

First show of unity after LS polls, Rahul to host Opp dinner meet on August 7

Bihar SIR, V-P polls on agenda; INDIA bloc to hold march to EC on August 8

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 3

IN THEIR first show of unity since the Lok Sabha elections last year, leaders of the Opposition INDIA bloc parties will gather for a dinner meeting on August 7. Hosted by Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi, they plan to chalk out a joint strategy on the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls and discuss fielding a joint candidate for the Vice-Presidential elections scheduled for September 9.

The dinner will be followed by a protest march to the Election Commission's (EC) office in New Delhi the following day. The INDIA bloc parties plan to demonstrate against the Election Commission's ongoing SIR exercise in Bihar that they allege could allow the manipulation of electoral rolls and which, according to them, bypasses the constitutional role of the poll panel.

The Congress has been facing flak from several INDIA bloc leaders for not taking the initiative to keep the alliance together.



Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi

GOVT & POLITICS

BIHAR S.I.R SPARKS CONCERN IN TAMIL NADU, EC SAYS 'ABSURD' TO LINK

EC TAKES ACTION AS ERRORS FLAGGED IN ADDRESSES, NAMES OF RELATIVES [PAGE 5](#)

The top leaders of the coalition had last met for a structured meeting at Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge's home in New Delhi a day after the Lok Sabha election results.

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Letter from Delhi Police refers to Bangla as 'Bangladeshi language', TMC demands apology

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, NEW DELHI, AUGUST 3

A LETTER from Delhi Police to Bangla Bhawan in New Delhi's Chanakypuri, in which Bangla is referred to as "Bangladeshi language", triggered a political row on Sunday with the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) in West Bengal calling it a deliberate attempt to strip a constitutionally recognised Indian language of its identity and demanding an apology.

As Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee targeted the Centre, the BJP hit back, accusing the TMC of shielding illegal Bangladeshi set-

tlers. This comes amid allegations of harassment faced by migrant workers from Bengal in BJP-ruled states on suspicion of being Bangladeshis — an issue highlighted by the Chief Minister at her recent rallies.

The letter dated July 24, written by Inspector Amit Dutt from Lodhi Colony Police Station to Officer-in-charge of Banga Bhawan, requested for a translator to decipher documents seized from suspected Bangladeshi nationals. It said that police needed an interpreter "proficient in Bangladeshi national language" to translate documents for a case involving eight persons "strongly suspected to

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Amid curbs on H1B and student visas, more Indians are lining up for US investment visas

DIVYA A
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 3

"THE TRUMP Card is Coming. Enter your information below to be notified the moment access opens," says the new US government website on the Gold Card, the \$5 million US residency visa programme announced by President Donald Trump in February.

Despite curiosity around the new programme, the launch date and specific details of which are yet to be released, data shows that the existing investment-based residency programme



PM, SHAH SEPARATELY CALL ON PRESIDENT

Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets President Droupadi Murmu at Rashtrapati Bhavan on Sunday. Later, Union Home Minister Amit Shah also called on the President. [REPORT, PAGE 5](#)

Army officer assaults 4 SpiceJet staff in Srinagar, one has spinal fracture

Staff flagged excess baggage; Lt Col claims he was harassed

BASHAARAT MASOOD & AMRITA NAYAK DUTTA
SRINAGAR, NEW DELHI, AUG 3

AN ARMY officer has been booked for allegedly assaulting four members of SpiceJet's staff at Srinagar International Airport.

The airline's staff were allegedly thrashed after they asked the officer, Ritesh Kumar Singh, who was flying out of Srinagar, to pay for extra luggage.

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A videograb of the incident at the Srinagar airport

STATE EDUCATION RETHINK

Reservation, 3rd language Hindi: Maharashtra govt rolls back 7 key decisions in six months

'Adjustments' based on feedback: Minister; experts blame lack of consultation

PALLAVISMART
MUMBAI, AUGUST 3

FROM QUOTAS based on income and caste to Hindi as third language; caste on exam hall tickets to sweet dish in school meals; and even blank pages in textbooks to reduce the weight of school bags.

These are some of the seven key decisions taken in the edu-



Maharashtra School Education Minister Dada Bhuse

cation sector by the BJP-led state government in Maharashtra that were rolled back over the past six months, triggering criticism from experts that they were im-

plemented "without thought" or "adequate consultation".

Six of these decisions were rolled back following a backlash from stakeholders, including the parents of students — for instance, the centralised uniform policy drew criticism for poor quality and delayed availability. In one case, the rollback came after the Bombay High Court granted interim relief to minority trust-run junior colleges that were asked to

implement social reservation.

Of these rollbacks, six came under the School Education Ministry currently headed by Dada Bhuse who took over last December from Deepak Kesarkar (August 2022 to November 2024) — both belong to Shiv Sena led by Eknath Shinde. The other key U-turn involved 10% EWS (Economically Weaker Section) quota in private

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EXPRESS NETWORK



SURVEY PROPOSES STEPS TO PREVENT ELEPHANT DEATHS ON RAIL TRACKS

KOLKATA MAN FOUND DEAD, HIS FAMILY SAYS HE FEARED DEPORTATION

6 CHILDREN AMONG 11 KILLED AS SUV FALLS INTO CANAL IN UP'S GONDA [PAGES 7, 6](#)

AFTER OP SINDOOR

Army overhaul: Drones to be in action at battalion level

Plan gains pace — from integrated brigades to light commando battalions

AMRITA NAYAK DUTTA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 3

THE INDIAN Army is set to undergo a significant organisational overhaul that will include integrating Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) and counter-UAV as standard weapon systems at the battalion level across most of its arms, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

The transformation will also involve establishing light commando battalions, creating integrated brigades, and developing specialised artillery regiments and batteries tailored for future warfare, sources told this newspaper.

These plans, under discussion for several months, have gained pace after Operation Sindoor in May, following the Pahalgam terror attack. Some of the changes will be drawn from lessons obtained during this operation, the sources said.

One of the initiatives is to incorporate UAVs and counter-UAV systems into infantry battalions, as well as armoured and artillery regiments. While current battalions possess drones, they are often utilised as secondary systems in addition to estab-

EXPLAINED
Lessons from May

OP SINDOOR in May revealed the increased use of military drones in new-age operations. Inducting a variety of drones as standard weapons at battalion levels will enable better training, procurement and maintenance.

lished weapons and tasks. As a result, personnel are diverted from primary responsibilities to operate the UAVs.

The new objective is to create a dedicated outfit within each unit that will be tasked primarily with operating drones. Each arm has been directed to draw up a structure that allows a select number of personnel to focus and train on this front, the sources said.

In the infantry, for instance, plans are underway to introduce several surveillance drones at the platoon and company levels.

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THE WORLD

CLASHES IN SYRIA AS GOVT STRUGGLES TO EASE TENSIONS

SIX DIE OF HUNGER IN GAZA, FUEL TRUCKS REACH BORDER [P 10](#)



Intervention by Indian team helped fix key issue before Axiom-4 launch: ISRO chief

ANONNA DUTT
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 3

WEEKS BEFORE it finally took off, the Axiom-4 mission, which carried Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla and three other astronauts to the International Space Station (ISS), was nearly cleared for launch despite a perceived minor oxygen leak — until an ISRO team insisted on further checks that revealed a potentially dangerous crack in the rocket, ISRO Chairperson Dr V Narayanan told *The Indian Express*.

The Axiom-4 mission took off for space from NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida on June 25 after a series of delays since the initial launch date of May 29.



'Mission was key step for ISRO human spaceflight programme'

The first launch was deferred to June 8 due to an electrical issue in the SpaceX Dragon spacecraft — the module where the crew was seated. But on June 8, when the engines were test-fired on ground, an oxygen leak was observed in addition to an anomaly in one of the actuators, used in controlling the direction of the rocket's thrust.

Dr Narayanan told *The Indian Express* that the oxygen leak was

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First AI-powered anganwadi: A rural classroom bridges digital gap

PAGE 1 ANCHOR

ANKITA DESHKAR
NAGPUR, AUGUST 3

MEHER PACHE, 4, can identify a crocodile in a virtual jungle in a jiffy, while Aarzo Prapapati, 3, can draw balloons on the interactive smart board with a flourish that stuns adults.

A quiet learning revolution has been taking place since the past three months at India's first Artificial Intelligence (AI)-powered anganwadi in a village in

Maharashtra's Nagpur district, located around 18 km from the city. Not just their learning, even the number of students aged 2-6 years attending the anganwadi in Waddhamna village regularly has gone up from 10 children earlier to over 25 at present.

Since July, instead of being limited to chalks and slates, the children in this anganwadi have been learning poems, songs and foundational concepts with the help of virtual reality (VR) headsets from Meta (formerly Facebook for Business), AI-enabled interactive smart boards, tablets and other interactive digital content.

This step to redefine early

childhood education was taken by the Nagpur Zilla Parishad, under its pioneering Mission Bal Bharati initiative, which aims to give children from rural areas the same digital access as their urban counterparts.

Inaugurated by Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis on July 27, the project was launched at a cost of nearly Rs 9.5 lakh from the Zilla Parishad's CESS fund.

Of the district's 2,202 anganwadis, including five in the village, the one led by Saroj Kukde, an anganwadi worker at Waddhamna for 14 years, was chosen as the pilot model.



The Waddhamna village anganwadi is equipped with VR headsets, AI-enabled dashboards and tablets. *Ankita Deshkar*

Vinayak Mahamuni, a 2021-batch IAS officer and the Nagpur Zilla Parishad CEO, says, "We chose this particular anganwadi because of its accessibility, the sevika's (Kukde's) enthusiasm and its proximity to other centres for training visits. It also offers a secure environment for safeguarding the equipment."

To ensure transparency, the anganwadi was retrofitted with Wi-Fi-enabled CCTV cameras that can be accessed by key stakeholders, including Mahamuni, his deputy and the Child Development Project Officer (CDPO).

Though the Zilla Parishad ini-

tially faced challenges in finding the right tech partner for the mission, Mahamuni says they eventually roped in Qolaba, a firm working under the Centre's IndiaAI programme.

Stating that the anganwadi was refurbished recently to both meet the new technological requirements and attract more children, Mahamuni says, "These frontline educators (anganwadi workers) were trained to navigate this new world of smart learning to ensure that children even from the remotest of areas get a chance to learn in an engaging and modern environment."

Aware that anganwadi work-

ers already juggle multiple roles — from cooking meals to keeping records — Qolaba structured their training programme as a three-month module to ensure they did not get overwhelmed. Over the past two months, a team from the company started working on a user-friendly system built on the anganwadi workers' familiarity with smartphones.

Trained by Qolaba, Kukde uses 10 VR sets and the interactive smart board for around one hour each day to teach the students, who spend five hours at the anganwadi (from 9.30 am to 2.30 pm) six days a week.

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FROM PAGE ONE

FULL REPORTSON
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

Army overhaul: Drones in action at battalion level

This will require reassigning approximately 70 personnel from various sections and modifying the responsibilities of some others — an infantry unit comprises 36 fighting sections across four companies and other supporting platoons, each managing various tasks and weapons.

Additionally, the Army is raising 30 light commando battalions, called Bhairav, each comprising about 250 personnel. These battalions will be specially trained and deployed in designated areas to enhance strike capabilities with teams trained for specific missions. They will operate under various commands with specific operational roles, and be trained and equipped accordingly.

Sources said multiple infantry regimental centres have been instructed to start raising these battalions, and initial units are expected to be ready for operational deployment within a month.

The Army will also establish Rudra brigades, which will consist of an all-arms brigade along with

UAVs and other logistical elements. This will involve restructuring existing infantry, armoured and artillery brigades, which will allow Rudra brigades to function independently across various sectors as integrated units for future warfare.

Likely to be deployed for conventional and hybrid operations, the logistics and network-centric operations for each such brigade will be tailored to specific missions and operational areas.

For the Regiment of Artillery, establishing two batteries with an increased number of guns each, as well as adding a third drone battery equipped with surveillance and combat drones, are being considered. Currently, each artillery regiment consists of three batteries, each with six guns.

Additionally, Divyasthra artillery batteries are being created with next-generation long-range guns and loitering munitions capable of conducting surveillance and identifying and engaging targets in depth areas. They will be

equipped with anti-drone systems for self-defence and area protection.

Some of these initiatives were announced by Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi on Kargil Vijay Diwas on July 26.

The armoured and mechanized infantry are also undergoing reorganisation.

Currently, there is a reconnaissance platoon responsible for navigating and leading units to their targets alongside three squadrons/ companies in Armoured/Mechanized Infantry battalions. The recon platoons will be enhanced with surveillance and strike drones. Discussions are also underway to have two expanded squadrons/ companies instead of three, converting the third into a drone-based squadron/ company or integrating attack drones as part of tank squadrons.

Plans are also being discussed to modify engineer regiments by introducing a drone section in each company for mine detection,

reconnaissance and area mapping — and bolstering Army Aviation Corps with more UAVs for reconnaissance, surveillance and data collection, thereby reducing the reliance on helicopter hours and pilot effort.

There are also moves to enhance the repair capabilities of Corps of Electronics and Mechanical Engineers (EME) in order to improve drone repair capabilities within corps zone workshops.

Sources said the initiative will increase the demand for specialised and trained manpower. They said the aim is to incorporate drones among other new generation equipment as standard issue items for the combat arms so that they can be procured on a regular basis.

The initiative will also help create a supply chain for procurement, instead of purchases on an ad hoc basis through the special financial powers of top Army brass or as emergency procurement.

● Bangla

be Bangladeshi nationals residing illegally in India".

"Upon inquiry, copies of national ID cards, birth certificates, bank account details etc. were found from these suspected Bangladeshi nationals. The suspected Bangladeshi nationals were arrested and remanded in judicial custody on the order of the honorable court concerned," the letter stated.

Inspector Dutt, the Investigating Officer, wrote that the identification documents contain texts written in "Bangladeshi" and are needed to be translated to Hindi and English. "Now, for the investigation to proceed further, it is requested that an official translator /interpreter proficient in Bangladeshi national language may kindly be provided for the aforesaid purpose," the letter said.

"Emphasis is laid on the fact that the requisite report would be a pivotal piece of evidence for successful prosecution of suspected Bangladeshi nationals facing trial. Expeditious disposal of this letter is desired as the same is required to be submitted before the honorable court in a timed manner. Any bills raised against the translation service shall be payable by the department and a quotation for the same may be communicated before hand," Dutt wrote.

Although senior police officers confirmed that the letter was sent

to Banga Bhawan, an official response from Delhi Police is awaited.

Targeting the Centre and the BJP, the TMC, which posted the letter on its X handle, said in a post: "Is there no limit to @BJP4India's hatred for Bengalis? After repeatedly harassing and detaining Bengali-speaking workers across BJP-ruled states, @AmitShah's @DelhiPolice has now crossed all lines by officially branding our mother tongue, Bangla, as the 'Bangladeshi language'. Make no mistake: this is not a clerical error. It is a calculated insult, an official attempt to strip a constitutionally recognised Indian language of its identity and portray millions of Bengali-speaking Indians as outsiders in their own country."

It demanded an "unconditional apology, immediate correction, and strict action against the officials responsible".

In a post on X, Chief Minister Banerjee said: "See how Delhi Police, under the direct control of Ministry of Home, Government of India is describing Bengali as 'Bangladeshi' language! Bengali, our mother tongue, the language of Rabindranath Tagore and Swami Vivekananda, the language in which our National Anthem and the National Song (the latter by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay) are written, the language in which crores of Indians speak and write, the language which is sanctified and

recognised by the Constitution of India, is now described as a Bangladeshi language!! Scandalous, insulting, anti-national, unconstitutional!! This insults all Bangla-speaking people of India. They cannot use this kind of language which degrades and debases us all."

"We urge immediate strongest possible protests from all against the anti-Bengali Government of India..." she said.

Hitting back, the BJP said in a post on X: "Delhi Police apprehended 8 illegal Bangladeshi nationals and referred to their spoken tongue as the 'Bangladeshi language'. Now TMC is outrageously claiming this is an 'insult to our language'. But here's the irony — their entire outrage is rooted in defending Bangladeshis. What does that have to do with India or Indian Bengalis? Let's get this straight — for TMC, a heavily Urdu-influenced dialect spoken by illegal migrants is now the real Bengali language? Is this what TMC politics has come to — defending foreign nationals while eroding Indian identity?"

State BJP president Shamik Bhattacharya said he saw no mistake on part of Delhi Police in the letter. "The language is absolutely correct... So if someone speaks Bangla, he doesn't become an Indian, it is not like his/her name will have to be included in the voter list if he speaks Bangla, such things will not work anymore..."

● Opp meet

The upcoming meeting is being viewed as a crucial moment that could allow the alliance to regroup.

SP chief Akhilesh Yadav and RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav have confirmed their presence, while TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee is also likely to attend. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and DMK president MK Stalin, who is said to be unwell, may join if his health permits. Leaders from the Shiv Sena (UBT), NCP (SP), JMM, and other INDIA bloc constituents are also expected to attend the meeting.

The SIR has become a glue for the divided INDIA bloc to come together, as they have not let Parliament function on this issue, barring last week's debate on the Pahalgam terror attack and Operation Sindoor and its aftermath.

The Opposition has alleged that the SIR exercise, which is going on in Bihar at present, is unconstitutional and aimed at excluding the poor and the disadvantaged with the aim of

voter manipulation. Since the SIR is now going to be conducted in all states, the Opposition has been demanding a discussion in the House. With Assembly elections due in key Opposition-ruled states such as West Bengal and Tamil Nadu next year, there is a sense of alarm among parties such as the TMC and the DMK about the exercise. The RJD and the Congress are already up in arms against the exercise in Bihar.

While the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has already announced it is no longer part of the INDIA bloc, the TMC, which has not been on good terms with the Congress, said it would attend the meeting. It is an opportunity for the Congress to rally all the parties together once again and shed the criticism that it was not taking the initiative to keep the alliance alive despite being the largest Opposition party.

Sources in the Opposition said it would not allow Parliament to function unless the government agreed to a discussion on SIR. On Friday, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju effectively re-

jected the demand, citing a ruling by former Lok Sabha Speaker Balram Jakhar to argue that the functioning of a constitutional body such as the EC cannot be discussed in Parliament.

The Monsoon Session so far has seen repeated adjournments over the issue, with the Opposition pressing for debate and the government refusing to budge.

The INDIA bloc, which came together last year to present a united front against the BJP, has struggled to project cohesion since the general elections. The alliance appeared divided on several issues, most notably on the Adani-Hindenburg controversy, with some parties choosing not to back the Congress-led charge.

However, the SIR controversy has served as a rallying point, with bloc members seeing in it a larger threat to the sanctity of elections. Leaders of the alliance's constituents hope that the dinner meeting and the protest march will help project renewed unity at a time when questions about the bloc have been growing louder.

● Army officer assaults SpiceJet staff in Srinagar

The incident took place on July 26, and SpiceJet issued a statement on Sunday, saying injuries suffered by their staff members in the "murderous assault" include a spinal fracture.

In a statement, the Army said, "The matter involving an alleged altercation between an Army personnel and airline staff at Srinagar Airport on July 26 has come to the notice of the Indian Army. The Indian Army is committed to upholding the highest standards of discipline and conduct, and takes all allegations seriously. Full cooperation is being extended to the authorities in investigating the case."

When contacted, Singh, a Lieutenant Colonel posted at the High Altitude Warfare School in Kashmir's Gulmarg, said over the phone, "I have no story to tell. The story is that they harassed me and provoked me. That is all."

Elaborating on the incident, a SpiceJet spokesperson said the assault took place at the boarding gate of flight SG-386 from Srinagar to Delhi.

"Our staff members suffered a spinal fracture and serious jaw injuries after being attacked with punches, repeated kicks and a

queue stand. One SpiceJet employee collapsed unconscious on the floor, but the passenger continued kicking and hitting the fainted employee. Another staff member suffered bleeding from the nose and mouth after receiving a forceful kick to the jaw while bending down to assist the colleague who had fainted. The injured employees were rushed to the hospital and remain under treatment for the grievous injuries sustained," the airline said.

CCTV footage of the incident showed the airport staff being assaulted and one of the injured being carried away on a stretcher.

According to SpiceJet, the passenger was carrying two pieces of cabin baggage weighing a total of 16 kg, "more than double the permitted limit of 7 kg." "When politely informed of the excess baggage and asked to pay the applicable charges, the passenger refused and forcefully entered the aerobridge without completing the boarding process — a clear violation of aviation security protocols. He was escorted back to the gate by a CISF official," the spokesperson said. "At the gate, the passenger grew increasingly aggressive and physically as-

saulted four members of the SpiceJet ground staff," the statement said.

Police have filed two FIRs in the incident — one based on a complaint from SpiceJet personnel and another based on a complaint from the Army officer.

The first FIR was registered under BNS Sections 115(2) (voluntarily causing hurt), 351(2) (criminal Intimidation) and 131 (criminal assault or force), police said, and the second under BNS sections 131, 115(2) and 191(2) (use of force or violence by an assembly).

SpiceJet said the airline has initiated the process to "place the passenger on the no-fly list in accordance with civil aviation regulations". "SpiceJet has written to the Ministry of Civil Aviation, apprising them about the murderous assault on its staff and has requested appropriate action against the passenger," the SpiceJet spokesperson said. "The airline has secured the CCTV footage of the incident from the airport authorities and handed it over to the police. SpiceJet strongly condemns any act of violence against its employees and will pursue this matter to its fullest legal and regulatory conclusion."

● ISRO chief

deemed minor and unlikely to affect the launch, but the Indian team — 18 scientists including the ISRO chairman and the director of the Human Space Flight Centre — embedded with the Axiom-4 and NASA teams felt something was amiss and pushed for further checks.

"Initially the team thought that there was a minor leak and the mission could proceed as planned. But, the Indian team insisted that proper checks be carried out even if it meant delaying the mission. And it was good that the tests were carried out because a crack was detected, allowing for repair. It was resolved before the mission took off," Dr Narayanan said.

The crack was in the oxidiser line, which carries liquid oxygen to power the rocket — a serious safety risk, especially for a crewed mission.

The crack and other issues were fixed, but on June 12 NASA announced it was working with Russian space agency Roscosmos to evaluate a leak in the Zvezda module, the Russian-built service module of the ISS that houses key life-support and docking systems. This further delayed the mission until the final launch two weeks.

During the mission, the Indian team was present at both Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral where launch operations took place and at mission control in Houston, Texas, where real-time flight operations are managed — from crew health monitoring and communications to emergency response.

Dr Narayanan described the mission as a significant step forward for ISRO's human space-flight programme, with astronaut training emerging as its single most valuable takeaway. He said Indian scientists got hands-on exposure to how crewed missions are run — from making real-time decisions and interpreting telemetry data to monitoring astronaut health and responding to in-flight contingencies.

"It was like a classroom where we learnt a lot by working with the other teams there," he said. "The experience was important for understanding how human space missions are run at an operational level... The training of the astronaut — especially with someone as experienced as the commander — was a big learning experience for the Indian team."

Axiom-4 commander Peggy Whitson, a veteran astronaut, holds the record for the most number of days spent in space by an American or a woman — 695 days across multiple missions.

India plans to build a sustained human spaceflight programme, with a space station targeted by 2035 and a human Moon mission by 2040. This will require setting up a permanent astronaut corps and regularly training new astronauts, like NASA and Roscosmos do.

In addition to the training, Dr Narayanan said Shukla's experience of living in microgravity, staying in an isolated environment and returning to Earth would be invaluable for India's own programme. ISRO has asked Shukla to document his entire experience in detail.

"This," Dr Narayanan said, "would become teaching material for his fellow astronauts as well as the other astronauts to come."

Shukla, who returned to Earth with a splashdown on July 15, is currently undergoing reconditioning in the United States. He is expected to remain in quarantine until the first week of August, after which he will participate in a debriefing with NASA and return home by mid-August.

● Reservation, 3rd language Hindi: Maharashtra rolls back 7 key decisions

medical colleges.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Kesarkar blamed the roll-backs on "certain challenges in its implementation at the ground level" while Bhuse pointed to "adjustments" that were incorporated based on "feedback".

The Opposition alleged that at least some of these decisions were taken with an eye on local body polls expected later this year, particularly those related to reservation that were announced and withdrawn within a month in June — a charge denied by the government.

Consider the decisions and the roll-back:

Hindi as mandatory third language in primary classes: On April 16, a government order mandated Hindi as the third language in Classes 1-5 in state board schools where students previously studied only two languages. The decision sparked criticism and political backlash, prompting a revised order on June 17 making it optional.

Even this failed to calm concerns and as protests intensified, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis declared after a high-level meeting on June 23 that a final decision would follow stakeholder consultations. On June 29, he revoked both orders and set up a new panel led by educationist Narendra Jadhav to make fresh recommendations.

Quotas in minority trust-run junior colleges: In late May, Maharashtra launched its first state-wide centralised online FYJC (First Year Junior College) admissions, including SC/ ST/ OBC reservations in the seat matrix for minority trust-run institutions, too, despite them being exempt under several court rulings. Traditionally, such colleges reserve 50% of seats for their community, 5% for management and the rest for open category on merit — without social reservation.

On June 10, the state minority educational institutions association and colleges filed a petition in the Bombay High Court. Two days later, the HC granted interim relief, halting the policy. The government formally reversed its decision on June 23.

One state one uniform: On April 2, the government scrapped its "One State, One Uniform" policy and handed over the responsibility of deciding school uniforms to school management committees. It reversed a decision taken in May 2023 under Kesarkar to standardise uniforms

THE SEVEN DECISIONS		
Policy decision	Announced	Withdrawn/ reversed
10% EWS quota in Pvt Medical Colleges	Jul 23, 2025	Jul 30, 2025
Hindi as mandatory third language in primary classes	Apr 16, 2025	Jun 29, 2025
Reservation in minority-trust-run colleges for FYJC admissions	Came to light in Jun 2025 first week	Jun 23, 2025
Caste on HSC Hall Ticket	Issued on Jan 11, 2025	Jan 18, 2025
Sweet Dish in midday meal	Jun 11, 2024	Jan 28, 2025
One state one uniform	May 2023	Apr 2, 2025
Blank pages in textbooks	Mar 8, 2023	Jan 28, 2025

from Classes 1-8 across government schools and introduce a centralised system for manufacturing and distributing uniforms to over 44 lakh students.

The implementation began in 2024-25 but the uniforms did not reach students until October 2024. Later, there were several complaints regarding poor quality and fit of the garments. In December 2024, the centralised process was withdrawn due to logistical issues.

Sweet dish in midday meal: On June 11, 2024, the government declared that midday-meals in government schools will have a three-course plan, including sprouts and sweet dish along with new options using rice, lentils, legumes and vegetables. On January 28 this year, after Bhuse had taken over, it was announced that sweet dish would be provided only if the school management committees are able to raise funds from the public for the sugar required.

Blank pages in textbooks: On March 8, 2023, the government announced the inclusion of blank pages after every chapter in textbooks prepared by Balbharti for the state board curriculum for classes 2-8, as an alternative to carrying notebooks separately. The reason: it will reduce the weight of school bags. Triggering backlash, with students carrying the textbooks and notebooks to school, the move was in place for only one academic year — 2024-25 — and was rolled back on January 28.

Caste on HSC exam hall ticket: The state board printed caste categories on hall tickets, issued on January 11, for the Higher

Secondary Certificate exam. Following sharp criticism from social groups, the board expressed regret and issued a new order on January 18 withdrawing the hall tickets and issuing new ones on January 23.

10% EWS quota in private medical colleges: On July 23, the information brochure for state medical admissions, released by the CET Cell, listed a 10 percent EWS (Economically Weaker Section) reservation. Aspirants, their parents and colleges wrote to the Minister that implementing the quota without increasing seat intake would reduce the slots available under the general pool.

On July 30, a day after a delegation of parents met the Minister, the move was withdrawn through a notification stating that the quota would be implemented only if additional intake is approved.

Vasant Kalpande, a former Director of Education in the state, blamed the disconnect between the decision-making and implementation on a "lack of dialogue in educational governance". "The current top-down approach is detrimental to effective policymaking in a state as diverse as Maharashtra. Effective governance hinges on dialogue with stakeholders, empathy, and sensitivity. With varying needs among students and teachers, a one-size-fits-all approach cannot work," he said.

Basanti Roy, who served over 30 years in the state's education department, stressed the importance of piloting new initiatives to identify challenges and assess impact before scaling them.

Without this, she warned, "reversals become inevitable". "In the rush to innovate, we are neglecting due diligence," she said.

Can't be seamless always: Minister

When contacted, Kesarkar, under whose tenure the decisions related to blank pages, uniforms and sweet dish were made, described them as "student-centric". "The process of decision-making involved thorough consultation with stakeholders concerned. There could have been certain challenges in its implementation at the ground level. But those could have been resolved by applying corrective measures which could have shown benefits of these decisions in the coming years," he said.

Bhuse, the current minister, said education policies are shaped after careful evaluation. "All policy decisions taken by the School Education Department are made with the best interests of our key stakeholders — students, parents, teachers, and schools — in mind. When feedback indicates the need for adjustments, those are duly considered and incorporated. However, that does not imply the original decisions were flawed."

Citing an example, he said, "The initiative to provide high-quality uniforms to government school students was launched with the right intent, but challenges in large-scale implementation required modifications in the process."

Pointing to "successful" decisions, Bhuse said, "Take the example of the 'Copy-Free Exam' campaign during the state board examinations. It may not have completely eradicated malpractice, but it significantly curbed it by raising awareness. Another example is the extension of the centralised online admission process for Class 11 across the state. Although it had initial challenges, as expected in its first year, it has ensured that lakhs of students receive equal opportunities to secure admission to colleges of their choice."

Noting that no decision would be perfect for all, he said, "I come from a rural background but I am equally familiar with urban realities. This dual perspective helps me understand the diverse needs of our education system. We must accept that not everything can be seamless all the time — there's no one-size-fits-all solution in public policy."

Without this, she warned, "reversals become inevitable". "In the rush to innovate, we are neglecting due diligence," she said.

Can't be seamless always: Minister

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● First AI-powered anganwadi: A rural classroom bridges digital gap

Before its inauguration, despite the anganwadi giving the children breakfast and a mid-day meal, she said they had just 10 regular students, with most others enrolled only on paper. "Now, over 25 children come to anganwadi regularly, filling the classroom with fresh energy and curiosity."

Zilla Parishad CEO Mahamuni said they took care while integrating the syllabus with the AI system. "The content was designed carefully to suit the needs of the children before being mapped to the tech platform," he says.

Stating that the children now draw on the interactive smart board, learn about animals via the VR sets and even save their artwork digitally, Kukde says with a smile, "Earlier, I taught with whatever tools I had. Now, I too learn new things every day. Though this transformation has been overwhelming, I feel proud

to be a part of something so transformative."

And the results are starting to show. While village resident Rajini Rahile's son Shivansh doesn't cry anymore at the mere mention of the word anganwadi, Preeti Balbudhe says the centre has transformed since her elder daughter went there eight years ago. "My younger daughter recites poems I haven't even heard of," Balbudhe says.

To improve learning outcomes, the Zilla Parishad had earlier introduced FITA (Fun in the Anganwadi), an initiative that used songs and games as teaching tools. "Tech-enabled learning takes it a step further. For instance, after a virtual garden tour, children answer questions on what they saw. This helps us assess and track their comprehension skills. The system also adapts to support slower learners," says Kailash Ghodke, Deputy CEO, Women

and Child Development, Nagpur Zilla Parishad.

Explaining how the AI system helps slow learners, Mayank Mukul, the vice president of Qolaba, says, "The smart board and VR headsets use gamified learning to track a child's response time and accuracy. For example, a child may be asked to identify a red car. Based on their response time, the system uses AI models (like Gemini and Perplexity) to adjust the difficulty levels. This helps all the children progress at their own pace," he says, adding that Qolaba also uses AI models to chart each child's learning progress.

On the training given to anganwadi workers, Mukul adds, "We give anganwadi workers structured sessions thrice a week. We coordinate with them as per their availability. The idea is to build confidence without rushing them and to ensure they

understand how these tools can genuinely help."

Under the next phase of their training, workers are now being introduced to generative AI tools, which can help create new content, like text, images, music, etc.

"For instance, if a government officer wants to send a text message but cannot be physically present, (anganwadi worker) Kukde can use the dashboard to convert the text message into a speech and broadcast it using the system," says Mukul.

Though Kukde is the only AI-trained anganwadi worker for now, weekend sessions have started for workers from other centres. "These sessions involve a visit to the pilot anganwadi to observe and learn with Qolaba's help. Training is intentionally conducted in person, not just through manuals," Mukul says.

Meanwhile, plans are afoot to expand the project to 40 more anganwadis in the district, be-

sides tracking physical and cognitive developments more closely, and using AI tools to evaluate nutrition.

Zilla Parishad CEO Mahamuni says their mission is not limited to just bridging the digital divide in rural areas. "An anganwadi is not just about education, but also about the holistic growth of women and children. We plan to integrate AI to help us track nutrition and development, and learning outcomes," he added.


On how AI can also be used to track these, Mukul says, "One of the major advantages of AI is its ability to simplify data analysis. Using existing data from the Poshan Tracker (which enables real-time monitoring of nutrition services and better tracking of progress), we can now monitor a child's growth and learning outcomes in real time."

Explaining the process, Nagpur Zilla Parishad CEO


Mahamuni says, "Anganwadi workers will upload pictures of meals to get real-time feedback on whether they meet a child's age-specific needs. This will be integrated with the Poshan Tracker data."


The broader vision includes tracking pregnancies, converting government orders into audio and introducing multi-language education, including English, Hindi and Marathi, and a foreign language, like German or French, for students.

While the journey wasn't always smooth, especially convincing workers and parents to adapt to this new model, Mahamuni says the response has been encouraging. For now, the Zilla Parishad is busy receiving visitors from other blocks who are keen on replicating the pilot anganwadi. Mahamuni says, "If we can show how AI can transform rural education and health, it can be replicated across India. This is not just a tech project but a social movement."

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79TH INDEPENDENCE DAY

Op Sindoor flag, tiered seating among firsts at this year's event at Red Fort

More than 15,000 Delhi Police personnel set to be deployed

SAKSHI CHAND
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 3

A SPECIAL flag to symbolically honour Operation Sindoor, an Under Vehicle Surveillance System (UVSS) amid heightened security measures, a tiered seating arrangement so that can guests can have a better view of the ceremony, and interlocking pavements for better movement of vehicles and visitors: these are the among the firsts for the Independence Day ceremony this year at Red Fort in Delhi.

Operation Sindoor was initiated on May 7 this year in the aftermath of the Pahalgam terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir, which claimed the lives of 26 citizens. It showcased a calibrated,



Preparations underway at Red Fort for Independence Day celebrations, in New Delhi, Sunday. PTI

tri-services response, according to the government, and a targeted campaign to dismantle the terror infrastructure across the Line of Control (LoC) and deeper inside Pakistan.

In a symbolic gesture, the valour of the forces will be high-

lighted during the celebrations on August 15 at the Red Fort, said officials.

In the run-up to 79th Independence Day, the Delhi Police has already stepped up the security arrangements at the Red Fort. With the officers from

the rank of Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) on senior police deployment, a two-layered ring security system has been put in place, starting Sunday.

Around 15,000 personnel of the Delhi Police will be deployed at the Red Fort and the surrounding precinct, officers highlighted.

Large-scale mock emergency exercises, hotel inspections, and increased patrolling are among the measures that are already being implemented, said officers. Snipers, Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) commandos, drones, and 700 AI-enabled CCTV cameras with facial recognition facility will also be a part of the security arrangements.

Specialised cameras can count the visitors and lens blockers obstruct visual access to the high-security targets, said officers, elaborating on the arrangements.

Along with the traditional undercarriage checks using a mirror, an officer said, the Delhi

Police will be using the UVSS to scan the underside of the vehicles for hazardous substances.

In another first, bleacher seating system or a tiered seating arrangement will be in place this time. The space-efficient seating system — which is seen in stadiums — will ensure that the guests can have a better and orderly view of the celebration, said officers.

To curb logistical issues that plagued the ceremony in the last few years, such as water-logging, the authorities have sought assistance from the Central Public Works Department (CPWD) to install interlocking pavements. This will help the authorities to accommodate up to 2,000 parked cars and ease pedestrian movement.

On August 15, Delhi Police will also deploy 'kite-catchers' to make sure that stray kites do not move into restricted airspace over the Red Fort. The officers will be on high alert in a bid to ensure a clear flying zone.

Flying drones and other aerial devices banned for 2 weeks

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 3

FLYING A drone, or any unmanned aerial device, in Delhi till August 16 can lead to a jail sentence of up to one year and a fine of Rs 5,000. The measure has been enforced in view of Independence Day, as per an order by Police Commissioner S B K Singh.

Soon after he took charge last week as the Delhi Police chief, Singh chaired a high-level security meeting on Friday to review preparations for Independence Day.

The latest order restricts flying aerial devices such as paragliders, para-motors, hang-gliders, unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), microlight aircraft, hot air balloons, small-sized powered aircraft, quadcopters, and remotely piloted aircraft under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS). "It has been reported that certain criminal, anti-social elements or terrorists inimical to

India may pose a threat to the safety of the general public, dignitaries and vital installations by the use of sub-conventional aerial platforms over the jurisdiction of the NCT of Delhi on the occasion of Independence Day celebrations-2025 and doing so shall be punishable under Section 223 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023," the order stated.

The order has been forwarded to all Deputy Commissioners of police, Additional DCPs, tehsil offices, all police stations and offices of the New Delhi Municipal Council, Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), Public Works Department (PWD), Delhi Development Authority (DDA), and Delhi Cantonment Board.

Friday's meeting lasted nearly two hours and included District Deputy Commissioners, Range Joint Commissioners, and Special Commissioners.

An officer said the meeting focused on stepping up surveillance measures in sensitive areas, among other aspects.

CM launches Jan Seva Kendra in Kalkaji: 'Tribute to Nari Shakti...'

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 3

DELHI CHIEF Minister Rekha Gupta Sunday inaugurated a Jan Seva Kendra at the community centre in the DDA Flats, Rajiv Gandhi Park, in Kalkaji.

"Today's event is a tribute to Nari Shakti (power of women). When the MLA, the MP, and the Chief Minister are all women, it is a powerful symbol of women's leadership and empowerment," she said.

She was joined by Lok Sabha MP Bansuri Swaraj, MLA Shikha Roy, among others.

She said the BJP government is committed to the development of Delhi and will ensure there is no shortage of funds for developmental work. "By electing a triple-engine government led by the BJP, the people of Delhi have demonstrated that when there is a clear vision for development and genuine intent for public welfare, transformation is inevitable," she said.

During the event, she also announced that markets in Delhi can now operate 24x7 to aid ease of doing business.



Union Minister Arjun Meghwal, CM Rekha Gupta, Speaker Vijender Gupta and others during a trial run of the National e-Vidhan app at the Delhi Assembly, Sunday. Amit Mehra

Delhi Assembly runs solely on sunlight in a first in the country

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 3

THE DELHI Legislative Assembly on Sunday became the first legislature in the country to be powered entirely by solar energy, following the commissioning of a 500-kilowatt rooftop solar power plant.

Alongside this, the Assembly launched the National e-Vidhan Application (NeVA), marking a shift towards paperless legislative functioning.

The two initiatives were inaugurated by Union Minister of State for Law and Justice Arjun Ram Meghwal, who called the Assembly's transition a model for sustainable and digital governance.

"This is not just an infrastructure upgrade, but a shift in institutional values," he said, adding that the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs will provide all possible assistance to the efforts and initiatives of the Delhi Legislative Assembly in this regard.

Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta emphasised that the solarisation of the Assembly is a cornerstone in a broader institutional shift towards sustainable and digital transformation.

"The present Assembly building was constructed in 1912 and was home to the country's first Parliament," Gupta said.

Highlighting the balance between tradition and progress, he remarked, "Virasat aur Vikaas saath chalega (Legacy and development go together)."

Gupta added that the solar power plant, installed on the rooftop, is expected to reduce the Assembly's monthly electricity bill by around Rs 15 lakh, or approxi-

mately Rs 1.75 crore annually. The savings, he said, would be redirected to developmental work.

It will also potentially generate surplus electricity through net metering.

The NeVA platform, developed under the Centre's "One Nation, One Application" initiative, will be fully implemented from the upcoming Monsoon Session.

A successful trial run was conducted with MLAs ahead of the inauguration. The trial offered a first-hand experience of the digital interface, which includes smart delegate units with microphones and voting panels, RFID/NFC access, multilingual support, real-time document access via iPads, an automated AV system with HD cameras, and a secure, power-backed networked environment.

Today's schedule

On Monday, the House will also see the introduction of the Delhi School Education (Transparency in Fixation and Regulation of Fees) Bill, 2025, by Education Minister Ashish Sood.

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta is also scheduled to table the Finance and Appropriation Accounts for 2023-24, which will present the financial position of the national capital.

Gupta will also present two audit reports from the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG): one on state finances for 2023-24 and a separate report on the welfare of building and construction workers in 2022-23.

Sood, who also holds the Power portfolio, will also present the Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission's annual accounts and a notification on Green Energy Open Access regulations.

UER-II, Jhanda Chowk, near Holambi Khurd village. The police team promptly reached the spot and found one person lying in the driver's seat in a burnt condition, while another injured person was seated adjacent to him," DCP (Outer North) Hareshwar Swami said.

The deceased was identified as Vipender (40), a resident of Haryana's Panipat. The injured man, identified as Jagbir (40), a resident of Panipat, was rushed to the Satyawadi Raja Harish Chandra Hospital in Narela.

A 40-YEAR-OLD man was charred to death while his co-passenger sustained injuries after the car they were travelling in caught fire in Delhi in the early hours of Sunday, said police.

According to the police, the incident happened at the Urban Extension Road II (UER). "On August 3, at 2 am, information was received via a PCR call regarding an accident and a fire in a car at

सत्यमेव जयते
Government Of India

75 National Sample Survey
Celebrating 75 years of NSS

Data for Informed Policy Decision on Travel and Tourism

Let us strengthen the National Statistical System

National Statistics Office (NSO), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) is conducting **Domestic Tourism Expenditure Survey (DTES)** and **National Household Travel Survey (NHTS)** from July 2025 to June 2026.

Domestic Tourism Expenditure Survey (DTES):

Information being collected on:

- Purpose of Trip - Holiday, Health, Pilgrimage, Shopping, Social, etc.
- Type of Trip - Package, Non-package
- Mode of Travel - Air, Rail, Water, Road Transport
- Type of Stay - Commercial, Non-commercial
- Destination - Within State, Outside State
- Trip services booked - Online, Offline
- Trip Expenditure

National Household Travel Survey (NHTS):

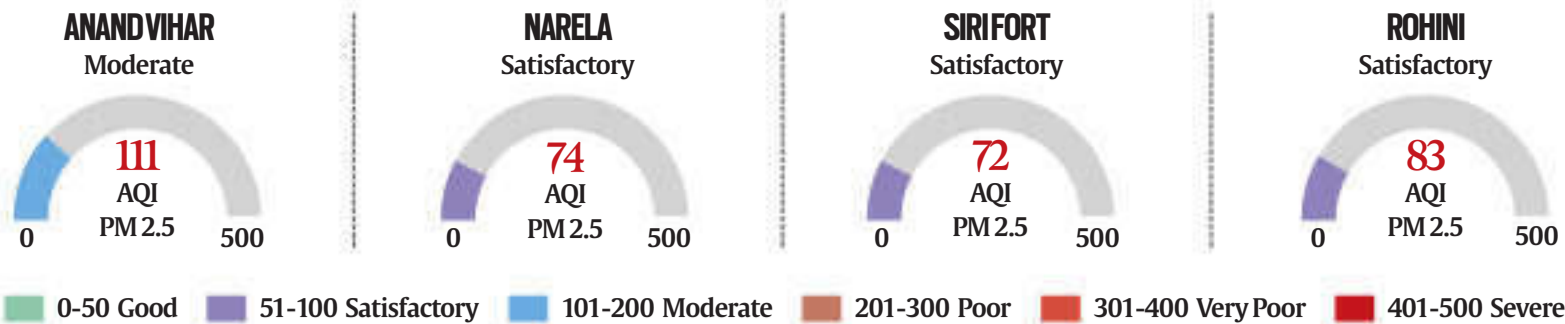
Information being collected on:

- Purpose of Trip - For work/pursuing education
- Cost of trips
- Mode of travel
- Same-day trips (excluding work/education)
- Origin and Destination of trips, distance, travel time

Contribute to nation-building, participate in the survey

Households are requested to cooperate with the enumerators of NSO and provide accurate data. Identity of the households participating in the survey is kept confidential in all reports/microdata of MoSPI.

www.mospi.gov.in @GoStats /GoStats GoStats Ministry of Statistics & PI



FORECAST: August 4
Partly cloudy sky; possibility of very light to light rain with thunderstorms

MAX: 32-34
0.2°C below normal

MIN: 23-25
1.9°C below normal

NEW COMPANY HIRED, WILL BEGIN CLEAN UP: MAYOR

Loudspeaker warnings, patrols: Okhla residents battle garbage outside homes

DRISHTI JAIN

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 3

“YOU ARE under CCTV surveillance. If caught throwing garbage, a complaint will be sent to the police and MCD.”

For the past 15 days, from 10 pm to 12 am, this recorded warning has been broadcast from a loudspeaker affixed to the first-floor balcony of a building in Zakir Nagar, in Southwest Delhi’s Okhla. The speaker has not been installed by the MCD or any government agency, nor is the message from the authorities.

It’s been set up by a group of residents, frustrated by the daily dumping of garbage on a large vacant plot in front of their homes. They have even resorted to standing guard to stop people from throwing trash.

At 10.45 am on Friday, Salman, one of the men on watch, dashes out of his grocery shop near the ‘dumping ground’ after spotting a man on a bike pause briefly, fling a paper bag, and speed off before he could intervene.

“We’ve submitted multiple complaints, both verbal and written, to the MCD and DDA,” he says. “This is a 1,200 sq ft plot, but in the past 30 years, I’ve never seen it free of garbage. It’s hard to even walk past.”

This plot is now higher than the adjacent road due to layers of garbage — from broken furniture, torn mattresses, kitchen waste, to construction debris — that has accumulated over the past 20 years.

Residents claim this land is owned by the DDA, as a board indicating ownership was erected there until a few years ago.

A few houses away, Saleem



Drishti Jain



Garbage on a plot near Chinar Apartments and (L) near Batla House on the Yamuna Pushta. Tashi Tobgyal

a watchman at a nearby apartment, cradling his nine-month-old daughter, expresses concern over the rising cases of dengue and malaria. Pointing to a puddle where mosquito larvae breed, he says, “People don’t understand the risk. They park their vehicles here, and every year, two or three catch fire when the dried garbage ignites.”

But this isn’t the only area in Okhla that has been turned into a dumping ground.

A few kilometers from Batla Chowk, Huma, a resident of Lane No. 22 in Zakir Nagar, often visits her parents in another neighborhood.

“My father is a heart patient, and the doctor has advised him to walk every day. But how can he, when the lane is filled with

garbage and construction debris?” she questions angrily.

The lane where she lives is dark even in the afternoon. Waste from factories operating in the basements of nearby houses and vegetable scraps have piled up due to irregular garbage collection.

Okhla MLA, AAP’s Amanatullah Khan, says the MCD has stopped paying heed to his complaints. “There are 128 sanitation workers in the Zakir Nagar ward, but none of them are seen doing their job. The entire Okhla area has turned into a dumping ground.”

Zakir Nagar ward councillor Naziya Danish of the Congress says that after a new tender for waste management was issued, the corporation provided four garbage collection vehicles per ward, but without any helpers. “How can garbage be collected without staff?” she asks, adding that these issues have persisted for the past two-and-a-half years since the previous concessionaire’s contract expired.

She says she will contact the landowner beside Chinar Apartments to initiate plantation efforts there.

When contacted, Mayor Raja Iqbal Singh says the new concessionaire began work on August 1. “They will require at least 4-5 days to maintain sanitation in the Central zone, after which everything will be normal. This tender is only for six months. But in the coming three months, a new tender will be issued for a seven-year period. Permissions have been granted to roll out fresh tenders for a longer period.”

The DDA did not respond to the queries from *The Indian Express*.

Tailor who kidnapped, killed 8-yr-old held — 26 years later

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 2

IN 1996, Raj Kishore, a 25-year-old tailor, was sentenced to life in prison by a sessions court in Karkardooma for the cold-blooded murder of an eight-year-old boy.

Three years earlier, he had kidnapped the child, demanding a ransom of Rs 30,000 from the boy’s businessman father. The father paid up — but Raj strangled the child and dumped his body in a gutter in Kalyanpuri.

He was eventually traced and arrested.

After three years in jail, Raj got out on a six-week parole in 1999. But he never came back. In 2014, he was declared a proclaimed offender on the Delhi High Court’s directions.

Twenty-six years later, his luck ran out.

On Saturday, a Delhi Police Crime Branch unit, led by Inspector Mangesh Tyagi and ACP Pankaj Arora, finally nabbed Raj from Ghaziabad.

The kidnapping

It was in 1990 that Raj came to Delhi from Kanpur, looking for work. After doing odd jobs for about 18 months, he finally landed a gig as a tailor at a small garment factory that belonged to Mohammad Asif, a garment businessman in Kalyanpuri, a

police officer said.

“The factory made garments for third-party retailers. There were 10-15 workers at the factory, and Asif knew everyone personally,” the officer said.

Asif would often bring his son and his elderly father to the factory. Police said the child would play around, and the workers mingled with him.

Police said Raj noticed that, though small, Asif’s business was booming — with his garments even being exported to other countries.

In 1993, Raj quit and decided to extort Asif.

His leverage? Asif’s son.

On December 15, 1993, Raj lay in wait near Asif’s house in Trilokpuri. He finally found the child alone and lured him with an ice cream, the officer said.

The next day, police said, Raj called Asif. He did not reveal his identity and demanded Rs 30,000 if he wanted his child back. By evening, police officers said, Asif dropped the cash at the location specified by Raj.

Asif kept waiting for his child’s return. To his horror, on December 17, Asif was told by the police that his son’s body was found — he was killed in a flat in East Delhi’s Chilla and dumped in the gutter.

“Raj thought the child would reveal his identity to Asif. So, he murdered him on the night of December 16 and fled,” a police officer said.

Delhi Cong to protest slum demolitions today, Rahul likely to attend

SAMAN HUSAIN

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 3

IN ITS first major demonstration since the BJP came to power in the Capital earlier this year, the Delhi unit of Congress is set to hold a protest against the ruling party on Monday over the recent demolition in slum clusters in the city, among other issues.

Sources suggested Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, may make an appearance at the protest. Gandhi, in Delhi for the Parliament’s Monsoon session, has in the past dropped in unannounced at local party protests in the city.

“His appearance tomorrow would not be out of character... there is a huge possibility he might show up,” a Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee office (DPCC) functionary said.

The demonstration is set to begin at the Sushruta Trauma Centre near Chandgi Ram Akhara and proceed to the Delhi Assembly, where the Monsoon session begins Monday.

Since the BJP came to power in the Capital, the Congress’s Delhi unit has claimed that over 3,000 jhuggi-jhopri dwellings have been razed, displacing nearly 15,000 families.

Last month, Gandhi visited the Ashok Vihar slum cluster in Jailorwala Bagh, where hundreds of homes were demolished in June as part of an ongoing anti-encroachment drive. Videos shared by the Congress on social media showed Gandhi walking through the debris, speaking to residents who said they were left homeless.



INCIndia on X

Last month, Gandhi visited the Ashok Vihar slum, where hundreds of homes were demolished in June

In addition to demolitions, Congress leaders claimed the protest will highlight “broader grievances” — law and order, drug proliferation, and unfulfilled BJP poll promises like the monthly stipend of Rs 2,500 for women and its promise to end the perennial monsoon water-logging woes in the city.

On Sunday, ahead of its protest, the party released a video compilation on its social media platforms, juxtaposing two statements made by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta. The first, from May, features Gupta assuring the media that slums in Delhi would not be demolished. The second clip is from her response to Gandhi’s recent visit to the Ashok Vihar demolition site, where she remarked that the Chief Minister “cannot protect illegal colonies”.

Posting the video, the Delhi Congress captioned it: “How can we trust her promises now?”.

Several Congress MPs also raised the issue of demolitions in Delhi in Parliament.

2 students from Manipur stabbed in Vijay Nagar; 2 held, juvenile nabbed

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 3

TWO MEN were arrested while a juvenile was apprehended for allegedly stabbing two students from Manipur in Northwest Delhi’s Vijay Nagar last week.

According to police, the incident took place around 4 am on Thursday.

One of the students lives in Vijay Nagar. His friend, who lives near Patel Chest Institute, had come to his house. One of them is preparing for government exams, and the other is a third-year BA (Political Science) student.

They both stepped out to buy water from a shop, police said. As they were heading back, they were approached by four people on two bikes who hurled abuses at them.

“A heated altercation ensued, during which one of the men pulled out a knife and stabbed a student in the abdomen and the other in the rear,” DCP (Northwest) Bhisham Singh said.

A friend of the injured duo, also from Manipur, rushed them to the Bara Hindu Rao Hospital after the accused fled the spot,

police said.

He then made a PCR call.

The students told the police that they were shoved by the four, and one of them also punched them, which started the fight.

A team led by Inspector Ashok Giri, SHO of Model Town station, tracked CCTVs in the area to trace the two-wheelers.

“The team examined the victims in detail. CCTV footage from all surrounding establishments was collected and analysed to trace the movements and possible escape routes of the accused persons. Based on this and call detail record analysis, a raid was conducted in the Gurmandi area,” DCP Singh said.

Two accused — Krishna, a resident of Mohalla Khatik, and Krishna Kashyap, a resident of Rajpura — were arrested on August 1. Later, a juvenile was apprehended as well. A search for the fourth accused is on, police said.

“During questioning, the trio admitted to their involvement in the incident. The weapon used in the crime, a blood-stained knife, was recovered,” DCP Singh said.

‘Not prepared for fourth year’: DU’s push for 12-hr shifts sparks criticism

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 3

AMID THE rollout of the four-year undergraduate programme (FYUP) under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 from this academic session at Delhi University, the push for 12-hour shifts has drawn criticism from teachers and students.

In a notification dated July 31, the university asked colleges to extend their hours and operate from 8 am to 8 pm to “ensure availability of faculty and staff during the period,” suggesting a staggered deployment to accommodate additional academic requirements.

However, faculty representatives argued that this blanket approach ignores the realities on the ground. “The order clearly shows that we are ill-prepared for the fourth year,” said Abha Dev Habib, Secretary of the Democratic Teachers’ Front and Associate Professor at Miranda House.

“The notification says students in the fourth year should be taught by senior faculty members. The varsity issued this advisory on August 1. Does the university know that teaching distribution and timetables have to be made during the vacation if



Classes for the new session begin on Monday. Praveen Khanna

classes have to start from day one?... It has made no systematic efforts to ensure smooth implementation...” she added.

Safety has emerged as the biggest worry. Many DU campuses are located in areas where traveling at odd hours feels unsafe to students and staff.

“This latest DU notification is extremely problematic. It is extremely dangerous from the safety perspective of students and teachers in many areas of Delhi,” said Dr Mithuraj Dhusiya, an elected member of DU’s Executive Council.

“Making students sit from 8 am to 8 pm is neither feasible nor

practical. It just shows DU is not prepared for the fourth year — neither on infrastructure nor manpower.”

Rudrashish Chakraborty, Associate Professor of English at Kirori Mal College and Delhi University Teachers’ Association Executive Member, called the measure “anti-teacher and anti-student”. “It forces colleges to adopt a draconian system. The notification expressly instructs colleges to prepare a staggered timetable of a minimum five hours per day for every teacher, even if there is no space for teachers to sit and work,” he said.

Chakraborty also flagged the potential impact on evening colleges, which traditionally cater to students who work during the day. “It is not clear how this will impact evening colleges. Are they going to schedule their classes from 8 pm to 8 am? Or are they going to be dismantled altogether as institutions?”

Faculty members also warned of an emerging hierarchy under the new system. “The university said only senior faculty should teach and supervise fourth-year students. This is a vicious attempt to create a division between so-called senior and junior colleagues,” Chakraborty added.



A signboard near Rajghat. Drishti Jain

increase in pigeon population needs to be controlled,” he adds.

Tradition and faith, however, mean that enforcement is tough.

“The civic body cannot completely ban pigeon feeding activities. We do not have any plan to

construct designated pigeon feeding areas,” a senior MCD official says. Over the past three months, however, the MCD has put up boards at popular feeding spots to warn people against feeding the birds.

TRADITION VS HEALTH

Why MCD’s signboards are no deterrent to pigeon feeding on roads in Capital

DRISHTI JAIN

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 3

AT 9 AM, Muhammad Yunus fixes his blue umbrella near Delhi Gate on Asaf Ali Road.

Methodically, he lays out plates filled with a spread of green and black gram, dried corn and *namkeen*. He then waits for customers — the dozens of people who stop at his roadside stall to feed pigeons.

“I sell roasted gram for Rs 10-20, depending on the demand. The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) has sent us challans, asking us to vacate the area,” says Yunus, who has been running his stall at this spot for 15 years.

Soon after, Sudha Pandey arrives with a Rs 10 note. She buys a cup of roasted gram for the

birds. “I have been coming here for seven days now to pray for my husband who is admitted in the hospital. When we feed someone, they bless us,” she says.

In a letter dated July 8, the MCD’s health department asked the veterinary department to control the Capital’s burgeoning pigeon population. This followed warnings about pigeon faeces causing respiratory and fungal infections and the need to control their population.

The issue of the birds being a public menace and causing diseases also became a topic of discussion in the civic body’s Standing Committee meeting on June 27. Last year, the MCD had said public feeding of pigeons, which leads to the population of the birds increasing beyond the carrying capacity of an area,

would be checked.

In a similar move earlier this month, the Maharashtra government had directed the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation to close *kabootar khana*s or pigeon feeding spots in the city, citing serious health hazards due to pigeon droppings and feathers.

Dr Vikas Maurya, senior director and head of Pulmonology at Fortis Hospital in Shalimar Bagh, says pigeon droppings are the root cause of many diseases in India. “These can cause fungal and bacterial diseases such as *Campylobacter*, allergic reactions such as sneezing, running nose, itching eyes as well as Hypersensitivity Pneumonitis, which can eventually cause lung fibrosis.”

“Hawkers don’t even realise that being exposed to the birds for so long is harmful. The rampant

to traffic rules, parking their vehicles in the middle of the road — sometimes also in the wrong direction — to feed birds.

A resident of Nehru Apartments, Satish Kumar, says the birds fly low near the feeding spot, resulting in injuries to many motorists.

“We can’t walk around the feeding spot, it smells. The food that rots there has led to an increase in the rat population; the rodents sometimes enter our homes too... Moreover, pigeons build nests in our balconies, which are also full of dried faeces,” he adds.

Piyush Prasad, RWA president of Nehru Apartments, says many pigeons die when vehicles hit them. “This has led to an increase in the feline population as well, since they feed on the carcass.”

office near Rajghat, is unconcerned about the MCD’s directive. “If the MCD wants us to stop, they should build designated feeding spots. We will go there.”

The feeding spot he has chosen is on the central verge of two busy roads going towards ITO and ISBT Kashmere Gate. The pigeons flock to the space as soon as passersby stop to empty a sack of grain.

Two hawkers, who sell grains here, keep their wares hidden, as a nearby MCD board reads — ‘No Feeding Zone’.

Chittaranjan Park

For residents, the pigeon feeding spot near B Block has been a major cause of concern.

Feathers, dried faeces, grains, sometimes even dead birds, are routinely found at the spot. The feeders, they claim, pay no heed

5 GOVT & POLITICS



HAPPY MOMENT

REPRESENTING VARANASI in Lok Sabha since 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has set up an office there as a Lok Sabha MP, manned by seven-member staff. In the last over 11 years, the PM has visited this office only once, however, several ministers and other party leaders do visit the place. During the PM's trip to his constituency on Saturday, the PM met the staff on the backside of the dais after his public meeting. The PM spent a very few minutes with the staff and also stood for pictures with them. "Vo bhi bahut khush the, hum sab bhi bahut khush hain (He was very happy, so were we)," one of the staff said after the meeting.

HERE & THERE

AS SEVERAL ministries are in the process of moving out of North Block and Nirman Bhawan into the new office buildings built as a part of the Central Vista plan, last week saw officials shuffling from one building to another to attend internal meetings. While the Home ministry has shifted out of North Block completely, the Personnel ministry is in the process of moving to the new Common Central Secretariat. Similarly, the Housing and Urban Affairs ministry is yet to move into the new office block on K G Marg, but the Minister, Manohar Lal, has shifted his office. Sources say the shifting would be completed after the Monsoon Session of Parliament. Till then, some ministries may be operating out of multiple locations.

OFFICIAL TALLY

DATA SUBMITTED by the Ministry of External Affairs in Parliament in response to two back-to-back questions from BJP Rajya Sabha MP Satnam Singh Sandhu officially declared that PM Modi surpassed eight of his predecessors by getting awards and recognition from 27 nations in the last one decade. According to the MEA, Indian PMs received 14 international awards in almost six decades between 1956 and 2015.

As both sides hold joint naval drill, Philippines President arrives today

DIVYAA

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 3



President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos Jr

PRESIDENT FERDINAND Romualdez Marcos Jr of the Philippines is set to arrive in New Delhi on August 4 in his first trip to India since assuming office in 2022, even as the two countries have begun their first bilateral naval exercise in the South China Sea.

A statement by the MEA Thursday said that Marcos Jr will be visiting India at PM Narendra Modi's invitation. During his four-day visit, Marcos Jr will hold talks with President Droupadi Murmu; PM Modi; External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar; and Union Health Minister J P Nadda. Marcos Jr will meet Jaishankar on August 4. The next day, he will lay a wreath at Raj Ghat, before holding talks with the PM in Hyderabad House, where India and the Philippines will sign several agreements. He will then meet Nadda and travel to Bengaluru, where he will meet Governor Thawar Chand Gehlot. India and the Philippines began the two-day "bilateral mar-

itime cooperative activity" on Saturday in waters close to the Scarborough Shoal, a focal point of the maritime dispute between China and the Philippines. Sources say India is joining these efforts owing to its shared concerns about China's growing maritime power, including in the South China Sea.

The diplomatic relations between India and the Philippines were established in November 1949. President Marcos Jr's state visit coincides with the 75th anniversary of bilateral diplomatic relations, the MEA said. The MEA statement said that India's relations with the Philippines were an integral pillar of its "Act East" policy. Vision MAHASAGAR, and its vision of the Indo-Pacific. The visit is an opportunity for both leaders to set the path for future bilateral cooperation, it added.

As Bihar SIR sparks concern in TN, EC says 'absurd to link them'

DMK, allies allege bid to alter TN's 'electoral landscape' by enrolling migrant workers

ARUN JANARDHANAN
CHENNAI, AUGUST 3

THE RIPPLE effects of the Election Commission's ongoing SIR in Bihar are being felt in Tamil Nadu. As leaders of DMK and its allies, including senior Congress leader P Chidambaram, alleged that the EC had included migrant workers, especially those from Bihar, in voter lists in the state, the EC Sunday dismissed the "false information".

"There is no need for political leaders to spread false information with respect to the SIR exercise being conducted by EC at the national level. It has come to the notice of the EC that such information is being deliberately peddled in the media with a view to obstruct the exercise. As far as voters who have permanently shifted from Bihar to other states and are ordinarily resident in those states, the exact figures can be known only after the SIR has been conducted... It is for the voters to come forward and get enrolled in the constituency where they are eligible. But, it is noticed that some false figures are being floated about enrollment of 6.5 lakh voters in Tamil Nadu. SIR has not yet been rolled out in TN. It is therefore absurd to connect the SIR exercise in Bihar with TN. Such peddling of false statements with respect to SIR should be avoided," the EC said in a statement.

After the EC's figures released following the end of the first phase of the SIR showed an estimated 36 lakh voters were



EC abusing its powers, says Chidambaram

"missing" from Bihar's voter lists due to "permanent migration" outside the state, leaders in Tamil Nadu claimed that 6.5 to 7 lakh of them might have already been added to the electoral rolls in the southern state. Leaders of DMK and its allies accused EC of "attempting to reshape the political demographics of the state".

"This is a problem in TN as they (migrants) came to work here as guest workers. But giving them voter IDs will result in political change in future. If such attempts are made, we will become roaring lions to oppose it," state's Water Resources Minister Duraimurugan said on Sunday.

Chidambaram accused the EC of an "abuse of power, and attempt to change the electoral character and pattern of states".

"While 65 lakh voters are in danger of being disenfranchised in Bihar, reports of adding 6.5 lakh persons as voters in Tamil Nadu is alarming and patently illegal. Calling them permanently migrated is an insult to the migrant workers and a gross interference in the right of the electorate of Tamil Nadu to elect a government of its choice," he wrote on X.

"Why should the migrant worker not return to Bihar or his/her home state to vote in the

Assembly election as they usually do? Does not the migrant worker return to Bihar at the time of the Chhath Puja festival?" he asked.

Claiming that a person must have a "fixed and permanent legal home" to enrol as a voter, Chidambaram said the migrant worker had such a home in Bihar. "How can he/she be enrolled as a voter in Tamil Nadu? The EC is abusing its powers and trying to change the electoral character and patterns of states. This abuse of powers must be fought politically and legally," he said.

The VCK, a DMK ally, urged CM M K Stalin to immediately convene an all-party meeting on the issue. "The EC is carrying out SIR in Bihar, where Dalits and minorities are eliminated from the voters' list. Tamil Nadu, which will face Assembly polls next year, will also see an SIR soon, and there are chances lakhs of guest workers from other states will be added to the voter list. This will change the entire political scenario in the state," said VCK president Thol Thirumavalavan.

The row has hit a flashpoint over deeper questions about identity and federal balance in a state that has long been governed by regional parties seen to be fiercely protective of its linguistic and cultural uniqueness.

Prof Ramu Manivannan, the former Head of Department of Politics at Madras University, said migrant workers in states such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka had grown in number in recent years. "Linking them with poll dy-

namics moves the debate away from issue-based politics. In the southern states, it is increasingly seen as a BJP-RSS strategy and it will have tremendous long-term implications," he said.

Pointing out that voting is a Constitutional right and a "deeply personal one" at that, Manivannan said, "At the core, this is not about denying migrants their rights but about whether voter inclusion is based on genuine, permanent relocation or politically motivated demographic engineering. The Constitution allows you to live and work anywhere in India, but that does not automatically grant you voting rights in your new place of work. Domicile is one thing, but electoral domicile is another."

Naam Tamilar Katchi (NTK) chief coordinator Seeman echoed Manivannan's views. "Trying to convert people from the North into voters of TN is a great injustice to Tamil people. All democratic forces should come forward to fight against BJP for this tyranny, and for trying to undermine the democratic system by using EC as a puppet to capture power in states where it cannot govern."

TVK founder said, "It is shocking that 6.5 lakh guest workers from Bihar were already added to list of voters in TN. Lakhs of guest workers are already working in the state and this is a challenge to the culture and tradition of the soil," he said, accusing BJP of devising a "covert plan" to form a government in TN through demographic shifts.

Amid 'slap' row, Maharashtra CM says ministers speak jokingly sometimes

MANOJ MORE
PUNE, AUGUST 3

EVEN as two more ministers landed in controversy in the last two days, CM Devendra Fadnavis, who last week had warned ministers against making controversial statements, on Sunday defended his Cabinet colleagues.

As videos of the two ministers — Sanjay Shirsat from Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena and Meghna Bordikar from BJP — surfaced, Fadnavis said ministers in their speeches sometimes speak jokingly. "If we make an issue out of everything, it won't be appropriate," the CM said.

As for Social Justice Minister Shirsat, Fadnavis said, "I don't think what Shirsat said is wrong." Regarding Bordikar, an MoS, he said, "... she told me the media has not shown her complete statement. I will be discussing her statement with her." On Sunday, a purported video showed Bordikar allegedly threatening to slap a gram sevaki if he fails to bring beneficiaries of a scheme. Bordikar said, "... The gram sevaki was not taking the welfare schemes being implemented by PM Narendra Modi and CM Devendra Fadnavis... I lost my cool because women labourers complained to me about the harassment from the gram sevaki."

The meetings also came nearly two weeks after Jagdeep Dhankhar on July 21 tendered his resignation as vice president citing health grounds.

The vice president also functions as the chairman of Rajya Sabha. The Election Commission last week announced that election to the post of vice president will take place on September 9.

Poll panel now asks Tejashwi to share details of his voter card for inquiry

HIMANSHU HARSH
PATNA, AUGUST 3

THE ELECTORAL Registration Officer (ERO) of Bihar's Digha Assembly constituency on Sunday formally wrote to Leader of Opposition Tejashwi Prasad Yadav, seeking details of the EPIC (Electors Photo Identity Card) number he cited during a press conference held on Saturday, during which he claimed that his name had been removed from the draft electoral rolls published last week.

In the letter, the officer said that the number on the voter ID that Tejashwi had presented during his press conference does not appear to be an officially issued EPIC number. The officer said that the RJD leader's name was in the electoral rolls, but under a different EPIC number.

The letter requested Tejashwi to furnish the details and the original copy of the EPIC card he referred to in his press interaction to enable a detailed inquiry.

This follows a clarification issued earlier by the Patna district administration, saying that Yadav's name had not been removed from the rolls. Officials said that his name, which was



RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav

previously listed in polling station number 171 at serial number 481, is now listed in polling station number 204 at serial number 416 — both polling stations are located in the same premises.

EC sources said that Tejashwi's EPIC number which is in the draft rolls has been consistently associated with him since at least 2015, and was used by him during the 2020 Assembly elections while filing nomination papers. Officials also said that extensive checks of electoral databases over the last 10 years have not revealed any record of the EPIC number on the card that he presented during his press conference.

Bihar draft rolls: EC assures action after errors flagged in names & addresses

DAMINI NATH
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 3

AFTER SOCIAL media users pointed out some errors in the draft electoral roll of Bihar published on August 1, as a part of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, Election Commission officials said Sunday that they would rectify those and action would be taken against Booth Level Officers (BLOs) responsible.

Among the errors flagged were "husband husband", "father father", "father voter ID card" and "Election Commission of India" written instead of the names of the husband or parent of some electors. The mistakes, according to EC sources, pertained to Chapra Assembly constituency of Saran district. The names had been included with the same errors in the second supplementary electoral roll issued in March, they said.

For example, in one booth in Chapra, a 22-year-old woman elector's father's name was mentioned as "father father"; husbands of two women were mentioned as "husband husband"; a 21-year-old woman's father's name was shown as "father's voter ID card", and a 19-year-old woman's mother's name was listed as "Election Commission of India".

Saran DM Aman Samir, who is also the District Election Officer, said in a statement on Sunday that

an inquiry has been initiated and action would be taken against the BLO in-charge at the time and the new BLO as well.

Samir said that four names, with the errors, had been in the rolls before the SIR and that Form-8 — for making corrections to entries on rolls — were also processed. The names were added using the BLO app sometime between January 2025 and March 2025, the DM said.

Electors and political parties can file claims and objections from August 1 to September 1, either to include or remove a name from draft rolls. As of 3 pm Sunday, the EC statement said that 941 claims and objections have been filed by electors, while nothing has been filed by the Booth Level Agents (BLAs) of national or state parties.

As per EC's order on June 24, all 7.89 crore Bihar electors were required to fill the enumeration forms by July 25, to be included in the draft rolls. After the month-long exercise, a total of 7.24 crore electors were included, while 65 lakh removed since the EC found that some were dead, others had permanently shifted, enrolled in multiple places or untraceable. The final roll will be published on September 30. Those who registered after January 1, 2003, when the last intensive revision was conducted, are required to submit documents establishing their eligibility, which includes citizenship, by September 1.

FROM PAGE ONE Amid curbs, more Indians are lining up for US investment visas

Experts said another factor fuelling EB-5 filings could be a record backlog in other immigration categories, including H1-B and green card. According to estimates, more than 11 million US immigration applications are pending with the authorities. So, EB-5 has become the fastest and most assured route to US permanent residency, they said.

Data accessed by *The Indian Express* from Washington-based Invest In the USA (IIUSA), an overarching trade association for the EB-5 regional centre programme, show that 1,428 EB-5 visas were issued to Indians in FY2024 (October 2023 to September 2024), as against 815 in the previous year. Between 2014 and 2021, the figures were minuscule, at 96 in 2014, and under 200 EB-5 visas until 2017.

Created by the US Congress in 1992, the EB-5 programme is a pathway to green cards to im-

migrants who make a minimum investment of \$1,050,000 (Rs 9 crore), or \$800,000 (Rs 6.88 crore) in economically distressed zones called Targeted Employment Areas (TEA), to create jobs for Americans, according to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services website.

It allows the investor, their spouse and unmarried children under 21, to immigrate to the US. However, changes were brought to the programme in 2022, introducing both flexibility for investors and stronger audit checks on sources of income. Following this, experts said, filings from high net worth Indian citizens looking for US residency increased manifold.

Between October 2024 and March 2025, 649 Indian nationals were issued EB-5 visas via consular processing — a strong indication that a large number of

EB-5 VISA AND PROPOSED GOLD CARD — KEY DIFFERENCES		
Feature	EB-5 visa	Trump's 'Gold Card' proposal
Minimum Investment	\$800,000 (TEA) or \$1,050M (Non-TEA)	\$5 million (direct payment to government)
Job Creation Requirement	Yes (10 full-time U.S. jobs)	No known requirement
Legal Status	Fully legislated and protected under RIA (until 2027)	Conceptual only, not legislated
Filing Options for Indians in the U.S.	Adjustment of Status + Concurrent Filing	Unknown
Availability	Open now	Not introduced as law yet

Indian filings from the financial year 2022-2023 have matured, Mastroianni said.

The path is also becoming popular in the adjustment of status category, among those already in the US on non-immigrant status. "Students and individuals on H-1B visas currently represent the primary group seeking lawful means to remain in the US with the ability

to work," said Sukanya Raman, country head, Davies & Associates, LLC, an immigration law firm.

"Indian nationals currently in the US on non-immigrant status such as H-1B or student visa and who file under the new provisions benefit from automatic issuance of work and travel permits within 3-6 months from the time of filing I-526E petition typ-

ically which remain valid until their EB-5 green card is approved," said Raman.

The number of student visas issued by the US government have dropped by 15% globally to 89,000 in the first half of fiscal year 2025 (October-March) with India reporting a massive fall of 43.5% in fresh visas compared to the same period in 2024, according to the US Department of State

data. The numbers are likely to fall further in the second half of fiscal 2025 due to a nearly month-long pause in new visa appointments over May and June.

While China remains top user of EB-5 visas, followed by Vietnam and India, IIUSA data also shows that most Indian filings come through the Indian consulate in Mumbai, showing that high net worth individuals from the financial capital and the region have been using this route to get US residency. Out of the total 638 unreserved consular processing (for those based in India, as opposed to adjustment of status, meant for those already living in the US) applicants between October 2024 and May 2025, 543 filed through the US consulate in Mumbai.

According to Ravneet Kaur Brar, Attorney-at-law in California who deals with immigration issues, the data is always

compiled with China and India as two data points because of very high volume coming out of these two countries, in almost every category. China accounts for 51% of worldwide filings. India remains the second-largest market, contributing a total of 1,341 I-526/E filings between FY2022 and July 5, 2024, with 1,057 of them filed under the Reserved EB-5 categories, Brar said.

"India shows a positive trend in approval rates over the years. India's approval rate rose from 59% in FY2022 to 82% in FY2024," she said.

The processing time from petition filing to visa issuance varies from the kind of projects being opted for by the applicant. While rural area projects take approximately 8-24 months; High-Unemployment Area Projects take 12-30 months.

Mastroianni said that con-

trary to assumptions, there has been a surge in demand for EB-5 after the announcement of the Gold Card programme. "We are witnessing one of the most promising surges in EB-5 interest from Indian families in recent history. The uncertainty surrounding future visa programmes like the proposed Gold Card, combined with heightened scrutiny of traditional student and work visa routes, has pushed many investors to act now — not later. What's changed is not just demand, but decisiveness," he said.

"With the spectre of visa retrogression looming and the current ability to file concurrently from within the US, families are prioritising stability, permanence, and long-term security. EB-5 is no longer seen as an alternative — it's become the preferred strategy," Mastroianni said.



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Stand up to Trump

Resisting the US might cause short-term pain, but not doing so will hurt India’s national interests



SHYAM SARAN

MALEGAON QUESTIONS

Acquittals turn focus, again, to procedural lapses in investigation of terror cases. NIA must appeal verdict

JUST 10 DAYS after the Bombay High Court acquitted 12 accused in the 2006 Mumbai train blasts case, highlighting critical procedural lapses in the investigation, a trial court in Mumbai has acquitted all seven accused in the 2008 Malegaon bomb blast case. The outcome in both sensitive and high-profile cases raises serious and urgent questions about the perils of the due process of justice being relegated by the surround sound of a polarising politics — in the Malegaon case, the spotlight had turned to allegations and counter-allegations on “Hindu terror”, kicking off a dismal war of labels, and a flurry of often contrived comparisons and equivalences. The verdict in the case, as in the Mumbai blasts case before it, has put in the dock the conduct of investigating agencies and prosecution, and the systemic delays that often render justice, when it comes, too little too late. The trial in the Malegaon case began in December 2018, a decade after a bomb went off outside a mosque, killing six and injuring nearly a hundred others. The Court was clear on the intent of the attack, on the last day of Ramzan and before Navratri was to begin: “It was apparent that conspirators caused bomb blast with an intent to terrorise the people, to cause loss to life and property, disruption of supplies and services essential to the community, to create communal rift and to endanger internal security of the State.” It is troubling that the investigation and prosecution of a case as consequential as this one was found to be riddled with glaring lapses and omissions, inconsistencies and contradictions. Special NIA Judge AK Lahoti found it necessary to mention that “the evidence on record creates the grave suspicion against the accused but mere on suspicion there cannot be a conviction.”

The probe into the Malegaon case was begun by the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS). Hemant Karkare, the ATS chief at that time, heading the investigation, was killed in the Mumbai terror attack on November 26, 2008, only days after the first arrest in the case. The ATS had filed a chargesheet after collecting evidence, including phone taps, witness statements, and video recordings of the meetings where the conspiracy was allegedly hatched from the lap-top of one of the accused. All these were deemed inadmissible in court since the agency had failed to fulfil the statutory requirement to prove the authenticity and reliability of electronic evidence. While transcripts were prepared from intercepted conversations, interceptions were not authorised in the specific period, and permissions were obtained belatedly, rendering the intercepted data unusable as evidence. In 2011, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) took over the case and criticised the ATS probe, even as it continued moving it in the same direction. In 2016, it dropped MCOCA charges arguing that the ATS had not followed proper procedure in invoking the stringent anti-terror law. There were other loopholes and omissions too — for instance, 13 statements of witnesses went missing from the court records.

The investigation in the Malegaon case was mired in political controversy over the (religious) colour and shade of terror right from the beginning. Investigators in cases such as this one do come under an enormous amount of pressure. But that is a challenge to be professionally navigated, it cannot lead to slipshod investigations and inordinate delays. Given that the court has underlined the several omissions of the state and said explicitly that there is “grave suspicion,” the NIA must appeal the verdict, and make a better case.

EPSTEIN’S GHOST

With his MAGA base demanding accountability, Donald Trump is finding out why no supporter should be taken for granted

THE SORDID SAGA of Jeffrey Epstein is filled with enough ambiguity and gaps to fuel many conspiracy theories. In the run-up to the 2024 US presidential elections, the release of the “Epstein Files” became a tentpole issue for Donald Trump; the late financier’s seeming impunity and connections with the high and mighty was the perfect metaphor for the “deep state” to help rally the MAGA base. Now, in office, Trump seems unable to shake Epstein’s ghost. The reality show star turned politician who takes pride in upending the conventions, rules and even the decencies of politics and policy seems to finally be facing a truth that all people in public life must confront: Even the most ardent supporter, the “base” cannot be taken for granted.

Epstein, who allegedly committed suicide in 2019 in prison under suspicious circumstances, was convicted of trafficking underage women. The source of his vast fortune is a mystery and for decades, he seemed immune — he was given sweetheart deals by prosecutors and rubbed shoulders with the likes of Donald Trump, the Clintons and Bill Gates. Epstein’s seeming impunity raised fundamental questions about the American justice system, which should be answered. Trump promised to release the “Epstein Files”, which he and his supporters, including V-P JD Vance, claimed contained client lists that include many of the powerful, rich and famous. The administration’s claim that there are no such documents, that the Epstein episode should be closed, has not cut ice. Increasingly, Trump’s supporters are questioning his links with Epstein. Several attempts at distracting from the issue, including the President sharing AI-generated videos of Barack Obama being arrested by the FBI, have not led to the matter dying down over the last several weeks.

A major part of Trump’s appeal has been his ability to present himself as an outsider to the deeply entrenched Washington elite. He has cynically flirted with conspiracy theories and painted political opponents as corrupt and with mala fide intentions — think “crooked Hillary” and the refusal to accept the 2020 election verdict. This kind of politics has legs in a climate where people feel disempowered by forces larger than themselves. The Epstein case is, at its core, about children being harmed — a fear that is almost primordial. Unfortunately, rather than bringing closure and justice to his many victims, the issue was used as a political weapon. As it turns out, this particular conspiracy theory is a knife that cuts both ways. Many in the MAGA camp are asking for transparency and accountability. By dismissing their concerns, Trump, the billionaire, is signalling — perhaps unwittingly — that he is one of the elites he once rallied them against.



GURU PRAKASH

THE RECENT VERDICT in the Malegaon blast case has not just acquitted individuals like Lieutenant Colonel Prasad Purohit and Sadhvi Pragma — it has exposed something far more sinister: The Congress party’s consistent and deep-rooted prejudice against the Hindu community. As someone who believes in justice, constitutional morality, and the inclusive spirit of India, I find it essential to call out this ideological poison for what it is.

The judgment in the 2008 Malegaon blast case is damning, not for the accused but for the political ecosystem that manipulated agencies, planted narratives, and criminalised identities. The court noted how the prosecution failed to provide evidence beyond reasonable doubt, how witnesses turned hostile, and how the fabric of the case was stitched together with political intent.

As someone who has followed the case closely, including the detailed biography of Lt Col Purohit by journalist Smita Mishra, I was appalled. Here was a decorated Army officer who had been entrusted with infiltrating terror networks, but who ended up being framed as a terrorist himself. His nine years behind bars were not just a personal tragedy — they were the outcome of a Congress-led UPA regime that needed to invent “Hindu terror” to balance Islamist terror in the public discourse.

This perverse narrative was systematically constructed by three key Congress leaders. In August 2010, then-Union Home Minister P Chidambaram publicly warned of a new phenomenon of “saffron terrorism”, alleging that radical Hindu outfits were implicated in bomb blasts. His colleague

AN INJUSTICE, A PATTERN

Acquittals in Malegaon blast case expose a deep-rooted bias in Congress

Digvijay Singh then popularised the term within the Congress ranks, describing “terrorism among Hindus” while paradoxically objecting to religious descriptors for terrorism. The campaign reached its peak when then-Home Minister Sushil Kumar Shinde defended “saffron terror” at a party conclave in January 2013, claiming his ministry’s confidential papers substantiated the allegations. Years later, Shinde would admit that coining the term was a mistake — but by then, irreparable damage had been done to innocent lives and India’s social fabric.

This perverse narrative found its way into diplomatic cables too. In the WikiLeaks cable from 2009, Rahul Gandhi reportedly told then-US Ambassador Timothy Roemer that Hindu radicalism was a bigger threat to India than Lashkar-e-Taiba. This was not a stray remark. It was a window into the Congress’s ideological framework, where the Hindu is always the problem and the minority vote bank must always be coddled, even at the cost of truth.

Go back to 1951. When the Somnath temple was reconstructed after centuries of devastation, India’s first President Rajendra Prasad, agreed to attend the inauguration. But Jawaharlal Nehru disapproved, fearing it would look like “Hindu revivalism”. Fast forward to 1985. The Supreme Court delivers a progressive judgment in favor of Shah Bano, a Muslim woman seeking alimony. But Rajiv Gandhi caved under pressure from conservative clerics and overturned the ruling through legislation. In 1988, the Congress government banned Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* — even before

protests erupted in India. It wasn’t about public order; it was about pre-emptively appeasing a vote bank.

And perhaps the most shocking of all: In 2006, then-Prime Minister Manmohan Singh declared, “We will have to devise innovative plans to ensure that minorities, particularly the Muslim minority, are empowered to share equitably in the fruits of development. They must have the first claim on resources.” I am a Dalit, and I cannot stay silent at the suggestion that national development should be filtered by religion. What about the poor Hindu, the Dalit student, the tribal child? Does their struggle not count?

Today, when Rahul Gandhi speaks of “social justice” and champions Dalit rights, one must ask: How does denying reservation to marginalised communities in prestigious institutions like AMU and Jamia serve social justice? This is the height of hypocrisy — using Dalit symbolism for votes while systematically undermining Dalit interests in policy.

This isn’t just about Congress. It’s about the future of India’s democracy. A nation cannot move forward if it continues to be shackled by ideological hatred and historical bias. Hindu identity is not extremist. It is civilisational. And those who equate it with terror not only insult India’s history — they endanger its future.

The Congress party owes an apology. To the falsely accused. To the institutions it compromised. And to the silent Hindu majority who have endured humiliation in the name of “secularism”.

The writer is national spokesperson of the BJP

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



AUGUST 4, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

GANDHI ON TERROR

PRIME MINISTER RAJIV Gandhi called upon the police force to evolve new methods and techniques to combat terrorism, “which obtains in most parts of the country in one form or the other”. Gandhi observed that traditional police methods would not work to face the new challenge posed by terrorism. Right now, “even at the drop of the hat, we are calling the para-military forces and the Army. We must stop this”, Gandhi pointed out.

FAROOQ’S OFFER

FORMER CHIEF MINISTER Farooq Abdullah has declared that he would cooperate with

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi for ending the prevailing uncertainty in the state. He said he was for a new era of stability, peace and progress in Jammu and Kashmir, where people have been suffering because of the “failures” of the Shah government. He was pleased that PM Gandhi had himself started taking a “serious” view of the Kashmir situation and taken certain steps to find a solution.

BOEING 747 INSPECTION

A SAMPLE CHECK carried out on one of Air India’s earliest Boeing 747 at its engineering base in Bombay has revealed “no evidence of corrosion”. A highly placed AI source said

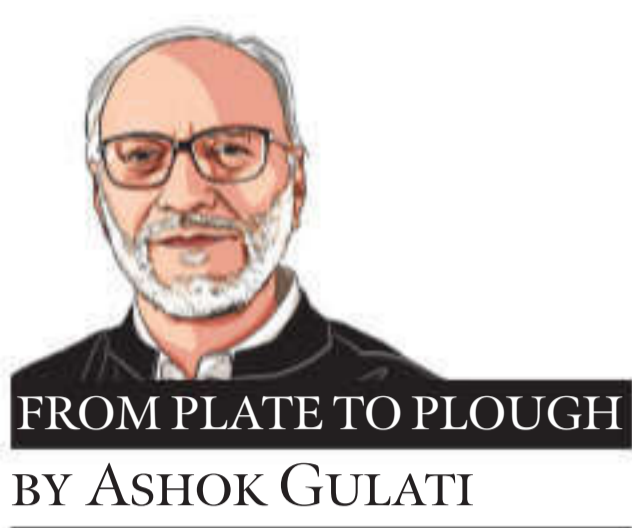
that a communication had been received from the Director of Air Safety, to conduct a sample check for corrosion. The Boeing aircraft, being inspected at the engineering base, was acquired in 1971 and it had an impressive flying record.

MAGSAYSAY FOR AMTE

MURLIDHAR DEVIDAS AMTE, an Indian lawyer who has made the lives of thousands of lepers and other social outcasts productive and respectable, has been selected for the 1985 Ramon Magsaysay Award for public service, the award foundation announced. Amte, 71, is the second person to be awarded Asia’s version of the prestigious Nobel Prize this year.

Needed: More bargaining chips

To get the most out of ongoing trade talks with US, India needs to diversify exports to other countries and carry out overdue reforms in agriculture



FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH
BY ASHOK GULATI

US PRESIDENT DONALD Trump has delivered a strong blow to India by imposing a 25 per cent tariff, plus some unspecified penalty, on exports of most Indian goods. Several experts suggest that this may hit overall GDP growth by 20 to 30 basis points. In other words, the overall GDP growth in the financial year 2025-26 (FY26) may not reach 6.5 per cent as expected by the RBI, but may end up somewhere around 6.2 to 6.3 per cent. This is a significant loss, but not something that India cannot endure.

More damaging are the social media posts of President Trump, where he says, "I don't care what India does with Russia. They can take their dead economies down together, for all I care". Is India a dead economy? Really? India's economy is growing at more than 6 per cent, against the US's economy growing at less than 2 per cent, India is still the fastest-growing large economy in the G20 group. Yes, the size of the Indian economy (about \$4.19 trillion) is way below that of the US, which touches \$30 trillion. But in Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) terms, we are at more than \$16 trillion and already the third largest economy.

A few things are clear from what has happened on the tariff front. First, the Trump-Modi bonhomie seems to be over. Investing in personal relations does not mean much to President Trump. He is transactional and focused on extracting as much from other countries as possible in the pursuit of his dream of Making America Great Again (MAGA). Second, he is very upset with Russian President Vladimir Putin for not heeding Trump's sermons on ending the Ukraine-Russia war – in his campaign, the US President had announced that he would end the war in 24 hours after taking office. Now he wants to punish those who are trading with Russia, especially for energy and defence needs. India is a soft target. Third, looking at what he has done to other countries to make trade deals, including allies like the EU, Canada, and Japan, it is clear that most of the US's allies are disillusioned. Fourth, by announcing tariffs for each country separately for the same products, he has literally buried the multilateral rules of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), especially the Most Favoured Nations clause. And finally, he does not like BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), as he sees it as a threat to the dominance of the US dollar in global trade. So, all BRICS countries are on his target list.

How does one navigate the challenge of Trump's high tariffs? There are many options for India. Should Delhi retaliate by imposing high tariffs on US goods? But Indian tariff levels are already quite high, especially in agriculture (about 64.3 per cent trade weighted average). President Trump keeps referring to India as the "tariff king". So, such retaliation will not pay much. Prime Minister Modi has



C R Sasikumar

to look for better ways and convert this adversity into an opportunity. For that, we need to diversify our exports to other countries.

India's total exports of goods in calendar year 2024 were \$442 billion, of which \$80.7 billion, roughly 18 per cent went to the US. The high tariffs will surely impact such goods. The magnitude of the hit they will take actually depends upon tariff rates imposed on competing countries for each commodity.

If PM Modi goes on a drive to diversify exports to other countries, the impact of US tariffs can be minimised. Another thing to keep in mind is that our services exports to the world were \$336 billion in the calendar year 2024, of which only 14 per cent (\$47.5 billion) went to US. So far, Trump has not targeted services. But among goods, our top exports have been gems and jewellery (about \$8 billion), pharmaceuticals (almost \$7.7 billion), smartphones (\$7.1 billion), and so on. Even frozen shrimps and prawns (marine products) account for \$2.2 billion, and come in the top 10 goods exports to the US. Workers in Gujarat cutting diamonds and shrimp farmers in Andhra Pradesh and Odisha are likely to face the heat of this elevated tariff structure very soon. The government may think about how best to tide over this challenge.

What is it that India can offer to the US in the ongoing negotiations on the bilateral trade agreement? Both countries had envisioned taking the bilateral trade to \$500 billion by 2030, up from the current levels of about \$200 billion. That was a very optimistic vision, and India hoped that the tariffs im-

If PM Modi goes on a drive to diversify exports to other countries, the impact of US tariffs can be minimised. Another thing to keep in mind is that our services exports to the world were \$336 billion in the calendar year 2024, of which only 14 per cent (\$47.5 billion) went to the US. So far, Trump has not targeted services. But among goods, our top exports have been gems and jewellery (about \$8 billion), pharmaceuticals (almost \$7.7 billion), smartphones (\$7.1 billion), and so on. Even frozen shrimps and prawns (marine products) account for \$2.2 billion.

posed would hover between 10 to 15 per cent, similar to that levied on countries and blocs like the UK, EU, Japan, and South Korea. But that expectation has been belied, and now it seems that there is little chance to negotiate and bring these tariffs down from 25 per cent to somewhere in between 15 to 20 per cent.

This scenario seems probable only if India offers something substantial. It could be crude oil/gas purchases from the US, or defence items, or high-tech chips. Also, India can offer to lower duties on a wide variety of imports, from whiskey to luxury cars to even some agri-products such as walnuts and cranberries and put in place import quotas on other sensitive agri-products. The US's interest in agriculture is more in soya and corn, both GM crops. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had allowed GM cotton, traces of which are already in our food system. PM Modi has to take a stand, based on science, whether to allow GM food crops like rapeseed-mustard or BT brinjal, which are home-grown or to let in GM soya and corn through imports under tariff rate quotas.

Reforming our own agriculture should remain a priority. Agri-R&D is the way forward, especially in the face of the high tariff duties. But the calibration to reduce duties on agri-products has to be done gradually and carefully. This is an overdue agenda, irrespective of Trump's tariff pressures today. Hope India can do it.

The writer is Distinguished Professor at ICRIER. Views are personal

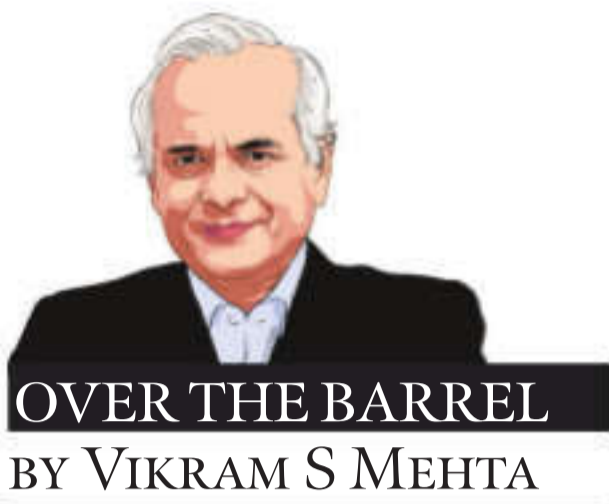
WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"With the UN climate summit nearing, all eyes are on China – the key player in the global renewables boom and the fight to stay within climate limits."

— THE GUARDIAN

For energy security, a redesign

To get rid of regulatory miasma, government can undertake a root and branch reconfiguration of the current system, simplify processes



OVER THE BARREL
BY VIKRAM S MEHTA

ENERGY SECURITY HAS typically been discussed within the frame of access, reliability and affordability of fossil fuels. Today, however, against the backdrop of global warming and India's commitment to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2070, this results in too narrow a perspective. India is on a two track energy trajectory. One track relates to the demand for fossil fuels (coal, oil and gas) and the other to renewables (solar, wind, bio etc). The national objective is to decrease the share of the former and increase that of the latter in the energy consumption basket. To achieve this goal, India must focus on not just conservation of the usage of fossils, but also the simplification and coherence of the energy regulatory system.

India has done well to safeguard its energy security in the traditional sense. It has opened up multiple sources of crude oil and has resisted western government pressure to sanction Russia. As a result, notwithstanding the crisis over Gaza, the Ukraine war and President Trump's economic and personal predilections, it has created a resilient supply chain. Also, by steadily increasing the share of Russian crude in its import basket from 2.1 per cent by value in 2021-22 to 35.1 per cent in 2024-25, it has reduced the weighted average cost of the basket of imported crude by at least \$2/barrel. Further, demand management and efficiency has reduced the intensity of fossil fuel demand per unit of GDP.

However, when looked at through the broader prism that captures the trajectory of renewables, the situation does not look as robust. This is not because growth in the capacity of renewable energy has been slow. In fact, on the contrary, it has been impressive, albeit from a low base. Five years back renewables accounted for 19 per cent of electricity generating capacity. Today it accounts for 49 per cent (234 GW).

What is worrying is the slowdown in the pace of this growth and the imbalance between the generation of capacity and the development of supporting transmission and distribution infrastructure. There are several reasons for this slowdown, but one major factor is the regulatory miasma surrounding the sector.

I recently read an article by Swaminathan Aiyar. He wrote about the findings of a study by Team Lease Regtech titled "unlocking renewable energy potential by reducing compliance burden". I have not read this study and so I repeat here only the data produced by Aiyar. He writes that the Team Lease researchers identified 2,735 compliance obligations for the renewable industry across 35 state and central governments and 30 different government departments; that 40 per cent of these compliances related to labour and the balance predominantly to land acquisition, environment and safety. He adds that 60 per cent of these obligations require the applicant to fill in the forms man-

ually and visit the offices of the regulator. Finally and more specifically, he writes a "solar plant of just 1 megawatt (MW) capacity may need over 100 licences, registrations, and approvals before it can begin operations... and that compliance is not a one-time process... but include annual, quarterly and monthly filings, physical inspections, renewals, and certifications".

Every businessman has had to deal with bureaucracy. But I suspect even the most hardened will catch their breath reading these statistics. I recollect three decades back when Shell built the first Shell branded fuel retail outlet in Mumbai on an already existing BPCL outlet, it took 12 months to secure all approvals before construction could commence. It needed to secure only 58 approvals. I remember wondering why anyone would expend this level of effort to create a downstream footprint and only recommended continuation because of the hope and expectation that the government would simplify the process. So on reading Swami's article, I could not help but reflect on how India would achieve its target of creating 500 GW of "usable" renewable electricity by 2035 if this were the regulatory maze that investors had to navigate?

The word "usable" is the key. For it is one thing to create generation capacity. Quite another to develop the interstate transmission network; establish backup storage systems; build the distribution network and set the tariffs and standards for this capacity to be consumed. And as the experience of Spain earlier this year brought into sharp relief, it is even more complicated to ensure that connectivity between these different segments of the value chain is seamless, balanced and technically solid. Last April much of Spain blacked out because of an interconnectivity fault in the cross border EU renewables transmission grid.

The supply of hydrocarbons depends crucially on geology. Governments have no control over a country's natural resource endowments. On the other hand, the supply of renewables faces no structural block. Sunlight and wind are "freely" available; the technology for generating wind and solar energy is well established; the economics are competitive; and there is investor interest.

The rub is the multiplicity of regulatory agencies and regulators that bear on this sector. Plus the fact there is no one executive authority with nodal responsibility or accountability for its operations.

The positive is the government faces no structural block like geology to overcome this rub. It can, if it so wishes, undertake a root and branch reconfiguration and redesign of the current regulatory system. It can simplify the regulatory process by removing or converging the current multiple layers of oversight. It can standardise operating rules; ease the process of land acquisition; digitise the approval process; align technical standards and safety conditions; render transparent the setting of network charges and supply contracts; and expedite dispute resolution.

The government does, of course, face the block of legacy vested interests. It is a powerful block but it cannot withstand determined political will. Such will is required for the prize of weakening the current unhealthy link between economic growth, energy demand and environmental protection – for "Energy Atmanirbharta".

The writer is former chairman of Shell Group in India. Views are personal



BRINDA KARAT

In Chhattisgarh, a travesty

Harassment of tribal youth, nuns raises urgent questions about minority rights

THE ARREST OF two nuns, Sisters Preeti Mary and Vandana Francis, and Sukhman Mandavi, an Adivasi youth belonging to the Christian community in Chhattisgarh, has been widely reported in the media. I was part of a delegation of Members of Parliament and political leaders who met them in Durg central jail. The cases against them are of forcible conversion and human trafficking. They were released after being granted bail by an NIA court on Saturday.

On July 25, three adult Adivasi women accompanied by Mandavi, their family friend, reached Durg station from their village in Orchha, Narayanpur. This was the first time they were travelling outside their district, and were understandably nervous. They were on their way to an Agra hospital to get trained as kitchen help to be employed in institutions run by the nuns. They were waiting at the railway station for two nuns who were to escort them to Agra. They had heard of the jobs through Mandavi's sister Sukhmati, who had worked at the Agra hospital for several years. Mandavi had not bought a platform ticket and was questioned by a passing inspector. This attracted attention and soon a crowd gathered, led by the local Bajrang Dal, who insisted that the group of Adivasis and the nuns, who had arrived by then, should be taken into police custody on charges of trafficking. The Adivasi women showed their Aadhaar cards, which proved that they were not minors. Their parents spoke to the police on the phone, as-

sureing them that their daughters were travelling with their consent. They offered to make the journey from their village several hours away to make written statements to this effect. Thus, no charge of human trafficking was made out. They also stated clearly that they and their daughters had been Christians for several years. There was, therefore, no question of forcible conversion. These are the facts.

But it is not facts that mattered. The police control room at the railway station became an arena for open hooliganism. There is video evidence of Bajrang Dal members, led by a woman, humiliating, intimidating and shouting at the nuns in filthy, sexist, abusive language. The video shows them beating Mandavi, threatening him to make him "confess" to being part of the nuns' "conspiracy". The young women were taken one by one into an adjoining room and beaten and bullied into changing their statements and agreeing that they were being forcibly taken away. The police stood by while the Constitution, rule of law and the norms of human rights were shredded. Without any independent inquiry, on grounds of "suspicion" on a complaint filed by a Bajrang Dal leader, the nuns were booked and arrested along with Mandavi. The terrorised Adivasi women were taken to a government home where they were isolated, and when their anxious parents arrived, they were not permitted to meet them. There has been tremendous pressure on the women and the parents to give statements against the nuns

and the Church. The women were released after a week of what is termed "counselling" by the government. Statements given under custodial pressure have little legal value.

There are several issues that arise, apart from the utter lawlessness and targeting of Christians by Hindutva outfits backed by the BJP government. This is an attack on the constitutional right of a citizen to travel and work anywhere in the country. Does a young Adivasi woman who belongs to the Christian community have to get a passport stamped by a Sangh Parivar outfit to travel to another state? Why should adult Adivasi Christian women have to show evidence as to why and with whom they are travelling? This case establishes a terrible precedent that directly impacts the lives and livelihoods of young Adivasi women travelling out of their villages for work. A second issue is the nature of the attack on the nuns and the Adivasi women. Can anyone, man or woman, use language that amounts to verbal sexual assault against those in custody and not be prosecuted? This was also a sexist attack that concerns the rights of all women. Then again, the only time the brave Sister Preeti Mary broke down was when she narrated that she was accused by the hooligans of being a "foreigner" and called a "deemak" (termite) working against national interest: "After all my years of work for the poor, for the leprosy-afflicted, in the most remote areas without any facilities, am I to be termed an anti-national termite? My religion

inspires me to work for the poor – am I to be punished for that?"

We have heard words like "termites" used by the Home Minister to abuse Bengali-speaking Muslims routinely, as being "illegal migrants". Here, we have Christian nuns being called termites. The words we heard joined the dots between that cell in Durg jail and the bastis of Delhi and elsewhere, where Indian citizens are being harassed and tortured in the name of detecting of illegal immigrants: Anyone and everyone who does not fit into the framework of Hindutva can be termed a "foreigner" and their rights curtailed. The deletion of lakhs of voters in Bihar – mainly the poor, Dalits and marginalised communities – in the Special Intensive Revision to "purify" the electoral lists is also being done in the name of detection of foreigners. The number of foreigners detected is negligible, but the EC's demand for documents, impossible to procure, has basically robbed the poor of the fundamental right of every Indian to vote in an election.

Join the dots of what is happening across India. The horrific aggression and arrest of the nuns and Adivasi Christians is not an isolated incident. To paraphrase what Pastor Martin Niemöller had said, "If we stay silent today, there will be no one to protest when they come for us tomorrow."

The writer is a member of the CPI(M) Politburo

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TRUMP'S HUBRIS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial 'The crude fact' (IE, August 2). Insulting and controversial remarks from US President Donald Trump against India have become frequent. He claims that the India-Pakistan ceasefire happened due to trade, calls India a "dead economy," imposes 25 per cent tariffs, and now suggests that India has stopped buying oil from Russia. These statements challenge India's sovereignty. Worse, our government has not given any strong response.

Raees Haneef, Haryana

THIS REFERS TO the editorial 'The crude fact' (IE, August 2). For decades after World War II, the US led the world by its sheer military might. By the 1970s, the dollar extended Washington's reach far beyond its borders. Now, in 2025, both instruments of power, military and monetary, find their embodiment in a Caesar who wields them in sheer hubris. History offers caution: Rome's decline did not begin at the nadir of its power but in the intoxication at the apex of strength.

R Narayanan, Mumbai

NEXT VP

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Dear Vice

President' (IE, August 2). The upcoming appointment of India's next Vice President offers an opportunity to combine experience, inclusivity, and national interest. Vasundhara Raje's name reflects the BJP's push for gender and regional balance, given her political stature and administrative record. While her selection would mark a significant step for women in leadership, the role demands more than symbolism. Candidates like Shashi Tharoor or former CJI DY Chandrachud bring intellectual depth and cross-party credibility.

Mohammad Asad, Mumbai

AN INJUSTICE

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Conversion, trafficking case: Kerala nuns walk out of Chhattisgarh jail after bail by NIA court' (August 3). The arrest of the nuns reeks more of communal vigilantism than credible law enforcement. When the kin of the tribal girls deny coercion, the justification collapses. Anti-conversion laws, ostensibly to prevent forced conversions, are being misused to criminalise legitimate acts of charity, employment or faith. The state must protect rights, not undermine them under pressure from ideological groups.

SS Paul, Nadia

TOP OF THE WORLD



Iran military, chief Amir Hatami. *File*

IRAN
Israeli threats remain, says Iran Army Chief

Dubai: The commander-in-chief of Iran's military, Amir Hatami, said on Sunday that threats from Israel persist, according to state media. In June, Israel and the U.S. launched strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities during the war, in which Tehran retaliated against Israel with several barrages of missiles. "A 1% threat must be perceived as a 100% threat. We should not underestimate the enemy and consider its threats as over," Hatami said. Meanwhile, Pakistan and Iran Sunday agreed to enhance bilateral trade volume to \$10 billion from the current \$3 billion as they signed 12 deals after talks between PM Shehbaz Sharif and Iran President Masoud Pezeshkian.

REUTERS&PTI

CHILE
Body of one of 5 miners trapped in mine found

Bogota: Rescue teams found a body inside a section of a Chilean copper mine that collapsed two days earlier during a moderate earthquake, the mine's director said Saturday. Rescuers have been trying to reach five miners who were trapped Thursday evening in the El Teniente mine in central Chile as rocks collapsed around them during a 4.2 magnitude quake. The copper mine is one of Chile's largest. A spokesman for the rescue team that is trying to drill through 90 meters (295 feet) of rock to reach the miners said the body found on Saturday is one of the five miners who were trapped in the mine. El Teniente Director Andres Music said authorities were still trying to identify the body.

AP

UNITED STATES
Small earthquake shakes New York, New Jersey areas

New Jersey: A small earthquake rattled the New York metropolitan area Saturday night. The US Geological Survey said the tremor had a magnitude of 3.0. It hit in the New Jersey suburb of Hasbrouck Heights, less than 8 miles (13 kilometers) west of Central Park, at a depth of about 6.2 miles (10 kilometers). One resident of New York's Brooklyn borough described it as a very brief tremor, just a slight swaying for a moment.

AP

TRUCKS REACH ENCLAVE'S BORDER FOR RARE FUEL DELIVERY

6 starve to death in Gaza as 40 killed in Israeli strikes, many near aid sites

NIDAL AL-MUGHRABI
CAIRO, AUGUST 3

SIX MORE people died of starvation and malnutrition in Gaza over the past 24 hours, its health ministry said, underlining the enclave's humanitarian emergency as Egyptian state TV said two trucks were set to make a rare delivery of fuel on Sunday.

The new deaths raised the toll of those dying from what international humanitarian agencies say may be an unfolding famine to 175, including 93 children, since the war began, the ministry said.

Egypt's *Al-Qahera News TV* said two trucks carrying 107 tons of diesel were set to enter Gaza, months after Israel severely restricted aid access to the enclave before easing it somewhat as starvation began to spread. Gaza's health ministry has said fuel shortages have severely impaired hospital services. Fuel shipments have been rare since March, when Israel restricted the flow of aid and goods into the enclave in what it said was pressure on Hamas to free the remaining hostages.

Israel blames Hamas for the suffering in Gaza but, in response to a rising international outcry, it announced steps last week to let more aid reach the population, including pausing fighting for part of the day in some areas.

UN agencies have said that air-drops of food are insufficient and that Israel must let in far more aid by land and open up access to the war-devastated territory.

Palestinian health authorities said at least 40 people had been killed by Israeli gunfire and



Around 90,000 pro-Palestine protesters gather at the Sydney Harbour Bridge in Sydney; (*and, right*) Palestinians carry aid supplies that entered Gaza through Israel, in northern Gaza's Beit Lahia on Sunday. *Reuters & AP*



airstrikes across Gaza Sunday. Deaths included persons trying to make their way to aid distribution points in southern and central areas of Gaza, medics said.

Meanwhile, Israel's far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir visited the flashpoint Al-Aqsa mosque compound in Jerusalem Sunday and said he prayed there, challenging rules covering one of the most sensitive sites in the Middle East. Under a delicate decades-old "status quo" arrangement with Muslim authorities, the Al-Aqsa compound is administered by a Jordanian body and Jews can visit but may not pray there.

REUTERS

US envoy tells Israeli kin of hostage he is working on plan to end war

REUTERS
JERUSALEM, AUGUST 3

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump's Middle East envoy told families of hostages being held by Palestinian militant group Hamas on Saturday that he was working with the Israeli government on a plan that would effectively end the war in Gaza.

Trump has made ending the conflict a major priority of his ad-

ministration, though negotiations have faltered. Steve Witkoff is visiting Israel as its government faces mounting pressure over the deteriorating humanitarian conditions in the enclave.

In a recording of the meeting, reviewed by Reuters, Witkoff is heard saying: "We have a very, very good plan that we're working on collectively with the Israeli government, with Prime Minister Netanyahu ... for the reconstruction of Gaza. That effec-

tively means the end of the war."

Witkoff also said that Hamas was prepared to disarm in order to end the war, though the group has repeatedly said it will not lay down its weapons. In response, Hamas, which has been militarily battered by Israel in the war, said it would not relinquish "armed resistance" unless an "independent, fully sovereign Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital" was established.

As Trump sends nuclear subs, China, Russia hold naval drills

REUTERS
MOSCOW, AUGUST 3

THE RUSSIAN and Chinese navies are carrying out artillery and anti-submarine drills in the Sea of Japan as part of scheduled joint exercises, the Russian Pacific Fleet was quoted as saying on Sunday.

The drills are taking place two days after U.S. President Donald Trump said he had ordered two nuclear submarines to be positioned in "the appropriate regions" in response to remarks by former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev. However, they were scheduled well before Trump's action.



Chinese and Russian naval officials in Vladivostok, Russia, on Thursday. *File*

Interfax news agency quoted the Pacific Fleet as saying Russian and Chinese vessels were moving in a joint detachment including a large Russian anti-subma-

rine ship and two Chinese destroyers.

It said diesel-electric submarines from the two countries were also involved, as well as a Chinese submarine rescue ship.

Interfax said Russian and Chinese sailors would conduct artillery firing, practise anti-submarine and air defence missions, and improve joint search and rescue operations at sea.

Russia and China, which signed a "no-limits" strategic partnership shortly before Russia went to war in Ukraine in 2022, conduct regular military exercises to rehearse coordination between their armed forces and send a deterrent signal to adversaries.

Federal agency opens probe into former Trump prosecutor Smith

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BRIDGEWATER, AUGUST 3

AN INDEPENDENT watchdog agency responsible for enforcing a law against partisan political activity by federal employees has opened an investigation into Jack Smith, the Justice Department special counsel who brought two criminal cases against then-candidate Donald Trump before his election to the White House.

The Office of Special Counsel confirmed Saturday that it was investigating Smith on allegations that he engaged in political activity through his inquiries into Trump.

Smith was named special counsel by then-Attorney General Merrick Garland in November 2022, and his special counsel title is entirely distinct from the agency now investigating him.

It was not clear what basis exists to contend that Smith's in-

vestigations were political in nature or that he violated the Hatch Act, a federal law that bans certain public officials from engaging in political activity.

Sen Tom Cotton, an Arkansas Republican, had earlier this week encouraged the office to scrutinise Smith's activities and had alleged that his conduct was designed to help then-President Joe Biden and his vice president Kamala Harris, both Democrats.



ONCE IN MANY LIFETIMES

A helicopter shot shows the eruption of the Krashennnikov Volcano in Russia's Kamchatka region on Sunday. The head of the volcano response team said this is the first confirmed eruption in 600 years whereas the US-based Smithsonian's Global Volcanism Program lists its last eruption as occurring 475 years ago in 1550. *AP*

POWERFUL WINDS, HEAVY RAINFALL EXPECTED
STORM FLORIS SET TO HIT BRITAIN

An intense summer storm is expected to sweep across northern Britain on Monday, forecasters said, bringing potentially life-threatening winds and waves. Forecasters said the "unseasonably disruptive system," known as Storm Floris, would most likely bring heavy rain-fall and wind gusts that could exceed 80 miles per hour, especially in Scotland. **NYT**



Druze factions attacked Syrian security forces, killing at least one in the southern province of Sweida on Saturday. *Reuters file*

Clashes break out in Syria as govt struggles to ease tensions

Israeli military says it conducted raid on targets in southern Syria

KAREEM CHEHAYEB
BEIRUT, AUGUST 3

NEW OUTBREAKS of violence overnight into Sunday rocked Syria at two distinct flashpoints, straining a fragile ceasefire and calling into question the ability of the transitional government to exert its authority across the whole country.

In the north, government-affiliated fighters confronted Kurdish-led forces who control much of the region, while in the south, in Sweida, they clashed with Druze armed groups.

The outbreaks come at a time when Syria's interim authorities are trying to maintain a tense ceasefire in Sweida province after clashes with Druze factions last month, and to implement an agreement with the U.S.-backed, Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces that would reintegrate large swaths of northeastern Syria with the rest of the country.

The Syrian government under interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa has been struggling to consolidate control since he led a surprise insurgency that ousted former President Bashar Assad in December, ending the Assad family's decades-long autocratic rule.

Political opponents and ethnic and religious minorities have been suspicious of Sharaa's de facto Islamist rule and cooperation with affiliated fighters that come from militant groups.

State state television said clashes between government forces and militias belonging to the Druze religious minority rocked the southern province of Sweida on Saturday after Druze factions attacked Syrian security forces, killing at least one member. The state-run Alikhbaria channel cited an anonymous security official who said the ceasefire has been broken. The Defense Ministry has not issued any formal statement.

Meanwhile, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based war monitor, said in addition to the member of the security forces killed, one Druze was killed and at least nine others were wounded in the clashes that took place in the in the western part of Sweida province.

The Israeli military said on Sunday that it conducted a raid on targets in southern Syria the previous day. It said it seized weapons and questioned several suspects it said were involved in weapons trafficking in the area.

AP WITH REUTERS INPUTS

‘Crimes against humanity’: Bangladesh tribunal starts trial of deposed PM Hasina

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
DHAKA, AUGUST 3

BANGLADESH'S INTERNATIONAL Crimes Tribunal Sunday started the trial of deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in absentia over crimes against humanity over the violent suppression of the 2024 student-led protests.

The interim government-appointed Chief Prosecutor, Tajul Islam, in his opening statement, described Hasina as the "nucleus of all crimes" and called for the maximum penalty.

The prosecution also named Hasina's two top aides — former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal and former Inspector General of Police Chowdhury Abdullah Al Mamun — as the co-accused in the case. The ICT com-

menced the proceedings against Hasina on several charges, with the major one being killings and tortures to tame last year's Students Against Discrimination (SAD)-led violent street campaign that eventually toppled her Awami League government on August 5, 2024.

While Hasina and Kamal are being tried in absentia, Mamun is in custody and has agreed to be the "approver" in the case.

Meanwhile, activists of the National Citizen Party and the BNP's student wing held separate rallies in Bangladesh on Sunday ahead of the first anniversary of the July Uprising that toppled the Sheikh Hasina-led government on August 5 last year. The newly-floated National Citizen Party (NCP) unveiled the party's 24-point manifesto during its rally in Dhaka's Central Shaheed Minar.

KREMLIN WANTS TO CONTROL INFORMATION AVAILABLE ONLINE AND ALSO WHERE AND HOW INTERNET TRAFFIC FLOWS, SAY ANALYSTS

In bid to control Internet, Russia launches MAX, state-sanctioned messaging app

PAUL SONNE
BERLIN, AUGUST 3

RUSSIA IS escalating its efforts to curtail online freedom, taking new steps toward a draconian state-controlled internet.

The authorities are cracking down on workarounds that Russians have been using for access to foreign apps and banned content, including through new laws signed by President Vladimir Putin this week. Moscow has also been impeding the function of services from U.S. tech companies, like YouTube, that Russians have used for years. At the same time, the Kremlin

is building out a domestic ecosystem of easily monitored and censored Russian alternatives to Western tech products. That includes a new state-sanctioned messaging service, MAX, which will come preinstalled by law on all new smartphones sold in Russia starting in September.

The idea, experts say, is to migrate more Russians from an open internet dominated by the products of Western tech giants to a censored online ecosystem, where Russians primarily use software under the gaze and influence of the state. The effort has advanced significantly amid wartime repression, but it is unclear how far it will go.

"The goal here is absolute control," said Anastasiya Kruope, a researcher at Human Rights Watch who wrote a recent report on declining Russian internet freedoms.

The Kremlin wants to control not only the information available online but also where and how internet traffic flows, Kruope said, so the Russian internet can function in isolation and be switched on and off at will. Russia's technical capabilities for clamping down are improving, she added.

"They are not perfect," Kruope said. "They are not nearly at the level they would like them to be. But they are getting better,



Since the first decade of Vladimir Putin's rule, Moscow had been articulating a vision for a 'sovereign' internet. *Reuters*

and this is the reason to start paying attention."

Unlike China, where users have been restricted since the dawn of the internet, Russia long boasted one of the most open and freewheeling environments anywhere online. Operating with virtually no barriers, millions of Russians flocked to Western tech platforms, posted critical news and freely expressed their thoughts on the web.

The Kremlin began to see that freedom as a threat, particularly after the rise of the opposition activist Aleksei Navalny, who died in prison last year. His exposés of the Putin elite, initially publicized in Live Journal blog posts and later

in popular YouTube videos, gave him millions of followers online and the power to mobilize mass protests on the street.

Since the first decade of Putin's rule, Moscow had been articulating a vision for what it called a "sovereign" internet that would sever Russia as much as possible from the rest of the online world and strip power from foreign tech firms, which didn't always give in to the Kremlin's demands.

But Putin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 gave the government the opportunity to accelerate the plan. Moscow banned Facebook, Instagram and Twitter outright and took steps that caused TikTok to disable functions

in Russia. Lawmakers passed draconian laws stifling free expression in the streets and online.

Now, with the introduction of MAX, authorities have signaled they may take aim at foreign messaging apps, in particular WhatsApp, which is owned by Meta and counts nearly 100 million monthly users in Russia. Telegram could be a target as well.

At an economic forum in June, MP Anton Gorelkin also called Telegram, based in the United Arab Emirates and owned by the Russian-born internet entrepreneur Pavel Durov, "an entity that worries the state." But he said previously that the app would not be banned. **NYT**

ECONOMY

RBI MONETARY POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING SCHEDULED FROM AUG 4-6

Amid US Fed hawkishness, RBI likely to walk the cautious line with a status quo

HITESH VYAS
MUMBAI, AUGUST 3

AFTER REDUCING the repo rate by 100-basis points this year, the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) six member Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) is likely to maintain status quo in the upcoming monetary policy scheduled to be announced on August 6. The MPC is also expected to retain the policy stance as neutral. While the inflation projection for FY26 is likely to be revised downward, the RBI may retain its forecast for real gross domestic product (GDP) growth for the current year.

What is expected?

The upcoming Monetary Policy Committee's (MPC) meeting, scheduled from August 4-6, is being held amid rising uncertainties around trade tariffs and geopolitical tensions, as well as moderation in headline inflation. Economists are of the view that the six-member MPC may pause in the upcoming policy, which will be announced on August 6, after frontloading a 50 basis points (bps) cut in the repo rate in June. The RBI started cutting repo rate in February 2025 with a 25 bps reduction, followed by a similar cut in the repo rate in June.

The RBI started cutting repo rate in February 2025 with a 25 bps reduction, followed by a similar cut in the repo rate in June

BRIEFLY

Exporters seek assistance, credit at affordable rates

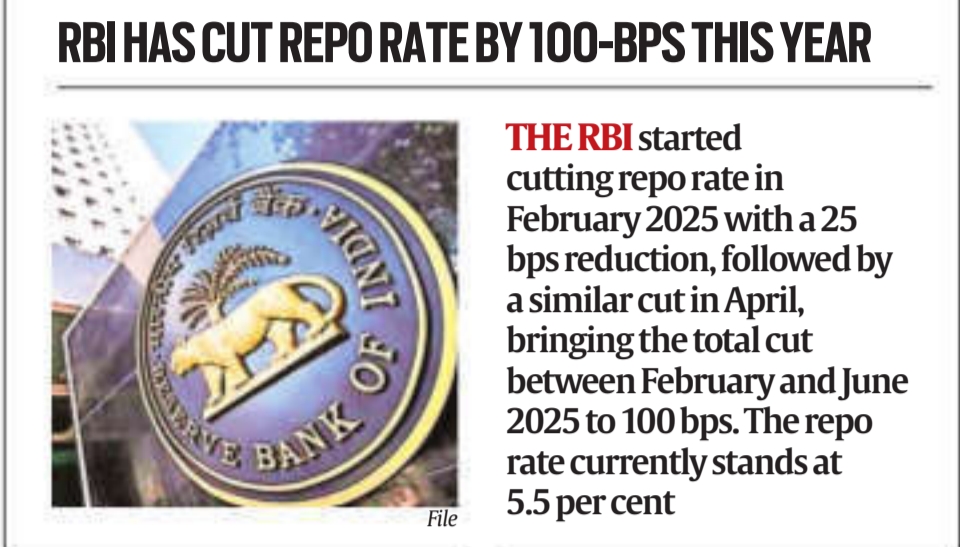
New Delhi: Indian exporters from various sectors, including food, marine, and textiles, have sought financial assistance and affordable credit from the government to cope with the 25 per cent Trump tariff, industry officials said. In a meeting with Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal in Mumbai, certain exporters sought plans on the lines of the production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme, they added. "Exporters shared issues, which they may face in the American market because of the high duty announced by US President Donald Trump," one of the officials said, adding that the minister has suggested that the exporting community send their suggestions in writing. They also demanded loans at affordable rates and fiscal incentives. In India, according to exporters, interest rates range between 8 and 12 per cent or even more, depending on the spread and risk assessment of the borrower by authorised dealer banks. **PTI**

India a key strategic market, says Samsung

New Delhi: Samsung sees India as a "key strategic market" with "immense potential" and stays optimistic about its growth trajectory, a top company official said. The comment comes against the backdrop of global trade turmoil, and the latest US salvo of 25 per cent tariff imposition on India. India is not just a strategic market for Samsung but a key pillar in its global future, said JB Park, president and CEO, Samsung Southwest Asia. **PTI**

VinFast plans 35 outlets across India by year-end

New Delhi: Electric vehicle manufacturer VinFast Auto India, a subsidiary of Vietnam-based VinFast, inaugurated its largest retail outlet in Chennai — its second showroom in India — a company official said on Sunday. Located in Teynampet in the city, the 4,700 sq ft facility marks the automaker's first showroom in Tamil Nadu, following its debut outlet in Surat, Gujarat. VinFast plans to establish 35 showrooms across 27 cities in India by the end of the year. **PTI**



2025 to 100 bps. The repo rate currently stands at 5.5 per cent.

"With the RBI having already frontloaded rate cuts and ensured ample liquidity, the MPC may prefer to pause for now and assess how the macroeconomic landscape evolves. Additionally, transmission of the previous rate cuts is still underway and could take some more time to show its effect on the economy," CareEdge Ratings said in a report.

"Moreover, a hawkish stance from the US Federal Reserve, ongoing trade tension with the US and recent appreciation of the US dollar index could provide further reasons for adopting a wait-and-watch approach, as additional pressure on the rupee may emerge," it said.

State Bank of India's group chief economic advisor, Soumya

THE RBI started cutting repo rate in February 2025 with a 25 bps reduction, followed by a similar cut in April, bringing the total cut between February and June 2025 to 100 bps. The repo rate currently stands at 5.5 per cent

Kanti Ghosh, however, expects RBI to continue frontloading with a 25 bps cut in August policy.

"With inflation having decisively eased and remained within the RBI's tolerance band for several months, maintaining a restrictive policy stance risks exacerbating output losses that are neither easily reversible. Monetary policy operates with lags, and postponing a rate cut until inflation falls further or growth weakens more visibly could result in deeper and more persistent economic damage," he said.

CareEdge expects the RBI's policy statement to retain a dovish tone, while maintaining a cautious outlook on evolving global developments.

Policy stance

The monetary policy stance is

EXPLAINED

Rising global uncertainties

THE UPCOMING Monetary Policy Committee's (MPC) meeting is being held amid rising uncertainties around trade tariffs and geopolitical tensions, as well as moderation in headline inflation. Experts are of the view that the six-member MPC may take a pause in the upcoming policy, which will be announced on August 6, after frontloading a 50 basis points (bps) cut in the repo rate in June.

likely to be maintained at 'neutral', having just changed in the June policy from 'accommodative' in April, said Kaushik Das, chief economist - India, Malaysia, and South Asia, Deutsche Bank AG.

The change in stance to neutral from accommodative within a span of two months came as a big surprise, but on balance, this reflects a prudent move on the MPC's part to ensure that the larger-than-expected 50bps repo rate cut in June did not result in expectations of further aggressive

easing in the period ahead, he said.

GDP and inflation forecast

According to Madan Sabnavis, chief economist, Bank of Baroda, RBI may revise downwards its inflation forecast for FY2026. In June policy, RBI projected consumer price index (CPI) inflation for FY26 at 3.7 per cent.

"There could be a downward revision in inflation but it will not be very significant. It may be revised from 3.7 per cent to 3.5 per cent," Sabnavis said.

Headline inflation, as measured by year-on-year changes in the all-India consumer price index (CPI), declined to 2.1 per cent in June 2025 — the lowest since January 2019 — from 2.8 per cent in May. The retail inflation remained below the 4 per cent target for the fifth consecutive month in June. Economists expect RBI to maintain its FY26 GDP forecast at 6.5 per cent in the policy.

Lending rates

If the RBI leaves the repo rate steady at 5.5 per cent, all external benchmark lending rates (EBLR) linked to the repo rate will not be changed. However, lenders may revise their interea rates on loans that are linked to the marginal cost of fund-based lending rate (MCLR).

reported weak numbers with same-store-sales growth decelerating to 7.1 per cent, from 8.4 per cent in FY25.

Numbers from auto majors were mixed. Revenues at Hyundai Motor were down 2 per cent y-o-y for the quarter with the operating margin down 20 bps y-o-y; average selling prices were down 3 per cent sequentially. Operating profit margins at Maruti Suzuki were down 230 basis points y-o-y, driving down the operating profit by 11 per cent y-o-y. However, TVS Motors posted a strong 20 per cent y-o-y increase in revenues as average realisations rose 2.5per cent y-o-y. This drove up margins by 110 bps y-o-y.

L&T's revenue grew a strong 16 per cent y-o-y and the company reported a jump in order inflows of 33 per cent. At the same time, operating profit margins fell 30 basis points (bps) y-o-y. Consolidates sales at Tata Steel were down 3 per cent y-o-y but operating profits were reasonably good thanks to smaller losses in UK and cost efficiencies. At Vedanta, consolidated ebtda(earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortization) were flat. **FE**

decided to restore the stretch for the operation of heritage trains.

In a letter to the Heritage Committee of Western Railway on July 30, 2025, Railway Board asked the zone to submit a formal proposal to declare the line as a heritage section.

A senior official of the Western Railway said that the Ratlam to Patalpani section has been converted to the Broad Gauge. Since, the Patalpani-Kalakund section is restored as a meter-gauge line, a detour alignment was planned from Patalpani to Choral to Khandwa, which is in the final stage.

The 9.5 km meter gauge line consists of four tunnels (0.5 km approx.), 24 sharp curves (6.5 km), six major bridges and 35 minor bridges. Apart from the picturesque views, the line also has cultural and historical significance. The Patalpani station is named after Tantia Bhil, a revolutionary who waged an armed struggle against the British in the jungles of central India. And the region is famous for the sweet *kalakand*, a delicacy from which the station Kalakund derives its name.

The train consists of two AC chair car coaches and three non-AC chair car coaches. The fare for one-way travel in the AC chair car is Rs 270 and in the non-AC chair car is Rs 20 per person.

MARKET WATCH

MCAP OF 7 OF TOP-10 VALUED COS DROPS

The combined market valuation of seven of the 10 most valued firms eroded by Rs 1.35 lakh crore last week, with Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) taking the biggest hit. Last week, the BSE benchmark tanked 863.18 points or 1.05 per cent. **PTI**

TCS layoffs signal strain on Indian IT as AI, US economic woes trigger uncertainty

GROWING PRESSURE						
Company	Revenue (Rs cr)			Profit (Rs cr)		
	Q4FY25	Q1FY26	QoQ growth	Q4FY25	Q1FY26	QoQ growth
TCS	64,479	63,437	-1.6%	12,224	12,760	4.4%
Infosys	40,925	42,279	3.3%	7,033	6,921	-1.6%
HCL Tech	30,246	30,349	0.3%	4,307	3,843	-10.8%
Wipro	22,500	22,135	-1.6%	3,570	3,330	-6.7%

Source: Company Websites

HITESH VYAS
MUMBAI, AUGUST 3

THE RECENT decision by tech major Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) to lay off 2 per cent of its workforce highlights the growing pressures on India's IT sector, driven by the fast-paced adoption of new technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) and ongoing economic uncertainty in the US, a key market for Indian tech companies.

In the first quarter of FY26, a considerable number of IT companies posted weak top-line performance and a squeeze in margins due to the tariff-related uncertainties.

Last week, IT bellwether TCS said that it will be laying off 12,000 employees, which is 2 per cent of its global workforce. The move is going to impact employees from the mid and senior levels. Framed as a push toward building a "future-ready generation" through "skilling and redeployment," TCS's move is, in effect, a sweeping cost-cutting exercise.

Analysts warn that as the use of AI continues to grow across the IT industry, a significant number of jobs could be at risk. With AI increasingly taking over tasks that were once handled manually — such as coding, data analysis and customer support — companies are likely to reassess workforce needs, potentially leading to widespread layoffs. Experts also point out that roles involving repetitive or process-driven functions are especially vulnerable, unless employees upskill or transition into areas where human oversight and creativity remain essential. "Aggregate headcount saw a modest quarter-on-quarter increase in Q1 FY26, but several IT companies announced workforce reductions," BNP Paribas Securities India said in a report. "TCS laid off nearly 2 per cent of its employees, while HCL Technologies is adjusting its talent deployment outside India, particularly scaling down in the automotive engineering and R&D segment. Wipro incurred a restructuring charge of Rs 247 crore linked to severance payouts in Europe."

Understandably, the employee retrenchment has started the debate of GenAI starting to impact the workforce, it said. The layoffs

In the first quarter of FY26, a considerable number of IT companies posted weak top-line performance

in the Indian IT sector are increasingly becoming common mainly due to skill mismatches and deployment challenges. "With growing pressure to reduce costs and align talent with AI-driven models, tech majors are slowing fresher hiring and trimming staff, signalling a structural shift in workforce strategy," said Arun Kailasan, research analyst - Fundamental Research, Geojit Investments Ltd. Rather than going for lateral hiring, IT firms are focusing on upskilling their existing workforce in emerging areas like AI and generative AI to take care of project execution going ahead.

Besides AI, other important factors for layoffs in the IT sector are the macroeconomic headwinds in the US due to tariff-related uncertainty and delay in rate cuts by the US Federal Reserve, resulting in a slower execution of projects by clients. These factors will affect the margins of domestic IT companies.

"During our April 2025 earnings call, we had called out delays in decision-making and projects start with respect to discretionary investments. This trend has continued and intensified to some extent in this quarter," TCS chief executive officer and managing director, K Krithivasan, said during the Q1 FY26 earnings call.

"Global businesses were disrupted due to conflicts, economic uncertainties and supply chain issues. We saw cost pressures in our customers causing previously unseen project pauses, deferrals and decision delays that resulted in less than expected revenue conversion," he said. In its recent policy announced on July 30, the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) kept the interest rate unchanged at 4.25-4.5 per cent. "At the beginning of the year, there was an expectation that the US Fed would reduce rates by 50-100 basis points. This cut has been consistently getting extended.

'RBI rate decision, Q1 earnings, tariffs to drive markets this week'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 3

EQUITY MARKETS this week will turn their focus on the RBI's interest rate decision, Q1 earnings from several blue-chip firms and tariff-related news for further cues, analysts said.

Moreover, trading activity of foreign investors and trends in global equity markets will also drive investors' sentiment.

"At the domestic level, all eyes will be on the Reserve Bank of India's monetary policy meeting, where the central bank's commentary on inflation, liquidity, and growth outlook will be keenly watched. On the earnings front, results from marquee companies, including Bharti Airtel, DLF, Bajaj Auto, Hero MotoCorp, Tata Motors, State Bank of India and Life Insurance Corporation of India, will shape sectoral momentum," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

Other important triggers include the release of HSBC services and composite PMI, crude oil price movement, and further commentary from the US on trade negotiations — all of which are likely to influence near-term volatility, Mishra added.

Trade-related concerns and persistent selling by foreign in-



File

vestors added to the gloom in the markets last week. Pravesh Gour, senior technical analyst at Swastika Investmart Ltd, said, "Looking ahead, the RBI policy meeting scheduled for August 6 will be a key event, especially amid heightened volatility from both global and domestic triggers. "Meanwhile, several major Nifty companies, including Adani Ports, Bharti Airtel, Bajaj Auto, Hero MotoCorp, Trent, Titan, State Bank of India and Tata Motors, are set to report their earnings this week, which could drive stock-specific action". Last week, the BSE benchmark Sensex tanked 863.18 points or 1.05 per cent, and the NSE Nifty dropped 271.65 points or 1.09 per cent.

Market perception is that after the initial chaos, there will be a deal between India and the US after the next round of negotiations.

When interest rates are high, spending in the US gets impacted, including on IT. This has a bearing on the contracts awarded to Indian IT firms," said an analyst.

Cautious hiring ahead

Analysts say that due to weak demand, IT companies are likely to slow down their hiring in the near future. "With muted demand and tighter budgets, companies are focusing on optimising existing talent rather than expanding headcount. Hiring remains subdued, while utilisation rates are rising and attrition has stabilised. The shift is towards value-based deployment and reskilling for AI-driven roles, setting the stage for long-term workforce transformation," Kailasan of Geojit Investments said.

Muted outlook

IT analysts said that domestic IT companies are likely to see soft earnings for the rest of 2025 amid volatile and uncertain geopolitical conditions. "The main challenge remains the slowdown in decision-making among major US clients," said Ashish Gupta, chief investment officer at Axis Mutual Fund. "There's a lot of uncertainty around the outlook—questions about retail spending, how consumers will respond to potentially higher interest rates, and whether the US economy can maintain its momentum. The broader economic picture remains unclear." A report by Nuvama Research said that the demand environment is expected to remain challenging for the next one to two quarters for the IT sector due to the macro — tariff-related — uncertainty.

"In the near term, we expect lack of clarity on macro to continue until most of the trade deals are announced. In general, a large part of the impact of delays was felt in Q1 FY26. The second quarter of FY26 can have some residual impact of the delays. If there are no further delays, Q2 FY26 will be at least better than the first quarter," said Sumit Pokharna, vice president (Fundamental Research), Kotak Securities. IT sector experts anticipate recovery in 2026 as clarity on the US tariffs emerges and potential rate cuts by the US Federal Reserve help revive demand.

OPEC+ makes large oil output hike in market share push

London: OPEC+ agreed on Sunday to raise oil production by 5,47,000 barrels per day for September, the latest in a series of accelerated output hikes to regain market share, as concerns mount over potential supply disruptions linked to Russia.

The move marks a full and early reversal of OPEC+'s largest tranche of output cuts plus a separate increase in output for the United Arab Emirates amounting to about 2.5 million bpd, or about 2.4 per cent of world demand.

Eight OPEC+ members held a brief virtual meeting, amid increasing US pressure on India to halt Russian oil purchases — part of Washington's efforts to bring Moscow to the negotiating table for a peace deal with Ukraine. US President Donald Trump said he wants this by August 8.

In a statement following the meeting, OPEC+ cited a healthy economy and low stocks as reasons behind its decision.

Oil prices have remained elevated even as OPEC+ has raised output, with Brent crude closing near \$70 a barrel on Friday, up from a 2025 low of near \$58 in April. The eight countries are scheduled to meet again on September 7, when they may consider reinstating another layer of output cuts, two OPEC+ sources said. **REUTERS**

TOP OF THE WORLD



Iran military, chief Amir Hatami. *File*

IRAN
Israeli threats remain, says Iran Army Chief

Dubai: The commander-in-chief of Iran's military, Amir Hatami, said on Sunday that threats from Israel persist, according to state media. In June, Israel and the U.S. launched strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities during the war, in which Tehran retaliated against Israel with several barrages of missiles. "A 1% threat must be perceived as a 100% threat. We should not underestimate the enemy and consider its threats as over," Hatami said. Meanwhile, Pakistan and Iran Sunday agreed to enhance bilateral trade volume to \$10 billion from the current \$3 billion as they signed 12 deals after talks between PM Shehbaz Sharif and Iran President Masoud Pezeshkian.

REUTERS&PTI

CHILE

Body of one of 5 miners trapped in mine found

Bogota: Rescue teams found a body inside a section of a Chilean copper mine that collapsed two days earlier during a moderate earthquake, the mine's director said Saturday. Rescuers have been trying to reach five miners who were trapped Thursday evening in the El Teniente mine in central Chile as rocks collapsed around them during a 4.2 magnitude quake. The copper mine is one of Chile's largest. A spokesman for the rescue team that is trying to drill through 90 meters (295 feet) of rock to reach the miners said the body found on Saturday is one of the five miners who were trapped in the mine. El Teniente Director Andres Music said authorities were still trying to identify the body.

AP

UNITED STATES

Small earthquake shakes New York, New Jersey areas

New Jersey: A small earthquake rattled the New York metropolitan area Saturday night. The US Geological Survey said the tremor had a magnitude of 3.0. It hit in the New Jersey suburb of Hasbrouck Heights, less than 8 miles (13 kilometers) west of Central Park, at a depth of about 6.2 miles (10 kilometers). One resident of New York's Brooklyn borough described it as a very brief tremor, just a slight swaying for a moment.

AP

TRUCKS REACH ENCLAVE'S BORDER FOR RARE FUEL DELIVERY

6 starve to death in Gaza as 40 killed in Israeli strikes, many near aid sites

NIDAL AL-MUGHRABI
CAIRO, AUGUST 3

SIX MORE people died of starvation and malnutrition in Gaza over the past 24 hours, its health ministry said, underlining the enclave's humanitarian emergency as Egyptian state TV said two trucks were set to make a rare delivery of fuel on Sunday.

The new deaths raised the toll of those dying from what international humanitarian agencies say may be an unfolding famine to 175, including 93 children, since the war began, the ministry said.

Egypt's *Al Qahera News TV* said two trucks carrying 107 tons of diesel were set to enter Gaza, months after Israel severely restricted aid access to the enclave before easing it somewhat as starvation began to spread. Gaza's health ministry has said fuel shortages have severely impaired hospital services. Fuel shipments have been rare since March, when Israel restricted the flow of aid and goods into the enclave in what it said was pressure on Hamas to free the remaining hostages.

Israel blames Hamas for the suffering in Gaza but, in response to a rising international outcry, it announced steps last week to let more aid reach the population, including pausing fighting for part of the day in some areas.

UN agencies have said that air-drops of food are insufficient and that Israel must let in far more aid by land and open up access to the war-devastated territory.

Palestinian health authorities said at least 40 people had been killed by Israeli gunfire and



Around 90,000 pro-Palestine protesters gather at the Sydney Harbour Bridge in Sydney; (*and, right*) Palestinians carry aid supplies that entered Gaza through Israel, in northern Gaza's Beit Lahia on Sunday. *Reuters & AP*



airstrikes across Gaza Sunday. Deaths included persons trying to make their way to aid distribution points in southern and central areas of Gaza, medics said.

Meanwhile, Israel's far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir visited the flashpoint Al-Aqsa mosque compound in Jerusalem Sunday and said he prayed there, challenging rules covering one of the most sensitive sites in the Middle East. Under a delicate decades-old "status quo" arrangement with Muslim authorities, the Al-Aqsa compound is administered by a Jordanian body and Jews can visit but may not pray there.

REUTERS

US envoy tells kin of Israeli hostages he is working on plan to end war

REUTERS
JERUSALEM, AUGUST 3

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump's Middle East envoy told families of hostages being held by Palestinian militant group Hamas on Saturday that he was working with the Israeli government on a plan that would effectively end the war in Gaza.

Trump has made ending the conflict a major priority of his ad-

ministration, though negotiations have faltered. Steve Witkoff is visiting Israel as its government faces mounting pressure over the deteriorating humanitarian conditions in the enclave.

In a recording of the meeting, reviewed by Reuters, Witkoff is heard saying: "We have a very, very good plan that we're working on collectively with the Israeli government, with Prime Minister Netanyahu ... for the reconstruction of Gaza. That effec-

tively means the end of the war."

Witkoff also said that Hamas was prepared to disarm in order to end the war, though the group has repeatedly said it will not lay down its weapons. In response, Hamas, which has been militarily battered by Israel in the war, said it would not relinquish "armed resistance" unless an "independent, fully sovereign Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital" was established.

As Trump sends nuclear subs, China, Russia hold naval drills

REUTERS
MOSCOW, AUGUST 3

THE RUSSIAN and Chinese navies are carrying out artillery and anti-submarine drills in the Sea of Japan as part of scheduled joint exercises, the Russian Pacific Fleet was quoted as saying on Sunday.

The drills are taking place two days after U.S. President Donald Trump said he had ordered two nuclear submarines to be positioned in "the appropriate regions" in response to remarks by former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev. However, they were scheduled well before Trump's action.



Chinese and Russian naval officials in Vladivostok, Russia, on Thursday. *File*

Interfax news agency quoted the Pacific Fleet as saying Russian and Chinese vessels were moving in a joint detachment including a large Russian anti-subma-

rine ship and two Chinese destroyers.

It said diesel-electric submarines from the two countries were also involved, as well as a Chinese submarine rescue ship.

Interfax said Russian and Chinese sailors would conduct artillery firing, practise anti-submarine and air defence missions, and improve joint search and rescue operations at sea.

Russia and China, which signed a "no-limits" strategic partnership shortly before Russia went to war in Ukraine in 2022, conduct regular military exercises to rehearse coordination between their armed forces and send a deterrent signal to adversaries.

Federal agency opens probe into former Trump prosecutor Smith

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BRIDGEWATER, AUGUST 3

AN INDEPENDENT watchdog agency responsible for enforcing a law against partisan political activity by federal employees has opened an investigation into Jack Smith, the Justice Department special counsel who brought two criminal cases against then-candidate Donald Trump before his election to the White House.

The Office of Special Counsel confirmed Saturday that it was investigating Smith on allegations that he engaged in political activity through his inquiries into Trump.

Smith was named special counsel by then-Attorney General Merrick Garland in November 2022, and his special counsel title is entirely distinct from the agency now investigating him.

It was not clear what basis exists to contend that Smith's in-

vestigations were political in nature or that he violated the Hatch Act, a federal law that bans certain public officials from engaging in political activity.

Sen Tom Cotton, an Arkansas Republican, had earlier this week encouraged the office to scrutinise Smith's activities and had alleged that his conduct was designed to help then-President Joe Biden and his vice president Kamala Harris, both Democrats.



ONCE IN MANY LIFETIMES

A helicopter shot shows the eruption of the Krashenninnikov Volcano in Russia's Kamchatka region on Sunday. The head of the volcano response team said this is the first confirmed eruption in 600 years whereas the US-based Smithsonian's Global Volcanism Program lists its last eruption as occurring 475 years ago in 1550. *AP*

POWERFUL WINDS, HEAVY RAINFALL EXPECTED
STORM FLORIS SET TO HIT BRITAIN

An intense summer storm is expected to sweep across northern Britain on Monday, forecasters said, bringing potentially life-threatening winds and waves. Forecasters said the "unseasonably disruptive system," known as Storm Floris, would most likely bring heavy rain-fall and wind gusts that could exceed 80 miles per hour, especially in Scotland. **NYT**



Druze factions attacked Syrian security forces, killing at least one in the southern province of Sweida on Saturday. *Reuters file*

Clashes break out in Syria as govt struggles to ease tensions

Israeli military says it conducted raid on targets in southern Syria

KAREEM CHEHAYEB
BEIRUT, AUGUST 3

NEW OUTBREAKS of violence overnight into Sunday rocked Syria at two distinct flashpoints, straining a fragile ceasefire and calling into question the ability of the transitional government to exert its authority across the whole country.

In the north, government-affiliated fighters confronted Kurdish-led forces who control much of the region, while in the south, in Sweida, they clashed with Druze armed groups.

The outbreaks came at a time when Syria's interim authorities are trying to maintain a tense ceasefire in Sweida province after clashes with Druze factions last month, and to implement an agreement with the U.S.-backed, Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces that would reintegrate large swaths of northeastern Syria with the rest of the country.

The Syrian government under interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa has been struggling to consolidate control since he led a surprise insurgency that ousted former President Bashar Assad in December, ending the Assad family's decades-long autocratic rule.

Political opponents and ethnic and religious minorities have been suspicious of Sharaa's de facto Islamist rule and cooperation with affiliated fighters that come from militant groups.

State state television said clashes between government forces and militias belonging to the Druze religious minority rocked the southern province of Sweida on Saturday after Druze factions attacked Syrian security forces, killing at least one member. The state-run Alikhbaria channel cited an anonymous security official who said the ceasefire has been broken. The Defense Ministry has not issued any formal statement.

Meanwhile, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based war monitor, said in addition to the member of the security forces killed, one Druze was killed and at least nine others were wounded in the clashes that took place in the in the western part of Sweida province.

The Israeli military said on Sunday that it conducted a raid on targets in southern Syria the previous day. It said it seized weapons and questioned several suspects it said were involved in weapons trafficking in the area.

AP WITH REUTERS INPUTS

‘Crimes against humanity’: Bangladesh tribunal starts trial of deposed PM Hasina

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
DHAKA, AUGUST 3

BANGLADESH'S INTERNATIONAL Crimes Tribunal Sunday started the trial of deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in absentia over crimes against humanity over the violent suppression of the 2024 student-led protests.

The interim government-appointed Chief Prosecutor, Tajul Islam, in his opening statement, described Hasina as the "nucleus of all crimes" and called for the maximum penalty.

The prosecution also named Hasina's two top aides — former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal and former Inspector General of Police Chowdhury Abdullah Al Mamun — as the co-accused in the case. The ICT com-

menced the proceedings against Hasina on several charges, with the major one being killings and tortures to tame last year's Students Against Discrimination (SAD)-led violent street campaign that eventually toppled her Awami League government on August 5, 2024.

While Hasina and Kamal are being tried in absentia, Mamun is in custody and has agreed to be the "approver" in the case.

Meanwhile, activists of the National Citizen Party and the BNP's student wing held separate rallies in Bangladesh on Sunday ahead of the first anniversary of the July Uprising that toppled the Sheikh Hasina-led government on August 5 last year. The newly-floated National Citizen Party (NCP) unveiled the party's 24-point manifesto during its rally in Dhaka's Central Shaheed Minar.

KREMLIN WANTS TO CONTROL INFORMATION AVAILABLE ONLINE AND ALSO WHERE AND HOW INTERNET TRAFFIC FLOWS, SAY ANALYSTS

In bid to control Internet, Russia launches MAX, state-sanctioned messaging app

PAUL SONNE
BERLIN, AUGUST 3

RUSSIA IS escalating its efforts to curtail online freedom, taking new steps toward a draconian state-controlled internet.

The authorities are cracking down on workarounds that Russians have been using for access to foreign apps and banned content, including through new laws signed by President Vladimir Putin this week. Moscow has also been impeding the function of services from U.S. tech companies, like YouTube, that Russians have used for years. At the same time, the Kremlin

is building out a domestic ecosystem of easily monitored and censored Russian alternatives to Western tech products. That includes a new state-sanctioned messaging service, MAX, which will come preinstalled by law on all new smartphones sold in Russia starting in September.

The idea, experts say, is to migrate more Russians from an open internet dominated by the products of Western tech giants to a censored online ecosystem, where Russians primarily use software under the gaze and influence of the state. The effort has advanced significantly amid wartime repression, but it is unclear how far it will go.

"The goal here is absolute control," said Anastasiya Kruope, a researcher at Human Rights Watch who wrote a recent report on declining Russian internet freedoms.

The Kremlin wants to control not only the information available online but also where and how internet traffic flows, Kruope said, so the Russian internet can function in isolation and be switched on and off at will. Russia's technical capabilities for clamping down are improving, she added.

"They are not perfect," Kruope said. "They are not nearly at the level they would like them to be. But they are getting better,



Since the first decade of Vladimir Putin's rule, Moscow had been articulating a vision for a 'sovereign' internet. *Reuters*

and this is the reason to start paying attention."

Unlike China, where users have been restricted since the dawn of the internet, Russia long boasted one of the most open and freewheeling environments anywhere online. Operating with virtually no barriers, millions of Russians flocked to Western tech platforms, posted critical news and freely expressed their thoughts on the web.

The Kremlin began to see that freedom as a threat, particularly after the rise of the opposition activist Aleksei Navalny, who died in prison last year. His exposés of the Putin elite, initially publicized in Live Journal blog posts and later

in popular YouTube videos, gave him millions of followers online and the power to mobilize mass protests on the street.

Since the first decade of Putin's rule, Moscow had been articulating a vision for what it called a "sovereign" internet that would sever Russia as much as possible from the rest of the online world and strip power from foreign tech firms, which didn't always give in to the Kremlin's demands.

But Putin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 gave the government the opportunity to accelerate the plan. Moscow banned Facebook, Instagram and Twitter outright and took steps that caused TikTok to disable functions

in Russia. Lawmakers passed draconian laws stifling free expression in the streets and online.

Now, with the introduction of MAX, authorities have signaled they may take aim at foreign messaging apps, in particular WhatsApp, which is owned by Meta and counts nearly 100 million monthly users in Russia. Telegram could be a target as well.

At an economic forum in June, MP Anton Gorelkin also called Telegram, based in the United Arab Emirates and owned by the Russian-born internet entrepreneur Pavel Durov, "an entity that worries the state." But he said previously that the app would not be banned. **NYT**

13 IDEA EXCHANGE

NEWSMAKERS IN THE NEWSROOM

ON INDO-US DIPLOMACY

The kind of language that President Trump is using is increasingly hostile and combative. So, what has this diplomacy achieved? We are telling the government to grow a spine

Manoj CG: In Parliament, we saw the debate in both Houses on Operation Sindoor. What are the answers you didn't get from the government?

Simple, who is responsible for Pahalgam? And, does this government have a sense of responsibility? We have not seen any form of responsibility — be it an apology to the people of India for failing them or a resignation, not even in the form of an admission. The kind of statement that the L-G Manoj Sinha made, what the Home Minister said in his one-hour speech and the Prime Minister in his two-hour speech about Pandit Nehru — Pandit Nehru did not cause Pahalgam. The UPA certainly did not cause Pahalgam and neither did the late Dr Manmohan Singh or Sonia ji. What people of India, the victims of Pahalgam and Poonch, needed to hear from their government was an honest admission of failure, an honest introspection on their responsibility and accountability which, I think, BJP in its hubris totally brushed over.

Secondly, the military operation was different compared to the Balakot air strike. Here, as per our top military generals, we faced the Pakistani Air Force backed by Chinese technology and Turkish military technology. Therefore, the rules of engagement had changed between Balakot and Operation Sindoor. There has been admission by top military generals in various Indian public fora for the need for modernisation, for upgradation. Normally, we would have had this discussion in the previous budget session. When we'd asked for a discussion on the demand for grants for defence, it was denied. The government and the defence minister could have been far clearer on this. They are only preaching to their own hardcore base and blaming the decisions of past prime ministers for their failures in the present.

Manoj CG: The LOP Rahul Gandhi asking the PM to show courage and call President Donald Trump a liar, comes at a time when India is negotiating a tough trade deal with the US. It's a complex process. Don't you think the Opposition should also factor that in and give the government that diplomatic space?

What has the government achieved by adopting its present negotiating stance? They have not achieved condemnation from the international community on Pakistan. If you look at the 26/11 reactions from the world condemned and linked terrorism with Pakistan. But this time, you got a condemnation of terror from the world but nobody linked terror and Pakistan. Everybody asked India and Pakistan to exercise restraint. In a way, we got hyphenated again. Something that we managed to escape in the last two decades, that India and Pakistan are not on the same plane. Please de-hyphenate us, but the world hyphenated us.

And talking about bilateral investment and trade with the US, the President (Trump) is hosting the brain behind Pakistan state-sponsored terrorism, which is the Pakistani armed forces. And the kind of language that the President is using is increasingly hostile. They said that they might invest in the crude oil production of Pakistan. So, what has this diplomacy achieved? What we are telling the government is to grow a spine. If you really want to practise the 56-inch diplomacy that you boast of, back up your hubris. The Opposition since the beginning has been supportive of the government on Pakistan and we are also telling them to stand up to President Trump, for the kind of insult to our Indian Air Forces.

Manoj CG: A couple of days ago, the US President said the Indian economy is dead. Do you agree with this?

We are in the middle of a bubble right now. I am in the Finance Standing Committee and I look at numbers closely, be it investment numbers, consumption, saving or purchasing numbers. And if it were not for the government, investing in highways where there is not enough traffic, investing in airports where flights cost Rs 15,000 - Rs 16,000, for the government borrowing and spending, then our economy would not be firing at all. Our farmers are not productive, neither are small businesses or entrepreneurs. What the government has managed to do is give us new slogans and new milestones. Whatever happened to doubling farmers' income by 2022, what happened to the five trillion economy? All that they are doing is shifting the goal post. We must do a lot more. I mean, look at how many income taxpayers there are. A country of 140 crore, as close to 1.5 crore of income tax payers and 80 crore of people need subsidised ration. That's the state of the average Indian. The economy is not working for the average person, it is working for three-four com-

WHY GAURAV GOGOI

As the Deputy leader of the Congress party in Lok Sabha, Gaurav Gogoi plays a key role in crafting the party's Parliamentary strategy and ensuring floor coordination with other opposition parties. He often leads the party's offensive against the NDA government in the house. He is also a member of the

Congress Working Committee and president of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee. With Assembly elections in Assam just months away, he will be in the thick of action formulating strategies to dethrone the BJP in the state, where the Congress has been out of power for 10 years.



ON ELECTION COMMISSION

The EC does not provide a level playing field. In 2023, we saw the way it undertook delimitation. They created some mega seats and created some very small seats — to suit the voting pattern of the BJP

‘Victims want to hear an honest admission of government’s responsibility... Nehru is not to blame for Pahalgam’

Gaurav Gogoi, Deputy Leader of the Congress in Lok Sabha and Assam Congress President, on holding the government accountable in Parliament and their challenges in Assam's Assembly elections. The session was moderated by Manoj CG, Chief of National Political Bureau



Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi (right) with Manoj CG, Chief of National Political Bureau, The Indian Express, at the Noida office. Amit Mehra

panies who, by sharing proximity to the Prime Minister, are doing well.

Manoj CG: In Assam, Congress had back-to-back defeats in 2016 and in 2021. Your party fared poorly in Lok Sabha and faced a resounding defeat in the recent Panchayat election. So how big is the challenge to revive the Congress?

See, any election is a challenge, whether you are incumbent or in Opposition. It's a challenge for many reasons. First of all, the electoral system today is not fair. The Election Commission (EC) does not provide a level playing field. In 2023, we saw how biased and partisan the EC was in Assam, in the way it undertook delimitation. It completely obliterated the principles of delimitation where roughly each seat should have the same demography, same size of voters, they created some mega seats and created some very small seats. All of which to suit the voting pattern of the BJP. Now, the EC makes it so hard to even verify voter lists. In my case, as a new state president, we have eight months left. Our past election record has not been optimal, but do I sense that people are ready for a change? Absolutely yes, and it's up to us on how hard and smart we work.

Rahul Sabharwal: In Assam, your chief minister has linked demolitions to demography. There hasn't been a pushback from the Congress, at least not in assembly debates. There is this sentiment that there is this massive demographic change that needs to be curbed. How do you counter that? And my second question is that while we have seen Mamata Banerjee being very vocal about migrants being targeted, Congress hasn't responded to that.

So, two things. What the chief minister and the BJP are doing currently in Assam is politics. Thankfully, the people of Assam and India are wiser than Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. They made many promises to secure the rights of indigenous Assamese, not one has been fulfilled. The NRC (National Register of Citizens) was supposed to be the answer to their politics. That is incomplete. Clause 6 of the Assam Accord was supposed to be the answer to their fear mongering. They created a report which the Centre has not accepted even though Home Minister Amit Shah thumped his hand on the table saying 'Humne woh kiya jo Rajiv

Gandhi nahi kar paaye'. Delimitation was the answer. But they keep talking about the same old things. If they really cared about forests, then they would have protected the forests from the various mafias that operate there. The stone mafia, the coal mafia, illegal quarries. People understand that this is a desperate attempt of a chief minister to cling to power because the minute the Congress party comes into power, he will have to face investigations. What people expect from us is that if we come to power, how are we going to work with local industries, with local entrepreneurs? How are we going to build up local artisans? How are we going to preserve and promote the culture of the various ethnic groups and tribal communities? That's what we are focusing on.

As for the second question, which is linked to how people are being forced out. Remember, this time in 2021, what did Amit Shah say? He was teaching us chronology, NRC's chronology, CAA chronology. Come election, it's the same BJP rhetoric. Congress is trying hard to live up to people's expectations and continues to reinvent itself. But the BJP is still feeding voters the same diet of fear and hate.

Vikas Pathak: The 2024 Lok Sabha elections were a big boost to the Congress. But after that, Haryana was a surprise, then Maharashtra and Delhi. What is the internal learning of the Congress from this?

What we're doing right now is continuing to be disciplined to our goal of bringing about social justice. This was started early last year during the Bharat Jodo Nyay

Yatra. We were talking about social reform through the caste census, through the Constitution being a living document and preserving its soul. We are also looking at the rights of people to vote fairly, to have their names on the voters list.

No doubt the losses in Haryana and Maharashtra are a setback. If the time from 2014 to 2024 has taught us anything it is that we have faced these kinds of setbacks before and we know how to overcome them and move forward. In Parliament, we are demanding the updating of voter lists. People in Bihar have been forced to cough up money to get photocopies of birth certificates. The fundamental nature of elections is at stake. We are doing something important and hope that others also join in, this should be a project of the nation.

Vikas Pathak: As a party that was the main vehicle of the freedom struggle, the Indian National Congress had leaders like Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi. Now, Narendra Modi, it seems, has successfully become the mainstream embodiment of Indian nationalism. Somehow, Congress is not being able to claw back. Can you reflect on that?

Well, I disagree with your conclusion because then Mr Modi would have come back to power in 2024 with a thumping majority. They were projecting 'Char sau paar' and could not reach a majority on their own. I don't see Prime Minister Modi holding the same space, both inside Parliament and outside Parliament, in election rallies, the way he did in his first

five years. Post-Covid, Indian thinking has changed. Prime Minister Modi is on a declining trend. I don't see him as the sole factor in Haryana or Maharashtra. I feel the Congress is really speaking to young voters right now. Rahul Gandhi, in his T-shirt and sandal avatar, the kind of content he is producing on social media and the kind of authenticity that he is presenting are far more relatable than the overt hubris of PM Modi. BJP's rhetoric is now stagnant and Congress is more vibrant. Priyanka ji brings another layer of freshness. Her speech in Parliament was so powerful because it spoke to the victims. It just shows how far removed Home Minister Amit Shah and Prime Minister Modi are. They didn't even mention the victims. They didn't even have the heart to say sorry that we failed, there was just no heart left.

Asad Rehman: The government says there will be no discussion on the SIR (Special Intensive Revision) in Parliament. What is the Opposition's strategy going forward?

To be fair to the government, they have not said that reason on the record officially.

Asad Rehman: Kiren Rijju said it (on August 1).

Then, that's a clerical reason. The way voters in Bihar have to show up with various papers to get their name registered on the voters list, Mr Rijju is just citing various historical papers to say that there can't be a discussion. It's absolutely false and he's misleading the public. Have we not discussed electoral bonds in Parliament? Have we not discussed the EC? There are many formats within the Parliament to have a discussion on an important topic without it being held under the ambit of a particular ministry. So if you want, if you have the courage, if you feel that sense of responsibility to the voter, to the right of the average voter, to know what's happening with their democracy, then Parliament allows you that space.

Damini Nath: Does Assam have a problem of foreigners on the electoral roll? If not the SIR, is there a need to clean the electoral roll?

We are all elected on the basis of this electoral roll. Prime Minister Modi is prime minister because of this. But by doing it in this manner, there are a lot of questions, the legitimacy of the exercise and its political timing. There are genuine

concerns but laws exist for you to identify a Bangladeshi. You are in charge of the borders. All the laws are there, provided you want to fix the problem. If you don't want to fix the problem, then you will always come up with some new rhetoric.

Deeptiman Tiwary: Your CM has been making certain allegations against you and your family. How do you respond to this?

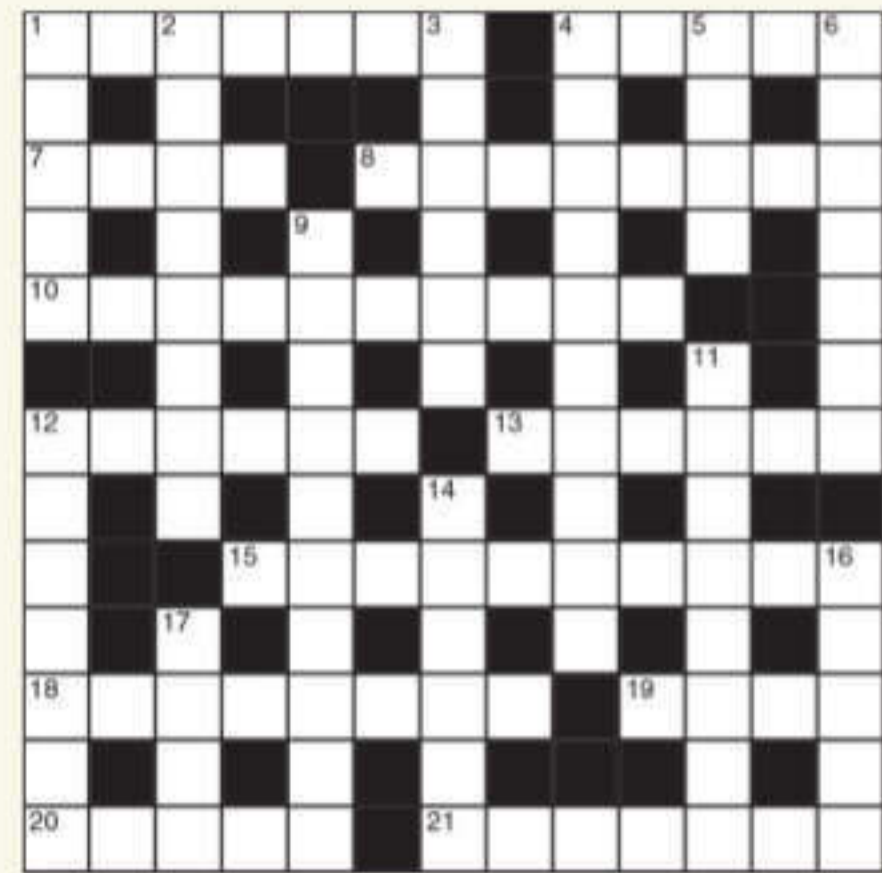
Even the home minister said so in the Parliament that I have been to Pakistan several times. Somebody has briefed him wrongly. I have been there once, before Modi ji had gone there to eat biryani, before Modi ji called (Nawaz) Sharif for his oath ceremony. This is at least 10-15 years ago. As I said, people are smarter. They think by targeting my wife, they will have some luck. They will soon realise that my wife is stronger than me.

Lalmani Verma: Two days ago when there was a resolution in Parliament to extend the President's rule in Manipur, the Opposition asked for a fresh mandate. Do you think the ground situation is conducive to conducting fresh elections?

This issue has several aspects. The first is the home minister's failure. He has been unsuccessful in safeguarding the country. He didn't do it in Uri, in Pulwama, Pahalgam or Manipur. This is his job, maintaining our internal security and he has been consistently unsuccessful. And he has never apologised for that. Second, in the Northeast particularly, through politics, we have been successful in maintaining harmony among different communities. Whether it is the insurgents or underground or communities who had taken up arms, we managed to bring peace through politics. But, this is what saddens me. The politics that was responsible for bringing peace at a crucial time is now dividing a state into two. The tension between two communities is so deep, the wounds are so deep, that it will take at least years to heal. But does that mean we can't have a stable government there? Does that mean there can't be elections there? Not at all. Didn't we have the Lok Sabha elections there? Everything is possible if you have the right political will. From how many states will you snatch away the rights? Ladakh is UT, J&K is UT and here too there isn't a government elected by people. So there are several legitimate questions related to Manipur. Manipur is a big blot on PM Modi's career.



CROSSWORD 5745



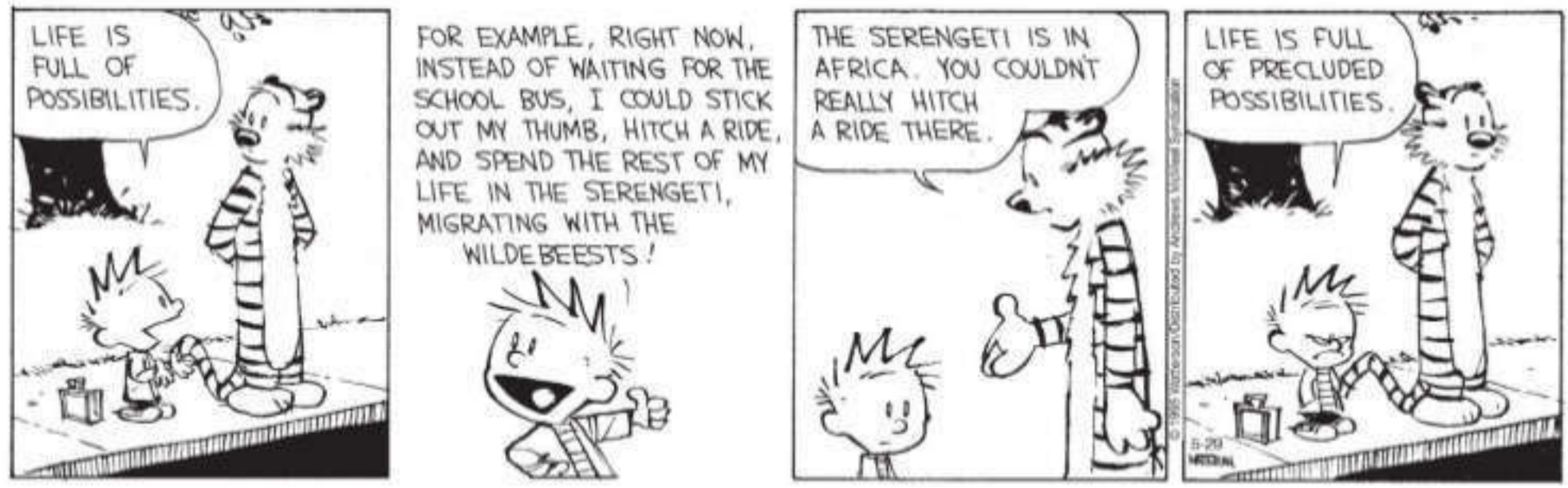
- ACROSS
- 1 Policemen get little money (7)
- 4 Engagement ring (5)
- 7 Period of time - spring for example (4)
- 8 Played with babies? (8)
- 10 Boxing champion employed in the circus (10)
- 12 The spirit of enmity (6)
- 13 A street to flatten out for a gentle walk (6)
- 15 Champions in five shows (10)
- 18 Public transport stops here when time runs out (8)
- 19 Nail turned blue (4)
- 20 Break up a dancing partnership (3,2)
- 21 Travelling goods will be in it (7)
- DOWN
- 1 Trace misdirected supply (5)
- 2 Movingly depict an academic (8)
- 3 Speak forcefully providing a cause of tension (6)
- 4 He's bound to learn a job in paper etc. (10)
- 5 Looked over carefully? I'd say! (4)
- 6 Learns a way to produce a magazine (7)
- 9 Charge for firearms (10)
- 11 Strives to study minds (8)
- 12 Acquit a drunk now living on water (7)
- 14 Tune gets the publicity deserved (6)
- 16 Shared a small bottle (5)
- 17 Summons an author without hesitation (4)

Solutions Crossword 5744 Across: 1 Regulations, 9 Inexact, 10 Prior, 11 Lido, 12 Antimony, 14 Nipped, 16 Geneva, 18 Twenties, 19 Asti, 22 Maria, 23 Spartan, 24 Stone's throw. Down: 2 Emend, 3 Upas, 4 Attend, 5 Impaired, 6 Noisome, 7 Killing time, 8 Army rations, 13 Restrain, 15 Pierrot, 17 Census, 20 Set-to, 21 Hash

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



CALVIN & HOBBS by Bill Watterson



MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



JUMBLED WORDS

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective squares below. Select the letters in the shaded squares and jumble them to get the answer for the given quip. Pure love and _ cannot dwell together at the door where the latter enters, the former makes its exit. - Alexandre Dumas (9)

IIODT

LSSBE

ONUECB

TCPAER

Solution: I-DIOT, BLESS, BOUNCE, CARPET. Answer: Pure love and suspicion cannot dwell together at the door where the latter enters, the former makes its exit. - Alexandre Dumas

SUDOKU 6036

Difficulty Level 5s

Instructions

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

Difficulty Level

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

SOLUTION SUDOKU 6035

4 3 6 1 5 8 7 2 9

8 7 1 4 2 9 3 5 6

9 5 2 3 7 6 4 8 1

7 2 8 5 9 4 1 6 3

1 6 5 8 3 7 2 9 4

3 9 4 2 6 1 8 7 5

5 1 7 6 8 3 9 4 2

6 4 9 7 1 2 5 3 8

2 8 3 9 4 5 6 1 7

Tamil Nadu Power Distribution Corporation Ltd.

Notice Inviting Tender (NIT)

TNPDCI invites e-tender via DEEP portal for procurement of 1500 MW RTC power for a period of five years under medium term on FOO (Finance, Own, Operate) Guidelines notified by Ministry of Power, Government of India revised guidelines dated 29.01.2019 and its amendment from time to time against Tender Specification No.06/TNPDCI/1500 MW/MEDIUM TERM/5 YRS/2025. The link for the e-Bidding portal is www.mstcecommerce.com, and is also available in the website of Ministry of Power (www.powermin.gov.in) and PFC Consulting Ltd (www.pfcindia.com). Specification is available in TANGEDCO website and MSTC DEEP E-Bidding portal.

Chief Engineer

Private Power Projects, TNPDCI

Mangalore SEZ Limited

Mangalore Special Economic Zone, Sy.No. 168-3A, Plot No. U1 Administrative Building, Bajpe Village, Mangalore - 574 142 Dakshina Kannada, Karnataka

INVITATION FOR BIDS

02.08.2025

Mangalore SEZ Limited (MSEZL) invites tenders from eligible bidders for the following work through e-tendering:

S No. Contract Package No. Name of Work Proposal due date

1. MSEZ/Short Term PP/25-26 Supply of power on short-term basis under wheeling & banking arrangement through tariff based competitive bidding process 11.08.2025

Please refer website www.mstcecommerce.com and www.mangaloresez.com for further details.

Sd/- Chief Executive Officer

Mangalore SEZ Ltd, Mangaluru

BANGALORE WATER SUPPLY AND SEWERAGE BOARD

Office of The Chief Engineer (Design&QA), 9th Floor, Cauvery Bhavan, KG Road, Bangalore - 560009.

INVITATION FOR TENDER (Through KPP Portal Only)

BWSSB, invites Tenders in Two Stage Tender system from eligible contractors through kpp Portal for the following work:

Sl. No. Name of Work Amount Put to Tender EMD

No. BWSSB/CE(D&QA)/ACE/TA/1300/2025-26 Date: 02.08.2025

1. Work of Comprehensive operation and maintenance of RO plants based on the revenue sharing method coming under AEE(BW&PS)-2-2 sub division (O&M-1- Total no-50). Rs. 2,34,00,000 Rs. 3,51,000

2. Work of Comprehensive operation and maintenance of RO plants based on the revenue sharing method coming under AEE(BW&PS)-1-3 sub division (O&M-1- Total no-50). Rs. 2,34,00,000 Rs. 3,51,000

3. Work of Comprehensive operation and maintenance of RO plants based on the revenue sharing method coming under AEE(BW&PS)-2-3 sub division (O&M-1- Total no-57). Rs. 2,66,76,000 Rs. 4,00,200

4. Work of Comprehensive operation and maintenance of RO plants based on the revenue sharing method coming under AEE(BW&PS)-2-3 sub division (O&M-5- Total no-44). Rs. 2,05,92,000 Rs. 3,08,900

5. Work of Comprehensive operation and maintenance of RO plants based on the revenue sharing method coming under AEE(BW&PS)-1-2 sub division (O&M-2- Total no-58). Rs. 2,71,44,000 Rs. 4,07,500

6. Work of Comprehensive operation and maintenance of RO plants based on the revenue sharing method coming under AEE(BW&PS)-1-3 sub division (O&M-4- Total no-63). Rs. 2,94,84,000 Rs. 4,42,300

7. Work of repair and rehabilitation of non-working RO plants coming under AEE(BW&PS)-2-1 sub division (38 No). Rs. 1,58,08,000 Rs. 2,79,900

For the above works Last date and time for Receipt of tenders will be on 22.08.2025 upto 16.00 hrs. The Technical bids will be opened on: 25.08.2025 at 16.00 hrs.

Sd/- Chief Engineer (Design&QA)

The detail regarding the tender & participation in the e-procurement portal process can be obtained by logging on to <https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in>. For further details contact the below signed office during working hours.

DIPR/CP/2176/Zen/2025-26

CESC LIMITED

CIN: L31901WB1978PLC031411

NOTICE INVITING TENDER (NIT)

CESC Limited invites Tenders from eligible bidders for Supply & Fabrication of High-Pressure Boiler Coils for Budge Budge Generating Station.

Detailed terms & conditions of the NIT are available at 'Live Tender/EOI' section under 'Vendors' of the official CESC website <https://www.cesc.co.in>

CCL Central Coalfields Limited

"A Miniratna Company" (A Subsidiary of Coal India Limited)

NOTICE

"All the tenders issued by CIL and its Subsidiaries for procurement of Goods, Works and Services are available on website of Coal India Ltd. www.coalindia.in/ respective Subsidiary Company (CCL, www.centralcoalfields.in). CIL e-procurement portal <https://coalindiatenders.nic.in> and Central Public Procurement Portal <https://eprocure.gov.in> in addition, procurement is also done through GeM portal <https://gem.gov.in>."

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON

(See Section 82 Cr. P.C./84 BNSS)

Whereas complaint has been made before me that the accused **Chote @Chota** S/o Babu, R/o 212, Kardam Puri, Delhi has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in **FIR No. 980/2015 U/s 379/411 IPC, PS Madhu Vihar, Delhi** and it has been returned to warrant of arrest there upon issued that the said accused **Chote @Chota** cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused **Chote @Chota** has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of said warrant). Proclamation is hereby made that **Chote @Chota** in **FIR No. 980/2015 U/s 379/411 IPC, PS Madhu Vihar, Delhi** is required to appear before this court to answer the said complaint on or before **02.09.2025**.

By order

Shri Udhbav Kumar Jain

Judicial Magistrate First Class-04

Room No. 13, Second Floor, Shahdara District

Karkardooma Court, Delhi

DP/10296/ED/2025

DAY TODAY BY PETER VIDAL

ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20)

There's one simple forecast: expect the unexpected. I'd get out my day-to-day survival kit and work through the next week with my head down. Partners will be in a forthright mood and deft footwork will be necessary to come through unscathed.

TAURUS (Apr 21 - May 21)

Family pressures are certainly stirring things up, but just for now significant developments are bubbling away below the surface. Keep up to date with routine chores, otherwise you may lose control. There's no time like the present for taking on fresh responsibilities.

GEMINI (May 22 - June 21)

A few quick quips at someone else's expense may be your idea of fun, but I'm not sure if that's the best way to exploit Mars' sharp and uncompromising power. A little generosity would suit you well. You have nothing to fear.

CANCER (June 22 - July 23)

You've pushed your own interests in the past – and there's nothing wrong with that. Now you must go out in a very wholehearted way to impress family members and anyone else you live with.

LEO (July 24 - Aug 23)

A great deal of your charm relies on the location of that graceful sign, Libra, in your solar chart. According to your current patterns and alignments, your sales pitch is about to reach an all-time peak. Now is the time to persuade reluctant partners.

VIRGO (Aug 24 - Sep 23)

You are in a really good state to take a leap into the unknown. I know it's not in your nature to throw caution to the wind, but do try. You have no idea what will happen unless you open yourself to the new and untried. Before you take a gamble, you have to work out the consequences.

LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23)

It's always difficult to leave the past behind but you probably feel prepared to bid farewell to one close association. This is because somebody has given you such a rough ride that you'll be happy to see the back of them.

SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 23)

Hope springs eternal and with so many planets presenting a mysterious face, that is precisely what you need. Or, perhaps, you could use a few good ideas. With the right moves you may also give hope to others and there is no better way to use your current planetary energy.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 24 - Dec 22)

Socially you should be on a winning streak. The chances for a dreamy, soft-focus encounter really are splendid. But passions are also rising and colleagues could be argumentative.

CAPRICORN (Dec 23 - Jan 20)

You are back to thinking that nobody loves you but this is very far from the case. Let's look at the positive faces of your solar chart, starting with the fact that worldly ambitions are about to take a quantum leap forward.

AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 19)

Although your own intentions may be above reproach, don't criticise others whose standards seem to slip. Remember the old teaching about throwing stones. Never be the first to throw one unless you are absolutely blameless.

PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)

Entrepreneurial and self-employed types are on an upwave. All of you are likely to benefit from windfalls. I'm not saying you'll be showered with gold from heaven, but you must end the week with future prosperity in your sights. Take no financial risks at all.

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I,Aneeta W/O, Phool Chand Balmiki R/o 123/7, Mcd Flats, Sec - 20, Rohini, Delhi -110086 have changed my name from Aneeta to Anita vide affidavit date 23.06.2025 at New Delhi. 0040803107-1

I,Sangeetaben,D/o Subhash Chandra Kapurchandra Sharma,resident of Block-B-1,Flat No-204,Olive County,Sector-5,Vasundhra, PO:Vasundhra,DIST:Ghaziabad , Uttar Pradesh-201012, have changed my name from Sangeetaben to Sangeetaben Goswami.Henceforth I would be known by the name of Sangeetaben Goswami,for all future purposes. 0040803218-7

I,Shivangi, D/o Late Shri Mishri Lal, R/o H. No. 645, Block-L, Mangolpuri, New Delhi-110083, declare that my father's name is incorrectly mentioned as "Anil Kumar" in my CBSE 10th & 12th certificates. The correct name is "Mishri Lal". 0040803087-2

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ANDERSON-TENDULKAR TROPHY: FIFTH TEST, DAY 4

Oval and out? Not yet, say India

Despite centuries from Root and Brook, Gill's defiant side hit back late as series heads for a fitting climax — India need 4 wickets, England 35 runs



EXPRESS IN ENGLAND

SANDEEP DWIVEDI
LONDON, AUGUST 3

JUST AS they have done all series, India refused to fade out even after Joe Root and Harry Brook had seemingly extinguished the lights with hundreds. Neither did the Indian section in the crowd. With less than 40 runs needed, they first found their voice, hollering away and that relentless warrior Mohammad Siraj conjured a series of magical deliveries to inspire his team-mate Prasidh Krishna, who took out Root with 37 runs still needed.

The runs dried up, ball kept beating the bat or pinging the pad, Indians kept appealing, and the blood, it seemed, was draining off England's lower order. Then light literally gave away as the sun went out of The Oval with England still needing 35 runs. India, England, and this astonishing series remains alive for one another day in paradise.

And to think that the Indian fight had seemingly evaporated out of the arena when on 94, Brook drove a Washington Sundar ball to wide long-off. Akash Deep dragged his tired legs to the ball, too knackered to bend down, he would put out his foot to stop the ball. He would fail, the ball would roll over the fence. Two balls later, Brook would get his 100 and the Oval would bring the roof down. On the boundary rope, a sullen Akash Deep would massage his aching arms not far from where Siraj would have head in his hands. This seemed to be the moment that broke India's back, but clearly this lot is made of sterner stuff.

England still needed 80 odd runs to win the Test and the series and things were almost on autopilot. While Brook would be celebrated for his 111 but he wasn't able to take England home. He charged out to Prasidh after hitting two fours in that over to have an almighty swing and his bat flew out of his hand even as the ball settled into Siraj's hands at cover. Little did one know that the moment of indiscretion was to leave a mark in the game and the series.

However, Root, fresh on the podium of the all-time Test run-getters, showed the nuance and art of scoring big and winning matches. In this series of 20-something heroes, on the final day of the grueling contest, he was desperate to show that he was the difference between the two sides. And he nearly was until he fell, edging a straightener outside off from Prasidh to a diving Jurel, and leaving England still 37 runs short.

Recurring pattern

This has been a theme to this draining and engrossing series. There would be those long stretched phases of intense battle, those very close 'who blinks first' situations. This is followed by a one 'slip up' that suddenly deflates the match. In this case, it was Brook's implosion and Root's dalliance with danger. At Manchester, England dropped Ravindra Jadeja on the first ball and he foiled India's victory bid. This too had the famous Ben Stokes 'give up'.

At Oval, India too got a chance when Harry Brook was dropped on 19 by Siraj on the fence as he stepped over the line to his utter agony. Returning after a short break in the dressing room, Siraj took his fielding po-



sition on the fine leg, guarding the fence since Brook was trying to break the shackles.

Barely settled, standing way off the central square, the spotlight was suddenly on him. Brook had pulled Prasidh and the looping ball seemed to be landing on Siraj. The pacer caught the ball comfortably but his right leg inadvertently touched the boundary cushion behind him. The score could have gone from 137/3 to 137/4 but now it was 143/3. England had survived.

All series Siraj has been running in like a tireless warrior, conjuring some magic from unresponsive Dukes balls but was left to rue that one betrayal of his feet. Just like Shane Warne in the epic 2005 series-deciding final Test at the same venue had dropped Kevin Pietersen on 15 and saw him churn a match-winning 158. Such is life.

Eye-catching clash

This morning it was said that Ben Duckett vs Siraj was to be the face-off that would decide this game. After the highest wicket-taker of the series had got Zak Crawley with the final ball of the day, he was tipped to get his batting partner too. The duel lived up to its billing and produced one of the many riveting bat-ball contests of this series. Siraj would bowl from over-the-wicket to the left-handed Duckett and try to get his outside edge. He had the perfect ball for him – the wobbly-scrambled seam ball that went away after pitching.

In one over, Siraj would beat Duckett's outside edge 5 times. Just when you thought India was winning the contest, the England opener would strike back. In the next over, Siraj would try his swinging full ball with fingers behind the seam in a conventional position but it was a bit short and Duckett would drive for a boundary. There was one more four and the score had been settled. In the third over, Siraj had the England opener

SCORECARD	
ENGLAND vs INDIA	
THE OVAL	
Toss: England, chose to bowl	
INDIA 1ST INNINGS	224
ENGLAND 1ST INNINGS	247
INDIA 2ND INNINGS	396
ENGLAND 2ND INNINGS/O/N	50/1
B Duckett c Rahul b Krishna	54 (83b, 6x4)
O Pope lbw b Siraj	27 (34b, 5x4)
J Root c J Jurel b Krishna	105 (152b, 12x4)
H Brook c Siraj b A Deep	111 (98b, 14x4, 2x6)
J Bethell b Krishna	5 (31b, 1x4)
J Smith batting	2 (17b)
C Overton batting	0 (8b)
■ Extras (b 1, lb 8, nb 1, w 11)	21
■ Total (76.2 Ov; RR: 4.44)	339/6
■ FoW: 2-82 (Ben Duckett, 22.4 ov), 3-106 (Ollie Pope, 27.3 ov), 4-301 (Harry Brook, 62.4 ov), 5-332 (Jacob Bethell, 70.4 ov), 6-337 (Joe Root, 72.6 ov)	
■ Bowling: A Deep 20-4-85-1, P Krishna 22.2-3-109-3, M Siraj 26-5-95-2, W Sundar 4-0-19-0, R Jadeja 4-0-22-0.	
England need 35 runs to win.	

playing and missing again. Prasidh, the first change bowler, would benefit from the pressure created by Siraj and he got Duckett caught in the slip, edging a full angler while driving the ball.

Ollie Pope's cameo wasn't quite a captain's knock and the now it was upto to the former and future captains – Root and Brook – to take them home. Perfect for the job was Brook. He had to take chances and thus be lucky. And that's when Siraj's drop came and Brook and Root would make it count. The heir-apparent of England cricket would keep swinging the bat to hit big hits. Root would do the same but his strokes were more refined. Their first small victory came when the Indian captain had to rest his three pac-



Harry Brook (L) and Joe Root both brought up their centuries and stiched together a 195-run partnership to bring England to the brink of victory. (Above) Prasidh Krishna took two late wickets, including the crucial one of Root, to drag India back into the contest before play was called off due to rain.

Reuters/AP



ers. But whatever he threw at Brook and Root, they had an answer.

Shubman had a brief dalliance with spin but didn't quite work. With the ball close to 50 overs old, what would Shubman do next? He tried his other pet tactic – asking wicket-keeper Jurel to stand up to Akash Deep. The off-side boundary would be left vacant and at 30-yards from the point to extra cover there would be a sprinkling of catcher. Against the well-set batsmen this too didn't work.

It was left to that man Siraj again to incredibly find some energy in himself and inject it to his team-mates. Egged on by the

fans, when Jacob Bethell fell, trying to slog Prasidh, Siraj suddenly started to threaten the pads of Root with his curling nipbackers from a old, soft ball. Couple of lbw shouts turned up, Prasidh too started to produce the odd threatening delivery and just as Root, the fourth-innings chase hero of England, was soaking up the pressure, he fell and the game hung on a knife's edge.

Who will blink first on Monday? Will Chris Woakes have to come out with a dislocated shoulder and bat one-handed? Will Siraj and co. produce one final drama in this soap opera of a Test series?

'Siraj has been outstanding in crucial moments'

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
AUGUST 3

INDIA'S BOWLING coach Morne Morkel has singled out Mohammed Siraj's attitude for the success the pacer has enjoyed in the Anderson-Tendulkar Trophy. Siraj, who is the leading wicket-taker in the series with 20, came up with another inspired performance on Day 4, when England were threatening to seal the series. His ability to relentlessly keep up the intensity was there to see again at the Oval, where the series is now headed for a fitting climax on Day 5.

Speaking at the close of play, Morkel was all praise for Siraj. "I said it earlier in the Test series, I'm very happy for Siraj that he's getting the recognition. He's a guy in that changing room who will lead the way. Although vocally he doesn't speak a lot, I think he leads a lot with his actions.

"In this series, he's done it with the ball at times when we've needed somebody to put his hand up and create something. Even if it was bowling an extra 2-3 overs or creating an opportunity for us, he's been that guy. He's put in the effort, and it's just nice to see the rewards and today again at the back end, stepping up, getting the support behind the team to lift us in the crucial moments, it's those sort of smart plays that you need, and for me, Siraj has just been outstanding," Morkel said.

While Prasidh Krishna walked away with the wickets of Ben Duckett and centurion Joe Root to inject life into the game, Siraj had played a role in both the dismissals with his spell at the other end. After dismissing Zak Crawley off the last ball of the previous evening, he removed Ollie Pope to give an opening.

And in the final session, was constantly in the ears of Prasidh and Akash Deep. Despite sending down more overs than anyone in the series, Siraj still delivered long spells with the old ball before bad light and rain brought an end to the proceedings on Day 4, with India needing four wickets and England 35 runs.

In a series where India have been able to play Jasprit Bumrah in only three Tests, Siraj has taken the lead mantle whenever his senior pro isn't available.

It was evident at the Oval as well. "I think he just enjoys that opportunity when it's given to him and he said it yesterday, he just loves playing for India and putting the shirt on and performing. That's what you want from a fast bowler – an important series, five Tests, a guy that's always willing to take the ball and a guy who's always putting his hand up to say, 'Listen, I want to do it for the team.'" Morkel said.

NUMBER PLATE

1088

Mohammed Siraj, the only pacer across both sides to play all 5 matches, has now bowled 181.2 overs (1088 deliveries), the most in the series – two balls more than Chris Woakes. Siraj is also the leading wicket-taker with 20.

RISE OF A TALISMAN

Heart of granite, body of thoroughbred: Siraj proves value of relentlessness

SANDIP G
AUGUST 3

THE IMAGES that define Mohammed Siraj so far in this Test series have been tragic. The ball spinning off a stout defensive block and dribbling to knock the stumps in Lord's. The heel nudging the ropes as he completed the catch of Harry Brook at the Oval. The anguished face when fielders kept shelling catches at Leeds.

There are those of rage and anger. The scowl at Ben Duckett in Lord's. The sighs and oohs. The redeeming frame would be the worldie that consumed Jacob Bethell. A more defining, and happier, one might await him on Monday. But irrespective of the outcome, it was the series when he became the talisman of a weary, wounded and callow Indian bowling band.

When he took the unenviable responsibility of spearheading a bowling firm of threadbare experience, when he filled the void of Jasprit Bumrah in the games he missed and those that the talisman was not his lethal self. When he bowled more than any other bowler in the series and took more wickets than any other (20), when he waged lone futile battles, when he kept India in the game, twice in this

game alone, and when he shed every drop of sweat and energy into the series.

Like late on Sunday evening, under sombre skies he bowled eight overs on the trot to keep the pressure on England. Back-to-back fours by Joe Root roused him in the 66th over. In the next 37 balls of heat and fury, he conceded only five runs, all nervy singles. He wobble-seamed the ball inwardly to the right-hander and swung the ball; or held the line using an upright seam position, orbited towards the batsmen by the dexterous wrists of his. His whooping nip-backers first induced doubts in Root and Bethell when everything seemed smooth-sailing. His accomplice Prasidh Krishna reaped the benefits. It is such a tragic flaw that his labours often go unnoticed.

His fate is akin to generations of batsmen in the Sachin Tendulkar era. Like a brigade of them whose contributions the great batsman overshadowed, Siraj's shine had been lost in the radiance of Bumrah. He is no Bumrah, a down-and-outest outlier, but it is his plight to be constantly compared to Bumrah. From speed to deviation, wits to craft, the benchmark is the exorbitantly gifted Bumrah, even though Siraj is a diamond by himself. Intelligent and witty, with a heart of granite and the body of a thoroughbred.



Mohammed Siraj is the only bowler to have featured in each of India's last four overseas Test series. He has missed only 3 of the last 16 games.

PTI

He promises one vital dimension that Bumrah cannot guarantee: availability. The modest sedan is often more useful than the Rolls Royce in the garage, better mileage and easy navigation. Siraj made his Test debut

three years after Bumrah, but he has played only seven Tests fewer than Bumrah has. In both Australia and England, he bowled more overs than Bumrah did (1571 and 1812, as opposed to 1512 and 1194). Bumrah nabbed

more wickets (46 in eight games) than Siraj (41 in 10 games), expectedly, but that does not diminish Siraj's impassioned dedication to his team's case. Almost 20 overs an innings on atypical England surfaces, largely bereft of grass and moisture, a series that has seen action on each of the 24 days of play.

Siraj has been at the heart of India's bowling effort because he was there and no one else was. He is the only bowler who has featured in all of India's last four overseas Test tours. Even in Tests since January 2023, he has missed just three of the last 16 games. Mohammed Shami was battling injuries, Bumrah was preserved for marquee tournaments and series. Siraj enjoyed few such considerations, because he was both durable and willing. He is the guarantee that enables Bumrah to replenish and reload.

There have been times when the repeated stretching of the sinews has compromised the sting of his bowling. The pouring of emotions has fatigued his mind. But whatever the state of his mind, or the condition of his body, he has perpetually steamed in, bowled as hard and tough as he could, as though every ball he bowled was the best ball he could. He, definitely, is imperfect. He could be scattergun, moody and frustratingly unpredictable, but not because his mind is not there, but be-

cause he simply can't reproduce his best day in and day out, in every single Test he plays.

Somehow, he becomes double the bowler he is when Bumrah is not around. Something stirs in him. Perhaps it originates from the increased responsibility, a subconscious coping mechanism to the situation, one that performs better in adversity. Maybe he feels a sense of liberation when the shadow of Bumrah does not lean onto him. Maybe it's just happenstance.

Even on Sunday, when all had given up, Siraj did not. He bent his back, hit the deck hard, and strove for movement, even if his body sometimes rebelled. The numbers are unflattering, but the toil behind it is not. He struck almost as frequently as Bumrah did (52 and 51.28). There were spells he was unstoppable. There was energy and intensity, difficult attributes to sustain in a long and gruelling tour, bowling with a ragged support cast. For all those junctures of grief and what-if moments, Siraj could reflect on a tour wherein he gave everything and emerged as the leader of this young and raw Indian fast-bowling group. And he, more than anyone else, would barrel down the stairway believing that India could win the Test and draw the series. For one last defining image of the series. A happier one, he would wish.

BRIEFLY

Bhawna, Yatri medal at U22 Asian Boxing Championships

Bangkok: Bhawna Sharma and Yatri Patel were on Sunday assured of a medal each in the U-22 Asian Boxing Championships after registering dominating wins over their respective opponents in the quarterfinals here. In the women's 48kg quarterfinals, Bhawna eased past Vietnam's Ngoc Linh Chi Ngo while Yatri punched her way to the last four with a confident showing against Keerththana Uthayakumar of Sri Lanka in the women's 57kg bout, each of them securing a unanimous victory. Meanwhile, Tanu tried her best to secure another medal for India but fell short against local hope Natnicha Chongprongklang in the women's 54kg quarterfinals. In the U-19 section, Shivam and Mausam Suhag registered contrasting victories to advance in their respective weight categories. **PTI**

Hungarian GP: Norris holds off PIAstri

Budapest: Lando Norris held off McLaren teammate Oscar PIAstri to win the Hungarian Grand Prix on a one-stop strategy and slash the Australian's Formula One lead to nine points going into the August break. Norris completed 39 of the 70 laps on a single set of hard tyres while PIAstri stopped twice and closed a 12-second gap to just 0.6 at the finish, with a nail-biting chase to the chequered flag and a near-collision on the penultimate lap. George Russell was a distant third, 20 seconds down the road, to complete Sunday's Hungarian GP for Mercedes. "I'm dead. I'm dead. It was tough," gasped Norris, who started in third place -- with PIAstri second -- and then dropped to fifth after being squeezed at the start. **REUTERS**

Namdhari FC beat Indian Air Force

Kolkata: Namdhari FC continued their winning run with a commanding 4-2 victory over Indian Air Force football team to go on top of Group A at the 134th Durand Cup here on Sunday. Samuel K opened the scoring for the Airmen in the 7th minute, but Namdhari responded with goals from Cleudson Dasilva (penalty, 37th), Amandeep Singh (45th), and second-half strikes from Dharmpreet Singh (60th) and substitute Seilenthang Lotjem (74th) to secure all three points. Despite a late goal from Sankit in the 78th minute, the Airmen could not mount a comeback at the Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krirangan (VYBK). **PTI**

USA end Swimming Worlds on a high

Singapore: The United States, which had a frustrating swim world championships, ended on a high note with a world record in the women's 4x100 medley relay in the last event of the eight-day championships. The Americans swam a time of 3 minutes, 49.34 seconds, breaking their own old mark of 3:49.63 set a year ago in the Paris Olympics. The United States finished with nine gold medals and 29 overall, ahead of Australia with eight gold and 20 overall. France and Canada were next with four gold medals. The 18-year-old Canadian Summer McIntosh won all four golds. **AP**

Finally passing trials, by combat

Maharashtra's Vaishnavi Patil breaks Haryana's wrestling juggernaut, qualifies for World Championships at trials in Delhi

PRITISH RAJ

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 3

AUDIBLE GASPS went around as Vaishnavi Patil of Maharashtra took down Muskan of Haryana to win the trial for the World Wrestling Championships berth in the 65kg category at the wrestling hall at Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium. The atmosphere was a measure of the unexpectedness of her triumph, and the most excited were the coach and the wrestlers cheering for Vaishnavi. The 22-year-old from Kalyan, Maharashtra, won an India berth for an international event for the first time, and that too for the most prestigious tournament there is, making her win even grander.

Vaishnavi saw Sakshi Malik on the Olympic podium for the first time during the 2016 Rio Olympics and decided to take up wrestling on the mat. Maharashtra has a huge culture of mud wrestling, like Haryana, but it barely transitions to mat wrestling. However, Vaishnavi was adamant about taking up the sport she saw on TV after wrestling in mud.

"When I saw Sakshi Malik for the first time in 2016, I knew I wanted to do this. Mat wasn't available in my area, and I used to wrestle just in mud," Vaishnavi told *The Indian Express* on the sidelines. After wrestling for four years in mud, she made the switch in 2020 and shifted to Hisar to train under her coach Jasbeer at the Sushil Kumar Akhada.

"I am processing it right now. I have been constantly coming for trials, but I always miss out on the final berth. This feels like all of my hard work is finally paying off. However, this is just the start, and I have to win many more such matches," said Vaishnavi, who was ecstatic and almost breathless after many photo requests after her win.

Vaishnavi has been a consistent presence in the wrestling selection events for the past four years. She participated in trials for the Asian Games, Asian Championships and also for the previous World Championships in 2023. However, losses in the semis and quarters would mean that she could never celebrate. "During my earlier losses, I would get depressed and sometimes wouldn't eat after



Vaishnavi Patil (in blue) defeated Haryana's Muskan 7-2 in the wrestling trials final on Sunday in New Delhi. **PTI**

going back to the academy. But my parents and my coach would always ask me to trust the process. My father always said that your hard work is never in vain. I was losing every time, but I knew that I didn't have to leave my zidd to get better," said Vaishnavi.

Scouting a coach

Usually, athletes start early from the junior level in the sport of wrestling and progress gradually through the ranks to play at the senior level. Vaishnavi, however, will be playing directly at the World Championships without any pedigree at the junior level internationally, but purely with her never-say-die attitude.

Usually, athletes are scouted by coaches, but Vaishnavi did the reverse and scouted a coach for herself. During the 2020 Khelo India Youth Games in Assam, Vaishnavi saw students from a certain academy doing well and asked her father to enquire about them. "We saw Jasbeer's sir girls doing well, and I asked my father to check where his academy is."

After enquiring about the whereabouts, the Patil family traveled all the way from Kalyan to Hisar. "After we came to Hisar, Coach Saab took me into his academy, and I started working slowly on my skills. I knew I had to work more than others," she said.

Her coach, Jasbeer, concurred that there

was a lot of work to be done before Vaishnavi got ready to take on other wrestlers. "*Zameen aur aasmaan ka farq hai jab aayi thi aur ab mein*," Jasbeer said (There is a huge difference now from when she came here). "She is hard hard-working kid, and after training her for the past five years, today I am the happiest. I had goosebumps sitting in the corner when Vaishnavi won the bout."

Away from home

Back in Kalyan, Dilip Patil received multiple congratulatory messages and calls from journalists enquiring about his family history amid a busy day in his dhaba. "My phone is buzzing and all of us here are very

Easy day for Antim in 53 kg trials

New Delhi: It was an easy day for Olympian Antim Panghal, who faced no resistance from her competitors in the 53kg category trials and booked her berth for the World Wrestling Championships on Sunday at Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium. Recently crowned Asian Champion Manisha Bhanwala was one of the two wrestlers in the 62 kg category and defeated Mansi Ahlawat 2-1 in the final to book her berth.

In the 68 kg category, another Paris Olympian, Nisha Dahiya, was in action, but her return from injury sustained during an Olympic bout against Park Sol Gum in Paris was cut short in the first round by Radhika, the eventual winner of the category. **PRITISH RAJ**

WOMEN'S TEAM FOR WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS
50 kg: Ankush, 53 kg: Antim, 55 kg: Nishu, 57 kg: Tapasya, 59 kg: Neha, 62 kg: Manisha Bhanwala, 65 kg: Vaishnavi Patil, 68 kg: Radhika, 72 kg: Jyoti Berwal, 76 kg: Priya Malik.

happy," Patil told *The Indian Express*. "When I sent her to train in Haryana, the only dream was that my kid represents India at the highest level."

The Patil family would take turns staying with Vaishnavi. "Sometimes her mother would stay with her for six months, sometimes her brother, and sometimes me. This time, Coach Saab told us not to worry."

Vaishnavi would stay in Hisar for the majority of the year, but would go back to Maharashtra to fight in Dangals. "She would go back to fight dangals, but this time I asked her parents to let her be with me as I was able to see that she is progressing rapidly," Jasbeer said.

While this is just the first step, Vaishnavi knows where she stands and what needs to be done. "I was waiting for one chance, and I have gotten it after so many defeats, I won't let it go in vain."

'Knew I would get chances': Alcaraz on beating Sinner at French Open

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

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FRENCH OPEN winner Carlos Alcaraz opened up on his unique rivalry with fellow Slam winner Jannik Sinner and how he overcame the Italian at a Roland Garros final that ranks right up there with some of the greatest tennis matches of all time.

Alcaraz said that he believed that closing a slam was going to be tough on Sinner and that he would get his chances to make his way back into the match.

"I simply thought about coming back little by little: one point, then another point, then another point, especially those three points," he said in an interview to *The Financial Times*.

"Closing a Grand Slam is very, very difficult, so I knew that I would have chances. That's why I stayed calm. I knew it wasn't going to be easy for him."

Alcaraz also spoke about the mental warfare during a match of this significance that took place in this year's French Open. The Spaniard revealed that his confident demeanor was also one that he portrayed in order to not show any weakness.

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CARLOS ALCARAZ

ON HOW HE BEAT SINNER AT FRENCH OPEN

"It was a bit the image I wanted to give as well," he said. "At no time did I doubt that I could come back, but obviously you have to show an image of self-confidence at all times. As soon as you show weakness to the other, that's it -- you are lost."

Alcaraz also spoke about his relationship with Sinner. While the initial years of a Roger Federer-Rafa Nadal rivalry was respectful yet distant, the same isn't necessarily true for this generation's greatest two tennis players.

"Jannik and I, who have had great battles on the court, see each other a lot off of it. We talk, we train together sometimes. And in the end you forge a good relation-



Carlos Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner's rivalry reached one of its peaks at the French Open earlier this year. **AP**

ship, a beautiful relationship ... We want to win and beat each other, but then off court, being good people and getting along is another matter. For me that is one of the virtues and values of sport," said Alcaraz, who will next be a part of the US Open.

Mboko stuns top seed Gauff

Reuters adds: Canadian teenager Victoria Mboko earned the biggest win of her career on Saturday, beating top seed Coco Gauff 6-1 6-4 to reach the quarterfinals of the Canadian Open in Montreal.

Mboko dropped her racket and covered her face in disbelief as the packed crowd leapt to their feet after the 18-year-old tournament wild card sealed the victory in just over an hour. "Thank you, you helped me so much," she told the home crowd in French during an on-court interview.

She called her first-ever appearance in the quarterfinals of a WTA 1000 event "incredible," especially after toppling reigning French Open champion Gauff.

Mboko was helped along the way by her error-prone opponent, who never found her rhythm on serve and failed to convert any of her five break point opportunities.

Gauff's sixth double fault set up match

point, which Mboko converted when the American's backhand slice drifted into the net.

Despite her disappointment, Gauff hugged Mboko at the net and will look to regroup as she prepares to make a run at a second U.S. Open crown next month.

Mboko will face either Lin Zhu of China or Spaniard Jessica Bouzas Maneiro - both unseeded players - in the quarters.

Earlier, ninth seed Elena Rybakina edged Dayana Yastremska 5-7 6-2 7-5 in their fourth-round battle and will next face another Ukrainian, 24th seed Marta Kostyuk, who came from behind to take out American McCartney Kessler 5-7 6-3 6-3.

On the men's side of the tournament, which is being held in Toronto, 20-year-old Alex Michelsen reached his first quarterfinal of a Masters 1000 event with a 6-3 6-3 win over fellow American Learner Tien. "It feels really good," Michelsen said. "It's uncharted territory from this point on, and I'm super happy to be in the quarters for the first time."

Michelsen, seeded 26th, will face hard-hitting 11th seed Karen Khachanov of Russia, who upset eighth seed Casper Ruud in their fourth round match 6-4 7-5.

CHess JUGGERNAUTS

Indian women's next challenge: Breaking the great Chinese wall

MAYANK

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 3

IN GEORGIA'S Batumi, the easternmost corner of Europe, Divya Deshmukh and Koneru Humpy were busy battling each other for glory after dismantling China's dominant force and some world-class individuals en route to the summit clash of the FIDE Women's World Cup 202. Meanwhile, something unusual was unfolding in Western Europe.

In Aix-en-Provence, 14-year-old Women's FIDE Master (WFM) Prishita Gupta was sweeping through the competition. By the time she finished the two events in France -- the Paris Masters and the 2nd Dole Trophy Pasino Grand Aix Masters 2025 -- her rating had soared to 2353, a staggering 135 Elo points higher than where she had begun. Prishita started July with a rating of 2218. Her performance at the Grand Aix Masters also earned her her maiden WIM norm.

Prishita's rise is even more astonishing considering that back in 2022, she was barely rated 1300. For context, the lowest possible FIDE rating one can start with is 1000, though even that is rare, as initial ratings are based on performance in the first few games against rated opponents. From being a near-rookie to now the eighth-highest-rated Indian woman in chess, all in just three years, is both a monumental

achievement and proof that Indian chess is a talent factory with no signs of slowing down.

While the 38-year-old Humpy is enjoying a second wind in her career, Divya's World Cup triumph at 19 stresses India's growing depth in the modern era of chess. But is it enough? Talents like R. Vaishali, Vantika Agrawal, and Divya Deshmukh are promising, but can they carry the torch for the next two decades?

The landscape is undoubtedly improving. For years, India relied solely on Koneru Humpy and, to a lesser extent, Harika Dronavalli, who shouldered the dual burden of personal and national expectations. But now, it is time to turn the tide.

GM Abhijeet Kunte draws parallels between Divya's breakthrough and the domino effect seen in Indian men's chess after Gukesh's World Championship victory.

"Chess in India has been dominated by Humpy and Harika for nearly 20-25 years. Humpy recently became a World Rapid Champion, adding a second rapid world title to her name," reminded Kunte, who was the captain of the Indian women's team at the Budapest Chess Olympiad 2024, where they claimed the country's first-ever team gold in the most prestigious team event in the sport.

"Both she and Harika have performed exceptionally well at the international level. However, the Women's World Championship title has always eluded Indian players until



After years of relying on Koneru Humpy (R) and to an extent Harika Dronavalli, women's chess is seeing its own rise. *Fide/Andrei Anosov*

now. With Gukesh's recent triumph, we hope Divya will follow a similar path, ushering in a new generation that brings these prestigious titles home," he added.

For Divya, the World Cup title brought many firsts as she not only secured a spot in the prestigious 2026 Candidates Tournament

(as did Humpy) -- which will decide the challenger for the World Championship title. Divya also became only the fourth female Grandmaster from India. Her coach in the past and one of India's finest chess trainers and a Dronacharya Awardee, RB Ramesh, believes the GM title is a game-changer not just for

Players like Prishita are emerging, but as for matching China's depth, that remains a distant dream for now. The top five players in the current world rankings are all Chinese.

Divya but for Indian women's chess as a whole.

"That will be a huge confidence boost for her, especially since we don't have many women players becoming grandmasters. Before her, India had only three," Ramesh told *The Indian Express*. "Hopefully, she will inspire young girls to take up chess more seriously and professionally. She will likely be one of the youngest players in the Candidates -- perhaps even the youngest," he added.

Depth needed

While Ramesh predicts that Divya could become India's strongest female player with the potential to "reach a 2650 rating," he also expresses concern about the overall depth of Indian women's chess.

"This isn't a very healthy sign. On the men's side, we have players like Praggnanandhaa, Arjun (Erigaisi), Gukesh (Dommaraju), Nihal (Sarin), and Rounak (Sadhwani) -- just in India,

I can name five or six players who are among the world's top 20. That's not the case in women's chess. We need more young girls to take up the game seriously and pursue it professionally. Fortunately, this is already starting to happen," Ramesh said.

"We do have some promising young girls, but it will take a few more years. I believe that in the near future, seeing players like Humpy -- who is still performing exceptionally well at 38 -- will help. This is good for India in the short term, as we have two strong players performing well. Now, we just need more young talent to emerge," he added.

Players like Prishita are emerging, but as for matching China's depth, that remains a distant dream for now. The top five players in the current world rankings are all Chinese. The world hasn't seen a non-Chinese player claim the throne in women's chess in the last decade, with Hou Yifan, Tan Zhongyi, and Ju Wenjun sweeping all World Championship titles since 2016. Even without the same iron grip they once held at the turn of the century, China continues to produce elite players. The next crop of talents, like Miaoyi Lu and Yuxin Song, only grows stronger with each tournament.

Breaking the Great Chinese Wall in women's chess is India's next big challenge. Divya's breakthrough might just be the trigger the country needed.