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INSIDE



**U.K. departs first migrant to France under return deal**

**LONDON**  
The U.K. has returned the first person to France, under a migrant return deal signed by both governments in July. The man is an Indian citizen as per reporting from the BBC and the Telegraph. » PAGE 14

**I believe in true secularism and in all faiths, says CJI**

**NEW DELHI**  
After social media outrage over his remarks made on a damaged Lord Vishnu idol, Chief Justice of India B.R. Gavai broke his silence on Thursday to clarify that he believes in all religions, visits sites of worship of every faith, and firmly trusts in "true secularism". » PAGE 4

**Centre's response sought in case on Roy's new book**

**KOCHI**  
The Kerala High Court has sought the Centre's response to a plea that sought a stay on the sale of Arundhati Roy's book *Mother Mary Comes To Me*, whose cover photo shows her smoking a bidi, without any statutory health-hazard warning label. » PAGE 3

**Stakeholders in Chabahar face U.S. sanctions**

**NEW YORK/WASHINGTON**  
The United States has said that individuals operating the Chabahar port in Iran would invite sanctions beginning later this month. » PAGE 6

# CEC shielding democracy wreckers: Rahul

Congress leader cites bid to delete voters in Karnataka; seeks IPs of online applications

He says that had the alleged 'vote theft' not been detected, the Congress would have lost the seat

He clarifies that this was not the 'hydrogen bomb' he had spoken of, promises to release it soon

**Sandeep Phukan**  
NEW DELHI

Mounting a scathing attack on Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, on Thursday accused him of "protecting" those "destroying" Indian democracy by refusing to share technical details of persons behind an attempt to delete names of voters from the electoral rolls of an Assembly seat in Karnataka. The Election Commission of India (EC) rejected his allegations as "incorrect and baseless".

Mr. Gandhi said that 6,018 names were sought to be deleted in the Aland constituency using centralised software and mobile phones registered outside Karnataka. In the past 18 months, the State's Criminal Investigation Department has written 18 letters



**Serious charges:** Rahul Gandhi addressing the media at Indira Bhavan in New Delhi on Thursday. R.V. MOORTHY

to the EC for details of the IP addresses used to fill online applications for the deletions, but the EC has not responded, he said.

The EC must stop protecting "vote chors (thieves)" and provide information sought by the Karnataka CID within a week, he said, adding that if the EC does not oblige, it will be known for being "complicit in the murder of the Constitution".

"I am going to make a serious claim about Gyanesh Kumar. I am not saying this lightly, I am the Leader of Opposition. The CEC is protecting vote chors and the people who have destroyed Indian democracy," Mr. Gandhi said. "Our demand is, Gyanesh Kumar, do your job, you have taken an oath, you are India's Chief Election Commissioner, you must give evidence to the

**All data handed over to police: Karnataka CEO**

**NEW DELHI**  
Responding to Rahul Gandhi's allegation that the EC was not sharing key data for probe into the alleged vote fraud in Aland constituency, Karnataka Chief Electoral Officer has claimed that his office handed over all available data to the police on September 6, 2023. » PAGE 5

Karnataka CID." In a subsequent post on X, he said the CEC should stop giving "excuses" and added that the alleged "vote theft" not been caught, the Congress candidate would have lost the Assembly seat.

Recently, *The Hindu* had reported on the Karnataka CID's probe into a systematic attempt to remove names of 5,994 voters from electoral rolls by forging

**Cong. leader lacks faith in Indian democracy: BJP**

**NEW DELHI**  
The BJP too has termed Rahul Gandhi's charges as baseless. BJP leader Anurag Thakur on Thursday said the repeated accusations of the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha against the EC showed his lack of faith in Indian democracy. » PAGE 5

Form 7 in the Aland constituency of Kalaburagi district ahead of the 2023 Assembly election.

Before making a detailed presentation on the Aland seat, Mr. Gandhi clarified that these revelations were not the "hydrogen bomb" that he had talked about earlier and promised that too will come soon. "I am just creating the foundation. This is going on for 10-15

years. India's democracy has been hijacked. Democracy can only be saved by the people of India. Rahul Gandhi can show the truth. The day the people realise that their democracy and Constitution have been stolen, the job will be done," he said.

Elaborating on the attempted voter deletions in Aland, the Congress leader alleged that the top 10 booths with maximum deletion applications were Congress strongholds.

Citing examples, he said, in one case, someone had used the name of a 63-year-old woman Godabai to apply for 12 deletions and then played out a video in which she denied having anything to do with such an application.

Mr. Gandhi called on stage a voter, Suryakant, whose identity was used to apply for 12 deletions in 14 minutes, but the Karnataka resident said he had no knowledge of it.

The Congress leader gave the example of Maharashtra's Rajura constituency where he claimed 6,850 voters were added in a fraudulent manner using automated software.

"We are pretty sure that this is being done using a software at a call centre," he said, adding, "Same system is doing this. It is doing it in Karnataka, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and we have proof of it".

The poll panel is not giving the details because it will lead to where this operation is being conducted, Mr. Gandhi said. "EC knows who is doing this. I want every youngster in India to know this. They are doing this to your future. When they are not giving this information, they are defending the murderers of democracy," he said.

He said it will take two-three months for the research and presentations on alleged "vote chori".

## Trail of destruction



**Rain fury:** Rescue operation under way at Nandanagar in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district, which was battered by heavy rain on Thursday. Gushing water, accompanied by debris, turned houses into rubble, leaving at least two people dead and seven missing. PTI (REPORT ON PAGE 4)

## Saudi-Pak. sign a defence pact that defines 'attack on one as attack on both'

**Associated Press**  
ISLAMABAD

Saudi Arabia and nuclear-armed Pakistan have signed a mutual defence pact that defines any attack on either nation as an attack on both – a key accord in the wake of Israel's strike on Qatar last week.

The kingdom has long had close economic, religious and security ties to Pakistan, including reportedly providing funding for Islamabad's nuclear weapons programme as it developed.

Analysts – and Pakistani diplomats in at least one case – have suggested over the years that Saudi Arabia could be included under Islamabad's nuclear umbrella, particularly as tensions have risen over Iran's atomic programme.



Shehbaz Sharif, left, embraces Mohammed bin Salman after signing a joint defence pact in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on Wednesday. AP

## Will study pact to protect India's interests, says MEA

Hours after Pakistan signed a defence agreement with Saudi Arabia, India said it was aware that the pact had been under consideration.

The External Affairs Ministry said India would study its implications for "our national security" and "regional stability". » PAGE 4

## U.S. revokes visas of Indian executives for 'smuggling' ingredients used in fentanyl

**Kallol Bhattacharjee**  
NEW DELHI

Months after charging two Indian companies of "criminal conspiracies" to smuggle fentanyl precursors into the United States, the U.S. Embassy on Thursday said that it has revoked and denied visas for "certain" Indian "business executives and corporate leadership", accusing them of smuggling ingredients that are used in the illegal production of the drug.

In a statement, the Embassy said the "family members" of these business executives would also "face consequences" for the illegal production and trafficking of drugs. "In furtherance to the Trump Administration's efforts to keep Americans

### Drug precursors

The following are two precursors highly suitable for illicit manufacture of fentanyl and fentanyl analogues

- 4-piperidone
- 1-boc-4-piperidone

Fentanyl and fentanyl analogues are very potent narcotic drugs that continue to result in overdose deaths, according to the International Narcotics Control Board



ing of drugs to the U.S., along with their families, will face consequences that may include being denied access to the U.S.," he added. The statement did not name the "business executives and corporate leadership", but added, "The Embassy is further flagging executives connected with companies known to have trafficked fentanyl precursors for heightened scrutiny if and when they apply for U.S. visas."

The Embassy announcement follows several U.S. executive orders aimed at combating drug trafficking organisations and demanding "reform by source countries from which illicit drugs and precursor chemicals flow into the United States."

In January this year, two

Indian companies – Raxuter Chemicals and Athos Chemicals – were charged with criminal conspiracies to distribute and import fentanyl precursor chemicals to the United States. Bhavesh Lathiya, founder and senior executive of Raxuter Chemicals, was arrested in New York on January 4 for smuggling fentanyl precursors to the United States.

Charging Mr. Lathiya, Raxuter Chemicals, and Surat-based Athos Chemicals with engaging in criminal conspiracies, the U.S. Department of Justice said that fentanyl was the "deadliest drug threat currently facing the United States".

Mr. Lathiya was charged on January 6, just ahead of the swearing-in of Donald Trump.

### Signal to Israel

But the timing of the pact appeared to be a signal to Israel, West Asia's only nuclear-armed state, which has conducted a sprawling military offensive since Palestinian nationalist Hamas's October 7, 2023, attack on Israel stretching across Iran, Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, Qatar, Syria and Yemen.

The pact marks the first major defence decision by a Gulf Arab country since the Qatar attack. Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman signed the pact on Wednesday with Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. While not specifically discussing the bomb, the agreement states "any aggression against either country shall be consi-

dered an aggression against both," according to statements issued by both Pakistan's Foreign Affairs Ministry and the state-run Saudi Press Agency.

"This agreement... aims to develop aspects of defence cooperation between the two countries and strengthen joint deterrence against any aggression," the statement said. A senior Saudi official, speaking on condition of anonymity to *The Financial Times*, seemed to suggest that Pakistan's nuclear protection was a part of the deal, saying it "will utilise all defensive and military means deemed necessary depending on the specific threat".

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have a defence relationship stretching back de-

acades, in part due to Islamabad's willingness to defend the Islamic holy sites of Mecca and Medina in the kingdom. Pakistani troops first travelled to Saudi Arabia in the late 1960s over concerns about Egypt's war in Yemen.

Retired Pakistani Brig. Gen. Feroz Hassan Khan, in his book on his country's nuclear weapons program called *Eating Grass: The Making of the Pakistani Bomb*, said Saudi Arabia provided "generous financial support to Pakistan that enabled the nuclear programme to continue, especially when the country was under sanctions."

Pakistan faced U.S. sanctions for years over its bomb – and saw new ones over its missile work at the end of the Biden regime.

## INBRIEF



## PM Modi to review Maritime Heritage Complex at Lothal

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be on a visit to Gujarat on September 20 where he will review the progress of the National Maritime Heritage Complex (NMHC) at Lothal in Ahmedabad district. He will also inspect the works completed so far and hold a detailed review meeting with officials regarding the ongoing projects at the site. Lothal, once a prominent trading hub of the Indus Valley Civilisation, is a symbol of India's maritime strength and prosperity. "NMHC will seamlessly blend history, education and research. Lothal, which served as a thriving port 5,000 years ago, will be revitalised, showcasing its illustrious maritime legacy," officials said.

## Probe against preacher: ED raids locations in Bikaner

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has carried out search operations at multiple locations in Rajasthan's Bikaner as part of money laundering investigation against a religious preacher and trader, Sadeeq Khan, and his close associates. Mr. Khan, the Amir (head) of Jamiat Ahle Hadees, has been accused of indulging in hawala dealings and suspicious financial transactions running into crores of rupees routed through nearly 20 bank accounts operated and controlled by him. The raids were conducted under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act.

## Congress files complaint on 'communal' BJP video; says bid to breach peace, BTC poll code violation

Rahul Karmakar  
GUWAHATI

The Assam unit of the Congress on Thursday filed a first information report (FIR) with the Dispur police station in Guwahati against the State Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) IT Cell for "criminal conspiracy, abetment, promoting enmity between religious groups, and violation of model code of conduct for the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) election".

The complaint, signed by Congress spokesperson Bedabrata Bora, said the State BJP had posted the communally sensitive video on its handle on social media platform X on September 15 to depict a hypothetical scenario of Assam under non-BJP rule.

"The video titled 'Assam without BJP' portrays an overwhelmingly Muslim-dominated Assam, with visuals of legalised beef sales in public spaces,



People with links to smuggling of cattle, coal, drugs will not dictate to the Assamese mind: State Cong. chief Gaurav Gogoi. FILE PHOTO

renamed landmarks adorned with Islamic motifs, exaggerated statistics claiming a 90% Muslim population, and Muslim common intention to polarise communities for electoral advantage," the FIR read.

'Book State BJP chief' Pointing out that the video violated six sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the Congress party underlined the "urgent need" to

## Midnight funeral for former Hurriyat chief Bhat; Mirwaiz, Mehbooba claim house arrest

BJP seems determined to keep J&K in turmoil, says PDP chief; locking people in their homes has only deepened the sorrow, says Mirwaiz; we deserved to say goodbye to Prof. Bhat: Sajad Lone

Peerzada Ashiq  
SRINAGAR

Authorities in Kashmir allowed a midnight funeral for separatist leader Professor Abdul Gani Bhat, who died on Wednesday evening.

Several senior leaders, including Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) president Mehbooba Mufti and J&K Peoples Conference (JKPC) chief Sajad Lone, claimed to have been placed under house arrest to prevent them from joining the grieving family in north Kashmir's Sopore on Thursday.

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah questioned the security agencies, which report to Lieutenant-Governor Manoj Sinha, over their purported decision not to let the leaders step out of their homes.

"Nothing would have happened had Ms. Mufti or Mr. Lone gone to the family to offer condolences. Is our security grid so fearful that it cannot even trust leaders to visit for con-



Is our security grid so fearful that it can't trust leaders to visit for condolences. This is not good for J&K, especially for 'Naya Kashmir'

OMAR ABDULLAH  
J&K Chief Minister

ferences? This is not good for J&K, especially for 'Naya Kashmir,'" Mr. Abdullah said.

Prof. Bhat, head of the Muslim Conference, Jammu and Kashmir, and former chairman of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference, passed away at the age of 89 after a brief spell of illness. Family sources said the authorities insisted on a midnight funeral. "The authorities ensured that the *janaza* (final rites) was held late so that few people could attend it," a close aide of the deceased leader said.

Hurriyat chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, who was also placed under house arrest, said, "It is extremely unfortunate that

and direction to the collective efforts of the Hurriyat". The separatist leader said his association with Prof. Bhat spanned 35 years of friendship and guidance and that many others longed to pay their last respects.

Ms. Mufti, a former Chief Minister, termed the authorities' decision not to let her step out of her house a "harsh and undemocratic reality of J&K".

"It is becoming increasingly clear that the BJP has no interest in peace or healing in Kashmir. Instead, they appear determined to keep the region in a constant state of turmoil, weaponising pain and unrest for political mileage across the rest of the country. This cynical approach is not just irresponsible; it is dangerous and utterly reprehensible," said the former CM.

Mr. Sajad Lone said, "Professor *sahib* was a pacifist and long retired. We deserved the chance to bid him a final goodbye. I fail to understand the need for this [house arrest]."

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## Target two-thirds majority in Bihar: Shah to BJP cadre

Amit Bhelari  
PATNA

Help form the government in Bihar with two-thirds majority, said senior BJP leader and Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday while addressing a regional conference of party workers from the Shahabad and Magadh region at Dehri-on-Sone in the State's Rohtas district.

Mr. Shah also accused Congress leader Rahul Gandhi of undertaking the Voter Adhikar Yatra not over "vote *chori* (theft)" but to save "Bangladeshi infiltrators". "I want to ask Rahul Gandhi and (RJD chief) Lalu Prasad, should infiltrators get the right to vote, employment, free ration, and other benefits? Who wants to give them these benefits? It is Rahul *baba* and his company doing it."

The Home Minister warned that if the INDIA bloc formed the government in Bihar, then infiltrators would be found in every district. He also listed out the corruption cases against Mr. Prasad. "The State cannot develop when there is a rule of ransoms and murder. If you all want a developed and prosperous Bihar, then vote for the NDA government in the up-



Union Home Minister Amit Shah addressing BJP workers in Rohtas on Thursday. ANI

coming election," he said. Mr. Shah acknowledged that the NDA had not performed well in the Shahabad and Magadh regions in the 2020 Assembly poll.

## 'Take pledge'

"After this meeting, we all have to take a pledge that more than 80% of seats of these regions would go into the pocket of the BJP and its partners," he said.

He later addressed a gathering in Begusarai for party workers from Patna and Munger divisions.

Earlier in the day, in a departure from the usual practice of visiting Chief Minister Nitish Kumar at his official residence, Mr. Shah and Mr. Kumar met at a hotel in Patna and held talks. Seat-sharing arrangements in the NDA for the Assembly election were discussed, sources said.

## Madras HC calls for framing of guidelines to penalise parties for damage caused to property

Mohamed Imranullah S.  
CHENNAI

The Madras High Court on Thursday impressed upon the State government the need to frame guidelines for collecting security deposits from political parties, whenever they intend to hold public meetings or such other events, and use the money to offer compensation for any damage caused to public/private property by the party cadre.

## Report sought

Justice N. Sathish Kumar directed Additional Public Prosecutor E. Raj Thilak to submit a report by September 24 with respect to the guidelines, which should be made applicable to all political parties as well as other organisations/associations that intend to conduct public meetings, processions, and so on.

The interim direction was issued after taking note of various incidents of damage to private/public property, which had been caused in the past during huge gatherings of political parties, and also having regard to the fact that the sufferers/victims seldom receive compensation for the losses. The judge pointed out though the Tamil Nadu Property (Prevention of Damage and Loss) Act was primarily intended at preventing widespread damage to public property, the law was amended in 1994 to also bring private property under its ambit.

"The very object of the Act and its amendment is to make political parties or communal or ethnic or any other group organising demonstrations/huge public gatherings to compensate the loss suffered by the victims in case of damage to

public/private property," the judge wrote.

"The statutory rules framed under the Act provide for compensation but the same has not been properly implemented for all these years. Therefore, in order to indemnify any such loss that may arise during such huge gatherings, this court is of the view that strict conditions must be imposed by way of deposit of an amount to indemnify the losses," Justice Kumar said.

The observations were made while passing interim orders on a writ petition filed by actor C. Joseph Vijay's Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam, which alleged discrimination in grant of permission for his campaign. The party complained about "onerous" conditions imposed by the police only with respect to TVK events.

## 1.8 lakh Maharashtra doctors protest against registration of homeopaths

Snehal Mutha  
MUMBAI

Doctors across Maharashtra went on a 24-hour token strike on Thursday to protest against the State government's decision to allow homeopathy practitioners with Certificate Course in Modern Pharmacology (CCMP) to register with the Maharashtra Medical Council (MMC).

Nearly 1.8 lakh doctors from government medical colleges, State-run hospitals, and private healthcare institutions in Mumbai, Thane, Nashik, Nagpur, and other districts participated in the strike, said Dr. Santosh Kadam, president of the Indian Medical Association (IMA) Maharashtra.

The protesters opposed the notification dated September 11 issued by the MMC, a State body that regulates the registration and



Doctors staging a protest in Thane on Thursday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

practice of modern scientific medicine. They argued that a one-year bridge course cannot replace the "rigorous 5.5 years of MBBS training followed by postgraduate residency" and that the notification "dilutes the standards of modern medicine and puts patients directly at risk, especially in emergencies".

"If they [homeopaths] are also given MMC registration numbers, then the public will be misled about their doctor's qualifications and unable to distin-

guish between a trained MBBS/MD and a short-course practitioner. This lack of transparency is dangerous and unfair to patients," said Dr. Suyash Dhavane, who practises at Nagpur Government Medical College and participated in the stir in Mumbai.

It was organised by the Maharashtra Association of Resident Doctors, Association of State Medical Interns, and IMA, with support from the Federation of All India Medical Association, Maharashtra State

Medical Teachers Association, and Maharashtra Government Medical Officers Association.

Over 500 doctors from the IMA participated in the protest in Thane. Dr. Kadam criticised the government for allowing homeopaths to practise modern medicine despite having their own council. "This is injustice to MBBS doctors and patients," he said.

However, a senior official from the State Medical Education Department said "everything is happening as per the law" and the MMC is following instructions. "The concerns of allopathy doctors are being heard and a meeting is scheduled with the Chief Minister to discuss the matter," the official said.

A delegation of doctors met NCP MP Supriya Sule, BJP MLA Ashish Shelar, and the Principal Secretary

of the Medical Education Department to reiterate their united stand.

## Challenged in court

The State government had amended the Maharashtra Homeopathic Practitioners' Act and the Maharashtra Medical Council Act in 2014, permitting homeopaths with CCMP to register with the MMC as "medical practitioners". The IMA then challenged it in the Bombay High Court.

Protests broke out on June 30 this year when the MMC issued a notification allowing homeopathy doctors with CCMP to prescribe allopathy medicines from July 15.

The Maharashtra Medical Education and Drugs Department stayed the notification after the IMA announced a one-day strike on July 11. The department then constituted

a seven-member special committee to examine the implications of the move.

The MMC issued a fresh circular on September 11 announcing the launch of a portal for the registration of homeopaths with CCMP from Wednesday.

The IMA on Tuesday announced a State-wide protest against the move.

Dr. Bahubali Shah, spokesperson of the Maharashtra Council of Homeopathy, said about 1,100 homeopathy doctors have registered with the MMC after the notification was issued. "A total of 9,160 homeopathy doctors with CCMP will register and practise legally," he said.

On the protest, he said, "Everyone has the right to protest, but if they want things to happen as per their will and don't want to follow the rules and law, then so be it."

## Congress gives notice for no-trust motion against Odisha govt.

Satyasundar Barik  
BHUBANESWAR

Soliciting the support of the Biju Janata Dal (BJD), the Congress has given notice for a no-confidence motion against the Mohan Majhi government on the opening day of the Monsoon Session of the Odisha Assembly on Thursday.

Given the Congress's strength in the House, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government faces no real threat. However, the motion is expected to pave the way for long hours of debate, with Opposition MLAs attempting to put the government on the defensive.

"The Odisha Pradesh Congress president had

earlier said that if the BJD brought a no-confidence motion, the Congress would support it, and if the Congress moved one, it expected the regional party's backing," said Congress Legislature Party leader Ramachandra Kadam.

## No real threat

In the 147-member House, the Congress has 14 MLAs and the support of one CPI (M) legislator. The BJD, which had won 51 seats in the last Assembly election, is now reduced to 50 following the death of its Nupada MLA. The BJP, however, remains comfortably placed with 78 members, backed by three Independents.

**IN BRIEF**



**A.P. govt. has cancelled pattas given to poor women: Jagan**

YSRCP president Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has accused the Andhra Pradesh government and Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu of betraying the poor women by cancelling the house site *pattas* allotted to them. Taking to X on Thursday, he alleged, "The present government has not built a single house in the past 16 months nor has purchased land for housing. Instead, it has cancelled *pattas* given to the poor, and diverted prime lands to private industrial parks, reflecting a pro-rich, anti-poor stance.

**Dharmasthala case: two more skulls found at Banglagudde**

The alleged mass burials in Dharmasthala village has taken a curious turn with the Special Investigation Team probing the case finding two more skulls lying on the ground at Banglagudde near Dharmasthala on Thursday. The team seized the skulls. The SIT found five skulls and 100 bones at Banglagudde on Wednesday, and all of them were found lying on the ground in the forest area, according to sources.

**Congress to move privilege notice against Kerala CM**

Congress leader and MLA Ramesh Chennithala on Thursday questioned Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's contention in the Assembly that 144 police officers had been dismissed from service on disciplinary grounds since 2016. Arguing that data available with the National Crime Records Bureau suggested that just about 50 officers had been dismissed in the said period, he said a breach of privilege notice would be moved against the Chief Minister.

**SC to hear plea over Banu Mushtaq's Dasara invite**

CJI B.R. Gavai agreed to urgently list the case after an advocate said that a non-Hindu had been invited to perform the *agrahara puja* in Chamundeshwari temple during Mysuru's Dasara festival

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday agreed to hear a petition challenging the Karnataka government's decision to invite Booker Prize winner and activist Banu Mushtaq to inaugurate the historical Mysuru Dasara festival on September 22, which has triggered a political slugfest between the Congress government and the State's BJP leadership.

Chief Justice of India B.R. Gavai agreed to list the case filed by Bengaluru resident H.S. Gaurav urgently after it was orally mentioned by an advocate, who said a "non-Hindu has



Mysuru Deputy Commissioner G. Lakshmi Kanth Reddy had offered a formal invitation to Banu Mushtaq to inaugurate Dasara festival, earlier this month. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

been invited to perform the *agrahara puja* in the Chamundeshwari temple as part of the Dasara festival in Karnataka".

A Division Bench of the High Court, on September 15, declined to interfere

with the State's invitation to the writer. The court had highlighted the secular character of the nation, while noting its objection to "arguments that an invitation to a person of different faith violates constitu-

tional or legal right".

In the High Court, Mr. Simha challenged the invitation to Ms. Mushtaq, citing her alleged "anti-Hindu and anti-Kannada" remarks at a literary event in 2023 and the lack of consultation with the Mysuru royal family.

The State government had argued that it was performing a secular function in organising the Dasara festival in Mysuru. Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar had said that Chamundi Hills in Mysuru was open to people of every faith.

BJP MLC C.T. Ravi had said that it was "not right for a person with uncertain faith to preside over a religious event".



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman during a programme on GST reforms in Kolkata on Thursday. DEBASISH BHADURI

**Date for slashed GST rates influenced by Bengal: Sitharaman**

**Shiv Sahay Singh**  
KOLKATA

Highlighting that the second generation GST reforms will boost the economy by increasing demand, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday said that the determination of September 22 as the date when revamped taxes will come into effect has a very strong influence of West Bengal.

"I am happy to say that the determination of September 22 as the implementation date for the next generation GST reforms was largely influenced by [Durga] Puja. The Shubh Mangal Diwas when the revamped GST comes into effect coincides with the first day of Navratri, the day after Mahalaya. There is, therefore, a strong influence of Bengal in this decision-making," Ms. Sitharaman said at an event in Kolkata.

"Durga Puja is Bengal's biggest festival, and people in the State make major purchases during this period. Keeping this in mind, we have chosen this date

for the new GST rates to come into effect. This will allow people to benefit from the reduced tax burden during the festive season," she said.

The Union Finance Minister also highlighted that GST rates have been reduced from 12% to 5% for a number of local products and handicrafts from West Bengal such as Darjeeling tea, processed mango products from Malda, jute bags, leather goods from Santiniketan, purulia chhau masks, wooden masks of Kushmandi, madur kathi, Bankura terracotta crafts, Shola crafts and nakshi kanta among others. Most of these products have Geographical Identification (GI) tags.

The Finance Minister expressed optimism that these changes would spur growth across various sectors in the State.

Ms. Sitharaman said that new generation GST reforms were a result of extensive consultations and efforts from all States, with significant contributions from the GST Council.

**All set for Ayyappa conclave tomorrow**

**The Hindu Bureau**  
PATHANAMTHITTA

All arrangements have been completed for the Global Ayyappa Sangamam at Pampa on Saturday, where discussions will focus on transforming Sabarimala into a global pilgrimage destination.

Addressing the presspersons on Thursday, Devswom Minister V. N. Vasavan said the cost of the

conclave is estimated at ₹7 crore, which will be funded entirely through sponsorships.

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan will inaugurate the conclave, to be also attended by two Ministers representing the Government of Tamil Nadu. Although representatives of the Union government have been invited, no confirmation has been received so far.

**V-C case: universities told to bear legal cost**

**The Hindu Bureau**  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Kerala Raj Bhavan has written to the APJ Abdul Kalam Technological University (KTU) and Digital University Kerala (DKU) seeking payment towards legal expenses incurred in the ongoing Supreme Court case relating to Vice-Chancellor appointments in the two universities.

The Raj Bhavan has in-

structed the two universities to jointly release ₹11 lakh towards the lawyers' fee. The letter asserts that the cost of the legal proceedings should be borne by the universities since the litigation concerns their functioning. Each university has been directed to disburse ₹5.5 lakh to clear the memo of fees provided by the Attorney General of India and Advocate-on-Record.

**'Aland episode is a window to a larger conspiracy'**

**The Hindu Bureau**  
BENGALURU

Endorsing the statements made by Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi on efforts to delete the names of eligible voters in Aland of Kalaburagi district, Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday alleged that it was not an isolated incident but a window into a larger conspiracy to manipulate electoral rolls and deny citizens their right to vote.

Taking to social media, Mr. Siddaramaiah argued that the Aland case was not a local mischief and wondered if it was only the tip of the iceberg. He alleged that the 'revelations' made by Mr. Gandhi had once again exposed how Indian democracy was being subverted through systematic and centralised attempts at "vote chori".

He recalled that between February 2022 and February 2023, 6,018 Form 7 applications had been filed through the Election Commission of India apps to delete names from the voters' list of the Aland Assembly Constituency. On inquiry, only 24 were genuine while the remaining 5,994 were fraudulent, he pointed out.

"Stolen voter details, fake logins, and mobile numbers from outside Karnataka were used to impersonate applicants... A case was registered, and the CID began investigation," he said. He alleged that the EC had refused to share the relevant data, despite the repeated requests from the Karnataka CID for technical details, which are essential to trace the origin of the operation and identify those responsible for it.



Pedestrians and motorists negotiate a flooded stretch at West Marredpally in Secunderabad on Thursday. Heavy rain left several areas of the twin cities of Telangana waterlogged. G. RAMAKRISHNA

**Heavy rain lashes Hyderabad for second consecutive day**

**The Hindu Bureau**  
HYDERABAD

Hyderabad witnessed another spell of intense rainfall on Thursday evening, continuing the downpour that began a day earlier.

Dark clouds enveloped the city even before sunset, followed by heavy showers that brought traffic to a crawl and left several key junctions waterlogged.

The Hyderabad Traffic Police issued advisories urging commuters to avoid the route from Panjagutta to Begumpet due to heavy waterlogging near GRT and Praja Bhavan.

Slow-moving traffic was reported across several busy corridors, including T-Hub, Madhapur, Cyber Towers towards Yashoda

Hospital, Gachibowli junction, Aparna Towers from Khanamet, Sattva Knowledge Park, Raidurgam, JNTU junction and IKEA junction. The overflow of the Musi forced authorities to close Musarambagh Bridge for traffic, with commuters redirected to the Golnaka bridge as an alternative.

Traffic police personnel from the Hyderabad, Cyberabad and Rachakonda commissionerates were stationed at major junctions to ease congestion, while Disaster Response Force teams from the Hyderabad Disaster Response and Asset Protection Agency were deployed to clear inundated stretches.

**Body recovered**  
Meanwhile, the body of Arjun, 26, who was washed

away from his living space in the Manggarodi Basti area on Sunday was recovered on Thursday morning in Valigonda, Bhongir, almost 70 km away.

An officer from Habeebnagar police said Arjun and Rama, 25, were dragged into the Afzal Sagar nala beside their house when floodwaters rushed through the area on Sunday. The body of Rama remains untraced, even though search teams have been working since Sunday night, an official said.

In another incident, a man identified as Mohammad Sharfuddin, a resident of Musheerabad, was heading home from work when he was swept away in the accumulated floodwaters at the Balkampet underpass on Wednesday evening.

**Karnataka Ministers urge CM to postpone socio-educational survey amid opposition**

**The Hindu Bureau**  
BENGALURU

Casting a shadow, days before the socio-educational survey scheduled to be conducted by the Karnataka State Commission for Backward Classes, some Ministers in the Siddaramaiah Cabinet are learnt to have brought pressure on the Chief Minister to drop the survey or postpone it, citing inclusion of castes that are not in the notified list of castes. According to sources, as many as 331 castes/subcastes were cited as examples that are not 'original castes'.

However, the survey is set to commence from September 22 with the commission making preparations even as the

government on Thursday, both at the Cabinet meeting and later during a meeting of group of Ministers, was seized with the matter on 331 castes.

The BJP and other caste groups have raised objections to certain 'new castes' being included in the list, which includes Brahmin Christians, Lingayat Christians, Kuruba Christians and Vokkaliga Christians among others. Objections have also been raised on the increased number of Muslim subcastes and Lingayat subcastes among others.

Sources said that the Cabinet meeting saw animated discussion on the caste survey with Ministers belonging to the politically powerful and land-owning

communities of Vokkaliga and Veerashaiva-Lingayat communities opposing the survey itself. The two communities have been traditionally opposed to the survey, and had successfully opposed the previous survey conducted by the H. Kantharaj Commission in 2015, the report of which was submitted by K. Jayaprakash Hegde Commission in 2024.

**'Political tool'**

While the Ministers from the Veerashaiva-Lingayat community raised the issue of confusion around the survey, a few others pointed out that it had become a political tool too. The Chief Minister is learnt to have expressed disappointment over he being

branded as pro SC/ST/OBC and minorities and opposed to other castes.

He pointed out at the poor people in all communities and the need to have the survey, sources said.

The post-Cabinet meeting of Ministers, including H.C. Mahadevappa, Santhosh Lad, H.K. Patil, M.B. Patil and Byrathi Suresh, was asked to look into the 331 castes in the list.

"People want to identify themselves in a certain manner and that cannot be prevented. Neither the government nor the commission has any role in this. The Chief Minister would be briefed about the matter. The survey will go on as per schedule," one of the Ministers said.

**Kerala HC seeks Centre's response to plea for stay on Arundhati Roy's book**

**The Hindu Bureau**  
KOCHI

The Kerala High Court has sought the Centre's response to a plea that sought a stay on the sale of Booker prize winner Arundhati Roy's recently released book *Mother Mary Comes To Me*, whose cover photo shows her smoking a bidi, without any statutory health-hazard warning label.

Referring to the cover photo as an act of 'intellectual arrogance', the petitioner, advocate Rajasimhan, submitted that the book violated Section 5 of the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and



Arundhati Roy during the launch of her book *Mother Mary Comes to Me* in Kochi. THULASI KAKKAT

Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 2013.

The Section 5 (1) of the Act says that no person engaged in, or purported to be engaged in the production, supply or distribution of cigarettes or any other

tobacco products, shall advertise, and no person having control over a medium shall cause to be advertised, cigarettes or any other tobacco products through that medium. No person shall take part in any advertisement which

directly or indirectly suggests or promotes the use or consumption of cigarettes or any other tobacco product. The petitioner said the photo was a form of glorification of smoking and sent a misleading message to impressionable youth, especially teenaged girls and women.

A Division Bench comprising Chief Justice Nitin Jamdar and Justice Basant Balaji asked whether the petitioner had approached the authority concerned, as specified in the Act, to ascertain whether this amounted to an infringement of the legislation, and to get instructions in this regard. The matter has been posted for hearing on September 25.

## NITI Aayog declines to give details about NGO status of RSS

The Hindu Bureau  
GURUGRAM

The NITI Aayog has declined to furnish information on the functioning of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) as a non-governmental organisation (NGO).

Replying to an RTI application seeking a copy of the registration certificate of the RSS for carrying out its function as an NGO, the Voluntary Action Cell of the NITI Aayog said the information was “personal” and “third-party information”. It cited Section 8(J) of the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005 to refuse the information.

The application was filed by P.P. Kapoor, a Panipat-based RTI activist, with reference to Prime Minister Narendra Modi describing the RSS as an NGO, in his address to the nation on the 79th Independence Day on August 15 this year.

Mr. Kapoor, in the RTI application filed on August 17, had also sought a certified copy of the “Aims and Objectives” of the RSS as per the registration record and the copies of all the annual audit reports, balance sheets, and annual income-expenditure reports submitted by the said organisation to the Registrar General of Firms and So-

**Central Public Information Officer declines to provide the requested information, saying it is ‘personal’ and ‘third-party information’**

cities till date.

However, in his reply, Deepak Nailwal, Central Public Information Officer, Voluntary Action Cell, said the information was “not available”.

To a query on the current office-bearers of the RSS, the CPIO replied that the information was available in the public domain and could be accessed on the Darpan portal.

**‘Concealed on purpose’**  
Mr. Kapoor alleged that the information related to the RSS was being concealed on purpose.

“Mr. Modi, in his address to the nation on Independence Day, said that RSS was a non-government organisation. He also praised RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat in newspaper articles marking his 75th birthday. But this RTI reply had made it clear that RSS was an illegal organisation running without a registration,” Mr. Kapoor said in a press statement.

## India studying defence pact between Saudi, Pak.; vows to guard its interests

Any aggression against either country will be seen as aggression against both, says pact signed by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan; MEA says India was aware that such a pact was under consideration

Kallol Bhattacharjee  
NEW DELHI

Hours after Pakistan signed a mutual defence agreement with Saudi Arabia, India has said that it was aware of the development and reiterated its commitment to “comprehensive national security”.

The Indian response came after Saudi Arabia and Pakistan issued a joint statement during the visit of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to Riyadh that said, “Any aggression against either country shall be considered an aggression against both.”

“The government was aware that this development, which formalizes a long-standing arrangement between the two countries, had been under consideration. We will study the implications of this development for our national security as well as for regional and global stability. The government remains committed to protecting India’s national interests and ensuring comprehensive national security in all domains,” said the Ministry of External Affairs in response to the Saudi-Pakistan mutual defence agreement.



Following talks between Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the two sides issued a joint statement on September 17 in which they highlighted bilateral relations over the past nearly eight decades and said, “This agreement which reflects the shared commitment of both nations to enhance their security and to achieving security and peace in the region and the world, aims to develop aspects of defence cooperation between

the two countries and strengthen joint deterrence against any aggression.” The agreement states that any aggression against either country shall be considered an aggression against both.

On September 15, Mr. Sharif had participated in the extraordinary Arab-Islamic summit held by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Doha, where Israel’s September 9 bombing of Qatar was condemned.

Saudi Arabia has close ties with India and had sent Foreign Minister Adel Al-Jubair to New Delhi, hours after India targeted locations inside Pakistan

under Operation Sindoor on May 7. He also visited Pakistan after his unannounced visit to Delhi.

Saudi Arabia, one of the top energy suppliers to India, is also a major employer of Indian blue and white collar expat workers in the Gulf and, in recent years, has gradually built military relations as well.

However, in comparison, the Saudi relations with Pakistan have been marked prominently by the generous support that Riyadh extended to Pakistan, especially after the humiliating defeat in the 1971 India-Pakistan war. Saudi Arabia first came to Pakistan’s rescue with a \$300 million assistance that King Faisal extended after meeting Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto’s Foreign Minister in Riyadh in 1974.

Over the years, Pakistan has intensified defence cooperation with Saudi Arabia and in recognition of that, Saudi Arabia conferred the prestigious King Abdulaziz Medal of Excellence on then Pakistani Army Chief Qamar Javed Bajwa in 2022.

## Modi calls Nepal’s PM Karki, reaffirms India’s support

Kallol Bhattacharjee  
NEW DELHI

Marking a fresh beginning, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday spoke with Sushila Karki, the newly appointed Prime Minister of Nepal’s interim administration, and condoled the loss of lives in last week’s protests.

“Had a warm conversation with Mrs. Sushila Karki, Prime Minister of the Interim Government of Nepal. Conveyed heartfelt condolences on the recent tragic loss of lives and reaffirmed India’s steadfast support for her efforts to restore peace and stability. Also, I extended warm greetings to her and the people of Nepal on their National Day tomorrow,” Mr. Modi said in a post on X.

The Ministry of External Affairs said Mr. Modi expressed “India’s readiness” to continue working closely with Nepal to restore its “peace and stability”. “Prime Minister Karki thanked Prime Minister for India’s firm support to Nepal and reciprocated Prime Minister’s desire to further strengthen ties between the two countries.”

**Rebuilding ties**

Earlier, in the aftermath of deadly police firing in Kathmandu on September



Sushila Karki

8, Mr. Modi had described the incidents as “heart wrenching”. On September 12, India had welcomed the formation of the interim government.

Ms. Karki, who served as the Chief Justice of Nepal from July 2016 to June 2017, was sworn in as Nepal’s first woman Prime Minister on September 12. After taking charge, she expressed concern over the rising financial corruption in Nepal. On September 16, Indian Ambassador Naveen Srivastava met Ms. Karki and conveyed Mr. Modi’s congratulatory message to her.

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri had visited Nepal on August 18 and invited then-Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli to visit India. Mr. Oli resigned after a massive uprising following the killing of youth who revolted against his sweeping order banning most social media platforms.

## 2 dead, 7 missing after rain batters Uttarakhand’s Chamoli

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

Torrential rain lashed Chamoli district of Uttarakhand on Thursday, with gushing waters and debris reducing homes to rubble. The deluge left two persons dead, while at least seven others remain missing.

Just two days ago, rain and floods wreaked havoc in the State capital of Dehradun, leaving 21 dead and 17 missing.

The Chamoli district administration said several villages in the Nand Nagar area suffered extensive damage. Teams of the National Disaster Response Force, State Disaster Response Force, police, doctors, and paramedics were rushed to the affected sites, with rescue operations launched on a war footing.



**Down to rubble:** Several houses lie damaged due to landslides in Nandanagar area of Chamoli district, Uttarakhand on Thursday. PTI

Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami reviewed the situation with senior officials, and directed them to ensure every possible effort to save lives.

He instructed the Chamoli District Magistrate to airlift the seriously injured to the AIIMS, Rishikesh,

while officials in flood-hit districts were ordered to restore roads, power and water supply, and communication networks at the earliest.

Arrangements for shelter, food, clean drinking water, and medicines were also mandated.

## ‘I believe in true secularism, in all religions,’ CJJ says putting the quietus on a controversy

Krishnadas Rajagopal  
NEW DELHI

After 48 hours of incessant social media outrage over his oral remarks made in a hearing on a damaged Lord Vishnu idol, Chief Justice of India B.R. Gavai broke his silence on Thursday to clarify in open court that he believes in all religions, visits sites of worship of every faith, and firmly trusts in “true secularism”.

“Someone told me the other day that the comments I made are being portrayed in social media. I believe in all religions. I respect all...” Chief Justice Gavai said to the assembled courtroom when the Bench re-assembled after the lunch break.

Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, who was pre-

sent, said he had known the Chief Justice for over a decade and knew of his visits to “temples and religious places of all religions”.

Chief Justice Gavai added to Mr. Mehta’s response by saying that he had visited dargahs and gurdwaras too. “I believe in true secularism, in all religions,” the CJJ reiterated.

On September 16, the court was hearing a petition seeking directions to reconstruct/replace or rejuvenate the seven-foot Lord Vishnu idol at the Javari temple, which forms a part of the Khajuraho group of monuments, a UNESCO World Heritage site in Madhya Pradesh.

Declining the plea, the CJJ, speaking for the Bench with Justice Vinod Chandran, had orally remarked



B.R. Gavai

that this was purely public interest litigation.

“Go and ask the deity himself to do something. If you are saying that you are a strong devotee of Lord Vishnu, then you pray and do some meditation,” the CJJ was reported to have told the petitioner, Rakesh Dalal.

On Thursday, the CJJ explained that his remarks were intended to convey that the court could not

possibly intervene as the area was a protected monument. He noted that the comments had been taken out of context. “We said it is within the monuments controlled by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), and how can we pass orders,” he explained.

The Chief Justice said the petition had come up when the waqf case was still fresh in his mind. He referred to an ASI report which had led to the insertion of a provision in the Waqf (Amendment) Act of 2025.

**‘Wrong reaction’**

“Really unfortunate the way it was shown on social media... Earlier, we used to learn Newton’s law which said that for every action there is an equal reaction. Now, the new law is every

action has a wrong and disproportionate reaction,” Mr. Mehta said.

“Therefore, I never watch social media. At least till November 24 [the date of the CJJ’s retirement],” Chief Justice Gavai responded.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, also present in the courtroom, compared social media to an “unruly horse”. “We cannot tame it,” he said.

Chief Justice Gavai referred to the happenings in neighbouring Nepal. Protests and violence, leading to the fall of the ruling government in that country, were reportedly sparked by a social media ban.

“It [social media] is designed that way, to multiply. That is their revenue model,” Mr. Mehta commented.

## Anil Ambani, Rana Kapoor named in CBI chargesheet

Press Trust of India  
NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation filed a chargesheet on Thursday against Anil Ambani and others over alleged fraudulent transactions between the industrialist’s companies, Reliance Commercial Finance Ltd. (RCFL) and Reliance Home Finance Ltd. (RHFL), and Yes Bank and firms of the family of the bank’s former CEO Rana Kapoor, causing a loss of ₹2,796 crore to the bank, officials said.

Mr. Ambani is the chairman of the Anil Dhirubhai Ambani (ADA) Group and director of Reliance Capital Ltd., the holding company of RCFL and RHFL.

The CBI registered two cases in 2022 against Rana Kapoor, the then managing

director and CEO of Yes Bank, RCFL and RHFL.

“Yes Bank invested around ₹2,045 crore in non-convertible debentures and commercial debts of RCFL and ₹2,965 crore in non-convertible debentures and commercial papers of RHFL in the year 2017 on the approval of Rana Kapoor despite CARE Ratings placing ADA Group financial companies ‘under watch’ in view of deteriorating financial standing and adverse market assessment,” a CBI spokesperson said.

The CBI findings have shown that funds, invested in RCFL and RHFL by Yes Bank, were subsequently siphoned through multiple layers, demonstrating a systematic diversion of public money, the statement said.

## Army scales up induction of drones, aims to make every soldier a drone operator

Saurabh Trivedi  
NEW DELHI

The Army is rapidly scaling up the induction of drones and counter-drone systems, with multiple units already operational and drone centres established at premier training institutions. On Thursday, the Chief of the Army Staff, General Upendra Dwivedi, visited one such facility at Likabali in Arunachal Pradesh, underscoring the Army’s focus on operationalising drone capabilities.

The initiative aims to make drone operations a standard soldier capability across all arms of the Army. Training institutions include the Indian Military Academy (Dehradun), Infantry School (Mhow), and the Officers Training Aca-



The initiative aims to make drone operations a standard soldier capability. PTI

demy (Chennai).

According to officials associated with the training, the concept is captured in the idea of “Eagle in the Arm” – that every soldier should be able to operate a drone just as he carries his weapon. Depending on mission needs, drones will be deployed for combat, surveillance, logistics, and even medical evacuation, while counter-drone systems are being inducted in

parallel to create layered protection.

The Army chief had earlier, during the 26th Kargil Vijay Diwas at Dras (July 26), announced that every infantry battalion will have a drone platoon, artillery regiments will be equipped with counter-drone systems and loiter munitions, and composite Divyastra batteries will be raised to boost precision and survivability. “Our firepower will now increase manifold in the coming days,” Gen. Dwivedi had said.

This dual thrust – arming soldiers with drones while strengthening counter-drone defences – reflects the Army’s recognition that unmanned systems are no longer niche but essential elements of modern warfare.

## HC issues notice to NIA, 7 persons freed in Malegaon case

The Hindu Bureau  
MUMBAI

The Bombay High Court on Thursday issued notices to seven persons acquitted in the 2008 Malegaon blast case, acting on an appeal filed by family members of the victims who died in the explosion.

A Division Bench of Chief Justice Shree Chandrashekhar and Justice Gautam Anhad also issued notices to the National Investigation Agency (NIA) and the Maharashtra government, directing that they be served within two weeks. The appeal is posted for further hearing after six weeks.

The appeal challenges the special NIA court’s July 31, 2025, judgment acquitting the accused – former BJP MP Pragna Singh Tha-

kur, Lt. Col. Prasad Purohit, retired Major Ramesh Upadhyay, Ajay Rahirkar, Sudhakar Dhar Dwivedi alias Swami Amrutananand Devtirth, Sudhakar Chaturvedi, and Sameer Kulkarni – of all charges.

The appeal filed by the petitioners argued that a faulty investigation cannot be grounds for acquittal, stressing that conspiracies are hatched in secrecy and rarely supported by direct evidence. It said the trial court wrongly acted as a “post office” and failed to fill in gaps in the prosecution’s case. The High Court on Tuesday said filing an appeal against acquittal in the 2008 case is “not an open invitation for all,” as it sought clarity on the role of petitioners challenging the special NIA court’s decision.

## ED attaches assets worth ₹696.21 crore in PACL case

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate has attached properties worth ₹696.21 crore in connection with the ₹48,000-crore PACL Limited case.

The ED’s probe under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) is based on a first information report registered by the Central Bureau of Investigation against PACL Ltd., PGF Ltd., the late Nirmal Singh Bhangoor, and others.

It was alleged that fraudulent collective investment schemes were floated by PACL, through which the company and its associates deceitfully raised and misappropriated around ₹48,000 crore from investors.

## Poll panel says allegations made by Congress leader are 'incorrect', 'baseless'

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The Election Commission on Thursday termed the allegations made by the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, against Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar "incorrect" and "baseless".

It said that "no deletion of any voter can be done online by any member of the public, as 'misconceived' by Mr. Gandhi".

Mr. Gandhi, at a press conference here, mounted a scathing attack on the CEC, accusing him of protecting those who were "destroying" Indian de-



A senior EC official said that the poll panel had fielded a complaint to investigate the matter.

mocracy by refusing to share technical details of the people who were behind an attempted voter deletion from an Assembly seat in Karnataka.

A senior EC official said that in "2023, certain un-

successful attempts were made for deletion of electors in the Aland Assembly constituency in Karnataka and an FIR was filed by the authority of EC itself to investigate the matter".

As per records, the Aland seat was won by Subhadh Guttedar (BJP) in 2018 and B.R. Patil (Congress) in 2023, the EC official said.

Recently, *The Hindu* had reported on the Karnataka CID's probe into an alleged systematic attempt to remove names of 5,994 voters from electoral rolls by forging Form 7, in the Aland constituency in Kalaburagi district, ahead of the 2023 Assembly polls.

## Rajura in the eye of a storm over 'voter fraud' charges

Vinaya Deshpande Pandit  
MUMBAI

The Rajura Assembly constituency in Maharashtra is in the eye of the storm yet again. After Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi's press conference on Thursday, where he highlighted alleged "voter fraud" in Rajura and Karnataka's Aland, the phone lines of Congress leader Subhash Dhote's office have been ringing non-stop.

Mr. Dhote, who lost to the BJP's Devrao Bhongle in the Assembly election by a margin of 3,050 votes in the constituency in Chandrapur district, told *The Hindu* that he has been speaking about the issue since last year. He says there were attempts to add nearly 18,000 bogus names to the voters' list in the constituency between the Lok Sabha election in April-May 2024 and Assembly election in November. While an attempt to enrol over 6,800 bogus votes was thwarted after the Congress's intervention, there are concerns over addition of 11,036 names in the period, he said.



Subhash Dhote

However, the office of the Sub-Divisional Officer, also the Electoral Registration Officer of Rajura, denied there was any wrongful addition of voters, and in fact said "suo motu" time-limited action by the administration prevented bogus voter registration" in the constituency.

"Thorough inquiry" "Taking serious note of the matter, the District Election Officer instructed the Electoral Registration Officer and Sub-Divisional Officer, Rajura, to conduct a thorough inquiry into all applications and to initiate necessary criminal proceedings under the provisions of the Representation of the People Act, 1950 and the Information Technolo-

gy Act, 2000. Consequently, Crime No. 629/2024 was registered at Rajura Police Station, and further investigation is being carried out by the Police Department," a statement released on Thursday said.

On allegations that 11,036 names were added to the voters' list between the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections, the District Information Officer told *The Hindu*: "It was a natural increase in the summary revision."

Rajura SDO Ravindra Mane, who spoke to *The Hindu*, also made a similar assertion. "Earlier, there was only one qualifying date to make additions. Now, there are four - January 1, April 1, July 1, and October 1. Thus, additions to the voters' list happens regularly. There is a natural summary revision. The additional names in the voters' list are valid. As far as the other 6,853 names are concerned, they had been bogus. A complaint has already been registered," he said.

However, Mr. Dhote said the police had not made any headway in the investigation so far.

## Rahul's charges show lack of faith in democracy: BJP

Infiltrators-first politics seems to be sole agenda of Congress leader, says Anurag Thakur; daring Rahul to go to court if his arguments had strength, BJP leader accuses him of misleading citizens

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The Bharatiya Janata Party on Thursday accused the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, of levelling baseless charges against the Election Commission over "vote theft", alleging that the Opposition was demonstrating an agenda of "infiltrators-first politics".

Addressing a press conference at the BJP's national headquarters in New Delhi on Thursday, former Union Minister and BJP leader Anurag Thakur said Mr. Gandhi's repeated accusations against the Election Commission showed his lack of faith in Indian democracy.

Mr. Thakur made these remarks after a press conference by Mr. Gandhi at the neighbouring Congress headquarters on what the Congress leader alleged were attempts to delete names of over 6,000 vo-



While the Election Commission is functioning without bias, Rahul Gandhi is weakening democracy, misleading citizens, and trying to create a situation like Bangladesh and Nepal

ANURAG THAKUR, BJP leader

ters from the electoral rolls in the Aland constituency in Karnataka.

"Infiltrators-first politics" seemed to be the sole agenda of Mr. Gandhi, Mr. Thakur alleged, adding that it was the interests of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes that would be harmed the most if the Congress's alleged agenda of protecting illegal voters was allowed.

"While the Election Commission of India is functioning without bias, Rahul Gandhi is weakening democracy, misleading ci-

tizens, and trying to create a situation like Bangladesh and Nepal," the BJP leader said.

### On past CECs

Defending the EC after Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar was repeatedly criticised by Mr. Gandhi at his press conference, Mr. Thakur hit back by citing the association of past CECs with the Congress, including the late M.S. Gill, who became a Minister in the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, and T.N. Seshan, who

fought the Lok Sabha election on Congress ticket.

Mr. Thakur dared Mr. Gandhi to go to court if the latter's arguments had strength.

Mr. Gandhi on Thursday accused Mr. Kumar of protecting "vote thieves", citing data from a Karnataka Assembly constituency to claim that names of Congress supporters were being systematically deleted ahead of elections.

"The Election Commission must stop this and provide within a week the information sought by the Karnataka CID (Criminal Investigation Department) in an investigation into voter deletions," the Congress leader said at a press conference at the Congress's Indira Bhavan headquarters here.

The BJP leader said that it was the Congress that had been elected from the Assembly constituency mentioned by Mr. Gandhi, and asked if it was a result of "vote theft".

## Karnataka CEO says all data handed over to police

The Hindu Bureau  
BENGALURU

Responding to Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's allegation over attempts to delete names of voters in the Aland constituency, the Chief Electoral Officer, Karnataka has said that his office, on the instructions of the EC, "has handed over all the available information with ECI for completing the investigation to the Superintendent of Police, Kalaburagi district, on 06.09.2023".

The CID has been asking for "destination IPs and destination ports" of the sessions through which forged Form 7 applications were made. The CEO, in a press release on Thursday, said it had provided "objector's details, including form reference number, name of the objector, his EPIC number of mobile number used for log-in and mobile number provided by the objector for processing, software application medium, IP address, applicant place, form submission date and time, and user creation date".

## Delhi court sets aside *ex parte* gag order against journalists in Adani defamation case

Aaratrika Bhaumik  
NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Thursday set aside the *ex parte* injunction that had restrained journalists Ravi Nair, Abir Dasgupta, Ayasant Das, and Ayush Joshi from publishing allegedly defamatory material about Gautam Adani's Adani Enterprises Limited (AEL).

District judge Ashish Agarwal of the Rohini Court said that the September 6 order was "unsustainable" as it had been passed without affording the journalists an opportunity of hearing. "While articles and posts spanning a substantial period were questioned by the plaintiff through the suit, the court did not deem it fit to grant an opportunity of hearing

to the defendants before passing the impugned order... In my opinion, the senior civil judge ought to have granted that opportunity before passing an order which had the impact of *prima facie* declaring the articles as defamatory and even directing their removal," he said.

Special civil judge Anuj Kumar Singh had restrained nine journalists, activists, and entities from publishing or circulating "unverified, unsubstantiated and *ex facie* defamatory" reports about AEL, and directed the removal of such content within five days. The order had also allowed the company to identify additional online material it considered defamatory, which intermediaries and platforms were

### Judge says that the journalists should have been afforded 'an opportunity of hearing'

required to take down within 36 hours.

The injunction was sought in a defamation suit where AEL alleged that "coordinated defamatory" content had been published to tarnish its reputation and disrupt its global business operations.

Appearing for the journalists, advocate Vrinda Grover submitted that the September 6 order contained no finding on whether the publications were defamatory. "[The order] was not the court expressing its mind. It is the

reproduction of the plaintiff's averments and pleadings," she said.

She said that most of the publications cited in the suit had been available in the public domain since June 2024 and argued that there was no urgency to justify the "extraordinary and exceptional relief" of an *ex parte* injunction months after their release. "Why the rush? Why was no notice given to us? How have they explained the delay in approaching the court?" she asked.

### 'Malicious campaign'

On behalf of the conglomerate, advocate Vijay Aggarwal contended that the journalists were engaged in a malicious campaign. "All of them like writing against me... it is a com-

pletely malicious targeting," he said.

Senior advocate Jagdeep Sharma, also appearing for AEL, submitted that the company's reputation was being unfairly maligned.

The court, however, noted that the veracity of the contested publications could not be determined at this stage. Judge Aggarwal orally observed that whether the defendants are able to prove the truth of their articles "would be a subject matter of trial."

The judge further clarified that his ruling applied only to the four appellants before him and did not extend to the separate appeal filed by senior journalist Paranjay Guha Thakurta, on which another judge of the same court has reserved judgment.

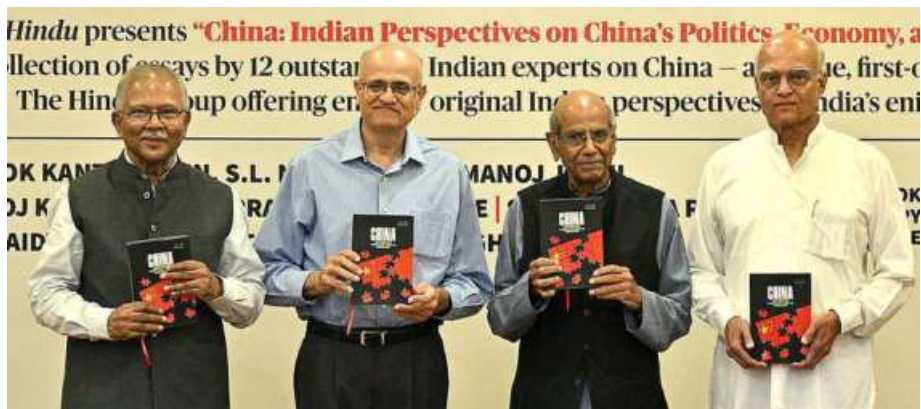
## Modi-Xi meet repaired India-China relations, but its importance should not be overstated: experts

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Tianjin has "repaired" India-China relations but its importance should not be "overstated", veteran diplomats and commentators said at the launch of the book *China: Indian Perspectives on China's Politics, Economy, and Foreign Relations*, a special publication by The Hindu Group, here on Thursday.

Delivering the keynote address, former National Security Adviser Shivshankar Menon praised the initiative by The Hindu Group and said, "The book is an Indian view of China. It tells us how to look at China in the future. It tells you what you need to learn [about China]."

Speaking on the occasion, former Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran said, "This book begins the conversation we need to understand China. It really is a great start. It is the most



Ashok Kantha, Vijay Gokhale, K. Shyam Saran and Shivshankar Menon at the release of *China: Indian Perspectives on China's Politics, Economy and Foreign Relations* on Thursday. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

comprehensive survey of contemporary China in all aspects."

Participating in a panel discussion moderated by *The Hindu's* Diplomatic Affairs Editor Suhasini Haidar, former Indian Ambassador to China Ashok Kantha said, "We start repairing our China ties in early 2024. It begins to gain pace with PM Modi and President Xi Jinping's meeting in Kazan. The meeting in Tianjin stabilises our ties in the troubled world right now."

"Even now we know so little of the engagement with China. Disengage-

ment with China at the border is one of the major issues that India is still facing today. Prime Minister Modi may have spoken about China a few times in the past, but we need to see what will happen," he added.

In the same panel, Manoj Joshi, Distinguished Fellow at the Observer Research Foundation, cautioned about the pace of India-China relations and said, "The Tianjin summit was a process in repairing the relationship broken in 2020. No one knows why China did what it did in 2020, but this meeting cer-

tainly propels the relationship to where it stands today. But, let's not overstate the value of the summit."

Mr. Joshi also highlighted the importance of Tibet and said, "Tibet is extremely important from Indian perspective. Tibet is a point of conversation between India and China. It is important to India from geographical and religious perspectives. Tibet opens up many conversations as to where India stands with China."

### Greater engagement

Former Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale cautioned

about the internal developments in China. "Chinese President's policies to control China and centralise power is strangling China's economic growth," he said.

He also called for greater engagement and said, "If we do not visit China, we have very unreal view of China. China has grown very fast and it's because the country is under an autocratic regime. It makes a lot of difference because in that sense India is a democracy."

Introducing the volume, Varghese K. George, Resident Editor, *The Hindu*, spoke about the ongoing e-book series by *The Hindu* that covers various segments such as politics, technology, and the Constitution. "The extraordinary group of contributors brought together by Ananth Krishnan compelled us to bring out this issue [the book on China] in print," he said.

Suresh Nambath, Editor, *The Hindu*, and Ananth Krishnan, Director, The Hindu Group Publishing Private Ltd., were present.

## NCST forms panel to look into duties given in 2005

Abhinav Lakshman  
NEW DELHI

More than 20 years after the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) was assigned additional duties to protect specific rights of ST communities in the country, the commission has, for the first time, formed a special committee along with three sub-committees to look into how these functions can be performed, commission Member Nirupam Chakma told *The Hindu* on Thursday (September 18, 2025).

In August 2005, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs issued a notification assigning a list of eight additional duties to the mandate of the NCST. These included suggesting measures to protect ownership of minor forest produce, rights to water and mineral resources, protecting tribal communities from land alienation, and full implementation of the Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996.

The NCST was also mandated to look at "viable li-

### In 2005, the Centre issued a notification assigning a list of eight additional duties to the NCST

velelihood strategies", "efficacy" of rehabilitation measures for tribals displaced by development projects, increasing the role of tribal communities in protecting and conserving forests, and finding ways to "reduce and ultimately eliminate" tribal communities' practice of shifting cultivation.

### 'To prepare a report'

At the time, the NCST had said a lack of staff and funds made it feel "severely handicapped" to initiate studies to perform these duties. However, this week, the commission has said that it will prepare a report on how these additional functions can be discharged.

Officials said that the special internal committee consists of 11 members and that the eight additional functions had been divided

and assigned to three separate sub-committees. They said that the sub-committee headed by member Jatothu Hussain will look at issues of livelihood strategies, and ownership rights to minor forest produce, mineral, and water resources.

The sub-committee headed by member Asha Lakra will examine the issues of land alienation and efficacy of rehabilitation schemes for tribals displaced by development projects, and the sub-committee headed by member Nirupam Chakma will take up issues of full implementation of the PESA, increasing the role of tribal communities in forest conservation, and the elimination of shifting cultivation.

While the first annual report of the independent NCST in 2005 had noted its inability to address the additional functions, successive reports available in the public domain make no mention of these functions and steps taken to perform them, a review of the reports showed.

## IN BRIEF



## SP's Azam Khan secures third bail from HC in past fortnight

The Allahabad High Court on Thursday granted bail to senior Samajwadi Party (SP) leader and former Uttar Pradesh Cabinet Minister Azam Khan in an alleged case of land encroachment. This was the third bail given to the SP leader by the High Court in the past fortnight. Justice Sameer Jain granted bail to Mr. Khan in a case related to alleged encroachment on the Quality Bar property in Rampur. Mr. Khan had approached the High Court for bail in this case after a local MP/MLA court has rejected his bail. Sources in the SP said that Mr. Khan had obtained bail in almost all the cases against him and may walk out of jail soon.

## Man killed by Maoists for working as 'police informer'

A 25-year-old man was allegedly abducted and killed by Maoists on suspicion of being a police informer in Madhya Pradesh's Balaghat district, officers said. Two notes have also been recovered with the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist) taking responsibility of the act. According to the police, Devendra Yadav was abducted on Tuesday near his village in the Lanji police station limits when he was attending to his cattle with another man. His body, with several injury marks, was recovered on Thursday. Shiyaz K.M., Commandant of the State's anti-Maoist Hawk Force, told *The Hindu* that an FIR under murder charges has been lodged but denied that the individual was an informant.

## U.S. to revoke waiver on Chabahar port sanctions

Decision will hamper India's plans for regional connectivity, investment of over ₹200 crore in the project in Iran; move comes just days after U.S., India had signalled rapprochement on trade issues

Subhasini Haidar  
NEW DELHI

In yet another harsh measure by the Donald Trump administration, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced on Thursday that the country was revoking its waiver of sanctions over the Iranian port of Chabahar within 10 days, ending a special waiver given to India in 2018.

The decision, among a number of other moves by the U.S. to impose "maximum pressure on Iran", including designating several entities involved in Iran's oil trade, will affect India's plans to develop the Shahid Beheshti terminal at the Chabahar port as an alternative trading route for India, circumventing Pakistan, to send cargo to Afghanistan and Central Asia.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) did not respond to requests for a comment on the development, which could severely hamper India's plans for regional connectivity.

President Trump had first announced that he planned to end the waiver given to India in his pre-



Key link: The Chabahar port is being developed by India and Iran to boost connectivity and trade ties. GETTY IMAGES

vious term, on February 5 this year, as he signed an executive order mandating Mr. Rubio to "rescind or modify" all such orders that provided any relief to Iran.

"Consistent with President Trump's maximum pressure policy to isolate the Iranian regime, the Secretary of State has revoked the sanctions exception (IFCA) for Afghanistan reconstruction assistance and economic development, effective September 29, 2025," the State department said in a statement.

"Once the revocation is effective, persons who op-

erate the Chabahar port or engage in other activities described in the IFCA may expose themselves to sanctions under the IFCA," it added.

Earlier this month, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval had discussed intensifying India's engagement with Iran on Chabahar during a conversation with Iranian SNSC Secretary Ali Larjani over telephone. According to an Iranian official release issued in Tehran, Mr. Doval discussed "expanding cooperation in economic ties, security and defence relations, and advancing the Chabahar port project," adding that the two sides would meet in Delhi soon.

According to a note issued by the Shipping Ministry in 2024, India has spent about ₹200 crore of a total allocation of ₹400 crore on the Chabahar project since 2016.

"The port recorded a 43% rise in vessel traffic and a 34% increase in container traffic in 2023-24" the note said.

The imposition of sanctions on Chabahar is the fourth such round of sanctions the Trump administration has passed that directly affects India, and comes just days after the two sides had signalled a rapprochement on trade issues.

In 2017-18, India had conceded to the U.S.'s demand to end all oil imports from Iran and then from Venezuela. India has not so far agreed to cutting down its imports of oil from Russia this year, despite the U.S.'s demand and imposition of a penalty tariff of 25% on all Indian goods in addition to a 25% "reciprocal tariff" already in place.

The sanctions will cost India in terms of its investment in the Iranian port, for which the Modi government signed a 10-year lease agreement in May 2024.

## EPFO's 'Passbook Lite' to provide easy access to PF details

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI



Mansukh Mandaviya

The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) on Thursday launched a new facility called "Passbook Lite" within its members' portal, which will provide a summarised view of the passbook with contributions, withdrawals, and current balance. Currently, members need to log in separately to the "passbook portal" to check their Provident Fund (PF) details.

Announcing the reform, Union Labour Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said the dual login system often caused delays, password synchronisation issues, and other grievances. He said the new move would reduce the load on the "passbook portal" and improve operational efficiency. "For detailed and comprehensive view of passbook, including graphic display, the existing 'passbook portal' can still be accessed," the Minister said.

"The initiative is expected to reduce grievances, improve transparency, and enhance member satisfaction," he said.

The EPFO also enabled online access to 'Annexure K' (transfer certificate) for

transparency in PF transfers. At present, when employees change jobs, their PF accounts are transferred to the new employer's PF office through Form 13 online. After their transfer, a transfer certificate (Annexure K) is generated by the previous PF office and sent to the new PF office.

"Until now, Annexure K was only shared between PF offices and was made available to members only on their request. From today (Thursday), members can directly download Annexure K in PDF format from the members' portal itself," the Minister said.

He said members could track the status of transfer applications online. "This ensures full transparency and allows members to easily verify their PF transfers..." he said.

## If the price of oil comes down, Putin will settle and drop out of Ukraine war: Trump

Sriram Lakshman  
LONDON



For peace: U.S. President Donald Trump says Russian President Vladimir Putin had 'let him down by killing many people'. AFP

If the price of oil drops, Russian President Vladimir Putin will end the war with Ukraine, U.S. President Donald Trump said on Thursday, suggesting that European countries, India, and China stopping the purchase of Russian oil was key to this.

Mr. Trump's comments were made during a joint press conference at Chequers, the official country residence of British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, at the end of his two-day state visit to the U.K.

Over the weekend, Mr. Trump had said EU and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) military alliance countries should altogether stop oil purchases from Russia. Last week, the U.S. administration was reportedly attempting

to persuade European countries to apply secondary tariffs of up to 100% on India and China for their trade with Russia.

"Very simply, if the price of oil comes down Putin will settle. He's going to have no choice. He's going to drop out of that war," Mr. Trump said, and he brought India into the picture as well.

"And when I found out that the European nations were buying oil from Russia... and as you know, I am

very close to India, I'm very close to the Prime Minister of India." Mr. Trump said as he went on to describe his Tuesday phone call with Mr. Modi.

"I spoke to him the other day, wished him a happy birthday. We have a very good relationship. He better had a beautiful statement too... but I said, you know, I sanctioned them," Mr. Trump said, referring to the additional 25% tariff he has imposed on Indian goods exported to the U.S.,

a rate imposed on India for its energy and arms trade with Russia. The 25% is on top of a "reciprocal tariff" rate of 25%.

The resulting 50% tariff rate and then, Mr. Modi's meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping and Mr. Putin in Tianjin two weeks ago, had resulted in a low in India-U.S. relations not seen in years. In recent days, ties have thawed.

Posting on X on Tuesday, responding to the birthday message from Mr. Trump, Mr. Modi had told the U.S. President that he supported his initiatives on resolving the Ukraine conflict.

Mr. Trump said China was paying a high tariff to the U.S. The Trump administration has argued that China is already paying a high tariff (and that it may not be in America's economic interests to increase

it further) when previously quizzed on why New Delhi and not Beijing was being subject to a "penalty" tariff for trade with Russia.

"China is paying a very large tariff right now to the United States, but I'm willing to do other things, but not when the people that I'm fighting for are buying oil from Russia," he said.

The President said Mr. Putin had "let him down".

Mr. Trump also claimed to have ended several conflicts. He repeated a claim India has denied - that he was responsible for ending the four-day armed conflict between India and Pakistan. Mr. Trump emphasised that he used trade as leverage.

"That was purely for trade. You want to trade with us, you're going to have to get along. And they were going at it hot and heavy," he said.

## SC fines Delhi PWD over manual cleaning of sewers near court

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday imposed a penalty of ₹5 lakh on the Delhi Government's Public Works Department (PWD) for violating its orders against manual sewer cleaning, after labourers, including a minor, were found clearing drains without protective gear outside the court premises.

A Bench of Justices Arvind Kumar and N.V. Anjaria pulled up the PWD for flouting its October 2023 directions prohibiting the practice. "It would be reasonable to impose a cost for having undertaken such work, as evidenced by the photographs annexed with this application. Hence, we direct PWD to deposit the sum of ₹5 lakh to the National

Commission for Safai Karmacharis within four weeks," the court said.

The Bench cautioned that not only those from the PWD but also other officials needed to "wake up from slumber" to ensure compliance with its directions "in letter and spirit".

## Blatant disregard

Senior advocate K. Parameshwar, assisting the court as amicus curiae, submitted that the incident reflected a blatant disregard of binding directions. He pointed out that video footage showed a minor among those deployed for the hazardous task.

"The minor was engaged, and it's specifically recorded in the video... This is not merely a labour law violation, rather, it is a breach of constitutional obligations," he added.

## Minister flays Cong. stance on Nicobar project

Press Trust of India  
NEW DELHI

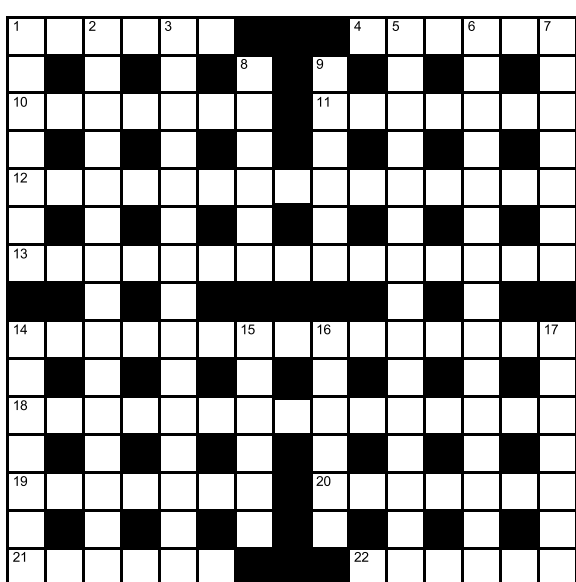
Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav on Thursday hit out at the Congress for opposing the Great Nicobar infrastructure project, accusing it of spreading confusion and indulging in "negative politics".

Speaking at an event organised by The Public Affairs Forum of India here, Mr. Yadav asserted that the mega project was crucial for national security and strategic connectivity in the Indian Ocean Region. He said only 1.78% of Great Nicobar's forest area will be used for the project.

"...Raising doubts over every developmental effort and writing columns when it comes to national security is nothing but negative politics," he said.

## THE CROSSWORD + 14593

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



## Across

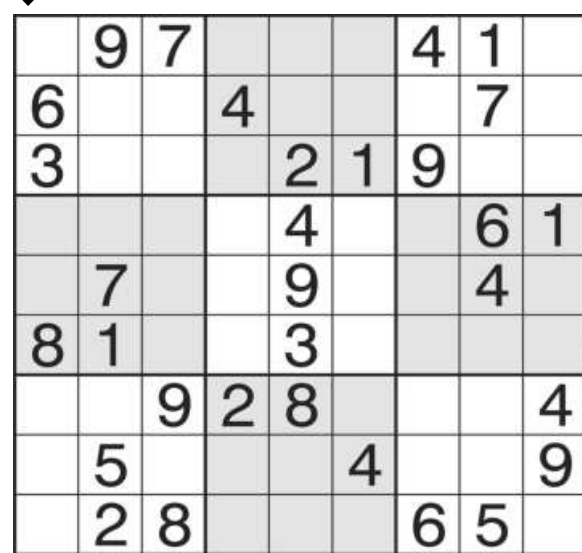
- 1 Intern's commission, good going for beginning of career (6)  
4 Hawk CA smuggling African currency (6)  
10 Runs, runs free and quietly to stimulate (7)  
11 One doing wrong, one deposed by father, one that is an impediment (7)

- 12 Again setting up Hitler's basement, possibly (2-13)  
13 Hippocrates hunt, perhaps for Java man (15)  
14 Member of a UK party, real old bat involved with crime organisation (7,8)  
18 Suddenly going to new, free ground inside protective fortification for addressing media (5,10)  
19 Oxygen is trapped in sphere, making another form of oxygen (7)  
20 Essay about one block and three related works (7)  
21 Sham fellow, not small like royal (6)  
22 Dumps English visitors leaving university (6)

## Down

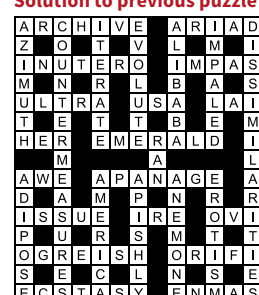
- 1 Part of a jewellery, kind of rare pod (7)  
2 Spooner's candy wire work, something to look at in drawing room (6-5,4)  
3 Famous Professor nailed English media first, for one the biggest economic collapses in history (5,10)  
5 Do bring the ware and start to actively contrive sidings for rain proofing (15)  
6 Endless disdain for failing to start a new America from the same generation (15)  
7 Ram and Sita consumed drinks of the Gods (7)  
8 Power to leader of Haiti by Caribbean witchcraft and American dread (6)  
9 Casualwear model managed his runs on time (1-5)  
14 Slip talks, in impertinent manner (4,3)  
15 Large horn without tip for pirate (6)  
16 Barren, cold deserts influence outcome in the end (6)  
17 Attached positively to coloured garments (3-4)

## SUDOKU

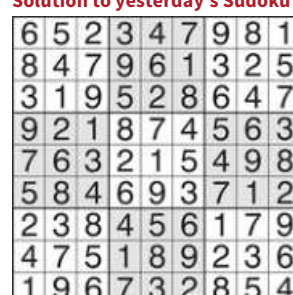


DIFFICULTY RATING: ★☆☆☆☆

## Solution to previous puzzle



## Solution to yesterday's Sudoku



## FAITH

## Significance of Navaratri

Followers of Hinduism worldwide celebrate Navaratri, a unique festival where the goddesses are worshipped for nine nights at a stretch. Our scriptures say Brahman is formless, characterless but attains all those by joining with Sakti. Like a mother birthing a baby, nurturing, protecting it and raising the child, similarly Sakti answers the appeals of devotees who petition her when beset by problems, said B. Damodara Deekshithar.

One of the hardest things to face in life is sudden, unexpected misfortune, leaving one in utter despair. At such moments, one should pray to Ambal. She is each one's personal favourite female goddess, is known by various names, including Parvati, Kamakshi, Mariamma, Kaliamma, etc., said Adi Sankara. One of his students wondered how praying to Ambal would help one surmount one's problem. The preceptor replied saying that the world is run by the devatas. While a person's success or failure, joy or sorrow, failings and victories are determined by one's actions in previous births (*karma*), the ones who dispense these life aspects in the current birth are these devatas, who are themselves guided by Ambal. When a sufferer prays to Ambal, She guides the servitor devatas in such a way that the problems dissipate. Adi Sankara further states that all gods starting with Brahma, Vishnu and Siva pray to Her, thereby becoming complete. Therefore, when a devotee prays to Vishnu and petitions Lakshmi as well, the benefit of placing such faith in Her is immeasurable, specially during Navaratri. One may wonder which goddess one should pray to, these special days. The goddess is one but Her name changes as per her residence.

# Ageing arteries, lingering risks: COVID's quiet impact on heart health

A large, multinational investigation into pandemic's impact on the cardiovascular system has found that survivors, particularly women, are left with stiffer arteries, equivalent to an age about five to ten years older; with nearly 700 million people surviving COVID worldwide, long-term healthcare burden of accelerated ageing could be significant

Anirban Mukhopadhyay

**W**hat if a single COVID-19 infection could make your arteries behave as though they were five to 10 years older? That unsettling possibility emerges from the CARTESIAN study, the largest multinational investigation yet into the pandemic's hidden impact on the cardiovascular system. Recently published in the *European Heart Journal*, it tracked nearly 2,400 participants across 18 countries and found that survivors of COVID-19 had stiffer arteries – a recognised marker of “vascular ageing” – compared to those never infected. The effect was most pronounced in women, whose arteries showed changes equivalent to an extra decade of age.

“The pulse wave velocity in women after COVID corresponded to that of women five to ten years older,” said Rosa Maria Bruno, lead author and cardiologist at Inserm, France's National Institute of Health and Medical Research, in Paris.

## Why it matters

As arteries stiffen, the heart pumps harder, blood pressure rises, and the risk of heart attack, stroke, kidney disease, and dementia increases. Unlike wrinkles, these vascular changes are invisible until serious events occur. That is what makes CARTESIAN worrying. The WHO estimates nearly 700 million people worldwide have survived COVID. If even a fraction experience accelerated vascular ageing, the long-term healthcare burden could be significant. Notably, stiffening appeared even in survivors of mild infections.

## What the study did

CARTESIAN – short for *COVID-19 effects on Arterial Stiffness and Vascular Ageing* – asked whether COVID leaves a vascular imprint. Researchers from 38 centres across 18 countries recruited 2,390 adults, average age 50, about half of them women. Groups included uninfected controls and three survivor categories: non-hospitalised, hospitalised, and intensive care. Tests were performed around six months after infection, with follow-ups at twelve months.

The team measured carotid-femoral pulse wave velocity (PWV), a gold-standard indicator of arterial stiffness. PWV tracks how fast blood pressure waves travel: the stiffer the artery, the faster the wave. Comparing COVID-positive groups with controls revealed whether infection accelerated ageing.

Results were clear. Every COVID-positive group had stiffer arteries



**Long-term impact:** The effect was most pronounced in women, whose arteries showed changes equivalent to an extra decade of age. They showed higher stiffness regardless of illness severity. FILE PHOTO

than controls. After adjusting for age, sex, blood pressure, diabetes and smoking, survivors still showed PWV about 0.4 metres per second faster – equivalent to arteries five years older. The effect, however, was striking only in women. They showed higher stiffness regardless of illness severity, and ICU patients had the equivalent of an extra decade of ageing.

Persistent symptoms mattered. Women with fatigue, breathlessness or muscle aches months later – often labelled “long COVID” – had even stiffer arteries. “Women mount a stronger immune response, which protects them during infection, but if that response lingers, it can damage blood vessels,” Dr. Bruno explained.

## Vaccination and recovery

One hopeful signal was that stiffening did not worsen indefinitely. In a subgroup followed for about a year, survivors' stiffness stabilised or slightly improved, while controls showed the gradual increase expected with normal ageing. Still, the damage did not vanish. “No return to baseline has been observed,” Dr. Bruno cautioned. “An improvement has been observed mostly in very severe cases, whereas PWV is mostly stable in most individuals.”

Vaccination blunted the impact, particularly in women. Those with at least one dose had lower stiffness than unvaccinated peers.

Not all cardiologists are convinced though. Balbir Singh, group chairman of

cardiac sciences at Max Healthcare, Delhi, urges caution. “I don't think we can make very firm conclusions based on the CARTESIAN study,” he said, citing the absence of pre-COVID baseline data as a major limitation. “These findings suggest arterial stiffness could be accelerated in patients who had COVID, but do not conclusively prove it.” From his own practice, Dr. Singh adds, he has not observed a marked shift. “Are we seeing higher hypertensive patients than before? I'm not seeing that. Am I seeing those who went into the ICU during COVID now coming back with heart problems? I'm not seeing that.”

Elsewhere, clinicians have been drawing different lessons from what they encounter. At the Cleveland Clinic, a nonprofit academic medical centre based in Ohio, U.S., Stanley Hazen has argued that a history of COVID-19 should inform preventive care, based on his research connecting the virus to heart problems, stroke, and death. “As clinicians, we should consider a patient's history of prior COVID-19 when formulating cardiovascular prevention plans – these effects [his findings] are not a small subgroup finding but a global signal that will translate into more cardiovascular disease,” he said.

Observations from other centres echo this. Dara Lee Lewis – writing from Brigham and Women's, a teaching hospital of Harvard Medical School, U.S. – described cases of myocarditis and persistent palpitations in previously

healthy individuals. Meanwhile, Bruce Levy, of the same hospital, points to autonomic dysfunction such as POTS (Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome) – where the heart races upon standing – as an example of how COVID can disrupt vascular regulation in practice.

At Mount Sinai in New York, physicians using advanced imaging have detected signs of inflammation in the hearts and large vessels of patients who had only mild infections.

## India's picture

CARTESIAN, like most large European studies, was not representative of South Asia. “A small proportion identified as Asian, and while their arteries appeared less stiff than Western participants in the uninfected group, this difference disappeared after COVID – suggesting the virus erased any ethnic advantage,” Dr. Bruno noted.

For India, that gap leaves open an urgent question. If COVID might accelerate vascular ageing elsewhere, what does it mean for a population already carrying one of the heaviest burdens of cardiovascular disease worldwide? Without rigorous home-grown data – the kind that is now guiding international researchers and physicians – the risk remains largely invisible.

(Anirban Mukhopadhyay is a geneticist by training and science communicator from Delhi. anir.deskspace@gmail.com)

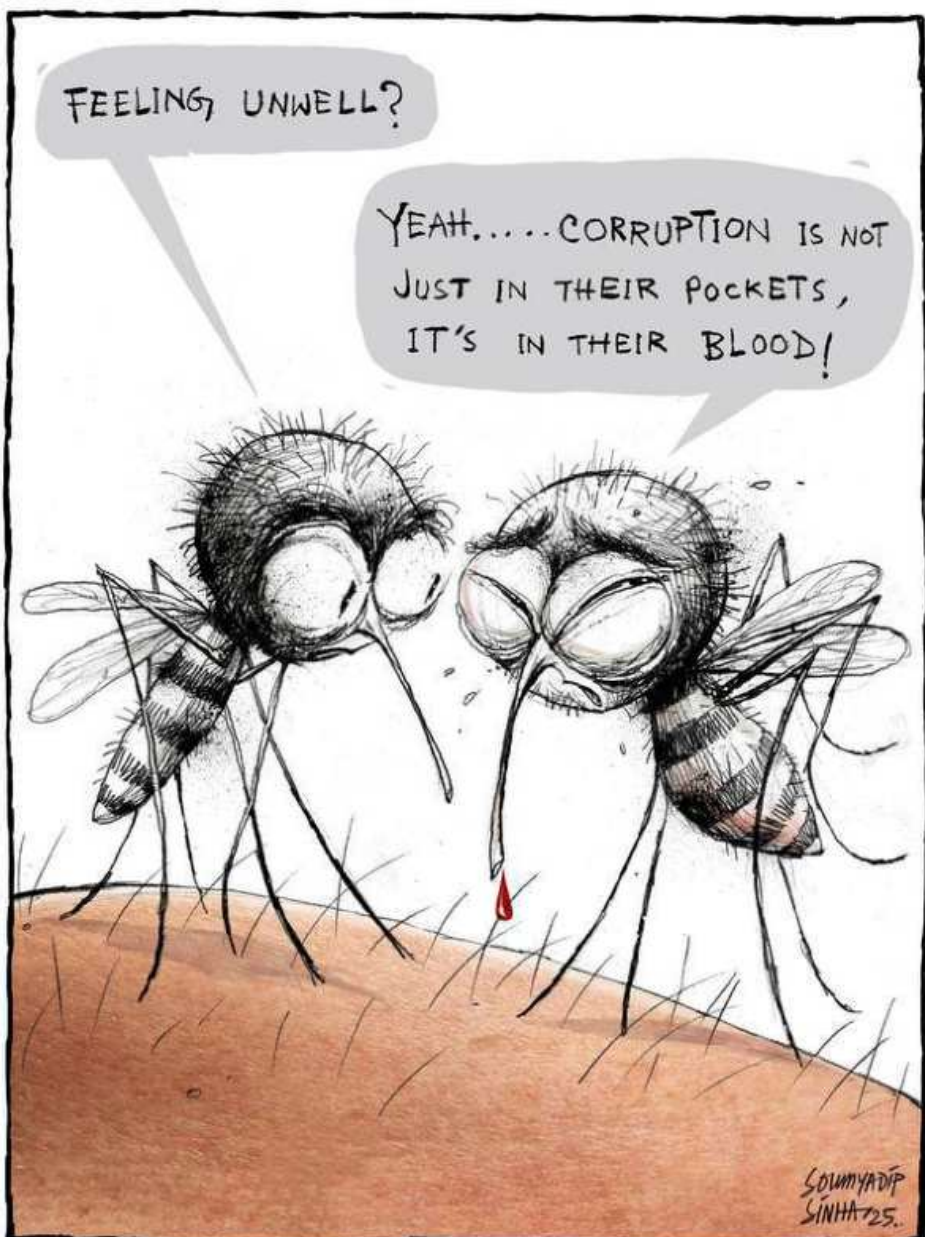
## THE GIST

As arteries stiffen, the heart pumps harder, blood pressure rises, and the risk of heart attack, stroke, kidney disease, and dementia increases. Unlike wrinkles, these vascular changes are invisible until serious events occur

Recently published in the *European Heart Journal*, the study tracked nearly 2,400 participants across 18 countries and found that survivors of COVID-19 had stiffer arteries – a recognised marker of “vascular ageing” – compared to those never infected

One hopeful signal was that stiffening did not worsen indefinitely. In a subgroup followed for about a year, survivors' stiffness stabilised or slightly improved, while controls showed the gradual increase expected with normal ageing

## HUMERUS



## Why prompt medical attention is crucial in cases of testicular torsion in children

D. Venkat Subramaniam

Children's testicular pain is frequently brushed off as a minor injury, or it is assumed that it will go away on its own. Testicular torsion is one condition though, where a delay could mean the difference between saving or losing the testicle. Raising awareness is the first line of defence against long-term effects.

When the testicle twists around the spermatic cord and cuts off its blood supply, this condition is known as testicular torsion.

The testicle may sustain permanent injury if treatment is not given immediately, typically within four to six hours.

Although it can happen at any age, newborns and children as well as teenagers during puberty are more likely to sustain this condition, when growth spurts cause the testicles to become more mobile. Timely intervention is critical. Taking the pain seriously and seeking immediate medical care can ensure the testis is saved.

Children might not always be able to express their symptoms as well as adults do. Parents need to be aware of any unexpected changes, such as: sudden, severe pain in one testicle, scrotal swelling or redness, nausea and vomiting, the child walking

### Tips for parents

- There is no guaranteed way to prevent torsion, but awareness makes all the difference
- Do not dismiss sudden testicular or groin pain in children
- Seek immediate emergency care rather than trying home remedies
- Encourage older boys to report any scrotal discomfort without embarrassment
- Fast action can preserve fertility and prevent future complications

awkwardly, refusing to sit or play and pain that comes on after a minor injury but continues to worsen.

Children frequently arrive at the emergency room hours after the pain starts, which can significantly lower the testicle's chances of survival. Awareness is key. Teenagers, young adults, and parents must be educated about the symptoms of torsion and the need for immediate medical attention. Until proven otherwise, treat scrotal pain in children as an emergency. A physician can confirm the diagnosis through an

examination or with an ultrasound. Emergency surgery to untwist the spermatic cord and fix both testicles is the standard treatment for testicular torsion in order to prevent recurrence. The testicle can be saved if blood supply to it is promptly restored. Delays longer than six to eight hours, however, significantly reduce the affected testicle's chances of surviving.

In cases where the testicle cannot be saved, removal may be required. Even then, with one healthy testicle, boys usually maintain normal fertility and hormonal function. Although a

normal sexual life and good quality of life are possible even with a single testis, the goal should always be to preserve both, for the physical and psychological well-being of the individual.

Although torsion is uncommon, it can have major consequences. The testicle can be saved with early detection and prompt treatment.

(Dr. D. Venkat Subramaniam is senior consultant urologist & executive director at Asian Institute of Nephrology and Urology, Chennai. drvenkat@ainuindia.com)



**Staying safe:** Children might not always be able to express their symptoms as well as adults do. Parents need to be aware of symptoms. REPRESENTATIONAL IMAGE



## Troubled transition

Interim government in Nepal must resist illegitimate demands

After violent protests that left 74 dead, Nepal's elected government has fallen, with its Parliament dissolved and former jurist Sushila Karki leading an interim government until the 2026 elections. While the Gen Z protesters had legitimate grievances including poor governance, entrenched corruption and intolerance of critical views, seen in the ousted CPN-UML-led government's banning of 23 social media websites – the transition itself was blatantly unconstitutional, violating Article 76 of Nepal's 2015 Constitution which permits dissolution only after failed Prime Minister appointments. Yet, considering the exigent circumstances, there is little purchase for judicial review of the steps taken last week. Notably, the President did not dissolve the upper house, the National Assembly. More troubling were the protesters' egregious actions which included burning Parliament and the Supreme Court (destroying vital documents). Nepal is expected to suffer severe economic losses besides governance issues due to the destruction of property and documents. The targeting of democratic institutions suggests an assault on Nepal's post-Constitutional order – institutions established after the painstaking constitution-writing process that followed the much-needed ending of a decade-long civil war in 2006, overcoming an anachronistic and discredited monarchy and which included marginalised sections beyond Kathmandu valley's power structures – even if there was half-hearted or ineffective implementation of the Constitution's spirit and letter.

The interim government must bring the criminals to justice as any inaction will lead to a normalisation of violence threatening all institutions that were set up to fulfil the promises of deeper democratisation and Nepal's transformation into a republic. Even if Gen Z protesters claim that impostors carried out the violence, their continued reliance on online forums, such as Discord, for decision-making reveals immaturity and an unrepresentative nature. The reliance on online forums, which feature anonymity, frivolity and impersonation, and the fact that there is no guarantee that these views are representative of the many marginalised groups suggest that giving into the demands from these unaccountable groups uncritically could be hazardous. The failures of mainstream leaders – the K.P. Sharma Oli-Sher Bahadur Deuba-Pushpa Kamal Dahal troika and their coteries – cannot justify discrediting democracy or the polity itself, as some protesters have made it out to be, echoing anti-social and destructive pro-monarchic elements. One outcome is that the entrenched leadership of mainstream parties could be compelled by party members to give way to fresh blood. Meanwhile, the interim government must protect Nepal's institutions and constitutional achievements while building the stage for free and fair elections – this is the surest path to safeguarding the promise of a democratic, plural and republican "Naya Nepal".

## Holistic approach

India needs a multi-pronged strategy to deal with stubble burning

The Supreme Court of India has broached the possibility of prosecuting farmers, caught setting fire to their fields, to prepare for winter sowing or *rabi* crop. 'Stubble burning' is a major contributor to air pollution in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana, particularly in October and November, when the southwest monsoon has receded and adverse meteorological conditions trap toxic particulate matter emissions from vehicles, industry, garbage burning and agricultural waste. While the causes and the ways to reduce particulate matter pollution from agriculture are known, the efforts by the Centre to tackle the long-standing problem have been half-hearted. The creation of the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM), a central body with the power to reach out across the borders of Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, was a positive step and an acknowledgement that air pollution in one State cannot be tackled without the cooperation of others. However, the four-year-old statutory body has failed to exercise its powers in a manner that is independent of political pressure. Take the example of its recent order to ban the sale of petrol and diesel in the National Capital Region to 'end-of-life' vehicles, from July 1. A public outcry in Delhi and its political leaders – largely on technical grounds – and the Court's intervention, forced its implementation to November this year, that too beginning with parts of the NCR that are not a part of the Delhi municipalities. In stubble burning too, the CAQM has not been able to impress upon the judiciary that stubble burning was due to recalcitrant farmers, limited enforcement by Punjab and Haryana and the structure of agricultural economics that left the average, debt-ridden farmer with little choice. In recent years, it has emerged that Punjab has been claiming a reduction in farm fires when it was in fact increasing. The CAQM chose not to disclose this.

In the absence of a transparent mechanism to evaluate and address an issue and being cowed down by imagined political repercussions, it is not surprising that suggestions such as to "jail farmers" to act as a deterrent to others are being banded about. While no section of citizens – farmer or industrialist – can be considered to be above the law, creating better incentives, enforcing existing laws and being transparent about what is realistically achievable are more advisable steps than 'carrot and stick' approaches.

# Equalising primary food consumption in India

The publication, in February 2024, of a household consumption survey by the National Sample Survey (NSS) Office, after a gap of over a decade, has made it possible to estimate the poverty rate in India. One such estimate, released by the World Bank in April 2025, has received the most attention. It points to the poverty rate being very low by now. To quote the World Bank, "Over the past decade, India has significantly reduced poverty. Extreme poverty (living on less than \$2.15 per day) fell from 16.2 percent in 2011-12 to 2.3 percent in 2022-23..." ('Poverty and Equity Brief: INDIA', 2025). If this is indeed an accurate description, it would be a source of satisfaction, for it suggests that extreme poverty has virtually disappeared from the country.

### The 'thali meal' as a consumption metric

The conventional approach to poverty measurement, pioneered by the Government of India over half a century ago, entails first determining the income that would enable food intake of a specified calorific value, and then classifying those with less as poor. This is a physiological approach, and has some merit. But there could be other approaches, based on the consumption of goods, for instance. One such approach would recognise that humans are likely to approach food from an angle wider than just its calorie content, taking into account the energy it provides, which calories measure, nourishment, and the satisfaction it gives. We believe the *thali* meal reflects this thinking, making it a natural choice to measure food consumption in real terms.

As a combination of carbohydrates, protein and vitamins, the *thali* is a balanced and self-contained unit of food consumption in south Asia, even if the nomenclature may vary across it. With this in mind, we have estimated the number of *thalis* the monthly expenditure reported in the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey of 2024 would translate into. The rating agency, Crisil, has estimated the cost of a home-cooked *thali*, comprising rice, *dal*, vegetables, *roti*, curd and salad, as ₹30. Adopting this price, we found that in 2023-24, up to 50% of the rural population and up to 20% of the urban population could not have afforded two *thalis* per day at the food expenditure recorded. If two *thalis* a day is taken as the minimum acceptable standard of food consumption, our estimates point to much greater food deprivation in India than conveyed by the poverty figures from the World Bank.

A crucial reason why our findings differ is that



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we do not assume that all of a household's income is available for spending on food. A household needs to spend on rent, transportation, telephony, health maintenance and education to just remain in the workforce. Now, expenditure on food ends up as the residual. Therefore, we have based our estimates on the actual expenditure on food.

It tends to be assumed that the Public Distribution System (PDS) deals effectively with food deprivation. To assess this, we have computed the value of food consumption including the imputed value of supplies received via the PDS – both purchased and free of cost. With the value of consumption thus adjusted, the proportion of the population that cannot afford two *thalis* declines to 40% in rural areas and 10% in urban areas. Notably, food deprivation remains very high in the former even with subsidised food.

### The role of PDS

To understand how the PDS can be leveraged to alleviate food deprivation, we estimated the subsidy per person across expenditure classes. What is interesting is that both PDS purchases and free food availed by sections of the population that can afford more than two *thalis* a day are high. For instance, in rural India, the subsidy received by an individual in the 90%-95% fractile is 88% of the subsidy received by an individual in 0%-5% fractile, even as the first has a consumption expenditure more than three times greater, and going by our own *thali* index does not require further support. By contrast, in urban India, the subsidy regime is strongly progressive. But here too about 80% receive subsidised sales from the PDS and also free food, even when they too can afford more than two *thalis* per day.

Based on the data on food deprivation and the structuring of the food subsidy regime we make a proposal on how policy should evolve. This data point to what needs to be done and how it can be achieved. First, there is scope for restructuring the food subsidy, raising it at the lower end of the distribution and eliminating it altogether at the upper. However, we learn from the most recent consumption survey that there is a constraint to be faced: cereals consumption is almost identical for individuals in the 0%-5% fractile and the 95%-100% fractile.

This suggests that the desired level of consumption of cereals, both rice and wheat, has been reached, for the richest can afford to purchase all the cereals that they desire. While it points to the success of the PDS, in that it has

equalised the consumption of a staple food, at the same time, it points to the limits to using the PDS in its present form to end food deprivation. Not only has cereals consumption very likely reached its desired level across the population but also it constitutes only 10% of the average household's expenditure.

It is unreasonable, from considerations of both logistics and expense, to expect that a government can distribute the entire food basket to any section. There is a middle path though, and that is to expand the distribution of pulses through the PDS. In a further comparison of the consumption patterns at the two ends of the distribution, we find that unlike in the case of the cereals, the per capita consumption of pulses in the 0%-5% fractile is exactly half of that in the 95%-100% fractile.

### Pulses consumption

The PDS can be leveraged to equalise the primary food consumption across the population. The expansion of the PDS to ensure desirable levels of consumption of pulses – for many Indians, the only source of protein and a very costly food item – is both desirable and feasible. The financial aspect can be addressed by restructuring the PDS. The per capita consumption of rice and wheat in the 0%-5% fractile implies that the PDS entitlement of rice and wheat is well above what is necessary for a significant number.

Expanding the subsidy regime to supply cereal to 80 crore people, as done by the central government in January 2024 and the particularly large entitlement of rice given to those below the poverty line in some States, do not reflect need. Also, they come at a cost to the economy, given the alternative uses of public funds. Trimming the current entitlement of cereals to levels indicated as needed by the recent consumption survey at the lower end of the distribution and eliminating it altogether at the upper end would also require lower stocking requirements for the Food Corporation of India, with substantial gains.

We have proposed an expansion of the PDS in the direction of the food most needed by the least well-off, namely pulses, accompanied by the elimination of subsidies for those whose food consumption exceeds a reasonable norm, such as two *thalis* a day. Right now, the PDS is both unwieldy and ineffective, as it spreads resources thin. Our proposal will render it compact, enabling the equalisation of primary food consumption in India by raising that of the poorest household to the highest level observed in the economy, a globally significant outcome.

# India needs more focus to reach SDG 3, a crucial goal

In June this year, India secured its best-ever position in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Index, ranking 99 out of 167 nations in the 2025 edition of the SDG Report. This marked a significant improvement from its rank of 109 rank in 2024, reflecting steady progress since 2021. India has demonstrated advancement in areas such as access to basic services and infrastructure. Yet, the report also flagged pressing challenges in key sectors, particularly health and nutrition, where progress has been uneven, especially in rural and tribal communities.

### There is still ground to be covered

In this backdrop, it is critical to ponder over SDG 3. Its goal is to "ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages", and is one of the most crucial, yet demanding, goals in India's SDG journey. It encompasses specific targets that India has committed to achieve by 2030. Despite gains in some areas, the overall trajectory indicates that India is not on track in most targets. For example, the Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) – the number of mothers dying after childbirth per 100,000 live births – stands at 97 deaths per 100,000 live births, higher than the 2030 target of 70.

Even the under-five mortality rate remains at 32 deaths per 1,000 live births against the target of 25. In developed countries, it ranges between two and six deaths. Life expectancy now is only 70 years, falling short of the target of 73.63 years. Out-of-pocket health-care expenditure continues to burden families at 13% of total consumption, nearly double the targeted 7.83%. Even immunisation coverage, though commendably high at 93.23%, has not yet reached the universal target of 100%.

There are multiple reasons for these gaps. They include, first, lack of access to quality health care partially due to poor infrastructure and economic factors; second, non-economic factors such as poor nutrition, hygiene and sanitation and other lifestyle choices and, third, cultural



**Rahul Mehra**

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practices and stigma around physical and mental health. These cultural practices and limited awareness often prevent communities from accessing even the health-care services available to them.

If India is to accelerate progress on SDG Goal 3, a three-pronged approach is essential and one that focuses on treatment and prevention of diseases. The first is providing Universal Health Insurance to the population. World Bank studies show that countries with robust insurance systems have lowered catastrophic health-care expenditure while ensuring greater equity in access. The second is to have high-quality primary health centres across the country and coordination of primary, secondary and tertiary care.

The World Health Statistics 2022 by the World Health Organization highlights that strong primary systems help in detecting diseases earlier, reducing hospitalisation costs, and achieving better long-term outcomes. This will also require harnessing the transformative potential of digital health tools. Telemedicine and integrated digital health records can bridge access gaps, especially in rural and underserved regions. Evidence from the Lancet Digital Health Commission shows how digital platforms have improved maternal health care and vaccination tracking in several low and middle-income countries, offering lessons that India can adapt.

### Health education at the school level

Prevention of diseases is more cost-effective than treating them. To prevent diseases, we need to provide health education to all schoolchildren. Children need to be educated about healthy nutrition, good hygiene and sanitation, reproductive health, road safety, and on mental health topics.

At this young age, they need to improve their health behaviour and not just their knowledge. The health habits they develop at this age will be maintained as they grow to be adults. When girls

become mothers, they will be more educated about their health and advocate this for themselves and their family. Over the long term, the school health education initiative has the potential to reduce MMR ratio, under-five mortality and deaths due to road accidents. At the same time, it can increase life expectancy and immunisation rates.

Finland's school-based health reforms in the 1970s, which wove lessons on nutrition, hygiene and lifestyle into the curricula, played a central role in reducing cardiovascular disease rates in the decades that followed. In Japan, compulsory health education has been linked to improved hygiene practices and longer life expectancy. A structured and progressive curriculum in India can achieve similar results.

### Need for concerted actions

Therefore, closing the SDG gap requires action by policymakers to individual actions. Policymakers need to embed health education in school curricula while simultaneously investing in universal health coverage and primary health care.

All parents have an important role to play in the health education of youth. They can review their child's school curriculum and determine whether topics on physical, mental and social health are being covered. If not, they should push for it by communicating this to the department of education.

India's improved SDG ranking is encouraging. But it should not obscure the reality that only 17% of global SDG targets are currently on track to be achieved by 2030. Educating its youth about healthy behaviour, supported by stronger health-care systems, can act as the foundation for sustainable progress. And while 2030 is an important milestone to reach, the true vision lies further ahead – building a healthier and stronger India. A government that devotes its attention to embedding health education in school curricula can help achieve the goal of a Viksit Bharat 2047.

Compulsory health education in schools is one measure that can help close the gap

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### The Jews and Israel today

The Jews have been the most persecuted race – the Holocaust is the darkest chapter in human history. Therefore, one would expect that the Jews would inherently imbibe qualities of empathy and tolerance, given their sufferings in the past. However, it seems that the oppressed have turned oppressor with renewed force. How else can one explain the atrocities that Israel is perpetrating in Gaza? Even today, German children are taught about

the shameful role that the Germans played in the annihilation of Jews during the World War, lest they forget. Similarly, let the people of Israel pause for a moment and rethink on how history will judge them for the genocide in Gaza. They may soon have to contend with the possibility that their victimisation during the Second World War will be relegated to the last pages of history in the aftermath of their actions.

**Sharada Sivaram,**  
Kochi, Kerala

India's inexplicable and continued silence on the genocide in Gaza reflects its narrow-mindedness, and its strange unwillingness to challenge executive decisions on foreign policy. As the world grapples with the mounting toll of the Gaza conflict, India's role as a silent bystander is growing increasingly untenable. The Prime Minister of India and the External Affairs Minister may frame their diplomacy as pragmatic, but history will judge them as moral

failures. The cost of complicity – both for Palestine and for India's global standing – is far too high to ignore. The question now is whether India will continue down this path of strategic expediency or rediscover the courage to condemn the genocide in Gaza – which it ought to do so. The answer will shape not only the fate of Palestine but also India's legacy in the global order.

**R. Sivakumar,**  
Chennai

**A loyal BSNL customer**  
I have been a long-standing BSNL customer, for nearly 20 years. The only reason my family and I (nearly 75 members) have continued with BSNL is out of our conviction to support a Government of India enterprise and promote its services. We have encouraged others in our circle to use BSNL despite its known limitations. Although BSNL is officially launched eSIM, it is still not available in Kerala. Even more concerning is the

explanation by customer-care representatives – that eSIM facilities are not available for long-standing customers. This policy shows a disregard for loyal customers. In the absence of BSNL's rollout of eSIM services, I am left with no choice but to consider porting my number to another operator.

**Akhil S. Karun,**  
Kochi, Kerala

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

# Should India overlook boundary issues while normalising ties with China?



**Vivek Katju**  
former diplomat



**Antara Ghosal Singh**  
Fellow, Observer Research Foundation

**PARLEY**

**E**arlier this month, Prime Minister Narendra Modi concluded his much-anticipated visit to China. Mr. Modi attended the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit and also held talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the summit. The two leaders decided to restart bilateral trade and air connectivity, and underlined the importance of peace and tranquility along the border. These decisions were significant as they were made five years after the deadly border clashes between the two neighbours in the Galwan Valley in Ladakh; and months after India launched Operation Sindoor against Pakistan (at the time, China supported the Pakistani military forces). Both leaders reaffirmed that the two countries were “development partners and not rivals, and their differences should not turn to disputes,” the Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement after the meeting. Should India overlook boundary issues while normalising ties with China? Vivek Katju and Antara Ghosal Singh discuss the question in a conversation moderated by **Kallol Bhattacharjee**. Excerpts:

**Is it possible for India to normalise ties with China without resolving the boundary issue?**

**Vivek Katju:** In 1988, during Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi’s visit to China, India and China decided to normalise ties in other sectors even as they attempted to resolve the border issue. In a way, this constituted a departure from the past. The crucial point was that peace and tranquility had to be maintained along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). While India wanted the border issue to be resolved (as part of normalising ties), China was more reluctant to do so (and wanted to set the issue aside for the time being). In the 1990s too, both countries agreed to maintain peace and tranquility (along the LAC). In 2020, the Galwan incident, which demonstrated China’s aggressive approach, upset this arrangement. That didn’t mean that there weren’t previous incidents which constituted serious setbacks to the normalisation process, but those paled in comparison to what happened in 2020. In the last five years, both sides, through diplomatic and military arrangements, have tried to restore the system that prevailed in the 1990s. So, when you ask whether the border issue is holding us back, I think we had moved past that in 1988 and in the 1990s. And one last point: if you see the Indian and Chinese readouts of the Modi-Xi Jinping meeting at the SCO margins, you will find a distinct difference in how the two sides describe the salience of the border issue.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping shake hands during a bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in Tianjin. AFP

**Antara Ghosal Singh:** My understanding is that it is not an either-or situation. The overall positive turn in China-India ties is not really a sudden development or a knee-jerk reaction to the current turmoil in international politics or the recent downturn in India-U.S. ties. India-China relations have been showing signs of improvement since early last year. Both sides have been sending some positive signals towards each other. As I gather from Chinese sources, the 2024 Border Patrol Agreement was a key icebreaker. Since the Galwan clash of 2020, India has been consistently demanding that the Chinese Army withdraw to the pre-April 2020 positions and restore India’s patrol rights in the disputed areas. From that perspective, India sees the restoration of patrolling points, even in Demchok and Depsang, as a diplomatic victory. Many Indian strategists have acknowledged this fact. Importantly, the Chinese side feels that they have not really suffered any loss in this agreement because it is a border patrol agreement and has nothing to do with the demarcation of sovereignty. The agreement means that two years after achieving disengagement at four places through the creation of non-patrolled buffer zones, now two more places, as demanded by the Indian side, are being disengaged through cross-patrolled buffer zones. That is the Chinese understanding from what I read.

**Do you see a situation where the normalisation of relations could be disrupted by, say, a Galwan-2 in the distant future?**

**VK:** Of course, that will disrupt relations – and disrupt them badly. In the Indian strategic community, China now looms large. China has always loomed large, but I think for historical



Despite all our differences, I have always argued that good workable ties between China and India are good for both sides.

ANTARA GHOSAL SINGH

reasons, Pakistan occupied a principal place. But today, I do believe, despite Pakistani terror and despite China’s consistent support for Pakistan, there is a realisation that China is India’s main threat and will continue to be so. Now, there are new formulations that suggest that India and China can be partners and not rivals. What I understand is that China is aspiring for primacy in the world. It no longer considers India to be on par with it. It believes that India is just another South Asian country it has to deal with. If you see (Chinese Foreign Minister) Wang Yi’s remarks, after his meeting with (Deputy Prime Minister of Pakistan) Ishaq Dar, that part is made clear. A journalist noted that Pakistan was the Minister’s final stop after visiting three countries. Mr. Wang said it was the final stop – and the most important one. That speaks volumes.

There has been a shift in India’s appreciation of China. But we cannot overlook the enormous infrastructure development, especially in the military area of the Tibetan Plateau. Why is this being done? And what will that lead to? It will lead to India having to spend a fair amount of its own financial resources in ensuring that the LAC infrastructure is fortified and that the LAC is well garrisoned throughout the year. I think that is also a Chinese objective.

I don’t think it will be wrong for me to say that China shows no interest in really resolving the border issue. Yes, the special representatives are going to meet, but are they going to make any headway? What does the history of the last 30 years show? And why did Galwan happen? No one has been able to come up with an authoritative reason for why it happened.

**AGS:** If you look at Chinese sources, you will find many theories (behind what prompted China’s action in Galwan). The most popular one is the dilution of Article 370 (of Jammu and Kashmir; China protested against the move). Another argument is the competition between China and India in terms of manufacturing. It was during COVID-19 that the first round of the China-U.S. trade war took place and there was this feeling on the Chinese side that India was collaborating with the U.S. to take away China’s position in the global supply chains. That caused a lot of panic within Chinese strategic circles. Ambassador Katju also mentioned that India is

often looked down upon by China; that is true. For a long time, China has chosen to believe that India is a retreating image in its rear view mirror. But it was during that time in 2020 when they started to realise that things can change and that India, a country with 1.4 billion people, can be a competitor. There is this weird ‘India is a threat’ theory. If you look at Chinese discussions on various platforms, you can see how they are concerned about India’s economic growth and India’s demographic dividend, particularly at a time when China is facing a population crisis. There is also a prevailing mood in China that it should not let Chinese industries invest in India; that it should impose various export controls; and that it should not let India develop and be a competitor to China. So, there is a change in perception within China as well, on the India issue. All these insecurities played a role in what happened in 2020.

**Can the two tracks of the normalisation of India-China relations, and China’s plans for South Asia, as seen in the recent Kuningting trilateral featuring Pakistan, China and Bangladesh, be in harmony with each other?**

**VK:** Of course not. I have reached the conclusion that China believes that India, if not now, then in later years, can be a rival and that it must be tackled. The way China is moving in South Asia establishes that too. Earlier, they were entering into bilateral ties. Now there are trilateral mechanisms. There is an Afghanistan, Pakistan, China mechanism. They are trying for a Bangladesh, Pakistan, China mechanism. Soon, I think they would want a mechanism involving all South Asian countries, including us. They will know that we might not take part in it.

**AGS:** They have their cards against us and we have our cards against them. But despite all our differences, I have always argued that good workable ties between China and India are good for both sides. We are aware of China’s manufacturing prowess and how dependent India and the world is on Chinese manufacturing. The Economic Survey 2024-25 highlighted China’s overwhelming manufacturing dominance in various sectors, including electric vehicles and critical minerals. It also stated how China’s overall manufacturing output, which is nearly 45% of the global total, is at a level never seen before since the U.S.’s or the U.K.’s at their industrial peak.



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**NOTEBOOK**

## Landing in the midst of a ‘revolution’

Journalists tend to go to the midst of rage-filled streets to report and record events, even if they are not there on work

Ramya Kannan

**W**hat are the chances of landing in the lap of a “revolution”, completely unintentionally? In the Indian subcontinent, there is a pretty high chance, given what we have seen in recent years. After the uprising in Sri Lanka against the fall in the island nation’s economic fortunes, and the protests in Bangladesh against the job quota system, the guarantee of peace in the region is shaky. The possibility of flights getting disrupted, arson and looting on the streets, curfews shutting down cities for days on end, and a palpable fear everywhere is not that remote.

For a journalist, there is also a measure of headiness. As vulgar as it may sound, even an unintended encounter with chaos counts as ecstasy for a reporter – to be amidst such a crisis and report on it. Something in our DNA takes us to the midst of rage-filled streets to report and record events, even if the purpose of visiting the place is different.

Who could have imagined that in the five-odd hours that it took to hop on to a flight in Chennai and hop off – first in New Delhi and then in Kathmandu – that things would fall apart so rapidly in Nepal? Protesters had initially turned up with flowers and books. They sang songs, demanding that the ban on social media be lifted. However, the situation deteriorated after reports of deaths began trickling in. The first few reports from the Himalayan kingdom stated that the number of dead stood at 19, and included a child.

Despite this, there is no panic among those who were already on the ground in Kathmandu and not part of the protests. Conference mates in the city lend assurance, recording how other people had arrived by air without any issues and how there are no disruptions on their side of the city.

On the first evening (September 8), everything seems fine. The airport is milling with people walking about normally. That the quotidian routine went on un-

disrupted is falsely calming. There are never-ending traffic jams on the way from the airport. This changes drastically overnight.

The next morning dawns with the smell of smoke. Thick, grey columns rise to blur the blue of the distant Himalayas. Protesters have set government buildings, institutions, and homes of politicians on fire. They have occupied a couple of media houses. The youth burn property in the middle of the road, unnerved by shoot-at-sight orders. On the sidelines of the “revolution”, and roads, people stand fearlessly, watching the burning piles. As can be expected during such a mass upheaval, bystanders mutter: “This government needs to go.” There is no fear on the main roads, but no cheering either. Pictures shot then tell the ambivalent side story of this South Asian equivalent of the Arab Spring.

That changes that evening: the youth cheer and give each other high fives and take out a victory march, a show of mostly testosterone. They sit on bikes, waving flags, sticks, even a rifle, yelling “victory”. It seems to some that the protests have quickly ended.

The next day dawns in sharp contrast. There is a calm and a curfew in place. The annoying hoots of pigeons holed in the eaves of buildings replace the sounds of the previous day’s raucous victory cries. Every shop is shut, and army pickets are within viewing distance on both sides of the winding roads. Army trucks whizz past, their sirens blaring. Hotels lock their gates and gently warn visitors against venturing out.

But that is for everyone else to follow. The journalist DNA drags one by the nose to the empty streets, the army pickets, into the centre of action. A video shot on an empty street seems disquieting. But for a journalist responding to the news, there are adrenaline hits with every photo and video recording history being rewritten, mostly in swirls of smoke.

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**PICTURE OF THE WEEK**

### Moving slowly in a fast-paced city



An aerial view of traffic snarls at the Dadar TT junction, a bustling centre in Mumbai, as demolition work on the century-old Elphinstone Road overbridge — a key east-west connector between Parel (East) and Prabhadevi (West) — commenced last Saturday. EMMANUAL YOGINI

**FROM THE ARCHIVES**



**FIFTY YEARS AGO** SEPTEMBER 19, 1975

### Proposal for flood relief stamp to raise Rs. 100 crores

New Delhi, Sept. 18: The Government is examining a proposal to raise Rs. 100 crores for flood relief in Bihar, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh from the issue of a special stamp, the use of which will be obligatory while posting letters. Such special stamps were issued at the time of the Bangladesh crisis to augment resources.

Since the issue of special stamps alone may not net in the projected Rs. 100 crores, it is proposed to ask the State Governments to introduce certain additional levies on stamp papers for registration of documents, motor vehicles taxation, etc.

The Centre, deeply perturbed over the extensive damage caused by the floods, particularly in Bihar, is examining various proposals for effectively coming to the rescue of the flood-affected States. The special stamp and additional levies proposal is, however, likely to face some resistance from the other State Governments, though they did not object to the issue of the Bangladesh stamp.

**A HUNDRED YEARS AGO** SEPT. 19, 1925

### Wire-nail industry

Calcutta, Sept. 18: Giving evidence before the Tariff Board to-day, Mr. Khusrim, proprietor of the Punjab Wire-nail Factory, Amritsar, said that they could not run their factory at a profit nor compete with the foreign-made articles unless protection was granted. He pointed out that many of the articles made by them, such as panel pins, tacks, etc., were already subject to a duty of 10 per cent whilst they paid about 35 per cent customs duty on the wires imported for manufacturing such articles in India.

# Text & Context

THE HINDU

## NEWS IN NUMBERS

## Number of 'illegal' structures targeted by demolition drive

**700** The Gandhinagar civic administration and other authorities launched a mega demolition drive on Thursday to clear encroachments on 1 lakh square metres of government land along the Sabarmati riverbank, said a senior police official. PTI

## Life-term serving prisoners released by West Bengal since 2011

**840** West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday said that the State government has released 840 prisoners serving life-term since 2011. She also announced that an additional 45 inmates are now being released following due legal process. PTI

## Maldives' government bonds to India to be repaid

**50** in \$ million. India on Thursday said it has rolled over, for one more year, \$50 million Maldives' government bonds as "an emergency financial assistance" to the archipelagic nation. The deadline for the repayment was extended once again "on the request of Maldives government." PTI

## Water tax owed by companies to the Odisha government

**3.7** in ₹ thousand crores. As many as 42 industrial houses have owed water cess to the Odisha government till March, the Assembly was informed. CM Mohan Charan Majhi said they draw water from Mahanadi, Kolab, Bramhani, Baitarani, Indravati, Rushikulya and Subarnarekha rivers. PTI

## Estimated costs of climate-related health risks by 2050

**1.5** in \$ trillion. The World Economic Forum report assessed climate-driven health impacts in four of the most affected economic sectors: food and agriculture; the built environment; health and healthcare; and insurance. PTI  
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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# Why did India condemn Doha strike?

How does India's reaction differ from its past responses? Why is Qatar treated differently from other countries? What role do India-Qatar ties play? Why has India stayed largely silent on Gaza? What does this mean for India's West Asia policy?

## EXPLAINER

Suhasini Haidar

## The story so far:

India's condemnation of Israel's bombing in Doha last week as a "violation of sovereignty" is a shift from its more muted positions on previous Israeli operations in other countries, leading some to wonder if there's a larger change in New Delhi's stand on the crisis in West Asia. However, experts said that while the strong wording of the statement denotes growing distress over mounting civilian casualties in the war in Gaza, India's intervention has more to do with its close ties with Qatar and the Gulf region than with an assertion of principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity. This has become particularly important, given New Delhi's concerns over the Saudi-Pakistan mutual defence agreement signed in Riyadh on Wednesday.

### Why did India criticise the Doha strike?

On September 16, India referred to the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) bombing on September 9 of a home in Doha where leaders of Hamas gathered to discuss the United States' latest ceasefire proposal, as actions that "threaten peace, stability and security" in the region and worldwide. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu defended the strike, which killed five, saying that it was "justified" as Qatar "harbours and funds" Hamas operatives.

"India is deeply concerned about the recent attacks in Doha and their impact on the security situation in the region. We unequivocally condemn the violation of the sovereignty of Qatar," said India's Ambassador to the UN Mission in Geneva Arindam Bagchi, speaking at the UN Human Rights Council, also invoking the UN charter and international law.

"Any escalation must be avoided, and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States must be upheld," Mr. Bagchi added, in a statement that built on an earlier statement by the Ministry of



A damaged building, following an Israeli attack on Hamas leaders, in Doha, on September 9. REUTERS

External Affairs, and another statement issued after Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamin Bin Hamad Al Thani on September 10, expressing "solidarity with the Qatari people".

### How does this differ from India's past reactions?

The statements are in stark contrast to New Delhi's reactions to Israel's bombings of several other countries in the region, including Lebanon, Yemen, Tunisia, Syria, and Iran.

When Israel bombed the Iranian Embassy in Damascus last April, the MEA had expressed some "concern", as it had when Israeli forces attacked a UN Peacekeeping post in southern Lebanon, but remained largely silent over other Israeli attacks on other countries. When Israeli intelligence detonated hundreds of pager bombs against Hezbollah in Beirut in September 2024, Indian Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi called the operation a "masterstroke". On Iran – a country with close ties with India and where investments such as the Chabahar port are at stake – the government's reactions have been more puzzling. In June, India called for dialogue after Israeli

and U.S. strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities, which Iran responded to. However, New Delhi disassociated from a statement issued by the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) days later, which condemned the strikes on Iran. In a subsequent flip-flop, India signed on to the SCO joint declaration on September 1 that "condemned" Israel and the U.S. for the June strikes.

### Why is Qatar treated differently?

"India's ties with the other countries mentioned are not the same as ties with Qatar, with its large Indian diaspora and personal relations at the highest levels between PM Modi and the Qatari Emir," explained former Ambassador to the UAE and Egypt, Navdeep Suri. "Eventually, in an age of 'transactionalism', this is not as much about values and principles as about the bilateral relationship with each of these countries, including Israel," he told *The Hindu*.

The MEA declined to respond to a question from *The Hindu* on why the Modi government has taken conflicting positions on the issue. Experts said a number of reasons explained the varied statements, from geopolitical to regional and bilateral. According to former

Ambassador and author of *West Asia at War*, Talmiz Ahmad, India's response to the attack on Qatar had "no larger strategic purpose" but focused on Qatar being a "crucial supplier of gas".

He also pointed out that Israel's attack on Qatar had put Gulf countries that house U.S. military bases and count on the U.S. to guarantee security "on notice", indicating a "fundamental geopolitical shift in the region", which India may need to take note of.

"The message Israel has given is that every Arab country, every Gulf country, is within their target zone and put them all on notice. Israel has now ended the process of normalisation and made it clear that ties with other West Asian countries are not a priority over its operations. Thirdly, Israel has shown that the U.S. is no longer a guarantor of security for these GCC countries," Mr. Ahmad said, speaking at a seminar organised by the India-America Friendship Association on Tuesday.

The alarm among Gulf countries was visible at an emergency joint session of the Arab League and the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation (OIC) conference in Doha this week, which condemned Israel's actions, even as the Gulf Cooperation Council committed to building a "joint defence mechanism" to deal with future threats.

### What does this mean for India's broader West Asia policy?

In addition, experts said India's silence on Gaza – where more than 65,000 have been killed, including at least 20,000 children, in Israel's incessant bombardment of Gaza, including the latest offensive against Gaza City – is straining its ties with the Arab world. In a rare response to media queries on August 27, the MEA called the killing of journalists and civilians by the IDF "shocking and deeply regrettable". India also voted in favour of a UNGA resolution endorsing the two-state solution for Palestine on September 12, indicating that, despite the steadfast relationship with Israel, the Modi government's shifts may indicate that it needs to factor in the rest of the region as well.

## THE GIST

India condemns Israel's bombing in Doha as a 'violation of sovereignty' and expresses concern over regional peace and security.

The strong stance reflects India's close ties with Qatar and the Gulf region rather than a shift in principles on sovereignty.

India's silence on Gaza and varied reactions to other Israeli strikes show a careful balancing of strategic, regional, and bilateral interests.

# Why are Maharashtra's onion farmers protesting?

Is the government's buffer stock policy hurting farmers?

Vinaya Deshpande Pandit

## The story so far:

Since September 12, thousands of farmers from Maharashtra, India's largest onion-producing State, have been holding a phone protest. The main reason for the agitation is the distress caused by the fall in market prices of onions. Farmers are demanding immediate government intervention and aid of ₹1,500 per quintal. Experts say the problem is systemic. Maharashtra has produced more onions than needed this year, and the quality of stored Rabi onions has deteriorated, lowering market prices. They argue that the government must streamline onion exports, establish a uniform export policy, build trust among importers, and hold discussions with key buyers to secure stable markets.

**Why are farmers protesting?**  
At present, farmers say they earn only

₹800 to ₹1,000 per quintal for their onions, while the production cost stands at ₹2,200 to ₹2,500 per quintal. The Rabi onions stored by farmers in the hope of better rates are deteriorating, forcing them to sell at even lower prices. At the same time, the government has released its buffer stock in the market at cheaper prices, further dragging down rates.

"NCCF and NAFED should be stopped from selling their stocks in cities across the country," one of the key demands put forth by the Maharashtra State Onion Producer Farmers' Organisation said. National Cooperative Consumers' Federation of India Ltd. (NCCF), a major consumer cooperative in India; and National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd. (NAFED), the apex cooperative organisation for promoting and developing the cooperative marketing of agricultural produce for the benefit of farmers, jointly procure, store and

thereafter sell the onions in the market as a part of the Government of India's price stabilisation policy.

### How is the onion price stabilisation policy affecting the farmers?

India's onion price stabilisation policy focuses on maintaining a strategic buffer stock under the Price Stabilisation Fund (PSF) to manage price volatility. The government procures onions to build this buffer, and during periods of high prices or lean supply, they are released from the stock into major consumption centres through outlets and mobile vans to ensure affordability for consumers and prevent hoarding.

However, at present, farmers are still sitting on the stocks of Rabi onions and are trying to sell them in the market.

At a time when their produce is receiving a market price lower than the production cost, the prices are brought down further due to the NAFED and

NCCF stocks.

### What solutions are farmers and experts proposing?

According to government data, 25.25 lakh tonnes of onions were exported in the year 2022-23, a significant surge compared to previous years. But within two years, exports fell by more than half – in 2024-25, only 11.47 lakh tonnes were exported. "There is an urgent need to restore competitiveness and secure India's position in global onion markets. Bangladesh and Sri Lanka were the two main importers of Indian onions. Today, both of them have looked away from us. The government needs to have a stable export policy. Any flip-flops lead to a loss of credibility for the country in the international market," an exporter who did not wish to be named said.

Farmers and exporters want the government to incentivise exports, as India is one of the leading growers of onions in the world. During the flux in the government's export policy, countries like China and Pakistan have taken over India's export market, farmers said.

Meanwhile, the Andhra Pradesh government has announced procurement of onions at ₹1,200 per quintal, a base price considered crucial to protecting farmers. One of the suggestions given to the government of Maharashtra is to emulate the Andhra model and incentivise the onion farmers.

## THE GIST

Farmers in Maharashtra, India's largest onion-producing State, are protesting as market prices have plunged to ₹800-₹1,000 per quintal, far below their production costs of ₹2,200-₹2,500.

They demand stable export policies and a halt to buffer stock sales that further drag down market rates.

ABSTRACT



GETTY IMAGES

# How the DeepSeek-R1 AI model was taught to teach itself to reason

Reinforcement learning alone, with the right design, could produce reasoning behaviour that was previously thought to require human examples; DeepSeek-R1 shows signs of reflection, verification, and adaptability without supervised fine-tuning

Vasudevan Mukunth

The story so far:

For many decades, one of the great challenges in artificial intelligence (AI) has been teaching machines to reason. Reasoning goes beyond memorising facts or completing sentences. It's the ability to follow steps, reflect on mistakes, and adjust strategies until the right answer is found.

Humans use reasoning for everything from solving maths problems to writing computer programmes, from negotiating their daily lives to deciding whom to vote for. Large language models (LLMs) such as GPT-4 or DeepSeek-V3 have surprised scientists by showing signs of reasoning when scaled to large sizes. Another method, called chain-of-thought prompting, where the model is nudged to "think step by step", has also boosted performance.

But both these approaches come with limits. Training models to reason usually demand human-made examples. E.g., people show an AI model how to solve problems and the AI learns to copy the method. This is slow, expensive, and introduces human biases. It also caps the AI's creativity because the model can't explore problem-solving methods that humans didn't think of.

In a paper published in *Nature* on September 17, the DeepSeek-AI team reported that it was able to reach its model, called just R1, to reason by asking an ambitious question: what if we allowed the model to teach itself to reason without showing it human examples first? That is, they found that R1 could develop new forms of reasoning using reinforcement learning, a method of trial and error guided only by rewards for correct answers.

What is reinforcement learning?

The team's aim was to make the model smarter at maths and coding, as well as to

uncover how reasoning behaviours might emerge naturally when a machine is given the proper incentives.

DeepSeek researchers began with V3 Base, a large language model similar to other state-of-the-art systems. Instead of using the usual supervised fine-tuning, where humans provide the reasoning steps, they applied 'group relative policy optimisation', a reinforcement learning method designed for efficiency.

In this setup, the model, called R1-Zero at first, was asked to solve mathematical and algorithmic problems. For each attempt, it had to produce two parts: a reasoning process inside ``<think>...</think>`` tags and a final answer inside ``<answer>...</answer>`` tags. The only reward came from whether the final answer was correct, judged by rule-based systems like answer keys or code compilers. No one told the model how its reasoning should look.

Over thousands of training steps, the model learned by trial and error. If an answer was wrong, the path that led there was discouraged; if it was right, the path was reinforced. Importantly, the researchers also tracked how the model's thinking time, i.e., the number of tokens it used in its reasoning section, changed. Strikingly, the model began writing longer and more reflective reasoning chains on its own, sometimes including phrases like "wait" or "let's try again", revealing an ability to self-correct.

Was there human intervention?

To address weaknesses such as poor readability and mixing English with Chinese, the team built R1 from R1-Zero. This process included adding incentives for consistently using one language, supervised fine-tuning with both reasoning and non-reasoning data. The final model thus inherited the raw reasoning power of R1-Zero while also becoming easier to use and safer.

The results were striking. On the American Invitational Mathematics

Examination (AIME) 2024, a tough competition that usually the smartest high-school students attempt, R1-Zero's accuracy jumped from just 15.6% at the start of training to 77.9% by the end. With more tuning, it reached 86.7%, surpassing the average performance of human students.

At a certain stage, R1-Zero began using the word "wait" more often in its reasoning, just like a human might have when a mistake is spotted. The researchers said this meant the model wasn't blindly following a path but actively rethinking steps when something seemed off. In effect, reinforcement learning had coaxed the AI into behaviours that resembled reflection and verification, both elements of reasoning.

The ultimate R1 model was even stronger: it was good at maths and coding as well as on benchmarks for general knowledge, answering questions, and following instructions. Compared to its predecessors, R1 was also more consistent with its choice of language and better aligned with human preferences for helpfulness and safety. When evaluated with frameworks like AlpacaEval 2.0 and Arena-Hard, which test how well a model follows instructions, R1 improved by 25% and 17%, respectively, which are considered large.

What are the pros and cons of reasoning?

Many large language models, including widely used systems like ChatGPT, often demand large amounts of computational resources during testing. R1, on the other hand, could adapt how much it "thought" depending on the task's difficulty. Simple problems were met with short reasoning chains, while harder ones led to longer, more elaborate chains. This dynamic allocation avoided demanding power on questions that didn't warrant it. However, reinforcement learning itself is energy-intensive.

Taken together, the findings confirm

that reinforcement learning alone (with the right design) could produce reasoning behaviours that were previously thought to require human examples. This could change the way we think about how intelligence might grow in artificial systems. For instance, in the future, researchers could build verifiers that check answers and let the model figure out its own strategies. If the answer to a maths problem, a computer programme or a factual question can be reliably checked, then reinforcement learning can do the rest. This could speed up progress while reducing human labour and bias.

Indeed, traditional LLM training pipelines bank heavily on large human-labelled datasets – people writing question-answer pairs, reasoning steps, preference judgments, etc. They are expensive and often assembled under exploitative labour conditions. If machines can be taught to reason using reinforcement learning alone, the demand for human-annotated data can shrink, thus also reducing pressure to source cheap labour worldwide. However, the study paper also acknowledges that tasks without clear ground-truthing still rely on human-labelled data for reward models. So human input is not eliminated; only its scope may shrink to areas where no reliable verifier can be built.

A model that learns to reason will also demand better reward signals for open-ended tasks like writing, which is difficult, as well as stronger safeguards as it becomes capable of generating dangerous or manipulative content. In fact, watching a machine develop reflective behaviour (pausing, checking, revising, etc.) raises questions about how far such systems can go. If reasoning emerges from incentives rather than instructions, could creativity or deeper forms of understanding emerge in the same way?

Time will tell – unless DeepSeek-R1 figures it out first.

THE DAILY QUIZ

Actor and director Robert Redford died at the age of 89 on September 16. How well do you know his work?

Please send in your answers to [dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in](mailto:dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in)

Radhika Santhanam

**QUESTION 1**  
This film is centred around a scandal that brought down the Nixon government. Redford played one of the journalists who broke the story of the scandal. The journalist worked for *The Washington Post*. Name the film and the journalist.

**QUESTION 2**  
Karen Blixen, also known by her pen name Isak Dinesen, was a Danish author. Her best-known book was about her life in Kenya. Redford starred in the film that was based on this book. Name the film, also starring Meryl Streep.

**QUESTION 3**  
Redford's final appearance on screen was in an American superhero film

based on the Marvel comics. Name the film.

**QUESTION 4**  
One of the leading film festivals in the world was named after a character played by Redford. Name the festival and the film that features this character.

**QUESTION 5**  
This film, directed by Redford, dramatised the rigged TV shows of the 1950s.

**QUESTION 6**  
Redford said about a famous song that was part of one of his films: "When the film was released, I was highly critical: How did the song fit with the film? There was no rain. At the time, it seemed like a dumb idea. How wrong I was, as it turned out to be a giant hit." What is the name of this famous song that was also used in the background of a montage in *Spider-Man 2*?



**Visual Question:** Redford was nominated at the Academy Awards for Best Actor for his performance in this film. Name the film.

**Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz:** 1. This person was the first democratically elected Prime Minister of Nepal. **Ans: Bisweshwar Prasad Koirala**

2. Considered the key founder of the communist movement in Nepal, this person played a major role in the struggles against the autocratic Rana dynasty in Nepal, which ended in 1951. **Ans: Pushpa Lal Shrestha**  
3. The younger brother of the person mentioned in Question 1, this leader played a prominent role in the 1990 Jan Andolan. **Ans: Girija Prasad Koirala**  
4. A prominent Communist leader, this person was also actively involved in Jan-Andolan I. **Ans: Madan Bhandari**  
5. This former Prime Minister of Nepal is considered one of the key architects of the process of electing a popular Constituent Assembly to rewrite its Constitution and in the transformation of Nepal from a constitutional monarchy into a republic. What is his connection to Jawaharlal Nehru University? **Ans: Baburam Bhattarai. He completed his PhD at JNU**  
Visual: Identify the two prominent Nepali leaders in the picture. **Ans: B.P. Koirala and former king Tribhuvan**  
**Early Birds:** Anubhav Gupta | Pranab Biswas



FROM THE ARCHIVES

## Know your English

Upendran

"COME on in! Where is Suresh? I thought he was coming with you."

"He is on his way. He should be here briefly."

"You mean 'shortly', don't you?"  
"Is there a difference between 'shortly' and 'briefly'?"

"Yes, there is. If something happens or is done briefly, it happens or is done for a very short period of time. For example, the villain smiled briefly before pulling the trigger."

"Is it O.K. to say, Anita looked up at me briefly before walking on?"

"Sounds good to me. Here's another example. The old woman paused briefly before continuing to speak."

"Don't pause now. Tell me what 'shortly' means."

"It means 'in a little while'. For example, the Principal will be with you shortly."

"Good God! I don't want to see the Principal now. How about this? The Manager informed us that the movie would begin shortly."

"Excellent! Yesterday, I returned home shortly after 6 o'clock."

"Meaning a little after 6-00?"

"That's right. Now tell me, what..."

"... how do you pronounce

b.o.n.k.e.r.s?"

"The 'o' in the first syllable sounds like the 'o' in 'pot', 'hot' and 'lot'. The 'e' in the second syllable is like the 'a' in 'China'."

"So it's pronounced BONKERS with the stress on the first syllable!"

"That's right. By the way, the final 's' is pronounced like the 'z' in 'zoo' and 'zip'. Do you know what 'bonkers' means?"

"I haven't a clue."

"Bonkers' is a slang expression meaning to be slightly silly or mad. For example, girls went bonkers when they saw Amir Khan."

"Can I say, my uncle Govind is bonkers?"

"You certainly can. One can also be bonkers about someone or something."

"Does it mean you are mad at someone or something?"

"Not 'mad at', but 'mad about' someone or something. In other words, you like the person/thing very much. For example, Karthik's sister, Amala, is bonkers about Shah Rukh Khan."

"My cousin Chandira is bonkers about noodles."

"Bonkers about noodles! I hate noodles."

"You hate noodles! I pity you."

"You don't 'pity on' someone, but 'pity someone'. For example, I pity Govind for being such a fool."

"I pity the people who were put on election duty."

"That's a good example. I pity the candidates who lost their deposit."

"You pity politicians! You must be bonkers. But tell me, when do you say 'pity on'?"

"You usually 'take pity on' someone or something. The hunter took pity on the deer and set it free."

"Our physics teacher took pity on us and postponed the test."

"He took pity on his wife and helped her clean up the mess."

"I hope that was just an example. My physics teacher doesn't have a wife to take pity on."

"I thought he was married!"

"Are you kidding! Any woman that marries him must be bonkers."

Published in *The Hindu* on March 3, 1998

## Word of the day

Veracity:

unwillingness to tell lies

**Synonyms:** honesty, truthfulness, credibility

**Usage:** I admire the veracity of her statements.

**Pronunciation:** newsth.live/veracitypro

**International Phonetic Alphabet:** /və'reɪsəti/

For feedback and suggestions for Text & Context, please write to [letters@thehindu.co.in](mailto:letters@thehindu.co.in) with the subject 'Text & Context'

## IN BRIEF



## Nvidia bets big on Intel with \$5 bn stake, chip partnership

Nvidia on Thursday said it will invest \$5 billion in Intel, throwing its heft behind the struggling U.S. chip foundry, but stopped short of giving Intel a crucial manufacturing deal. The pact, which also includes a plan for Intel and Nvidia to jointly develop PC and data center chips, represents a potential risk to Taiwan's TSMC. TSMC currently manufactures Nvidia's flagship processors, business that the world's most valuable company could one day extend to Intel. **REUTERS**

## Anand Rathi Share and Stock Brokers to float IPO on Sept. 23

Anand Rathi Group's brokerage arm, Anand Rathi Share and Stock Brokers, on Thursday fixed a price band of ₹393 to ₹414 per share for its upcoming ₹745-crore initial public offering (IPO). The company's maiden public offering is scheduled to open for subscription on September 23 and conclude on September 25. The broking firm's IPO is entirely a fresh issuance of shares worth ₹745 crore with no offer-for-sale (OFS) component. **PTI**

## MeitY to set up 500 AI data labs across country: Vaishnav

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) will set up 500 AI Data Labs across the country, IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnav said on Thursday. The labs will be located in a diverse set of districts, he said. The Minister was speaking at a pre-event for the AI Impact Summit to be hosted by India in February 2026. Additionally, an AI Governance Framework, based on a draft released earlier this year, will also be released in the coming days, he added.

## Tax experts laud move to operationalise GST Appellate Tribunal

**T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan**  
NEW DELHI

In a further step towards making the crucial Goods and Services Tax Appellate Tribunal (GSTAT) functional, the government has notified the timelines for appeals and has expanded the scope of cases that can be taken up by the Principal Bench of the GSTAT.

During its 56th meeting on September 3, the GST Council had decided that the GSTAT would be made operational for accepting appeals before the end of September and would begin its hearings before the end of December this year.

In a notification dated September 17, the Ministry of Finance notified that appeals against orders communicated before April 1, 2026, can be filed up to June 30, 2026. It added that appeals against orders communicated on or after April 1, 2026, must be filed within three months.

"The notifications operationalising the GST Appellate Tribunal is nothing short of a game-changer for India's indirect tax landscape," Manoj Mishra, Partner and Tax Controversy Management Leader at Grant Thornton Bharat said. "For years, taxpayers were stuck in a vacuum with appeals piling up, cash flows locked, and litigation costs escalating."

"This structured framework finally delivers predictability and timely access to justice," he added.

## SEBI gives clean chit to Adani Group in Hindenburg case

All the money has come back with interest before the start of the investigation, impugned transactions have not been held as related party transactions, says markets regulator

**Ashokamithran T.**  
MUMBAI

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) on Thursday gave a clean chit to Adani Group, stating that the group companies — Adani Ports & Special Economic Zone Limited and Adani Power Ltd. — had not violated regulations as alleged by U.S.-based shortseller Hindenburg Research.

"Having considered the matter holistically, I find that the allegations made against noticees in the SCN [show cause notice] are not established. Consider-



**Big boost:** SEBI has reaffirmed what we have always maintained, that the Hindenburg claims were baseless, said Gautam Adani. **PTI**

ing the above, the question of devolvement of any liability on noticees does not arise and hence the question of determination of quantum of penalty also does not require any deliberation," said SEBI Whole

Time Member Kamlesh Chandra Varshney. "The transactions cannot be classified as manipulative or fraudulent transactions or unfair trade practice as there was no allegation of siphoning off of money or

## Amid weak job market, Fed cuts rates by 0.25%

**Reuters**  
NEW YORK

The U.S. Federal Reserve cut interest rates by a quarter of a percentage point on Wednesday and indicated the central bank will steadily lower borrowing costs for the rest of this year, as policymakers responded to concerns about weakness in the job market in a move that won support from most of President Donald Trump's central bank appointees.

## Indian Oil to buy 10 crude carriers from Shipping Corp JV

**Press Trust of India**  
NEW DELHI

Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) is likely to place an order to buy at least 10 medium-range oil tankers from a Shipping Corporation of India (SCI)-led joint venture, with the vessels to be built at an Indian shipyard, sources said.

The world's third largest oil importing and consuming nation relies heavily on hired ships to ferry its energy supplies. IOC and

other state-owned oil firms had initially planned to jointly establish a shipping company to build vessels in India.

Having indigenously built ships was seen as not just helping the cause of energy security but also creating jobs. However, the proposal, floated over a year ago, has remained on the drawing board due to a lack of shipbuilding expertise, three sources with direct knowledge of the matter said.

## JK Tyre diverts U.S. exports to other markets

**The Hindu Bureau**  
CHENNAI

JK Tyre & Industries Ltd has diverted its exports from India to the U.S. to other markets, its MD Anshuman Singhania said.

"The company is serving the U.S. markets through its Mexico plant. There is postponement of tariffs on tyre exports from Mexico to the U.S. by about 90 days as of now," he said at a media interaction on Thursday.

## MARKETS

## MARKET WATCH

	THURSDAY	% CHANGE
Sensex	83,014	-0.39
US Dollar	88.20	-0.39
Gold	1,13,200	-0.52
Brent oil	67.51	-0.91

## NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Enter.	2402.00	0.00
Adani Ports	1412.80	6.70
Apollo Hosp.	7850.50	-37.50
Asian Paints	2478.70	-14.90
Axis Bank	1133.00	7.00
Bajaj Auto	9075.00	-9.00
Bajaj Finance	2069.20	12.20
Bajaj Finserv	996.50	11.00
Bharti Elec.	409.90	-2.30
Bharti Airtel	1941.10	-0.20
Cipla	1578.20	-18.60
Coal India	393.15	-6.60
Dr Reddys Lab	1322.70	11.30
Eicher Motors	6924.50	34.00
Eternal Ltd.	337.85	9.60
Grasim Ind.	2878.80	13.40
HCL Tech	1493.80	12.30
HDFC Bank	976.90	10.40
HDFC Life	784.60	16.55
Hero MotoCorp	5370.00	20.00
Hindalco	750.15	0.05
Hind Unilever	2556.80	17.10
ICI Bank	1421.70	2.50
IndusInd Bank	735.45	-3.60
Infosys	1540.60	18.20
ITC	411.55	2.25
Jio Financial Services Ltd.	317.35	1.50
JSW Steel	1121.10	10.10
Kotak Bank	2054.60	4.30
L&T	3686.00	0.50
M&M	3642.20	9.00
Maruti Suzuki	15817.00	16.00
NestleIndia	1209.10	4.80
NTPC	336.95	0.55
ONGC	235.59	-1.29
PowerGrid Corp	289.10	1.95
Reliance Ind.	1415.00	1.20
SBI Life	1821.80	17.80
State Bank	854.35	-2.80
Shriram Finance Ltd.	626.90	3.65
Sun Pharma	1648.60	28.40
Tata Consumer Product	1129.30	-7.00
Tata Motors	711.20	-7.95
Tata Steel	172.03	0.67
TCS	3176.70	3.90
Tech Mahindra	1550.70	3.50
Titan	3511.30	-11.70
Trent Ltd.	5144.00	-53.50
UltraTech Cement	12626.00	-95.00
Wipro	256.93	2.78

## 'No impact on Oil India's Russia production'

Oil India CMD Ranjit Rath said there was no impact on the firm's production or exploration ambitions post Ukraine's recent drone attack in Russia's northwestern region.

## NHAI moves to curb subcontracting work

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has tightened bidding norms for highway projects in order to curb subcontracting by concessionaires, including by imposing penalties.

The changes have been notified through a policy circular on qualification criteria for engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) projects issued in August.

According to the modifications, any unauthorised subcontracting and subcontracting beyond permissible limits, would be classified as an undesirable practice where the NHAI is entitled to forfeit and appropriate the bid security and performance security provided by bidders.



The NHAI has tightened bidding norms for highway projects.

In a media statement, the NHAI said such malpractices amounted to a breach of contractual provisions, and undermined quality assurance, disrupted project timelines and weakened regulatory oversight. Subcontracting highway development works was among the issues flagged by the Parliamentary Accounts Committee (PAC) chaired by Congress MP K.C. Venugopal.

## Stir and smoke



**Flared up:** Protesters wave flags and brandish smoke flares in front of the July Column at Place de la Bastille in central Paris on Thursday during a demonstration part of a day of nationwide strikes and protests called by unions over France's national budget. Trade unions have urged French people to strike in protest at the authorities' 'horror show' draft budget designed to reduce France's ballooning debt. **AFP**

## 'Weak finances deter municipal bond issue'

**Ashokamithran T.**  
MUMBAI

The weak balance sheets of municipal bodies are a challenge in the development of municipal bond market in India, said Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) Chairperson Tuhin Kanta Pandey.

"Municipal bonds have been a cornerstone of city-level development, enabling urban local bodies to raise long-term funds for essential projects such as water supply, sanitation, transport, and waste management... challenge lies in project readiness and credibility. Many municipal bodies struggle with weak balance sheets or delayed clearances," he said at an event here.

"While the municipal bond market in India is still at a nascent stage, its po-

tential is immense." He called for measures to develop the capital market and make it attractive for institutional and retail investors to invest in municipal and green bonds.

## Asset monetisation

He also emphasised on the need to expand asset monetisation. "There is a need to accelerate asset monetisation in various sectors such as roads, railways, ports, airports, energy, petroleum and gas and logistics. State Governments, barring a few, are yet to crystallise asset monetisation plans to provide further boost to infrastructure creation."

He highlighted the development of the Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs) and Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InvITs) into a new asset class.

## Switching LPG connections mobile telephony way, PNGRB seeks views

**N. Ravi Kumar**  
HYDERABAD

The Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) has invited stakeholder and consumer comments on an LPG interoperability framework that would allow households to draw refills from distributors of other PSU oil companies, similar to mobile number portability.

The move follows more than 17 lakh consumer complaints annually, mainly about refill delays.

PNGRB noted while oil marketing companies address grievances, consum-



Delivery men carry LPG cylinders on rickshaws. **PTI**

ers cannot migrate to another distributor.

"While interoperability has been adopted in telephony with much success, the same has not happened in LPG," the regula-

tor said. Citing reports that highlighted supply disruptions and prolonged delay in refill deliveries, the regulator said safeguarding consumers from service failures and ensuring uninterrupted access to this essential fuel is necessary.

There may be other reasons too — consumer's freedom of choice on the LPG company/dealer being one, especially when the cylinder price is same. PNGRB said it was seeking steps to facilitate timely access to refills — by enabling consumers to be served from the nearest available distributor via improved

coordination and flexible delivery arrangements within existing network.

While porting was discussed in the past, the move was given up. Switching distributor or company involves surrendering the equipment and some cost to the consumers.

When it is done during times of disruption and as a temporary measure there will be practical issues, especially on how refills and pressure regulator, which differ from one company to another, are deposited with the concerned company, sources in the industry said.

## Real money gaming ban to be formally notified on Oct. 1: Vaishnav

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

Union Minister of Electronics and Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnav said on Thursday that the online real money gaming (RMG) ban would formally go into force on October 1, barring any pressing requests from the RMG industry that would warrant a further delay. Mr. Vaishnav was speaking on the sidelines of a pre-event for the AI Impact Summit, to be hosted by India next February.

The real money gaming ban has already been im-



Ashwini Vaishnav

plemented by the RMG industry at large, even as some have challenged the prohibition in court. The government has not notified the law, passed in the monsoon session of Parliament within 72 hours of the Cabinet clearing it.

With firms winding down their business and processing most refunds, the government appears to see a clear path to formalising the prohibition.

"We also engaged with the banks, we engaged with practically every stakeholder possible in this, and we have finalised the rules," Mr. Vaishnav said. "The rules will be promulgated with effect from 1st October. And before that, we'll have one more round of discussions with the industry. And in case they need some more time, we will definitely look at a more conservative ap-

proach." The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology has also finalised the Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025, Mr. Vaishnav said, adding that the rules will be notified by September 28 as an "outer limit".

The DPDP Rules have been pending since the Digital Personal Data Protection Act was passed in Parliament two years ago. Without the Rules, the Act isn't in force. News media representatives have complained to the IT Ministry about a lack of protections for journalists collecting data in the Act.

## Lebanon's distressed debt soars to shaky new heights



**Some hope:** The bonds have rallied from just 6 cents on the dollar a year ago to close to 24 cents. REUTERS

### NEWS ANALYSIS

REUTERS  
LONDON

Lebanon's defaulted government bonds have nearly quadrupled in price over the past year as investors bet on signs of economic recovery but a wild variance in estimates of their likely worth after a restructuring could restrain any further rally. A "recovery value" for the bonds will not become clearer until lawmakers decide what level of losses struggling local banks must take, which in turn will inform how much money the government can funnel to bondholders.

The bonds have rallied from just 6 cents on the dollar a year ago to close to 24 cents, following a political shake-up which ended more than two years of government paralysis that had exacerbated Lebanon's economic crisis.

### Rising hope

The formation of a new government in February spurred the gains, with investors hoping authorities would bring the country closer to accessing reconstruction funds after a devastating war between Israel and the Lebanese armed group Hezbollah. Some fixed income analysts, however, say the rally may be getting ahead of itself given myriad uncertainties, notably on the bonds' "recovery value". This figure is what the bonds will be worth after a long-awaited debt restructuring that is essential to revive the economy. The range of estimated value is disproportionately large.

"One can construct scenarios of recovery in a broad range (of) 20-40 cents," said Roger Mark, an analyst in the fixed income team at asset manager Ninety One, which holds the bonds.

"Of course, there are also more negative scenarios whereby we don't get an IMF deal in the coming year at all."

Hopes that Lebanon can secure an International Monetary Fund bailout to help rebuild rose after the IMF said in June that the country had made progress toward a lending deal. Its staff will visit Beirut this month to advance discussions. Morgan Stanley, in a note to clients seen by Reuters, said recovery on Lebanon's bonds could be as much as 40 cents - but also could "fall materially, to around 23-26 cents" in a worse scenario. A group representing bondholders declined to comment.

### Green shoots of progress

After defaulting on its \$31 billion of outstanding international bonds in March 2020, Lebanon's financial crisis spiralled, wiping out banks' balance sheets and costing the currency 99% of its value. The bonds fell below 6 cents as hopes dwindled for a debt restructuring or crucial IMF bailout. Following Parliament's election of a new President in January, lawmakers passed in July a long-awaited banking sector restructuring law, one of several pieces of legislation needed for financial system reform.

## Fed's rate cut comes with caveats, leaving investors lukewarm

U.S. Federal Reserve tempers dovish tilt as inflation remains sticky; investors cautious on risk assets amid stagflation threat; market reaction muted to first rate cut since December; Disagreement within Fed expected to add to volatility; Treasury yields rose with two-year yields up four basis points

### NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters  
NEW YORK

Investors look set to face a volatile few months ahead after the Federal Reserve resumed interest rate cuts and opened the door to further easing but tempered its message with warnings of sticky inflation, sowing doubt over the pace of future policy adjustments.

Some investors are now less certain that a rapid shift to lower borrowing costs will materialise, potentially dampening optimism that stocks and bonds would get a strong lift from easier policy. Adding to the uncertainty was a wide variety of views within the Fed on the future path of rates.

"We've had a rather cautious, not necessarily fully defensive... view here for a while," which was "reinforced" by the Fed's message, said Larry Hatheway, global investment strategist at the Franklin Templeton Institute.

Mr. Hatheway added that many in the market would likely be slightly disappointed at the lack of clarity and direction from the Fed, which stopped short of endorsing market expectations for a clear string of rate cuts, emphasizing a meeting-by-meeting, data-dependent approach.



**With caution:** Fed Chair Jerome Powell highlighted "a challenging situation" for policymakers. AP

At Wednesday's meeting, the Fed lowered its policy rate by 25 basis points to a range of 4%-4.25%, its first cut since December, and signalled a gradual easing cycle in response to mounting labour market concerns. At the same time, Fed Chair Jerome Powell highlighted "a challenging situation" for policymakers, noting risks to inflation were tilted to the upside and risks to employment to the downside.

The comments dampened market optimism despite a much hoped-for dovish shift after recent data that showed unemployment climbing to 4.3% in August and payrolls growing far less than expected. A steep downward revision to benchmark jobs figures for the year through March



The Fed's projections put inflation ending this year at 3%, well above its 2% target, while its projection for economic growth was a tad higher at 1.6% versus 1.4%

also recently added weight to the view that the labour market is losing steam, bolstering the case for multiple rate cuts ahead.

### Dot plot

The U.S. central bank's release on Wednesday of updated quarterly economic projections, including rate forecasts issued in a chart known as the "dot plot", reflected expectations of

more easing this year when compared to the 'dots' from the June meeting, with 50 basis points in cuts seen before year end.

At the same time, the Fed's projections still put inflation ending this year at 3%, well above the central bank's 2% target, while its projection for economic growth was slightly higher at 1.6% versus 1.4%.

"Markets may welcome the easing bias, but the messaging remains nuanced and far from a full pivot," said Dan Siluk, head of global short duration and liquidity, and a portfolio manager at Janus Henderson Investors.

The Nasdaq and the S&P 500 had gone into the meeting close to record highs, but closed lower in choppy trading on

Wednesday.

Treasury yields, which move inversely to bond prices, rose, with two-year yields up four basis points on the day at 3.55% and benchmark 10-year yields up by about seven basis points to 4.09%. The yield curve had been flattening in recent weeks, with the gap between long-dated and short-dated yields decreasing on expectations of rate cuts. "The Fed is in a tough spot," said Jack McIntyre, portfolio manager at Brandywine Global Investment Management. "They expect stagflation, or higher inflation and a weaker labor market. That is not a great environment for financial assets."

### Stagflation risks

U.S. consumer prices increased by the most in seven months in August amid higher costs for housing and food, resulting in the biggest year-on-year increase in inflation since January.

Combined with softening labour market conditions, higher inflation has sparked fears of stagflation - a worrying mix of sluggish growth and high inflation that haunted the U.S. in the 1970s and that could complicate the Fed's ability to support the jobs market with hefty rate cuts.

"This is far from the stagflation of the 1970s, but at the margin argues for a more conservative outlook

for returns on stocks and bonds," said Michael Rosen, chief investment officer at Angeles Investments.

The Fed's shift to easing on Wednesday was also being scrutinised after relentless pressure from U.S. President Donald Trump's administration on the Fed to cut rates. Stephen Miran, Mr. Trump's nominee and economic adviser, was sworn in to the Fed's Board of Governors on Tuesday and registered the lone dissent to the Fed's quarter-point cut decision, instead arguing for a bigger half-point reduction.

Markets were also left to contend with the Fed's 'dot plot' showing a wide variety of forecasts, with one participant pencilling in a 4.4% year-end rate, above the new 4-4.25% range. At the other end, one policymaker marked down year-end policy rate of 2.9%.

"I think the market was having trouble digesting all the information they got. Certainly, it did not give anyone a tremendous line of sight" into how Fed policymakers are approaching decision-making, said Josh Hirt, senior U.S. economist at Vanguard. "There is such disagreement among the committee members that there is some heightened uncertainty," Mr. Hirt added, and greater volatility "is one potential consequence of this increased number of different cross currents."

## Anglo-Teck merger may unlock Chile mine synergy

### NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters  
SANTIAGO

The proposed Anglo American-Teck merger has revived long-standing ambitions to share infrastructure at two major mines in northern Chile, but analysts say the plan could face hurdles to gain buy-in from Swiss miner and trader Glencore.

Glencore is an equal partner with London-listed Anglo at Collahuasi, one of the world's largest copper deposits that sits about 10 kilometre from Canadian miner Teck's flagship Quebrada Blanca mine.

Investors see combining operations at the two sites as a lynchpin to the Anglo-Teck merger, one of the



**Huge savings:** Anglo and Teck said "synergies" from Quebrada Blanca and Collahuasi would save \$800 million a year. REUTERS

biggest deals in mining history that would catapult two medium-sized mining firms into the top tier of global copper producers just ahead of an expected boom in demand.

Yet the companies will face questions about how such a fusion would work in practice, because of is-

suues critical to Glencore such as valuation, supply agreements, profit sharing and governance structure, as well as how to manage mining waste problems at Quebrada Blanca and find cost savings from two separate sets of infrastructure. "The potential for synergies is tremendous, but

they're not easy at all. They're different operating styles, different management approaches - they're different beasts," said Jorge Cantalotto, head of Chile's Center for Copper and Mining Studies (CESCO).

### Hinges on valuations

Glencore's support for a tie-up between the two Chilean mines hinges on the valuation of Quebrada Blanca, a source familiar with the matter said. The Keevil family, which controls Teck's class A shares, backed the merger, believing Teck lacked the resources to invest further in the costlier-than-expected project, the source added.

The Keevil family did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Teck, when consulted by Reuters, said it is working

on operational issues at Quebrada Blanca.

Quebrada Blanca has had cost overruns and serious problems with mining waste at its expansion project launched in 2023 known as QB2, forcing it to lower production guidance and defer decisions on growth plans. Some analysts cautioned output could suffer into 2026.

Glencore declined to comment. Collahuasi, which operates as an independent unit, said it would not comment because the merger announcement came from one of its shareholders. Anglo and Teck plan to construct a conveyor belt between the two mines to feed Collahuasi's high-quality ore for processing at Quebrada Blanca, but have not detailed if they would merge the

mines into an independent business unit. Anglo CEO Duncan Wanblad pointed out Glencore has previously called for sharing operations between Quebrada Blanca and Collahuasi.

"Glencore has been for a long time very interested in getting the adjacency benefits out of Quebrada Blanca," he told journalists last week, adding that the company had not yet discussed the merger with Glencore but he expected the plan would appeal to all shareholders.

Anglo and Teck said "synergies" from Quebrada Blanca and Collahuasi would save \$800 million a year and boost annual output by 1,75,000 metric tonne. Glencore and Anglo each own 44% of Collahuasi, alongside a consortium led by Japan's Mitsui.

## Tariff chaos spurs footwear and apparel deals to record-highs

### Reuters

U.S. President Donald Trump's trade war is helping to push U.S. clothing and footwear acquisitions to all-time highs this year, with some companies merging to help offset tariff costs while others go private to weather the next 3-1/2 years of his Presidency outside of the public market, dealmakers say.

Popular sneaker company Skechers announced a \$9.42 billion deal in early May to go private days after it pulled its annual earnings forecasts and sent a letter, along with 75 other footwear companies, telling Mr. Trump the tariffs were an "existential threat" to the industry. Sneaker seller Foot Locker, which also signed

the letter to Mr. Trump, in May accelerated its \$2.4 billion sale to Dick's Sporting Goods. While both deals were in the works for months, bankers and analysts said Mr. Trump's tariffs are creating both chaos and opportunity for retailers and brands for some tie-ups.

It has driven dealmaking in the U.S. footwear and apparel sectors to roughly \$21 billion in deals announced year-to-date.

### No lofty valuations

With more than three months left in the year, that figure is already a record, according to LSEG data dating to the 1970s, and particularly surprising for an industry where valuations are not nearly as lofty as, say tech or finan-



**Gaining speed:** Dealmaking in U.S. footwear, apparel sectors has risen to roughly \$21 billion. REUTERS

cial services. The previous record for U.S. apparel and footwear M&A was last year's \$16.1 billion in deals, and before that, 2021 with \$15.6 billion, according to LSEG. "Scale is more im-

portant in a tariff-rich environment because you can negotiate better terms across a larger base with many of your counterparties," said Carmen Molinos, Morgan Stanley's global co-

head of consumer retail investment banking. Morgan Stanley advised Canadian apparel maker Gildan Activewear on its deal last month to buy U.S. underwear maker Hanesbrands

for \$2.2 billion.

Both companies produce more in Central America and the Caribbean than in Asia, and mostly use U.S.-grown cotton, giving them some protection from tariffs. The combination insulates them more from fluctuating geopolitics, and Gildan was one company looking to get bigger amid the chaos. "We think we're really well aligned to take advantage, actually, of this near-shoring opportunity," Gildan's CEO and co-founder Glenn Chamandy said on an August investor call about the deal. Tariffs were a shock to the system that showed retailers just how quickly their businesses can get disrupted and highlighted the importance of scale, several bankers said.

"In moments of turmoil and change, those who are in a position of strength are looking to build up on those strengths and if they see the right strategic fit, they're taking advantage (and buying)," said JPMorgan's Jonathan Dunlop, co-head of North America consumer & retail investment banking.

### Brand management

This year, JPMorgan advised 3G Capital for Skechers and brand management firm Authentic Brand Group's \$1.4 billion deal for Guess. Authentic also picked up Dockers from Levi Strauss, while another brand management firm Bluestar Alliance announced a deal to buy Dickies from VF Corp. Brand management

firms typically buy a brand's IP and then license it to operating partners that have the manufacturing, design and sales responsibilities. "The brand management companies have been some of the most prolific acquirers of both middle market and a handful of multi-billion dollar retail brands," said David Shiffman, partner and head of Consumer Retail at Solomon Partners. The bank advised the special committee of Guess.

Going private, like in Skechers' case, is becoming an increasingly attractive option to navigate the uncertainty without the pressure of public quarterly reporting, especially if companies feel the public market is not valuing them appropriately.

## WASHINGTON

## Trump says designating Antifa 'a major terrorist organisation'



U.S. President Donald Trump said he would designate "Antifa" as "a major terrorist organisation," a move he threatened in his first term. The White House did not immediately offer details on how the label could be applied. Critics of the Republican President warn such a move could be used as a pretext to quash dissent. AFP

## DAMASCUS

## Syria, Israel advance security talks as U.S. pushes peace settlement



Syria expects to finalise security and military deals with Israel this year, officials said on Thursday, marking progress after Assad's ouster. With the U.S. pushing for a settlement, Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shaibani arrived in Washington to discuss talks with Israel and the possible lifting of sanctions on Syria. AFP

## PHNOM PENH

## Cambodia accuses Thailand of blocking families at border



Cambodia's leader Hun Manet has accused Thailand of preventing more than 20 families from returning to their homes on the disputed border, according to his letter to the head of the UN released on Thursday. The Thai army said the Cambodian residents had "illegally occupied" Thai territory. AFP

## TAIPEI

## In first, Taiwan, U.S. firm to make missile and underwater drone



Taiwan and U.S. defence firm Anduril will jointly produce a missile and underwater drone, marking Taiwan's first such deals with a foreign company. Officials said it strengthens self-defence amid China's threat, boosts local production, and supports Taipei's growing defence budget and military modernisation efforts. AFP

## Qatar meets ICC head as it mulls action against Israel

Five Hamas members and a Qatari official were killed in the Israeli strike in Doha that targeted the group's top leadership; Qatar, as an observer state at the ICC, cannot itself refer cases to the court

Agence France-Presse  
DOHA

Qatar has met with the president of the International Criminal Court as it seeks legal action against Israel over its unprecedented strike on its territory last week, an official said on Thursday.

The emirate's chief negotiator, Mohammed al-Khulaifi, met in The Hague on Wednesday with the president of the ICC, Judge Tomoko Akane, as it pursues "every available legal and diplomatic avenue to ensure accountability for those responsible for Israel's attack on Qatar", the Qatari official said.

Last week's deadly Israeli strike targeted Qatari-based leaders of Palestinian militant group Hamas and sent shock waves through the Gulf states that have long depended on the United States for their security. Hamas has said top offi-



The emirate's chief negotiator says it is 'exploring legal avenues to respond to the illegal Israeli armed attack against Qatar'. AFP

cial of its political bureau, hosted in Qatar with U.S. blessing since 2012, survived the strike but it said five members were killed, along with an officer of Qatar's internal security force.

Speaking on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the discussions, the official called Israel's attack "unlawful", adding it "constitutes grave violations of international humanitarian law". Qatar, as an observer

state at the ICC, cannot itself refer cases to the court.

But after emergency talks in Doha, the Arab and Islamic blocs called on their members on Monday to take "all possible legal and effective measures to prevent Israel from continuing its actions".

In a post on X after his meeting with the ICC chief, Mr. Khulaifi said his visit had been "part of the work of the team tasked with exploring legal avenues to

respond to the illegal Israeli armed attack against the State of Qatar".

Last year, the ICC launched a prosecution of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for war crimes and crimes against humanity during Israel's war in Gaza, including by intentionally targeting civilians and using starvation as a method of war.

The ICC also sought the arrest of Israel's former Defence Minister Yoav Gallant and Hamas commander Mohammed Deif, who has since been confirmed killed by Israel.

The Gaza war was triggered by Hamas's October 2023 attack, which resulted in the deaths of 1,219 people, most of them civilians.

Israel's retaliatory campaign has killed at least 65,141 people, also mostly civilians, according to figures from the territory's Health Ministry that the United Nations considers reliable.

## U.K. deports first migrant to France under new deal

Sriram Lakshman  
LONDON

The U.K. has returned the first person to France, under a migrant return deal signed by the French and British governments in July. The man is an Indian citizen as per reporting from the BBC and the Telegraph. The French Interior Ministry confirmed to The Hindu that one migrant was received by France on Wednesday but declined to confirm citizenship details.

The deal to return migrants arriving on 'small boats' from France across the English Channel was announced during French President Emmanuel Macron's State visit to the U.K. in July. For every migrant returned to France, the U.K. will accept a vetted migrant from France under the 'one-in one-out' arrangement. Preference would be given to those who have U.K. ties.

"A man who arrived in the U.K. by small boat in August was removed on a commercial flight this morning marking another major step in the government's action to dismantle



Migrants waded through the sea in an attempt to board an inflatable dinghy to cross the English Channel to reach Britain. REUTERS

the criminal networks profiting from human misery," the U.K. Home Office said in a statement that did not specify the man's citizenship.

The U.K. government said more flights are due to take off this week and next.

## Border security

The government – which has pitched much of its push against illegal migration as a fight against people smuggling gangs – boosted funding for Border Security in August by £100 million to disrupt trafficking gangs.

The deal will run on a trial basis until July 2026. However, the process has

already run into legal issues, with migrants not making it on deportation flights scheduled for earlier this week.

The High court in London blocked a 25-year old Eritrean man from being returned to France to allow his lawyers more time to provide evidence that he may have been the victim of modern-day slavery.

"I will continue to challenge any last-minute, vexatious attempts to frustrate a removal in the courts," newly appointed U.K. Home Minister Shabana Mahmood said. The Home Office has also begun to review the country's modern slavery legislation.

## Ukraine hits Russian oil refinery deep behind front

Agence France-Presse  
KYIV

Ukrainian drones on Thursday hit a major Russian oil refinery some 1,400 km from the front line, triggering a fire, officials from both countries said.

The strike is the latest in a wave of drone attacks on Russia's energy infrastructure as Kyiv seeks to knock out Russia's vital energy revenues that fund its army.

A source in Ukraine's SBU security agency said its drones had hit "the heart" of a refinery in the central Bashkortostan region run by state-controlled energy giant Gazprom. Unverified images on Russian social media showed a fire at the facility and a plume of dark smoke rising above it.

Russia typically does not confirm Ukrainian strikes, but Radiy Khabirov, the Russian head of the region, said on Thursday the refinery had been hit. Strikes over the summer months have knocked out a notable portion of Russia's refining capacity.

## French police shoot dead a man with machete near school

Agence France-Presse  
MARSEILLE

French police on Thursday shot and killed a man wielding a machete near a school in the southeastern town of La Seyne-sur-Mer, prosecutors said.

The "threatening" individual refused to comply with police orders and moved towards the officers, who first used an electroshock weapon and then fired six shots at the man, said public prosecutor Samuel Finielz. He said they aimed at the man's lower

body but he died of his injuries at the scene.

The incident took place shortly before 5.00 p.m. near a nursery school, according to a police source.

"It appears that the children were threatened," Mr. Finielz said, adding that no one was harmed.

Officers arriving at the scene saw the man carrying a weapon that appeared to be a machete "with a blade several dozen centimetres long", he said. They ordered him "to drop his weapon, which he did not do," he said.

## United voice



Jamaat-e-Islami supporters hold a protest rally at Baitul Mukarram National Mosque in Dhaka on Thursday, as part of coordinated protests with other Islamic parties pressing a common set of demands, including holding the national election in February under July Charter. AFP

## Israel military says it intercepts missile launched from Yemen

Agence France-Presse  
JERUSALEM

The Israeli military said it intercepted a missile launched from Yemen toward Israeli territory on Thursday, after air raid sirens sounded in several areas, including Jerusalem.

"Following the sirens that sounded a short while ago in several areas in Israel, a missile launched from Yemen was intercepted by the IAF (air force)," the military said in a statement.

Since the Gaza war

erupted in October 2023, Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels have launched repeated drone and missile attacks against Israel claiming solidarity with the Palestinians.

In response, Israel has carried out rounds of retaliatory strikes in Yemen, mainly targeting infrastructure such as ports, power stations and the international airport in Sanaa. It also assassinated the head of the Houthi government together with 11 other senior officials in air strikes last month.

## U.S. is trying to 'get back' Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan: Trump

Sriram Lakshman  
LONDON

The Trump administration is trying to negotiate a take over of Bagram Airfield in Afghanistan, U.S. President Donald Trump announced on Thursday. Mr. Trump's comments were made at Chequers, the official country residence of U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer at a joint press conference with the two leaders, at the conclusion of the President's two-day State visit to the U.K.

Mr. Trump said that

when his first administration (2016-2020) had planned on taking U.S. troops out of Afghanistan, it had planned to hold on to Bagram, a 77 sq. km airbase with a 11,800 ft runway, which was a focal point for logistics for U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

## Chaotic exit

U.S. troops exited Afghanistan – including Bagram – in a chaotic manner on February 29, 2020 under the newly-appointed administration of Joe Biden.

Mr. Trump said that the U.S. had "given" Bagram to the Taliban for "nothing". The Taliban took over Afghanistan after America's exit.

"We're trying to get it back, by the way. Okay, that could be a little breaking news. We're trying to get it back, because they [the Taliban] need things from us. We want that base back, but one of the reasons we want the base is, as you know, it is an hour away from where China makes its nuclear weapons," Mr. Trump said.

Agence France-Presse  
CHEQUERS

Donald Trump hailed America's "unbreakable bond" with Britain on Thursday as he and Prime Minister Keir Starmer signed a huge tech deal on the second day of the U.S. President's pomp-filled state visit.

A day after King Charles III treated Mr. Trump to a day of royal pageantry at Windsor Castle, Mr. Trump flew to Mr. Starmer's Chequers country residence for talks on thorny issues,



Friendly ties: Donald Trump, Keir Starmer during a joint press conference at Chequers near Aylesbury, England on Thursday. AP

including the wars in Ukraine and Gaza.

But Britain's work in wooing the unpredictable Mr. Trump on his second

tum computing and nuclear energy.

At the signing ceremony attended by a host of U.S. tech CEOs, Labour leader Starmer said he and Republican Trump were "leaders who genuinely like each other". "It is the biggest investment package of its kind in British history by a country mile," he added. The deal comes on the back of pledges of £150 billion (\$205 billion) of investment into the U.K. from U.S. giants including Microsoft, Google and Blackstone.

## UN Security Council to vote on Iran sanctions

Agence France-Presse  
UNITED NATIONS

The UN Security Council will vote on Friday on whether to reimpose sanctions on Iran over its nuclear program, the Council's rotating presidency said, after Britain, France, Germany triggered vote.

Sources expect that the resolution will not have the nine positive votes needed to uphold the status quo and as such the punishment will be reimposed.



Conservationist Harry Wong installs an artificial nest box for wild yellow-crested cockatoos in Victoria Park. AP

## Wild cockatoos find a city sanctuary in Hong Kong

Associated Press  
HONG KONG

Critically endangered yellow-crested cockatoos found an unexpected sanctuary among Hong Kong's towering skyscrapers, but like their human neighbours they now face trouble finding a place to call home.

Native to Indonesia and East Timor, the snow-white birds, their crests flashing like yellow crowns, squawk through the urban parks of the Asian financial hub. They make up roughly 10% of the species' global wild population, which numbers only up to 2,000 mature birds.

Research shows the city's cockatoo population has stagnated as the birds, which live in tree cavities, are losing natural nesting spaces in old trees due to typhoons and government tree trimming for public safety.

That's adding to global pressures on cockatoos such as the illegal pet trade and climate change. Hong Kong's conservationists have stepped in with a solution – installing artificial nest boxes that mimic these natural hollows.

Astrid Andersson, a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Hong Kong who led the project, said a pair of birds already settled in a nest box her team fixed onto a tree on her campus, the city's oldest university. She aims to install 10 boxes by year's end and ultimately boost that figure to 50 in the next few years across Hong Kong Island. "And then they can continue to live in the city," she said.

Once widespread across island chains from central to eastern Indonesia and East Timor, the yellow-crested cockatoo has vanished from many islands and clings to survival on others.

Climate change is making things worse. Rising temperatures dry out forests, leaving them more vulnerable to fires.

# France erupts in protest over Macron's proposed fund cuts in public services

Labour unions call for strikes and demonstrations; protesters at nationwide 'Block Everything' campaign voice anger about mounting poverty and sharpening inequality; police deployed in large numbers; 94 arrests made by midday; strikes affect schools, transport and other important sectors

Associated Press  
PARIS

Protesters hit France with transport strikes, notably hobbling the Paris Metro, demonstrations, traffic slowdowns and blockades on Thursday, pitting the power of the streets against President Emmanuel Macron's government and its proposals to cut funding for public services that underpin the French way of life.

The first whiffs of police tear gas came before daybreak, with scuffles between riot officers and protesters in Paris. Nationwide demonstrations, from France's biggest cities to small towns, were expected to mobilise hundreds of thousands of marchers, voicing anger about mounting poverty, sharpening inequality and struggles for low-paid workers and others to make ends meet.

"We say 'no' to the government. We've had enough. There's no more money, a high cost of living," striking transport worker Nadia Belhoum said at a before-dawn protest targeting a Paris bus depot.

Labour unions that called strikes are pushing for the abandonment of proposed budget cuts, social welfare freezes and other belt-tightening that opponents contend will



Voicing dissent: Demonstrators who are part of the 'Bloquons Tout (Block everything)' movement face a police cordon in Toulouse, southwestern France on Thursday. AFP

further hit the pockets of low-paid, middle-class workers and which triggered the collapse of successive governments that sought to push through savings.

Opponents of Mr. Macron's business-friendly leadership complain that taxpayer-funded public services – free schools and public hospitals, subsidised health care, unemployment benefits and other safety nets that are cherished in France – are being eroded. Left-wing parties and their supporters want the wealthy and businesses to pay more, rather than see spending cuts to plug holes in France's finances and to rein in its debts.

"Public service is falling apart," said teacher Clau-

dia Nunez. "It's always the same people who pay."

The day of upheaval – with strikes also impacting schools, industry and other sectors of the European Union's second-largest economy – aimed to turn up the heat on new Prime Minister Sébastien Lecornu. Mr. Macron appointed him last week, tasking Mr. Lecornu with building parliamentary support for belt-tightening that brought down his predecessors.

"Bringing in Lecornu doesn't change anything – he's just another man in a suit who will follow Macron's line," said 22-year-old student Juliette Martin.

"We want our voices heard. People my age feel like no one in politics is speaking for us," she said.

"It's always our generation that ends up with the insecurity and the debt."

Unions have decried budget proposals by Mr. Macron's minority governments, weakened by their lack of a dependable majority in Parliament, as brutal and punitive for workers, retirees and others who are vulnerable.

"The bourgeoisie of this country have been gorging themselves, they don't even know what to do with their money anymore. So if there is indeed a crisis, the question is who should pay for it," said Fabien Ville-dieu, a leader of the SUD-Rail train workers union.

"We are asking that the government's austerity plan that consists of making the poorest in this country always pay –

whether they are employees, retirees, students – ends and that we make the richest in this country pay."

Striking rail workers waving flares made a brief foray into the Paris headquarters of the Economics Ministry, leaving trails of smoke in the air before leaving.

Mr. Macron's opponents also continue to denounce unpopular pension reforms that he railroaded through Parliament and which raised the minimum retirement age from 62 to 64, triggering a firestorm of anger and rounds of protest earlier in what is his second and last term as President, which ends in 2027.

The government said it was deploying police in exceptionally large numbers – about 80,000 in all – to keep order. Police were ordered to break up traffic blockades and other efforts to prevent people who weren't protesting from going about their business. The Paris Police used tear gas to disperse a before-dawn blockade of a bus depot. French broadcasters also reported sporadic clashes in the cities of Nantes, in the west, and Lyon in the southeast, with volleys of police tear gas and projectiles targeting officers.

The Interior Ministry reported 94 arrests nationwide by midday.

"Every time there's a protest, it feels like daily life is held hostage," said office worker Nathalie Laurent, grappling with disruptions on the Paris Metro during her morning commute.

The Paris Metro operator said rush-hour services suffered fewer disruptions than anticipated but that traffic largely stopped outside those hours except on three driverless automated lines.

French national rail company SNCF said "a few disruptions" were expected on high-speed trains to France and Europe, but most will run.

Regional rail lines, as well as the Paris Metro and commuter trains, will be more severely impacted.

In airports, only few disruptions are anticipated as the main air traffic controllers union decided to postpone its call for a strike pending the appointment of a new Cabinet.

Last week, a day of anti-government action across France saw streets choked with smoke, barricades in flames and volleys of tear gas as protesters denounced budget cuts and political turmoil.

Although falling short of its self-declared intention of total disruption, the "Block Everything" campaign still managed to paralyse parts of daily life and ignite hundreds of hot spots across the country.

## Jimmy Kimmel show yanked after govt. pressure over Kirk comments

Agence France-Presse  
UNITED STATES

Jimmy Kimmel's late-night show was pulled from the air on Wednesday, hours after the U.S. government threatened to cancel broadcasting licences because of comments the host made about the killing of conservative influencer Charlie Kirk.

The move by network ABC to remove one of America's most influential late-night shows was blasted by critics as government censorship but celebrated by Donald Trump. "Great News for America," he posted on Truth Social.

In Hollywood, where Mr. Kimmel's show is recorded, audience members were turned away at the door before taping began Wednesday. Tommy Williams, a longshoreman



People demonstrate outside the El Capitan Entertainment Centre, where 'Jimmy Kimmel Live!' is recorded for broadcast. REUTERS

from Florida, said the move felt un-American.

"Any show that's on TV that speaks out against Donald Trump, he's trying to shut down," the 51-year-old said. "We are supposed to have free speech in this country, and this is not free speech. He didn't say anything wrong," said Sherri Mowbray, a San Francisco resident.

The furor comes a week after Kirk, a close Trump ally, was shot dead on a Utah university campus, setting off a bitter battle over responsibility in deeply polarised America, with conservatives – including Mr. Trump – blaming "the radical left." Authorities said this week that 22-year-old Tyler Robinson was the lone gunman and brought

a murder charge against him.

Mr. Kimmel spoke about the shooting in his show-opening monologue on Monday. "The MAGA gang [is] desperately trying to characterise this kid who murdered Charlie Kirk as anything other than one of them and [doing] everything they can to score political points from it," said Mr. Kimmel.

He then showed footage of Mr. Trump pivoting from a question about how he had been affected by Kirk's death to boasting about the new ballroom he is building at the White House, prompting laughter from the studio audience.

"This is not how an adult grieves the murder of somebody called a friend. This is how a four-year-old mourns a goldfish," Mr. Kimmel said.

## Childhood interrupted



Fleeing chaos: Children bathe at a makeshift shelter for people displaced by gang violence in Port-au-Prince, Haiti on Wednesday. AP

## In east Ukraine, rival Orthodox churches battle for influence among believers

Agence France-Presse  
KRAMATORSK

Near bloody battles between Ukrainian and Russian forces in east Ukraine, a very different kind of conflict is taking place – a battle for believers' souls.

Two rival Orthodox churches – one set up with Ukrainian government backing in 2018 and the other an older church tied to Moscow – compete for followers in Kramatorsk, some 20 kilometres (12 miles) from the front line.

Kyiv has sought to ban the Moscow-linked Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), arguing Russia has used it to spread influence, and accusing many of its

priests of being Russian agents.

Most Ukrainians have switched to the newly created Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU). But some in the east – typically older, Russian-speaking parishioners – are hesitant.

In a narrow wooden chapel made partly of chipboard, Archbishop Oleksandr Tkachuk of the Kyiv-backed OCU gave an impassioned homily to his congregation, just a handful of people.

Built in 2019, his church has fewer followers and has struggled to expand its flock. Mr. Tkachuk is convinced his rival, the UOC, is an arm of Russia. "It's just

the FSB [Russian intelligence agency] under the guise of the church," he said, packing up his altar.

Russia's 2022 invasion prompted many Ukrainians to cut ties with anything associated with Moscow. Last year, 56% of the population said they belonged to the newer OCU and 6% to the Moscow-linked UOC, compared to 34% and 15% respectively in 2020.

But in Kramatorsk, most in the church pews are elderly, often nostalgic for the Soviet era, when many earned good salaries in the region's coal mines.

Mr. Tkachuk, who is pro-European, stands out in his home town. He



People attend a service at Holy Trinity Cathedral of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate in Kramatorsk. AFP

sports a T-shirt and is clean shaven – in stark contrast to the typical long hair and beards worn by most priests of the other church.

"I want to put up pews like the Catholics. What's all this about standing for hours?" he said, echoing

the recommendations of his church leader, Epiphanius, who supports reforms. His parishioners were also hostile towards their rival.

"We pray to Epiphanius, not Onufriy," said 63-year-old Mykola, referring to the

head of the Moscow-backed UOC. In July, Kyiv accused Metropolitan Onufriy of having acquired Russian citizenship, despite the cleric condemning Russia's church for backing the invasion.

Mr. Mykola's son was killed in Ukraine's pro-European 2014 revolution. His village, Novopavlika, was razed by Russian bombs in 2023. "All of Kramatorsk attend Russian churches," he vented, demanding they be closed.

### 'Holy war'

Since the invasion, Ukrainian authorities have launched criminal proceedings against 180 UOC priests, usually on suspi-

cion of being Russian agents, Ukraine's security service said. The UOC says it has condemned the war, broken ties with the Kremlin and that Kyiv's suggestions otherwise are false.

It says it no longer commemorates the Russian Orthodox Church's Patriarch Kirill, who has called the invasion of Ukraine a "holy war".

But Father Oleg, a Ukrainian military chaplain standing on steps of his preferred church, was not convinced. "Russia is using the Church as a political tool to influence people's minds," he said.

Kramatorsk's Holy Trinity Cathedral – part of the Russian-affiliated church

and built in 1996 – was packed. In one room, a socialist realist-style painting of a muscular Jesus adorned the wall – a sight typical in Soviet-era churches. Ukrainian soldiers came to pray at the cathedral, said 48-year-old Archbishop Sergiy Kapitonko, adding that he prayed for Ukraine. But he refused to ally himself with the new church.

Leaving the cathedral, 22-year-old Roman Salnykov, who came from Kyiv to experience the atmosphere of war in Kramatorsk, said he visited both churches and saw "no major difference". Perhaps the only variety is in the priests themselves?

## TOP PRIORITY

'Will continue to work on batting, but my job is to pick wickets'



You should always work on your batting. But if I play in any team, I will play as a bowler. My job will be to take wickets. It is very important to understand that. Obviously, I will continue to work on my batting — Left-arm wrist-spinner Kuldeep Yadav on his perceived lack of batting ability.

## SUCCESS MANTRA

Don't lose sight of the ball even for a split second: Dilip tells fielders



The challenge in the 'Ring of Fire' is especially on boundary line catches. There is a tendency that you lose sight of the ball for a split second, especially when the ball is travelling through that or coming through it — Indian fielding coach T. Dilip reveals the key to taking high catches at the Dubai International Stadium.

## FILLING POSTS

CAC interviews 15 candidates for BCCI selection committees



BCCI's two-member Cricket Advisory Committee interviewed 15 candidates for seven posts in the senior men's, women's and junior men's selection committees on Thursday. Four candidates were interviewed through videoconferencing for the senior men's post, 10 for senior women's and one for the junior selector's position.

## HARD-FOUGHT

Nitin, Samadi star in Pink Panthers' thrilling win over Bengal Warriorz



Jaipur Pink Panthers posted a narrow 45-41 victory against Bengal Warriorz in a PKL 12 match in Jaipur on Thursday, riding on Super 10s by Nitin Kumar and Ali Samadi. Devank Dalal notched up his seventh straight Super 10 alongside Manprit Pardeep but that wasn't enough for the Warriorz. Puneri Paltan beat U Mumba 40-22.

# Chance for India to test bench strength in clash against Oman

Ahead of the Super Four tie against Pakistan, the Men in Blue have an opportunity to try out Arshdeep, Harshit, Jitesh and Rinku



Gearing up: The Suryakumar-led team training with intensity ahead of the Oman match. ©BCCI

## ASIA CUP

Vivek Krishnan  
DUBAI

It is approximately a 130-kilometre stretch over 90 minutes that will take the Indian team from its hotel in Dubai to the Sheikh Zayed Cricket Stadium in Abu Dhabi for the Group-A encounter against Oman in the Asia Cup on Friday. If India's nine-wicket victory in its opening game against the United Arab Emirates, which lasted all of 17.4 overs, is an indication, the journey to the venue may be as arduous as it gets for the in-form Suryakumar Yadav-led outfit in the inconsequential fixture.

The Men in Blue, who qualified for the Super Four phase with resounding wins over the UAE and Pakistan, are far too superior to the team from the Middle East to expect anything less than another facile triumph in the penultimate match of the preliminary phase. This will be the first meeting between the two nations.

So far in the tournament, the Indians haven't hit a false note. In their first match, they bundled out the UAE for 57 and raced home in less than five overs. Pakistan was expected

## Today's match



Abu Dhabi, 8 p.m. IST  
HEAD-TO-HEAD T20is  
First Meeting  
LIVE ON SONY SPORTS TEN 5 (SD & HD) & LIV

to offer a more rigid examination, but India's bowlers produced another stellar showing, restricting the arch-rival to 127 for nine to clinch a seven-wicket rout.

Before the Super Four phase gets underway for India with another high-stakes outing against Pakistan on Sunday, this is an opportunity to give some of its players on the bench a run out. Arshdeep Singh, Harshit Rana, Jitesh Sharma and Rinku Singh have had to bide their time on the sidelines in the first two games. Arshdeep, in particular, must be chomping at the bit for a chance, given he also spent the entirety of the five-Test series in England as a substitute. The left-arm pacer, one shy of 100 wickets in T20is, is India's highest wicket-taker in the format, but the team balance on these spin-friendly surfaces has not merited more than the lone specialist quick in Jasprit Bumrah.

"These pitches have

been very helpful for spin. During the Champions Trophy, the surfaces were slow. But now, there is a lot more bounce and zip off the surface," left-arm wrist-spinner Kuldeep Yadav said on Thursday.

Before the Oman players rub shoulders with some of the best in the business, they should be buoyed by coach Duleep Mendis' message. "You can perform over and over again with the small countries. But you will not be known. If you have one or two big performances against good sides, then you are recognised. This type of opportunity, they will never get," Mendis told *The Hindu* on Wednesday.

## The teams (from):

**India:** Suryakumar Yadav (Capt.), Shubman Gill, Abhishek Sharma, Tilak Varma, Hardik Pandya, Sanju Samson (wk), Shivam Dube, Axar Patel, Jitesh Sharma (wk), Jasprit Bumrah, Arshdeep Singh, Varun Chakaravarty, Kuldeep Yadav, Harshit Rana, Rinku Singh.

**Oman:** Jatinder Singh (Capt.), Aamir Kaleem, Hammad Mirza (wk), Vinayak Shukla (wk), Sufyan Yousaf (wk), Mohammad Nadeem, Nadeem Khan, Karan Sonavale, Hassnain Shah, Shakeel Ahmed, Samay Shrivastava, Sufyan Mehmood, Aryan Bisht, Mohammed Imran, Ashish Odedara, Jiten Ramanandi, Shah Faisal, Zikria Islam.

# There was clarity from Gambhir on omission in England: Kuldeep

Vivek Krishnan  
DUBAI

All through India's recent five-Test tour of England spanning six weeks, there was clamour for Kuldeep Yadav to unfurl his left-arm wrist-spin on surfaces that were drier than usual. But India's insistence on having batting till No. 8 meant that the 30-year-old had to settle for ferrying drinks.

A frustrating period it must have been, but Kuldeep has responded in the Asia Cup: by scalping seven wickets in two matches and winning consecutive Player-of-the-Match awards. On the eve of India's Group-A match against Oman, Kuldeep reflected candidly on the tough time in England.

"Challenges are there. But in England, seeing the

conditions and the team combination, I didn't get a place," he said.

Kuldeep said there was clear messaging from head coach Gautam Gambhir over his repeated exclusion. "There were 3-4 matches where I felt I could play, but unfortunately I couldn't. The team needed batting depth. The communication was very clear from Gambhir."

# Lankans knock Afghans out; Bangladesh through

Press Trust of India  
ABU DHABI

Opener Kusal Mendis blazed away to an unbeaten 52-ball 74 as Sri Lanka defeated Afghanistan by six wickets in its last group league match to qualify for the Asia Cup Super Fours along with Bangladesh here on Thursday.

Afghanistan was eliminated from the tournament following the result.

Batting first, Afghanistan rode on Mohammed Nabi's 22-ball 60 to post 169 for eight.

Nabi hammered five sixes in the 20th over bowled by left-arm spinner Dunith Wellalage.

**The scores:** Afghanistan 169/8 in 20 overs (Mohammad Nabi 60, Nuwan Thushara 4/18) lost to Sri Lanka 171/4 in 18.4 overs (Kusal Mendis 74 n.o.).

**Toss:** Afghanistan.

**PoM:** Kusal Mendis.

## Points table

GROUP A	M	W	L	Pts	NRR
India (Q)	2	2	0	4	4.793
Pakistan (Q)	3	2	1	4	1.790
UAE	3	1	2	2	-1.984
Oman	2	0	2	0	-3.375
GROUP B					
Sri Lanka (Q)	3	3	0	6	1.278
Bangladesh (Q)	3	2	1	4	-0.270
Afghanistan	3	1	2	2	1.241
Hong Kong	3	0	3	0	-2.151

Q: Qualified

## SUPER 4s SCHEDULE

Sept. 20	Sri Lanka vs Bangladesh	Dubai
Sept. 21	India vs Pakistan	Dubai
Sept. 23	Pakistan vs Sri Lanka	Abu Dhabi
Sept. 24	India vs Bangladesh	Dubai
Sept. 25	Pakistan vs Bangladesh	Dubai
Sept. 26	India vs Sri Lanka	Dubai

All matches start at 8 p.m. IST

# Kranti adds cutting edge to the Indian bowling attack

P.K. Ajith Kumar  
NEW DELHI

Kranti Goud adds more teeth to the Indian attack. She looks the real deal in pace bowling. Someone the Women in Blue have badly needed for some time now.

The 22-year-old on Wednesday night took three wickets to play an important role in India's remarkable 102-run victory against Australia in the second ODI at New Chandigarh. She sent back the Australian captain Alyssa Healy early and then came back to mop up the tail.

Kranti had taken the wicket of the dangerous Healy in the first ODI on the same ground as well. She proved a worthy foil to Renuka Singh, who has made a welcome return from injury. The new ball now holds promise for the co-host at the World Cup, starting on September 30.

Kranti, who could move the ball at good pace, had hit headlines when she took six wickets in India's 13-run win against England in the third ODI at Chester-le-Street a couple of months ago.

It hasn't taken the Madhya Pradesh bowler long to establish herself in the team; she had made her international debut only in May.

Shortly after helping India score what was its first



Kranti has been impressive. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

win against Australia at home in 18 years, Kranti said her focus was to bowl to her strengths.

"I keep it simple," she said. "When I talk to the coach, he just tells me to bowl to my strengths. If I do that, I believe it becomes tougher for the batter."

Kranti said she enjoyed watching Smriti Mandhana make a century (117 off 91 balls).

The opener's 12th ODI hundred ensured India had enough runs on the board to pose questions even to Australia's star-studded batting line-up.

"Everyone is crazy about her batting," Kranti said. "When Smriti bats, the whole stadium chants her name. Now we are focusing on the final match in the series."

It will be played here on Saturday.

# Why Pakistan did not proceed with the pullout threat

Vivek Krishnan  
DUBAI

When Pakistan stayed put in its team hotel until an hour before the scheduled start of the Asia Cup contest against the UAE here on Wednesday, it seemed plausible that Salman Agha's men would go ahead with their threat of pulling out of the tournament over its demand for match referee Andy Pycroft to be removed.

Eventually, however, Pakistan's players and support staff did make their way to the stadium despite the Zimbabwean staying on in his officiating role.

The Pakistan Cricket Board later said in a statement on X that the 69-year-old had apologised for prohibiting captains Salman Agha and Suryakumar Yadav from shaking hands at the time of the toss in Sunday's encounter against India.

Even though Pakistan's initial demand of removing Pycroft from the remainder of the tournament was not met, the fact that it did not follow through on its pullout threat is a result of the serious financial ramifi-



Better sense prevails: After much suspense, the Pakistan team made its way to the middle for the match against the UAE. ANI

cations it would have faced.

As per estimates, the PCB could have had to let go of revenue anywhere between \$10 million and \$15 million in case of withdrawal from the tournament.

In November last year, Sony had won the media rights for the Asia Cup for the 2024-31 cycle for a base price of \$170 million. With the five full-member nations entitled to 15% of the total revenue pool each, it is safe to say Pakistan's projected earnings for this year would have taken a massive hit.

Besides, the risk of fi-

nancial sanctions from the Asian Cricket Council, owing to pressure from the broadcaster and other member boards, loomed large. These factors played a part in Pakistan turning up.

In a late development on Thursday, the ICC sent an email to the PCB for breaches of rules of the Players Match Officials Area (PMOA) ahead of the UAE game. The global body is said to be contemplating action, with the main contention being Pakistan shooting and posting a video of Pycroft in discussion with a few of its members in the PMOA.

# Jurel, Padikkal lead strong India-A reply

## AUS-A IN INDIA

Sahil Mathur  
LUCKNOW

If Australia-A's innings was constructed around power-hitting, India-A's reply was built on textbook strokes spread across the Ekana Cricket Stadium on day three of the first 'Test' on Thursday.

Dhruv Jurel showcased his willingness to take on bowlers. Devdutt Padikkal was composed, while B. Sai Sudharsan impressed with his silken wrists as the hosts ended on 403 for four, 129 behind Australia-A's first innings score of 532 for six declared.

Vice-captain Jurel and Padikkal added 181 for the unbroken fifth wicket.

Jurel signalled his intent against Corey Rocchiccioli, lofting him over midwicket and later pulling for four. Strong in defence, he shifted gears effortlessly, striking two sixes and a late cut

to reach fifty in 55 balls. He maintained the tempo to bring up his hundred in 115 balls, hitting 10 fours and four sixes.

Padikkal played the anchor's role and broke free with a lofted drive over cover to raise his half-century off 117 balls. The pair cashed in on the hardness of the second new ball, driving and flicking confidently into the stumps after captain Shreyas Iyer's early exit.

Sai Sudharsan was unflappable. He left the short ball alone and punished Xavier Bartlett's fuller deliveries, driving him straight. His fluent 73 off 124 ended unexpectedly, leg-before attempting a reverse sweep against Cooper Connolly. His knock, however, laid the platform for Jurel and Padikkal.

**The scores:** Australia-A 532/6 decl. vs India-A 403/4 in 103 overs (Abhimanyu Easwaran 44, N. Jagadeesan 64, Sai Sudharsan 73, Devdutt Padikkal 86 batting, Dhruv Jurel 113 batting).



Power-packed: Jurel smashed 10 fours and four sixes in his knock.



Antim Panghal. FILE PHOTO

# Antim wins bronze, opens India's tally

## Sports Bureau

Antim Panghal (53kg) redeemed some pride after her ignominious Paris Olympics performance as she claimed a bronze medal at the World wrestling championships in Zagreb on Thursday and joined Vinesh Phogat in winning two Worlds bronze medals.

The 21-year-old defeated Sweden's Olympian Emma Jonna Malmgren 9-1 and earned India its first medal in this edition.

Antim led 3-0 at the break and defended well in the second period. Her swift two-pointer and a spectacular throw in closing stages shut out Emma.

Priya Malik (76kg) lost 0-10 to Olympics medalist Milaimys Marin in another bronze-medal bout.

In Greco-Roman, Aman (77kg), who was outclassed 8-0 by Olympic champion Nao Kusaka, progressed to the repechage when the Japanese reached the final.

Anil Mor (55kg), Rahul (82kg) and Sonu (130kg) made early exits.

**IN BRIEF**



**Messi, Miami agree to extend contract beyond 2026: source**

Inter Miami and Lionel Messi have agreed to extend the Argentine's contract to remain in MLS beyond next year's World Cup, according to a source close to the club. The contract extension would ensure that the 38-year-old remains in competitive action until and after the 2026 World Cup hosted by the USA, Canada and Mexico. An official announcement is expected within the next two weeks, said the source, and could mean Messi ending his career in the MLS.

**FC Goa loses to Iraq's Al Zawraa in AFC CL 2**

FC Goa fought hard but suffered a 0-2 defeat at the hands of Iraq's Al Zawraa SC in their AFC Champions League Two Group-D match in Margao on Wednesday. The match saw plenty of goalmouth action but, in the end, strikes from Reziq Banihani (44th minute) and Nizar Alrashdan (90+5) saw Al Zawraa take the points on the road. A lapse in concentration early on nearly cost Goa as Mahdi Humaidan intercepted a back pass and surged into the box before passing to Mohammed Qasim, who saw his effort crash against the bar.

**Adil Kalyanpur loses in the doubles quarterfinals**

Adil Kalyanpur and Robin Bertrand of France lost 2-6, 4-6 to Trey Hilderbrand and Mac Kiger in the doubles quarterfinals of the €181,250 Challenger tennis tournament in Saint-Tropez (France).

**Other results: \$15,000 ITF men, Monastir: Doubles:** Quarterfinals: Oliver Johansson (Swe) & Anton Shepp (Nzl) bt Manas Dhamne & Jaishnav Shinde 2-0 (retired); Jesse Flores (CRC) & Haoyuan Huang (Chn) w/o Chirag Duhan & Ewen Lumsden (GBR).

**\$15,000 ITF women, Heraklion (Greece): Pre-quarterfinals:** Fanny Norin (Swe) bt Tanisha Kashyap 6-4, 6-3.

**\$15,000 ITF women, Hurghada (Egypt): First round:** Mariam Atia (Egy) bt Ashmitha Easwaramurthi 6-1, 6-0; **Doubles: Quarterfinals:** Saoirse Breen (Fij) & Ashmitha Easwaramurthi w.o. Justine Bretznacher & Louna Zoppas (Fra).

**Sachin finishes fourth; Neeraj disappoints**

Debutant uncorks an 86.27m personal best effort while the defending champion ends up eighth after failing to cross the 85m mark

**ATHLETICS**

**Agencies**  
TOKYO

Defending champion Neeraj Chopra endured a nightmarish outing at the World Championships' men's javelin throw final to end a disappointing eighth even as debutant compatriot Sachin Yadav logged in a personal best to finish a creditable fourth here on Thursday.

On a day when no thrower managed to cross 90m, Neeraj was ousted after the fifth and penultimate round, which he fouled, with a best effort of 84.03m that left him eighth overall at the venue where he won a history-making Olympic gold back in 2021.

Known for his consistency, it was inexplicable for Neeraj not to even cross the 85m mark in five attempts.

Before Thursday, his worst was 82.27m while winning gold at the Federation Cup in May 2024.

The last time Neeraj had finished outside of the top two in a major athletics event final was in June 2021 at the Kuortane Games in Finland where he came third.

**Weber, Nadeem flop** Sachin's 86.27m, which came in the very first attempt, was a personal best performance and he bested not just Neeraj but also German star Julian Weber (86.11m, fifth) and Olympic champion Arshad Nadeem (82.75m, 10th) among others.

The gold went Keshorn Walcott (88.16m) of Trinidad and Tobago, followed Grenada's Anderson Peters (87.38m) and Curtis Thompson (86.67m).

Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone ran the second fastest time ever to win gold in the women's 400 metres. The 26-year-old American clocked 47.78s to smash the previous championship record of 47.99s set by Jarmila Kratochvilova of then-Czechoslovakia in 1983.

Botswana's 21-year-old Busang Collen Kebinatshipi won the men's event.

Cuba's Leyanis Perez Hernandez took the women's triple jump while Yulimar Rojas, winner of the last four World titles, claimed a remarkable bronze in her first competition for two years.



So near, yet... Sachin missed out on the bronze medal by 40 centimetres. AFP

**Van Dijk snatches Liverpool's thrilling victory; PSG starts title defence in style**

**CHAMPIONS LEAGUE**

**Agence France-Presse**  
PARIS

Virgil van Dijk scored a dramatic late winner to grab Liverpool a 3-2 Champions League victory over Atletico Madrid, while Paris Saint-Germain kicked off its title defence by thrashing Atalanta on Wednesday.

Harry Kane scored twice as Bayern Munich downed Club World Cup winner Chelsea 3-1 as Pafos and Bodo/Glimt marked their Champions League debuts with draws.

Liverpool raced into a two-goal lead inside the first six minutes as Atletico



Another late strike: Van Dijk nods home Liverpool's winner against Atletico. AFP

struggled to get out of its own half on Merseyside.

But Atletico eased itself into the game and halved the deficit in first-half injury time. Marcos Llorente stabbed the ball beyond a diving Alisson Becker from the edge of the box. Liver-

pool missed several chances to restore its advantage, including a glaring miss from Salah when he struck the post, and Llorente made it pay with a deflected late volley to draw Diego Simeone's men level.

But skipper Van Dijk produced the big moment with an excellent header from Dominik Szoboszlai's corner in the 92nd minute.

PSG got its campaign off to a flying start with a 4-0 win over Atalanta in Paris.

Bayern gave itself an early two-goal lead against Chelsea.

**The results:** Olympiakos 0 drew with Pafos 0; Slavia Prague 2 (Mbodji 23, 74) drew with Bodo/Glimt 2 (Bassi 78, Brunstad Fet 90). Ajax 0 lost to Inter Milan 2 (Thuram 42, 47); Bayern Munich 3 (Chalobah 20-og, Kane 27-pen, 63) bt Chelsea 1 (Palmer 29). Liverpool 3 (Robertson 4, Salah 6, Van Dijk 90+2) bt Atletico Madrid 2 (Llorente 45+3, 81); PSG 4 (Marquinhos 3, Kvaratskhelia 39, Mendes 51, Ramos 90+1) bt Atalanta 0.

**Sindhu, Satwik-Chirag enter quarterfinals**

**BADMINTON**

**Press Trust of India**  
SHENZHEN

Shuttler P.V. Sindhu and the men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty sailed into the quarterfinals of the China Masters badminton with straight-game wins here on Thursday.

Sindhu took just 41 minutes to get the better of sixth seed Pornpawee Chochuwong of Thailand 21-15, 21-15 while the pair of Satwik and Chirag, who recently reached the Hong Kong Open final, aced the Taiwan duo of Hsiang Chieh Chiu and Wang Chi-Lin 21-13, 21-12 in 32

minutes.

Sindhu, ranked 14th, improved her head-to-head record against the Thai shuttler to 6-5.

Sindhu will meet top seed An Se Young of Korea in the quarterfinals. An Se edged past Mia Blichfeldt of Denmark 23-21, 21-14.

Eighth seeded Satwik and Chirag, who recently broke a string of early losses to make the Hong Kong Open final, beat the lower-ranked Taiwan pair for the second time this year.

**The results (second round): Women:** P.V. Sindhu bt Pornpawee Chochuwong (Tha) 21-15, 21-15. **Men: Doubles:** Satwiksairaj Rankireddy & Chirag Shetty bt Hsiang Chieh Chiu & Wang Chi-Lin (Tpe) 21-13, 21-12.

**Archery joins list of sporting leagues with APL**

**Uthra Ganesan**  
NEW DELHI

Some of the top Indian and foreign archers were among the 48 players drafted into six franchises as the inaugural edition of the Archery Premier League (APL) was launched here on Thursday.

The competition will be held from October 2-12 in a double round-robin format at the Yamuna Sports Complex followed by semifinals and final. With eight archers per team - four men and women each - including two foreigners, the Archery Association of India is hoping to make the sport more viewer-friendly with tweaks in format and presentation.

Top Indians, including Deepika Kumari and Dhiraj Bommadevara, will be the main draws in recurve while Jyothi Surekha and Rishabh Yadav are the top-ranked Indians in compound. Among the foreign participants will be World No. ones Andrea Becerra (Mex) and Mike Schloesser (Ned) in compound and Brady Ellison (USA) in re-



At the launch: Jyothi Surekha, second from left, and Rishabh Yadav, fifth from left, along with the other Indian archers and AAI officials. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

curve. Powerhouse South Korea, however, has decided to skip the event.

"For the first time we will have combined mixed teams of recurve and compound archers competing together. The shooting distances will be Olympic standard - 70m for recurve, 50m for compound - and we will be holding three matches every day under lights. Each match with four archers each will last 20 minutes with the shooting time reduced to 15 seconds," APL Director

Anil Kamineni explained.

**The teams: Prithviraj Yodhas (Delhi): Recurve:** Matias Grande, Krish Kumar, Gatha Anandrapo, Sharvari Somnath; **Compound:** Abhishek Verma, Priyansh, Andrea Becerra, Pranjal Salve; **Rajputana Royals (Rajasthan): Recurve:** Mete Gazoz, Sachin Gupta, Ankita Bhakat, Basanti Mahato; **Compound:** Prathamesh Fuge, Ojas Deotale, Ella Gibson, Swati Dudhwal; **Kakatiya Knights (Telangana): Recurve:** Neeraj Chauhan, Rohit Kumar, Elia Canales, Tisha Punia. **Compound:** Nico Wiener, Jignas, Jyothi Surekha Vennam, Avneet Kaur.

**Mighty Marathas (Maharashtra): Recurve:** Dhiraj Bommadevara, Mrinal Chauhan, Alejandra Valencia, Bhajan Kaur; **Compound:** Mike Schloesser, Aman Saini, Parmeet Kaur, Madhura D.

**Chero Archers (Jharkhand): Recurve:** Rahul, Ata nu Das, Katharina Bauer, Kunkum Mohod. **Compound:** Mathias Fullerton, Sahil Rajesh, Prithika Pradeep, Madala Hamsini. **Chola Chiefs (Tamil Nadu): Recurve:** Brady Ellison, Tarundeep Rai, Deepika Kumari, Anshika Kumari; **Compound:** Rishabh Yadav, Pulkit, Meeri-Marita Paas, Taniparthi Chikitha.

**Vidarsa tops in women's rifle 3-position**

**SHOOTING**

**Sports Bureau**

Vidarsa Vinod shot 463.3 and beat Nischal by 2.1 points for the top spot in women's rifle 3-position event in the fifth National shooting selection trials in Bhopal on Thursday.

It was quality fare from Vidarsa as she had done well in qualification earlier with the second best score of 590 out of 600.

Ashi Chouksey climbed to the third spot, after having shot 587 in qualification. Ayushi Podder who topped qualification with 594, placed sixth ahead of Mehuli Ghosh and Priya. Surabhi Bharadwaj and



Top performers: Nischal, topper Vidarsa Vinod and Ashi Chouksey of the women's rifle 3-position category. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Aakriti Dahiya were the others to make the final.

In men's air rifle, Olympian Arjun Babuta topped 2.2 points ahead of Parth Mane, after topping qualification with 632.7.

Vishal Singh placed third ahead of Abhishek Kamthe, Sandeep Singh, Nishan Budha, Shahu Tushar Mane and Dhanush Srikanth. Anish Bhanwala won

the rapid fire pistol event as he beat Neeraj Kumar 35-32. Qualification topper Rajkanwar Singh Sandhu (586) placed third. Udhayveer Sidhu, Omkar Singh and Ankur Goel were the others to enter finals.

World Cup gold medalist Vijayveer Sidhu shot 576 and missed a seat at the final.

**The results: 10m air rifle: Men:** 1. Arjun Babuta 254.4 (632.7); 2. Parth Mane 252.2 (631.1); 3. Vishal Singh 230.2 (630.8).

**25m rapid fire pistol: Men:** 1. Anish Bhanwala 35 (585); 2. Neeraj Kumar 32 (582); 3. Rajkanwar Singh Sandhu 25 (586).

**50m rifle 3-position: Women:** 1. Vidarsa Vinod 463.3 (590); 2. Nischal 461.2 (587); 3. Ashi Chouksey 448.9 (587).

**KPMG to solicit views of ISL clubs for AIFF's commercial rights**

**Press Trust of India**  
NEW DELHI

The AIFF has informed all 13 Indian Super League (ISL) clubs that their views will be solicited by consultancy firm KPMG while

preparing tender documents for the rights to monetise the national body's commercial properties following the football governing body's decision on Monday to select KPMG India Services LLP as the

consulting firm to manage the process of monetisation.

The AIFF's move came after the clubs sought representation in the commercial right tender process through a letter on

September 8. According to sources, the idea is to take inputs from the stakeholders as they have invested huge amount of money in the last 10 years. The AIFF is hoping to issue the tender on October 1.

**F1 title rivals Piastri and Norris hope to secure team crown for McLaren**

**Agence France-Presse**  
BAKU

Championship leader Oscar Piastri and Lando Norris resume their world title battle in Azerbaijan this weekend, but could also secure McLaren the constructors' crown.

Having won 12 of the 16 races to date this year between them, Piastri and Norris are already on the brink of wrapping up McLaren's 10th team title with seven races to spare.

But the teammates are also locked in a race for the drivers' world championship, with Piastri leading Norris by 31 points after the Briton cut his lead last

time out in Monza.

Despite Max Verstappen's victory at the high-speed Italian GP, the return to a street circuit where Piastri triumphed last year should enable McLaren to resume normal service. But accidents and incidents are often part of the spectacle in Baku.

Norris can ill-afford another slip-up after retiring from the Dutch Grand Prix last month due to a mechanical failure. McLaren can clinch the constructors' title with a 1-2, which would be its eighth of the season already.

The team could also secure the trophy on Sunday by outscoring Ferrari by

nine points, providing Red Bull or Mercedes do not win and collect a big haul of points. Ferrari's Charles Leclerc is seeking a fifth consecutive pole in Baku.

Despite some signs of improved form for Ferrari, Leclerc has been unable to win in Baku in the past and is without a victory this season, while teammate and Lewis Hamilton is still without a podium finish.

Verstappen, who has proved he can out-perform the potential of his Red Bull car, remains a threat and was buoyed by his Monza victory. "Monza was incredible for us and we made a good step forward with where we want

to be with the set-up of the car," he said. "The win has been a huge boost for everyone and I have been back at the factory this week to celebrate, which has been great, and on the sim to prepare for the next race. Baku is always a bit more of a challenge and you have to find a compromise... I'm hoping we can carry our form into this weekend."

McLaren leads Ferrari by 337 points in the constructors' standings after 16 of the 24 races. A McLaren title triumph would make it the second most successful of all-time behind Ferrari which is expected to be strong in Baku.

# Always late but never too late: Liverpool's early season winners just plain luck or champion mentality?

Ruthless but not clinical would be a fair assessment of the Reds' campaign so far; for all the flair and potency in its attack, the Premier League title-holder is also susceptible to conceding goals



**Teenage hero:** Ngumoha scores Liverpool's 10th minute stoppage time winner against Newcastle. AP

**Sankar Narayanan E.H.**

Is it a good sign that Liverpool is getting the better of its opponents without being at its absolute best? How do you evaluate the side's early season late winners? Is it champion mentality or just the Reds getting the rub of the green?

Whether it be the four last-gasp wins in the Premier League before the theatrical 3-2 victory over Atletico Madrid in their UEFA Champions League opener, Arne Slot's men sure do have a knack for bulging the net in the closing moments.

Liverpool was just getting started with the 11th-hour drama when Federico Chiesa restored the side's lead in the 88th minute in the 4-2 win over AFC Bournemouth.

Ever since Chiesa said it was "better late than never" for him to score his first Premier League goal, it's been always late but never too late for Liverpool.

Rio Ngumoha netted in the 10th minute of stoppage time for a 3-2 win at Newcastle United before Dominik Szoboszlai's 83rd-minute free-kick helped Liverpool beat title-contender Arsenal 1-0 in a cagey affair at home. Interestingly, the Gunners are yet to concede another goal this season apart from that stupendous 32-yard effort from Szoboszlai.

Then Mohamed Salah broke Burnley's hearts by converting from the penalty spot in the fifth minute of added time as Liverpool escaped with a 1-0 win at Turf Moor.

With these results, Liverpool became the first team in Premier League history to win four straight games with the winning goal scored in the final 10 minutes or later.

Coach Slot had an honest take on his team's domestic campaign so far.

"For us to be on 12 points now is so much more than I expected, especially after the changes we made this summer," he said during the pre-match press conference for Liverpool's continental clash against Atletico.

Last but not least, skipper Virgil Van Dijk's precise header in the 92nd minute condemned Diego Simeone's men to a 3-2 loss in a roller-coaster of a contest on Wednesday.

"We need to get back to winning a bit simpler and easier," Liverpool left-back Andy Robertson said after the Champions League game.

"The assistant manager turned to me when Virgil put it in and said he's getting too old for it, so I can't imagine what the fans are like. It's a great thing to have, being able to keep going until the end,

[but] when you're 2-0 up and playing so well in the first half, it should've been a more comfortable night," Robertson added.

And there have been conflicting opinions on what to expect from Liverpool after such a volatile start to the season.

"I'm unsure about Liverpool. They should be mid-table. They've been gifted six points. You could take six points off Liverpool and no one would have argued," football columnist Paul Merson wrote in a *Sky Sports* article published on September 16.

Ruthless but not clinical would be a fair assessment of Liverpool's campaign; the side, however, would certainly be looking at this from a glass-half-full perspective.

## Need some time

As Slot alluded to in his press conference, this Liverpool team is coming off a busy summer transfer window and will need some time for all the hot new signings to settle down.

The fact that the Reds have an unblemished record despite the churning makes things that much easier during the transition period. Points on the board sure do take a load off, even for the defending champion.

"They're settling in this new wave of players like [Florian] Wirtz and [Hugo] Ekitike into the club, and the team is not at its absolute purring best. However, they've got something, and they are winning, and that's really important," former Manchester United defender and football commentator Gary Neville said after Liverpool's victory over Burnley.

"Obviously, you can't keep on winning by playing below your best and

performing like they did today, but they keep on getting over the line; they've demonstrated that in the first few weeks of the season, and they've carried it on after the international break," Neville opined.

Liverpool's run of thrilling triumphs had some football pundits compare the team to Sir Alex Ferguson's Manchester United, and how the famed outfit used to walk away with a win with a last-minute goal or two.

While it is still premature to use 'Fergie Time' and 'Slot Time' in the same vein for the art of finding late winners, Liverpool will do well for itself if it can emulate what Ferguson & Co. pulled off in their prime.

Former Manchester United captain Roy Keane, somebody who very well knows the feeling of coming in clutch when it matters the most, lauded Liverpool's tenacity.

"They keep going. They've got quality players, and they have the desire to win football matches. Liverpool stuck at it, and you have to keep going until the end. That's what the top teams do," Keane told *Sky Sports* after the Burnley game.

Former Crystal Palace striker Clinton Morrison said Liverpool's victories cannot be dismissed as pure luck. "Everyone keeps saying Liverpool leaves it late, but it can't be lucky the number of times they've done it already this season. They've got big players and big characters," Morrison told *Sky Sports' Soccer Special* after Liverpool's victory over Atletico.

These positive takes on Liverpool's prospects may also be coming from the fact that the Reds have been consistently finding the net since Slot took over last season. In fact, the last time Liverpool

failed to score in the Premier League was on September 14, 2024, against Nottingham Forest, and the side has been on a 38-game scoring streak in the league since then.

It's almost as if Liverpool has made legendary Dutch footballer Johan Cruyff's famous quote its motto: "To win, you have to score one more goal than your opponent."

## Egyptian magician Salah

Egyptian magician Salah's role in Liverpool's ascendancy to the Premier League crown last season could not be overstated. He rightly won the Player-of-the-Season award for matching Alan Shearer and Andrew Cole's record for the most direct goal involvements in a league season (47).

The prolific winger, however, has been blowing hot and cold in the 2025-26 campaign. His best performance yet came against Atletico, where he outmuscled and outmanoeuvred three defenders to give the host a two-goal lead in the sixth minute. Liverpool will hope this was a sign of Salah finding his feet ahead of yet another glorious season.

## Matter of intrigue

Record signings Wirtz and Alexander Isak's output was another matter of intrigue, and both players are slowly coming into their own after dealing with their own set of challenges.

While the German attacking midfielder took some time to get used to the rigours of Premier League football, the Swedish forward's troubles were more off the pitch than on it.

Just like Salah, Wirtz found his mojo against Atletico. According to Squawka, no Liverpool player had more touches in the opposition box (seven), created more chances (five) or created more big chances (two) than Wirtz in that Champions League contest.

Liverpool will also be pleased with Isak finally getting some game time after a tumultuous transfer window that saw him miss the crucial pre-season training period. Wirtz and Isak also produced some lovely combination plays on Wednesday, with the best one coming in the 42nd minute through the No. 7's run from midfield to find Isak for a dangerous one-two in front of the Atletico goal.

For all the flair and potency in its attack, Liverpool is also susceptible to conceding goals. Missing out on signing Crystal Palace's Marc Guehi on deadline day has accentuated the side's lack of competition in the centre-back position.

But for now, it's where there's a will, there's a late Liverpool winner!

## THE GIST

The Liverpool team is coming off a busy summer transfer window and will need some time for all the hot new signings to settle down

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**Unlikely star:** Chiesa celebrates after giving the Reds the lead against Bournemouth. AP