 3.

On Sunday, the father of a medical aspirant appearing for the exam in Mumbai expressed relief regarding the stricter security arrangements in place. “There are police personnel deployed on the campus. We are hopeful she will perform better this time and no hiccups will occur,” said retired postman

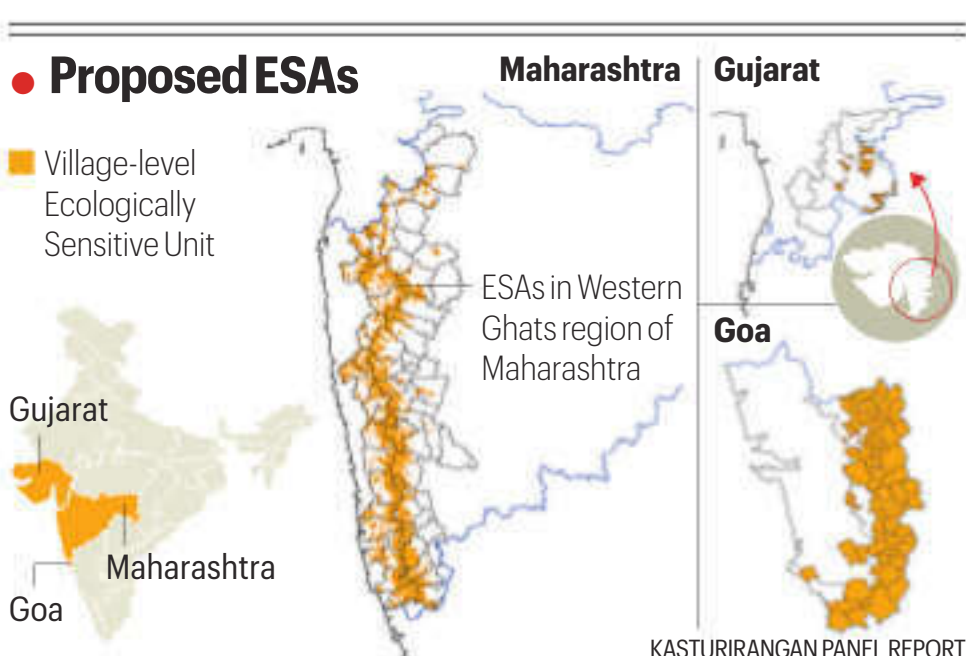
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Govt prepares to notify Western Ghats eco sensitive areas in at least three states

Nikhil Ghanekar & Amitabh Sinha
New Delhi, June 21

TWELVE YEARS after it issued the first draft notification, the Centre is finally ready to finalise and notify the demarcation of Ecologically Sensitive Areas (ESA) in the Western Ghats region, at least in the three states in which contentious issues have more or less been resolved, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

Over 56,000 square km of land in six states are proposed



to be demarcated as ESA, based on the 2013 recommendations of a high-level working group led by former ISRO chairman K Kasturirangan.

The Centre's original draft notification had come in 2014, and has undergone five revisions since then, but disagreements with the state governments on the areas earmarked for declaration as ESAs within their jurisdictions have not been fully resolved. Even now, the states of Kerala and

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Extradited for three cases 10 years ago, sent back to Hong Kong after acquittal

Sadaf Modak
Mumbai, June 21

TEN YEARS after he was extradited from Singapore to face trial in three criminal cases, India-born alleged gangster Kumar Krishna Pillai has been repatriated to his home country, Hong Kong, it is learnt.

A Mumbai sessions court had on February 13 directed police to send Pillai back to Hong



Alleged gangster Kumar Pillai

Kong, noting that he could not be kept in India after being

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NEGOTIATORS IN SWITZERLAND, TRUMP WARNS IRAN

‘Can we turn over a new leaf?’: Vance, Ghalibaf lead talks

Iran links progress to Lebanon, US focus on Tehran n-plan



US Vice President J D Vance with President Donald Trump's envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner; (right) Iran Foreign Minister Seyyed Abbas Araghchi with Parliament Speaker Mohammed Bagher Ghalibaf at the Qatari-owned mountaintop resort of Buergerstock in Switzerland, Sunday. AP & REUTERS

Aamer Madhani, Seung Min Kim & Jamey Keaten
Obbuerger (Switzerland), June 21

US VICE President JD Vance said Sunday there was an opportunity to “turn over a new leaf” with Iran as the sides held talks aimed at building out the interim deal to end the war in Iran reached by the two sides last week.

Vance and US negotiators met with Iran's parliamentary speaker, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, and Foreign Minister

E. EXPLAINED
Interim deal

The interim deal between the US and Iran is meant to stop fighting on all fronts, including Lebanon. It also gives negotiators 60 days to reach a nuclear agreement, but that can be extended.

Abbas Araghchi at a Swiss mountainside resort near Lake Lucerne.



Mediators from Pakistan and Qatar were also in the room for the direct engagement that, according to Iranian state media, lasted about 80 minutes. The US and Iranian negotiating teams also held separate private talks with Pakistani and Qatari officials.

The US is looking to get Iran locked into negotiations over its nuclear programme amid concerns it may be used for military purposes, which Iran denies. Vance also wants to push Tehran to commit to

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

NSDC crackdown continues: Current, ex-staffers get notices for PMKVY ‘lapses’

Ritu Sarin
New Delhi, June 21

MORE THAN a year after it cut short the tenure of its CEO, and months after it filed a police complaint alleging that some of its top officials indulged in “misappropriation” of funds, the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) has cracked down on its own employees again.

In the latest move that point to systemic failures within the organisation, *The Indian Express* has learnt that NSDC, which implements Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), has sent show cause notices to around 20 serving and former employees over alleged irregularities flagged by the Comptroller & Auditor General (CAG) in the flagship skills training scheme.

The show cause notices, sent earlier this month, lists several “charges” against each



The Indian Express report on September 22 last year

of the staffers under scrutiny — including failure to match job role selection for candidates to market demand, verify accreditation and documents, or ensure Aadhaar attendance. The notices warn that the cases will be referred to investigating agencies if financial misconduct and criminal culpability are detected.

The NSDC implements PMKVY on behalf of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE). PMKVY was launched in 2015 and has imparted skills training

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

7 dead, 9 critical after ammonia leak at seafood export unit in TN

Arun Janardhanan
Chennai, June 21

SEVEN MIGRANT workers died and more than 40 were hospitalised after an ammonia gas leak at a private seafood export unit near Periyapalayam in Tiruvallur district of Tamil Nadu on Sunday, officials and police sources said.

The leak occurred at St Peter's Paul Seafoods Exports Private Limited at Kannigaipair, near Periyapalayam, where about 120 migrant workers, mostly women labourers from Assam, Odisha and Jharkhand, were staying on the factory premises. The company had provided accommodation for the workers within the campus. Sunday was the unit's weekly

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NIMBALKAR TO JOIN SHINDE-LED SHIV SENA

LOST THEIR DOCUMENTS AS THEIR VESSEL CAME UNDER ATTACK OFF OMAN COAST IN EARLY DAYS OF WEST ASIA CONFLICT

3 months after missile strike, 8 sailors still struggling — for identities, job papers

Purnima Sah
Mumbai, June 21

WHEN EIGHT Indian seafarers jumped into the waters off Oman on the morning of March 1, after a missile struck their oil tanker *MV Sky Light* in the early days of the West Asia conflict, they struggled to survive. Three months later, survival remains the central struggle of their lives.

Following the attack near Khasab port that killed the vessel's captain, Ashish Kumar of Bihar, and left another crew member missing, the eight sailors were rescued by the Omani military after

spending nearly 45 minutes aboard the burning vessel and then in the sea.

Hailing from Rajasthan, Haryana, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Puducherry, the eight men reached Mumbai on March 18 believing their ordeal was over. Instead, they now find themselves facing another nightmare — red tape and unemployment.

After vowing never to return to the sea, all of them now want to sail again, saying they have “no other option”. But all the work documents and IDs they had were destroyed or lost that day: passports, service records in the form of Continuous

Discharge Certificates (CDCs), Seafarers' Identity Documents (SIDs), educational certificates, vaccination records, Aadhaar cards, voter IDs, and PAN cards.

Back home, without identity

Abdur Rahaman Mondal, 27, from Mirjapur village in West Bengal's Nadia, is a farmer's son and the first in his family to work abroad. After spending two years pursuing a BA course, he trained for six months at a marine institute in Navi Mumbai. He entered shipping in 2024, completed two voyages, and joined Sky Light as an “able seaman” in January. “I lost everything in the fire



The eight sailors Srinu Donkani, Pagalvan Haridas, Bikram Ghosh, Sunil Puniya, Abdur Rahaman Mondal, Kaushal Sorout, Bhumesb and Pramod Kumar Yadav. PURNIMA SAH

— my passport, educational certificates and all other docu-

ments. Back home, I also discovered that my name had

been deleted from the voters' list in the Special Intensive Revision (SIR),” he said.

Mondal has since applied for a fresh voter card, Aadhaar and PAN cards, approached the panchayat for a birth certificate, and sought duplicate Class 10 and 12 certificates. But he still needs a passport, CDC, SID and Yellow Fever certificate to sail again.

He now farms with his father on about seven bighas, growing jute, paddy and seasonal vegetables, and is considering factory work in Pune, where his cousin lives. March 1 still returns in nightmares, he says. “But one bad experience cannot define my entire life,”

he said.

Global waters to village farms

Bhumesb, 23, of Chhithroli village in Haryana's Mahendragarh, holds a BA in English and is the sole earner for his ageing parents and sister. He trained for six months at a Delhi institute and took computer courses before signing up as an “able seaman”.

“Officials keep asking me to come later or send me from one department to another,” he said about his lost documents, adding that he has no soft copies either because he lost his phone.

According to him, there has been no communication since

he returned home with the Recruitment and Placement Services Licence (RPSL) company, SKS Krishna Marine Services, which hired and placed him on *MV Sky Light*, with “no compensation” or “clarity on salary”.

“I have returned to farming and occasionally drive trucks. I want to go back to sailing,” he said.

First voyage, almost last

Sunil Puniya, 26, of Bamna Kalan village in Rajasthan, says he lost belongings worth over Rs 2 lakh, including a laptop and phones, apart from his documents on March 1. He says

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Fresh blow to AMMA: Shweta Menon resigns as chief of Malayalam actors' association

Shaju Philip & Nikhila Henry
Thiruvananthapuram, Hyderabad, June 21

THE FIRST woman president of the Association of Malayalam Movie Artists (AMMA), Shweta Menon, resigned from the post on Sunday along with the other office-bearers following a dispute within the actors' body.

Menon, who was elected as president of the three-decade-old association, announced that she was also stepping down as a member of AMMA.

The 17-member executive body of AMMA, led by Menon, had assumed office in August last year after the previous committee, headed by Malayalam superstar Mohanlal, was forced to step down in 2024 in the wake of the controversies surrounding the release of the Justice Hema Committee report on the treatment of women in the Malayalam film industry.

Menon announced the decision at the end of the annual general body meeting of the association held in Kochi. "There are attempts to take the association into the hands of people who are facing allegations. I cannot remain as a puppet," she told the media.

An ad hoc committee led by actor-turned-MLA Ramesh Pisharody was constituted until a new committee is elected.

Mohanlal on Sunday issued a statement calling for unity within the association.

From the outset of the annual general body meeting, members engaged in heated exchanges over AMMA's annual receipts and payments accounts. A section of members led by actors Siddique and Edavela Babu protested alleging a lack of transparency. Subsequently, Menon announced the resignation of the entire executive committee as well as her decision to quit the body.

AMMA has been under close public scrutiny since the Justice Hema Committee report. Several male members of the association were accused of sexual



Shweta Menon

misconduct soon after the Hema Committee report came out in 2024.

Moreover, allegations against actor Dileep, who was acquitted in December 2025 by a sessions court of conspiracy charges in the 2017 actor sexual assault case, are still a source of tension among a section within AMMA, sources said. "There is still a strong Dileep lobby in AMMA. There are other lobbies led by other actors who are accused of sexual misconduct. Hence, it is very difficult to run the ship in AMMA," a source said.

Trouble started brewing once again with actor and former general secretary of AMMA, Anisiba Hassan, raising a character assassination complaint against actor Tini Tom. Hassan, who is known for her role in the Mohanlal-starrer *Drishyam* series of films, had the support of other members of AMMA, who issued public statements against the artiste body's management. AMMA issued a gag order to actors to prevent them from appearing before the media to make statements in this case. "This was strongly opposed by a section within AMMA," a source said.

Veteran actor Jagadish, a senior member of AMMA, told reporters that the executive committee led by Menon could not present the accounts in a transparent manner.

"The Members sought permission to present a no-confidence motion against the leadership. Before the no-confidence motion was taken up, the executive committee decided to quit," Jagadish said.

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

US-Iran peace talks

keeping open the Strait of Hormuz, the critical waterway through which about a fifth of the world's traded oil passes.

But the on-again, off-again conflict in Lebanon between Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah militants continues to threaten to derail the effort for the US to win concessions from Tehran on its nuclear programme and keep the strait open.

"The question before us now is how much more can we accomplish together? Can we turn over a new leaf?" Vance said as the talks, dubbed the 'Lake Lucerne Summit', got underway.

"Can we change relations in the Middle East permanently, or do we go back to doing things the old way, which is not our preference, but is certainly very much something that can happen."

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei told the country's state news agency ahead of the meeting with Vance that their team's negotiations looked to focus on the war between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

The interim agreement was signed last week, and now top American and Iranian negotiators are in a 60-day sprint to reach an agreement on the tech-

nical details that hold massive implications for the world economy and global security.

Only days after signing the agreement, it is being stress-tested after fighting escalated in Lebanon between Israel and Hezbollah, and by the subsequent announcement by Iran's military that it had again closed the vital waterway. A renewed ceasefire in Lebanon, brokered Saturday, appeared to be holding.

Vance stressed that "great progress" had been made on Lebanon. But minutes after he finished speaking, President Donald Trump took to social media to threaten Iran if it didn't rein in Hezbollah.

"If they don't, we'll hit Iran very hard again, just like we did last week, only harder!!!" Trump wrote.

Iran is cautiously approaching the talks, given its previous experience with US negotiations on the nuclear issue, which twice in the past year were interrupted by massive military strikes against the country.

"The implementation of any document is more important than its signing," Baghaei said. Iran's president added that Iran will maintain its right to a

nuclear programme.

"What is certain is that we will never back down from the right to enrich uranium, and the other side is also forced to accept it," Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said, according to Iran's state media.

Trump, in a telephone interview with *Fox News* Sunday, warned that the Iranian president "better watch his mouth". "He'd better shape up, or we'll take over the rest of the country," *Fox News* quoted Trump as saying.

The agreement says commercial vessels can pass through the Strait of Hormuz for 60 days without charge, but does not preclude future fees imposed by Iran. Trump made his own threat Saturday to levy US tolls if there is no deal with Iran in 60 days, insisting in a social media post that the money would be for "services rendered as the Guardian Angel to the countries of the Middle East."

Further complicating matters, neither Israel nor Hezbollah is a signatory to the deal between the US and Iran, and Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to keep his forces in southern Lebanon until any threat to Israel is eliminated. Hezbollah has refused to halt its attacks unless Israel commits to withdrawing from Lebanon.

— ASSOCIATED PRESS

Ordeal ends

Mohan Chavan, 65, waiting outside the Sardar Patel College of Engineering examination centre for his daughter, Aditi Chavan.

Students emerging from examination centres in the evening offered mixed reactions. Vrushali Parmar from Goregaon felt the paper was relatively easy and comparable to the earlier exam. "Chemistry was a little different and more difficult this time. It was lengthy and had several organic chemistry questions. Overall, though, it was not bad. I had scored 545 marks in the previous exam," she said.

For Shreya Gupta from Nalaspoura, the paper was "moderate to easy". "Some students felt physics was difficult, but I did not find it too challenging. I just want to secure an MBBS seat somehow," she said.

At the Jadavpur University exam centre in Kolkata, stu-

dents said dealing with the stress of the last one and a half months was more difficult than the exam itself. "The real challenge was coping with the stress caused by the paper leak controversy. It has deeply affected us," said a candidate, Tanmoy Roy.

At Assam's Gauhati Commerce College, some aspirants said they stayed calm through the chaos of this period. "In my mind, I had approached the May exam as a mock test. It was my first attempt, so I am feeling okay today as well," said Aryan Chakravarty (18).

But for most candidates, the period leading up to this re-test was fraught with stress. Mohammad Yasin (19), who had travelled from central Assam's Hojai to write the test, said, "For those of us who had dropped a year just to prepare for the test, it (the cancellation of the May 3 test) was a very big *hatka* (jolt). I found it difficult to rebuild the flow of preparation once it was broken after the May test. It was like all my planning went out

the window, so I am not feeling very confident today. I am not feeling 100%, and I am quite nervous."

From Rajasthan to Gujarat to Delhi, aspirants noted that the security was much tighter than before.

In Barmer, the district administration ordered the closure of photostat shops, e-Mitra kiosks and cyber cafes within a 300-metre radius of examination centres.

"Earlier, religious threads on our arms were allowed," said 18-year-old Tulsi, a first-time candidate from Dwarka in Delhi. "This time, they made us remove everything. They even asked me to take off my hair-band."

In Ahmedabad, Inspector General of Police (Law and Order) Makrand Chauhan, who was appointed as the state's nodal officer for the exam, said messaging apps like WhatsApp and Telegram were under close scrutiny to prevent any attempt to leak exam-related material or spread any misinformation.

Adda

The Indian Express.

Lokesh had kick-started the process to turn Andhra Pradesh into an IT destination in his first term, from 2017 to 2019. In his second stint, starting in 2024, he has attracted several companies to the state, with Google announcing last October that it would invest \$15 billion to develop an AI hub, its largest outside the US, in Visakhapatnam.

The son of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, Lokesh is also the minister of Real Time Governance and Human Resources Development.

Lokesh is also at the forefront of a plan to regulate social media access to children between 13 and 16 years of age in Andhra Pradesh, and to ban social media for those below 13, as well as to prevent the online abuse and harassment of women.

Among the challenges he faces is the widespread migration of new graduates from the state, with many leaving for Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and other destinations in search of tech jobs as soon as they finish their course in Andhra Pradesh.

The Express Adda is a series of informal interactions organised by *The Indian Express* Group and features those at the centre of change.

NSDC crackdown

to over 1.64 crore youth till June 2025.

The CAG has audited three phases of PMKVY from 2015 to 2022, covering an outlay of Rs 14,450 crore and a combined target of training and certifying 1.32 crore candidates — the latest phase of the scheme PMKVY 4.0 is ongoing.

The audit flagged multiple irregularities, including fake bank account numbers linked to beneficiaries, duplication of identification details across candidates, and non-payment to training partners for 34 lakh candidates.

In its 94-page report, which was tabled in Parliament in December 2025, the CAG also found that coordination between Central and State departments was "not effective" and described NSDC's monitoring mechanisms as "unreliable". It cited "poor monitoring and oversight" by the Ministry and highlighted deficiencies in the inspection of skill centres, including non-functional biometric attendance devices. Following the report, the Ministry had stated that the audit had "significantly strengthened" the scheme.

In some of the latest show cause notices, signed by the

head of NSDC's legal department, employees have been given 15 days to reply to specific "charges", with failure to do so construed as "admission of the charges".

The Indian Express reviewed some notices, which were sent over registered post. They list specific lapses allegedly committed by each recipient, described as "gross negligence of duty" and "willful non-compliance" with guidelines of PMKVY 2.0, the second phase of the scheme introduced in December 2017.

Responding to a request for comment from *The Indian Express*, NSDC CEO Arunkumar Pillai stated, "NSDC has taken note of the CAG observations and, under its new leadership, has initiated due course-corrective and accountability measures as PMKVY's implementation agency."

Pillai said, "Show cause notices have been issued as per applicable contractual/service terms, internal governance processes and legal provisions. Since the matter is under due process, comments on individual cases, proposed action, or further notices would be premature."

He said that "any action will

Pillai

acquitted in the three specific cases for which he had been extradited.

Sources said that after being informed he could leave the country on his own, Pillai returned to Hong Kong Thursday.

Born and brought up in the Vikhroli suburb of Mumbai, Pillai left India in 1997 and later obtained Hong Kong citizenship. He was arrested in Singapore in 2016 and extradited to India on June 26 that year to face three cases pending before the Mumbai Police Crime Branch.

Two of these cases, filed in 2009, related to alleged extortion bids; the third was filed in 2013 for attempted murder. In one of the cases, he also faced the stringent charge under the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act.

Acquitted in all three cases in 2020, 2022 and 2024, Pillai had approached a special court in Mumbai last November, stating he was not required in India and should be allowed to return to Hong Kong as he is a citizen of that country. "After being acquitted in all the cases, the applicant (Pillai) was not repatriated to Hong Kong and continues to stay in India with no status in India or visa for stay in India," his application had said.

Following the session court's February 13 order directing Pillai's repatriation, Mumbai Police obtained an open-ended warrant against him in another pending case. However, the court cancelled it on February 23, noting he cannot be tried for cases for which approval has not been taken from the authorities in Singapore. "The Extradition Treaty and Extradition Decree need to be honoured," the court said on February 23.

According to police, Pillai was allegedly initiated into the underworld after he was arrested in connection with the murder of a local corporator to avenge his father's death. His father, Krishna Pillai, ran a club and was murdered over a dispute, allegedly stemming from his refusal to sell his establishment to a local politician. Kumar was a student of automobile engineering at that time.

Police claimed Pillai had a gang influential in the eastern suburbs of the city. However, he was cleared of all charges.

Retest

helped transport exam material in three days, compared to a process that would have normally taken 15-18 days by road, a source said.

The NTA, in its statement, said experts from academic institutions across the country were involved in preparing multiple sets of question papers for the retest.

Another area where changes were introduced this year was in paper setting and translation. This process usually takes two to three months, a source said, adding that it was completed in two weeks this time. "We had to involve more people...with technology interventions (for translation) along with human inputs," a source said. NEET-UG can be taken in 13 languages including English.

The NTA statement said the retest was conducted with support of the Indian Air Force, the Department of Posts, the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of External Affairs, the Central Armed Police Forces, the Ministry of Electronics and Informa-

tion Technology, the Ministry of Defence, and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

It also underlined support from state governments and district administrations — at exam centres, Aadhaar-based biometric authentication, CCTV monitoring, jammers, and frisking was ensured with the help of the police in the states. State governments had also ensured facilities at exam centres, besides free travel for candidates.

The CCTVs were being monitored through centres at the NTA, the Education Ministry, district collectorates, and 36 Centrally-funded institutions.

The NTA said special arrangements were made for 81 candidates with medical conditions, including a candidate undergoing chemotherapy.

Ahead of the exam Sunday, Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said, "I have complete faith in the NTA, all the state governments, the district administrations, the Indian education system, and India's students." He appealed to people to "not jeopardise the future of the new generation", and "not do anything that can impact the mental health of students."

Ghats

Karnataka have been holding out. Kerala wants its own area to be further reduced, while Karnataka has been continuing to question the entire exercise.

Gujarat, Goa and Maharashtra are the states where the areas to be demarcated are almost agreed upon, top officials from the Environment Ministry said. Tamil Nadu, the sixth affected state, does not have any major divergences on this issue. The 6,914 square km of ESA proposed in the state is smaller than the areas identified in neighbouring Kerala and Karnataka. But the extent is yet to be finalised.

Though the negotiations with Kerala and Karnataka are continuing, the Centre is learnt to be preparing to notify the ESA in the states where an agreement on this issue has either been achieved, or is close to being finalised. This is different from the previous attempts in which the Centre had issued draft notifications for ESAs in all the states together.

In the last draft notification, the sixth one, issued in 2024, a

total area of 56,825.7 square km was proposed to be demarcated as ESA. This was lower than the nearly 60,000 sq km originally identified as ESA by the Kasturirangan panel. The reductions have happened mainly in the highly urbanised state of Kerala, at the repeated insistence of the state government.

A final notification, when it happens, will give more legal teeth for protecting the fragile biodiversity area of the Western Ghats under the Environment Protection Act, 1986, and prohibit activities that threaten the sensitive environment of the region.

Activities like new mining and quarrying projects, setting up of thermal power plants, operation of most-polluting red category of industries, new and expansion projects of buildings and construction with a built-up area of 20,000 square metres or above, are proposed to be completely banned or heavily restricted.

The Western Ghats are one of the eight 'hottest biodiversity hotspots' and the mountain chain was inscribed as a UNESCO world heritage site for being the exclusive home of hundreds of plants and animals.

7 dead

holiday, and many workers were inside their accommodation when the gas spread through the premises.

According to police sources, the ammonia leak originated from the seafood processing unit and quickly affected the residential area inside the campus. Many workers complained of breathing difficulties, while some suffered bleeding from the mouth and nose.

Tiruvallur District Collector S Kavitha said 67 affected workers were rushed to local medical centres immediately after the incident. Nine critically ill patients were later moved by 108 ambulances to the Government Stanley Medical College Hospital in Chennai for advanced treatment.

Personnel from the Periyapalayam police station, Fire and Rescue Services, the Revenue Department, and the Health Department rushed to the spot and carried out rescue operations.

Following a request from the district administration, the National Disaster Response Force deployed a specialised Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear response team from its 4th Battalion in Arakkonam. A 30-member team equipped with gas detection devices, personal protective equipment and specialised rescue gear was sent to assess the impact of the leak, secure the area and assist rescue efforts.

Chief Minister Vijay instructed that an inquiry committee comprising the Director of Industrial Safety and Health, the Pollution Control Board Member-Secretary and the Additional Director of Public Health be constituted. The committee has been asked to submit an interim report within 24 hours and a final report in three days.

The Chief Minister also directed IT Minister R Kumar, the district in-charge minister for Tiruvallur, to visit the spot with monitoring officer K P Karthikeyan and coordinate care for the affected workers with the Collector and district administration.

Sailors

he underwent a one-month course at a Jaipur academy before landing his first job as an "oiler". He now grows *jowar* (sorghum) and *gawar* (cluster beans), though heat and dry weather have made farming "unprofitable" for his parents, two daughters and wife.

Puniya had earlier called his survival a "second life" and vowed never to sail again, but finances changed his mind. "I want to get all my documents ready and return to shipping. I have applied for Aadhaar and PAN cards, and a duplicate passport... nobody is helping us," he said.

Third Engineer Pagalavan

Haridas, 30, of Puducherry, now joins his father and brother on their fishing boat. He is a BBA graduate with five years' experience across four vessels, including repeated stints with Sky Light's RPSL. "When I worked on ships, I earned around Rs 88,000 a month. Today, I earn barely Rs 300 a day," he said.

Haridas has soft copies of his voter ID, PAN and Aadhaar on email but still needs hard copies. He says he has heard nothing from the RPSL or DG Shipping, and his salary was deducted too. "I want to return to shipping because it is the only way to earn a decent living," he said.

Pramod Kumar Yadav, 38, the vessel's Chief Engineer from Alwar in Rajasthan, says he spent "over Rs 15,000 paying officials for paperwork", and is

using "old photocopies" of his Aadhaar card.

Yadav, who has worked at sea for 12 years, says he now farms mustard, wheat, bajra and cotton while digging a borewell to support his parents, wife, sister and son. "Until my documents are ready, I have to do something," he said.

According to Yadav, he earned Rs 4.75 lakh a month as Chief Engineer. Asked if he would sail again, Yadav said, "If we meet with an accident while driving a vehicle, does that mean we will never drive again? If we are destined to die, we can die anywhere," he said.

Srinu Donkani, 23, of Visakhapatnam, served as a "Wiper" (cleaner), among the youngest on board at the entry-level job in the engine department. The son

of daily wagers, he had hoped a career at sea would lift his family out of poverty, but the attack wiped out all the documents he had gathered.

"I still need my birth certificate, SSC certificate, voter ID, PAN card, CDC, SID and Yellow Fever vaccination certificate," he said, adding that he has applied for an Aadhaar card.

Donkani says he also lost a phone worth Rs 30,000 and Rs 5,000 in cash, and alleges that Rs 1.3 lakh in wages remains unpaid by the RPSL.

He trained at an institute in Visakhapatnam, and says his first posting, between Thoothukudi and the Maldives, paid Rs 25,000 a month, rising to Rs 47,000 on his second voyage aboard Sky Light. He now earns Rs 700-1,000 a day at a vehicle

repair workshop with his father and brother. "I was scared after what happened. But now I want to return because I need to earn more money," he said.

Kaushal Sorout, 27, of Hodal in Haryana, has managed to replace only his Aadhaar card so far. "Officials had instructed the RPSL to issue documents and compensate us for our losses, but nothing happened. I keep knocking on the doors of government offices, and everyone sends me somewhere else," he said.

A B.Com graduate, Sorout completed a six-month course at a Lucknow centre. He says that as an "able seaman" on his second voyage, he earned Rs 40,000 a month, up from Rs 33,000 in his first job. He now helps on the wheat farm while

job-hunting. On Thursday, he took a test and appeared for an interview with an MNC.

Bikram Ghosh, 23, of Tikarkhanji village in West Bengal's Purba Bardhaman, was the ship's chief cook and has replaced his Aadhaar, voter ID, PAN card and passport — but "for a price", he says. "I spent around Rs 10,000 paying agents. I still need the CDC, SID and Yellow Fever certificate. Once I get them, I will join a shipping company again, since options are scarce," he said.

Ghosh says he earned Rs 61,000 a month at sea but now helps his grandfather grow vegetables for the local market, adding that he has received neither compensation nor his full salary.

When contacted, Director General of Shipping Shyam Ja-

gannathan said the Directorate remained willing to help crew members facing difficulties with documents or employment.

"I will get the matter followed up. They need not spend money on documentation, as it was assured during their debriefing that documents would be issued to them," he said.

Sumit Singh, director of Lucknow-based SKS Krishi Marine Services, said, "Two days ago, we got instructions from DG Shipping... Their documents will be done soon." Asked about salary and compensation for the loss of valuables and cash, he said, "We have done more than any RPSL company would do. I made multiple trips to Mumbai as part of the effort to bring them all back to India. We also have our limitations."

‘Security was tighter this time’: Layers of checks, strict frisking for NEET re-exam

Mishal Mussaddique & Vidheesha Kuntamalla
New Delhi, June 21

AT 1:32 pm on Sunday, two minutes after gates of a NEET-UG 2026 exam centre had closed, a young woman came sprinting towards the entrance of a government school in New Delhi’s Pandara Road, her admit card clutched tightly in one hand.

She had gone to the wrong examination centre. Breathless and pleading, she explained to security personnel that she had mistakenly reported to school in Dwarka that had a similar name before racing across the city. But protocol was unforgiving. The gates had shut.

Shed stood outside in tears on a sweltering Sunday afternoon, after missing her chance at a re-test for the national-level undergraduate medical entrance exam, which saw over 23



Outside an examination centre in New Delhi on Sunday. TASHI TOBGYAL

lakh candidates appear.

The re-exam was conducted after the National Testing Agency (NTA) cancelled the May 3 examination following allegations of a paper leak.

By the time the re-examination began at 2:15 pm, across 5,440 centres in India and 14 centres abroad, candidates had already navigated biometric verification, face authentication, frisking checkpoints, CCTV sur-

veillance and layers of police security. More than seven lakh personnel — from district officials and invigilators to police officers and central security forces — had been mobilised in what the NTA later described as a “Team Bharat” effort.

Outside examination centres in the Capital, however, the day unfolded under immense stress and anxiety.

At B R Ambedkar School of

Specialised Excellence in South Delhi’s Kalkaji, Pradeep Kumar, a scrap dealer from Burari, waited patiently under a tent erected for parents at the centre. “It is her first attempt,” he said of his daughter, Aditi. “There are no expectations. Let her understand the exam first. If she wants to try again next year, we’ll see.”

Inside the NEET centres, candidates encountered heightened security arrangements. “Earlier, religious threads on our wrists were allowed,” said 18-year-old Tuls, a first-time candidate from Dwarka. “This time they made us remove everything. They even asked me to take off my hairband.”

Several candidates described the security checks as significantly stricter than those in place during the examination held earlier on May 3. Inside a government school in Dwarka Sector 6, candidates

underwent multiple rounds of document verification, biometric authentication and frisking before being allowed to enter examination halls. “They checked my documents twice and frisked me too,” said Shilpa, a Delhi University student appearing for her second attempt at NEET. “The security was tighter this time.”

By late afternoon, the mood outside the centres began to shift. At CM Shri School and PM Shri School in Dwarka Sector 5, barricades lined the road as hundreds of parents gathered outside the gates, fanning themselves in the heat while waiting for the 5:15 pm bell.

As soon as the gates opened, Shalini, an aspirant from Najafgarh, rushed straight towards her mother. “The paper was better than I expected,” she said while adding that the Physics section had been easier in the original May examination.

STUDY TO INCLUDE 3D MAPPING, TECHNICAL ASSESSMENT

Mehrauli collapse: Police seek IIT Delhi’s help to find cause

Alok Singh
New Delhi, June 21

DELHI POLICE has approached IIT Delhi for help in conducting a study to ascertain the exact cause of the collapse of a five-storey building in the Saidulajab near Saket Metro station in South Delhi’s Mehrauli that left six people dead and eight others injured, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

The incident took place on May 30 evening. The structure was originally a four-storey building, but the owner and builders were in the process of constructing two additional floors. One extra floor had already been completed when the building collapsed.

The building housed offices of private companies and a call centre. While the ground, first

and third floors were occupied and operational, the second floor had remained vacant for the past few months.

As per sources, the additional floors are suspected to have contributed to the collapse. However, the police are seeking a detailed structural assessment, including 3D mapping and technical studies, to determine the precise cause.

“Delhi Police approached IIT Delhi earlier this month, and a team of engineers visited the site. A second visit is expected soon, after which the team may submit its report,” a source said.

The study is expected to help investigators determine the exact reason behind the collapse through an expert assessment of the building’s structural integrity, the source

added. As per police, the probe so far has revealed that the building was constructed around eight years ago and that its basement was not structurally capable of bearing the additional load of two more floors.

“One extra floor had already been constructed, while work on another was underway. However, construction had reportedly been halted for several days because of a payment dispute between the builder and the contractor,” the source said.

A few days before the collapse, excavation work was carried out in the basement to install a water tank. Police suspect that this may have further weakened the structure. Police have already arrested the building owner and two builders involved in the construction of the additional floors.

CJP stir: No permission for Day 2 but protesters ready for long haul, refuse to leave Jantar Mantar

Devansh Mittal
New Delhi, June 21

BY AROUND 3:30 pm on Sunday — a day after the Cockroach Janata Party (CJP) held a protest at Jantar Mantar — many grew tired and restless after camping at the site overnight. The harsh summer sun and lack of shade saw many dispersing.

Then an A R Rahman’s rendition of ‘Vande Mataram’ acted as magic. The crowd started to gather near the stage. As tracks like ‘Hindustani’ and ‘Chak De India’ played next, the crowd shook all pain off. CJP founder Abhijeet Dipke urged



At the protest site on Sunday.

protesters to stay at Jantar Mantar till Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigned and on Sunday, they seemed ready for the long haul.

The CJP received an approval from the police for a protest only till 5 pm on Saturday. “There was no arrest, no case,

nor any detention today. Some people, who were creating ruckus, were isolated,” said a senior police officer on Sunday. “They were allowed to hold a protest only till 5 pm yesterday. But protesters have still not left the venue,” he added.

Alauddin Ansari (21) said: “Last night, I wanted to stay, but I went outside to get water and they did not allow me to come inside again. So today, I am not going to step outside at all.” A student of Himachal Pradesh’s Shoolini University, Ansari works at Amazon in Noida.

“I had taken the UGC-NET exam in 2024, and it had gone

well. When news emerged that there was a paper leak, I was heartbroken,” said Prashant Sagar (27), who came all the way from UP’s Hathras. He was at the site on Saturday night. “The ground was simmering hot till around midnight. Police were not allowing food and water at the site initially. Even the water connection inside the toilet was cut. But after repeated requests, they allowed food and water.”

“It’s important that we come here, even if no one resigns. The pictures and videos will create a sense of fear among the authorities,” said Sachin Sangwan (27).

Getting monsoon ready: More than 2,800 potholes repaired in a day

Express News Service
New Delhi, June 21

WITH THE monsoon approaching, the Delhi government’s Public Works Department (PWD) on Sunday carried out a citywide special drive and repaired over 2,800 potholes, officials said.

As per PWD records, 14,757 potholes were identified on roads maintained by the department between January 1 and June 4. Of these, 12,762 had already been repaired. Sunday’s drive was launched to address the remaining identified potholes before the monsoon season, an official said.

PWD Minister Parvesh Sahib Singh inspected repair works at multiple locations across the Capital and reviewed the progress of the exercise. Department officials said engineers, maintenance staff, and field teams were deployed throughout the day, to complete the work within a stipulated time frame.

Speaking during an inspection, Singh said the department intensified road maintenance activities ahead of the rains, when potholes tend to expand and create safety hazards for motorists.

Gurgaon road rage: 2 youths held for assault and vandalism

Express News Service
New Delhi, June 21

Two men were arrested on Saturday for allegedly assaulting a commuter and vandalising his vehicle after a dispute over giving way on the road near Rajiv Chowk in Gurgaon.

The accused, identified as Parth and Paras, both 22, are residents of Fazilpur. As per the complaint filed at the Naharpur Rupa police post, the incident began while the complainant was driving from Sohna Road toward Rajiv Chowk.

He alleged that an SUV, being driven by the accused, narrowly missed colliding with his car. The accused initially blocked the complainant’s vehicle and verbally abused him. Though the victim managed to drive away, the accused intercepted him again near Rajiv Chowk by parking their SUV directly in front of his car. The duo then allegedly smashed the windows of the complainant’s vehicle with sticks, an officer said.

The purported video of the incident has gone viral on social media in which the complainant, who filmed from inside his car, is screaming at the accused before turning to bystanders for help, officers said.



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New Delhi

INSIDE THE RACE TO BUILD THE NEXT BLUSMART

Delhi's EV Cab Void

BluSmart's downfall opened a rare gap in NCR's ride-hailing market. But as startups, fleet operators and global entrants rush in, growth has been slow and fraught with challenges, reports **Devansh Mittal**

FOR MONTHS after the ride-hailing service BluSmart shut down, Arjun Pratap Chauhan continued to make the same small mistake.

Before leaving home in Delhi, the 24-year-old musician would unlock his phone, type the company's name into the search bar and only then remember that there was no car to book.

The app had become a habit. If he was meeting friends in Gurgaon or heading anywhere across the city for dinner, he would reserve a ride in advance and expect, with little thought, that it would arrive.

What he misses now is not the electric vehicles that helped make BluSmart one of national capital's most recognisable mobility startups.

It is the certainty.

"The cars were cleaner. Drivers cancelled less often," Arjun said. "I haven't found anything that works the same way."

In April 2025, BluSmart suspended operations after allegations of fund diversion surfaced around related party entity Gen-sol Engineering.

More than a year later, Arjun says he still hasn't found a replacement.

"I don't mind paying Rs 100 extra," he said. "I just haven't found something that works like BluSmart."

His complaint is not unusual.

In Delhi-NCR, BluSmart's shutdown left behind more than idle electric vehicles and displaced drivers. It also left behind customers who had grown accustomed to a more reliable ride experience.

And yet, industry insiders say, no new entrant in the NCR has emerged as a clear successor.

Industry insiders say replacing BluSmart has proven more difficult than simply launching another electric cab fleet. Part of the challenge is operational: inconsistent charging infrastructure and the complexity of running tightly controlled fleets.

But executives and analysts also point to a larger business problem – maintaining that level of service, in NCR, requires significant investment, and scaling it sustainably remains difficult.

The contenders

For some founders, BluSmart's exit created space to build something new.

Sahil Jindal, Managing Director of the DS Jindal group, says he had explored entering the EV cab business for nearly two years but held back while BluSmart dominated the market.

Instead, he and his associates briefly considered moving upmarket into luxury mobility before shelving the idea.

BluSmart's shutdown changed that.

"That is when I thought this is the right space," he said. "There was a complete vacuum in the market."

Soon after, Sahil launched Trevel, an electric cab company. Today, Trevel operates 25 electric cabs in Gurgaon and plans to deploy 20,000 vehicles over the next five years.

Others, too, have placed their bets on the market.

The largest bet so far has come from Reflex Mobility, a Chennai-based fleet operator led by Anirudh Arun, the former chief executive at BluSmart. Reflex operates roughly 2000 cars across India; 1600 of them are electric.

One afternoon in Gurgaon, at an underground charging hub beneath a shopping complex in Sector 29, drivers gathered beside rows of plugged-in electric vehicles waiting for their next assignments. Among them was Kapil, who, like most of his fellow drivers, fleet managers, and the CEO, worked at BluSmart.

Work has been slower than he expected. "I do only two or three rides a day right now," he said.

The lower number of rides Kapil and other drivers complete is a deliberate choice. Rather than compete immediately for every consumer booking, Reflex, Anirudh says, has concentrated on transporting office (B2B) employees along fixed routes.

For electric vehicles, predictability matters. A taxi stranded with a depleted battery can disrupt an entire chain of rides. Scheduled corporate commutes are easier to manage than the uncertainty of on-demand travel across the sprawling NCR.

"When we had thousands of cars at BluSmart, if one vehicle ran out of charge, another nearby could take over the book-



Lakshmi Kumari drives her electric cab; (top) a Jio-BP charging and parking station for electric cabs at Trillium Avenue in Gurgaon Sector 29. GAJENDRA YADAV

“Operations have to be planned to maximise bookings and minimise non-revenue kilometres, such as trips to charging stations. EVs need to be used as much as possible: while they cost more upfront than petrol or CNG cars, their running costs are lower”

SHYAMASIS DAS,
CENTRE FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROGRESS

ing," Anirudh said. "Today we don't yet have that scale." However, Reflex has now started offering on-demand rides but only on a small scale for now.

For customers like Arjun, however, this new EV fleet makes little difference.

That may change soon, though: another fleet operator, which launched in Delhi-NCR just a few weeks ago, could soon become available to customers like him.

Vietnamese green-mobility company Green SM entered India's cab-hailing market earlier this month with a fleet of 1,000 turquoise electric SUVs in Delhi-NCR. India becomes the company's fifth market after Vietnam, Laos, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

At a launch event held on June 5, Manoj Ravikanti, Green SM India's Chief Operating Officer, outlined a more consumer-facing approach. "We will get around 80% of our commuters directly, while getting the remaining through B2B tie ups and partnerships," he said.

The arrival of a global player suggests that confidence in electric mobility has not disappeared with BluSmart. "Delhi repre-

sents India with all of its diversity. We want to test our model and stabilize our operations here, after which we will look at other markets," Manoj said.

Industry insiders say that Green SM entered with 1,000 vehicles from the outset because scale itself is part of its strategy to attract customers. "It is important for people to see your cars on the road to build a customer base, and for that, you need scale," says Shyamasis Das, who works on electric mobility at Delhi-based think-tank Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP).

Why replacing BluSmart is harder than it looks

The problem, industry insiders say, was never finding customers.

The problem was everything that happened after a customer pressed 'Book'.

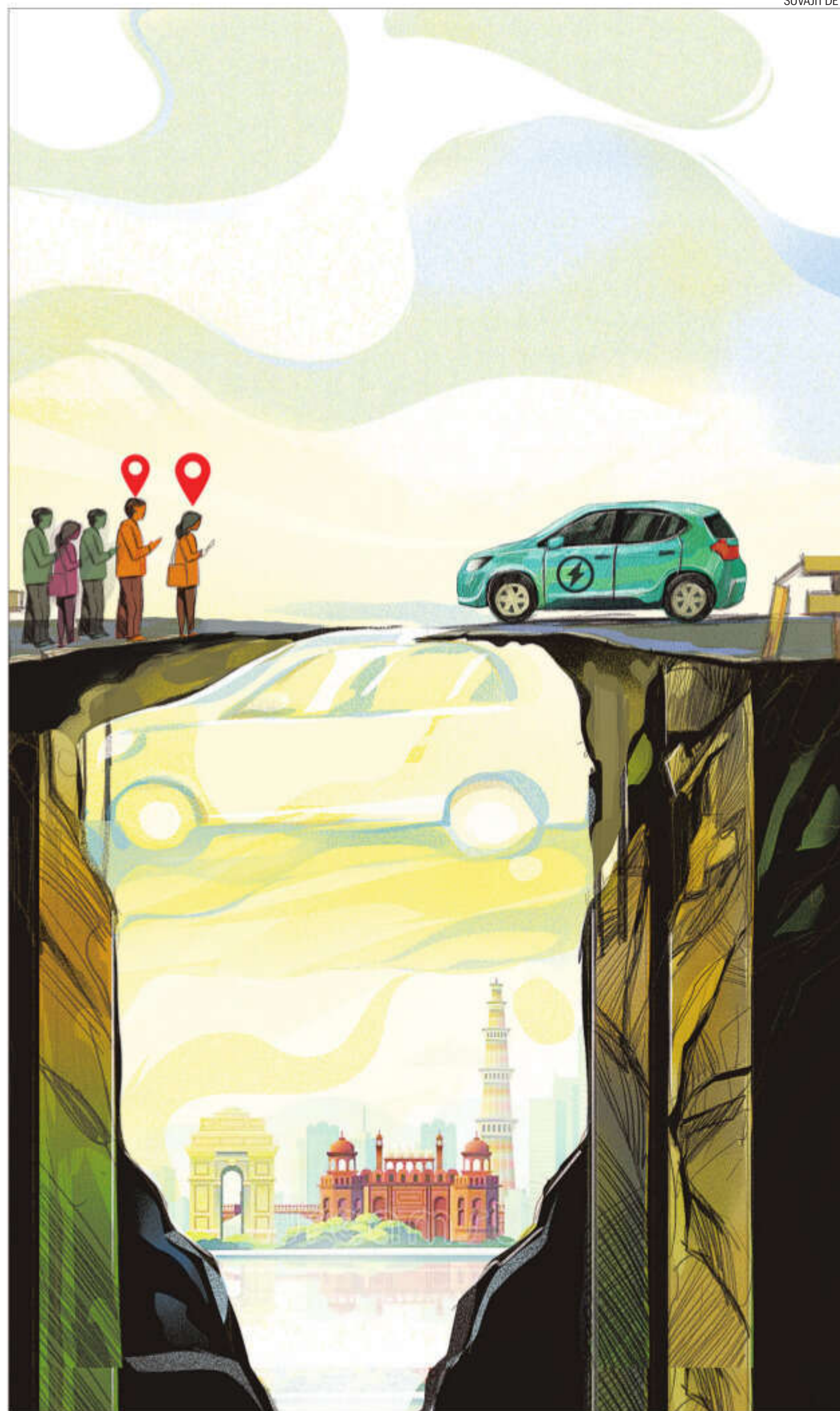
For years, ride-hailing companies in India have relied on a relatively simple arrangement: drivers supply their own vehicles, platforms supply passengers, and fuel stations are rarely more than a few minutes away.

Electric fleets change that equation. "EV operations are not as straightforward as they seem," Anirudh says.

"Consider a cab dispatched to Noida, where charging options may be sparse. If the vehicle runs low on battery mid-route, the disruption affects not just the driver but the rider as well."

Charging remains another constraint for electric mobility, experts say. Unlike ICE vehicles, EVs spend longer off the road to recharge, limiting daily trips and, in turn, earnings.

"Operations have to be planned to maximise bookings and minimise non-revenue kilometres, such as trips to charging stations. EVs need to be used as much as possible: while they cost more upfront than petrol or CNG cars, their running costs are



TREVEL

CURRENT FLEET

25 E-CABS (in Gurgaon)

TARGET FLEET

20,000

CARS in 5 years

Founders: Sahil Jindal, Rishi Raj Kochhar, Mishu Ahluwalia

REFEX MOBILITY

TOTAL FLEET

2,000 CARS

(200 in Gurgaon)

EV FLEET

1,600 CARS

CEO: Anirudh Arun (former BluSmart CEO)

FOCUS: B2B employee transport, expanding into on-demand rides

GREEN SM INDIA

LAUNCH FLEET

1,000

ELECTRIC SUVs

MARKET: DELHI-NCR

TARGET FLEET

10,000 CARS

PARENT COMPANY
Vietnamese mobility firm Green SM

NAVIGET

APP LAUNCHED

3 MONTHS AGO

CURRENT SCALE

50 RIDES/DAY

MODEL: Partners with fleet operators instead of owning vehicles

SHOFFR

CURRENT FLEET

250 E-CABS

(around 90 in Delhi)

TARGET FLEET

500 CARS in 1 year

FOUNDER: Vikas Bardia

lower," Shyamasis says.

Uber and Rapido did not respond to queries about their electrification efforts.

The obstacles are also partly technological and financial, industry insiders point out.

Platforms such as Uber and Rapido largely rely on drivers bringing their own vehicles and using the app to find customers. BluSmart took the opposite approach, owning or leasing vehicles in an effort to standardise maintenance and customer experience.

"In the West, many Uber drivers work part-time and treat their car as a personal asset, so they maintain it well," said Anmol Sharma, founder of Naviget, a new EV-first ride-hailing startup. "In India, drivers often depend entirely on the vehicle for income, which can lead to heavy usage and less maintenance."

To deliver a more consistent service, BluSmart retained control of its fleet. Ownership gave the company tighter control over quality, said Shivani Palepu, senior principal analyst at Gartner, adding that such operators rely on strict technological and operational checks to maintain their vehicles.

Companies also tend to own EVs because high upfront costs and uncertainty over battery life make drivers less likely to buy them, Anirudh said.

But ownership creates another problem. Buying and maintaining vehicles requires significant capital expenditure. "Quality of service generally diminishes as you scale, so that will have to be tightly controlled," Shivani said.

Even operators that entered the electric cab market while BluSmart was still active have expanded cautiously.

Vikas Bardia, founder of Shoffr, a Bengaluru-based electric taxi company which runs around 90 cars in Delhi-NCR and around 160 in Bengaluru and Hyderabad, said the company does not want to be the biggest player.

"Our focus is on solving underlying challenges – building a dependable pipeline of drivers, improving operational efficiency and developing our own servicing and technology capabilities as we grow," Bardia said.

Anmol says there is a third option: don't own the cars – partner with fleet owners instead.

"Owning a vehicle is very expensive, and then you have to deal with wear and tear on these expensive assets. This is also where BluSmart was wrong," he says.

Anmol argues that fleet operators should own the vehicles while technology companies focus on setting standards and supplying demand. His company works with fleet partners, providing training protocols, maintenance requirements and bookings through its plat-

form.

Whether that model succeeds remains uncertain. The company is still small, completing only a handful of rides each day.

As new startups continue trying to solve the riddle of scaling the BluSmart model without bleeding cash, for many drivers, meanwhile, the disruption has proved more enduring.

The people left behind

Three years ago, when Lakshmi Kumari was handed the keys to a Tata Tigor. At the time, she was among the first women recruited by BluSmart.

For Laxmi, then in her early twenties, the position offered something she had rarely experienced before: predictability. She could plan her finances. She could continue her studies. "Everything was going so well," she recalled. "Customers were respectful, and I was earning more than other cab drivers."

Then came the allegations that engulfed the company.

When news of the crisis began spreading in April 2025, Laxmi initially struggled to believe it. In the weeks that followed, she found herself on the phone with other women drivers, exchanging job leads.

What happens now?

The answer arrived slowly. "Some drivers left the industry altogether. Others moved between employers searching for work," she recalls. Eventually, Laxmi heard that former BluSmart employees were being hired by Reflex.

She joined months later.

The job restored a measure of stability. "However, pay was lower. The hours were longer," she says.

By then, Laxmi had completed her undergraduate degree and enrolled in a master's program in public administration. Balancing work and study became increasingly difficult.

"Drivers were expected to work fixed 12-hour shifts; taking more than one day off beyond the required 26 working days in a month meant a deduction of Rs 1,000," she says.

Over time, the schedule began to compete with her studies. In December, she left again – this time for Giriraj Mobility Services, where the pay is lower but the hours are easier to manage.

"The salary is the lowest here," she said, "but I have more freedom."

What Laxmi misses is not simply a former employer, but the stability BluSmart briefly provided. She is not alone. Hundreds of former drivers are still rebuilding after the company's collapse. And many, like Laxmi, are still waiting to see whether anyone can fill the vacuum BluSmart left behind.

SUVAJIT DEY

‘Absurd’: India slams Zardari’s statement on ‘demolition threats’

Express News Service
New Delhi, June 21

THE CENTRE has rejected Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari’s statement on alleged demolition threats facing Muslim religious sites in India.

“India categorically rejects the unwarranted comments made by the President of Pakistan. He has, in any case, no locus standi to comment on matters that are internal to India,” said Randhir Jaiswal, official spokesperson, MEA.

“These comments are particularly absurd given Pakistan’s own abysmal record on human rights, which is a matter of global commentary,” he said. “..The (Pakistan) President’s remarks can only be read as a deliberate political attack, driven by Pakistan’s national policies of bigotry and hatred,” he said.

The MEA’s response came after Zardari in a post on X referred to the alleged demolition threats facing the 1,000-year-old Masjid Ganj Shaheeda in Varanasi and urged the Indian authorities to halt such actions.

PM Modi inducts three new vessels into Indian Navy at Kolkata port

Atri Mitra
Kolkata, June 21

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi inducted three new indigenously built naval vessels into the Indian Navy during his visit to Kolkata on Sunday, while remarking that India is no longer just a buyer but also a manufacturer and seller of modern weapons to many countries.

Addressing the formal commissioning of the three indigenously built naval ships at a ceremony at the Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port here, the PM said, “Today, India is no longer just a buyer; it is manufacturing and selling modern weapons to many countries and also building indigenous strength.”

The three ships inducted into the Indian Navy on Sunday are INS Dunagiri, an advanced stealth frigate; INS Sanshodhak, a survey vessel (large); and INS Agray, an anti-submarine warfare shallow water craft. Highlighting the importance of the warships, the PM said, “These were made in India and designed in India.

The skill and hard work of in-



PM Narendra Modi, flanked by West Bengal CM Suvenudhikari and Governor R N Ravi, during a ceremony to commission two Indian Navy warships and a survey vessel in Kolkata on Sunday. PTI

dian engineers lie behind them. This is the greatest strength of New India. Today, India no longer wants to remain merely a buyer in the defence sector.”

He added, “Our military strength cannot become a market for the world. The identity of our strength does not lie in becoming a global market, but in our self-reliance. India wants to become a producer. The day we become a producer, we will also become a decision-maker.” As per experts, the commissioning of these vessels is expected to enhance India’s maritime combat capabilities, underwater and surface warfare readiness,

hydrographic surveys, and maritime domain awareness.

The PM said that the induction of the three ships would also increase employment in eastern India. Praising the state, Modi said: “Bengal has given momentum to India’s growth. It is from Bengal that the campaign for a self-reliant, secure India is being carried forward. To become strong in defense, one must also be powerful at sea.”

Talking about the state’s recent regime change, Modi said, “Bengal is an important land for connectivity by waterways. The course of the Hooghly River has witnessed history changing. It

has witnessed a new chapter and a new journey of development. Significantly, this port is named after Bengal’s illustrious son, Syama Prasad Mookerjee.”

Chief Minister Suvenudhikari was also present at the event, apart from government officials and senior Navy and Air Force officers.

The vessels were designed by Navy’s Warship Design Bureau and built by Kolkata-based Defence PSU Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers Ltd. The warships were ready in March, their formal handover to the Navy remained pending till now. WITH PTI INPUTS

DAY AFTER VERDICT ON HIS FATHER’S KILLING

Omraje Nimbalkar joins Shinde group

Vallab Ozarkar
Mumbai, June 21

A DAY after a special CBI court acquitted all eight accused in the 2006 murder of his father, former Congress leader Pavanraje Nimbalkar, Osmanabad MP Omraje Nimbalkar on Sunday crossed over to the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena, becoming the crucial sixth MP backing the rebellion.

The move comes after days of hectic political activity, with both the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) and the Shinde camp making last-minute attempts to secure Nimbalkar’s support. His decision is significant because it gives the rebel group the numbers required to cross the two-thirds mark among the Sena (UBT)’s Lok Sabha MPs.

Announcing his decision before supporters and party workers, Nimbalkar said the switch was dictated by the need to secure development funds and complete pending works in his constituency.

“In local body elections in Dharashiv, despite all our efforts, we could not win. We never lacked commitment or hard work, but being out of power affected our ability to help people,” he said. Dismissing claims that the move was driven by personal considerations or political pressure, Nimbalkar said, “I am not going with the ruling side for money or personal benefit. I am not the kind of person who takes decisions for personal gain, nor am I under pressure because of any CBI or ED case. This decision is for development, and for that we need to be in power. We will now show how power can be used for the welfare of the people of Dharashiv.”

The MP said he had repeatedly faced difficulties in meeting the expectations of constituents who approached him with demands for basic infrastructure and public works.



Omraje Nimbalkar is an MP from Osmanabad PTI

“People come to their MP expecting solutions... For the last seven years, people have had huge expectations from me. I will continue to work honestly to fulfil those expectations,” he said.

He added that he would now work under Chief Minister Eknath Shinde’s leadership to push long-pending projects in the region “Projects such as the Krishna-Marathwada irrigation scheme and several barrage works have remained incomplete for years. We will show people how power can be used for development and not merely for making announcements.”

The timing of the decision has drawn attention as it came just a day after the verdict in the Pavanraje Nimbalkar murder case. On Saturday, a special CBI court acquitted all eight accused, including former minister Padamsinh Patil in the case. Omraje Nimbalkar had publicly expressed disappointment over the verdict and later revealed that he had spoken to Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis, Deputy Chief Minister Shinde and Union Home Minister Amit Shah. The state government subsequently announced that the CBI would challenge the acquittal before the Bombay High Court.

Despite joining the rival camp, Nimbalkar refrained from attacking the Thackeray family and instead went out of

his way to acknowledge their support. “I have received immense affection, blessings and support from Uddhavji, Aadiyaji and everyone in the Thackeray family. I have never spoken a bad word about anyone and will never do so,” he said.

Appealing to his supporters to not target his former party leadership, he said, “I have told all my workers that not a single disrespectful word should be spoken about Matoshree. No one should make any objectionable comments.”

Late on Saturday, Sena UBT MLAs Varun Sardesai and Kailas Patil, both considered close to Uddhav Thackeray, reached Nimbalkar’s Pune residence and held discussions with him for nearly an hour. Party sources said Uddhav Thackeray had also directly spoke to Omraje Nimbalkar on phone and sought to understand his stand amid the ongoing political developments. However the reachout seemed to have failed.

Nimbalkar was not the only rebel MP to justify his switch on development grounds. MP Nagesh Ashtikar, another member of the breakaway group, said the lack of funds had stalled projects in his constituency and left him with little choice but to align with the ruling side.

Rejecting suggestions that the rebellion was ideological, Ashtikar said, “I have not abandoned the ideology. I am going from Sena to Sena only, not anywhere else.” Avoiding any criticism of Uddhav Thackeray, he said, “I am not upset with Uddhav saheb, but without power, the work of the people was not happening.”

The statements from Nimbalkar and Ashtikar indicate a conscious effort by the rebel MPs to present their move as a practical decision linked to governance and development rather than a revolt against the Thackeray leadership.

Nitish Kumar endorsed as JD(U) national president, son Nishant as ‘party’s future’

Santosh Singh
Patna, June 21

AS THE JD (U) completed the formality of endorsing former CM Nitish Kumar as its national president on Sunday, all top party leaders declared with voice vote that Bihar health minister and Nitish Kumar’s son Nishant Kumar was the “future of the party”.

The party held meetings of its state and national councils to complete the procedure of endorsing its state president Umesh Kushwaha and national president Nitish Kumar on Sunday. The meetings were attended by JD (U) national working president Sanjay Kumar Jha, Union minister and JD (U) MP Rajeev Ranjan Singh alias Lalan Singh, Deputy CMs Bijendra Prasad Yadav and Vijay Kumar Choudhary, JD (U) leader in the Assembly Shrawan Kumar, and health minister Nishant Kumar. Nitish Kumar, however, attended only the national council meet.



JD(U) national president Nitish Kumar and working president Sanjay Jha in Patna on Saturday. PTI

Jha told The Indian Express: “I have clearly said in the party meeting, in the presence of our national president Nitish Kumar, that Nishant Kumar is the future of the party. I also re-

iterated that Nishant alone is the future of the party and would carry forward the legacy of his illustrious father.”

Lalan Singh and Shrawan Kumar, also a minister in the Bihar government, echoed similar sentiments at the party forum. This was the first key meeting of the Janata Dal (United) after Nitish Kumar quit as Bihar CM around two months ago.

For his part, Nishant Kumar said: “We have to work hard on ground to carry forward the legacy of Nitish Kumar. I thank all party leaders and workers for giving me some important role to play.”

A senior JD (U) source said: “The biggest takeaway of the party meeting is the clear endorsement of Nishant Kumar as its future leader. The fact that the message went out from the highest party forum in the presence of Nitish Kumar sent a clear message to the rank and file.”

Karnataka CM meets Uddhav

Press Trust of India
Mumbai, June 21

KARNATAKA CHIEF Minister D K Shivakumar met Shiv Sena (UBT) president Uddhav Thackeray at his Mumbai’s residence on Saturday. He visited Matoshri, the Bandra residence of the Thackerays, on Saturday. Shivakumar was in Mumbai to attend the wedding of NCP (SP) MP Supriya Sule’s daughter. “Glad to meet former Maharashtra Chief Minister Shri Uddhav Thackeray and his family, along with Shri Sanjay Raut, Member of Parliament, in Mumbai. We had a warm interaction and exchanged views on matters of public interest,” Shivakumar said in a post on Facebook.

SALUTE THE SOLDIER

BORDER SECURITY FORCE

Director General and all Ranks of Border Security Force remember its gallant Jawans on their Balidan Diwas.

 CONSTABLE HARI SHANKAR TIWARI 50 BN BSF 08.12.1967 22.06.1992	 NAIK INDRA BAHADUR GURANG 50 BN BSF 18.10.1945 22.06.1992	 HEAD CONSTABLE YUDHBIR SINGH 194 BN BSF 05.07.1967 22.06.2000
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CENTRAL RESERVE POLICE FORCE

 Veer Balidani Lance Naik Ram Murmu 10 Bn 02-03-1965 To 22-06-2000	DG and all Ranks of #CRPF pay solemn tribute to Lance Naik Ram Murmu of 10 Bn, who made the supreme sacrifice after being grievously injured in a cowardly attack by a militant in Baramulla, J&K on 22 June 2000. CRPF salutes the bravehearts and pledges never to let his sacrifice go in vain.
 Veer Balidani Constable K. C. Sahoo 137 Bn 06-05-1980 To 22-06-2008	DG and all Ranks of #CRPF pay solemn tribute to Constable K. C. Sahoo of 137 Bn, who made the supreme sacrifice after being injured in gun battle with militants in Srinagar on 22 June 2008. #CRPF salutes the braveheart and pledges never to let his sacrifice go in vain.
 Veer Balidani Constable S. Prem Kumar Singh 23 Bn 01-03-1976 To 22-06-2002	DG and all Ranks of #CRPF pay solemn tribute to Constable S. Prem Kumar Singh of 23 Bn, who was seriously injured in an ambush by militants on 28 May 2002 in Banihal district, J&K and breathed his last on 22 June 2002 during treatment. #CRPF salutes the braveheart and pledges never to let his sacrifice go in vain.

DHARANIDHAR UNIVERSITY,
KEONJHAR-758001

No. 2229 /DDUC/ESTT. /2026 Date: 19.06.2026

RECRUITMENT NOTICE

Applications are invited from eligible candidates as per UGC eligibility criteria (UGC Notification 18th July 2018 and subsequent amendments) to fill up various faculty positions in the Department of Anthropology (Arts), B.Ed., Botany, Chemistry, Commerce, Computer Science, Economics, Education, English, Geology, History, Material Science, Mathematics, Odia, Philosophy, Political Science, Physics, Sanskrit, Sociology and Zoology. Please refer website <https://himsrecruitment.odisha.gov.in/> for vacancy details notification wise.

The filled-in application should be submitted Online in the **HIMS portal: <https://himsrecruitment.odisha.gov.in/>**) which will be available from 22.06.2026 onwards. Candidates are required to complete the application in all respects and upload all necessary supporting documents on or before 27.07.2026.

In addition, a hardcopy of downloaded application submitted online in HIMS portal along with all relevant documents must be sent only via Speed post/ Registered post to the Registrar, Dharanidhar University, Keonjhar, District- Keonjhar, Odisha, PIN- 758001 in a A4 size envelope superscribed. Applications for the post of..... so as to reach on before 07.08.2026 by 05:30 p.m.Applications received after due time and date will not be entertained under any circumstances.

Candidates are advised to visit <https://dduniversity.ac.in>, regularly for further updates till completion of recruitment process.

By Order of the Vice-Chancellor
Sd/-
Registrar
Dharanidhar University, Keonjhar

OIPR/11001/11126/1/26-27/0003

IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUDICATURE AT BILASPUR CHHATTISGARH
CAVEAT APPLICATION NO. 2026 [W.P. (S) NO. 2026]
CAVEATOR/APPLICANT : South Eastern Coalfield Limited,
PROPOSED RESPONDENT : Through General Manager (Manpower), South Eastern Coalfield Limited, Headquarter, Seepat Road, Bilaspur (G.G.).

VERSUS
Public in General

NON-APPLICANTS
PROPOSED PETITIONER
CAVEAT APPLICATION UNDER SECTION 148A OF CIVIL PROCEEDURE CODE

The above named Caveator/Applicant/Proposed Respondent SECL most humbly begs to submit as under:

1. That, the Caveator / Proposed respondents i.e. the Management of SECL issued Employment Notification / letter no. SECL/HR/MP/Recruitment/2026/166 dated 08-04-2026 in respect of recruitment to the post of Mining Sirdar T&S Grade C, Dy Surveyor T&S Grade C (Mining) and Assistant Foreman (Electrical) T&S Grade C and invited application from the open market. Now notice for schedule of examination has been issued vide letter no. SECL/MP/RECT/2026/549 dated 19/06/2026 which is to be held on 02-07-2026. The copy of Employment Notification / letter no. SECL/ HR/MP/Recruitment /2026/166 dated 08-04-2026 and The copy of Notice/ letter no. SECL/MP/RECT/2026/549 dated 19/06/2026 are enclosed herewith as **ANNEXURE C1**.

2. That the proposed petitioner/non-applicant / any candidates/public in General may file the Writ Petition (Service) under Article 226/227 of the Constitution of India before this Hon'ble High Court against Employment Notification / letter no. SECL/HR/MP/Recruitment/2026/166 dated 08-04-2026 and Notice/letter no. SECL/MP/RECT/2026/549 dated 19/06/2026 issued by the Caveator, proposed respondent/SECL and may also seek interim relief against the said notice.

3. It is, therefore, requested that this Hon'ble Court be pleased to hear the Caveators/ Applicants/Proposed respondent/SECL before passing any interim order by this Hon'ble Court against Employment Notification / letter no. SECL/HR/MP/Recruitment/2026/166 dated 08-04-2026 and Notice/letter no. SECL/MP/RECT/2026/549 dated 19/06/2026.

4. The copy of the caveat application has been published in News Paper, The Copy of the News Paper publication is filed herewith as **ANNEXURE C2**.

PRAYER

It is, therefore, prayed that this Hon'ble Court be pleased to hear the Caveator/ Applicant/Proposed Respondents before passing any interim order in favour of the proposed petitioner against Employment Notification / letter no. SECL/HR/MP/Recruitment /2026/166 dated 08-04-2026 and Notice/letter no. SECL/MP/RECT/2026/549 dated 19/06/2026, in the interest of justice.

Bilaspur (Vinod Deshmukh)
Dated: 20-06-2026 Counsel for caveator/proposed respondent/SECL

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON

See Section 82 Cr. P.C.

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused Person **Rajnikant S/o:** Sh. Tarakant, **R/o:** C-144, Gali No. 22, Khajuri Khas **Delhi** has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in **Case No. 806/2017, FIR No. 1065/2015, U/S: 354/354B/451 IPC & 4DP, PS: Khajuri Khas, Delhi**, and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said accused person(s) **Rajnikant**, cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused person(s) **Rajnikant**, has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant). Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused person **Rajnikant**, of **Case No. 806/2017, FIR No. 1065/2015, U/S: 354/354B/451 IPC & 4DP, PS: Khajuri Khas, Delhi**, is required to appear before this Court to answer the said complaint on or before **24.07.2026**.

By Order
Rishika Srivastava
Judicial Magistrate First Class
Mahila Court-01 North East
Karkardooma Court, Delhi

DP/8206/NE/2026
(Court Matter)

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in conversation with
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JOURNALISM OF COURAGE



‘Unofficial’ Review

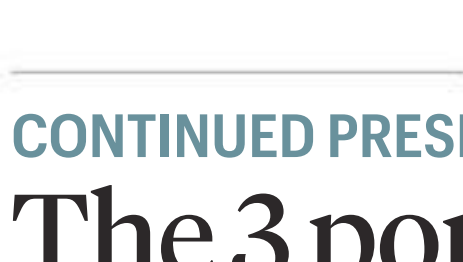
RAILWAY MINISTER Ashwini Vaishnaw has a unique way of reviewing the projects of his ministry. He often goes on unannounced inspections to redeveloped stations and other railway-related venues and engages in conversations with passengers, TTEs and cleaning crew about the project. His close aides say this informal sharing of information may not happen during routine official briefings. Recently, Vaishnaw was travelling on a train between two project inaugurations in Rajasthan when he struck a conversation with officers about execution gaps, construction bottlenecks and engineering solutions. After the discussions, he convened a meeting with senior officials regarding the redressal of specific issues such as underpass water leakage, said sources.

In Company of Film Stars

AFTER CYCLING with Jackie Shroff in Mumbai earlier this week, Union Sports and Labour Minister Mansukh Mandaviya celebrated International Yoga Day with another film star in the Capital on Sunday. He practiced yoga alongside actor Akshay Kumar at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium. In a conversation with the actor, the minister also spoke of his love for cycling and his inspiration for the ‘Sundays on Cycle’ initiative launched by his ministry. Mandaviya has been participating in cycling events across the country with people from different walks of life — students, police personnel, health professionals, journalists among others.

Plantation Drive on Birthday

AMID THE ongoing preparations for Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh early next year, the Samajwadi Party (SP) has decided to run a week-long plantation drive from July 1 — on the birthday of party president Akhilesh Yadav — in all 403 Assembly segments in the state. A similar initiative is being run by the ruling BJP called ‘Ek Ped Mae Naam’, linking love for mothers to nature. The SP has sent written communications to its district units to make arrangements for the campaign. According to party leaders, the drive is aimed at making UP “pollution free”.



NORTHERN LIGHTS

BY MANRAJ GREWAL SHARMA

A WEEKLY DISPATCH ON THE POLITICS AND IDEAS SHAPING NORTH INDIA

IT IS strange that Punjab’s politics continues to be defined by just a handful of men. One is the most famous Sikh ruler who ruled over the largest trans-regional empire in the north. Another is a freedom fighter, an extraordinarily brave, bright,

Times Square to Nicobar: World marks Yoga Day



(Clockwise from above) People perform yoga at Times Square in New York; in Kozhikode, Kerala; Indian Coast Guard personnel in Andaman and Nicobar; and local residents in Srinagar, J&K, on the occasion of International Yoga Day on Sunday. PTI/SHUAIB MASOODI



TMC No. 2 to ‘fall guy’: How Abhishek becomes lightning rod for party meltdown

Ravik Bhattacharya & Atri Mitra
Kolkata, June 21

TMC’s national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee met Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla Friday to submit petitions seeking disqualification of 20 party MPs who recently jumped ship. This was a desperate attempt to counter the revolt of 20 of the party’s 28 Lok Sabha MPs, who announced their merger with the NCPI, and met the Speaker to seek their recognition as a separate bloc on June 14.

The split in the Abhishek-led TMC parliamentary party came days after nearly 60 of the party’s 80 MLAs defied its leadership’s selection of Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay as the LoP, naming instead Ritabrata Banerjee as their legislature party leader. While these splits have created an existential crisis for the Mamata Banerjee-led TMC, it is her nephew Abhishek, 38, who has faced the brunt of the party’s unravelling putting his political future at stake.

Abhishek, who until one-and-a-half months ago was the TMC’s undisputed number two, has now been under siege since the party’s debacle in the Bengal Assembly elections in early May.

Both TMC rebel groups, of MLAs and MPs, have accused his “high-handed leadership” and his “inaccessibility and arrogance” as a prime reason for



TMC’s unravelling has put the MP’s political future at stake. FILE

their rebellion.

During a meeting convened by Mamata on May 19 to take stock of the party’s defeat, several MLAs blamed Abhishek’s leadership. Some questioned him over party candidate Jahanvir Khan’s move to withdraw from the Faltas seat repoll. Jahanvir was later arrested under various charges, even as his proximity to Abhishek appeared to be one reason for the TMC dissidents’ resentment.

After the party leadership picked Sobhandeb as the LoP, Ritabrata and Sandipan Saha, complained to Assembly Speaker Rithindra Bose that their signatures were allegedly forged in the party’s resolution on the matter. This triggered an implosion in the TMC’s legislature party. Later, about 60 MLAs chose Ritabrata as their leader, with Speaker Bose recognising him as the LoP.

Ritabrata then targeted Abhishek, holding him responsible for the TMC’s plight. “Abhishek Banerjee has no connection with the legislature party,” he said, urging Mamata to “guide” them as their “chief advisor”. Other rebel MLAs also said while they respected Mamata they would never accept Abhishek. Later, when the 20 MPs revolted and pledged their support to the NDA, they too blamed Abhishek for the crisis gripping the TMC.

Soon after the poll results, the Kolkata Municipal Corporation issued notices to a total of 17 premises linked to Abhishek, his parents and his firm over alleged unauthorised constructions. The police also registered cases over some of his alleged “inflammatory remarks” during the poll campaign. Abhishek’s name has also figured in alleged cattle and coal smuggling cases being probed by the CBI and ED.

“The challenges before Abhishek Banerjee, who still enjoys support of Mamata Banerjee, are daunting and unprecedented. The TMC is fighting a battle for survival and so is

Abhishek, for his political future. On one hand the rebel MPs and MLAs have split the party, and on the other hand, multiple state and central agencies are issuing him summons in case after case,” said a senior party leader close to Mamata. **FULL REPORT ON**

WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

As regional parties splinter, BJP seeks to isolate Congress, reshape Opposition

CAPITAL CONTEXT
BY LIZ MATHEW

A WEEKLY LOOK AT POLITICS IN A STATE FROM THE VANTAGE POINT OF NEW DELHI

THE RESULTS of the recent Assembly election have opened up an opportunity for the BJP to weaken the Congress, which had shown signs of revival in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, and undercut Leader of the Opposition (LoP) Rahul Gandhi.

BJP sources said its political strategy since the 2024 Lok Sabha election has been aimed at isolating and systematically weakening the Congress, eroding its traditional support bases, and diminishing Gandhi’s political influence. Critics, however, argue that these aggressive moves stem from the BJP’s disappointment with its below-expectation performance in the last Lok Sabha polls.

The party’s resolve to expand its parliamentary strength intensified further after the government suffered a significant setback in April when the Lok Sabha defeated the Constitution (One Hundred and Thirty-First Amendment) Bill, 2026, BJP leaders said.

With the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) heading towards a split, the BJP may be moving closer to securing the number required for pushing through key Constitutional amendments. In recent times, both the TMC and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) have witnessed groups of MPs breaking away, with some extending

PM’s message: Should aim to become more flexible at 40 than 20

Sweetie Kumari
Kolkata, June 21

AS THE world marked the 12th International Yoga Day on Sunday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said yoga has become the largest global community celebration, binding people across countries and cultures.

Kicking off the day’s celebrations at Kolkata’s iconic Red Road, Modi said June 21, the longest day of the year, or summer solstice, in the northern hemisphere, is now known to the world as a day of yoga.

“June 21, which marks the longest day on Earth, has now become the largest community celebration day because of yoga. Yoga brings people together. I congratulate the people of the world on this occasion,” he said.

He also emphasised this year’s theme for the celebrations, ‘Yoga for Healthy Ageing’, and said, “Yoga is not just physical exercise, not restricted to any age group; it is an expression of human spirit.”

He said the aim should be to become more flexible at 40 than at 20, and more energetic at 50 than at 30. He added that this ancient practice plays a crucial role in promoting physical health, mental well-being, and



PM Narendra Modi at Red Road in Kolkata, after kicking off the celebrations of 12th International Yoga Day, on Sunday. EXPRESS

active ageing, thereby improving the quality of life.

Flanked on the stage by Chief Minister Suvenudh Adhikari and Governor R N Ravi, PM Modi practised a series of asanas before walking through the crowds to interact with participants, occasionally pausing to correct their postures. He also invoked the philosophies of Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, and Rishi Aurobindo to underscore the spiritual and social depth of the practice. “Tagore believed that human identity lies in staying connected with the people around us. Yoga speaks of this connection. Maharishi Aurobindo used to say that our entire life is yoga. There-

fore, yoga is not just physical postures... it is the expression of consciousness in human life.”

Adhikari thanked Modi for elevating yoga to a global platform. Given the state’s political landscape, Adhikari claimed that although International Yoga Day began 12 years ago, it had never been officially celebrated as a government-backed initiative in West Bengal until the BJP government took office. The CM credited Modi for the achievement of “bringing yoga home”, while stressing that the tradition of yoga had been practised in Bengal for over a century.

The fervour was mirrored across the state and other parts of the country.



Rahul Gandhi remains principal focus of BJP’s political attacks. FILE

support to the NDA and others joining the BJP. The DMK, which has 22 MPs in the Lok Sabha and has distanced itself from the INDIA bloc, is also learnt to be considering issue-based support to the BJP-led government at the Centre.

In the 543-member Lok Sabha, the BJP-led NDA already has 293 MPs and the newly formed bloc of 20 TMC MPs has also declared support to the alliance. With the current strength of the Lower House being 540, the two-third mark is 360.

A section in the BJP is, however, cautious that the fragmentation of regional parties could be perceived by voters as the result of the BJP using its political influence and resources to engineer splits. Such developments, they argue, may not necessarily translate into corresponding gains on the ground.

However, a few other leaders pointed out that the Congress’s rise from 52 seats in

aided by support from INDIA bloc partners. So the BJP will naturally draw attention to that support if it begins to weaken,” the leader said.

Sources in the BJP acknowledged that much of the party’s strategy since 2024 has focused on Gandhi and on politically isolating the Congress. While Prime Minister Narendra Modi has consistently targeted the Congress in his speeches, party strategists have also sought to corner the party both inside and outside Parliament. Gandhi remains the principal focus of the BJP’s political attacks.

At a recent event in Bengaluru, Modi said, “The Congress’s identity now is that of a parasite party. At the first opportunity, it will betray even its allies...” Modi was referring to the Congress’s decision to part ways with the DMK and join hands with the TVK to form the government in Tamil Nadu.

The BJP also believes that Gandhi is increasingly relying on southern India to sustain the Congress’s political relevance. As part of its strategy for the 2029 elections, the BJP will look to redouble its efforts in the South, especially in Karnataka and Telangana. “By being in power in Karnataka and Telangana, winning in Kerala and securing a share in power in Tamil Nadu, Gandhi believes the Congress is the only national party with a strong presence in the South. The BJP has to challenge that perception if it wants to expand its pan-India support base,” said a BJP leader from the region.

अलीगढ़ विकास प्राधिकरण, अलीगढ़

उत्तर प्रदेश शासन

आवास एवं शहरी नियोजन अनुभाग-8

संख्या-1/1367742/2026/आठ-8-2026

लखनऊ: दिनांक:

पत्रांक : 1960/नियो०अनु०/ए०डी०ए०/2026-27

दिनांक-20, जून, 2026

अधिसूचना

चुकि राज्य सरकार द्वारा अलीगढ़ विकास क्षेत्र के अंतर्गत अलीगढ़ महायोजना-2031 में संशोधन करने के संबंध में आपत्तियां एवं सुझाव प्राप्त करने की सूचना 03 स्थानीय समाचार पत्रों "द टाइम्स ऑफ इण्डिया" व "दैनिक आज, एवं "दैनिक प्रावदा" में दिनांक 17.05.2026 को प्रकाशित करायी गयी थी और उपर्युक्त सूचना में विनिर्दिष्ट समय के भीतर जन सामान्य से कोई आपत्ति एवं सुझाव प्राप्त नहीं हुये।

अतएव अब, उत्तर प्रदेश राष्ट्रपति अधिनियम (परिष्कारों सहित पुनः अधिनियमित)-1974 (उत्तर प्रदेश अधिनियम संख्या 30 सन् 1974) द्वारा परिष्कारों सहित यथा पुनः अधिनियमित 1973 (राष्ट्रपति अधिनियम संख्या 11 सन 1973) की धारा 13 की उपधारा (2) के उपबन्धों के अधीन शक्ति का प्रयोग करके वर्तमान में प्रभावी उत्तर प्रदेश नगर योजना एवं विकास (भू-उपयोग परिवर्तन शुल्क का निर्धारण, उद्ग्रहण एवं संग्रहण) नियमावली-2014 में प्राविधानित व्यवस्था के अनुसार अवस्थापना सुविधाओं का विकास जल निकासी व सीवरेंज आदि की व्यवस्था व 'उत्तर प्रदेश के विकास प्राधिकरणों हेतु मॉडल भवन निर्माण एवं विकास उपविधि तथा मॉडल जोनिंग रेगुलेशन्स, 2025" के प्राविधानानुसार पहुँच मार्ग की उपलब्धता सुनिश्चित किये जाने की शर्त के साथ ही संगत शासनादेशों/नियमों के आलोक में श्री राज्यपाल, अलीगढ़ विकास क्षेत्र के क्षेत्रान्तर्गत अलीगढ़ महा योजना-2031 में अनुसूची में उल्लिखित खसरा संख्या में सम्मुखे अंकित भू-प्रयोग हेतु निम्नानुसार संशोधन करते हैं:-

अनुसूची

(1) प्रश्नगत योजना की "जिला व्यापारिक केन्द्र" एवं "लघु उद्योग" भू-उपयोग की क्रयीत व पुनर्ग्रहीत भूमि में से आवासीय भू-उपयोग में परिवर्तन हेतु प्रस्तावित भूमि का ग्रामवार, गाटावार, क्षेत्रफल सहित विवरण निम्नवत है :-

क्र. सं.	ग्राम का नाम/तहसील	गाटा संख्या	भूमि की श्रेणी	कुल क्रय व पुनर्गहीत क्षे. (हे.में.)	वर्तमान भू-उपयोग महायोजना-2031 के अनुसार जिला व्यापारिक केन्द्र क्षे. (हे.में.)	लघु उद्योग क्षे. (हे.में.)	परिवर्तित भू-उपयोग
1	मूसेपुर करीब जिरौली/कोल	85 मि.	ग्राम सभा	0.0460	-	0.0360	आवासीय
2	अहमदाबाद/कोल	59	निजी	0.6085	-	0.4974	आवासीय
3		60	निजी	0.2345	-	0.2345	आवासीय
4		61	निजी	0.1350	-	0.1350	आवासीय
5		61	ग्राम सभा	0.1390	-	-	आवासीय
6		63	ग्राम सभा	0.0870	-	0.0870	आवासीय
7		65	निजी	0.0930	-	0.0930	आवासीय
8		67	निजी/ग्राम सभा	2.3240	-	2.3240	आवासीय
9		67	ग्राम सभा				आवासीय
10		1	ग्राम सभा	0.0380	0.0380	-	आवासीय
11		2	ग्राम सभा	0.0310	0.0310	-	आवासीय
12	अहमदाबाद/कोल	3	निजी	2.0100	2.0100	-	आवासीय
13		4	निजी	4.0100	4.0100	-	आवासीय
14		5	ग्राम सभा	0.0610	0.0610	-	आवासीय
15		6	निजी	2.5627	2.5627	-	आवासीय
16		7	ग्राम सभा	0.0610	0.0610	-	आवासीय
17		8	ग्राम सभा	0.0310	0.0310	-	आवासीय
18		11/2	ग्राम सभा	0.0080	0.0080	-	आवासीय
19		13	ग्राम सभा	0.0150	0.0150	-	आवासीय
20		15	निजी	1.4170	1.4170	-	आवासीय
21		17	ग्राम सभा	0.0620	0.0620	-	आवासीय
22	अहमदाबाद/कोल	18	ग्राम सभा	0.0090	0.0090	-	आवासीय
23		19	ग्राम सभा	0.0180	0.0180	-	आवासीय
24		20	निजी	1.1750	1.1750	-	आवासीय
25		21	ग्राम सभा	0.0750	0.0750	-	आवासीय
26		22	निजी	2.6800	2.6800	-	आवासीय
27		24	ग्राम सभा	0.0880	0.0560	-	आवासीय
28		25	ग्राम सभा	0.1120	0.1120	-	आवासीय
29		27	निजी	1.4215	1.4215	-	आवासीय
30		132	निजी	0.2212	0.2212	-	आवासीय
31		133	ग्राम सभा	0.0350	0.0350	-	आवासीय
32	अहमदाबाद/कोल	181	ग्राम सभा	0.0250	0.0250	-	आवासीय
33		185	निजी	0.0320	0.0320	-	आवासीय
34		339	निजी	1.6509	1.6509	-	आवासीय
35		340	निजी	0.2587	0.2587	-	आवासीय
36		342	निजी	1.0675	1.0675	-	आवासीय
37		343	निजी	0.0080	0.0080	-	आवासीय
38		352	निजी	1.1220	1.1220	-	आवासीय
39		356	निजी	0.9870	0.9870	-	आवासीय
40		357	ग्राम सभा	0.3140	0.3140	-	आवासीय
41		358	निजी	1.3654	1.3654	-	आवासीय
42	अहमदाबाद/कोल	360	निजी	0.3180	0.3180	-	आवासीय
43		361/1	ग्राम सभा	0.0810	0.0810	-	आवासीय
44		362	निजी	0.8670	0.8670	-	आवासीय
45		363	ग्राम सभा	0.0920	0.0920	-	आवासीय
46		364	निजी	2.5740	2.5740	-	आवासीय
47		365	निजी	0.0751	0.0751	-	आवासीय
48		366	ग्राम सभा	0.1270	0.1270	-	आवासीय
49		367	ग्राम सभा	0.0720	0.0720	-	आवासीय
50		368	निजी	0.7390	0.7390	-	आवासीय
51		369/2	ग्राम सभा	0.0040	0.0040	-	आवासीय
52	जिरौली डोर/कोल	370/1	निजी/ग्राम सभा	1.1370	-	-	आवासीय
53		370/2	ग्राम सभा	1.1370	-	-	आवासीय
54		371/2	ग्राम सभा	0.0040	0.0040	-	आवासीय
55		372	ग्राम सभा	0.2540	0.2540	-	आवासीय
56		374	निजी	0.3950	0.3950	-	आवासीय
57		376	निजी	0.0290	0.0290	-	आवासीय
58		316	निजी	0.0205	-	0.0205	आवासीय
59		317	निजी	0.8883	-	0.8883	आवासीय
60		320	निजी	0.9246	-	0.9246	आवासीय
61		321	निजी	1.8933	-	1.8933	आवासीय
62	जिरौली डोर/कोल	328	ग्राम सभा	0.1370	-	0.1370	आवासीय
63		329 मि.	निजी	0.6754	-	0.6754	आवासीय
64		330/1	निजी	3.7000	-	3.7000	आवासीय
65		331/2	ग्राम सभा	0.0260	-	0.0260	आवासीय
66		332/1 मि.	निजी	1.4339	-	1.4339	आवासीय
67		335 मि.	ग्राम सभा	0.0190	-	0.0190	आवासीय
68		336/1	ग्राम सभा	-	-	0.4090	आवासीय
69		336/2	ग्राम सभा	0.4090	-	-	आवासीय
70		363/3	ग्राम सभा	-	-	-	आवासीय
71		338	निजी	0.2381	-	0.2381	आवासीय
72	अटलपुर/कोल	76	ग्राम सभा	0.2100	-	0.0300	आवासीय
73		77	निजी	0.1210	-	0.0978	आवासीय
74		79 मि.	निजी/ग्राम सभा	4.8820	-	4.8820	आवासीय
75		79 मि.	ग्राम सभा	-	-	-	आवासीय
76		80	निजी	2.7600	-	2.6300	आवासीय
77		81	निजी	1.8461	-	1.8461	आवासीय
78		82/1	निजी	0.9426	-	0.9426	आवासीय
79		82/2	ग्राम सभा	-	-	-	आवासीय
80		83	निजी	0.1500	-	0.1500	आवासीय
81		84 मि.	निजी/ग्राम सभा	0.1400	-	0.1400	आवासीय
82	अहमदाबाद/कोल	84 मि.	ग्राम सभा	-	-	-	आवासीय

83	लहौसरा विसावन/ कोल	1	निजी	3.6335	-	3.6335	आवासीय	
84		2	निजी	1.2881	-	1.2881	आवासीय	
85		3 मि.	निजी	0.2085	-	0.2085	आवासीय	
86		4 मि.	ग्राम सभा	0.2113	-	0.2113	आवासीय	
87		5 मि.	निजी	0.5030	-	0.5030	आवासीय	
88		6	निजी	0.4720	-	0.4720	आवासीय	
89		7	निजी	0.5250	-	0.5250	आवासीय	
90		9	निजी	1.0830	-	1.0830	आवासीय	
91		10	निजी	1.1945	-	1.1945	आवासीय	
92		11 मि.	निजी	0.6650	-	0.6650	आवासीय	
93		12	ग्राम सभा	0.1500	-	0.1500	आवासीय	
94		13 मि.	निजी	0.7282	-	0.7282	आवासीय	
95		22	निजी	0.4150	-	0.4150	आवासीय	
96		23	ग्राम सभा	0.0920	-	0.0920	आवासीय	
97		25	निजी	2.3245	-	2.3245	आवासीय	
98		26/1	निजी	2.0740	-	2.0740	आवासीय	
99		26/2	निजी	1.3200	-	1.3200	आवासीय	
100		27	निजी	0.3320	-	0.3320	आवासीय	
101		28	निजी	1.1700	-	1.1700	आवासीय	
102		30 मि.	ग्राम सभा	0.0080	-	0.0080	आवासीय	
103	जनतपुर अंखन/कोल	33	निजी	0.0200	-	0.0200	आवासीय	
104		34	निजी	0.0290	-	0.0290	आवासीय	
105		35	ग्राम सभा	0.1000	-	0.1000	आवासीय	
106		62	निजी	0.3964	-	0.3964	आवासीय	
107		185/1	निजी	1.4407	-	1.4407	आवासीय	
108		रूसतमपुर अंखन/कोल	1	निजी	0.5990	-	0.5990	आवासीय
109			2	निजी	0.3770	-	0.3770	आवासीय
110			3	ग्राम सभा	0.0080	-	0.0080	आवासीय
111			4	निजी	0.9850	-	0.9850	आवासीय
112			5	ग्राम सभा	0.0180	-	0.0180	आवासीय
113	6 मि.		निजी	0.5590	-	0.5590	आवासीय	
114	18		ग्राम सभा	0.1408	-	0.1408	आवासीय	
115	19मि.		ग्राम सभा	0.0895	-	0.0895	आवासीय	
116	20		निजी	1.0850	-	1.0850	आवासीय	
117	21		ग्राम सभा	1.1750	-	1.1750	आवासीय	
118	22		ग्राम सभा	0.0020	-	0.0020	आवासीय	
119	23		निजी	0.3860	-	0.3860	आवासीय	
120	24	निजी	0.3840	-	0.3840	आवासीय		
121	25 मि.	निजी	0.8510	-	0.8510	आवासीय		
122	27 मि.	निजी	1.7130	-	1.7130	आवासीय		
योग				83.5798 हे०	29.7080 हे०	53.2465 हे०		
कुल योग (6+7)				82.9545 हे.				

(2) प्रश्नगत योजना की कुल भूमि में से क्षेत्रीय पार्क व पार्क नियोजित खुले स्थल भू-उपयोग की क्रयीत व पुनर्ग्रहीत भूमि के सापेक्ष समायोजन/विस्थापन हेतु प्रस्तावित ग्राम-कस्तली वैश्य की भूमि गाटा, क्षेत्रफल तथा भू-उपयोग परिवर्तन के लिए विवरण निम्नवत है:-

क्र. सं.	मौजा/ग्राम का नाम	तहसील	गाटा संख्या	गाटा का कुल क्षेत्र (हे. में.)	भू-उपयोग परिवर्तन हेतु प्रस्तावित क्षेत्रफल (हे. में.)	प्रभावी महायोजना के अनुसार भू-उपयोग	परिवर्तित भू-उपयोग
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
2	कस्तली वैश्य	कोल	768 मि.	87.711	55.00	कृषि	क्षेत्रीय पार्क/पार्क नियोजित खुले स्थल (मनोरंजन 1 व 2)
योग				87.711	55.00		

नोट- प्रभागीय निदेशक, सामाजिक प्रभाग, अलीगढ के पत्रांक-3895/14-10, अलीगढ दिनांक 20 मई, 2025 द्वारा कस्तली वैश्य के गाटा संख्या-768 मि० क्षेत्रफल 87.711 हे० भूमि को महायोजना-2031 में कतिपय शर्तों के अधीन पार्क/पार्क नियोजित खुले स्थल (हरित क्षेत्र) के रूप में विकसित किये जाने हेतु अनापत्ति प्रदान की गयी है। प्राधिकरण द्वारा उक्त तालिका के अनुसार 87.711 हे० भूमि में से 55.00 हे० भूमि का भू-उपयोग परिवर्तन का प्रस्ताव है।

(3) प्रश्नगत योजना की "क्षेत्रीय पार्क एवं नियोजित खुले स्थल" भू-उपयोग की क्रयीत एवं पुर्नग्रहीत में से आवासीय भू-उपयोग में परिवर्तन हेतु प्रस्तावित भूमि का ग्रामवार, गाटावार, क्षेत्रफल सहित विवरण निम्नवत है:-

क्र. सं.	ग्राम का नाम/तहसील	गाटा संख्या	भूमि की श्रेणी	कुल क़रीत व पुनर्ग़हीत क्ष० (हे० में)	प्रभावी महायोजना के अनुसार भू-उपयोग		परिवर्तित भू-उपयोग
					क्षेत्रीय पार्क क्ष०(हे. में)	पार्क क्ष० (हे. में)	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	मूसेपूर करीब ज़िरीली/कोल	85मि.	ग्राम सभा	0.0460	-	0.0100	आवासीय
2		114	ग्राम सभा	0.0200	-	0.0200	आवासीय
3		116	ग्राम सभा	0.0290	-	0.0290	आवासीय
4		118	ग्राम सभा	0.0230	-	0.0230	आवासीय
5		119	निजी	0.5490	0.1330	0.4160	आवासीय
6		120	ग्राम सभा	0.0300	0.0300	-	आवासीय
7		122	निजी	0.5890	0.5890	-	आवासीय
8		123	ग्राम सभा	0.0100	0.0100	-	आवासीय
9		125मि.	ग्राम सभा	0.0270	0.0270	-	आवासीय
10		126/1मि.	निजी	0.3860	0.3860	-	आवासीय
11		126/2मि.	निजी	0.2580	0.2580	-	आवासीय
12		127मि.	निजी	1.8700	1.8700	-	आवासीय
13		128मि.	ग्राम सभा	0.0610	0.0610	-	आवासीय
14		129मि.	निजी	1.4000	1.4000	-	आवासीय
15		131	ग्राम सभा	1.0140	1.0140	-	आवासीय
16		133	निजी	0.5897	0.5897	-	आवासीय
17		134	ग्राम सभा	0.0120	0.0120	-	आवासीय
18		135	ग्राम सभा	0.0200	0.0200	-	आवासीय
19		140	निजी	0.2130	-	0.2130	आवासीय
20		141मि.	ग्राम सभा	0.1220	-	0.1220	आवासीय
21	अहमदाबाद/ कोल	24	ग्राम सभा	0.0880	0.0880	-	आवासीय
22		46	निजी	0.2800	0.2800	-	आवासीय
23		47	ग्राम सभा	0.0470	0.0470	-	आवासीय
24		48	ग्राम सभा	0.2100	0.2100	-	आवासीय
25		49	निजी	0.3285	0.3285	-	आवासीय
26		50	निजी	0.6816	0.6816	-	आवासीय
27		51	निजी	1.8528	1.8528	-	आवासीय
28		52	निजी	1.6140	1.6140	-	आवासीय
29		53	निजी	1.0140	1.0140	-	आवासीय
30		55	निजी	2.0463	2.0463	-	आवासीय
31		56	निजी	0.6300	0.6300	-	आवासीय
32		56	ग्राम सभा	0.1530	0.1530	-	आवासीय
33		57	निजी	0.5705	0.5705	-	आवासीय
34		58	निजी	3.5460	3.5460	-	आवासीय
35		59	निजी	0.6085	0.1111	-	आवासीय
36		68	निजी	2.2700	2.2700	-	आवासीय
37		69	ग्राम सभा	0.0690	0.0690	-	आवासीय

2 killed, 1 injured as car rams into divider on Maharashtra highway

Express News Service
Mumbai, June 21

A 24-YEAR-OLD man and a woman of the same age died, while their male friend suffered severe injuries after a BMW convertible alleged to be going at high speed hit a divider at the Mumbai-Vadodara highway in Badlapur and was flung off the road early Sunday, police said.

The trio was returning after celebrating the birthday of one Yogesh Negi, who turned 24 on Sunday, when the incident took place. Police are checking if a now-viral video of a dashboard showing a vehicle reaching speed of 251 kmph was from this incident, officers said.

Senior Inspector of Badlapur (west) police station Kishore Shinde said that the incident took place at around 3 am when Negi, Angad Gill (26) and Rebecca Jacob (24) were returning from a party celebrating Negi's birthday, and they lost control of the vehicle. The car, which had its hood down, flipped several times in the air before falling to the ground.

While Negi and Jacob succumbed to their injuries, Gill is currently recuperating at the



The BMW convertible on the Mumbai-Vadodara highway in Badlapur on Sunday. EXPRESS

Fortis hospital in Kalyan. The officers said that while Negi and Gill are Badlapur residents, Jacob resided in Bandra.

"It is not clear who was at the wheel. We have found that Negi had uploaded a video of the speedometer of a car touching 251 kmph at a point. We are verifying if this was taken moments before the car met with an accident," Shinde told *The Indian Express*. The officer said that the road where the accident took place was under construction and there were no street lamps. The road had not been opened to the public, the officer said.

Monsoon revival likely this week, very heavy rainfall in Northeast

Heatwave in UP, MP, Maharashtra; 'severe' hot spell in Vidarbha until June 24, says IMD

Express News Service
Bengaluru, June 21

AFTER OVER a week of no movement, the southwest monsoon is likely to advance along the west coast and eastern India regions around the middle of this week.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Sunday said, "Conditions are favourable for further advance of southwest monsoon into some more parts of Maharashtra, Telangana, Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar and Chhattisgarh around June 23."

The Arabian Sea branch of the monsoon had last progressed along south Konkan regions on June 8. The monsoon onset stands significantly delayed over Maharashtra, where it would have, under normal climatological circumstances,



A flooded Mumbai road after a brief spell of rain, Sunday. AKASH PATIL

covered the state by June 15. The delay has resulted in heatwave conditions continuing over the Vidarbha region.

On Saturday, Brahmapuri in Maharashtra and Banda in Uttar Pradesh remained the hottest locations in the country, with the maximum temperature touching 43.2 degrees Celsius. On Sunday, heatwave conditions continued over Vidarbha, where the day temperatures remained 5 to 7 degrees above normal.

Ahead of the next leg of the monsoon advancement, the

Met Department has warned of "very heavy" to "extremely" heavy rainfall (110 to over 200mm in 24 hours) along the northeast India region, which will continue till June 25. Parts of sub-Himalayan West Bengal and Sikkim will receive intense rain until Monday.

The IMD has said heatwave conditions would prevail over Chhattisgarh, eastern Madhya Pradesh until June 25, over eastern Uttar Pradesh till June 24. Vidarbha will experience "severe" heatwave until June 24, it has warned.

Yellow alert for Mumbai; water woes to continue

Pratip Acharya
Mumbai, June 21

MUMBAI EXPERIENCED light rain Sunday morning, with several areas in the island city and eastern suburbs recording brief showers between 6 am and 7 am. The IMD issued a yellow alert on Sunday, which is in effect until June 24. This alert indicates the possibility of moderate rain, accompanied by lightning, thunderstorms, and gusty winds up to 40 kmph. A yellow alert has also been issued for Thane, Palghar, Raigad and Sindhudurg.

Meanwhile, officials have stated that the rain will not affect the catchment areas of the seven lakes — Tulsi, Vihar, Tansa, Bhatsa, Modak Sagar, Upper Vaitarna and Middle Vaitarna — that supply water to Mumbai. "...Since these lakes are located deep in the hinterland, chances of their catchment areas receiving substantial rain do not seem favourable at this time," Sushma Nair, scientist at IMD Mumbai, said.

Row erupts over renaming of Kolkata road

Sweetey Kumari
Kolkata, June 21

IN A first since the BJP came to power in West Bengal, Kolkata's Suhrawardy Avenue, a prominent arterial road in the city's heart, has been renamed Gopal Mukherjee Road, after Gopal Patha, a polarising figure associated with 1946 communal riots prior to India's partition in 1947.

Welcoming Kolkata Municipal Corporation's move, CM Suvenud Adhikari called it a "historic decision" towards "rectifying a historical wrong". Although Adhikari did not specify which Suhrawardy he was referring to in his post, historically, the road was never named after the controversial political leader, Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy. Instead, it was named after his uncle, Hassan Shaheed Suhrawardy — a highly regarded Bengali academic, diplomat, and art critic.

Meanwhile, opposition leaders slammed the move, saying that the BJP government was "overlooking historical facts".

Congress leader Pawan Khera said: "These BJP leaders do not even know the difference between Hasan Suhrawardy and Huseyn Suhrawardy. Such is their ignorance," he said.

In a social media post, TMC MP Mahua Moitra, said, "Suhrawardy Avenue was named after Hassan Suhrawardy, Vice Chancellor of Calcutta University... What cheap political points is the BJP trying to score?..."

The curious case of Yusuf Pathan's Vadodara land and a Rs 20.5-crore question

Aditi Raja
Vadodara, June 21

A 978 SQUARE-METRE plot in Vadodara that has been at the centre of a long-running dispute involving former India cricketer and TMC MP Yusuf Pathan is set to go under the hammer after the Vadodara Municipal Corporation (VMC) initiated the process for its public auction.

The plot is among seven municipal land parcels whose valuations were cleared by the civic body's Standing Committee this week and are expected to be placed before the VMC General Board in July. The move comes even as Pathan has been given time by the Gujarat High Court to seek relief under a state government policy that provides for allotment of land to international sports persons.

The disputed plot — plot number 90 in Town Planning Scheme 22 in the city's Tandalja area — has been valued at Rs 2.10 lakh per sqm. At the approved rate, the land is worth about Rs 20.5 crore. The valuation is nearly three times the rate at which the plot was proposed to be allotted to Pathan 14 years ago. The dispute dates back to 2012 when Pathan approached the VMC seeking allotment of the land on a 99-year lease. The VMC Standing Committee and General Board approved the proposal and agreed to allot the plot at Rs 57,270 per sqm without conducting a public auction.

However, the proposal ran into trouble when it was sent to the state's Urban Development Department for approval. In June 2014, the department rejected the allotment, holding that the land could not be transferred without following a public bidding process. The rejection effectively stalled the proposal, but the land remained fenced and under Pathan's possession.

Issue resurfaces

The issue resurfaced in June 2024, shortly after Pathan was elected to the Lok Sabha from West Bengal's Baharampur constituency on a TMC ticket. The BJP-controlled civic body issued him an encroachment notice, alleging unauthorised occupation of municipal land. Pathan challenged the VMC's action and sought recognition of his claim over the plot. In August 2025, however, the High Court upheld the state government's decision rejecting the original allotment proposal, ruling that the Urban Development Department had acted within its powers in refusing approval to the transaction.

Hearing Pathan's appeal against the High Court order on June 15 this year, a Division Bench headed by Chief Justice Sunita Agarwal granted him four weeks to pursue relief under a 1999 state policy that permits allotment of land to international sports persons under certain conditions. At the same time, the Bench questioned how



Civic body clears valuation of disputed parcel occupied by cricketer-turned-politician Yusuf Pathan since 2014, auction process set to begin after board approval. FILE

he had continued to occupy the land since 2014 despite the rejection of the allotment proposal and without making any payment to the civic body.

The court also indicated that compensation for unauthorised occupation of public land, if found payable, could be calculated at prevailing market rates. Against this backdrop, the VMC's latest valuation of the land could assume significance not only for any future auction but also for determining potential recovery arising from its prolonged occupation. Municipal officials, however, have maintained that the sports-person policy cited by Pathan

may not apply in the present case because the land belongs to the civic body rather than the state government.

"The policy does not apply to civic body plots. The state may allocate land, but such allotment cannot be imposed on the municipal corporation," a VMC official said, adding once the General Board approves valuation, the plot can be auctioned through a public bidding process as and when the land and estate department decides. Of the seven plots cleared for valuation, five are reserved for public and government infrastructure projects, while two have been designated for residential use. Both residential plots are located in Tandalja. Besides Pathan's plot, the second residential parcel, plot number 97, measures 2,878 sq m and has been valued at Rs 1.5 lakh per sqm. The remaining plots are earmarked for public facilities, including a neighbourhood centre in Akota and three parcels in Bhayli reserved for a bus stand, a central health centre and a school-cum-games ground. Civic officials said plots sought by government departments for public projects may not require auction.

TMC crisis

The land dispute has also acquired a political dimension amid the ongoing unrest within the TMC's Lok Sabha ranks. Pathan is among the party MPs who have backed a dissident

group seeking recognition as a separate bloc in Parliament, drawing criticism from sections of the party leadership. The controversy spilled into the public domain on June 15 when National Conference MP Aga Syed Ruhullah Mehdi alleged on X that during a protest in Parliament's Well in Winter Session, a Muslim MP had warned Pathan that the BJP could "bulldoze" his house in Gujarat and advised him to stay away from the agitation. Ruhullah claimed that TMC MP Mahua Moitra had reassured Pathan that the Opposition would stand by him.

Responding on X, Moitra identified the MP as AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi and criticised Pathan after he joined the dissident camp. "What a pity I fought for a *gaddar* (traitor) with no courage and no spine. He was better off doing commentary."

In an apparent reference to the row, Owaisi wrote on X on Thursday, "Some UBT MPs are also looking to defect to BJP. Maybe we should ask the two prominent MPs to tell us who 'threatened' these MPs to defect to BJP? Why did the other 19 TMC MPs defect? Maybe it'll take a month to blame someone. As the Qur'an says 'Woe to every backbiter, slanderer' (104:1). Why are large-scale defections to BJP so easy? Why are all these people running away? You cannot blame one 'prominent MP' for all your failures."

Rakhigarhi skeletons to undergo DNA tests, facial reconstruction

Sukhbir Siwach
Chandigarh, June 21

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL Survey of India (ASI) has sent nearly 5,000-year-old skeletons unearthed at Haryana's Rakhigarhi, the largest known site of the Harappan civilisation, for scientific examination and facial reconstruction.

Four skeletons recovered during the latest excavation were sent to the Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI) in Kolkata on Friday, while DNA samples from one of the skeletons have been forwarded to the Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeosciences (BSIP), Lucknow. Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Manoj Saxena, Superintending Archaeologist, ASI, said three skeletons, along with soil samples, had been sent to Kolkata, while only skeletal remains were sent in the fourth case. A fifth skeleton has been retained by the ASI.

Of the five skeletons recovered, three are believed to be female and two male. Preliminary assessments suggest all five individuals were between 30 and 40 years old,



The nearly 5,000-year-old skeletons were unearthed in Haryana's Rakhigarhi, the largest known site of the Harappan civilisation. EXPRESS

though their exact ages will be determined through detailed scientific analysis.

Saxena described the discovery as significant as the remains date back nearly 5,000 years to the Harappan period. He said the studies would help determine whether the individuals died of natural causes or disease and, if disease was involved, identify the nature of the ailments.

The research is also expected to reveal details about their ancestry, height, physical

features and social status.

One of the key objectives of the study is facial reconstruction, which could provide a visual representation of what inhabitants of the Harappan civilisation may have looked like. According to Saxena, anthropological and DNA studies will be combined to produce a comprehensive report.

Researchers are also expected to reconstruct the palaeo-environment of the period to better understand the human populations that inhabited the region and identify areas requiring further study. Apart from the five complete skeletons, archaeologists recovered three additional burials from Mound No. 7, the ancient cemetery area of the site. However, these burials contained only fragmentary remains. One yielded only a skull, another contained damaged bones, while a third had a broken skull.

Archaeologists believe these remains were disturbed by agricultural activity over the years, as they were located just 15 to 20 centimetres below the surface.

Sabarimala shrine to get AI predictive systems, drones to manage crowds

Shaju Philip
Thiruvananthapuram, June 21

THE UPCOMING annual pilgrimage to the Sabarimala temple in Kerala could see the use of AI-based crowd management systems.

The Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB), which manages the temple, and officers of the Kerala Police held a meeting with an expert committee on Saturday in this regard, officials said.

The pilgrimage season at the hill shrine will begin in the second week of November. Last year, the shrine, situated in Kerala's Pathanamthitta district, witnessed a footfall of 51 lakh devotees.

Representatives of three AI firms from Delhi, Chennai and Mumbai briefed the expert committee, as well as senior TDB functionaries and police officers, about the proposal.

Pathanamthitta district police superintendent R Anand, who was tasked with preparing a report on the project, said AI technology would be used in Sabarimala in a phased

manner for effective crowd management, coordination between various departments, and the safety of pilgrims.

"AI-enabled crowd management has been effectively used in the Maha Kumbh Mela and other festivals with large gatherings. Sabarimala requires tailor-made AI solutions, considering that the temple is situated within a dense forest. We are planning to deploy the system in a phased manner in the coming season," he said.

The SP said the AI-enabled crowd management system can offer solutions for a lot of issues in Sabarimala.

"It will ensure safe and hassle-free darshan for the devotees; people who go missing at the shrine can be easily traced; and movement of pilgrims from 26 parking grounds can be managed without human intervention. This will also ease the heavy load on police personnel deployed at the shrine during the festival," he said.

The AI-enabled crowd monitoring and management system will comprise AI cam-

eras, drones and GIS mapping.

Officials said that by analysing video feeds, the AI will predict crowd density, and the control room will be frequently alerted about the movement of the crowd.

The system can also give forecasts about congestion.

The real-time data will also help authorities solve issues without delay, officials said, adding that the men on duty at various centres will get instant alerts via digital devices.

At present, police have erected a virtual queue system for the pilgrims, who have to register online before their visit.

They can select a day and time slot for the visit to the temple and have to report at the base station accordingly, before trekking to the shrine.

However, pilgrims sometimes have to wait for several hours at various camps on the way to the temple as part of crowd control measures.

The virtual queue system will continue even after the AI-enabled crowd management system is deployed, officials clarified.

• BRIEFLY



The accident spot in West Bengal's Jalpaiguri on Sunday. PTI

WEST BENGAL

6 killed, 29 injured as bus collides with stationary truck in Jalpaiguri

SIX PERSONS, including a child and two women, were killed and at least 29 others injured after a bus hit a stationary truck in Jalpaiguri district on Sunday, police said. The accident took place on NH-27 near Ulladabri when the bus travelling from Maynaguri to Domohani rammed into the rear of the truck parked on the roadside around 11.30 am. Chief Minister Suvenud Adhikari wrote on X that he was "deeply saddened" by the accident, and that the next of kin of each deceased victim would receive Rs 5 lakh, while those grievously injured would get Rs 1 lakh and passengers with minor injuries Rs 50,000 as compensation. PTI

346 Sikh pilgrims depart for Lahore

A JATHA (group) of 346 Sikh pilgrims crossed over to Pakistan from the Attari-Wagah border in Amritsar on Sunday to attend the death anniversary congregation of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in Lahore, located adjoining the historic Sikh shrine Gurdwara Panja Sahib, officials said. An SGPC official said the Jatha will visit Gurdwara Nankana Sahib after paying obeisance at Gurdwara Sacha Sauda Sahib, Mandi Chuharkana and return to Nankana Sahib. PTI

Patna: 3 children drown in Ganga

THREE CHILDREN drowned while bathing in Ganga in Patna on Sunday morning, police said. The incident took place near Hetanpur Ghat. "We received information that three children, all aged between 10 and 12 years, drowned while bathing in the river. Police went to the spot where locals had already recovered the bodies," Shahpur SHO Naveen Kumar said. "An initial financial aid of Rs 20,000 each has been provided to kin of the deceased." PTI

Ram Temple donation row: SIT wraps up initial investigation; Kejriwal asks why no FIR lodged

Express News Service
Lucknow, June 21

THE SIT, set up by the Uttar Pradesh government to probe into the allegations of embezzlement of donation money at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, on Sunday completed its preliminary investigation and is likely to submit a report to Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, said sources.

The three-member team, led by IAS officer Vijay Vishwas Pant, has completed its preliminary inquiry and may submit its report to the state government shortly. Based on the findings of the SIT, the procedure of the donation collection and deposition, and the roles and responsibilities of the individuals in the temple Trust, are also likely to be revisited, said a source.

The Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust had previously denied allegations of misappropriation of donation funds and maintained that all money and valuables offered by devotees are handled through laid down procedures involving counting, verification, and secure deposit mechanisms.

Adityanath had formed an SIT on June 13 to probe the embezzlement charges after a request from the Trust. Besides Lucknow Divisional Commissioner Vijay Vishwas Pant, other two members of the SIT are IGP Kiran Sand Finance Department Special Secretary Neel Ratan.

Meanwhile, the Opposition parties stepped up their attack on the BJP government in the state and the Centre over claims of irregularities in donations.

AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal asked why no FIR has been registered in the case yet. In a statement, Kejriwal alleged that cash donations and valuables worth around Rs 200 crore had gone missing from the temple. "If allegations involving such a large amount of cash and valuables have surfaced, why has neither the UP Police nor Central agencies such as the ED or CBI registered an FIR?"

SP leader and former minister Pawan Pandey also demanded that "Shankaracharyas and saints should sit together and decide the system through which the temple should be managed".

Kharge attacks BJP, says 'loot in name of Ram'

ENS & PTI
Bengaluru, June 21

CONGRESS PRESIDENT and LoP in the Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge on Sunday attacked the BJP over allegations of funds being siphoned off from donations made to the Ram Temple in Ayodhya. He alleged that around Rs 5,000 crore was stolen from the funds collected by the temple. "They are looting in the name of Ram. Did you construct Ram Mandir to loot crores of rupees?"

Highlighting Prime Minister Narendra Modi's role in the programmes leading to the construction and inauguration of the temple, he said that Modi was everywhere then. "Now, the money is being robbed from the donation box. Whether his (Modi) followers are doing it or someone else is behind it should be probed," Kharge said. He was addressing a mega convention in Bengaluru where

senior leader B K Hariprasad formally assumed charge as Karnataka Congress president.

Chief Minister D K Shivakumar, who had served as Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee chief since 2020, formally handed over the charge to Hariprasad by presenting him with the party flag. The 71-year-old MLC was appointed Karnataka Congress chief on June 3, after Shivakumar's resignation as KPCC chief. An OBC leader from the Billava community, Hariprasad, was re-elected to the Karnataka Legislative Council Thursday. He has previously served as a Rajya Sabha MP and AICC in charge of several other states.

While addressing the convention, Kharge also schooled some Congress workers, who were chanting "DK, DK" slogans in favour of Shivakumar, saying "personality cult will not work in the party". "This is a meeting of the Congress. It is not a meeting about one person," he said.

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

TECH

Guardrails in AI growth to protect developing nations



EXPERT EXPLAINS
B RAVINDRAN

HEAD, CENTRE FOR RESPONSIBLE AI, IIT MADRAS

THE TRANSFORMATIVE potential of artificial intelligence (AI) is becoming increasingly evident, and its impacts are already being felt, touching everything from daily life to broader industries. Consequently, efforts have begun to create global institutions and frameworks to regulate the development and deployment of AI systems.

Some preliminary institutional structures have already been set up. Last year, the United Nations General Assembly established a Global Dialogue on AI in which every country has been invited to participate. An Independent International Scientific Panel on AI is tasked with making periodic scientific assessments to enrich the Global Dialogue discussions.

Professor B Ravindran, head of the Centre for Responsible AI at IIT Madras, is the only Indian among the 40 people appointed to the Panel for a three-year term. He spoke to **Amitabh Sinha** about the need for a system of global AI governance, why it matters for developing countries like India, and what a commons system for AI tools and resources could look like.

What is the International Scientific Panel on AI supposed to do?

This is the first time a global scientific body on AI has been set up. It is supposed to take a periodic view of the state of science around AI and inform the Global Dialogue on AI.

Our primary responsibility would be to produce reports on the scientific aspects of AI. This body would not get into the politics or policy side of AI discussions. That is the responsibility of the Global Dialogue, in which governments would participate.

Why is a global governance structure on AI needed? Are we moving in that direction?



Visitors at the AI Impact Summit in New Delhi this year. PRAVEEN KHANNA

Personally, I feel that having some kind of international agreement on how AI is to be deployed or the applications we want to use might be useful. As of now, countries are developing their own frameworks to deal with this technology, but that might not be the most effective way forward.

There are two ways of looking at it. One is from the perspective of the development of AI systems. If the regulation is too fragmented, meaning every country has its own set of differing regulations, then the development of AI would also become fragmented. Companies will have to ensure that their systems can adhere to differing sets of requirements in different geographies.

What might happen, as a result, is a possible slowdown in innovation. AI companies might prefer to roll out their services or support innovation only in countries seen as more friendly in terms of their regulations.

At the same time, if some countries begin invoking issues of data sovereignty (seeking control over data originating within their borders) and insist that all AI development and its infrastructure must

be within national boundaries, it can lead to significant concentration of power. Already, a few countries have the infrastructure and resources to support the entire AI ecosystem.

The other perspective is of deployment. Many countries in Asia or Africa might not have the resources or capacities to frame robust regulations to protect their interests. There would always be a danger of them being reduced to digital colonies.

In this context, having a globally agreed-upon set of minimum regulations would be useful.

AI is a very transformative technology, with a capability of the order of the steam engine. It would be awful if, owing to a lack of regulatory capacities, certain developing countries were denied the benefits of AI. It will be a disservice to humanity at large.

This is why international agreements and arrangements are important. We need to ensure that the interests of countries that are not AI developers themselves are also protected, and they continue to benefit from advancements in this technology.

Global regulation can help with technology innovation while ensuring that the benefits of AI are widespread and equitable

Where AI regulation stands

Several parallel attempts are being made to regulate the development and deployment of artificial intelligence. Most of these structures have voluntary participation, varying degrees of legal force, and focus on specific aspects like standards, safety and ethics.

The most comprehensive legal framework for AI is the European Union AI Act of 2024. EU prioritised safe, transparent, non-discriminatory and environmentally friendly AI systems.

Annual global AI summits, whose most recent edition was held in New Delhi in February, have also resulted in mechanisms that could feed into the development of global governance models on AI.

Would international regulation also control the risks from AI?

There are definite risks, no doubt. People talk about AI's capabilities in building the next generation of biological weapons or the next most powerful chemical weapons. We have international agreements and treaties that control biological or chemical weapons. Now, people might also want to bring about international frameworks that control AI models and the tools that enable these weapons to be built.

While that is logical, the fear and worry are that it might take the shape of non-proliferation language. There might be attempts to propose that only certain countries or companies can develop safe and responsible AI, and therefore, they should be the only ones allowed unrestricted development and use of AI systems. That would lead to something similar to the global nuclear regime.

I am worried about the dialogue on AI moving in that direction. Hopefully, it will not happen, but I think we have to be on constant vigil against it.

You were personally involved in developing the framework for Trusted AI Commons, which was one of the main outcomes of the New Delhi AI Impact Summit in February. What is that, and how would it help?

It can be seen as another part of the global governance structure. The Trusted AI Commons is a repository of various tools needed to develop and deploy AI systems in a safe and responsible manner.

Suppose someone wants to test an AI system meant for agriculture. Trusted AI Commons would be like a one-stop shop to figure out what tools are available to test AI deployment, what the benchmarks, datasets, and even protocols are. Several resources will be housed in the Trusted AI Commons.

To begin with, this Commons will be hosted and managed by India. The India AI mission has to identify a suitable vehicle to do that. Trusted AI Commons will not commission building these tools right away, but many organisations are already working on it. This includes the Centre for Responsible AI at IIT Madras. Companies like Google have also created their own tools. It is called Commons because it will be open, accessible, and with very liberal licensing requirements.

DEFENCE

Three distinct strategic roles of the three ships inducted into Navy

Sushant Kulkarni
Pune, June 21

THE NAVY inducted three ships on Sunday — one that can fight far out at sea, one that can map the sea, and one that can hunt submarines close to the coast.

The three vessels — the Brahmos-armed stealth frigate INS Dunagiri, the deep-water survey vessel INS Sanshodhak, and the Anti-Submarine Warfare Shallow Water Craft (ASW SWC) INS Agray — have been built by Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers (GRSE) in Kolkata. According to the Ministry of Defence, the three together have more than 75 per cent indigenous content, and involve over 200 MSMEs.

What are these three ships?

INS DUNAGIRI: The largest and most heavily armed of the three is INS Dunagiri. It is a frigate, smaller than a destroyer but large enough to operate far from the coast.

It is part of the Navy's Project I7A, under which a new generation of stealth guided-missile frigates are being built in India. Dunagiri carries weapons such as BrahMos surface-to-surface missiles, sensors including Multi-Function Surveillance, Track



PM Modi presided over the commissioning ceremony in Kolkata on Sunday. PTI

And Guidance Radar (MFSTAR), electronic warfare systems and anti-submarine weapons. "At the strategic level, these multi-mission frigates are capable of operating in a 'blue water' environment — deep sea far from shore — dealing with both conventional and non-conventional threats," a serving Navy officer said. Other vessels in the class are INS Nigiri, Himgiri, Taragiri, Udaygiri and Vindhayagiri.

INS SANSHODHAK: This is a Survey Vessel

— Large (SVL). Its job is to measure and map the sea: the depth of waters, seabed features, approach channels to ports, navigational routes, and oceanographic data. It is equipped with systems such as autonomous underwater vehicles, remotely operated vehicles and multi-beam echo sounders. These help the ship collect data from the surface and underwater.

"Warships and submarines do not operate in an empty blue space. They move through waters shaped by depth, seabed features, currents, reefs, channels, ports, underwater slopes and coastal clutter. Knowing this environment helps ships move safely, submarines plan routes, ports update charts, and forces prepare for operations. It also supports civilian needs such as safe shipping, disaster relief, ocean research and coastal development," said a Navy officer who has served on survey ships.

INS AGRAY: The smallest vessel of the three, it has a highly specialised role. Agray belongs to the Arnala-class of smaller warships built specifically to detect and attack submarines in shallow waters near the coast, ports, naval bases and important sea approaches. Agray carries lightweight torpedoes, indigenous anti-submarine rocket

launchers and sonar systems.

"Coastal waters are difficult places to find submarines. They are noisy, busy and cluttered. Fishing boats, merchant ships, seabed features and coastal activity can make submarine detection harder than in the open ocean. That is where ASW-SWCs such as Agray come in," said an officer.

What is the larger message behind commissioning them together?

The importance of Sunday's ceremony is that the three ships add three different capabilities at once.

As the Indian Ocean becomes more contested, the triple-commissioning "is a sign of how the Navy is building capability in layers: big warships for distant operations, survey ships to understand the sea, and smaller submarine-hunters to guard coastal waters," said an officer.

It is also an industrial signal. That three different kinds of ships, with different missions and technologies, can be built domestically and commissioned together shows the growing maturity of India's naval shipbuilding ecosystem.

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EDUCATION

Scrutiny and security: How China conducts its biggest college entrance exam

Rishika Singh
New Delhi, June 21

THE RE-TEST for the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) was held on Sunday, a few weeks after allegations of paper leak led to the original exam's cancellation.

Earlier this month, China also conducted its biggest national exam for college admissions, the Gaokao (literally, "the highest exam"), with over 1.29 crore students. A spokesperson of the Chinese Embassy in India shared a post on X, stating that "The #Gaokao is one of the most important exams for millions of Chinese students — and what makes it remarkable is its fairness... Students know their hard work truly pays off, because the process is strictly regulated and the road to academic success is not rigged."

Teachers under supervision, no internet access

Gaokao has been conducted in China

since 1952. During the Mao Zedong-led Cultural Revolution (1966-76), which saw sweeping changes to align Chinese society with Communist ideals, the exam was put on hold.

Today, the exam includes three compulsory subjects: English, Mandarin and Mathematics, with optional science and social science subjects. Chinese state media reports note that the full exam lasts between three and four days, and the duration varies by region.

There are strict protocols for the conduct of the exam, including but not limited to question papers drafted under strict security. Teachers who are selected to prepare the question papers are sent to isolated locations, including military facilities and prisons.

And it's not just the state that goes all out. "Among other heart-warming measures, some companies offer free taxi rides to candidates going to their exam centres, while some restaurants provide free lunches, and some hotels free beds, on gaokao days," a recent Chinese state media report said.

kao days," a recent Chinese state media report said.

Not a foolproof system

Chinese state media reports also point to attempts to curb unfair practices during exams. A 2025 report said about the province of Liaoning, "Students are required to pass through two intelligent security gates capable of detecting small metal objects, including mobile phones, smartwatches, smart glasses, hidden earpieces and other high-tech devices that could be used to cheat. If an alarm is triggered, teachers follow up with handheld metal detectors."

It quoted a high school principal as saying, "Cheating technologies are evolving every year, so this year's entry screening process is stricter than ever."

Biometric verification is conducted at entry to detect student impersonation. Cases of impersonation have previously been reported years after the exam, and punishments have been handed out. In 2016, six teachers were handed a jail sen-

tence from one year to 26 months after being convicted of "illegally obtaining state secrets".

In 2025, state media *China Daily* reported that the city of Benxi, with a population of around 1.3 million, had every gaokao room monitored by a "real-time intelligent surveillance system that automatically flags irregular behavior — from whispers and frequent glances between students to inattentive proctors". Other recent reports have also touted "AI-powered" systems.

The exam involves both objective and subjective questions. Experienced teachers from key senior high schools and universities in a region are selected to grade the papers. "Personnel involved in grading have to present their identity documents, leave electronic devices in a small basket in a separate area, and undergo security checks before work starts," an official media report said.

Grading computers are connected to an exclusive network to prevent hacking and intrusion of viruses and the rooms are

equipped with surveillance cameras, with police officers on duty 24/7, it added.

STEM focus

In their book *The Highest Exam: How the Gaokao Shapes China* (2025), authors Hongbin Li, Ruixue Jia and Claire Cousineau wrote, "If China's education system is a symphony orchestra, the central government is the conductor." It directs everyone, but relies on musicians (in this example, the local governments) to achieve what is desired, they write. Local authorities own and fund non-elite colleges and institutions, as well as schools, but they operate based on policies made by the Central government.

The book credits Deng Xiaoping, the leader under whom the Chinese economy modernised in 1978, for raising the scale and scope of the education system. Among 18 to 24-year-olds, the share of people enrolled in college increased from 1% in 1976 to 57% in 2021.

The exam has come under criticism for

furthering inequalities, particularly on regional and class lines. Colleges can set local quotas and most premier institutions are based in major cities.

Combined with China's household registration system that designates citizens as hailing from rural or urban areas, it means that those in cities have a disproportionately high chance of making it to top colleges. They are also more equipped to spend a considerable amount on additional classes and other resources.

A type of affirmative action system awards some advantages to ethnic minorities, including those from the regions such as Tibet.

Over the years, there has been an increasing focus on pushing Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects in Chinese universities. This is in line with the government's plans to push for "New Quality Productive Forces", meaning high-tech and more efficient economic development. It has also meant a lower uptake for social sciences.

India has spelt red lines to US. Now seal trade deal

THE LAST year-and-a-half has seen strains in the India-US relationship over trade, Russian oil, and claims of American mediation during Operation Sindoor. Despite high-level engagement, including US Secretary of State Marco Rubio's recent visit to India, restoring trust between the two sides remains a work in progress. India is not the only country whose diplomacy has been challenged dealing with the mercurial US President, Donald Trump. Italian PM Giorgia Meloni's once-warm relationship with Trump has soured over Rome's reluctance to support Washington in its war with Tehran. Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Canada's Mark Carney are no strangers to this predicament. Trump's maverick style of statecraft has forced allies and rivals alike to recalibrate their approach to Washington. It is in this context that the meeting between Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi — their first in 16 months, on the sidelines of the G7 summit last week — assumes significance. The Prime Minister welcomed the progress made in peace efforts in West Asia and underlined that “mutual trust is the most important strategic asset today”.

The US President, through his military actions, weaponisation of tariffs and transactional diplomacy, has eroded the post-war international order, and India has not been immune to the consequences. The question is whether New Delhi can quickly come to terms with the structural shifts underway in American foreign policy. Given that the US is India's largest economic partner, not just in trade, but also in investment, technology and higher education, the fundamentals of the relationship remain strong. New Delhi has no choice but to adapt and manage Trump for the remaining two-and-a-half years of his term; neither open confrontation nor submissive behaviour is likely to work. Prime Minister Modi's approach at the G7 — crediting Trump for his peace efforts while simultaneously working towards a trade deal to limit tariffs, as US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer visits India this week — appears to be the most effective course available.

That does not mean India should hesitate to defend its interests. PM Modi raised with Trump the safety of Indian seafarers after External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar lodged a protest with Rubio over US attacks in the Gulf that killed three Indian mariners earlier this month. The task of diplomacy is to make India's red lines clear while navigating crises beyond its control. What remains in India's control is strengthening its leverage by modernising the economy, defence capabilities and technology ecosystem. Achieving those goals will require deeper engagement with the West, particularly the US. India's challenge is to preserve both partnership and autonomy.

When doctors can move, healthcare benefits

IN A first-of-its-kind reform, Andhra Pradesh has thrown open its doors to doctors from across India by removing state registration hurdles. An MBBS graduate holding a recognised medical qualification and valid registration with any state or UT medical council in the country will now be allowed to practise in the state, without a separate Andhra Pradesh Medical Council registration or a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the council where they are registered. The order cuts through a bureaucratic roadblock that has long deterred doctors — particularly young graduates and specialists — from moving to states where there are better opportunities. With Andhra Pradesh's registered doctor base standing at roughly 1.05 lakh for a population of nearly 5 crore, and the country's overall doctor-population ratio hovering at 1:811 against the WHO benchmark of 1:1,000, this is likely to help address shortages in specialist care and strengthen the state's ambition to attract medical talent from across India.

The significance of the decision is not limited to healthcare administration alone. In a country that routinely speaks of the ease of living and doing business, domicile preferences in public employment and local registration requirements have often tested the spirit, if not always the letter, of constitutional guarantees. Driven by political and administrative considerations, states frequently create procedural hurdles that limit opportunities. For instance, in an attempt to stem high attrition rates, Bihar recently made it mandatory for government doctors to complete three years of continuous service before becoming eligible for NOCs. There are also other tangible costs for those seeking to relocate. Re-registration fees at state councils typically range from Rs 5,000 to Rs 10,000, while obtaining an NOC from a home-state council — a prerequisite for re-registration elsewhere — can take weeks and involve additional paperwork.

Andhra Pradesh's move also aligns with the broader objective behind the National Medical Commission's efforts to create a seamless national registration framework. The “One Nation, One Registration” platform was launched in August 2024 to eliminate impediments to professional mobility. Yet only around 1,800 registration certificates have been issued so far, while more than 30,000 applications remain pending verification at state medical councils. By lowering barriers to mobility, Andhra Pradesh has not only moved to strengthen healthcare delivery, it has shown that states need not wait for administrative bottlenecks to be resolved before adopting the principle underlying the reform.

FREEZE FRAME

BY EP UNNY



The Editorial Page

Road to energy security passes through our farms



FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH

BY ASHOK GULATI
AND SUBHDEEP BASU

THE WEST Asia crisis has exposed a structural vulnerability in India's growth story: Its heavy dependence on imported fossil fuels. Whether it is power generation, transport or fertiliser production, India's energy architecture remains deeply import-dependent. For a fast-growing economy, this is not merely a macroeconomic concern; it is a strategic risk.

But energy insecurity is not India's only challenge. Climate change is increasingly threatening agricultural livelihoods. The forecast of a strong El Niño in 2026 does not augur well for farm incomes. The question, therefore, is not only how India secures its energy future, but also how it builds income resilience for its farmers, who comprise 43 per cent of the workforce. The answer may lie in turning India's *annadata* into *urjadata*, from producers of food to producers of energy, too.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's push towards renewable energy is commendable. As of March 2026, renewable energy capacity stood at about 274 GW, with solar alone crossing 150 GW. But the model so far adopted in solar energy is mainly large solar parks and PM Surya Ghar. The PM-KUSUM scheme is basically for solar pump sets. This is not sufficient for agricultural transformation. We

lay out below a case for agriphotovoltaics on farmers' fields that has potential not only to generate clean energy in rural areas but also to halve the government's power subsidy, while also increasing farmers' incomes manifold. If promoted by PM Modi on priority basis, it can transform not just agriculture but the very growth story of India. Let us delve a little deeper into it.

Agriphotovoltaics (Agri-PV) integrate solar power generation and crop cultivation on the same piece of land. This allows farmers to harvest both sunlight and crops. Solar panels are mounted at a height of about 3.5 metres, which permits cultivation beneath them while generating electricity for sale to discoms. The result is dual use of land and dual streams of income.

Unlike agricultural income, which is vulnerable to weather shocks, pest attacks and market fluctuations, solar income is stable. In effect, solar becomes a “third crop” that provides a dependable source of earnings when conventional crops fail.

ICRIER, with support from Kotak Mahindra Bank's CSR initiative, has created a pilot 600 KW solar plant in Rajasthan. The State Bank of India provided a loan of Rs 1.4 crore, and the farmer himself put in Rs 60 lakh. The project has increased the farmer's income from about Rs 40,000 per acre from wheat and bajra cultivation to nearly Rs 4 lakh per acre through a combination of energy sales and shade-tolerant horticulture, demonstrating a tenfold income enhancement potential.

The significance of Agri-PV extends beyond farmers' income. It also addresses a longstanding distortion in India's power sector. Agri-culture consumes nearly 2,60,000 GWh of electricity annually, yet pays tariffs far below the actual cost

of supply. According to the Comptroller and Auditor General of India's recent report, Steering India's Power Sector Towards Viksit Bharat (2026), the average cost of supplying electricity in India is around Rs 8.5/kWh, and assumed revenue realisation from agricultural consumers close to Re 1/kWh. This implies an effective subsidy of at least roughly Rs 7.5/kWh. India's annual power tariff subsidy bill is approximately Rs 2.35 lakh crore, with agriculture accounting for roughly 85 per cent. The true cost of power subsidy to agriculture may be even higher as the cost of supply to agriculture is higher than Rs 8.5/kWh, once technical losses, long feeder lines and the costs of maintaining rural distribution infrastructure are taken into account. This would take the farm power subsidy to over 90 per cent of total tariff subsidy. No wonder that, despite repeated reforms and financial bailouts, discom finances remain under severe stress.

Agri-PV offers an opportunity to fundamentally alter this equation. By generating electricity at the farm level and feeding it into local distribution networks, it reduces transmission losses and infrastructure costs while transforming farmers from consumers of highly subsidised power into producers of clean energy. However, scaling Agri-PV requires supportive policy. Elevated structures make Agri-PV systems 15-20 per cent more expensive than conventional solar projects, creating a significant entry barrier for farmers.

A differentiated feed-in tariff of say Rs 4.5/kWh, coupled with targeted support under PM-KUSUM, can significantly improve project viability and accelerate adoption. From the perspective of discoms and state governments, such support should be viewed not as an additional subsidy but as a smarter

● WORDLY WISE
Diplomacy is to do and say the nastiest things in the nicest way.
— Isaac Goldberg

reallocation of existing expenditure. Even at a feed-in tariff of Rs 4.5/kWh, discoms would be procuring clean power at roughly half the effective cost of supplying power to agriculture. In effect, every unit of electricity generated through farmer-owned Agri-PV has the potential to reduce the subsidy burden by nearly half while simultaneously creating a new source of farm income.

The policy implications are clear. Existing support mechanisms under PM-KUSUM Components B and C already provide capital subsidies for standalone solar pumps and the solarisation of grid-connected agricultural pumps. If public support is considered justified for solarising irrigation, a strong case can be made for extending similar support to farmer-owned Agri-PV projects under Component A that simultaneously generate clean energy and preserve farm incomes. Targeted capital subsidies and an attractive feed-in-tariff can be game-changers, and a win-win for the government as well as farmers.

Institutional innovation will be equally important. Just as milk cooperatives transformed India's dairy sector, solar cooperatives can aggregate small-holders, improve access to finance, strengthen bargaining power and manage power sales collectively. Such cooperative institutions can become the vehicle through which the Agri-PV revolution can be unleashed.

If PM Modi takes it up on priority, he can not only transform India but also set an example for the Global South, especially Africa, under the theme of “One Sun, One Earth, and One Grid”. That would bring relief from fossil fuels while augmenting farmers' incomes. Can he do that? Only time will tell.

Gulati is distinguished professor and Basu is research fellow at ICRIER. Views are personal

A home of her own can be a lifeline



BINA AGARWAL

T WISHA SHARMA'S untimely death in Bhopal on May 12, following reported spousal abuse and dowry demands, is just one of several thousand such deaths reported annually in India. People often ask me (given my research on gender inequality issues): Why don't even educated professional women leave abusive marriages? My answer is simple: Usually because they have nowhere to go.

A woman could potentially return to her parents, but most Indian parents encourage a daughter to “adjust” and view her return from a “failed marriage” as a blot. What about a shelter home for victims of domestic violence? Apart from inadequate numbers, these can, at best, provide temporary emergency refuge. The same goes for friends. A rental apartment can be expensive, would not be available immediately if you have to flee violence, and landlords are often suspicious of single women tenants. The one sure protection, however, can be owning an apartment, even a one-room studio flat.

My research with a colleague, Pradeep Panda, on spousal physical violence among ever-married women in 502 randomly selected rural and urban households in Kerala (a state with high female education and female-favourable sex ratios), showed that owning immovable property (house or land) provided the single most important protection against this. The incidence of domestic violence (DV) was 49 per cent where women owned neither house nor land, 18 per cent and 10 per cent respectively if they owned land or a house, and only 7 per cent if they owned both. Simply being employed did not help unless it was a formal-sector job (which barely 10 per cent of Indian women have). Working in a family enterprise or farm does not provide women independent or assured earnings. Subsequent research, in UP in India, as well as other countries, has reinforced these findings.

Owning a house gives a woman an exit option. It deters violence and gives her a place to stay if she does face abuse. It provides what economists call “a credible threat point”. Also, in our study, very few of the pro-

pertyless women who faced DV left their spouses, and of those who did, most returned. Women owning homes, on the other hand, rarely returned.

In 2005, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act was passed. Its implementation has been poor. Neither policymakers nor most women's groups have made the link between DV and women's home ownership, even though the Hindu Succession Amendment Act, also passed in 2005, gave married women coparcenary rights in ancestral property and the legal right to return to their parental homes.

The just-released NFHS-6 (2023-24) fact-sheet shows that women own a house or land (individually or jointly) in only 18.8 per cent of households across India. Even in Kerala, the figure is just 34 per cent.

The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, which gives homes to poor urban families, prioritises female household heads. This is a welcome start, but not enough. Middle-class women facing violent marriages also need independent housing support. There are three aspects to this. One is architectural — the need to build several affordable studio apartments in every multi-storey housing complex. The second is financial — some government schemes do provide subsidies and charge women buyers lower interest on loans, but awareness is limited, and a grant along with the loan would help. The third is the need to think outside the box. For instance, women can jointly own homes with other women if they can't afford one alone. Parents could also gift funds for such purchases, instead of the usual dowry in jewellery and moveable items. Joint home ownership with non-relatives is possible in India with a co-ownership agreement, under laws such as the Transfer of Property Act, 1882, and the Registration Act, 1908. Much can be done to protect women from spousal violence, the most effective measure being helping them buy a room or a plot of their own.

The writer is professor, Development Economics & Environment, GDI, University of Manchester, & former director, Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi



BHARATH REDDY

On AI, US & China have an outdated arms race mindset

OVER THE past few weeks, two governments showed us how they are thinking about AI. Beijing restricted overseas travel for top AI engineers from private firms like DeepSeek and Alibaba. Washington issued a directive to Anthropic to suspend its frontier models for foreign nationals, including its own employees. A commercial product used by millions of people was pulled off the shelf. One country treated software engineers like nuclear physicists, and the other treated a software product like a munition. Both policy actions flow from the same story about what AI is.

National security thinking in the US and China treats AI as a zero-sum arms race or a weapon of mass destruction to be contained through non-proliferation. This narrative has been promoted by frontier labs to gain market share and shape the regulatory landscape. Other policy instruments seen recently, such as export controls and hardware tracking of chips, also stem from this narrative. The framing makes coercion feel like prudence.

However, this analogy misrepresents the technology. Unlike rare, controllable fissile material, AI models are mathematical artefacts that are easily reproducible and constantly diffusing. Chinese firms built competitive models despite chip export controls, and powerful open-source models remain freely downloadable. The bottlenecks to unlocking productivity lie in widespread adoption: Bridging the capability-reliability gap, learning curves, organisational reforms and regulatory compliance.

A more honest framing is the geopolitical innovation race. Here, a dense web of public and private actors across the world compete and collaborate, driven by a mix of national security, economic advantage, and market incentives. The policy instruments that follow are constructive: Compute investment, skilling, industrial policy, strategic partnerships, organisational reforms.

The response for a middle power like India is to lean into AI as a general-purpose technology while acknowledging the geopolitical innovation race. The value lies not just in inventing the frontier but also in diffusing it widely and well. The Supreme Court's draft guidelines on the use of AI tools in courts are a telling example. The returns of the AI era will accrue to the countries that put it to work in health, agriculture, law, and public services.

That points to three priorities. Diffusion over denial: Spend political energy on adoption infrastructure, regulatory clarity, and sector deployment. Plurilateral resilience over self-sufficiency: Coalitions of the like-minded — India and the EU have complementary strengths — can share open-source development costs and build trusted supply chains. Finally, open over closed: The Fable 5 and Mythos 5 suspension shows that dependence on a nationally controlled, closed model risks access being withdrawn overnight. Open-weight models, open standards like RISC-V, and open alternatives to proprietary stacks are resilient because no single government can switch them off.

The writer is associate fellow, Takshashila Institution

The response for a middle power like India is to lean into AI as a general-purpose technology while acknowledging the geopolitical innovation race

40 YEARS AGO
June 22, 1986



Vajpayee among 9 elected

THE BHARATIYA Janata Party leader, Atal Behari Vajpayee, and eight Congress (I) candidates were elected unopposed to the Rajya Sabha as the deadline for withdrawal of nominations ended. As many as 58 candidates are now left in the fray for the June 28 elections for the remaining 37 seats in six states. The Congress (I) bagged all three seats from Orissa, where the opposition did not field any candidate.

Punjab, Centre at loggerheads

A WAR of attrition has begun between the Centre and the Punjab government over the terms of reference given to Justice D A Desai,

who was asked to identify the 70,000 acres of land to be transferred from Punjab to Haryana in lieu of Chandigarh. While the Punjab Cabinet repudiated the reference made to Justice Desai, the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, in a communication to the Punjab Chief Minister, Surjit Singh Bamala, pointed out that the terms of reference of the Desai Commission were amended in accordance with the text settled in consultation with Bamala and accepted by him.

Centre-MNF accord likely

THE NEGOTIATIONS between the Government and the Mizo National Front to end the insurgency have reached the final stage, and an agreement is expected “very soon”. After

an hour-long meeting between the Union Home Minister, Buta Singh, and the MNF chief, Laldenga, in New Delhi, an official spokesman said that a draft agreement had already been prepared.

Army to vacate Red Fort

THE ARMY has agreed to vacate the Red Fort and hand over most of the complex to the Archaeological Survey of India. Of the 80.45 acres in the Red Fort complex, 68.45 acres are with the Army, which does not permit even ASI officials in this portion. The decision to hand over this historic fort to the ASI was taken under a directive from the late Indira Gandhi some years ago that the Army should vacate all ancient forts under its control.



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In time of distrust, Constitution's promise of fraternity matters more than ever



S Y QURAISHI

EVERY SCHOOLCHILD can recite the Preamble to the Constitution: Justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. The first three have generated debate in courts, politics and academia. The fourth, however, has passed almost unnoticed. Yet fraternity may be the most consequential of all the constitutional values because it is the one value that law alone cannot create.

The neglect is curious because the Constitution does not treat fraternity as an afterthought. It appears in the same sentence as the other three, carrying equal constitutional weight. The framers placed it there deliberately. The question is why we have spent 75 years largely ignoring it, and what that neglect has cost us.

The answer begins with a distinction that was explicit during the Constituent Assembly debates but has since faded from constitutional discourse. Liberty and equality define the relationship between the citizen and the state. Fraternity defines the relationship between citizens themselves. That distinction makes all the difference. If the state violates liberty or equality, courts can intervene. But what recourse exists when citizens cease to regard one another as fellow citizens? When disagreement hardens into hostility and difference into suspicion, fraternity begins to disappear. B R Ambedkar understood this with unusual clarity. In his final address to the Constituent Assembly on November 25, 1949, he warned, "Without fraternity, equality and liberty will be no deeper than coats of paint." His warning stemmed from a frank assessment of Indian society. "How can people divided into several thousands of castes be a nation?" he asked. He was reminding us that nationhood is not a given but an achievement, and fraternity both its condition and proof. The Constitution's concern with fraternity did not end with the Preamble. Article 51A(e) makes it a Fundamental Duty of every citizen to pro-

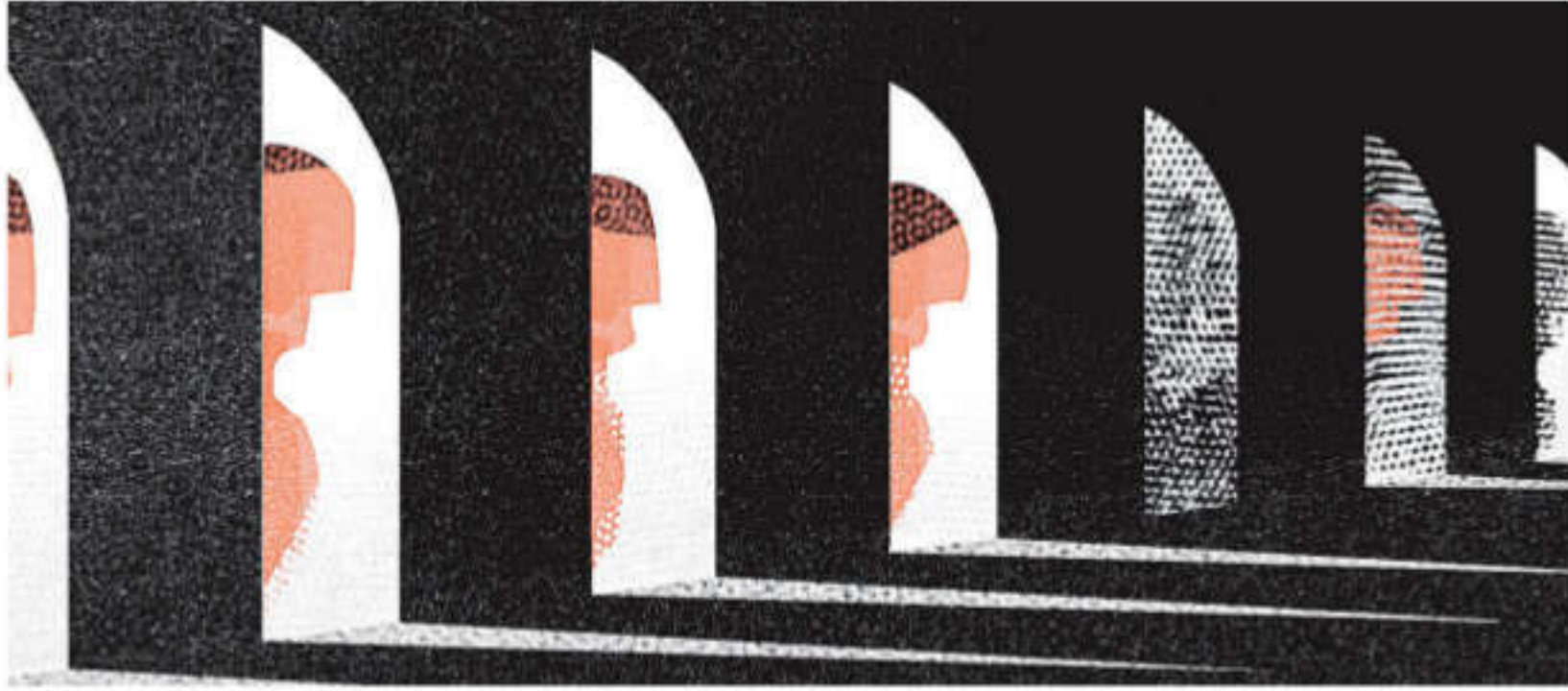


ILLUSTRATION: C R SASIKUMAR

mote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood across religious, linguistic and regional differences.

Seventy-five years later, the original anxieties have not diminished. Though we have never been more connected technologically, we have rarely been more estranged socially. Public debate has grown louder, sharper and more vicious, while mutual understanding has become thinner. The greatest damage caused by hate-filled discourse — whether political, religious or digital — is not that it offends. Democracies have always survived offence. Its deeper damage lies in the erosion of trust.

Trust is the invisible infrastructure of a functioning society — the assumption that strangers can deal with one another in good faith. When that assumption erodes, no law can fully restore it. The economy depends upon it. Democracy depends upon it.

Liberty and equality are justiciable, enforceable and actionable before a judge. Fraternity belongs to a different category. If liberty and equality are the fundamental rights of citizens, fraternity, for me, is the fundamental right of the nation. No court can manufacture mutual respect. No statute can create a sense of common belonging. No government programme can legislate trust. Yet it would be wrong to conclude that fraternity lies entirely beyond the reach of law and the government and the courts are helpless spectators.

No court can manufacture mutual respect. No statute can create a sense of common belonging. Yet it would be wrong to conclude that fraternity lies entirely beyond the reach of law

The Constitution and the criminal law contain a substantial architecture designed to protect social harmony. Article 14 guarantees equality before the law. Articles 15 and 25 protect citizens against discrimination and safeguard freedom of faith. Article 51A(e) imposes a duty to promote harmony and common brotherhood. Criminal law goes further. Sections 153A, 153B, 295A and 505 of the IPC, along with provisions protecting places of worship, were enacted to preserve civic peace and prevent communal hostility.

These provisions may not create fraternity, but they exist to prevent its systematic destruction. The challenge, therefore, is not the absence of legal safeguards. It is their uneven enforcement. Courts cannot command affection, but they can act against hatred, intimidation and attacks on equal citizenship. The law cannot manufacture fraternity, but it can — and must — prevent its destruction.

It is worth asking what 75 years of neglecting fraternity has produced. Consider what the government's own data tell us. For more than a decade, roughly 2 lakh Indians have been surrendering their citizenship every year, amounting to nearly 9 lakh in the last five years alone, according to information placed before Parliament. Many of those leaving are successful entrepreneurs and professionals. Their decisions reflect multiple factors, but the scale of the phenomenon raises a legitimate question: What role do social climate and civic

confidence play in such choices?

History suggests that prolonged social conflict leaves economic scars that persist long after the headlines disappear. India has already learned this lesson. Punjab was once the most prosperous state in the country, with the highest per-capita income as recently as the mid-1980s. The decade-long militancy and communal discord that followed devastated the investment climate. Punjab slipped from first place in per-capita income rankings and, between 2014-15 and 2022-23, it ranked 18th in economic growth among 21 major states. The damage was not merely economic; poisoned atmospheres take generations to clear.

The irony is difficult to miss. We have spoken of India becoming the world's third-largest economy and a fully developed Viksit Bharat by 2047. Yet public institutions have often appeared insufficiently concerned about an atmosphere of anxiety and periodic lawlessness that seems to corrode such ambitions. Lynchings, targeted demolitions and the normalisation of communal hostility are not merely law-and-order failures. They are fraternity failures. When such acts go unpunished, they send a signal — not just to minorities, but to every entrepreneur, investor and family weighing its future.

Polarisation may have delivered electoral dividends to those who have practised it. But a nation cannot continuously inflame its divisions for short-term political advantage and expect to contain its economic consequences.

Fraternity is not a pious wish inscribed in a preamble and ceremonially quoted on national occasions. It is the social oxygen without which neither liberty nor equality can survive, and without which no economy, however ambitious its targets, can truly flourish. Ambedkar warned that without fraternity, liberty and equality would be no deeper than coats of paint. For three-quarters of a century, we barely noticed the paint peeling. We are beginning to see the cracks now.

The framers placed all four values together for a reason. It may be time we did the same.

Quraishi is former chief election commissioner of India and author of An Undocumented Wonder: The Making of the Great Indian Election

Ease of justice has brought legal system closer to people



ARJUN RAM MEGHWAL

JUSTICE HAS always been a vital and integral pillar of human civilisation. Judicial institutions have served as the bridge that enables every stakeholder to develop a sense of trust, belonging, and association with the larger pursuit of justice and collective good. This necessitates the creation of a robust justice ecosystem — one that not only ensures access to justice but also facilitates ease of living for every citizen.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the governance paradigm has facilitated ease of living through a bottom-up approach while implementing a nation-first approach from the top down. Judicial reforms have encompassed legislative modernisation, institutional strengthening and digital innovation. The mantra 'ease of justice' incorporates ease of engagement for litigants, ease of working for advocates and judges, and ease of understanding for citizens.

From the litigant's perspective, services like Tele-Law and Nyaya Bandhu to promote pro-bono work under the Designing Innovative Solutions for Holistic Access to Justice scheme have made justice delivery accessible and affordable. More than 11.2 million beneficiaries from rural and remote areas have benefited from free pre-litigation legal consultations under Tele-Law. E-filing services and e-Seva Kendras have eased the litigant's interactions with the judicial ecosystem.

For advocates and judges, a push to upgrade both digital and physical infrastructure has enhanced the ease of working. As the subordinate judiciary serves as the first point of contact for the vast majority, strengthening it is an imperative. The number of court halls has increased from 15,818 in 2014 to 22,712, supported by the disbursement of Rs 9,400.40 crore since 2014 for the development of state-of-the-art integrated court complexes. Further, the e-Courts Phase-III project seeks to transform courts into end-to-end digital, paperless, and AI-enabled institutions of justice delivery. Initiatives like videoconferencing, virtual courts, and livestreaming court proceedings have brought the judiciary closer to the people.



Ease of understanding for citizens is an essential pillar of the broader ease of justice framework, particularly in a linguistically diverse country like India. AI-powered natural language processing tools such as the Supreme Court Vidhik Anuvaad Software and Bhashini are translating SC judgments and orders into 18 Indian languages. The National Judicial Data Grid provides single-click access to the analysis of information relating to over 340 million court orders.

The new criminal laws have incorporated contemporary realities. The integration of e-courts, e-prosecution, e-prisons, and e-forensics with the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems is a transformative step. The Nyaya Shruiti platform is facilitating virtual appearances and the recording of witness testimonies so efficiently that when a court grants bail to a citizen, the digital bail order immediately reaches the prison portal, eliminating the delays that traditionally hindered timely release.

The sanctioned strength of high court judges has increased from 906 in 2014 to 1122; that of the Supreme Court was increased from 31 to 34 in 2019, and has now been raised to 38. The appointment of 1,175 high court judges and 77 Supreme Court judges from diverse backgrounds in the past 12 years reflects the executive's commitment to strengthening the judicial ecosystem.

Reducing more than 40,000 compliances and repealing 1,725 redundant and obsolete colonial-era laws has contributed to the ease of doing business. Strengthening arbitration law, setting up institutions like the India International Arbitration Centre, and promoting mediation through the dedicated Mediation Act, 2023 reflect India's global leadership in alternative dispute resolution. India's leadership ensured the adoption of the Gandhinagar Declaration, a collective commitment to strengthening mediation and arbitration, at the BRICS justice ministers' meeting in 2026.

As India advances towards the goal of Viksit Bharat by 2047, we remain steadfast in our commitment to building a future-ready justice system — one that is resilient, innovative, inclusive, and inspired by the collective aspirations of 140 crore Indians.

The writer is Minister of State for Law and Justice (I/C) and Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs, Government of India

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Anthropic ban

THE RECENT US decision to restrict access to Anthropic's advanced AI models, Mythos 5 and Fable 5, for foreign users should serve as a wake-up call for India ('US diktat on AI makes case for global regulation', *IE*, June 20). Nations that do not control critical AI infrastructure and frontier models may increasingly find themselves dependent on decisions made elsewhere. For India, this development underscores the urgent need to accelerate investments in indigenous AI capabilities.

Bal Govind, Noida

WHEN ONE government can suspend global access to frontier models without citing specific risks, technological sovereignty becomes urgent ('US diktat on AI makes case for global regulation', *IE*, June 20). Opaque national-security claims breed mistrust and fragment innovation. Real safety demands binding rules, independent audits, and third-party testing before release, not post-hoc bans. India, with its vast data resources and user base, must lead in crafting a multilateral framework. Unilateral control will push states towards digital blocs, hurting science and security alike.

K Chidanand Kumar, Bengaluru

Cost of impunity

TEN YEARS of a special police cell and only 33 convictions from 2,656 FIRs expose a hollow promise ('Delhi's unfinished fight against prejudice', *IE*, June 20). Racist slurs and housing bias persist because nodal officers lack authority, data, and accountability. Awareness campaigns cannot replace time-bound trials, trained prosecutors, and public tracking of case outcomes. The Bezbaruah Committee's warnings still ring true. Racial violence must be treated as an institutional metric. Bias training, fast-track courts, victim compensation, and quarterly district-level disclosures should be mandated. Until prejudice carries a real cost, trust will not follow young people from the Northeast to India's capital.

Babu Crishna, Bengaluru



ASHOK KHEMKA

THE CONTROVERSY over the rejection of a nomination paper in the recent Rajya Sabha election from Madhya Pradesh raises an important constitutional question: How should the legal system respond when a returning officer (RO) is alleged to have unlawfully excluded a candidate from an election, yet the constitutional commitment to uninterrupted elections restricts judicial intervention until the electoral process is over?

The issue highlights a tension in election law. The Constitution seeks to ensure that elections proceed without disruption and are conducted in accordance with law. These objectives are complementary in theory but can occasionally come into conflict. The conventional constitutional response is found in Article 329(b), which generally bars judicial interference in electoral matters once the election process has begun. It channels disputes into an election petition after the declaration of results. This principle, upheld by the Supreme Court, serves an important democratic purpose. Elections cannot be subjected to litigation at every intermediate stage. Yet Article 329 was never intended to create a zone of immunity for electoral illegality.

An erroneous rejection of nomination affects not merely the rights of a candidate but the structure of the election. After polling, the consequences of such exclusion may become difficult to remedy in a meaningful way. The question is

Election petitions are often decided after substantial delays. A successful petition may establish a legal wrong but offer little practical means of correcting it

whether the constitutional framework provides a corrective mechanism.

The answer may lie in a fuller understanding of Article 324 — it vests in the Election Commission of India the "superintendence, direction and control" of elections. Judicial decisions have recognised that Article 324's supervisory authority enables the ECI to safeguard the integrity of the electoral process. Although ROs exercise statutory powers under the Representation of the People Act, they do so under the ECI's constitutional control. If the body has the authority to supervise electoral conduct, ensure compliance with election law and even countermand elections in exceptional circumstances, it is difficult to conclude that it lacks the power to correct a legal error by an RO in the scrutiny of nominations.

Such oversight need not assume the character of conventional appellate jurisdiction. Every dissatisfied candidate cannot be permitted to seek the reconsideration of routine factual determinations. However, a limited revisional jurisdiction to correct jurisdictional errors, manifest illegality, or clear misinterpretation of statutory provisions would enable serious legal disputes to be resolved promptly before polling and, more importantly, harmonise Articles 324 and 329.

The SC's cautious approach was justified. However, constitutional adjudication must remain attent-

ive to the efficacy of remedies. Election petitions are often decided after substantial delays. By the time a final judgment is rendered, elected representatives may have served a significant part of their term. Political alignments may have shifted. Members of the electoral college may have resigned, died or become disqualified. A successful petition may establish a legal wrong but offer little practical means of correcting it.

That's why Article 142 is relevant — it empowers the SC to pass such orders as may be necessary for doing complete justice in a matter before it. It is not a licence to disregard constitutional limitations, nor can it routinely displace statutory remedies. It exists for exceptional situations. Where a candidate alleges exclusion on a ground that is ex facie contrary to law, where the ECI has not exercised corrective supervision under Article 324, and where postponing scrutiny until an election petition may render effective relief impossible, a carefully tailored exercise of Article 142 may be constitutionally defensible. This would not amount to repudiating Article 329, but an attempt to reconcile the constitutional commitment to electoral continuity with the equally important commitment to meaningful justice.

The controversy reveals a structural gap. The challenge is not to choose between the three articles, but to harmonise them.

The writer retired as a senior IAS officer. Views are personal

A 10 per cent rule for sustainable development



RAJESH GOPAL

INDIA'S DEVELOPMENT trajectory is entering a decisive phase. Infrastructure expansion, renewable energy transitions and economic growth are accelerating, often in the landscapes that underpin the country's ecological security. Forested regions, many overlapping with tiger habitats and wildlife corridors, are increasingly at the centre of this transformation. This raises a difficult question: How much ecological cost is too much?

For decades, India has relied on regulatory instruments such as Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA), forest clearances and compensatory afforestation to manage this balance. More recently, the idea of Green

GDP — adjusting economic output to reflect environmental loss — has gained attention. Yet these approaches are often difficult to translate into clear decision thresholds. Policymakers need not merely more data but a simple, credible benchmark to recognise when economic activity begins to undermine its own ecological foundation. An answer may lie in a principle that governs all natural systems. In every ecosystem, energy flows through a hierarchy — from plants to herbivores to predators. At each step, most of the energy is lost, leaving only a small fraction available for the next level. This principle, described by Lindeman's 10 per cent Law, explains why nature forms pyramids.

In much of India's forests, the tiger is at the pyramid's apex. Its survival depends on a large and stable prey base, which in turn depends on healthy vegetation, water sys-

tems and minimal disturbance. Even small disruptions at the base can cascade upward, destabilising the system. This ecological reality offers an important economic insight: Systems can absorb only limited stress before they begin to degrade.

Recent estimates place the economic cost of environmental degradation in India at around 9-11 per cent of GDP. A precautionary approach would be to treat this as an ecological threshold

Recent estimates place the economic cost of environmental degradation in India at around 9-11 per cent of GDP. A precautionary approach would be to treat this as an ecological threshold

gical threshold — a point beyond which the economy is not operating sustainably and is drawing down its natural capital. Development must pay a minimum ecological due.

This idea acquires particular urgency in tiger landscapes. India's tiger reserves and corridors are embedded within landscapes that support agriculture, infrastructure and local livelihoods. They also provide critical ecosystem services, including water regulation, carbon storage and biodiversity conservation. These systems also operate under tight ecological margins. Incremental pressures — linear infrastructure, mining, unsustainable extraction and land-use change — can accumulate rapidly. The consequences are already visible in many regions: Rising human-wildlife conflict, fragmentation of corridors and stress on prey populations. In such contexts, a simple threshold can

serve as an early warning. If the cumulative ecological cost of activities within a landscape begins to exceed a notional 10 per cent of its total economic or ecological value, it should trigger a policy pause — not to halt development, but to reassess its scale, location and design. In more fragile wildlife corridors, an even more conservative threshold of 5-8 per cent may be appropriate. Such an approach can be incorporated into EIA processes, landscape-level planning in notified corridors, green accounting frameworks and infrastructure design.

In nature, as in economics, systems that consume their foundations do not collapse immediately. But they do, eventually — and often without warning.

The writer is secretary general, Global Tiger Forum

IRAN SAYS LEBANON A FOCAL POINT AS NEGOTIATORS MEET IN SWITZERLAND FOR PEACE TALKS

Ceasefire holds, but Israel says free to act against threats in Lebanon

Defence Minister Katz says troops to stay in Lebanon security zone

Reuters
Beirut, Jerusalem, June 21

ISRAELI SOLDIERS are free to act without restriction to eliminate threats in Lebanon, Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said on Sunday, adding troops remained in position in what Israel refers to as a security zone.

A ceasefire with Iran-backed Hezbollah took effect on Friday after months of escalating violence, but on Saturday Israeli strikes killed at least 20 people in Lebanon, Lebanon's state news agency NNA reported.

Israel said the strikes were a response to projectiles fired by the Iran-backed group at its troops in southern Lebanon, prompting attacks on what an Israeli official described as "Hezbollah targets".

A Hezbollah official told Reuters the group was committed to the ceasefire as long as Israel adheres to it, adding that Israeli forces do not have the right to freedom of movement in south Lebanon.

The official said Hezbollah forces have not fired on Israeli troops since 6:30 pm (1530 GMT) Saturday.

Security sources told Reuters Israel had also launched no major strikes on Lebanon since the same time.

That represents the longest spell without major strikes since the war in Lebanon between Hezbollah and Israel began on March 2.

When asked by Reuters about the last time Israel fired on Lebanon or engaged with Hezbollah, the Israeli military declined to provide a "specific time". The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request to comment on the claim they have ceased firing after 6:30 pm on Saturday.

Iranian officials have said Lebanon is the focal point for Sunday's peace talks with the United States in Switzerland after Washington and Tehran signed a framework to halt the war between them that began at the end of February, escalating tension across the region.

The Israeli military invaded parts of southern Lebanon. Hezbollah maintains it has the right to fight Israeli forces in Lebanon, but would halt attacks on northern Israel.

Katz said Israeli troops would remain in all positions in what it calls a security zone, which extends about 10 km (6 miles) into southern Lebanon.

Israel says that is to protect northern Israeli communities. "All of the IDF's achievements in the campaign in Lebanon are being preserved," Katz said in Sunday's statement.

Israeli armed forces chief of staff Eyal Zamir said that the ceasefire in Lebanon was fragile and that forces must maintain a high level of readiness for a possible resumption of combat operations. Zamir said forces must be prepared to eliminate threats and transition rapidly to renewed operations if required.

Meanwhile Hezbollah chief Naim Qassem said Israel will not stay in Lebanon, adding that the group would respond to any violation from the Israeli side.



A Lebanese army soldier at the site of an Israeli strike in Nabatieh, Lebanon, on Sunday. REUTERS

Israel says it 'eliminated' two Hamas, Islamic Jihad operatives

Reuters
Dubai, June 21

THE ISRAELI military said on Sunday that it had "eliminated" Hussein Qadra and Mohammed Farra, whom it described as operatives in the military wings of Hamas and the Islamic Jihad.

Qadra, who led the network alongside Farra, facilitated the transfer of more than half a billion shekels to Hamas, the Israeli military said in a post on X.

"With these funds, Hamas has continued to pay salaries to its terrorists and finance terror attacks," the military said, adding that the network was a significant source of financing for the group's military activities.

Later on Saturday, an Israeli airstrike killed three people, medics said, including Ahmed Wishah, a journalist working for Al Jazeera, in the Bureij refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip.

Al Jazeera said Wishah, a cameraman, was killed in what the network called a "heinous crime," about two months after his brother, Mohammed Wishah, also an Al Jazeera journalist, was killed by the Israeli military. The Palestinian Journalist Syndicate condemned Wishah's killing on Saturday.

Starmer on precipice as pressure builds on UK leader to resign

Associated Press
London, June 21

BRITISH PRIME Minister Keir Starmer is facing a career-defining decision: step down or fight a challenge from Labour Party rival Andy Burnham.

Starmer has publicly vowed to stay in post, but pressure is building as more and more Labour Party colleagues conclude his time is up. Expectation is growing that he will announce a timetable for his resignation as soon as Monday.

That's the day Burnham will be sworn in as a lawmaker in the

House of Commons after winning a special election last week. Starmer is spending the weekend at Chequers, the country mansion used by British prime ministers, with his family.

Business Secretary Peter Kyle said Sunday that Starmer is "making time to reflect on the political realities, challenges and opportunities that he finds himself in." "I know he is a prime minister who always puts his country first," Kyle told the BBC, though he said reports that Starmer will resign are "speculation."

Discontent with the prime



British PM Keir Starmer

minister has been building for months, with Labour lawmakers desperate to reverse the government's decline in popularity since Starmer led the centre-left party to a landslide election victory in July 2024.

He has struggled to deliver promised economic growth, repair tattered public services and ease the cost of living, and has been hamstrung by repeated missteps, including his decision to appoint Peter Mandelson, a scandal-tarnished friend of Jeffrey Epstein, as the UK ambassador to the United States.

Labour is losing liberal voters to the growing Green Party and facing a rising Reform UK, the Nigel Farage-led anti-immigration party that consistently leads in nationwide opinion polls.

Burnham, until this week the popular mayor of Greater Manchester, decisively won the seat of Makerfield in northwestern England in a special election held Thursday. He took almost 55 per cent of the 45,510 votes cast, over 9,000 more than the Reform UK runner-up.

Now that he is a lawmaker, he's in a position to challenge Starmer for leadership of the Labour Party. Burnham's acceptance speech left no doubt that he wants to lead both the party and the country.

"Everyone knows that politics isn't working," he said. "Everyone can feel that the country isn't where it should be. Tonight could, just could, be the turning point." Starmer congratulated Burnham on Friday, but insisted he would fight any attempt to oust him.

"I will run, I will stand," if there is a Labour leadership contest, Starmer said. "I've said repeatedly I'm not going to walk away from that." But Charlie Falconer, a senior Labour member of the House of Lords, said Saturday that Starmer has "absolutely no authority" left.

E-passport contract probe puts Nepal government under scrutiny

Yubaraj Ghimire
Kathmandu, June 21

A MEETING convened by Nepal's Prime Minister's Office (PMO) last week with senior officials from the country's anti-corruption body and foreign ministry has sparked a fresh political and diplomatic controversy amid an ongoing investigation into the procurement of electronic passports.

The unusual episode unfolded on June 15, when Chief Commissioner Prem Rai of the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) and Foreign Secretary Amrit Rai appeared at the PMO following a verbal summons, according to multiple sources familiar with the matter.

The discussions reportedly centred on the award of

contracts for printing and supplying more than six million electronic passports.

The contracts were awarded in June 2025 to two German companies — Veridos GmbH and Muehlbauer. Veridos received a contract worth Rs 6.15 billion for passport printing, while Muehlbauer was assigned biometric services under a separate contract at Rs 1.6 billion.

Sources familiar with the matter said PM Balen Shah had sought information on the progress of the project and concerns surrounding the procurement process. Several officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, claimed members of the ministry's technical procurement team had declined to endorse proposal to award contracts to German firms.

"The members from the

technical side of the procurement team had refused to endorse the ministry's proposal last year," one source said. The CIAA had been informed more than a week earlier about the PM's concerns regarding the passport procurement process.

Addressing the first national convention of the RSP in Chitwan on Sunday, Prime Minister Shah reiterated his government's zero-tolerance policy on corruption. He said the government would continue to question the CIAA's performance if investigations into corruption allegations were not conducted fairly and promptly.

The CIAA has already taken into custody the Director General of the Department of Passports, Mandira Malla, the local representative of Muehlbauer, as part of its investigation.



Czechs Defend Public Broadcasters

Thousands of people march through Prague on Sunday in support of Czech public broadcasters and against government plans to overhaul their funding. Critics say the proposal, which would shift Czech TV and Czech Radio financing from licence fees to the state budget, could undermine their independence and increase political influence over public media. REUTERS

• BRIEFLY

THE PHILIPPINES

Russia frees 24 Filipinos after Marcos speaks with Putin



Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr

RUSSIA HAS freed 24 Filipinos who were detained for months without charges in a Siberian city, after Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. raised concern for them in a meeting with President Vladimir Putin, Philippine officials said Saturday. The 24 arrived in Manila aboard two flights early Sunday, and the first batch was welcomed by Philippine Foreign Secretary Theresa Lazaro, who accompanied Marcos in his talks with Putin Wednesday in the city of Kazan, the Department of Foreign Affairs in Manila said. AP

TAIWAN

Military to launch five-day readiness drills

TAIWAN'S MILITARY will hold a five-day combat readiness drill this week, the defence ministry said on Sunday, as part of modernisation plans to shift its training focus to more realistic exercises simulating war, away from setpiece events.

Taiwan, says China's armed forces routinely operate in the skies and seas around the island in an effort to pressure it to accept Chinese sovereignty. REUTERS

GERMANY

1 dead as freight trains collide on Munich bridge

TWO FREIGHT trains collided on a railway bridge in Germany overnight, officials said Saturday, the crash sending two wagons plunging off the bridge and onto the street below. One person was killed. The German news agency dpa did not identify the victim in the crash, which occurred in the city of Munich. The wagons fell about 5 meters (16 feet) from the bridge, dpa said. AP

• NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

PAKISTAN

Cop killed in suicide bombing in KPK province

A POLICEMAN was killed and three others were injured in a suicide attack near a police vehicle in northwest Pakistan's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Sunday, police said. The incident occurred in the Lakki Marwat district when a police van from the Tajori police station came under attack when a suicide bomber detonated himself near the vehicle, officials said. AP

NEPAL

RSP kicks off first general convention

THE FIRST general convention of Nepal's ruling Rastriya Swatantra Party kicked off in Bharatpur Metropolitan City of Chitwan District on Sunday. RSP president Rabi Lamichhane and Prime Minister and senior leader of the party Balendra Shah jointly inaugurated the three-day general convention in a special programme. PTI

Ukraine drone attack kills five as Crimea halts public fuel sales

Reuters
Moscow, June 21

FOUR PEOPLE were killed and 28 wounded in a Ukrainian drone attack on the Russian-controlled peninsula of Crimea, Russian-installed governor said.

Separately, local authorities in Russia's Krasnodar region said a Ukrainian drone attack on an oil transport facility, confirmed by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, killed one person on a passenger ferry and set an oil terminal ablaze.

The Russian Defence Ministry said 239 Ukrainian drones had been shot down overnight.

Crimean Governor Sergei Aksyonov said fuel stations across the peninsula suspended sales to the public and businesses, with supplies restricted to government agencies responsible for essential services and security.



Residents evacuate after a Russian missile strike on a residential building in Kharkiv, Ukraine, on Saturday. AP

Ukraine has recently intensified drone attacks on Crimea, home to Russia's Black Sea Fleet, targeting peninsula's supply routes and triggering a fuel crisis.

A local power grid operator reported outages in several areas after damage to electricity networks, while ferry services were temporarily suspended.

• WITH SECONDARY EDUCATION AND MOST JOBS OUT OF REACH, THOUSANDS OF AFGHAN WOMEN HAVE TURNED TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS THE ONLY PATH TO MAKE MONEY AND MAINTAIN A SOCIAL LIFE

As opportunities vanish under Taliban rule, Afghan women turn to business to survive

Eliau Peltier
Herat, June 21

THE TALIBAN have imposed some of the world's toughest restrictions on women and girls, but to ward off economic collapse and isolation, they have let women start businesses in Afghanistan, as long as they comply with a cascade of debilitating rules.

More than 10,000 Afghan women have business licenses — a tenfold increase in the past five years, according to the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry. With an additional estimated 120,000 working without licenses, small businesses are the largest em-

ployers of Afghan women, according to the World Bank.

But that apparent boom does little to hide the shrinking horizons for women's lives.

Those who dreamed of becoming lawyers, engineers or university professors have turned to carpet weaving, cosmetics or vocational training because they cannot work in government administration or for many nonprofits.

They also cannot run beauty salons, study midwifery or nursing, or speak with male clients, suppliers or banking officials.

The vast majority of Afghan women do not work at all — less than 7% of Afghan women were employed as of 2024, ac-

cording to the UN Development Programme.

Those who do work have faced growing hurdles. The harassment and arrests of dozens of women by the morality police in June led to a rare public protest.

Still, as the Taliban approach the five-year anniversary of their return to power, Afghan women have turned to entrepreneurship as one of the last ways they can support their households and find a semblance of social life.

"The only remaining hope for women in Afghanistan is business," said Behnaz Saljugh, a representative for female business owners in the province of Herat.



On a recent morning in a warehouse in Mazar-e-Sharif, in northern Afghanistan, some 60 women knotted, trimmed

and wove rugs under the watch of their boss, Nasira Azizi, 19. Azizi was 14 when the Taliban swept back to power in 2021

and barred millions of girls like her from studying beyond sixth grade. "I fell into depression," Azizi said about the ban on education. "At home, you see the same faces all the time."

The rug workshop opened up her world. "Here, there are at least more topics to discuss, more motivation to get the job done," she said.

Azizi launched her business with financial support from the U.N. Development Program, including a grant to create jobs for Afghan women who have been expelled from neighboring Iran and Pakistan in recent years.

"Even before the Taliban came, I wanted to be an entrepreneur," Azizi said.

She now has about 450 workers in two workshops and at home. Her two brothers handle the rugs' design and the marketing. Her father runs one of the workshops, where male employees clean the rugs before they are sold.

The rest, management, human resources, finances, falls to Azizi. "The business license is under my name," she said.

Rozia Rezaei, 21, said she had dreamed of becoming a mining engineer before the Taliban took over Afghanistan. Unable to pursue that field, she taught English, but the Taliban government cracked down on private tutoring, and her students dwindled.

In 2022, she founded Magnolia, a soap business in Herat, one of Afghanistan's largest cities. It now sustains her family of seven, she said.

The smell of turmeric wafted over Rezaei's workshop on a recent afternoon as her mother stirred the simmering, gluey matter that would soon become soap. Rows of saffron-infused soap bars and dropper bottles filled with black seed oil sat in an adjacent room.

The setup remains rustic — two large stockpots, no automation — but Rezaei has her eye on Iran and Tajikistan as the next frontiers for her business, which she wants to turn into an international brand by 2030. NYT

TIE-UP WITH HOLTEC INT'L ON THE CARDS, FOLLOWS PACTS WITH EDF, CLEAN CORE AND ROSATOM

Global nuclear players turn to NTPC for N-tech partnerships

It is the only state-owned company involved in construction of a nuclear power project, apart from NPCIL

Pratyush Deep & Anil Sasi
New Delhi, June 21

NTPC LTD, the country's largest integrated power generator, is emerging as a key pivot in India's nuclear landscape after the sector was opened up through an overarching legislation late last year.

For decades, the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd (NPCIL) has been the vanguard of India's traditional nuclear establishment. With the passage of the SHANTI Act, 2005, which eased the liability framework and paved the way for greater private and foreign participation, NTPC is emerging as a second pillar of sorts and a partner of choice for global nuclear technology providers seeking a foothold in the Indian market.

Notably, an NTPC functionary is also seen as a possible contender for a top energy advisory role in the government.

The latest collaboration in the works is with New Jersey-based nuclear technology firm

Holtec International known for its flagship small modular reactor, the SMR-300. The company is understood to be in advanced discussions with NTPC and could formalise a partnership as early as next month, *The Indian Express* has learned.

This comes after NTPC signed a non-binding Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in April with Électricité de France (EDF) to explore co-operation in developing new nuclear power projects in India. The company has also inked an agreement with Russia's state-owned nuclear company Rosatom for its VVER series of reactors — a type of reactors called light water reactors, or pressurised water reactor (PWR).

NTPC is also in talks to buy a minority stake in US-based nuclear fuel technology company Clean Core Thorium Energy (CCTE), the company had informed the stock exchange in January. Both the companies are exploring the "development and deployment of a thorium-based fuel" for

• DEEPENING NUCLEAR PUSH

NTPC'S LATEST collaboration is with New Jersey-based nuclear tech firm Holtec International known for its flagship small modular reactor, the SMR-300

THE COMPANY is in advanced discussions with NTPC and could formalise a partnership as early as next month

THE THERMAL major is also in talks to buy a minority stake in US-based nuclear fuel tech firm Clean Core Thorium Energy (CCTE)



CCTE AND NTPC are exploring the 'development and deployment of a thorium-based fuel' for existing nuclear stations in India

existing nuclear stations in India, subject to regulatory clearances, Department of Atomic Energy told the parliament earlier this year.

Both Holtec and Clean Core are among the handful of American nuclear companies which have begged 'specific authorisations' from the US government with respect to a restrictive American regulation referred to as "10CFR810" — (Part 810 of Title 10, Code of Federal Regulations of the US Atomic Energy Act of 1954).

The authorisation permits these firms, subject to certain

conditions, to transfer technology to Indian entities, which is otherwise barred under 810 regulations.

NTPC's unique role, NPCIL's hold on PHWRs

NTPC's growing appeal among foreign nuclear technology providers stems from its unique position within India's nuclear ecosystem. Apart from NPCIL, it is the only state-owned power company currently involved in the construction of a nuclear power project. NTPC is developing the Mahi Banswara Rajasthan Atomic

Power Project through ASHVINI, its joint venture with NPCIL.

In its latest earnings call, NTPC said it has secured capacity consent for 2,770 megawatt-electric (MWe) of the proposed 2,800 MWe Mahi Banswara Rajasthan Atomic Power Project from the customers in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, and Andhra Pradesh.

The first concrete pour for the project is expected by August 2027, while synchronisation of the first unit with the grid is targeted for November 2032, the company added.

Another factor working in favour of the state-owned thermal power major, as many in the policy circle point out, is NPCIL's monopoly over the pressurised heavy water reactors (PHWR) technology which has long formed the backbone of India's nuclear power programme.

While PHWRs are a technology India's nuclear establishment has mastered, it is increasingly out of sync with the light water reactors (LWRs), or pressurised water reactors, that are now the most dominant type worldwide. The Americans, Russians and French are among the leaders in LWR technology.

FULL REPORT ON
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

Why India's largest power trader can't trade on the exchange it helped create

Pratyush Deep
New Delhi, June 21

INDIA'S LARGEST power trader, PTC India, finds itself in a Catch-22 situation.

The country's top electricity regulator on June 17 rejected a plea by a power exchange — a platform for generators, distribution companies, traders and large consumers to buy and sell electricity — that sought an exemption for PTC India.

Hindustan Power Exchange Ltd (HPX) asked for a three-year transitional exemption for the company to trade on the exchange while it gradually dilutes its stake to meet the regulatory threshold. Under the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC) (Power Market) Regulations, 2021, a trader-member cannot hold more than 5% equity in the power exchange on which it trades. PTC India currently owns 22.62% of HPX.

This comes as the CERC plans to overhaul India's power market architecture through market coupling. Under this mechanism, power prices across exchanges would be discovered through a centralised mechanism operated by Grid Controller of India, replacing the current system where each exchange independently determines prices based on its own demand-supply dynamics.

Hurdles for PTC India

The regulatory framework has left PTC in a difficult position. The company cannot trade on the HPX, which it helped create, unless it first dilutes its stake. Yet, selling that stake may prove difficult because HPX has struggled to gain market share and attract sufficient trading volumes. India

• MARKET STRUGGLE

• PTC cannot trade on the HPX, which it helped create, unless it first dilutes its stake. PTC India currently owns 22.62% of HPX

• Yet, selling that stake may prove difficult because HPX has struggled to gain market share and attract sufficient trading volumes

currently has three power exchanges regulated by the CERC. The Indian Energy Exchange (IEX) dominates the market with over 80% share, while Power Exchange India Ltd (PXIL) and HPX account for the remainder. Established in 1999, PTC India is the country's pioneering power trader and accounted for nearly 31.8% of the total bilateral electricity volume transacted through licensed traders in FY25, making the regulatory impasse significant for both the company and HPX.

HPX's struggle for market share

In HPX's submissions before the regulator, the exchange said that it has struggled to gain meaningful market share "due to the dominant position of one of the Power Exchanges", in an indirect reference to IEX.

It contended that allowing PTC India to participate as a trading member would bring liquidity and trading volumes to the platform, benefiting all stakeholders.

This is exactly what the HPX first projected as a business plan when the process of its formation began.

In that business plan, the exchange presented three business scenarios that were ana-

lysed for market size estimation. In all three scenarios, it was assumed that PTC would be able to bring business to the exchange platform. Even the conservative scenario in the business plan assumed that HPX would start with only the volume that PTC was trading through other exchanges. Other investors had invested a large amount in HPX based on this projection, the regulator noted in its order.

However, since the commencement of the exchange in 2022, PTC India has not reduced its stake and continued to trade through the other two power exchanges — IEX and PXIL. In its order, CERC noted that PTC India had not submitted documents showing efforts to dilute its shareholding. "Therefore, we find no merit in such submissions of the Petitioner, as these are purely commercial considerations," the regulator said.

PTC India seeks removal of curbs

PTC India's unease with this regulatory restriction prominently featured in its latest submission to the regulator on draft CERC (Power Market) (Second Amendment) Regulations, 2026. It proposed norms on market coupling — a process that seeks to discover a uniform electricity price across exchanges. In its submission to the regulator on June 5, PTC India argued that the proposed regulations mark a shift from an "exchange-centric" structure towards a more "member-centric" one. Here, market-clearing prices would be determined by the Market Coupling Operator, based on aggregated anonymous bids received across power exchanges.

FULL REPORT ON
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USTR Greer to arrive today for trade talks, tariff edge vital: Goyal

ENS Economic Bureau
New Delhi, June 21

THE UNITED States Trade Representative (USTR) Jamie-Song Greer will arrive here today to give final touches to the India-US interim trade agreement, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Sunday.

The ministerial-level discussion on the agreement between Goyal and Greer will be held on Tuesday and Wednesday. The talks follow two rounds of negotiations between Indian and US teams in the past two months.

Indian officials visited the US in April and in early June the negotiating team led by Assistant USTR Brendan Lynch was in India for four-day talks.

Last week, Prime Minister Narendra Modi met with US President Donald Trump for their first in-person talks in more than a year on the sidelines of the G7 summit in Evian, France. Both leaders struck an upbeat tone as they sought to turn the page on recent strains stemming from trade and other disputes, even as Trump said the deal has been "very close to a while."

New Delhi is keen on a competitive advantage over countries competing with it in the US market, before rolling out the much-delayed trade agreement. "The issue currently pending is that our duties need to be lower compared to those of competing nations," Goyal said. "Once this is settled, the trade agreement will be implemented."

“The issue currently pending is that our duties need to be lower compared to those of competing nations. Once this is settled, the trade agreement will be implemented.”

PIYUSH GOYAL
COMMERCE & INDUSTRY MINISTER

He added that the framework for the pact was finalized before the US Supreme Court ruled in February that Trump's previous tariff policy was unlawful.

The interim deal is based on the framework agreement reached between India and the US in February this year. As per the agreement, the US had agreed to bring down additional duties on Indian products to 18% from 50% in return for duty-free access for its manufactured products in Indian markets.

The agreement also mentions India buying \$500 billion worth of goods from the US over five years.

While the reciprocal tariffs, which sparked the trade negotiations, are no longer in force, the US is building another framework of tariffs using Section 301 of the Trade Act to enter into trade deals with partners. India's contention is that it must get lower tariffs among its competitors in the US market. FE

• REAL ESTATE'S NEXT AI FRONTIER: GENAI

The country's growing real estate economy could see an addition of \$14-17 billion over the next seven years, said a report titled 'GenAI in Indian real estate: Scaling the next frontier of innovation' by consultancy firm EY-Parthenon and realtors' apex body CREDAI.

30-50%
The increase expected in sales velocity through adoption of GenAI

\$359-438 billion The amount GenAI could contribute to the GDP by 2030, translating into an additional 5.9-7.2% impact on economy

GenAI's strategic value in real estate

• Real estate developers are seeing the strategic value of GenAI in unlocking operational efficiency, customer insights and competitive differentiation

• Apart from a likely improvement in sales velocity, developers could see around 30% faster product launches, said the report

Sector impact, inaction a risk

• By incorporating GenAI in real



estate sector's business landscape, the impact on its gross value added in the next seven years is estimated to be 3-4%

• Generative AI helps in generating new ideas and designs, among other things, by extracting patterns from

existing datasets

• According to Chaitanya Seth, Partner, Real Estate practice, EY-Parthenon India, GenAI is fast becoming central to value creation and competitiveness, making inaction a growing strategic risk

“The next phase of growth in Indian real estate will be driven not only by scale, but increasingly by intelligence, speed and the ability to make better decisions across the project lifecycle.”

SHEKHAR G PATEL, PRESIDENT, CREDAI

SOURCE: EY-PARTHENON-CREDAI REPORT/PTI

‘60% professionals say AI key to HR ops’

Press Trust of India
New Delhi, June 21

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) is becoming central to human resource management, with 60% of professionals surveyed saying it is now a top focus across HR functions, while another 15% reported its growing importance in areas such as recruitment and onboarding, according to a survey-based report.

The 'AI As The New HR Pri-

ority-Efficiency, Cost and Workforce Impact' report is based on a survey among 1,811 HR professional across industries conducted between May 7-31. Over 60% of professionals believe AI is now a top priority across HR functions, while another 15% say it is becoming a growing priority across recruitment, onboarding, routine HR operations, workforce staffing and HR solutions firm Genius HRTech DigiPoll Survey, the report revealed.

According to the report, 60% of respondents identified improving efficiency and productivity as the primary reason for AI adoption, followed by 20% who believe organisations are leveraging AI to reduce costs and optimise workforce management.

It found that AI is already transforming day-to-day HR operations, with 42% of respondents reporting significant improvements in the speed and efficiency of HR processes. PTI

Tata Motors secures orders for over 3,400 electric CVs

Mumbai: Commercial vehicle major Tata Motors on Sunday said it has secured orders for over 3,400 electric commercial vehicles (e-CV) across freight, logistics and passenger mobility segments.

The orders comprising around 2,000 small commercial vehicles and pick-ups, 900 trucks, and 500 buses, cut across a diverse range of applications from e-commerce, logistics, FMCG and FMCD distribution, and intra-city mobility to demanding sectors like cement, steel, mining, and tarmac operations, alongside inter- and intra-city passenger transport.

This wide-ranging deployment reflects growing customer confidence in electric mobility solutions in real-world conditions and signals a decisive shift from pilot programmes to scaled, operational integration of EVs across use cases, it said.

The firm said over the past 12 months, it has strengthened its electric commercial vehicle portfolio, introducing a new generation of e-CVs tailored to varied duty cycles and operating conditions. PTI

AC demand weakens in June despite heatwave

Viveat Susan Pinto
Mumbai, June 21

DEMAND FOR cooling appliances, particularly air conditioners (ACs), has slowed sharply in June compared with May as the peak summer buying cycle eases and consumers remain cautious amid higher prices, industry executives told *FE*. Persistent price increases over recent months have also pushed some entry-level buyers towards lower-cost alternatives such as air coolers and fans.

In contrast, fast-moving consumer goods such as beverages and ice cream have seen strong growth in June as consumers continue to seek relief from high temperatures.

"Sales growth rates for ACs in June have slowed to around 10-15% versus 30-35% seen in May," NS Satish, Chief Executive, Haier Appliances India, said. "Input costs remain elevated across several categories, including ACs, requiring calibrated pricing actions. Consumers are increasingly focused on value, particularly in larger appliances," he said. Kamal Nandi, Business Head and Executive Vice-President, appliances business, Godrej Enterprises Group,

said sentiment for AC purchases has remained weak in June, with April and May accounting for the bulk of seasonal buying.

"Demand for ACs was at its peak in April-May when temperatures first spiked. This has curtailed fresh purchases in June despite the ongoing heatwave," he said. Industry executives also pointed to intermittent rainfall across several regions that temporarily eased temperatures, further moderating demand for cooling appliances even during peak summer conditions.

While AC sales have softened, categories such as ice cream and packaged beverages have continued to post strong growth.

Amul and Mother Dairy have reported nearly 50% growth in ice cream volumes in June, while beverage makers are seeing robust demand for carbonated drinks, juices and hydration products. "The current heatwave has created a favourable environment for daily-consumption categories," said Jayen Mehta, Managing Director of Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation, which markets the Amul brand. FE

• SOME EXPERTS POINT TO THE RELIANCE GROUP ASSOCIATION AND JIO'S LARGE CUSTOMER BASE AS IPO STRENGTHS, WHILE OTHERS FLAG POTENTIAL LONG-TERM GROWTH STAGNATION DUE TO ITS INDIA FOCUS

Jio IPO may command higher valuation than Airtel despite lagging in key metrics

Akash Mandal,
June 21, Mumbai

RELIANCE INDUSTRIES Ltd's (RIL) telecom and digital arm Jio Platforms' IPO is expected to place the company among the country's most valuable listed entities, with some analysts pegging its valuation between Rs 12-13 lakh crore. This would put it ahead of rival Bharti Airtel, which has a market capitalisation of around Rs 11.6 lakh crore and ranks third among the country's most valuable listed firms.

The telecom major is valued higher than Airtel despite lagging in key metrics such as earnings and average revenue per

user (ARPU). For FY26, Jio had reported a consolidated profit after tax (PAT) of Rs 30,053 crore on a revenue of Rs 1.47 lakh crore, compared to a profit of Rs 33,823 crore and a consolidated revenue of Rs 2.11 lakh crore reported by Airtel. Airtel also ended the financial year with an average revenue per user (ARPU) — the highest in the industry — of Rs 257.4 per month, while Jio ranked second at Rs 214.

Why, then, is Jio expected to command a higher valuation?

India subscriber base

Airtel reported a total customer base of 66.6 crore across 15 countries as of March 31, including 48.2 crore subscribers in

India. While Jio operates only in the domestic market and trails Airtel globally, it has a larger Indian subscriber base of 52.4 crore, accounting for nearly 40% of the country's mobile users. Since Airtel still derives nearly 75% of its revenues from its India operations, Jio's higher Indian subscriber base provides a competitive edge for the company for now. "The key metric to see here is a product of both ARPU and revenue. So when it comes to the product of both these metrics, I would say Jio is currently leading," said Piyush Pandey, senior VP and lead analyst for the telecom sector at Centrum Broking.

"One of the reasons why the Jio IPO may pull investors is the



Jio's higher valuation is also driven by its 5G infra edge. REUTERS

association of the Reliance Group, who have historically left some money on the table for investors to make during IPOs

of their group companies. Secondly, the large pull of the customer base the company has currently is another factor," said

A Balasubramanian, MD and CEO at Aditya Birla Sun Life Asset Management Company.

However, some believe Jio's focus on the Indian market may lead to growth potentially stagnating in the longer run. "Jio's focus on Indian market has been positive till now, but maybe 7-8 years down the line, we might see subscriber growth getting very saturated, and growth would be driven by ARPU. In comparison, Bharti's Africa operations are growing much faster, which gives them a good opportunity," an analyst tracking the sector at a domestic research firm said. As per the data from Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, mobile net-

work penetration in India was at 90.28% as of April 2026, with the industry-wide subscriber base growing just 0.5% y-o-y.

The 5G infra edge

Jio's high valuation also comes from the edge it holds in its 5G infrastructure. When both firms began transitioning from 4G to 5G in 2022, Airtel chose the non-standalone (NSA) route, upgrading its existing network of 4G towers with 5G antennas, leading to a faster 5G rollout but limited speeds and restricted use cases. Meanwhile, Jio opted for the standalone (SA) route, which required more capital and longer time frame to implement. In fact, it spent around Rs

2 lakh crore to deploy the technology. However, this newer infrastructure allowed Jio to offer higher internet speeds, as well as serve the enterprise segment.

"Jio's integrated technology stack is a structural advantage that enables lower cost, faster rollout, and superior monetization vs peers reliant on external vendors. Its cloud-native 5G standalone (SA) network, proprietary UBR & nLOS technologies, and AI-led JioBrain platform improve broadband economics and network efficiency at scale for 524 million users," Elara Capital said in a report before Jio's IPO announcement.

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NEWSMAKERS IN THE NEWSROOM

WHY DENIS ALIPOV

Denis Alipov has been the Russian ambassador to India for more than four years, coming here in February 2022, just before the war in Ukraine began. He has lived in India for a few years as a child, went to Jawaharlal Nehru University to study for a year, and has done three diplomatic postings here. This is his fourth posting. Alipov is considered one of the top India experts within the Russian government. He had also worked with Russian Foreign minister Sergei Lavrov in his office. He is best placed to make sense of Russia-India ties at a time of political turbulence and the recent developments in geopolitics from that vantage point

Shubhajit Roy: You are among the first generation of diplomats from post-Soviet Russia to join the Foreign Service. Could you give us a broad overview of how India–Russia relations have evolved over the course of your four postings and where they stand today?

India and Russia have been close friends since before India's independence, with the Soviet Union supporting India's decolonisation efforts. Our relationship is built on a remarkably stable foundation. While we may differ on minor issues, we have never disagreed on matters of major international importance or on issues affecting our respective national interests. Today, one of the key priorities in our bilateral dialogue is addressing the trade imbalance by increasing Indian exports to Russia in order to ensure stable, balanced and mutually beneficial economic ties. India is an indispensable strategic partner for Russia, just as Russia remains an indispensable strategic partner for India.

Shubhajit Roy: How has India's position on the war in Ukraine evolved over the last four years?

India's position has remained consistent because it deeply understands the underlying context. For decades, Russia sought to establish a common security framework with the United States, Europe and NATO through dialogue, but those efforts ultimately failed. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, NATO disregarded Russia's security concerns and continued to expand eastwards. Like any self-respecting nation, we cannot accept infringements upon our core security interests or allow an openly hostile neighbour to become established on our borders. A lasting settlement will require both sides to accommodate each other's security interests. Otherwise, the conflict is likely to continue.

Shubhajit Roy: Last year, President Trump claimed he could end the war, yet there has been no resolution. What is the principal stumbling block?

Unlike his predecessor, Joe Biden, President Trump has demonstrated a genuine interest in resolving the conflict. However, the uncompromising position adopted by many European countries on Ukraine remains a significant obstacle. We are now in an indirect confrontation with the NATO alliance, which was created to counter the Soviet Union and has historically maintained an adversarial position towards Russia. We cannot allow Ukraine to become a NATO member and serve as a permanent source of security threats on our borders. Furthermore, the Nazi nature of Ukraine leadership, issues such as the ban of the Russian language, restrictions on the Russian Orthodox Church and the overall discrimination against Russian-speaking communities in Ukraine remain matters of serious concern for us. Until these fundamental issues are addressed, the conflict is unlikely to come to an end.

Shubhajit Roy: India has a deep defence relationship with Russia. How has the war in Ukraine affected defence exports to India?

I do not believe it has had a serious impact on our defence cooperation. For many years, we have moved beyond a simple supplier-buyer relationship towards a model based on co-production and co-development. Only a few days ago, I spoke at a seminar marking the 25th anniversary of the BrahMos joint venture. Two-and-a-half decades later, India has institutionalised the principle of self-reliance in defence through the Make in India initiative. We are proud to have been pioneers in what has now become a central pillar of India's defence policy. BrahMos missiles, Su-30MKI aircraft, T-90 tanks and Kalashnikov rifles are all examples of this approach. We are keen to expand co-operation through new projects. Deliveries of the S-400 system are proceeding according to the mutually agreed schedule. Four of the five regiments have already been delivered, and we expect to complete the contract by the end of the year.

Shubhajit Roy: There is some concern that, because of Russia's growing proximity to China, India's relationship with Russia could be tested in the event of a conflict between India and China. Are these concerns justified?

We will never allow our relationship with China to affect our ties with India, and vice versa. Russia maintains independent and self-sustaining relationships with both China and India, as well as with many other countries. India remains one of the highest priorities in our foreign policy and economic engagement. While our relations with China have expanded significantly, we would like our cooperation with India to be equally broad and intensive, and we have been entirely consistent on that point. India is a pragmatic and business-oriented country, although it has, at times, approached certain areas of cooperation with caution. Nevertheless, we have continued to make progress, which reflects India's desire to diversify its economic partnerships. We see growing willingness to expand cooperation across a wide range of sectors, including industry, agriculture, energy, nuclear power, defence, space, culture, hu-

ON INDIA'S RUSSIAN OIL IMPORTS

'Russian oil has been advantageous for India over the past several years. We continue to offer competitive prices. If India chooses to reduce imports from Russia, we will simply redirect those supplies to other markets'

ON INDIANS IN RUSSIAN MILITARY

'At present, there are no Indian citizens serving in the Russian armed forces. We stopped accepting Indian volunteers approximately two years ago following a request from the Indian government'

‘We will never allow China to affect our ties with India, which remain a high priority in our foreign policy’

Denis Alipov, the Russian Ambassador to India, on the solid foundation of the India-Russia relationship, the impact of Western sanctions on defence exports and its continued conflict with Ukraine. He was in conversation with Shubhajit Roy, Diplomatic Editor, *The Indian Express*



Russian Ambassador Denis Alipov (right) with Shubhajit Roy, Diplomatic Editor, *The Indian Express* RENUKA PURI

manitarian exchanges and labour mobility.

Ritu Sarin: Could you provide an update on two aspects of India–Russia trade relations? First, the contract for 120 Vande Bharat trains that Russia is expected to supply, and second, the delay in Gazprombank commencing operations in India.

We have been awaiting the issuance of a licence for Gazprombank by the Reserve Bank of India. The delay is not on the Russian side. More broadly, we are keen to expand our financial relationship, including by increasing the presence of Russian banks in India and encouraging more Indian banks to operate in Russia. As for the Vande Bharat project, we won the contract and the work is proceeding according to schedule. The first prototype is expected by the end of this year.

Anil Sasi: Has the conflict in West Asia exposed the limitations of American security guarantees? And does that, in any way, overlap with Russia's concerns about NATO expansion?

NATO is, in our view, an outdated organisation that should be dismantled. Our assessment is that the United States has failed as a security provider for the Gulf countries and made a serious mistake by attacking Iran. We also observe a broader shift in global attitudes towards the United States. Its position as the sole dominant global power is weakening. President Trump's current emphasis on domestic priorities suggests a reduced interest in maintaining claims to global dominance which, in our view, would be beneficial for the international system.

Shubhajit Roy: Many would argue that Iran has been one of Russia's key partners, particularly given its supply of Shahed drones. Russia is, therefore, also a significant actor in the region. Is the current situation a test case of

whether Russia can push back against American influence as a security guarantor in the Middle East?

We have no intention of imposing ourselves on the Middle East or replacing any other external power in the region. However, we do have legitimate interests there and we are determined to defend them. Russia has long been a member of the Quartet on the Middle East peace process, which has regrettably been sidelined in recent years, particularly following the emphasis placed on the Abraham Accords. We continue to believe that the Palestinian issue can only be resolved on the basis of a two-state solution. The region to Russia's south is of considerable strategic importance to us. I would not say that we have been as actively involved in efforts to end the conflict involving Iran as countries such as Pakistan, Qatar and several other Gulf states. Nevertheless,

we have made proposals to both Washington and Tehran and offered assistance, including with regard to the storage of enriched uranium. Those proposals were not accepted. President Putin has discussed the possibility of Russian involvement in resolving the crisis with both President Trump and the Iranian leadership. Russia remains ready to assist whenever our help is required.

Anil Sasi: How do you explain Ukraine's ability to reclaim territory and conduct strikes deep inside Russia?

Ukraine has intensified its drone attacks, and we have responded in kind. On the battlefield, Russia is advancing gradually but steadily across all sectors of the front line. The basic reality is that the defeat of Russia, on which Ukraine and some European governments continue to place their hopes, is

objectively impossible.

Europe's attempt to wear Russia down economically has also failed. We possess a significantly higher threshold of endurance. Europe is not prepared to put everything at stake, whereas Russia is. It should also not be forgotten that Russia is a nuclear power. We retain the right to use nuclear weapons if the existence or territorial integrity of the Russian state is threatened.

P Vaidyanathan Iyer: European economic pressure has pushed Russia closer to China. How do you view this growing reliance?

Our trade with China was expanding well before 2022. At the same time, we remain determined to deepen our economic relationship with India, although the response from the Indian side has been more cautious. The assumption that Russia's relationship with China should automatically be viewed as a sensitive issue for India is fundamentally mistaken. A broader and more diversified economic partnership between Russia and India would help alleviate such concerns.

P Vaidyanathan Iyer: Do you see significant reluctance on India's part when it comes to expanding trade with Russia?

Not on the part of the government. The business and financial communities have naturally been more sensitive to the impact of sanctions, and we understand that. India's economy is deeply integrated into global trade and financial networks. India would not wish to sacrifice its relations with the United States and Europe for the sake of its relationship with Russia. My point is that Western sanctions interfere in what should be a bilateral relationship between Russia and India. These are matters that do not concern third parties. We see this as a manifestation of a neo-colonial mindset — the notion that others know better than India what

India's interests should be. Such pressure tactics are illegitimate and should be rejected

Flora Swain: There have been reports of Indian nationals and North Korean soldiers participating in the war in Ukraine on Russia's side. What safeguards are in place to prevent foreign nationals from being recruited into the Russian military?

Russia has faced demographic challenges for more than three decades. That is a long-term issue and is unrelated to the conflict in Ukraine. At present, there are no Indian citizens serving in the Russian armed forces. We stopped accepting Indian volunteers approximately two years ago following a request from the Indian government. In fact, Russia has never operated a programme specifically designed to recruit foreign nationals. Those foreign citizens who serve in the Russian military do so on a voluntary basis.

Sukalp Sharma: Given the uncertainty surrounding sanctions and India's purchases of Russian oil, do you expect current import levels to be maintained once the latest US sanctions waiver expires? And how do you assess India's continued purchases of Russian crude following sanctions imposed on companies such as Rosneft and Lukoil?

I cannot predict the precise volumes of Russian oil that India will purchase in the future, either with sanctions in place or without them. What is clear is that Russian oil has been economically advantageous for India over the past several years, particularly after Europe increased its purchases of Middle Eastern crude, which had previously been one of India's principal sources of supply. We continue to offer oil at competitive prices, and India will always be welcome to purchase it. If India chooses to reduce imports from Russia, we will simply redirect those supplies to other markets. We are comfortable with either outcome. Nevertheless, Russian oil remains among the most competitively priced options available. As of May this year, Russia accounted for approximately 38 per cent of India's total crude oil imports.

Shubhajit Roy: Before that, Russia accounted for less than one per cent of India's imports.

Sanctions should be understood for what they are: a political instrument of pressure. They should be rejected. There is another, less obvious but equally important point. Even if a political settlement in Ukraine is eventually reached, sanctions may remain in place for a considerable period. Waiting for them to disappear would only damage Russia–India cooperation over the long term. Neither Russia nor India wants that outcome. Russia remains, and will continue to remain, one of India's principal partners. Nuclear energy, defence and space cooperation are among the key pillars of our relationship. Rosatom is the world's leading nuclear energy company. We have worked successfully with India for many years, even without legislation such as the SHANTI Act, while fully accommodating India's positions on safety, liability and regulatory conditions. We are also engaged in extensive discussions on artificial intelligence and large language models. Russia and India cannot rely exclusively on technologies developed in either the United States or China, and both countries are investing heavily in developing their own capabilities.

Sukalp Sharma: G7 sanctions and the oil price cap have led to what the West calls Russia's 'shadow fleet'. Critics have concerns over their age, safety standards, the disabling of AIS transponders and ship-to-ship transfers. How do you respond?

These are artificial pretexts. The term 'shadow fleet' is used because many of these vessels are not insured through Western providers such as Lloyd's. They are insured by Russian, Indian and other non-Western insurers and should, therefore, be regarded as part of a normal commercial fleet. This is yet another example of double standards being applied in order to single out political opponents. The actions recently taken by Britain and France are unacceptable. Russia has begun escorting certain vessels and tankers with naval ships in order to prevent such incidents. The vessel detained recently in the English Channel was not sailing under the Russian flag. It may have been carrying Russian oil, although I cannot say whether the cargo was destined for India. In our view, such actions amount to a form of piracy that Britain appears to have revived.

Ravi Dutta Mishra: What is the current status of rupee–rouble trade and Sberbank's operations in India?

We already have a functioning mechanism for conducting transactions in national currencies — roubles and rupees — and Sberbank is making full use of it. Indian banks should also take greater advantage of these opportunities and of the bilateral mechanisms that have been established to expand trade in national currencies. Sberbank has maintained an active presence in India and continues to expand its activities. It is also involved in projects related to artificial intelligence, the digital economy, digital solutions and education.



WEEKLY CAPSULE

Brain improves into your 90s

A THREE-YEAR study of nearly 4,000 adults, ranging from age 19 to 94, found that brain health can improve at any age, challenging the common belief that mental sharpness must decline as we get older. Participants spent just a few minutes a day on brain-training activities, and researchers at the University of Texas at Dallas found measurable gains across multiple aspects of brain health, including thinking clarity, emotional well-being and a sense of purpose. Positive changes were observed even among participants in their 80s, showing that efforts to improve brain health are just as effective later in life.



Kidney's secret backup system

SCIENTISTS AT Mayo Clinic have uncovered a surprising new way the kidneys conserve water, revealing a hidden backup system that works independently of the hormone, long believed to control the process. The discovery emerged when researchers testing an old drug called probenecid expected it to worsen polycystic kidney disease (PKD) but found it actually slowed cyst growth instead. Probenecid alters how kidney cells handle urate, a molecule that sets off a series of cellular events that move water channels to the cell surface, allowing the kidneys to reabsorb water and concentrate urine.



Preservatives up BP risk

A STUDY of more than 1,12,000 people found that eating foods containing common preservatives may be linked to a higher risk of high blood pressure and heart disease. Researchers tracked participants for up to eight years and discovered that people consuming the highest amounts of certain preservatives had significantly greater risks of hypertension, heart attack, stroke and other heart problems. The strongest associations were seen in people who consumed the largest amounts of preservatives, suggesting that greater exposure may carry greater health risks. The research was done by INSERM.



Sugar-free diet may backfire

NEW RESEARCH by the Dasman Diabetes Institute in Kuwait suggests that completely eliminating sugar may backfire. Mice on a sucrose-free, low-fat diet showed worse blood sugar control, increased inflammation, disrupted gut bacteria and signs of fatty liver compared with mice that consumed some sucrose. The results highlight the importance of a balanced diet and a healthy gut microbiome rather than focusing solely on limiting sugar. This may influence future diet recommendations by emphasising the importance of maintaining a healthy gut microbiome rather than focusing only on sugar restriction.



GLP-1 reduces violent behaviour

A RUTGERS study suggests GLP-1 drugs such as Ozempic and Wegovy may weaken the link between impulsive tendencies and violent behaviour. The surprising finding hints that these medications could affect how people act on impulses, though researchers stress that cause and effect have not been proven. According to the researchers, the relationship between impulsivity and violent behaviour was about 62 per cent weaker among current users than among former users. The connection between alcohol use and violent behaviour was about 52 per cent weaker among current users.



CONSULTATION ROOM

DR AMBUJ ROY

PROF OF CARDIOLOGY, AIIMS, NEW DELHI

Can yoga complement medicine? The evidence is growing

Studies are showing results, from heart attack recovery to prevention

EVERY YEAR on International Yoga Day, millions roll out their mats, celebrating a practice that has been part of India's civilisational heritage for millennia. Yet the most important development of yoga for us in academia is happening beyond parks or stadiums. It is happening in research laboratories, clinical trials and medical journals. Yoga is steadily moving from a belief system to an evidence-based health intervention. The numbers tell a compelling story. Nearly 90 per cent of all scientific publications on yoga in medical literature have appeared in the last two decades. In fact, this has accelerated further in the last decade, with the number of yoga-related clinical trials reported in PubMed (the leading biomedical search engine) more than doubling in the most recent decade compared with the preceding 10 years. This transition is particularly important in my field of cardiovascular medicine, where claims are scrutinised rigorously and only interventions supported by evidence find a place in clinical practice. Today, that evidence is beginning to emerge and become mainstream. One of the landmark studies in this field was the Indian Council of Medical Research-funded trial by our Yoga-CaRe group of authors, published in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology* in 2020. Conducted across 24 centres in India and among nearly 4,000 patients recovering from heart attacks, it remains the largest randomised clinical trial ever undertaken on yoga-based cardiac rehabilitation. It found that patients who participated in a structured yoga-based rehabilitation programme reported significantly better health status and earlier return to normal daily activities, following a heart attack. In fact, among practitioners who attended 75% or more of yoga sessions, there were 40% fewer adverse cardiovascular outcomes. The Yoga-CaRe trial was important not merely for its findings but also for demonstrating that yoga can be evaluated using the same rigorous standards applied to medicines and medical devices. More recently, CaReMATCH, an analysis of several cardiac rehabilitation trials, showed that yoga was as beneficial as conventional cardiac rehabilitation in improving quality of life and preventing recurrent hospitalisations by 30%. This has important implications for India, since the availability and acceptability of standard cardiac rehabilitation with multiple instruments and gadgets is limited and expensive, while yoga is culturally acceptable and readily available and affordable.

Altogether 49 trials found that yoga produced reductions of 5 mmHg in systolic and 3 mmHg in diastolic BP

A yoga-based rehabilitation model can extend the reach of cardiovascular care far beyond tertiary hospitals into smaller cities and rural communities. Research suggests that yoga works by improving autonomic balance (equilibrium between the sympathetic fight-or-flight and the parasympathetic rest-and-digest systems) enhancing heart-rate variability (the natural fluctuation in the exact time intervals between consecutive heartbeats and an indicator of how well your body adapts to stress and recovers from exertion) reducing stress-related hormonal activation, and improving psychological well-being. These mechanisms are key to cardiovascular health.

Evidence for yoga is emerging not only in cardiac rehabilitation but also in preventive cardiovascular health. A growing body of research suggests that regular yoga practice can improve blood pressure, body weight, lipid levels and, importantly, quality of life. A pooled analysis of 49 trials found that yoga produced average reductions of 5 mmHg in systolic and 3 mmHg in diastolic blood pressure. Such reductions can lead to 25% and 20% lowering in the risk of brain and heart attack, respectively. The public health implications of this can be profound. Even modest improvements in these risk factors can translate into large reductions in cardiovascular disease and other non-communicable conditions, including disorders affecting brain health, kidney disease and bone health, when adopted across large populations. Beyond disease prevention, yoga promotes positive health and has been shown to improve physical fitness, mental well-being, emotional resilience, sleep quality and healthy ageing — outcomes that are increasingly recognised as important components of overall health.

The next step is to expand access to yoga while systematically measuring its impact on health outcomes. Doing so will help generate the evidence needed to guide policy and maximise yoga's contribution to public health. Positive results should lead to its systematic implementation through the extensive network of Ayushman Aarogya Mandirs as a proactive health policy. The real story of yoga in the 21st century is, therefore, not one of ancient wisdom competing with modern science. It is one of ancient wisdom being examined, tested and, where justified, validated by modern science. India has long exported yoga as culture. The moment has come to export it as evidence-based therapy.

Over 2,000 cough syrup brands: Can regulators ensure they're safe?

Cough syrups are among the most consumed medicines but recurring contamination incidents have exposed flaws in quality checks

Anonna Dutt

COUGH SYRUPS are among the most widely manufactured and consumed medicines in India, making robust regulation of the market essential. In May alone, sales touched at least 8.47 lakh units worth Rs 6,670 crore, according to pharma retail tracker Pharmarack. Yet the sector has repeatedly come under scrutiny after contaminated cough syrups were linked to the deaths of children in India and abroad. The Health Ministry has since tightened rules, restricting sales to licenced chemists and making doctors' prescription mandatory. With more than 2,000 manufacturers producing cough syrups across the country, experts say sustained regulatory vigil, rigorous quality testing and stricter enforcement are critical to safeguarding public health. "Cough syrup manufacturers are like *halwais* — they are everywhere. This is the reason it is very difficult to maintain the quality of the products. While bigger companies may implement good manufacturing practices, ensure sterile water and environment, it is not true for most manufacturers," says an industry expert, who did not wish to be named.

This is a cause for concern, considering the apex drug regulator did not have on its record the Tamil Nadu-based firm whose cough syrup was implicated in the deaths of at least 22 children in Madhya Pradesh (MP) last year. After the incident, the drug regulator admitted that the company was not on its records and that the state had never shared information about them with the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO).

Massive inspection drive but does it yield results?

Following the incident, the apex regulator reached out to all states to gather data on all cough syrup manufacturers across the country and then carry out a risk-based inspection — vetting of the premises of a manufacturing unit that has been repeatedly flagged for substandard drugs.

The CDSCO, along with state regulators, has inspected the premises of 960 companies since last year, based on which 860



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actions were taken, including issuance of showcase notices, stop production order, suspension, cancellation of licences/product licences and warning letters. Around 1,100 manufacturers have been subjected to intense audit since.

"While the states were asked to share details of all cough syrup manufacturers after the incident in MP, the challenge is that some may still not do so," says an official in the know of the matter. Another expert on drug regulation adds: "If the company is not on record itself, how can risk-based inspection be carried out? For risk-based inspection, data of previous regulatory action and instances of samples failing are used to determine which companies or manufacturing units need to be inspected."

Where are manufacturing clusters located?

Manufacturing units of the companies making the most common cough products — by sale and by volume — are largely clustered in states such as Maharashtra, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Goa.

Some of the topmost common brands of cough syrups sold in India are Cipla's Corex, Glenmark's Ascoril, Centaur's Sinarast, Dr Reddy's Zedex and Johnson and Johnson's Benadryl among others.

There's need for a consolidated database across states and the Centre for regulatory information



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DIAGNOSING ILLS

What are the major regulatory challenges?

While the current move by the Centre is likely to have limited impact, experts say that ensuring availability of quality raw materials — even to the smaller companies — is likely to reduce instances of contamination. "The 2,000 manufacturers of cough syrup are not the problem, the fragmented regulatory ecosystem in India is. India today has effectively 37 regulators, one per state/UT and the national regulator — the CDSCO. There is no consolidated database containing accurate information from all these 37 regulators, despite India being a single market for all practical purposes with drugs being able to cross state borders as easily as any other commodity," says public health activist Dinesh Thakur.

So, a drug manufactured in West Bengal can be sold in Karnataka but the Karnataka drug controller cannot inspect the plant in West Bengal or cancel its manufacturing licence if it sells substandard drugs in Karnataka. "At most the Karnataka drug controller can launch a criminal prosecution and that can take a lot of time in Indian courts. Even if there is enough evidence, the courts tend to be very lenient. It is this fragmented regulatory framework that is the problem. Despite petitions, the core issue is still unaddressed," adds Thakur.

• DECODING A STUDY

IIT Bombay finds a new way to lower LDL cholesterol

Researchers stop bad fat from reaching the site inside liver cells that releases it into the blood

Purnima Sah

FOR DECADES, scientists have tried to lower harmful fats in the blood by targeting enzymes, genes or receptors involved in fat metabolism. Researchers at IIT Bombay have now taken a strikingly different approach: preventing bad fat from reaching the site inside liver cells that releases it into the bloodstream.

Working with scientists at IISER (Indian Institute of Science Education and Research) Pune and IISER Kolkata, the team has developed a tiny peptide (a short chain of amino acids or the building blocks of life) called KTDP that interrupts the movement of fat inside liver cells. In laboratory-grown liver cells and zebrafish, this reduced the release of cholesterol and triglycerides into the bloodstream by nearly 50 per cent.

The findings, published recently in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)*, are still at an early stage. The peptide has not been tested in humans. But researchers say the work opens an en-

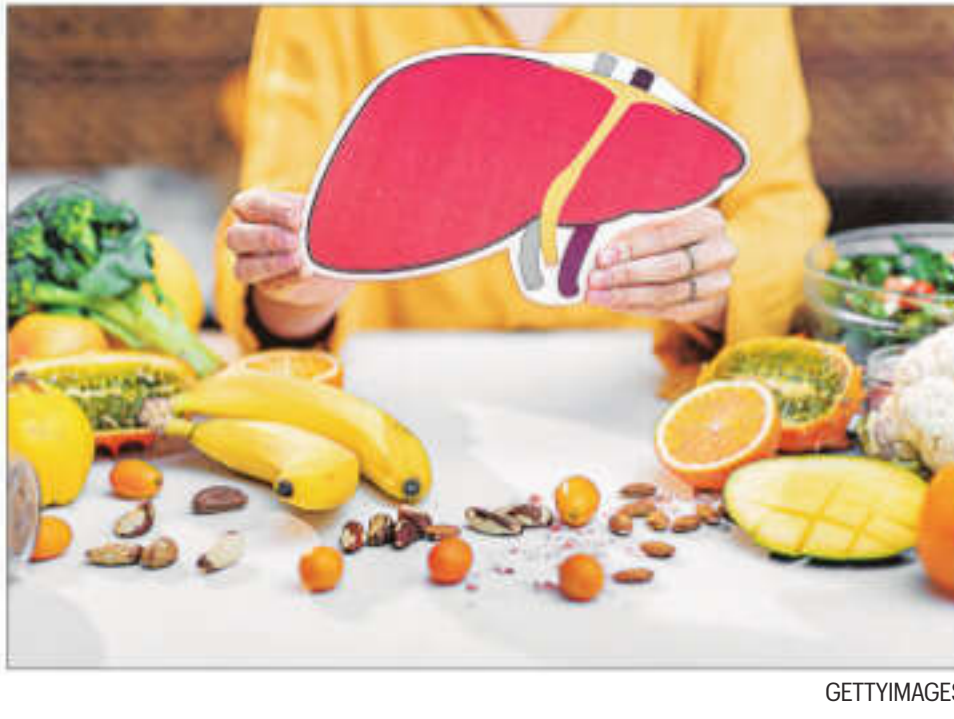
tirely new strategy for reducing the biggest risk factor of heart attacks, namely bad fats — LDL (low-density lipoprotein) and triglycerides — in the blood.

Why does this finding matter?

While medicines such as statins have transformed the treatment of high cholesterol, options for lowering triglycerides remain relatively limited. The IIT Bombay study proposes a fresh way of reducing the liver's export of fats into the bloodstream rather than interfering with how fats are produced or broken down.

The liver is the body's central hub for fat metabolism. Inside liver cells are tiny storage compartments called lipid droplets that temporarily hold fats such as cholesterol and triglycerides. When required, these droplets are transported to specific locations within the cell, where they are repackaged into very low-density lipoproteins (VLDL) and released into the bloodstream.

Professor Roop Mallik of IIT Bombay explains it simply. "There are little balls of fat



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Blocking fat export did not lead to dangerous fat build-up inside the liver. Fatty acids were instead redirected to the mitochondria

inside our liver cells. These need to be carried to specific locations inside the liver cell. From there, the fat is repackaged into lipoprotein particles and sent out into your blood," he says. "If we can tone down the export of fat from the liver into blood using a small peptide, we could have a new way of treating high serum lipids." The researchers' solution was KTDP, a tiny peptide derived from a naturally occurring protein.

What is KTDP?

Researchers identified a motor protein

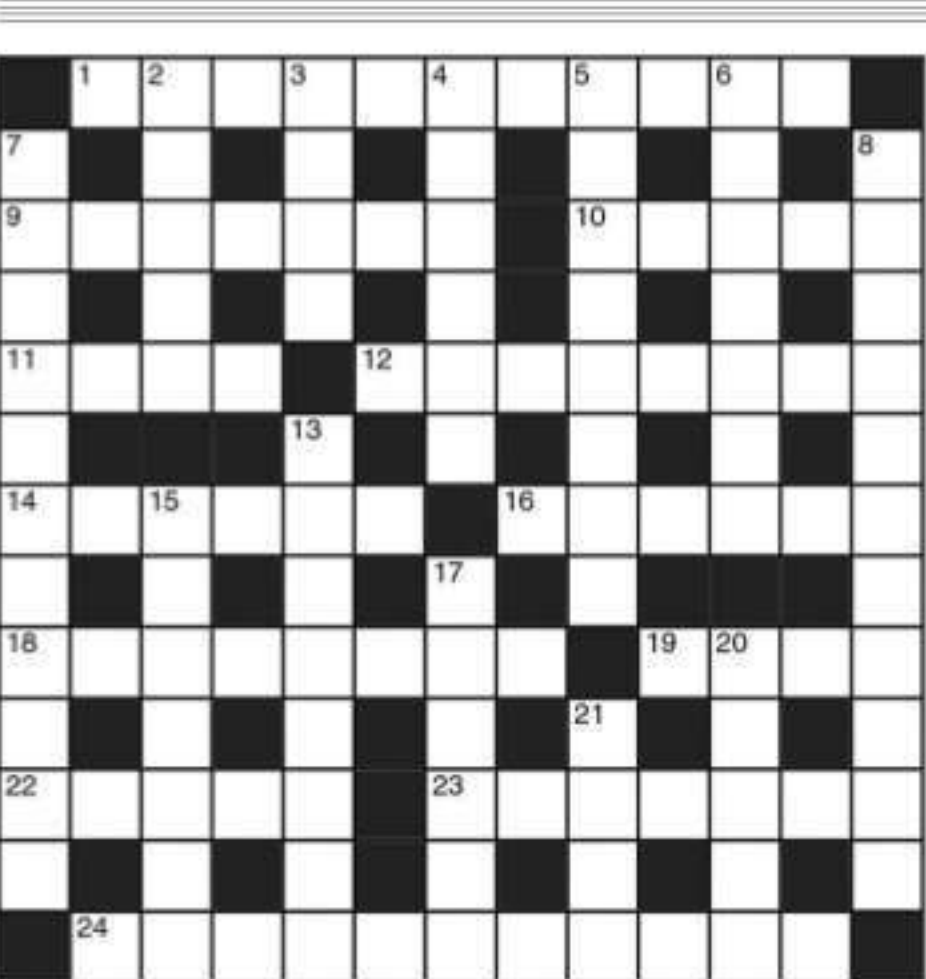
called kinesin-1, which is a delivery truck operating inside a cell. "These motor proteins catch hold of these fat particles and take them to a certain location. We found a small piece of this protein called a peptide. When we delivered this to cells or zebrafish, these didn't get carried to the right location," Prof Mallik says. Without reaching that destination, the fat cannot be packaged into VLDL particles and exported into the bloodstream.

How is this different from statins?

Current cholesterol-lowering medicines, including statins, work by reducing cholesterol synthesis or increasing its clearance from the blood but have nothing to halt it in its tracks. Because the peptide selectively blocks the transport of lipid droplets without shutting down protein functions overall, researchers believe it could avoid some of the side-effects associated with disrupting a motor protein.

Excess fat circulating in the blood can accumulate in several organs. "That is a disaster because that fat is going to accumulate in your heart and other tissues," says Prof Mallik. Interestingly, blocking fat export did not lead to dangerous fat build-up inside the liver. Fatty acids were instead redirected to the mitochondria — the cell's energy-producing structures.

CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1 He'll do! (3,2,6)
9 Perfectly good chaps but still on probation (7)
10 One big bird or two below par (5)
11 Sell damaged lengths of cloth (4)
12 Ragman upset by bill for brandy (8)
14 Spread out (6)
16 Be back in time for a serious discussion (6)
18 Patient having had to give up work (8)
19 But they could be even for the better (4)
22 Yet such a marriage won't end in the divorce court (5)
23 Free delivery (7)
24 A warning of some blow to come (5,6)

DOWN

2 It's hard hit when ironworkers strike (5)
3 Unrepeatable start of fairy story (4)
4 Maintain a lock up (6)
5 One who hasn't made a score in years (8)
6 Ron goes to Gaza in order to get material (7)
7 Irate, took food to excess (11)
8 Treat speech broadcast as a sign of bias in class (8,3)
13 Unusual for one (8)
15 He quibbles about suits after the bill goes up (7)
17 He has the skills to make a suit (6)
20 American lawyer without force or emotion (5)
21 Give a signal and slow down (4)

SOLUTIONS CROSSWORD 6020 ACROSS: 1 Past it, 4 Act a part, 9 Ousted, 10 Emphatic, 12 Each, 13 Manor, 14 Free, 17 Dark thoughts, 20 Call to the bar, 23 Ural, 24 Stand, 25 Long, 28 Overseer, 29 Carmen, 30 Fortress, 31 Adults
DOWN: 1 Proceeds, 2 Sash cord, 3 Item, 5 Common ground, 6 Ache, 7 Astern, 8 Ticket, 11 Man of letters, 15 Steak, 16 Itchy, 18 Abnormal, 19 Brigands, 21 Put off, 22 Career, 26 User, 27 Raid

JUMBLD 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.

Any philosophy that can be _____ belongs there. - Sydney J. Harris (3,2,1,8)

NAEIS

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

LOTTA

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

EFLNNU

○ ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

LMYHPU

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

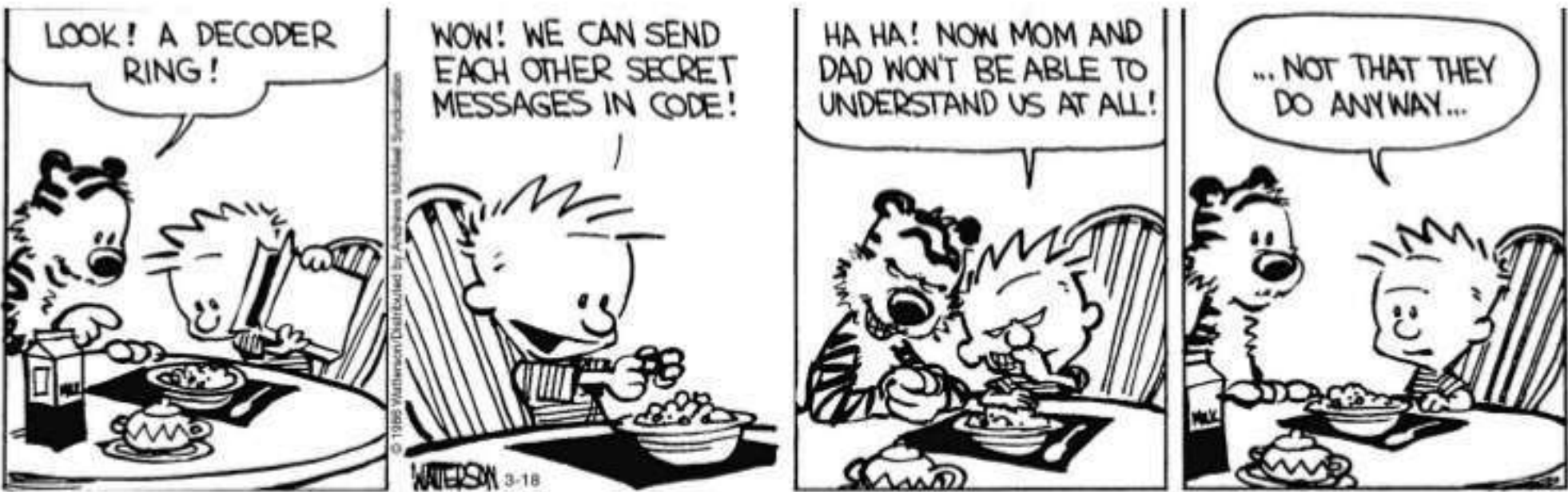
ANSWER: Any philosophy that can be put in a nutshell belongs there. - Sydney J. Harris

SOLUTIONS: Aries, Total, Funnel, Phylum

OVER THE HEDGE



CALVIN & HOBBS



MARVIN



DIFFICULTY LEVEL 5s

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

SUDOKU 6357

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

SOLUTION SUDOKU 6356

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

ROYAL STARS

ARIES (MAR 21 - APR 20): Today the Moon is opposite your sign, which means you have to go more than half-way when dealing with others. Having said that, a close friend might be critical or difficult today. Don't be dis-suaded. Tonight: Cooperate.

TAURUS (APR 21 - MAY 21): The good news is that you have the determination to be productive today. In fact, everything you do will be more powerful and more in-tense. Late in the day, don't let criticism or comments from someone older discourage you. Tonight: Get better organised.

GEMINI (MAY 22 - JUNE 21): Parents need to take a lighter touch when dealing with their kids, because you might be obsessed about something, or perhaps they are. Remember the advice of Johann Goethe, "Correc-tion does much, but encouragement does more." To-night: Socialise.

CANCER (JUNE 22 - JULY 23): Family discussions will be emotional today, perhaps because someone — and this someone could be you — is obsessed about some-thing. This will make you exhausted. (Send out for dark chocolate.) Tonight: Relax at home.

LEO (JULY 24 - AUG 23): Today has its challenges. Dis-cussions with others might not be easy. In fact, you might feel isolated or cut off, certainly misunderstood or ignored. Don't be discouraged. Tonight: Study and learn.

VIRGO (AUG 24 - SEP 23): Today money issues and fi-nances might be important to you. In fact, discussions about taxes, debt, credit, inheritances or shared prop-erty might occupy your thoughts. Take a deep breath and reorient yourself. Tonight: Maintain your possessions.

LIBRA (SEP 24 - OCT 23): Today the Moon is in your sign dancing with Pluto, which can intensify your emo-tions and make you obsessed about something. Mean-while, your partners and close friends might lack sym-pathy. Tonight: You win.

SCORPIO (OCT 24 - NOV 23): Today has its challenges. Accept this right off the bat and decide to move forward carefully, step-by-step. Reduce expectations for yourself and others. Be proud of what you achieve. Tonight: Privacy.

SAGITTARIUS (NOV 24 - DEC 22): You might attract someone who seems like a zealot. Meanwhile, relations with your kids and romantic partners might be strained. Channel your energy into work. Tonight: Be friendly.

CAPRICORN (DEC 23 - JAN 20): You're noticed today. You might be keen about an idea, and yet you feel no one is listening. Be patient with family members. It's easy to feel disappointed. Tonight: You're admired.

AQUARIUS (JAN 21 - FEB 19): You want to save the world before bedtime. Perhaps today you're on your soapbox urging others to listen to your ideas because you feel it's important to be heard. Tonight: Explore.

PISCES (FEB 20 - MAR 20): Financial discussions might be discouraging today. You might feel broke, and no matter what happens, the light at the end of the tun-nel looks like a train. Be reassured that this is a temporary dark cloud on your horizon. Tonight: Check your finances.

FEDBANK FINANCIAL SERVICES LTD. AUCTION NOTICE

This is to inform the public at large that FEDBANK FINANCIAL SERVICES LTD. has decided to conduct Auction of Gold ornaments belonging to accounts (mentioned below) which are NPA (Non-performing Asset) or margin breach account/s or any account/s falling into the loan recall clause as specified in the **terms & condition** of the Loan. The Auction would be held as per the schedule provided below:

Loan A/c Number	Base Branch	District 1 Contact	District Auction Date
FEDGL03720007111, FEDGL03720007112	Faridabad Sec 3 - 9870538374	Faridabad Sec 3 - 8743841101	25/07/2026
FEDGL03720007151	Faridabad Sec 3 - 8810448618	Faridabad Sec 3 - 8743841101	25/07/2026
FEDGL06010000166	Faridabad Sector - 34 - 9310091021	Faridabad Sec 3 - 8743841101	15/07/2026
FEDGL06020000308	Hansi - 9350166613	Hisar - 7206366639	15/07/2026
FEDGL05320000787	HISAR - 8222000884	Hisar - 7206366639	25/07/2026
FEDGL04840003519	Jagadhri - 9050986143	Jagadhri - 8529967897	25/07/2026
FEDGL04840003538	Jagadhri - 9050962964	Jagadhri - 8529967897	25/07/2026
FEDGL04840003546	Jagadhri - 8168070356	Jagadhri - 8529967897	25/07/2026
FEDGL05270001218	Jind - Haryana - 9812933260	Jind - 9812933260	25/07/2026
FEDGL05270001224	Jind - Haryana - 8929811298	Jind - 9812933260	25/07/2026
FEDGL05270001225	Jind - Haryana - 9728666655	Jind - 9728666655	25/07/2026
FEDGL05380000327	Kaithal - 8607228541	Kaithal - 8986044641	25/07/2026
FEDGL05380000897	Kaithal - 9729337200	Kaithal - 8986044641	15/07/2026
FEDGL04110004700	Karnal - 9588324872	Karnal - 7015335053	25/07/2026
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FEDGL04880007255	Palwal - 8307781899	Palwal - 9813879553	25/07/2026
FEDGL04880007303	Palwal - 9728695697	Palwal - 9813879553	25/07/2026
FEDGL04880007308	Palwal - 7988161947	Palwal - 9813879553	25/07/2026
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FEDGL01170010115	Bhangel - 8742997160	BHANGEL - 9555984246	25/07/2026
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FEDGL05100005202	Dadri - 9911870752	BHANGEL - 9555984246	25/07/2026
FEDDS05100001029	Dadri - 8448324475	BHANGEL - 9555984246	25/07/2026
FEDGL05100005206	Dadri - 9312001891	BHANGEL - 9555984246	25/07/2026
FEDGL04380008749	Mathura - Delhi - 7452878410	Mathura - 7452878410	25/07/2026
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	Vishwas Nagar - 9310787562	Vishwas Nagar - 7838606648	15/07/2026

Change in Venue or Date, if any, will be displayed on our Website <https://www.fedfina.com/gold-loan/special-sections/auction-venue/>. Customer who want to release their ornaments shall visit any of the above branch/es or contact at the number mentioned above on/or before auction Date subject to the terms and condition applicable. Auction will be conducted at respective Districts. In case the auction does not get completed on the given date due to any reasons, the auction in respect thereto shall be conducted on subsequent working days at district level as per above schedule. This would continue till the auction process is over. On failure of the first online auction at District level, auction will also be initiated through the E-auction platforms of SAMIL <https://gold.samil.in> and/or e-Procurement Technologies Ltd. (AuctionTiger) - <https://egold.auctiontiger.net/>.

All participating bidders will be intimated subsequently with respect to acceptance or rejection of bids submitted by them.

Dated : 22.06.2026
Place : Delhi

For, sd/- Authorised Signatory
Fedbank Financial Services Ltd.,

BHARATIYA RESERVE BANK NOTE MUDRAN PVT. LTD. (BRBNMPL)
(Wholly owned subsidiary of Reserve Bank of India)
P.O.: RBNML, Salboni - 721132, Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal
Phone No. 03227-280176 / 280317; Fax No. 03227-280744 / 280222

OPEN TENDER ENQUIRY (OTE)/NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING (NCB)
Bids are invited under Two-Part bidding system for the following e-Tender through MSTC Portal:-

1. DESIGN, ENGINEERING, SUPPLY, INSTALLATION, TESTING, COMMISSIONING AND TRAINING OF AN AI-ENABLED DISTRIBUTED FIBER OPTIC PERIMETER INTRUSION DETECTION SYSTEM (DFPOIDS) AT BRBNMPL, SALBONI AND MYSURU; MSTC Event No. BRBNMPL/Salboni Press/MMD/7/26-27/ET/12 [PIDS]; BRBNMPL TENDER No. 004/SAL/PUR/2026-27; [EST. COST - ₹670 LAKH]

2. SUPPLY OF LDPE SHRINK FILM AT BRBNMPL, SALBONI AND MYSURU PRESSES; MSTC EVENT No. BRBNMPL/SALBONI PRESS/MMD/6/26-27/ET/10 [LDPE SHRINK FILM]; BRBNMPL TENDER No. 003/SAL/PUR/2026-27; [EST. COST - ₹522.33 LAKH]

Last date of tender submission for Sl. No. 1 is 15.09.2026 by 11:00 Hrs and for Sl.No. 2 is 21.07.2026 by 11:00 Hrs. For downloading tender document and other details, kindly visit websites www.mstccommerce.com and www.brbnmpl.co.in. Any changes shall be uploaded on the above websites only.

Senior General Manager

Online Tender Document" Purchase Of Laptop, Desktop and Multifunction Printer For SCRB PHQ" M.P. Police STATE CRIME RECORDS BUREAU, POLICE HEADQUARTER, M.P., BHOPAL

No./PHQ/SCRB/STORE/1144/2026 Bhopal, Dated 19.06.2026

Online tender are invited by Assistant Inspector General of SCRB, Police Head Quarter, Bhopal on behalf of DGP of MP, for the following on website <https://gem.gov.in/>

SN.	Name of Works	Tender No.
1	Purchase Of Laptop, Desktop and Multifuction Printer For SCRB PHQ	Gem/2026/B/7676068

1. Bids shall be submitted online only at GEM PORTAL.
2. Critical Date Sheet:

Published Date	17/06/2026
Pre bid meeting	24/06/2026 Time 12:00
Bid Submission End Date	08/07/2026 Time 18:00
Bid Opening Date	08/07/2026 Time 18:30

Sd./-
AIG SCRB
For: DGP MP
PHQ BHOPAL

G/14721/26

छत्तीसगढ़ जल संसाधन विभाग

कार्यालय कार्यपालन अभियंता

वि./यां मिनीमाता बांगो संभाग माचाडोली मुख्यालय कटघोरा जिला-कोरबा (छ.प्र.) ई-प्रोक्चरमेंट निविदा सूचना

[eprocurement portal:https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in](https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in) (प्रथम आमंत्रण)

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मिनीलिखित कार्यो के लिए दिनांक 24.06.2026 17:30 PM तक अनललाईन निविदाएं आमंत्रित की जाती है।

कार्य का नाम जिला-जशपुर के सिंचाई योजना के गेट मरम्मत एवं वि./यां संरचना के कार्य।

अनुमानित लागत रू. 141.25 लाख

अन्य विवरण एवं विस्तृत निविदा छत्तीसगढ़ शासन की ई-प्रोक्चरमेंट वेब साईट [eprocurement portal: https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in](https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in) पर दिनांक 24.06.2026 से समय 07:30 बजे से देखे तथा डाउनलोड किये जा सकते है।

नोट :- 1. निविदा में भाग लेने हेतु ठेकेदारों को ई-प्रोक्चरमेंट वेब साईट [eprocurement portal :https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in](https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in) पर नामांकित / पंजीयन तथा लोक निर्माण विभाग की एकीकृत पंजीयन प्रणाली के अंतर्गत ठेकेदारों को उम्पयुक्त पंजीयन कराना अनिवार्य है।

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वि./यां मिनीमाता बांगो संभाग माचाडोली मुख्या. कटघोरा जिला कोरबा (छ.प्र.)
पु. क्र. 2464/व.ले.लि./2026 / कटघोरा दिनांक 17/06/2026

Classifieds

PERSONAL

I, Tej Prakash Singh S/o Late Balwant Singh Dhalwal, R/o 102, E Space, Nirvana Country, Near Courtyard Market, Sector-50, Nirvana Country, Gurgaon, Haryana- 122018, have changed my name to Tej Prakash Singh Dhalwal.

0071043289-1

I Niti Biyala Dwivedi D/O, Surendra Kumar Biyala R/o House No 1394, Sector 9, Faridabad Haryana 121006 have changed my name to Niti Biyala .

0040861753-1

I,Shahin Begum,W/o Mohd Abdullah,R/o 1898,Gali Rajan,Kucha Chalan,Darya Ganj,Delhi-110002,have changed my name to Shaheen Begum, permanently.

0040861851-1

I,Kulbeer Singh, S/O Sant Singh RZF-768/21,Flat No.-UG-4,Gali.No.-8,Palam Colony,Raj Nagar,Part-2, Delhi-110077,have changed my name to Kulbir Singh for all purposes

0040861851-3

I, Neha Gupta D/o Na

● **RESULTS**

GROUP F

Netherlands 5-1 Sweden
Houston Stadium

Tunisia 0-4 Japan
Monterrey Stadium

GROUP E

Germany 2-1 Ivory Coast
Toronto Stadium

Ecuador 0-0 Curacao
Kansas City Stadium

GROUP H

Spain 4-0 Saudi Arabia
Atlanta Stadium

● **MATCH SCHEDULE**

GROUP J

Argentina vs Austria
Dallas, **10.30 pm**
(Monday)

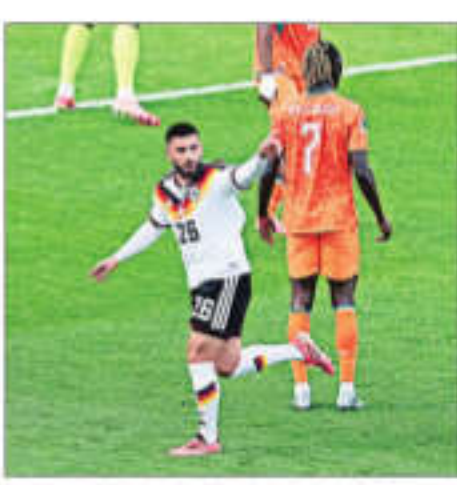
Jordan vs Algeria
San Francisco, **8.30 am**
(Tuesday)

GROUP I

France vs Iraq
Philadelphia, **2.30 am**
(Tuesday)

Norway vs Senegal
East Rutherford, **5.30 am**
(Tuesday)

ZEE5 OTT & UNITE8 CHANNELS



Deniz Undav (L). AP

Undav scores twice to save Germany

DENIZ UNDAV scored two goals off the bench as Germany pulled off a thrilling comeback to beat Ivory Coast 2-1 in their World Cup Group E match on Saturday, securing their place in the knockout stage for the first time since they won the title in 2014. After having two goals disallowed in the first half, Germany did not lose focus and used their passing to find their way while the West Africans produced their brand of football in a wild encounter at Toronto. The last time Germany got past the group stage it won the tournament in 2014. REUTERS

Ueda brace helps Japan win 4-0 against Tunisia

JAPAN MOVED one step closer to reaching the knockout stages of the World Cup for the fourth consecutive time after pummeling Tunisia 4-0 in Group F, securing a milestone victory in the tournament's 1,000th men's match. Japan's four goals were the most the Samurai Blue have ever scored in a World Cup game, as it dismantled Tunisia with aplomb. Asase Ueda scored twice, along with Daichi Kamada and Junya Ito to put Japan level with the Netherlands on four points. The loss for Tunisia means it is eliminated from the tournament. Japan is guaranteed at least third in the group, which could be enough to advance to the knockout stages. AP

● **OUT BUT NOT DOWN**

Haiti's defiance: First to abolish slavery, now gang wars disturb football, survival

Sandip G
Philadelphia, June 21

THE HAITIANS were defeated, but they didn't shed tears in the Philadelphia arena. They danced and sang their way to the aisles, chanting the most powerful phrase in their history, Grenadye, Alaso. Or march forward grenadiers, a tribute to their revolutionaryaries who drove out the French Army of Napoleon. "We lost, but we fought. We take pride in that, and that's our tradition," says Thomas Ehiogene.

"To just qualify in the tournament is a big feat, and it has united a nation," he says. He is not resorting to the usual minnow-speak, but from his own harrowing personal experience. "Most of us here, the fans, and

THE GREAT DIVIDE

Yin & Yang: A statistical breakdown of Messi & Ronaldo's first games

Shuvaditya Bose
New Delhi, June 21

BASED ON the first matches of Argentina and Portugal, one can safely conclude that the gulf in effectiveness between Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo — two players who have defined football in the 21st century — has never been greater. Messi's hat-trick in the defending champions' 3-0 romp over Algeria was contrasted with the sorry figure the Portuguese superstar cut in 1-1 draw with underdogs Democratic Republic of Congo. With the two legends on the final legs of their careers, we analyse why.

1. Effective in attack

Messi attempted six shots in his first game, four of which were on target, yielding a conversion rate of 66.7 per cent. Remarkably, three of those attempts came from outside the penalty area. Ronaldo, in comparison, attempted three shots — all from inside the box — and failed to test the goalkeeper even once.

2. Game involvement

Messi not only exerted a greater influence on the game, but was more involved in it. He

recorded 57 touches, with neither Lautaro Martinez nor Thiago Almada — his partners in attack — surpassing that figure. Ronaldo had 25 touches against Congo — his fewest in a major tournament game for Portugal when he played the full 90 minutes. The 41-year-old attempted 20 passes — second-lowest among Portugal's starters.

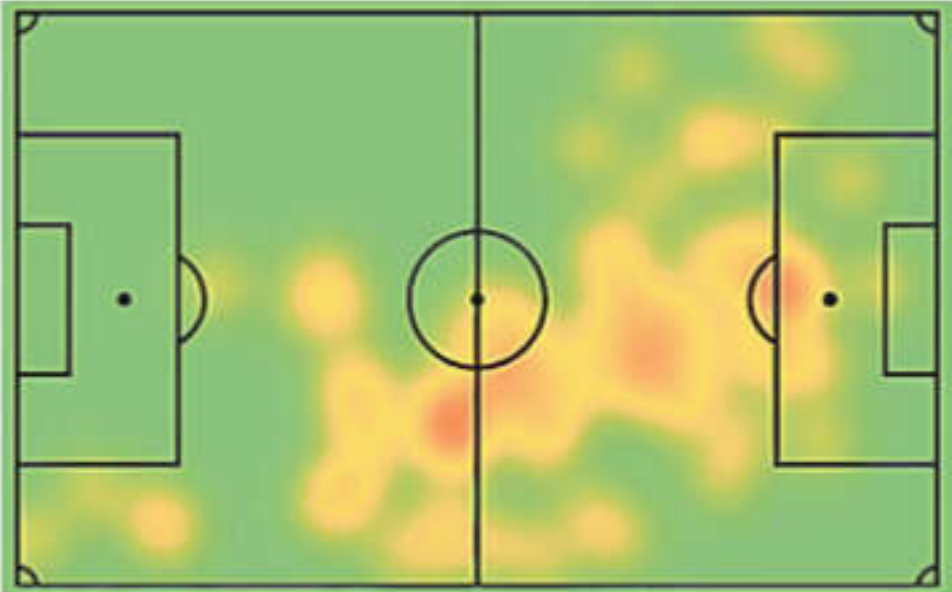
Nor was the disparity confined to distribution. Messi excelled at the receiving end too. He received 44 passes — much more than Ronaldo's tally of 17.

Delve deeper into receive success percentage — a measure of whether a player positions himself optimally to receive a pass directed towards him — and the divide becomes starker still. Messi posted a success rate of 50 per cent. Ronaldo's corresponding statistic stood at 21.3.

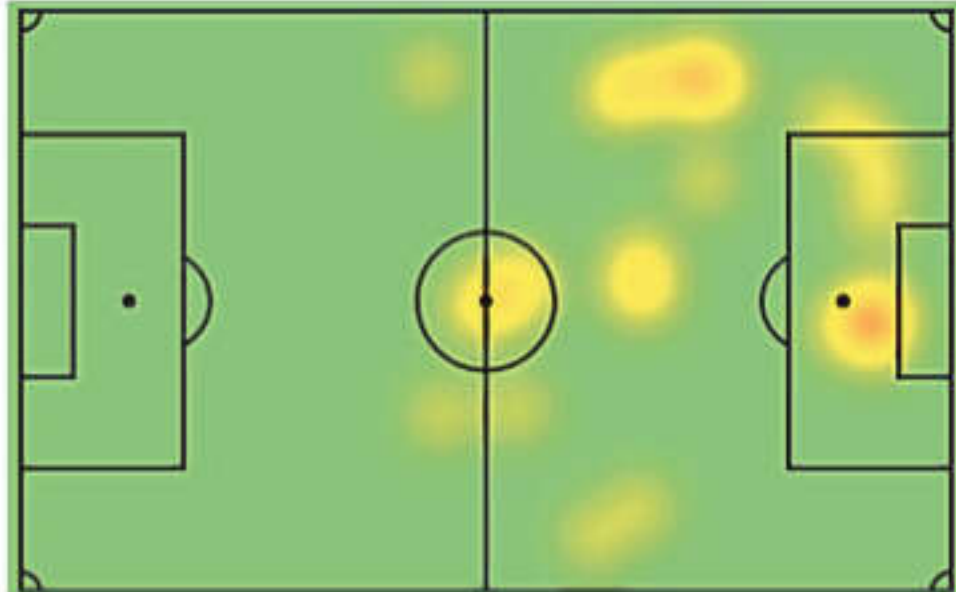
3. Creativity

Ronaldo was well behind in this metric as well.

If one goes by line breaks — a pass that penetrates the opposition's defensive structure, essentially an antidote to low blocks like that of Algeria and Congo - Messi attempted 15 of them. In the Argentine team,



Messi's heatmap



Ronaldo's heatmap

ATTACKING PLAY

METRIC	MESSI	RONALDO
Goals	3	0
Shots	6	3
Shots on target	4	0
Shots from outside the penalty box	3	0
Key passes	2	0
Crosses	3	0

only Enzo Fernández attempted more, at 16. For Portugal, Ronaldo attempted a line-breaking pass only once. Messi

GAME INVOLVEMENT

METRIC	MESSI	RONALDO
Touches	57	25
Passes attempted	40	20
Passes received	44	17
Receive success rate	50%	21.3%

also recorded a carrying distance of 252.3 metres, of which 125.9 metres constituted progressive carrying — advancing

possession towards goal by bypassing opponents. Ronaldo's corresponding figures were 49.4m and 27.3m.

CREATIVITY

METRIC	MESSI	RONALDO
Line breaks attempted	15	1
Carrying distance	252.3m	49.4m
Progressive carries	7	1
Progressive carrying Distance	125.9m	27.3m

Across most metrics, Lionel Messi eclipses Cristiano Ronaldo, who has become obsolete in the modern game

4. Mobility

This is a metric where Ronaldo is ahead — he ran 8.39 km in the game, while Messi

BROBBEY WINS IT FOR DUTCH

The marksman who survived an encounter with a gangster

Brian Brobbey, who scored a brace, once escaped from a criminal and has now found his calling in front of goal



Sandip G
Philadelphia, June 21

BRIAN BROBBEY, the Dutch striker whose brace sank the Swedes 5-1, was at the right place at the right time. Yet, four years ago, he was at the wrong place at the right time, a happenstance that would have cost not only his career, but his life when he met a school friend who he did not know was a gangster.

After the saga was settled, he told the Dutch press: "I have unknowingly brought a lot of shame to my club (then Ajax) and country. One day I will make you proud," he said.

He fulfilled the promise in Houston on Saturday with two classic fox-in-the-box strikes. A flick and a deflection, goals that would not be immortalised, but invaluable for a side clanking to find its rhythm.

The two goals captured the virtues of Brobbey, an Ajax alumni with mid-table Premier League side Sunderland, but with covetous glances lurking towards him. He is a muscular barge-into-the-box striker, but with dexterous feet. He wins the battle of the muscle with his markers, just as he outmuscled Isak Hien, holding off his elbow embrace and laying off the ball to Cody Gakpo, who reciprocated with a pass.

It was not a made-to-measure pass onto his feet. But Brobbey, sprinting into the box, stretched his right foot and in-stepped the ball goalwards. Seemingly a routine strike but one that involved far more nuance than just being there like an immobile receptor. Brobbey had to beat the off-side trap, judge the pace, the weight, the bend, the bounce, and decide the ball's route and destination. Dissect the replays and one sees him snap his ankles, so that he gets the ball on the inside of his boot. As his spiritual predecessor Pippo Inzaghi would say, "You need more than just two feet to score a goal. You need the intuition of millimetres."

It was a quip to Johan Cruyff's denigration that, "Look, actually he can't play football at all. He's just always in the right position." This was a goal from the Inzaghi album of run-of-the-mill deception. Brobbey's second goal was even more Inzaghi-esque. Denzel Dumfries' cross was low and a tad over-hit, but he slithered in to stick out his foot and squeeze the ball to the far corner. The balance was so immaculate that his supporting left leg did not collapse.

The most striker-esque vibe he gave was when he tried to steal the ball off Gakpo to complete his hat-trick in the second half. Gakpo scored the goal and Brobbey grinned sheepishly.

Underrated

He will never fire the imagination in the manner of captivat-



Brian Brobbey scores for the Netherlands against Sweden at the Houston Stadium on Saturday. AP

ing Dutch No. 9s such as Robin van Persie, Patrick Kluijvert and Marco van Basten, but his clinical finishing is a comparable thing of beauty. The sniper analogy sits well, because they operate in the shadows, pounce from nowhere, and anonymity is a virtue.

Dutch manager Ronald Koeman employing him as a striker was in sync with the tournament's revival of old-fashioned tactics such as the 4-4-2 mid-block and set-pieces. In scorching heat, teams have become direct and vertical. The resurrection of the striker was inevitable. It turned out to be a masterstroke, rendering the Dutch a focal point after their disjointed outing against Japan. Koeman's backline is one of the most robust in the league, the suspicion lingered on his front-line. Much of the fog has now been wiped.

Brobbey is not often classi-

fied as a striker because of the structural demands of the teams he has played for. But the true calling is scoring goals. "I am not spending sleepless nights worrying about my best position. I am happy just to play and contribute to the team," he said last year.

Strange meeting

Platitudes, but in his life, more than just hollow words. In 2022, he was attending a music festival in his hometown. A man who once lived in the same locality dusted up old acquaintances and told him that he had saved his life from a feared Moroccan gang and he needed to be compensated accordingly.

Little did Brobbey know that his supposed friend was a dreaded criminal wanted for murder and drug-peddling. He revealed the details of the strange meeting with his friend and showed his photograph. When the police were informed,

the criminal's true whereabouts were revealed.

The tale only got murkier. Unidentified assailants shot his friend, and emergency surgeries were performed to save his life. Bombs were hurled at his sister-in-law's car. She had a narrow escape. Fireworks were dropped through the letterbox of his mother-in-law. An explosive was flung at Brobbey's car days later. He got a text message from an unknown number demanding 150,000 pounds. Whether he paid or not, whether the police nabbed the criminal or not, the scandal drifted from public memory. He shifted to Sunderland in 2025, and a change of scenery rejuvenated Brobbey, who adapted to the English style seamlessly.

At 24, he is a late bloomer by modern standards. But he is at the right place at the right time, after nearly being at the wrong place at the wrong time.

Yamal inspires Spain to Saudi hammering

Bhuvan Gupta
New Delhi, June 21

THERE IS little that could have jolted the Goliath-esque Spain more strongly than being kept at bay by Cape Verde's veritable David. Coach Luis de la Fuente said as much before the World Cup favourites' meeting with Saudi Arabia.

"The team is stung and sometimes criticism is motivating. The players do read things, they're angry, and for sure tomorrow, the game will be very different."

Six nights after failing to break through Cape Verde's resistance at the same Atlanta Stadium, La Roja made amends. Lamine Yamal's maiden World Cup start sparked a ruthless 4-0 hammering of their opponents.

The Green Falcons, seeking to emulate the great Cape Verde escape, employed five men at the back in a departure from their usual 4-4-2 formation. But it was scant insurance against the artistry of an 18-year-old.

Yamal showed what Spain were missing in their opener from the outset, prancing around the Saudi defence threateningly in the very first minute. Ten minutes of pressing in the Saudi half bore fruit after a delightful transition in midfield, as the ball found Mikel Oyarzabal on the left flank.

The frontman, who could only get his first touch after 30 minutes against Cape Verde, eyed a charging Yamal to his right and squared the ball across. The teen Barcelona sensation slid in smoothly and tapped it deftly through the narrow gap past custodian Mohammed Al-Owais. Just like that, the luminous new superstar had arrived on the biggest stage.

The creative incision that went missing against the Blue Sharks was on full display. Provider Oyarzabal soon turned finisher, netting twice in the space of three minutes. First, Dani



Lamine Yamal. AP

Olmo sent a corner to Aymeric Laporte, who was able to nod it onwards to Oyarzabal. The Real Sociedad captain did the rest, beating Al-Owais to his right.

Another cross cracked the Saudi defence open, and Olmo set Oyarzabal up to stab in his second. Spain were up 3-0 before the first hydration break. Oyarzabal very nearly completed his hat-trick in the 36th with a masterful trivela that flicked the crossbar.

Unfortunately for Georgios Donis' men, the Spanish party resumed post break. Ferran Torres' corner was flicked on to Marc Cucurella, who pile-drove it with his left foot. The powerful shot was goal-bound and took a deflection off Hassan Al-Tam-bakti before going in.

Spain found the back of the net for the fifth time, only for the goal to be ruled out on video review. A neat stoppage-time move saw Pedro Porro knock the ball across the six-yard box for Torres to slot home, but the Barcelona attacker was deemed offside.

Unlike their previous outing, where Spain were hardly able to move the ball centrally, La Roja found ample acreage on the wings as well as down the middle. Saudi Arabia are not yet out of contention and Spain are still a point away from the knockouts. But the game depicted just how potent the European champions can be, when at full tilt.



Thomas Ehiogene, a fan. EXPRESS

stadium Stade Sylvio Cator and destroyed its facilities, rendering it impossible to play. Reminisces Johnson Charles, who had left his country decades ago: "I have been to the stadium, a beautiful

To just qualify in the tournament is a big feat, and it has united a nation. Most of us here, the fans, and the team, have one thing in common. We don't have a home."

THOMAS EHIogene,
HAITI FOOTBALL FAN

one with a lot of palm trees. I have heard from relatives, the entire building has been demolished too. It's sad that they can't play, but how can you play in such fear?"

Two years before the gangs seized the stadium, a visiting team was held hostage at gunpoint. When Belize visited Port-au-Prince for a match, a group of armed men held up the team bus for an hour. They left them unharmed and Belize players did not venture out for practice.

Sense of resistance

Unsurprisingly, only 10 of the 26 members were born in the country. Twelve were born in France of Haitian parents, one in Canada, one in Switzerland and two in the United States. Haiti and America have a long soccer connection—the USA's first big upset, beating England in 1950, featured a goal from Haiti-born Joe Gaetjens, who worked as a dishwasher. Only one of them,

Woodensky Pierre, plays for a Haitian club. He is from Cite Soleil, a seaside slum, which is a base for powerful gang leaders. "There was a moment where I felt like I would never make it to this point because things were very difficult, I had no support, nothing," he told CNN. "I did not grow up in a rich family, my mom was a street vendor, and my father was always doing side jobs. Football was all I had."

The 21-year-old defensive midfielder was the last member to get a visa, as the USA under Donald Trump ended Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Haitians. A Columbia District Court issued a reprieve on appeal, leaving the Supreme Court to make a verdict. "Where do we go? India?" he says, chuckling.

But centuries of living in violence and exile has instilled an unshakeable resistance. "We were the first country to abolish slavery and drove the Europeans out. So we are a small but strong nation, not afraid of tomorrow, always partying and enjoying the moment. If we are asked to leave America we will find a new place. Once you are living away from home, it doesn't matter where you are living," he says.

The fans didn't burden themselves with expectations. Thomas says: "Strong teams dream of winning the World Cup. But we are just happy to see them because you never know when we would play in another World Cup, or where we will be." The revelry resumed and will spill on since their last game.

Jaiswal left out after Afghan ton, Kohli named provisionally

Express News Service
New Delhi, June 21

A DAY after scoring his second ODI hundred, Yashasvi Jaiswal did not find a place in India's 15-member squad for the upcoming England series. The southpaw cracked an unbeaten 110 off 86 balls against Afghanistan in Chennai, yet missed the cut. Jasprit Bumrah was included, meanwhile, marking his first appearance in the 50-over format after the 2023 ODI World Cup final against Australia. The pace spearhead headlines the squad announced on Sunday for the three-match series, which begins at Edgbaston on July 14.

The 32-year-old has missed India's recent ODI assignments, with the team management prioritising his presence in Test and T20 cricket. He was not part of the squad which won the Champions Trophy in March last year, after not recovering fully from back discomfort. Virat Kohli, who missed the ODI series against Afghanistan because of a hamstring injury, was also included in the squad, subject to fitness clearance.

Rohit Sharma remains part of the squad as one of the senior batters, alongside Kohli if he is declared fit. KL Rahul and Ishan Kishan have been picked as the two wicketkeeping options. Axar Patel returns to the ODI squad after missing the Afghanistan series. His inclusion adds greater balance to India's spin-bowling resources.

INDIA ODI SQUAD FOR ENGLAND SERIES: Shubman Gill (captain), Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli (subject to fitness clearance), Shreyas Iyer (vice-captain), KL Rahul (wicketkeeper), Ishan Kishan (wicketkeeper), Washington Sundar, Axar Patel, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Kuldeep Yadav, Jasprit Bumrah, Prasidh Krishna, Harshit Rana, Arshdeep Singh and Gurnoor Brar.

INDIA WIN A-SERIES FINAL

Fastest List A fifty: Vaibhav delivers on big stage again

Despite controversy about scuffle in previous game against Sri Lanka A, 15-year-old stays focused to hit quickest List A fifty in final

Shuvaditya Bose
New Delhi, June 21

OF THE many ways to issue rejoinders addressing scepticism on his readiness for the big stage, Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, true to his style, chose the most emphatic one. In the final of the A-Teams' Tri-Series at Dambulla, the 15-year-old scored a 29-ball 94 against Sri Lanka A, triggering yet another break-and-make cycle of records.

Courtesy of his knock, wherein he scored the fastest-ever List A half-century, India sailed to a comfortable 66-triumph.

Sooryavanshi took 11 deliveries to score his fifty, and no one had ever done so in fewer balls. Drawing poetic parallels, his blitzkrieg against Sri Lanka came at the cost of a Lankan's record, with the previous fastest fifty in List A cricket being scored by the former all-rounder, Kaushalya Weeraratne. He had scored a 12-ball half-century whilst playing for Ragama CC, while fellow countryman Thisara Perera — now demoted from second to third on the pedestal — has a 13-ball List A fifty to his name.

The pre-match discourse for the game was centered not on Sooryavanshi's batting — 117 runs in four matches appearing pale in comparison to the standard set by his IPL 2026 exploits — but his antics.

The teenage prodigy got into a scuffle with Sri Lanka's Vishen Halambage when the two teams met earlier in the series. What began as an exchange of

● FASTEST FIFTIES IN LIST A CRICKET

● **Vaibhav Sooryavanshi: 11 balls**
(Ind A v SL A, 2026)

● **Kaushalya Weeraratne: 12 balls**
(Ragama CC v Kurunegala, 2005)

● **Thisara Perera: 13 balls**
(SL Army v Bloomfield, 2021)

● Vaibhav Sooryavanshi hit five sixes in the first 11 deliveries he faced.

● His half-century came entirely from boundaries.

words following India's Super Over defeat spiralled into physical contact, with the vastly experienced Niroshan Dickwella forced to intervene to prevent further escalation.

Questions were subsequently raised on Sooryavanshi's maturity, and whether he possessed the temperament to match his talent. On Sunday, he let his bat furnish all the answers. Adjudged player of the match, Sooryavanshi elaborated on his rationale after the match: "I hadn't thought of anything. I just wanted to make the most of the first 10 overs and execute what I had planned... I have learnt a lot (from this series)."

A marker was laid down in the first over itself, when Sooryavanshi struck consecutive boundaries off the first two deliveries he faced. What ensued was mayhem, which is now a frequent occurrence with him at the scene. The outcome of the next three deliveries was as



Vaibhav Sooryavanshi tore through the Sri Lankan A bowling line-up, hitting a total of 18 boundaries in his innings. X/BCCI

such: a swing over deep mid-wicket for a four, another towering blow over deep square leg for a six, and a sublime lofted drive over in the exact opposite direction for the same outcome.

It took the Lankans six deliveries to extract a dot ball off Sooryavanshi, but the relief was short-lived. The next five deliveries yielded 26 runs — three sixes and a couple of fours. If one could take their eyes off the wunderkind and scour through statistics, it would have been revealed that amid the pandemonium, he had created a new record. His knock propelled India to a score of 377/9. Though shadowed by the opener, captain Tilak Varma led with composure and poise with a 67-run knock. In response, Sri Lanka were bowled out for 311 runs in 47.1 overs. Yash Thakur and Vipraj Nigam picked three wickets apiece, while for Sri Lanka A, Wanuja Sahan top

scored with a 69-ball 62.

When viewed from a macrocosmic vantage point, the knock reinforces Sooryavanshi's growing reputation for living up to expectations precisely when the stakes are at their highest. At the ICC U-19 Men's Cricket World Cup, held earlier this year, the batter orchestrated India's record sixth title triumph with a 33-ball 68 in the semi-final, followed by an 80-ball 175 in the final.

The theme was similar in IPL, where Sooryavanshi scored a 29-ball 97 in the Eliminator and a 47-ball 96 in the Qualifier 2. Despite his knocks not culminating in a trophy for the Rajasthan Royals, the southpaw became the youngest-ever to win the Orange Cap.

BRIEF SCORES: Ind A 377/9 in 50 overs (Sooryavanshi 94; Sahan 2/39) beat SL A 311 all out in 47.1 overs (Sahan 62; Thakur 3/45) by 66 runs.

Kapp's masterclass dents India's semifinal hopes

Shankar Narayan
Mumbai, June 21

AT 45/2 after nine overs in pursuit of 159, South Africa's chase was threatening to unravel. India had squeezed the scoring, struck twice in the powerplay and appeared firmly in control. But standing between them and victory was Marizanne Kapp, whose innings took the Proteas to a six-wicket victory in Manchester on Sunday to keep their campaign alive.

The defeat puts India in a precarious position as they now most likely have to win their remaining two fixtures — against Bangladesh and Australia — to remain in contention for a semifinal spot. When they look back at the game, the inability to capitalise on a decent start and a forgettable fielding effort may come back to haunt the 50-over world champions.

Kapp's first task with the bat was simply to survive. With Laura Wolvaardt and Annerie Dercksen dismissed in Sree Charani's double-wicket maiden and the ball gripping just enough to keep the batters guessing, the all-rounder absorbed the pressure through singles and twos, waiting patiently for India to err.

The release came in the 10th over when Kapp carved Prema Rawat over extra cover before a top-edged sweep just evaded Nandini Sharma's desperate one-handed attempt at deep backward square, sailed over for six, helping South Africa collect 14 runs from the over and shift the momentum.

From there, Kapp steadily moved through the gears. She mixed innovation with classical strokeplay, scooping Nandini over short fine, stepping out to loft Sree Charani over mid-off and repeatedly sweeping anything drifting into her arc. Her reading of the conditions was exemplary as she targeted the right bowlers without ever allowing the required rate



South Africa celebrate the wicket of Shafali Verma. AP

to climb out of reach.

India's fielding only made her task easier. On 31, Kapp survived when Radha Yadav overran a chance at long-on off Charani. Four overs later, the same fielder grassed a far easier opportunity at long-on off Shafali Verma.

Kapp brought up her half-century with consecutive boundaries off Arundhati Reddy before taking complete control of the innings. A crunching drive through extra cover, a towering straight six off Shafali and two more sixes off Deepti Sharma in the penultimate over extinguished India's hopes as she remained unbeaten on a masterful 81 off 45 balls.

Taznim Brits played the ideal supporting role. Her 40 off 36 balls lacked Kapp's fluency but was no less valuable as she absorbed pressure early, rotated the strike effectively and chipped in with timely boundaries. Together, the pair added 97 runs in just 63 balls, a partnership that took South Africa from a position of crisis to one of control and ultimately sealed a memorable victory.

India's innings consisted of two contrasting halves. The opening pair of Smriti Mandhana and Shafali attacked from the outset, but once South Africa struck, the innings lost momentum on a surface that be-

came harder to score on.

Mandhana scored 17 off 12 balls, driving and pulling Shabnim Ismail before scooping Marizanne Kapp. But the latter had the last word, producing a wobble-seam delivery that jugged back to bowl the left-hander. Shafali took 17 runs off a Chloe Tryon over and raced to 31 off 15 balls. But a faint glove off an Ismail bouncer was detected on review, ending her innings. India reached 59/2 after the Powerplay, but that proved their high point.

Promoted to No.3, Yastika Bhatia struck three boundaries before Ayabonga Khaka trapped her LBW for 15. Jemimah Rodrigues struggled for fluency and chipped a return catch to Nadine de Klerk after scoring 10. India slipped from 54/1 to 83/4 by the 11th over.

Harmanpreet Kaur and Deepti added 33 for the fifth wicket. Playing her 200th T20I, the skipper made 24 off 22 before chopping an Ismail off-cutter onto her stumps. Deepti kept India afloat with 29 off 21, using the sweep before miscuing Nonkululeko Mlaba. Richa Ghosh was restricted to 15 off 14.

BRIEF SCORES: India 158/7 in 20 overs (Shafali 31; Kapp 2/27) lost to South Africa 161/4 in 19.1 overs (Kapp 81 not out, Brits 40; Sree Charani 3/24) by 6 wickets.

FICCI and ICC India Past President Mr. Harsh Pati Singhania takes over as Chair of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) in Paris

The appointment of Mr. Harsh Pati Singhania as Chair of the International Chamber of Commerce, the world business organisation, marks an important milestone for global business and for India's growing leadership in the international economic landscape.

Mr. Singhania, Director of JK Organisation and Chairman & Managing Director of JK Paper Ltd., assumes the highest elected office of ICC after decades of distinguished leadership in industry and business institutions. A former President of ICC India (the National Committee of ICC in India) and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), he has been a strong advocate of international trade, enterprise-led growth, and constructive engagement between business and policymakers.

His election reflects both his personal stature within the global business community and the increasing



influence of Indian industry on the world stage. This makes him only the fourth Indian business leader to hold this prestigious global position in ICC's century-long history, underscoring the rarity and significance of this honour.

Mr. Singhania takes over at a significant moment in ICC's history, as the organisation advances an ambitious agenda to strengthen global trade cooperation, support business-led solutions to emerging economic priorities, and shape the future of international commerce.

Founded in 1919 by a group of visionary business leaders who called themselves the "Merchants of Peace", ICC was established on the belief that

commerce can be a powerful force for prosperity, cooperation and stability among nations. More than a century later, that founding belief remains deeply relevant. At a time when the global economy is facing geopolitical tensions, regulatory fragmentation, rapid technological change and new sustainability imperatives, the need for trusted business-led frameworks has only grown stronger.

Today, ICC represents more than 45 million companies across over 170 countries through its global network of National Committees and the World Chambers Federation. Bringing together businesses of every size, sector and geography, ICC is among the most representative business organisations in the world. It is also the only business organisation with Permanent Observer Status at the United Nations General Assembly, underscoring its unique role in international policymaking.

As the institutional voice of business, ICC engages with governments, private enterprises, multilateral institutions and intergovernmental forums, including the United Nations and the World Trade Organization, to promote open markets, trusted rules and international trade cooperation. Its role, however, extends well beyond advocacy.

ICC is also a leading global rules and standards-setting body whose frameworks and services underpin international commerce. From Incoterms and the ATA Carnet system to international banking and trade finance rules and world-renowned dispute resolution mechanisms, ICC has helped make cross-border trade and investment more predictable, efficient and secure for businesses worldwide.

In his initial remarks as Chair, Mr. Singhania emphasised the importance of strengthening confidence in global commerce and ensuring that business remains a constructive partner in advancing prosperity and international trade cooperation. His vision is centred on reinforcing

For India, Mr. Singhania's appointment carries special significance. As one of the fastest-growing major economies, India is increasingly at the forefront of global discussions on trade, investment, sustainability, digital governance and economic development. The election of an Indian business leader to chair the world's largest business organisation reflects India's emergence as a major force in the global economy and its growing influence in shaping international trade, business standards and economic governance.

trusted frameworks for trade and investment, shaping practical rules for the new economy, and ensuring that the voice of business remains at the heart of international decision-making. During his tenure, particular emphasis is expected to be placed on areas such as digital trade, artificial intelligence, sustainability, and expanding opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises.

Supporting this agenda are several flagship ICC initiatives that reflect the organisation's commitment to shaping the future of global commerce. The ICC Compact for Trade, Growth and Jobs provides a business-led framework to promote trade, investment, sustainability and wider participation in international markets. At the

same time, Vision 2035 is helping define ICC's long-term direction by assessing how technological innovation, sustainability, changing business expectations and evolving economic realities will transform international trade and business in the years ahead.



This focus is particularly important for small and medium-sized enterprises, which account for the overwhelming majority of businesses worldwide and are key drivers of innovation, employment and economic growth. For many smaller businesses, the challenges of international commerce - from regulatory complexity and access to finance to

digital adoption and dispute resolution - can be significant. Ensuring that businesses of all sizes can participate in global trade, access new markets, and benefit from trusted standards and practical support will remain central to ICC's work in the years ahead.

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It also comes at a time when Indian industry is becoming more globally engaged, outward-looking and integrated with international value chains. As businesses across sectors expand their global footprint, India's voice in shaping trusted, inclusive and future-ready frameworks for commerce will become increasingly important.

Mr. Singhania's longstanding business experience, global perspective and commitment to strengthening international trade cooperation will reinforce the important role that business can play in advancing growth, innovation and employment. His leadership at ICC will bring a valuable

perspective from India and from the wider emerging economy context, while contributing to ICC's global mission of enabling peace and prosperity through trade.

On behalf of Indian industry, ICC India and FICCI are delighted that their Past President, Mr. Harsh Pati Singhania, has assumed this important

global responsibility. His appointment is a source of pride for Indian business and an opportunity to further strengthen connections between businesses, markets and institutions in support of shared growth, cooperation and economic progress across borders.