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AIR 77

Arohi Deshpande
Classroom Course

ALL INDIA FEMALE TOPPER

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 AIR 30 Amrit Raj Classroom Course	 AIR 32 Mahroof Ahmed Khan Classroom Course	 AIR 33 Koustubh Deshpande Classroom Course	 AIR 41 Snehal Roy Choudhury Classroom Course	 AIR 43 Shaurya Khemka Classroom Course	 AIR 44 Yash Yadav Classroom Course	 AIR 46 Surya Kantil Ghosh Classroom Course	 AIR 48 Nathan Jais Classroom Course	 AIR 50 Keshav Mangal Classroom Course	

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Rescue workers use excavators, as they search for victims under the rubble of a building that was hit in an Israeli airstrike in the southern port city of Tyre. REUTERS

'You're f****g crazy': Trump tells Netanyahu to stop attacking Beirut

Press Trust of India
Washington, June 2

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump said he persuaded Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to call off the strike on Beirut, following which the Israeli leader "turned his troops around". Trump made the announcement on Truth Social on Monday evening amid reports that the conversation between the two leaders was "heated" and the US president telling Netanyahu that he would have been in prison but for his intervention.

"I had a conversation with Bibi Netanyahu today (Monday), asking him not to go into a major raid of Beirut, Lebanon. He turned his Troops around. Thank you Bibi," he said, referring to the Israeli PM by his widely used nickname.

Trump's phone calls with Netanyahu came after Iran threatened to end the negotiations with the US over Israel's attacks on Lebanon. Netanyahu had said Israel would hit "terror targets" in Beirut if Hezbollah did not stop attacking Israel.

The president said he also had a conversation with the representatives of the leaders of Hezbollah, who agreed to "stop shooting at Israel and its soldiers". US media outlet Axios reported that tempers flew during Trump's phone call with Netanyahu.

"You're f****g crazy. You'd be in prison if it weren't for me. I'm saving your a**. Everybody hates you now. Everybody hates

Israel continues to attack south Lebanon, 11 killed

Israeli drone strikes on southern Lebanon on Tuesday killed 11 people, including a man along with his son and daughter, the state-run news agency said, a day after U.S. President Donald Trump said Israel and the militant group Hezbollah agreed to dial back fighting.

Hezbollah, which is backed by Iran, launched dozens of projectiles and drones toward Israeli soldiers in southern Lebanon and Israeli cities and towns in recent days as Israel's airstrikes killed dozens, including women and children, in Lebanon. Hezbollah did not carry out any attacks on Israel after Trump's announcement. Two semi-official Iranian news agencies reported Tuesday that the country cut off communication with mediators facilitating the ceasefire talks. AP

Israel because of this," Axios reported, quoting an unnamed US official.

A second source told Axios that Trump was "pissed" and at one point yelled at Netanyahu: "What the f**k are you doing?" Another official told the outlet Trump had "steamedrolled" Netanyahu during the call.

"Bibi said, 'OK, OK, just make sure everything is taken care of,'" according to the official.

China detains its top scientist for 'corruption'

Press Trust of India
Beijing, June 2

CHINA'S LEADING cartographic scientist Zhou Chenghu, a former deputy director of the Institute of Geographic Sciences, has been detained by anti-corruption officials.

The Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI), China's top internal disciplinary and supervisory body, on Monday said that 62-year-old Zhou is under investigation for "suspected serious violations of duty". It, however, did not reveal any details of the allegations, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported on Tuesday.

In China, cartographic scien-

tists play a crucial role in the country's maritime and border disputes with various neighbours. Maps highlighted China's claims over the disputed regions. They also play a key role in mapping out the natural resources, including mining.

Zhou's primary research fields include spatial data mining, geographic systems modelling, hydrology and water resources, and the application of geographic information systems and remote sensing. In late May, the state-run Economic Observer, a weekly Chinese newspaper, cited "informed sources" and said Zhou was taken away by disciplinary inspectors from the lobby of his research institute building in late April.

KYIV SAYS CITIES HIT BY 656 DRONES, 73 MISSILES OVERNIGHT

Heavy Russian strikes kill at least 22 in Ukrainian cities

Valentyn Ogirenko & Anna Voitenko
Kyiv, June, 2

RUSSIA POUNDED Ukraine with hundreds of drones and dozens of missiles early on Tuesday in attacks that authorities said killed 22 people and wounded more than 100.

The attacks on cities including Kyiv and Dnipro followed Russian warnings of "systematic" strikes on the capital after a deadly drone attack on a dormitory in Ukraine's Russian-held region of Luhansk last month. Kyiv denies targeting the dormitory.

It was the third heavy assault on Kyiv in under a month, but Russia has been relentlessly attacking Ukrainian cities, including Kyiv, since it invaded its smaller neighbour in 2022.

US-brokered talks on the war in Ukraine have stalled with Washington focusing on Iran, while Russian advances on the battlefield have slowed this year, and Kyiv has stepped up its strikes on Russian oil refineries.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Russia had fired 73 missiles and more than 600 drones in the overnight attack and again urged Washington to send additional Patriot missile interceptors to replenish Kyiv's dwindling supplies.

"This was a large-scale at-



Firefighters at a workshop damaged during Russian missile and drone strikes on Kyiv. AP

tack and an absolutely clear statement from Russia: if Ukraine is not protected from ballistic and other missile strikes, these attacks will continue," Zelenskyy said on Telegram.

The Kremlin said on Tuesday the war had entered "a new paradigm" after what it called "inhumane acts of terror" by Ukraine's military against civilians. Moscow warned last week of systemic strikes and urged foreigners to leave Kyiv.

Zelenskyy sent a letter last week to U.S. President Donald Trump and Congress, asking

for air defence systems. As of Monday, officials said he had not received a response.

Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha urged partners to take "concrete steps" to help Ukraine and increase pressure on Russia, appealing for tougher sanctions and more military support.

"Moscow is losing on the battlefield. No number of missiles can change this. What we can change is Russia's ability to continue terror," he said on X.

Moscow's war in Ukraine has killed tens of thousands of people, forced much of the

population out of their homes and devastated cities, towns and villages, and Russia controls about one-fifth of Ukraine.

Ukraine has also hit civilian targets during attacks on Russia or Russian-occupied areas, though on a far smaller scale. Both sides deny targeting civilians. Photographs on Tuesday showed large explosions and plumes of smoke billowing over high-rise buildings in Kyiv, where officials said the overnight strikes had killed six people and wounded close to 80, including three children. REUTERS

Rubio will testify before Congress for first time since start of Iran war

Associated Press
Washington, June 2

SECRETARY OF State Marco Rubio is set to face a litany of questions Tuesday about the Trump administration's fragile or stalling diplomatic efforts around the world when he appears for back-to-back hearings on Capitol Hill for the first time since the Iran war began.

The Republican former senator will sit before House and Senate committees to make the State Department's annual budget request. But the focus is likely to shift quickly to the already unsteady ceasefire between Washington and Tehran, which has been further tested in recent days by back-and-forth attacks. Cabinet members, includ-



Marco Rubio

ing Rubio, have defended President Donald Trump's decision to launch the conflict despite promises over the years not to engage in "forever wars" in the Middle East. That work has been made more difficult by Trump's shifting goals for the conflict. While Rubio is testifying before Congress for the first time since the Iran war started on Feb. 28, he took part in a clas-

sified briefing for lawmakers days after the first U.S. and Israeli strikes. He faced Democrats' anger over the lack of congressional approval but strong support from most Republicans for taking action against one of America's oldest adversaries.

In the two months since the war began, however, a small but growing faction of Republicans have joined Democrats in questioning the astronomical price tag and overall economic consequences of the conflict as they head into midterm elections in the fall. The war has cut tanker traffic in the Strait of Hormuz, a critical waterway through which 20% of the world's traded oil and natural gas passes in peacetime, spiking gas prices.

Bangladesh minister elected President of 81st session of UNGA

Washington: United Nations, Bangladesh's Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman was on Tuesday elected as the President of the 81st session of the UN General Assembly in a closely-contested election.

Rahman and Cyprus' Special Envoy for Multilateralism Andreas Kakouris were vying to lead the 193-member General Assembly in its 81st session, which will commence in September.

In the closely-contested elections, the Bangladeshi diplomat garnered 99 votes while Kakouris got 91 votes in his favour out of the 190 members present and voting. PTI

Youth gets life term for murder with kirpan, British Sikh MPs defend religious symbol

Aditi Khanna
London, June 2

BRITAIN'S SIKH lawmakers on Tuesday defended the ceremonial knife, the kirpan, during a Parliament debate following the conviction of a British Sikh man who had presented his murder weapon as a religious item in court.

Vickrum Digwa, 23, was sentenced to life imprisonment on Monday after being found guilty of the murder of 18-year-old Henry Nowak, who was caught on police body-worn

camera footage being handcuffed in his final moments over racism allegations.

PM Keir Starmer said he "felt sick" watching the "harrowing" footage but appealed against it being "whipped up" to create divisions within British society.

"There are clearly serious questions that need to be addressed, not least how accusations of racism informed the decision-making in this case," Starmer said in a statement from 10 Downing Street.

As the incident from December last year in Southamp-

ton caused an uproar, UK Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood made a statement in the House of Commons to reiterate that the wider Sikh community must not be condemned for an individual's "heinous crime".

"There have been calls to limit the right of Sikhs to carry their ceremonial knife, the kirpan, one of the five holy items in their faith," said Mahmood, referencing some far-right groups calling for a ban.

The minister referenced the UK's Offensive Weapons Act of

2019, which "clarified and strengthened existing legal protections in relation to long kirpans".

"This included extending defences, so that kirpans can be lawfully possessed for religious reasons and used in religious and ceremonial contexts. But let me be clear, carrying a knife for the purpose of religious observance is one thing, using it as so tragically occurred in this case is quite another. It is a vile act, a crime of the utmost severity, and it will be met with the severest punishment," she said.

BRIEFLY

THE VATICAN

Vatican gets its first woman communications head



Maria Monserrat Alvarado. REUTERS

POPE LEO named an executive with US Catholic media conglomerate EWTN as the new head of the Vatican's communications department on Tuesday, in the first appointment of a woman to the senior Church role. Maria Monserrat Alvarado, originally from Mexico City, will lead the Vatican's Dicastery for Communications, a sprawling operation that oversees the Vatican's news portal, radio station, newspaper and press office, among other entities. Alvarado, president and chief operating officer of EWTN News since 2023, will replace Paolo Ruffini, who has been in the role since 2018 and is retiring. She will start her duties in November, said a statement. The Eternal Word Television Network was launched by a nun named Mother Angelica in 1981. REUTERS

UGANDA

Health ministry confirms 6 new cases of Ebola

UGANDA HAS confirmed six more new cases of Ebola, bringing the total confirmed in the country so far to 15, the health ministry said on Tuesday. The ministry said in a statement on its X account that the six were confirmed among contacts of other confirmed cases. It said to date there were two discharges from hospital, with 12 people admitted and one death. AP

DENMARK

Frederiksen secures third term as PM

DENMARK'S SOCIAL Democratic leader Mette Frederiksen said on Monday she has agreed to form a centre-left coalition government, maintaining her grip on power amid a crisis in ties with US President Donald Trump over the future of Greenland. The deal to form a minority cabinet gives Frederiksen a third consecutive term as prime minister. AP

NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

SRI LANKA

Rajapaksa allowed to testify online

SRI LANKA'S former president Gotabaya Rajapaksa was on Tuesday allowed to testify online in a long-standing case about the disappearance of two rights activists in 2011. Rajapaksa was the chief bureaucrat in the Ministry of Defence under the presidency of his elder brother, Mahinda Rajapaksa, when the disappearances of human rights activists Lalith Kumar Weeraraju and Kugan Muruganandan were reported. PTI

PAKISTAN

Forces foil suicide attack, kill four TTP militants

SECURITY FORCES on Tuesday foiled a suicide attack on a military check post in northwest Pakistan and killed four Taliban militants, police said. The TTP militants attempted to target a security post using an explosives-laden vehicle near Miran-shah in KPK, they said. However, security personnel, who were on high alert, detected the threat and destroyed the vehicle before it could reach its intended target. PTI

Nepal House adjourned after protests over PM's remarks on border issues

Press Trust of India
Kathmandu, June 2

BOTH HOUSES of Nepal's Parliament were adjourned on Tuesday after lawmakers continued to obstruct proceedings over Prime Minister Balendra Shah's remarks about his country's border issues with India. While the Lower House — House of Representatives (HoR) — was adjourned until June 8, the National Assembly was adjourned until Wednesday. Earlier, the Parliament sessions were adjourned on Monday too.

The opposition lawmakers were protesting against PM Balen's Sunday remarks at the Parliament when he said that

"Not only India, but Nepal has also encroached territories of India at many places", sparking controversy.

Balen suggested without elaborating that India and Nepal have agreed to take the help of historians, surveyors and experts to seek a resolution, adding that Kathmandu has also taken up the matter with China and the UK. India on Tuesday categorically rejected any role for "third parties" to resolve its boundary row.

Opposition lawmakers expressed their dissent against PM Shah's remarks as soon as the meeting started, with some even surrounding the bell to show their protest.

WHILE MANY ENDED UP IN AUSTRALIA, SEVERAL AFGHAN PLAYERS SPREAD ACROSS EUROPE AND SOME IN THE UNITED STATES

After escaping Taliban and years in exile, Afghan women's soccer team rises again

Steve McMorran
Wellington, June 2

FATIMA YOUSUFI escaped the Taliban, arriving in Australia with a backpack and a burning ambition to play international soccer.

Through their own determination and courage, and with family support, Yousufi and others like Mona Amini had been able to study, to play soccer for clubs and for the Afghanistan women's team. But when the Taliban returned to power in 2021 it shut down all women's sports, and the players of the Afghan team went into hiding.

After a frantic evacuation, 13 of the players settled in Australia

where for five years they lived, played and trained in the hope of once again being allowed to represent their country.

The Afghanistan soccer federation doesn't recognize the women's team. But in April, soccer's world governing body granted the Afghan women's team eligibility for international competition.

This week, 23 members of the Afghan Women United program are in a training camp in Auckland, New Zealand and will play games against a team from the Cook Islands.

"It was a special day that we heard that Afghanistan can represent again our flag in international tournaments," Amini, a

midfielder, told The Associated Press in a Zoom call Tuesday. "This is the result of hard work that we did in the past four or five years."

Seven months ago, the Afghan women played in the so-called "Unite" tournament in which they achieved a win over Libya.

"It was a very special moment because we played in an international friendly tournament, and after three years we heard our anthem," Amini said. "That was amazing for me."

FIFA's subsequent recognition was another important milestone on a long and perilous journey.

Yousufi, a Melbourne-based



Afghan soccer players Mona Amini, left, and Sosan Mohammadi during a training session in Auckland, New Zealand, on Tuesday. AP

goalkeeper, remembers her rejection vividly.

"We're going to have the national team! That's the greatest

thing ever that could have happened to the team," she said. "It was super important to us, especially thinking of the time

when we arrived in Australia and we had lost everything: family, our childhood memories and that national team." Yousufi said she left home with one backpack, "to be safe and to continue to be alive."

"When we came here the most important part of our life was to be a soccer player and to be a soccer team," she said. "When we saw we could not be (officially) a national team and we could not represent our country ... it was like I lost the game."

While many ended up in Australia, there are Afghan players spread across Europe and some in the United States. Coach Pauline Hamill holds tal-

ent identification camps and helps pull the squad together for games. Memories of their darkest days remain a strong part of the team's motivation to succeed, and to represent women and girls still in their homeland. The Afghan women's team played its last official competitive match in 2018. "We couldn't play freely in Afghanistan," Amini said. "Going out from home was tough because there was the risk of the Taliban seeing us and finding that we were playing soccer. "It was a very tough time and I'm pretty sure every one of the girls, every single one of us, fought hard to create this team and we are very happy right now

to stay with each other." Yousufi was a student and a soccer player, and she said it was difficult even before the Taliban returned to power "for a girl to play football in Afghanistan with such difficulties as family barriers and difficulties of the society to accept a woman in sport." "We were thinking of any other outcomes like the danger we were facing, everyday dangers in Afghanistan like bomb explosions. Considering all those things — and it was the same for the other girls — we took all those risks to be part of the national team and to be a football player." Then life became even more difficult. AP

The Indian EXPRESS

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IN JANUARY, PRINCIPALS, HEAD EXAMINERS OF KENDRIYA VIDYALAYAS, NAVODAYA, TOP DELHI SCHOOLS TESTED SYSTEM

What CBSE ignored: Its own panel found glitches in dry run, said delay OSM by a year

After trial in Delhi in Jan 2026, two reports sent to Board, highlighted major problems, tech glitches, random increase, decrease in marks

Vidheesha Kuntamalla
New Delhi, June 2

THE CBSE's new On-Screen Marking (OSM) system needs at least a year's trial and rectification before being implemented. The OSM system depends heavily on well-equipped evaluation centres and highly trained evaluators. Improved training is essential for fair, transparent, and error-free marking of answer scripts. This needs time to be done properly. The OSM system is glitchy, and it is unable to resolve these glitches speedily.

These are some of the problems with the digital evaluation system that were explicitly flagged to the CBSE by participants in an evaluation dry run carried out by the Board less than a month before this year's Class 12 examinations began on February 17.

The CBSE pushed through the system anyway. Instead of paper booklets, examiners used computers to evaluate digitally scanned copies of answer scripts submitted by the examinees, which the CBSE put on a secure online platform. Students started complaining about their marks almost

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

THE EARLY WARNING

Glitches flagged during dry run

- Score increases by additional head examiners reportedly reflected as deductions.
- Marks showed on-screen didn't always align with official marking.
- In some cases, marks for one sub-part of a question reflected.
- System reportedly allowed or forced 0.5-mark award not permitted under marking scheme.
- Evaluators reported that the platform would freeze.
- Evaluation progress reportedly not being saved automatically.
- Marks could reportedly be entered against blank pages, unattempted questions.



CBSE claims to have fixed

- 'Save' option added to evaluation interface.
- Mark deletion process simplified.
- Static IP issue fixed before actual evaluation.
- Marks' display repositioned to avoid obscuring answers.
- AHE/HE review process revised to allow answer-book review irrespective of daily evaluation percentage.
- Server capacity enhanced to address internet speed.

RELATED REPORTS PAGE 6

Rahul Singh: CBSE Chairman who failed board test

CBSE transfers a cover-up, sack Pradhan: Rahul

CBSE Chairman, Secretary moved out, OSM service procurement to be probed

Harikishan Sharma & Abhinaya Harigovind
New Delhi, June 2

WITH THE Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) under fire over glitches in the On-Screen Marking (OSM) system for its Class 12 board exam, the Centre Tuesday moved out CBSE Chairman Rahul Singh and Secretary Himanshu Gupta and named their replacements. The government also set up a one-member committee to look into the procurement of services for the OSM system. To be chaired by S Radha Chauhan, Chairperson, Capacity Building Commission, it has been asked to submit its report

to the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) within a month. The announcements came on the day official sources confirmed that the issue flagged in a May 31 post on X by Nisarga Adhikary — a 19-year-old ethical hacker, he had also posted a picture to indicate that he could access the scanned answer sheets — had been verified, resulting in the Board acknowledging "vulnerabilities" in the OSM portal. "The vendor had a security audit certificate, and the Board didn't do an audit of the vendor's systems," the sources said. Lokhande Prashant Sitaram

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

2022 PORT BLAIR CASE

Key witnesses turn hostile in gangrape case against former Andamans Chief Secy

Confident about every word victim has spoken in her testimony: Prosecution

Ritu Sarin
New Delhi, June 2

"I FEEL safe in uniform." This is what the rape victim now says, four years after her police complaint against the then Chief Secretary of the Union Territory rocked Port Blair. She doesn't want more details published, except that last September she got a job in the "security sector" for a monthly salary of Rs 25,000. Since the case was filed in 2022, life has been harsh for her. And has only got harsher. Her husband has left her and the case against the accused has "weakened" with four of the key witnesses, including the husband, turning hostile and denying their recorded statements. "Nobody, not even the lawyers, tell me what is going on in court. They don't want to upset me. So I just wear my uniform every morning and go out for duty," says the victim. On October 15, 2022, *The Indian Express* first reported how she, then a 21-year-old government job seeker from Port Blair,



The Indian Express report published on October 15, 2022

had filed a police complaint alleging gangrape by Jitendra Narain, IAS, who was then Chief Secretary of Andaman and Nicobar, and then Labour Commissioner R L Rishi. The woman was given police protection and the A & N police set up a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe into her allegations. By the time the FIR was registered, Narain was transferred from A & N and appointed Chairman and Managing Director of the Delhi Finance Corporation. A day after *The Indian Express* report, Narain was suspended via an order of the Home Ministry citing "grave misconduct." The next day, an A&N police team raided his house in New Delhi and seized

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Grandson of Nandalal Bose, who fought to get his name back in electoral roll, dies at 88

Atri Mitra
Kolkata, June 2

SUPRABUDDHA SEN, the grandson of celebrated modern artist Nandalal Bose, passed away on Monday morning, days after he was admitted to a hospital in Durgapur with breathing difficulties. He was 88. Suprabuddha Sen and his wife, 82-year-old Deepa Sen, were excluded from the electoral roll during the Election Commission's Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise, forcing them to seek relief from the Supreme Court. Residents of Visva-Bharati in Santiniketan mourned his death. A member of his family, Chakradhar Nayak, said, "His passing is an irreparable loss for us. This void will not be easy to fill." According to his family, Suprabuddha was admitted to a private hospital in Durgapur on Sunday with breathing difficulties.



Suprabuddha Sen and his wife Deepa Sen before casting their votes in the West Bengal elections on April 23. FILE

He died there on Monday at around 7.15 am after suffering a cardiac arrest. Anil Konar, secretary of the Santiniketan Trust, said, "He was a gentle person. He had no arrogance. He could easily make everyone feel at ease." Suprabuddha Sen hit the national headlines after his and his wife's names were deleted from the electoral roll following

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



TMC chief Mamata Banerjee during a protest against post-poll violence, in Kolkata's Esplanade, Tuesday. PARTHA PAUL

Mamata hits the streets post poll-defeat: 'Jiyeenge toh, BJP ko hataake jayenge'

Sweetie Kumari
Kolkata, June 2

BACK ON the streets of Kolkata to protest after the party's shocking and humiliating defeat in the Assembly elections, Trinamool Congress (TMC) chief Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday launched a fierce political counter-offensive, accusing the ruling BJP of trying to "bulldoze the democracy" by attacking and intimidating her party leaders and workers. Denied permission to protest at Rani Rashmoni Avenue, the former chief minister reached Esplanade's Y-channel in Central Kolkata around 3pm, with some of the senior party

leaders accompanying her. "Our MLAs, councillors, and party candidates are being intimidated," Mamata told a surging crowd of party workers amid a heavy deployment of police personnel. Alleging a deep-rooted conspiracy orchestrated from Delhi to dismantle her party, she issued a stern warning to the BJP that such attempts would be "foiled". "Our MLAs are not being allowed to leave their houses, and police are asking them to quit TMC and form a "new TMC"... Who will build this new TMC? Those who have been with the party since the beginning, or those who won on the

party symbol," she asked, adding "Do not run a bulldozer over democracy... Do not scare our MLAs and MPs. Do not arrest our people. People are committing suicide due to your atrocities." Addressing Prime Minister Narendra Modi, she said, "Look at whom you have given the responsibility to". "Look at what is happening in West Bengal. You have to look into all of this," she said, indirectly referring to Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari. "Modi has left Bengal in the hands of anti-socials and bulldozer-happy politicians, pushing the state into darkness," she added.

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INSIDE PAGE 4



TALK OF 'SECRET MEETINGS' ADDS TO BUZZ OF TMC SPLIT

AMID CID PROBE, ABHISHEK SENDS FRESH LETTER TO SPEAKER FOR LoP



THE BIG PICTURE

'Why not ask women what they want?' PAGE 8

AMID LPG IMPORT DISRUPTION For larger PNG footprint, Govt looks at centralised consumer-friendly portal

Sukalp Sharma
New Delhi, June 2

MOVING TO push piped natural gas (PNG) connections amid the squeeze in supply of LPG owing to the crisis in West Asia, the government is actively considering a proposal to launch a national centralised portal for consumers to apply for PNG connections, *The Indian Express* has learnt. The proposal, a senior official said, also involves putting gas grid maps online to ostensibly facilitate customer requests and their ability to locate a pipeline near their premises. But there are potential security risks around placing natural gas pipeline layouts and maps in the public domain. The proposal is being deliberated upon and there is no clear timeline yet on its implementation. The official said it could be announced over the

E. EXPLAINED

Huge base, wide gap

LPG has a huge consumer base in households across the country: 33.3 crore domestic connections. Households with PNG connections are far fewer at about 1.6 crore. In the current scenario, priority sectors continue to get natural gas supplies.

next few days or weeks. Currently, consumers are required to apply for a connection directly with the city gas distribution (CGD) entities serving their respective areas. Under the proposed centralised interface, the demand for an application for a new

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

CASES OF HALIMA, HER HUSBAND AND MOTHER-IN-LAW ARE BEFORE TRIBUNALS, HER FATHER WAS IN 2002 ROLL AND IS NOW IN NEW S.I.R.; GUDIYA, HER HUSBAND AND FATHER-IN-LAW ARE WAITING TO HEAR FROM TRIBUNALS

Halima & Gudiya, in queue at Bengal tribunals as cloud darkens over citizenship

Sweetie Kumari
Kolkata, June 2

ON MAY 27, upholding the legal validity of the Election Commission's Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, the Supreme Court directed that those excluded from the list will face "adjudication of their citizenship". "... the (Election) Commission shall refer such cases within 4 weeks to the competent authority under the Citizenship Act, 1955," the Court said, adding that the authority

should decide their case before whichever election was due next, "after giving notice and an opportunity of hearing to the deleted individuals". *The Indian Express* meets two families whose cases are pending before tribunals, and who now live in the fear of being asked to prove their citizenship, as well as uncertainty over their continuation in government scheme beneficiary lists. **Halima Khatun, 32** Recently, Halima emptied

out her bank account of all her life savings. A domestic help who shares a one-room accommodation with her family at Kamarhati in North 24 Parganas, Halima says she was worried that by the time the tribunals decide her case for inclusion in the electoral roll — along with that of her husband and mother-in-law — her bank account may be closed and the money lost. Among other things that those deleted like her during the SIR may lose, Halima has heard, will be bank accounts. She feels further defeated



Halima Khatun, a domestic help, lives in Kamarhati in North 24 Parganas; (right) Gudiya Rajak, who also works as a domestic help, is a resident of Bishnupur in South 24 Parganas.

after the Supreme Court order directing that the EC could refer those rejected for a citizen-



ship test. What more can she do, Halima says. "My parents and grandparents are all from

Canning", her father Akshay Khansama's name figured in the 2002 electoral roll of the state — the most crucial condition for inclusion in the SIR — and Khansama figures in the electoral roll after this SIR too. Halima also has multiple documents, including records showing she was born in 1994 in the Canning Purbha Assembly constituency of South 24 Parganas. She says she submitted her Aadhaar card, PAN card, Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) papers, her father's legal identity documents including the proof that his name was re-

corded in the 2002 electoral roll of Canning, and her previous voter ID-card. Halima says she voted in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, while her husband Abdul Mallick Sardar and mother-in-law were voters in Sandeshkhali constituency. Yet her name was deleted in the first draft itself, with no notice or official reaching out to her, she says. After the first rejection came, Halima adds: "I followed the Booth Level Officer's (BLO) advice and filled out Form 6 (for new voters). I did so twice, and both times it was rejected."

Pointing out that it takes her a full day to travel to her parents' house in Canning for any official requirement, Halima says: "I work at people's homes. How many times will my employers give me leave to go and complete paperwork?" On the tribunal hearings, Halima says none of them has received any notice for a formal hearing. "I was planning to visit," she says. "But I heard that without an official notice, no one is allowed inside the building. So we have been just waiting for months now, to see how

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Back from Haj

Union Minister Kiren Rijiju greets Haj pilgrims arriving on the first return flight from Jeddah, at New Delhi's IGI Airport on Tuesday. PTI

51 wounds, burns: Post-mortem reveals torture of Kerala baby 'by mother's partner'

Shaju Philip
Thiruvananthapuram,
June 2

LAST FRIDAY, one-and-a-half-year-old Arshid was rushed to the Sri Avittom Thirunal Hospital in Thiruvananthapuram. Accompanying him was his mother's live-in partner, A Ashkar, who claimed that Arshid had choked on his food. The toddler was declared dead soon after. A postmortem has now revealed a crime, allegedly carried out by his mother's partner with the support of his mother.

Ashkar (31), has been arrested on charges of murdering the toddler, while the boy's mother Akhila on charges of abetting the crime. As the victim belonged to Dalit community, police Tuesday slapped relevant sections of SC/ST Act against the accused.

Arshid's body tells a gruesome tale of about one-and-a-half-month-long torture. Quoting the postmortem report, police said the toddler's body had 89 wounds, both internal and external. "Seven ribs were broken and there was a contusion in the brain. Of these 89 wounds, 51 had been identified during the inquest, which revealed fresh wounds as well as old scars. The investigation has found evidence suggesting the toddler was subjected to repeated abuse for around one and a half months. His arms were broken," a police officer said.

K Biju Kumar, Deputy SP in Nedumangad, said, "Ashkar saw the baby as an obstacle to his life with Akhila. So he wanted to annihilate the boy. He was subjected to torture

7 killed, 40 injured as 2 buses collide in Surat; 4 critical

Express News Service
Surat, June 2

AT LEAST seven persons on board a bus were killed and 40 injured after it caught fire following its head-on collision with another bus, near Badroli town in Gujarat's Surat district on Tuesday afternoon, police said. Out of the 27 people hospitalised due to the accident, four were said to be in critical condition.

Both buses were operated by the Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) and belonged to a depot in the neighbouring Dhule district, they added. While one of them was bound for Surat from Dhule, the other was returning to Dhule from Surat.

Surat Superintendent of Police (SP) Rajesh Gadhiya said the Surat-to-Dhule bus first struck a tractor that was pulling a water tanker while on National Highway-53 at Una village in Badroli taluka. Then, it jumped the road divider and hit the Dhule-to-Surat bus, which turned over by the impact and caught fire, he added.

Locals and passersby gathered at the spot and began pulling people out of the two buses. Fire and police officials took over the rescue efforts soon after. Along with the SP, District Collector Tejas Parmar also helped in taking the injured Gadhiya said: "Seven

over a period of time. The crime was committed with the connivance of the boy's mother. We are also probing into other allegations against Ashkar," said the police officer.

As per police, Ashkar said during questioning that Akhila, a dancer, had travelled to Tamil Nadu for a programme on Friday and left her son with him. The baby started crying while Ashkar was trying to feed him. This enraged Ashkar, and he banged the toddler's head against a wall. Autopsy report showed the baby suffered internal bleeding in his head. It also revealed fractured ribs and arms.

Police said probe has also revealed that the couple tried to tamper with evidence at their rented home in Karikkuzhy at Thiruvananthapuram. Police have found that the toddler's bloodstained clothes were burned in the backyard.

Police have found that Ashkar and Akhila started living together about five months ago after Akhila's husband, Akhil, died by suicide before the child's birth. "We are also looking into Akhil's death. He was a history sheeter. Ashkar, a driver, had met Akhila during dance programmes. He used to drive vehicles for dancers," said police.

Ashkar, on the other hand, married Amina in 2021. Amina's family alleged he tortured her. He then abandoned her and moved in with Akhila.

Akhila's mother, S Reena, said: "Two months back, I had approached the police. The baby's hands were then plastered. Akhila and Ashkar told me that he fell from the cycle."

deaths have been reported so far. Twenty-seven others, who were travelling from Dhule to Surat, were injured and hospitalised. The injured were taken to three hospitals: 15 to the government hospital in Bardoli, 7 to the Sardar Smarak hospital in Bardoli, and 5 to the New Civil Hospital in Surat."

Stating that all the dead were on board the Dhule-Surat bus, he added that it ran on compressed natural gas or CNG.

"We are in touch with the Maharashtra state transport department and are trying to identify the deceased. Our priority is to first ensure that all the injured passengers get immediate medical help, and the deceased are identified. We will register an offence in the incident. Four passengers are critical, while the remaining others are undergoing treatment for minor to major injuries."

Meanwhile, district fire officer P B Gadhiya while six people died at the spot, another collapsed in a hospital. "When we arrived at the spot, we saw that the bus was on fire. We extinguished the fire and cut the body of the bus to rescue the injured, who were then rushed to hospitals in ambulances. While six people died on the spot, and one (mostly the bus driver) was declared dead in the government hospital. Locals helped us in taking the injured to hospitals."

What CBSE ignored

immediately after the CBSE declared the Class 12 results on May 13. On Tuesday, a public interest petition was filed in the Delhi High Court seeking an inquiry into the alleged irregularities, technical deficiencies, and grievance-handling failures associated with the OSM system.

In the evening, the government removed the CBSE chairman, Rahul Singh, and the Board secretary, Himanshu Gupta, from their posts and ordered an inquiry into the OSM fiasco.

The OSM pilot exercise was conducted in Delhi over three days in mid-January. Participants in the exercise included representatives of five among the capital's most reputed schools — a group that includes private schools, schools run by the Delhi government, and Kendriya Vidyalayas and Navodaya Vidyalayas, which are administered by the central government.

Principals, evaluators, examiners, and subject experts appointed by the CBSE took part in the exercise. The participants were trained on the OSM system, and were then asked to evaluate mock answer scripts using the new platform.

The participants in the pilot exercise flagged a wide variety of problems with the marking schemes, calculations, and the technical working of the system, official sources familiar with the dry run told *The Indian Express*.

Specifically, the sources said the problems that were identified on the first day of the exercise could not be rectified even by the end of the third day, when the exercise concluded.

Key witnesses turn hostile

electronic evidence including mobile phones and laptops. Narain was arrested on November 10, 2022, and got bail from the Calcutta High Court on February 20, 2023.

The SIT in Port Blair filed a 900-page chargesheet. The trial commenced on July 1, 2024 in the court of the District Judge, Port Blair, with Narain appearing in court via tele-conferencing.

Till date, Narain remains suspended from service and is due to retire this October.

A scrutiny of the list of 115 witnesses cited by the prosecution show that three years after the trial began, four witnesses have turned hostile. They include the victim's husband; the driver at the Chief Secretary's residence, who is listed as a "protected witness," and who had, in his statement, said he had driven "several" women, including the victim, to the residence.

A third witness who turned hostile is Sawab Hussain, the CCTV technician who had testified to the police that the Chief Secretary's staff had asked him to handover the DVD containing footage from his residence. The DVD was never traced.

The fourth witness declared "hostile" is Shohood Akhtar, who had given a Section 161 CrPC statement and is listed as a Computer Assistant working with the A&N Government. Significantly, the driver and the CCTV technician had given statements to the police under Section 164. The victim's deposition

Bengal

the government plans to enroll us back." The tribunals hearing the cases are all located in one government in Joka, outside of Kolkata.

With the new BJP government vowing action against "illegals", and some party leaders linking the SIR exercise to this, Halima says they also live in fear of their names being excluded from welfare programmes like Annapurna Yojna (which has replaced Lakshmi Bhandar).

So, when they heard that the government may also freeze the bank accounts of anyone without a voter ID, they got their money out. Her husband works as a helper at a shop, and they have managed to save a little, she says. Their two minor children study at a government school. "We are the poorest of the poor. Even Rs10,000-Rs20,000... is an entire life's savings for us," Halima says.

Ashok Kirtania, the BJP MLA from Bongaon Uttar and Minister for Food and Supplies, says: "It is clear that those names which are under adjudication or tribunals will be able to avail gov-

copies of their answer scripts alleged that answers had been left unchecked or partially checked, or had been inconsistently evaluated. It was also alleged that the scans were blurry and difficult to read, and that sheets were mismatched — allegedly leading to examinees being marked on answers that they had not written.

Before the chairman and secretary of CBSE were moved out Tuesday, *The Indian Express* had sought their reactions on the negative feedback submitted by the participants of the dry run, but had received no response.

The Indian Express also reached out to Controller of Examinations Sanyam Bhardwaj with a detailed set of queries but received no response. Minutes of a meeting of the CBSE's Governing Body in June 2025 show that the "members (of the Governing Body) suggested that the on-screen marking may be implemented only after completion of pilot projects in some subjects across the various Regional Offices of the Board".

This was not done. Instead, the CBSE chose to do the three-day dry run in January with just five schools in Delhi.

In a document titled "Know About On Screen Marking" that it published after the allegations started, the Board said it had updated the system "as per suitability of the traditional evaluation system", and followed it up with a dry run in five schools "to check the feasibility of the system".

According to the Board, teachers from Kendriya and Navodaya Vidyalayas, as well as state government and private schools participated in the exercise, and submitted reports on the suitability of the platform and recommendations for im-

ment, he denied the entire sequence of events during the trial. "I did not tell the police that I served drink and snacks to Sahib... I did not tell police that she was such girl whom I saw with Rishi sir and to whom I served cold drinks... I did not state to police that some girls used to come in veil and some used to come having vermilion."

In a written submission given to court, Public Prosecutor Karmakar has said that disciplinary action should be taken against the driver since he was a Government employee and had caused a reversal in an important criminal case.

Another blow to the prosecution case has been the victim's husband turning hostile. On March 12, 2026, he denied that the victim was ever his wife. "I have no idea regarding any complaint lodged by anyone... It is not a fact that the victim is my wife... I was called by the police and I put my signatures on 2-3 papers. I put my signature without perusing the documents."

The husband did not reply to messages and calls made by *The Indian Express*.

Jitendra Narain was not available for comment. S Ajit Prasad, one of the lawyers defending him in the Port Blair trial until three months ago, said that successive key witnesses turning hostile had "significantly weakened" the case of the prosecution. Prasad said that due to some "misunderstandings" with the client, he had returned the brief.

Narain's senior lawyer, Deep Kabir, said, "Since the matter is sub judice, I will make no comments on developments in the case."

South 24 Parganas. Neither the couple nor Raju's father Deepak, 65, figure in the electoral roll of Bishnupur after the SIR.

Gudiya's name was also removed in the first draft, after which she says she submitted all that she was told was required: a filled Form 6, her Aadhaar card, PAN card, bank account details and residential proof. Now the case of her family is in the tribunals, says the mother of two.

A month after the tribunals were set up, Gudiya walked to the Joka building, located 15 minutes from Bishnupur constituency. But she was turned away and asked to wait for a notice from the tribunals. "I have received no updates."

Gudiya is confident there is no question of family's citizenship coming into question or them being sent to a detention centre should the tribunals uphold their deletion from the roll. "I am an Indian, born in Bihar and legally residing in Bengal," says the 35-year-old. She has heard about detention camps coming up in districts. But, Gudiya says, "Those are meant for those who are undocumented, who have come across the border. Not for Indian citizens like me facing technical errors."

provement. The "three days intensive activity provided the Board with a blueprint of what modifications were needed in the system," the CBSE said.

The Board also claimed that several changes were incorporated in the system after the dry run was completed. It said that "there was no 'Save' option available, which was added at later stages", and "the process for deletion of marks was a little lengthy, which was altered".

It also said that "the issue of a static IP emerged which was resolved for later evaluation purpose" and that "the marks awarded position was hiding written text of students, which was changed".

The CBSE also said a "different colour code for HE (Head Examiner), AHE (Additional Head Examiner) and Evaluators as in traditional evaluation was brought about", and that the "marking scheme linkage with answer book was done" were among the changes made.

In a second report to the Board, participants in the same dry run flagged at least 36 technical, operational and evaluation related concerns. Some of the observations flagged in this report included risks of "blind or superficial checking" and warned that the system "does not provide opportunities for evaluators to interact, deliberate or arrive at a consensus while allotting marks, which is essential for fair and standardized assessment".

It also stated the absence of "a mechanism enabling additional head examiners (AHEs) to return answer scripts to evaluators when multiple errors are detected, allowing re-evaluation and corrections before final submission".

PNG

connection can be placed by a customer directly on this portal, which would then need to be addressed by the utility serving that area within a given time-frame.

Sources indicated that the centralised portal would help the government monitor and keep a tab on CGD entities' response and action on customer applications on an almost real-time basis. The move is part of the government's effort to facilitate migration of LPG consumers — households as well as commercial users — to PNG wherever feasible.

LPG has been the worst-impacted segment of the energy supply disruption due to the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz. India depended on imports to meet about 60% of its LPG demand, and 90% of the imports came from West Asia via the maritime choke-point. While India's natural gas supplies have also been hit due to the West Asia supply disruption, the situation is significantly better than in the case of LPG. India's reliance on imports for natural gas is around 50%, and 55-60% of LNG imports come through the Strait of Hormuz.

Mamata back on the streets

Vowing to defeat the BJP, the TMC supremo said all the "anti-BJP parties" would soon formulate a country-wide opposition programme. "Very soon, all anti-BJP parties will meet in Delhi," she said, referring to the INDIA bloc's June 8 meeting. "I share good relations with all political parties except the BJP. However, I have also stood by those BJP members who asked for help.... Jiyeenge to BJP ko hataake jayenge (If I remain alive, I will ensure the defeat of the BJP)," she said.

Earlier in the day, she left her Kalighat residence around 2 pm and reached Red Road, where she garlanded the statue of BR Ambedkar. She was accompanied by party leaders Madan Mitra, Kunal Ghosh, Kalyan Banerjee, Dola Sen, and Ashima Patra. From there, she headed straight to the TMC dharna march at Y-Channel, where police were on high alert.

Hitting out at the BJP government, as well as the police, for denying permission to protest at the adjacent Rani Rashmoni Avenue, she said, "They didn't allow us at Rani Rashmoni because they are scared."

According to senior TMC leaders, the police sent an email at 12.30 am on Tuesday informing the party that permission would be granted only for the Y-Channel venue, which required a fresh application.

"Traitors use that road (Rani

CBSE Chairman

has been appointed the new CBSE Chairman. A 2001-batch IAS officer of the AGMUT cadre, he was serving as Additional Secretary, Department of Home, Ministry of Home Affairs.

Varun Bhardwaj has been named the new CBSE Secretary. A 2008-batch Indian Information Service officer, he was Director, Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education.

Outgoing CBSE Chairman Rahul Singh has been transferred as Additional Secretary, Department of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare, in the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare.

Himanshu Gupta, the CBSE Secretary, has been prematurely repatriated to his parent cadre, the Ministry of Home Affairs, on "administrative grounds" with the condition of "extended cooling off".

"He will be eligible for another Central deputation after 12.12.2030," the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) order stated.

Official records showed that Gupta was heading the committee which recommended that the work order of a service provider for digital evaluation be awarded to Coempt Edudeck Pvt Ltd, a Hyderabad-based company.

The CBSE had engaged Coempt Edudeck Pvt Ltd for the

OSM system. As reported by *The Indian Express* earlier, Coempt's performance had been called into question before. In 2019, the firm, then known as Globarena Technologies Private Limited, had figured in a similar evaluation row in the state board exam in Telangana.

This year was the first time that the fully digital evaluation system was used by CBSE for the Class 12 results. The controversy emerged after students who sought access to the scanned copies of their answer books flagged blurred answer sheets, missing pages, and, in some cases, that answer book of other students was showing up as theirs.

Meanwhile, the CBSE opened its online portal for verification of issues observed in scanned copies of answer books and re-evaluation of answers.

"The portal for applying for verification of issues observed in supplied scanned copy of answer book and re-evaluation of answers has been made live on June 2, 2026. Students can avail the facility of verification of issue(s) observed in supplied scanned copy of answer book, if any, and re-evaluation of answer(s) if not satisfied with the evaluation," the Board said. The portal will remain open from June 2 to June 6 (midnight), it said.

Nandalal

The Supreme Court later ordered him to approach the special tribunals for hearing the SIR deletion case.

Just before the first phase of polling for the West Bengal Assembly elections on April 23 this year, the tribunal had ordered his name to be included in the voters' list. However, on the day of the voting, booth officials turned him and his wife away. After escalating the issue to the district magistrate and Election Commission officials, the couple was successfully escorted to the booth to cast their votes.

That was the last time he exercised his franchise.

"I do not feel bad that I won't be able to vote this time, but I just have to take it in stride that the two parties fighting led to the deletion of our names," he had said after his name was deleted.

Suprabuddha was the son of Jamuna Sen, the youngest daughter of Nandalal Bose, one of the pioneers of Indian art. Nandalal Bose served for many years as the principal of Kala Bhavana. He is celebrated for his role in illustrating the original manuscript of the Indian Constitution and for his iconic linocut of Mahatma Gandhi during the Dandi March.

Moreover, Kshitimohan Sen, the grandfather-in-law of Nobel laureate economist Amartya Sen, was Suprabuddha's maternal uncle by marriage. Their ancestral home in Santiniketan stood next to Amartya Sen's house. After completing higher education in Kolkata, Suprabuddha worked at DVC for 33 years.

"I took an oath after garlanding Mahatma Gandhi's statue that as long as these atrocities continue, I will fight back. Karage ya marange (do or die)."

At one point, she lashed out at the police for allegedly not allowing TMC supporters to enter the Y-Channel area. "Let those who are coming enter. Otherwise, Lalbaraz (the headquarters of Kolkata Police) will be gheraoed. Nabanna (the state secretary) will be gheraoed. Every police station will be gheraoed," she warned.

However, immediately after, she added, "I am not blaming the police. They are not at fault. I have also been in the administration. They listen to the 'chair'. They do what the 'chair' commands."

The protest was marked by intermittent chaos, with TMC workers shouting slogans amid the former chief minister's speech.

Later, Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari asserted that a handful of TMC leaders turned up at party supremo Mamata Banerjee's dharna in Kolkata over alleged post-poll attacks on its leaders. Adhikari was speaking to reporters after offering prayers at the famed Tarakeswar temple in Hooghly district. "Only three MPs and six MLAs turned up at Mamata Banerjee's protest dharna," he said. "The TMC's condition is now pathetic. It resembles that of Falta," he said.

Mayor-in-council of KMC, ex-deputy Speaker resign amid churn in TMC

Press Trust of India
Kolkata, June 2

FORMER DEPUTY Speaker in the previous West Bengal Assembly, Asish Banerjee, on Tuesday resigned from the post of chairman of TMC's Birbhum district core committee.

Meanwhile, TMC leader Tarak Singh on Tuesday also said he resigned as the mayor-in-council of Kolkata Municipal Corporation, claiming he was unable to perform his work properly in the sewerage and drainage department.

Banerjee said he has informed TMC state president Subrata Bakshi about his decision. "I will continue to remain as the party's general member," the former Rampurhat MLA said. Banerjee said he was in consonance with former Lavpur constituency MLA Abhijit Sinha, who resigned as a member of the Birbhum district core committee, accusing it of not functioning in accordance with its political tasks during the assembly election. Both Banerjee and Sinha faced defeat in the assembly polls.

Singh is a TMC councillor of ward number 118 in southwest Kolkata. "I am not able to complete my mission of freeing Kolkata of waterlogging in heavy rain," he told reporters. Expressing his displeasure with a section of TMC leaders, Singh said that some statements made by them during the campaign for the West Bengal assembly elections should have been avoided.

Singh had not attended a key meeting of the TMC's councillors called by Mamata Banerjee after the declaration of the results of the West Bengal assembly polls, which the BJP won.

AMID SPECULATIONS OVER INTERNAL UNREST WITHIN PARTY

'Maharashtra model', talk of 'secret meetings' add to buzz of TMC split



Atri Mitra
Kolkata, June 2

AS TRINAMOOL Congress (TMC) chairperson Mamata Banerjee hit the streets of Kolkata on Tuesday for the first time since being voted out last month, the buzz of an impending split in her party has gained ground, with the phrase "Maharashtra model" being used by leaders close to the former Chief Minister.

This came a day after the former ruling party in the state expelled MLAs Ritabrata Banerjee and Sandipan Saha for alleging that their signatures had been forged on a letter endorsing the TMC's legislature party leadership. The party has appointed Sobhabdeb Chattopadhyay as the Leader of the Opposition (LoP) and Nayana Bandyopadhyay and Ashima Patra as Deputy LoPs, and Firhad Hakim as Chief Whip. Though the party submitted a fresh letter to the Speaker's office on Tuesday, with a police probe going on, it has not yet been accepted.

There was a buzz in the city's political circles about meetings between Ritabrata Banerjee and several TMC MLAs on Thursday, hours after he was expelled. MLAs and Mamata loyalists Kunal Ghosh and Madan Mitra also alleged that there had been a secret meeting.

"We have heard they had a meeting at the MLAs' hostel

Mamata alleges conspiracy hatched from Delhi — referring to the central BJP leadership — to dismantle TMC

and in a private hotel as well. They are trying to follow the Maharashtra model," said Ghosh, the Belegghata MLA.

Mitra, the Kamarhati legislator, said, "I have heard a meeting was organised in a private hotel by some rebel MLAs, but I don't have more details."

Ritabrata denied any secret meetings and said he had met only fellow legislators Rathin Ghosh and Shiuli Saha. "I am not that big a leader who enjoys the support of more than 50 MLAs. I never believed in tomorrow; I have always believed in the present. I don't know what will happen tomorrow," he told reporters.

Mamata, meanwhile, alleged a conspiracy orchestrated from Delhi — referring to the central BJP leadership — to dismantle her party. "Our MLAs are not being allowed to leave their houses and the police are asking them to quit TMC and form a 'new TMC'... Who will build this new TMC? Those who have been with the party since the beginning, or those who won on the party symbol?" she said, adding attempts to intimidate her party would be "foiled".

The speculation about a rift in the party comes at a time

when MLAs have been conspicuous by their absence in meetings held in the TMC chief's home in Kolkata's Kalighat area.

"Some of the MLAs are trying to follow the 'Maharashtra model' in which Eknath Shinde of Shiv Sena and Ajit Pawar of the Nationalist Congress Party broke away from their parties, got the rights to use the name and symbol. These MLAs are trying to carry out a similar coup," said a senior TMC leader. These splits in the regional parties in Maharashtra were engineered by the BJP. To avoid attracting the anti-defection law, any breakaway group of legislators will need to have two-thirds of 80 MLAs or 53.

While TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee, the Diamond Harbour MP, sent a fresh letter to the Speaker's office on Tuesday endorsing Chattopadhyay as LoP, Kunal Ghosh alleged that the letter had not been accepted. Ghosh claimed that he and Patra had gone to the Speaker's office to submit the letter, but were informed that no communication from them would be received. "Do they want to conceal objections to be recorded for some misdeed?" he

asked.

Since the TMC lost power, the number of MLAs who have attended meetings convened by the leadership has steadily dwindled. On May 6, two days after the results were announced, 71 MLAs were present. Almost two weeks later, on May 19, 65 MLAs were at a meeting chaired by Mamata Banerjee. On May 31, only 20 MLAs turned up at a meeting at Mamata Banerjee's residence.

The following day, Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari claimed Ritabrata Banerjee and Sandipan Saha had complained to the Assembly that their signatures on the TMC leader had been forged. He also claimed that MLAs Arup Roy and Baharul Islam had admitted to the CID, which is investigating the matter, that they had not signed the letter.

Following his expulsion, Saha said, "The party supports those who do unethical things. And it expels those who do ethical things. We did not even know that a signature in an attendance register would be passed off as a signature on a proposal."

Ritabrata, who was a CPI(M) Rajya Sabha MP before joining the TMC in 2017, has criticised the party leadership for not being ready to accept defeat. "When we went to the meeting (on May 6), it was said we have to give a standing ovation to Abhishek Banerjee for the result," he said.



Abhishek's Kolkata house. FILE

Abhishek's parents move HC against KMC notice on 'unauthorised construction'

Tanusree Bose
Kolkata, June 2

TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee's parents have approached the Calcutta High Court, seeking to quash a notice issued by the KMC over alleged unauthorised construction at their residence. The case is listed to be heard by the vacation bench of the Calcutta High Court on Wednesday.

After the new BJP government came to power in the state, the KMC in May served notices on 17 properties owned or co-owned by Abhishek Banerjee in areas within its jurisdiction.

On Monday, Abhishek's father, Amit, and mother, Lata, filed a petition in the Calcutta High Court challenging the notice. As per sources, the plea states that their residence at 29-C, Harish Chatterjee Street, was legally constructed. It adds that despite being an authorised structure, the KMC had issued a notice alleging illegal construction. The KMC notices were issued under section 400(1) of the KMC Act, 1980, which allows owners of alleged illegal constructions an opportunity to appear before civic authorities and present their case.

Copies of the notices had been pasted on the walls of such properties. Two residences of the Diamond Harbour MP — one at 188A, Harish Mukherjee Road, and the other at 121, Kalighat Road — were also under the KMC scanner.

Regarding the property at Harish Mukherjee Road, a notice was served to Leaps & Bounds Private Limited, reportedly owned by the Banerjee family. In the case of the property at Kalighat Road, the notice was served to Abhishek's mother, Lata. Later, KMC sources said, Abhishek Banerjee sought two weeks to respond to the notices.

The new BJP government in the state has become highly proactive against illegal constructions. Several illegally built structures across Tangra, Topsia, Kasba, and Belegghata have been demolished by bulldozers.

Former chief minister Mamata Banerjee had expressed displeasure over the issuance of these notices during a meeting with KMC — the civic body is controlled by the TMC — councillors. At the time, Mayor Firhad Hakim had said that he was unaware of the matter.

Messi fiasco: summons to Aroop Biswas

Press Trust of India
Kolkata, June 2

THE POLICE on Tuesday issued a summons to former West Bengal sports minister Aroop Biswas, asking him to appear before its officer over last year's "Messi fiasco" at the Salt Lake stadium.

He was summoned days after Argentine footballer Lionel Messi's India Tour organiser Satadru Dutta, who had been arrested in connection with the incident during the TMC regime, filed a police complaint against Biswas, over alleged malpractices in the distribution of tickets for the event and intimidation.

Biswas, a TMC leader, was asked to appear before the investigating officers of Bidhannagar Dakshin Police Station on June 5, an officer said. "The police... need to question Aroop Biswas in connection with a complaint which we received tied with the Messi incident," he told PTI.

After poll rout, TMC leaders forced to return 'cut money' to villagers

Express News Service
Kolkata, June 2

AFTER THE defeat of their party in the Assembly elections, TMC leaders have reportedly started returning "cut money" to people under pressure from the residents and BJP workers.

On Sunday, two TMC leaders in Pachagarh gram panchayat under the Mathabhanga-1 block reportedly returned nearly Rs 1.5 lakh to villagers, which they had collected from them in the previous government to facilitate land transactions, house construction, and securing various government schemes. It is alleged that money was collected, especially from BJP workers and supporters.

"I never thought I would get my money back," said Sadhan Barman, a BJP supporter.

As per the villagers, two local TMC leaders — Tapan De and Babai Roy — had collected over Rs 85 lakh in the past few years

from the villagers as "cut money". Suren Barman, vice-president of the BJP's Mathabhanga No. 4 Mandal, said, "All the TMC leaders must also return the money they took from ordinary people."

PTI reports: In another such incident, a TMC panchayat member returned Rs 5,000 each to 45 villagers at Patibunia village in Namkhana area of South 24 Parganas district.

Bikas Mondal, one of the affected villagers, said that after getting the first tranche of the Awaas Yojana funds of Rs 60,000, he built a part of a house when he was asked to pay Rs 5,000 to the panchayat member, or else the second tranche would not be transferred to his bank account.

He claimed that owing to similar threats, a total of 45 villagers had paid Rs 5,000 each for getting the second tranche of their Awaas Yojana benefit. "On Sunday... money was returned to all of us," he said.

SIGNATURE 'FORGERY' ROW

As CID probes, Abhishek sends fresh letter to Speaker backing party's LoP

Press Trust of India
Kolkata, June 2

TMC NATIONAL general secretary Abhishek Banerjee on Tuesday shot off a fresh letter to West Bengal Assembly Speaker Rathindra Bose, reiterating the party's decision to appoint Sobhabdeb Chattopadhyay as the Leader of Opposition (LoP).

The communication added a fresh twist to the ongoing alleged signature forgery case and an additional intrigue to speculations on the fallout of the visible cracks in the Trinamool legislative party from where two MLAs — Ritabrata Banerjee and Sandipan Saha — were expelled on Monday.

Two TMC MLAs, Kunal Ghosh and Ashima Patra, attempted to deliver the letter by hand to the Speaker, but alleged that, in the absence of Bose in his office, his office secretary refused to accept it, stating he was under verbal in-



Abhishek Banerjee. FILE

structions not to receive any letters from the TMC.

"Till yesterday, the Speaker was receiving our letters. For unknown reasons, the office has stopped accepting them from today. How can he not receive an official communication from two elected MLAs? Is this a joke? With this attitude, what kind of custodian of democracy can this Speaker become?" Ghosh said.

A top source in the party later said it had emailed the letter to the Speaker following the failure to hand over a hard copy. The letter signed by Ba-

nerjee, which also endorsed Ashima Patra and Nayana Bandyopadhyay as deputy LoPs and Firhad Hakim as chief whip, requested the Speaker to recognise the posts "on the basis of the precedent or practice of Legislative Assembly, which is in vogue for decades together".

Abhishek drew from the 2001 precedent of then Speaker Hashim Adul Halim's acceptance of Pankaj Banerjee as LoP following the TMC's recommendation, a practice, he said, that was followed after the 2006, 2011, 2016 and 2021 state elections. "In 2021, the BJP recommended the name of Shri Suwendu Adhikari, as Leader of Opposition, which was accepted by the then Hon'ble Speaker," Banerjee wrote.

Senior BJP minister Tapas Roy questioned the legality of the letter on the grounds that it carried no supporting signatures from the elected TMC MLAs.

DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL, SILIGURI
2nd Floor, PCM Tower Building, 2nd Mile, Sevoke Road, Siliguri - 734001

SUMMONS/ NOTICE
Summons under sub-section (4) of section 19 of the Act, read with sub-rule (2A) of rule 5 of the Debt Recovery Tribunal (Procedure) Rules, 1993
T.O.A. No. 42 of 2026
(Arising out of O.A. No. 993 of 2024)

UCO BANK.....Applicant
Vs.
SMT. SAROJ DEVI AGARWALA PROP. OF MS. SRI BHOMJI RICE MILL AND ORS.Defendants

1. Smt. Saroj Devi Agarwala, W/o Bajranglal Agarwala, Proprietress of M/s Bhomji Rice Mill, Vill. and P.O. Hetampur, P.S. Dubrajpur, Dist. Birbhum.

2. Bajranglal Agarwala, Vill. and P.O. Hetampur, P.S. Dubrajpur, Dist. Birbhum.

WHEREAS, the instant application bearing O.A. No. 993 of 2024 between the parties above named was registered under Debts Recovery Tribunal-II Kolkata under Section 19 of the Recovery of Debts Due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act, 1993.

AND WHEREAS the said O.A. No. 993 of 2024 has been transferred and renumbered in this Tribunal as T.O.A. No. 42 of 2026 due to change in jurisdiction from DRT-II, Kolkata to DRT, Siliguri.

You are hereby directed to appear in person or through duly empowered legal practitioner or through duly authorised officer for further proceedings/ hearing of the case on 16.06.2026 at 11.00 o'clock or immediately thereafter, before the Registrar.

TAKE NOTICE that in default of your appearance on the date aforementioned, the application will be heard and decided in your absence.

Given under my hand and the seal of the Tribunal on this 11.05.2026.

BY ORDER OF THE TRIBUNAL sd/-
Registrar
Debts Recovery Tribunal, Siliguri

DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL, SILIGURI
2nd Floor, PCM Tower Building, 2nd Mile, Sevoke Road, Siliguri - 734001

SUMMONS/ NOTICE
T.O.A. No. 74 of 2026
(Arising out of O.A. No. 64 of 2021)

UCO BANKApplicant
Vs.
MIS R. G. GOLD AND ORS.Defendants

To
1. Mis R. G. Gold, Office at: Holding No. 720/74/E/13, Near Rampurhat Bus Stand, P.O. and P.S. Rampurhat, Ward No. 7, Dist. Birbhum, West Bengal, Pin - 731224

2. Mr. Raihan Iqbal, Residence at Indrapally, Suri, P.O. and P.S. Suri, Dist. Birbhum, West Bengal, Pin - 731101

3. Mrs. Kazi Ismat Ara, Residence at Indrapally, Suri, P.O. and P.S. Suri, Dist. Birbhum, West Bengal, Pin - 731101

4. Mr. Ashraf Iqbal, Residence at Indrapally, Suri, P.O. and P.S. Suri, Dist. Birbhum, West Bengal, Pin - 731101

5. Mr. Sk. Aftab Uddin, Residence at Puratanline, Suri, P.O. and P.S. Suri, Dist. Birbhum, West Bengal, Pin - 731101

6. Mrs. Mossamat Safura Bibi, Residence at Indrapally, Suri, P.O. and P.S. Suri, Dist. Birbhum, West Bengal, Pin - 731101

7. Mr. Noor Mohammad, Residence at Salbadra, Mashra, P.O. Mashra, P.S. Suri, Dist. Birbhum, West Bengal, Pin - 731216

WHEREAS, the instant application bearing O.A. No. 64 of 2021 between the parties above named was registered under Debts Recovery Tribunal-II Kolkata under Section 19 of the Recovery of Debts Due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act, 1993.

AND WHEREAS the said O.A. No. 64 of 2021 has been transferred and renumbered in this Tribunal as T.O.A. No. 74 of 2026 due to change in jurisdiction from DRT-II, Kolkata to DRT, Siliguri.

You are hereby directed to appear in person or through duly empowered legal practitioner or through duly authorised officer for further proceedings/ hearing of the case on 19.06.2026 at 10.30 o'clock or immediately thereafter, before the Registrar.

TAKE NOTICE that in default of your appearance on the date aforementioned, the application will be heard and decided in your absence.

Given under my hand and the seal of the Tribunal on this 22.05.2026.

BY ORDER OF THE TRIBUNAL sd/-
Registrar
Debts Recovery Tribunal, Siliguri

AIMPLB demands withdrawal of BJP govt's Vande Mataram order: 'Infringes Muslim student' rights'

Lalmani Verma
Lucknow, June 2

THE ALL India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) on Tuesday said the West Bengal government's decision to make recitation of all stanzas of the national song, Vande Mataram, compulsory during morning assemblies in government schools and government-recognised madrasas across the state amounts to a direct infringement upon their religious identity and constitutional freedoms of Muslim students.

The Board demanded that the notification be withdrawn immediately or, at the very least, exempt Muslim students from its application.

AIMPLB spokesperson SQR Ilyas said compelling any student to recite a song or text that is contrary to his or her religious beliefs constitutes a clear violation of the fundamental rights guaranteed under the Constitution of India, particularly Articles 19, 25, and 28(3). He said such a directive is inconsistent with the Supreme Court's landmark judgment in Bijoe Emmanuel vs State of Kerala, wherein the court categorically held that no citizen can be compelled to participate in a national or religious ceremony in violation of sincerely held religious or conscientious beliefs.

Ilyas said the Board considers it necessary to clarify that certain stanzas of Vande Mataram contain concepts that Muslims regard as inconsistent with the Islamic doctrine of monotheism (Tawhid). "Therefore, forcing Muslim students to recite the song amounts to a direct infringement upon their religious identity and constitutional freedoms," he said, emphasising that a secular state must not impose the religious or cultural traditions of one community upon another. He said the AIMPLB will challenge the Bengal government's notification in the appropriate court.

The AIMPLB spokesperson pointed out that since Independence, the government has never made the recitation of Vande Mataram compulsory in educational institutions. For this reason, the matter has historically been treated as one of individual conscience, religious liberty and personal choice.

Referring to Article 28(3) of the Constitution, Ilyas said no student attending an educational institution maintained

by the state or receiving state aid can be compelled to participate in religious instruction, worship, or religious observances without his or her consent. Consequently, the West Bengal government's decision is not only contrary to the spirit of the Constitution but also inconsistent with India's secular and democratic traditions, he said.

The Board appealed to Muslim students, parents, and teachers in West Bengal to remain aware of their constitutional rights. It also urged them to seek appropriate legal remedies if they are subjected to any form of coercion to recite Vande Mataram, relying upon the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution and the Supreme Court.

The Board also cautioned the West Bengal government to respect the religious rights, cultural identity and constitutional freedoms of all citizens. The West Bengal government last month made it mandatory for madrasa students to sing Vande Mataram during morning prayers. The order came a week after the government made singing of six stanzas of the national song mandatory in all schools under the Department of Education.

'Only source of income': Fear of eviction trigger unease in Kolkata's famed College Street book market

Antoreep Das & Subhosree Dask
Kolkata, June 2

A CLOUD of deep uncertainty has gripped College Street, the heart of Kolkata's book trade, as widespread rumours of an impending eviction drive targeting roadside book stalls spread through the area. Coming on the heels of a broader urban cleanup initiative by the new BJP government, the sudden panic has left hundreds of pavement booksellers fearing loss of their livelihoods.

Even as Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) authorities deny issuing any official eviction orders, the anxiety on the ground remained palpable. Tension escalated following reports of verbal warnings to vendors directing them to clear the footpaths on Bankim Chatterjee Street. Though no formal written notices ordering eviction have been issued, many vendors have already begun downsizing their displays out of fear.

For the pavement booksellers who form the backbone of Boi Para (book-mart), the threat of eviction comes at an already precarious time. A sharp decline in footfall has left many struggling to get by, making the current climate of fear more



At College Street in Kolkata. FILE

worrisome. "I am just a small roadside bookseller. Watching stall owners being evicted is upsetting. This stall is our main and only source of income," said Samir Halder, who has sold books in the area for forty years.

Indrani Dey, whose family bookstore has been around in College Street for nearly thirty years, highlighted that sales have dropped since vendors were told to downsize their displays. "An entire family relies on this," she said.

Beyond the fear of eviction, booksellers also point to a deeper structural crisis that has been eroding their business for years. The traditional market is shrinking, driven by a cultural shift from Bengali-medium

state schools to private English-medium institutions.

Meanwhile, owners of government-approved permanent shops remain largely unconcerned, with some viewing the potential cleanup as a necessary measure to reclaim pedestrian footpaths.

For the students and patrons who frequent the area, however, the pavement stalls are inseparable from the identity of the place. "Many who sit on the footpath of stalls nearby use the space to display more books. If they are removed, College Street will lose what makes it special," said Udit Biswas, a zoology student.

(The writers are interns with The Indian Express)

SC appoints high-powered panel to review Aravalli definition report

Jay Mazoomdaar
New Delhi, June 2

THE SUPREME Court on Tuesday constituted a High-Powered Committee (HPC) under Kanchan Devi, Director General, Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE), to obtain a "fair, impartial and independent" opinion and "resolve critical ambiguities" in the report on the definition of the Aravalli hills submitted last October by a panel headed by the Environment Secretary.

The HPC has been asked to submit its comprehensive report by August 31.

ICFRE is an autonomous council under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, and is registered as a society with the MoEF Minister as its President.

Kanchan Devi, a 1991-batch Indian Forest Service officer, reports to the ICFRE Board of Governors headed by the Environment Secretary. The High Powered Committee will review the October 2025 report of the earlier Aravalli panel, which was chaired by the MoEF Secretary.

Other than Kanchan Devi who will be the ex-officio chair-

person, the HPC announced on Tuesday has four members — Dr Subhash Ashutosh, former Director General of the Forest Survey of India; Dr Rajoraj Kumar Sharma, former Director of the Geological Survey of India; Brij Mohan Singh Rathore, former Joint Secretary in the Environment Ministry; and Prof Ashok K Bhatnagar, former head of the Department of Botany at Delhi University.

The SC also named two special invitees — Prof Jagdish Krishnaswamy of the Indian Institute for Human Settlements, Bengaluru, and Prof Laxmikant Sharma of the Central University of Haryana — who will be "associated from time to time by the chairperson" of the HPC.

The Environment Ministry will nominate an officer of the rank of director as the HPC's member secretary.

In the past, high powered committees have often been chaired by independent experts like Dr Madhav Gadgil (Western Ghats), Dr Ravi Chopra (Char Dham Project) and Prof MGK Menon (hazardous waste).

"It is customary that a high powered committee is headed

by a person senior in stature and expertise to those whose findings are being evaluated," said eminent conservation zoologist and tiger expert K Ullas Karanth.

Conservationist Bittu Sahgal, who served in multiple government panels, flagged as "bad optics" the choice for the HPC chairperson. "Justice must not only be done, but must also be seen to be done," he said.

But two newly-appointed HPC members *The Indian Express* spoke said they expected no conflict with the ministry. "We are supposed to take an independent look at the definition issue and not necessarily review the ministry's report," said one of them. "The mandate is to evaluate the definition scientifically and good science leaves no room for opinions," said the other.

A series of investigations by *The Indian Express* during November-December 2025 reported that a SC-appointed committee headed by the Environment Secretary ignored the Forest Survey of India's (FSI) warning that a 100-metre height threshold would exclude nearly 90 per cent of Ara-

valli hills, overlooked objections raised by the Central Empowered Committee (CEC), and disregarded the SC's own rejection of the 100-metre benchmark in 2010.

Subsequently, the SC's amicus curiae in the Aravalli definition case also informed the court in writing that the October 2025 report had "completely suppressed" the views of the FSI while recommending a 100-metre definition for the hills.

On December 29, the SC put the implementation of the Environment Ministry's October 2025 report on hold and underscored the need for a HPC of domain experts to undertake a comprehensive review.

The apex court further observed that "a fair, impartial, independent expert opinion must be obtained and considered, after associating all requisite stakeholders... to resolve critical ambiguities and to provide definitive guidance" on three key issues:

• Whether restricting the definition of the Aravalli ranges to areas within 500 metres between two or more hills creates a structural paradox by significantly narrowing the geographical scope of protected territory

and facilitating the continuation of unregulated mining and other disruptive activities;

• Whether the Aravalli Hills with an elevation of 100 metres and above, constitute a contiguous ecological formation even when the intervening distance exceeds the prescribed 500-metre threshold, and whether regulated mining would be permissible in these gaps;

• Whether the assertion that only 1,048 of Rajasthan's 12,081 hills meet the 100-metre elevation threshold — thereby stripping the remaining lower ranges of environmental protection — is factually and scientifically accurate; and

• Whether there exists a significant regulatory lacuna requiring an exhaustive scientific and geological investigation.

Subsequently, the apex court asked the parties to suggest names of experts for the HPC. At the last hearing on May 25, the government counsel submitted that four names common to the lists proposed by the amicus curiae and the CEC could be included in the committee with the DG, ICFRE as chairperson.

Mehbooba to Omar, LoP: Time has come to make a united outreach to PM

Bashaarat Masood
Srinagar, June 2



The PDP chief's call comes against the backdrop of progress in talks between the Centre and representatives from Leh and Kargil

FORMER JAMMU and Kashmir chief minister Mehbooba Mufti, who heads the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), has written to Chief Minister Omar Abdullah and the Leader of Opposition Sunil Sharma, saying that "time has come to make a united outreach" to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah to "prevail upon them to initiate a sustained dialogue with the people of Jammu & Kashmir".

The call comes against the backdrop of significant progress in talks between the Centre and representatives from Leh and Kargil, who are jointly leading the agitation for statehood and the Sixth Schedule for Ladakh. "Recent breakthroughs achieved by the Leh Apex Body & Kargil Democratic Alliance with the Centre offer an important lesson — only dialogue can deliver meaningful outcomes,"

Mufti wrote to Abdullah. "Jammu & Kashmir finds itself yet again at a crossroads in its history where the pervasive feeling of despair and disillusionment has gripped the state. It necessitates a broad consensus above and across party and partisan lines to pull J&K out of the current debilitating stalemate. If we want to restore the dignity and security of our people, a constructive dialogue with the Gov-

ernment of India is a much needed imperative".

She wrote to the CM, "We have to keep our disagreements and contrarian views on the backburner to unite for the common good and collective welfare. This cannot become a matter of appropriating political credit or point scoring. Rather it must become a moment of unification in the largest interest of the people we all claim to represent."

She wrote: "I therefore urge you as head of state to initiate the much-needed process of bringing all parties together through an official meeting. This will set the ball rolling for us to formally reach out to the central government. Given the fact that disagreements and squabbling between regional parties have been detrimental to the collective interests of J&K, a reasonable consensus, especially post 2019, is the only solution. If Ladakh could do it, so can we."

The Voice of Hind Rajab to release on June 19

Alaka Sahani
Mumbai, June 2

AWAITING approval of the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) for several months, Tunisian filmmaker Kaouthar Ben Hania's film *The Voice of Hind Rajab* is all set to release in Indian theatres on June 19 after being given an 'A' certificate.

Commenting on the film's India release, Ben Hania wrote on social media: "Hind was a little girl whose voice should never have been silenced. Today, that voice will travel across South Asia and be heard by millions of people." The film will also release in Sri Lanka on June 19 and in July it is expected to have a theatrical run in Pakistan,

Nepal and Maldives. *The Voice of Hind Rajab*, which was nominated for Best International Feature Film at the 98th Academy Awards as a Tunisian entry, is about a six-year-old Palestinian girl who was killed by Israeli forces in 2024 during the Gaza war. The film was earlier scheduled to be released in India on March 6.

Corporator booked for sheltering Nida named AIMIM ex-MP: Police in chargesheet on TCS case

Jaleel says he never denied meeting Nida's family, ready to face any inquiry

Zeeshan Shaikh
Mumbai, June 2

THE FIRST chargesheet in the case of alleged sexual harassment and religious conversion involving Nashik TCS office makes a reference to former AIMIM MP Imtiaz Jaleel in the context of the search for accused Nida Khan, while she was "absconding".

As per the chargesheet, AIMIM corporator Matin Patel, booked for allegedly sheltering Nida, repeatedly referred to Jaleel when he was questioned about her whereabouts.

On May 22, the Nashik police filed the 3,500-page chargesheet in the first of nine FIRs registered in connection with the case. The first FIR, registered at Deolali Camp Police Station, was filed under charges of rape, hurting religious sentiments, as well as under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. It named TCS employees Danish Shaikh, Tausif Attar and Nida Khan, apart from Matin Patel.

According to the chargesheet, the probe showed that Patel provided refuge to Nida despite knowing that her anticipatory bail plea had been rejected by a Nashik court. "While the search for accused Nida Ejaz Khan was in progress, it was revealed through confidential information and technical analysis that Matin Majid Patel had provided shelter to

the accused to help her evade arrest," the chargesheet states.

The document says that when Patel was summoned to the Crime Branch office in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar and questioned about Nida's whereabouts, he repeatedly responded: "Imtiaz Jaleel *Sahib ko pochna padega* (We will have to ask Imtiaz Jaleel Sahib)."

The chargesheet adds that after sustained questioning, Patel finally led police to where Nida and her family had allegedly been sheltered, and that in the raid in the Naregaon-Kausar CIDCO area of Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar, Nida, her parents, brother and aunt were found. Nida was taken into custody and handed over to the Nashik Police Special Investigation Team. Subsequently, the civic authorities demolished the house where Nida was allegedly found, along with two other properties linked to Matin Patel. One of the premises was later found to be owned by Hanif Khan, who said he had given it to Patel to use. Hanif too was later booked in the case and questioned by the Nashik police. So far, police have not issued any notice to Jaleel or sought to question him in the investigation. However, his mention in the chargesheet comes at a time when Shiv Sena minister Sanjay Shirsat has been alleging Jaleel's role.



Security personnel at the site after madarasas were sealed in Khoda colony of Ghaziabad on Tuesday. PTI

Manesar violence: 3 get bail, court asks how families survived without wages

Abhimanyu Hazarika
Gurgaon, June 2

STATING THAT demanding a salary hike to meet rising daily expenses is "not an offence itself", a Gurgaon court has granted bail to three factory workers arrested following the April 9 labour unrest in Manesar. The court also expressed grave concern for the workers' families, observing that it was a matter of "serious and sensible thought" as to how their children survived without wages while the men languished in jail.

Additional Sessions Judge Dr Gagan Geet Kaur passed three separate bail orders on May 30 for Shyambir (50), Vivek Kumar alias Bunty (24), and Raj Kumar (32).

The Judge observed in each of the orders: "It is a matter of

serious and sensible thought that how the family, children of the migrant labour/workers, who are confined in jail... for participating in protest of workers for raising demand in their wages/salary, would have survived without salary/wages".

The court further noted, "This is an irony of our system. Raising demand to increase their wages/salary by workers/employees due to rising prices of daily needs is not an offence itself".

The three were arrested in connection with the violence that erupted on April 9, during a protest by workers demanding higher wages at Richa Global Exports Pvt. Ltd at the Industrial Model Township (IMT) area. The prosecution alleged that a mob of 200-250 protesting workers pelted stones at the company's

managerial staff and police, set vehicles on fire, and caused injuries.

The charges levelled against the accused included rioting, obstruction, causing damage to public and company property, and attempt to murder, with the police alleging the workers attacked officials with the "intention to kill". While the prosecution opposed bail citing the severe nature of the charges, the court closely examined the specific roles attributed to the three men and the lack of substantial evidence.

The prosecution alleged both Vivek Kumar and Raj Kumar were present at the spot, pelted stones with the intention to kill police officials, set a government motorcycle on fire, and were "captured in video damaging a government vehicle".

CHANGES IN IMMIGRATION RULES

Foreigners on visa up to 180 days have to register before period expiry

Express News Service
New Delhi, June 2

THE UNION Home Ministry has notified changes in the Immigration and Foreigners Rules, 2025, making it mandatory for foreigners coming to India on a visa for 180 days or less to register themselves any time before the expiry of the said period in case they want to extend their visit.

The new provision, notified on Monday, will replace the previous rule that required the registration to be done within 14 days after the expiry of 180 days of arrival in India.

The foreigners on a visa for more than 180 days with a stipulation that each stay shall not exceed 180 days and who wish to stay in India beyond that period on any single occasion or in the aggregate in a calendar year shall have to register anytime before the expiry of 180 days. The new rule has made it clear that such registration will now be granted "only

The new provision will replace the previous rule that required the registration to be done within 14 days

in emergent circumstances".

It also provides slight relief to children born to either or both foreigner parents. The previous rules stipulated that upon the birth of the child in such cases, the parents had to electronically intimate the registration officer within 30 days for availing visa services, including the grant of new visa and exit permission, on the designated online portal or the mobile application.

According to the notification, this sub-rule shall not apply in cases wherein either of the parents is an Indian citizen and such parent wishes to retain the Indian citizenship of the child.

It, however, says if the child acquires citizenship of a foreign country while in India at a later stage, either of the parents shall intimate the position to the registration officer within 30 days of acquiring the citizenship of the foreign country by the child.

The notification also revises provisions relating to reporting requirements and administrative procedures for every hospital, nursing home or any other medical institution providing medical, lodging or sleeping facility in their premises.

Last month, the Centre had notified draft changes to the Citizenship Rules, 2009 that would require certain applicants to declare possession or surrender passports issued by Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh. Before that, the MHA had notified the Citizenship (Amendment) Rules, 2026, introducing electronic Overseas Citizen of India (e-OCI) cards, fully online applications and stricter norms on dual passports for minors.

THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER Divn. South Road-1, PWD (GNCTD), Sukhdev Vihar, Mathura Road, New Delhi-110025.	
INFORMATION AND INSTRUCTIONS FOR BIDDERS FOR e-TENDERING FORMING PART OF BID DOCUMENT	
The Executive Engineer, Division South Road-1, (M-441), PWD, Sukhdev Vihar, New Delhi-110025 (E-Mail ID: eepwddelhisr1@gmail.com) on behalf of the President of India invites on online Percentage Rate tender from CPWD enlisted contractors of appropriate class & category and firms/contractors of repute satisfying the set eligibility criteria in two bid systems for the following work:-	
CE NIT No.:-	14/CE/South/PWD/2026-27
EE NIT No.:-	08/EE/PWD/RMD/SR-1/2026-27.
Name of work:-	Improvement of drainage system at M.B. Road under Division South Road-1 & South East Road-2, PWD, New Delhi. (SH: Construction of Precast RCC Box drain at M.B. Road from Lado Sarai to RUB Pul Prahladpur).
Estimated Cost	Rs. 293,99,18,110/-
Earnest Money	Rs. 3,03,99,181/-
Performance Guarantee	5% of the Estimated Cost put to tender (ECPT) or Contract Amount whichever is higher + APG
Additional Performance Guarantee (APG)	Amount equivalent to the difference between 80% amount and quoted amount. [E.G. (0.8A - quoted Amount) where A = ECPT].
Security Deposit	2.5 % of tendered value of the work + Additional Security Deposit @ 2.50% of the cost of Precast Drain.
Time Allowed	18 (Eighteen) Months
Pre-Bid Conference	Date: 08/06/2026 at 4:00 PM Pre-Bid conference shall be held in the conference room of the O/o Chief Engineer, South (M), Zone, 7th Floor, MSO Building, New Delhi-110002. Intending bidders may send their queries on e-mail at least 3 days before the scheduled pre-bid meeting.
Date of Submission of tender	22-06-2026 upto 3:00 P.M.
Further details can be seen on the website govt. procurement.delhi.gov.in	



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Spiritual Bond

WHEN A delegation of Nepal's Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) visited the BJP office in the Capital on Tuesday, it didn't seem like a foreign group was visiting the premises under 'Know BJP' programme. To receive the team led by RSP chairman Rabi Lamichhane, senior party leaders, including Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, Union Minister and state BJP chief Harsh Malhotra, MPs Sanjay Jaiswal, Manoj Tiwari, Bansuri Swaraj, Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, Praveen Khandelwal and former Delhi BJP chief Vi-render Sachdeva among others, were waiting outside the office. Asked about the unusual fanfare for the visiting delegation, a BJP leader said: "Being Ram Bhakts we have to welcome those who came from Sita Mata's native place."

Renewed Push

DAYS AFTER Union Home Minister Amit Shah attended a tribal rally organised by RSS-linked Janjati Suraksha Manch and Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, the VHP on Tuesday said tribals who have converted to other religions should be deprived of all benefits that accrue to Scheduled Tribes. VHP president Alok Kumar demanded that the government should amend the Presidential Order in this context. Notably, this has been a longstanding demand of the Janjati Suraksha Manch, which has been spearheading a movement in this regard in tribal belts of the country. Shah's presence in the May 24 event has given the demand a renewed push.

Summer Goals

IN VIEW of the severe heat-wave conditions, Delhi Police Commissioner Satish Golchha has directed all the district DCPs to treat complaints about water and power disruptions with urgency. Golchha has directed PCR units and local police to ensure prompt response to distress calls. Officials say the move aims to curb needless panic, prevent avoidable escalation and involvement of local political parties in these issues.

UP: Fazil Nagar renamed Pawagarh

Express News Service
Lucknow, June 2

UTTAR PRADESH Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday announced that Fazil Nagar in Kushinagar district will be renamed Pawagarh in honor of Jain Tirthankar Lord Mahavir.

The Kushinagar district administration had earlier sent a proposal for the renaming to the Chief Minister's Office. The proposed name, Pawagarh, is derived from Pawapuri in Bihar, a revered Jain pilgrimage site closely associated with Lord Mahavir.

Addressing a government event in Fazil Nagar, Adityanath said, "We have approved the proposal to rename Fazil Nagar. It will no longer be known as Fazil Nagar; instead, it will gain a new identity as Pawagarh. The town will be named after Lord Mahavir. Why should we continue to call it Fazil? People from across the country and around the world will visit here, carrying forward the cultural legacy of Pawagarh. We should be grateful to our ancestors."

Rahul says CBSE transfers a cover-up, demands Minister Pradhan's sacking

Express News Service
New Delhi, June 2

ASTHE government transferred CBSE Chairman Rahul Singh and Secretary Himanshu Gupta on Tuesday amid the ongoing On-Screen Marking row, Lok Sabha Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi reiterated his demand for the sacking of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan and said that the transfers were not "accountability" but a "cover-up".

Gandhi, who has been vocal against Pradhan over the NEET-UG paper leak and the CBSE row, said in a post on X: "Officials removed. Minister spared. This isn't accountability—it's a cover-up. Our demand remains the same today: Dismiss the Education Minister and conduct an independent judicial inquiry—these aren't some one-month-old internal file of the Modi government to be brushed aside just like that." He said that if Prime Minister Narendra Modi cared about the 18.5 million CBSE students, Pradhan would have been removed long ago.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said the transfers were a "mere eye-wash". "Modi ji should immediately sack Dharmendra Pradhan. Nothing less than that would provide a sense of justice to 18.5 lakh CBSE students. 'Big Breaking' is not this whitewashing, the Real News is Pradhan's continuation despite all this," he said in a post on X.

Student flags 'anomalies' before House panel

Express News Service
New Delhi, June 2

SARTHAK SIDHANT, a 17-year-old student from Jharkhand, who has been impacted by the CBSE's online marking system, made a presentation before a parliamentary committee on Tuesday on alleged irregularities in the tendering process for vendor selection for online marking in the Class 12 exams.

Sarthak, who appeared in CBSE's Class 12 examinations this year, presented a seven-page

copy of his findings before the Parliamentary panel for Education, Women, Children, Youth and Sports, chaired by Congress MP Digvijaya Singh.

The meeting was also attended by CBSE Chairman Rahul Singh, Secretary, School Education, Sanjay Kumar and other officials of the Ministry of Education and the board.

The CBSE is learnt to have handed over a report to the committee members and assured the MPs that the glitches that appeared on its portal have since

been rectified and students now have time till June 6 to apply for re-evaluation of their answer sheets.

Speaking to reporters after the panel meeting, Singh confirmed that Sarthak made a presentation before the committee and it would deliberate on the issues raised and the responses submitted by the CBSE.

"Sarthak Siddhant has made his presentation. It is for the committee to decide (on the replies given by the CBSE)," Singh said. "I am only saying

that the whole committee is concerned and will also take into account whatever can be done in the interest of the students and their stance," he told reporters.

Asked about the timeline for the committee's report, Singh said the process would involve preparing a draft report and placing it before the members for deliberation. "The process is that we have to prepare a draft; the basis of that draft will be put up before the committee and then the committee has to prepare the report," he said.

The CBSE chairman who failed the board test

Abhinava Harigovind
New Delhi, June 2

RAHUL SINGH, who was shunted out Tuesday as CBSE Chairman in the wake of glitches in testing of the Class 12 board exam papers, had an eventful two-year tenure on the job.

From introduction of the three-language policy, and recently its abrupt extension to Class 9, to learning in the mother tongue at the primary level, to the On-Screen Marking (OSM) system rolled out without a pilot in the Class 12 board exams this year, Singh oversaw several measures – often controversial – driven by the NEP, 2020.

A 1996-batch IAS officer of the Bihar cadre, Singh took

charge of the CBSE in 2024, moving to the post from the Department of Personnel and Training.

In August last year, Singh was given an extension till November 2027 by the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet.

Singh took over as head of the CBSE nearly a year after the release of the National Curriculum Framework for School Education, which is based on the NEP. This framework now guides the curriculum and structure of school education from pre-primary to Class 12, and Singh oversaw its implementation in the CBSE, through the extensive changes required for the same.

Last year, as part of this, the



Last year, Rahul Singh was given an extension until 2027

CBSE issued a circular asking schools to begin teaching students in the mother tongue or a "familiar regional language" from pre-primary to Class 5. While it did not make this compulsory, it suggested that the language of instruction should ideally be mother tongue, and if that's not practical, it can be

the state language.

The Board had earlier issued advisory circulars encouraging use of the mother tongue, but this was the first time that it set a timeline, asking schools to commence mother tongue-based instruction from July 2025 onwards.

Both the NEP and National Curriculum Framework recommend that mother tongue be used in primary school, up to the age of eight, since children learn concepts "most rapidly and deeply in their home language". The three-language policy was announced formally through the release of the CBSE's curriculum in April this year.

FULL REPORT ON
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

TOP BRASS KEEN ON TIE-UP, SECTIONS OF SECOND, THIRD-RUNG LEADERS HAVE THEIR RESERVATIONS

UP polls looming, why SP and Congress are bracing for hurdles in sealing seat deal

Asad Rehman
New Delhi, June 2

WITH THE Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections due in February next year, the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Congress, key constituents of the Opposition INDIA bloc, have intensified their efforts to identify seats that could be shared between them, even as both the allies concede that their seat-sharing exercise is going to be a rocky affair.

While the AICC leadership has asked its secretaries handling UP party matters to identify seats it would bargain for in negotiations with its senior state ally, SP president Akhilesh Yadav has also started getting feedback from his party leaders from all 75 districts on the seat-sharing issue.

SP sources said Akhilesh has asked his senior leaders, MPs and MLAs to recommend one seat in their district which the party may offer to the Congress at the initial stage of their talks.

Sources said Akhilesh is finalising a list of 60-80 seats for the Congress, while also identifying the SP's probable candidates for all 403 seats in the state keeping in view the contingency of their talks coming a cropper.

Congress insiders said while the party would begin negotiations by demanding about 120 seats, it could eventually settle for around 80 seats as part of an alignment with the SP.



The run-up to the 2024 Lok Sabha polls saw Akhilesh Yadav questioning the Congress's credibility. He eventually made peace with the party after a conversation with Rahul Gandhi. FILE

Top UP Congress leaders told *The Indian Express* that they will try to "convince" the party high command to "not ally with the SP". "This is what the BJP wants – the Congress and SP coming together – so they can attack us on appeasement, SP's past track record on law and order and other issues," said a senior leader, who said he would soon meet Rahul Gandhi to convince him "not to join hands with SP".

"We don't mind a post-poll alliance...but going together in the polls will be suicidal for us," the Congress leader claimed.

Some leaders of both the parties agree that their alliance would get a boost if they are able to finalise a seat sharing agreement soon as it would give them as well as their candidates a head

start in preparing the ground in their seats. However, this process is likely to be marked with hard bargaining and friction over various issues, which may complicate and delay it.

While the top brass of the SP and the Congress are keen to forge an alliance for the 2027 elections, sections of their second or third-rung leaders do not seem to be in its favour, fearing fewer seats for their probable candidates.

Several SP leaders claim that the Congress does not have a "strong base" in the state. Countering it, some Congress leaders maintain that it was because of the grand old party that the SP-Congress alliance could win 43 parliamentary seats of the state's 80 in the 2024 Lok

Sabha polls. They argue that it was because of Rahul Gandhi's "Save the Constitution" pitch in 2024 which resonated with various groups, especially Dalits, which helped their alliance get the better of the BJP. The SP leaders, for their part, cite the 2022 Assembly polls when both the parties contested separately. The Congress had then managed to win just two of 403 seats with just 2.33% vote share.

The relations between the SP and the Congress have always been marked with ups and downs. In October 2023, the two parties had bitter exchanges, when UP Congress chief Ajay Rai called Akhilesh a "chirkut" (small fry). It had started after the Congress declined to give any seats to the SP in the Madhya Pradesh elections, forcing the latter to declare its candidates in 30 seats.

The run-up to the 2024 Lok Sabha polls saw Akhilesh questioning Congress's credibility. He finally made peace with the party after having a conversation with Rahul Gandhi. The SP later sealed a pact with the Congress, allotting it 17 seats. A key factor behind their tie-up was their understanding that if they went their own ways, the Muslim vote may split in the state.

While their seat-sharing talks have yet to begin, some Congress leaders have already struck discordant notes, upsetting Akhilesh. Last month, two senior

Dalit party leaders – AICC's Scheduled Caste department chairman Rajendra Pal Gautam and UP MP Tanuj Punia – showed up at BSP chief Mayawati's house in Lucknow unannounced. They, however, could not meet her.

Their posturing, Congress insiders said, was aimed at sending out a signal that the party may have other alliance options beyond the SP too. While the Congress issued the two leaders show-cause notices, Akhilesh was not amused. He is learnt to have told his leaders that he will have a discussion with Rahul Gandhi on the need to curb such developments.

In June 2025, Congress MP Imran Masood stirred the pot by claiming that the "80-17 formula" would not work in the 2027 polls. Masood was referring to their seat-sharing arrangement for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. The SP hit back, with party MP and Akhilesh's cousin Dharmendra Yadav saying in an interview to *The Indian Express* that Masood did not have powers to take a call on seat sharing.

The Congress has been claiming since 2024 that while the SP gave it a respectable number of seats, the "quality" of some seats was not as per its preferences, referring to the ones where an anti-BJP party may have "an advantage because of conducive social arithmetic".

Dipke to land in Delhi on June 6; Wangchuk lends support to CJP

Jatin Anand
New Delhi, June 2

AHEAD OF his return to India on June 6, 'Cockroach Janata Party' (CJP) founder Abhijeet Dipke said on Tuesday that he was "counting on the people" and their support after landing in New Delhi over the weekend.

Speaking to *The Indian Express* over the phone from Boston, Dipke, who in a video message a day ago said he would stage a "peaceful sit-in protest at Jantar Mantar" on June 6 and demand the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over issues such as NEET paper leak row, said he was ready for what would come his way. "Honestly, I was nervous before the decision (to come back to India)...ab jo hoga dekh lenge (will see whatever happens). I am counting on the people – I am in this for the long haul," he said. Highlighting that the "youth pressure group" he created less than a month ago had both a sizeable support base as well as stature, Dipke said, "We are preparing data (around the support base); but yes, people (who support the group) are being mobilised from across the country and there is now a structure in place," he said.

Asked if he was prepared for the eventuality of police detention, Dipke said, "I will land at

the airport and then we will go to the (Parliament Street) police station to seek permission. They may arrest me for a year or six months – but I am ready for whatever happens next."

Dipke in a post on Tuesday announced that climate activist and education reformer Sonam Wangchuk will also join the protest at Jantar Mantar on June 6.

Wangchuk, in a video post, said he decided to express support to the CJP after being "convinced that they are immensely patriotic, that they are making a sacrifice to improve the country". "I had asked the cockroaches, in my previous post, to prove, to convince (me) that this Cockroach Janata Party is an expression of the Indian youth and not a conspiracy by foreign powers," Wangchuk said.

"After that...Dipke ji established contact with me and shared data (regarding its support base) with me. When I spoke to him, I understood that they do not have any ulterior motive, that they are immensely patriotic, that they are making a qurbani, a sacrifice to improve the country," he also said.

He said if Pradhan does not resign by June 5, he will join Dipke and Gen Z supporters of what is intended to be a "youth pressure group" from across the country at the sit-in protest at Jantar Mantar.



K Annamalai (right) meets Union Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi on Tuesday. PTI

BJP top brass asks Annamalai to put exit plan on hold

Liz Mathew
New Delhi, June 2

WITH K Annamalai, the BJP's popular face in Tamil Nadu and its former state chief, keen to quit the party and chart his own course, the party central leadership is learnt to have asked for time to take a call on his proposed resignation.

Annamalai, who met BJP national president Nitin Nabin and party national general secretary (organisation) B L Santhosh on Tuesday morning, had a separate meeting with Union Home Minister Amit Shah in the afternoon, party sources said. Santhosh is considered to be his mentor.

In his meetings with top BJP leaders, Annamalai expressed his desire to leave the party on a cordial note while keeping the option of working closely with it in future if required, sources said.

According to party leaders familiar with the developments, Annamalai was called back for discussions while being on his way to the Delhi airport to leave for Chennai.

It is learnt that the BJP leadership wants Annamalai to reconsider his decision to resign from the party's primary membership. If the leadership manages to convince him to remain in the party, it would be an unusual move, considering its record on enforcing strict organisational discipline.

The Indian Express on Monday reported that Annamalai had made up his mind to quit the BJP and that his Delhi visit was intended as a "gesture of gratitude" to the party leadership.

Annamalai had asked the BJP top brass to reinstate him as the Tamil Nadu unit chief with long-term autonomy and authority for at least seven years, or allow him to pursue a different

If the leadership manages to convince him to remain in the party, it would be an unusual move, considering the BJP's record on enforcing strict organisational discipline

political path.

Sources said Annamalai is mulling over launching a new party in the state, where the Dravidian majors, the DMK and the AIADMK, faced a debacle in the recent Assembly polls, in which superstar-turned-politician Vijay led his fledgling TVK to a stunning win on its debut.

The TVK has formed the government with the support extended by smaller parties including the Congress, which broke its alliance with the former incumbent DMK after the elections.

Annamalai has argued that there is still no significant scope for a national party in Tamil Nadu's political landscape, hence a new party addressing the concerns of various sections has the potential to grow as an alternative force in the state, sources said.

However, Annamalai would not want to end his association with the BJP on a bitter note, preferring to have a "healthy political rivalry with it marked with respect", a source said.

In his tenure as the state BJP chief during 2021-25, Annamalai had increased the visibility of the BJP and often succeeded in setting the narrative. The BJP central leaders acknowledged his "energy, hard work and ability to be a strong voice" in the state, where the party has been struggling to make its mark.

Ahead of Shivakumar's swearing-in as Karnataka CM today, Siddaramaiah appointed CWC member

Express News Service
Bengaluru, New Delhi, June 2

A DAY before D K Shivakumar's swearing-in as Karnataka Chief Minister on June 3, his predecessor Siddaramaiah was named a member of the Congress Working Committee (CWC) – the highest decision-making body of the party – on Tuesday.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge appointed Siddaramaiah as a member of the CWC with immediate effect, said a statement from the Congress.

The top party leadership on Tuesday held deliberations with Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar on giving the final shape to the new Cabinet in the state.

Karnataka is set to witness



An installation with portrait of Karnataka CM-designate D K Shivakumar, in Bengaluru on Tuesday. PTI

the oath-taking ceremony of the 34th Chief Minister, D K Shivakumar, 64, and the first batch of around 10 ministers, including Siddaramaiah's son Siddara-

maiah, 45, an MLC, on Wednesday. The oath-taking ceremony will be held with minimal fanfare at the state Lok Bhavan with a crowd of around 2,000 in at-

tendance. Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi will be present at the ceremony along with party chief Mallikarjun Kharge.

The probable list of 10 ministers who can take oath with Shivakumar includes several seniors from the Siddaramaiah Cabinet and two young faces – Priyank Kharge, the son of Mallikarjun Kharge, and Krishna Byregowda.

The Congress is also expected to choose between veteran K H Muniyappa and his daughter Roopakala Shashidhar, who is a fresh ministerial aspirant, and Yathindra Siddaramaiah as its youth choices, sources in the state government said. The choice of senior ministers is expected to include MB Patil, Eshwar Khandre – both

from the dominant Lingayat community – G Parameshwara, a Dalit, Ramalinga Reddy, a Vokkaliga, Satish Jarkiholi from an ST community and K J George, a Christian. The Muslim choice for the Cabinet is likely to be the incumbent Speaker and former minister U T Khader.

The Cabinet formation in the first round will be an exercise in balancing the Congress's caste equations in Karnataka, sources said. The OBC face to replace Siddaramaiah is likely to be his son Yathindra; the Dalit face is likely to be Priyank Kharge.

The new Karnataka Cabinet formation exercise could also see the appointment of deputy chief ministers and a new president for the state Congress to replace incumbent Shivakumar.

Monsoon onset over Kerala on June 4: IMD
Express News Service
Bengaluru, June 2

THE INDIA Meteorological Department (IMD) on Tuesday said that the southwest monsoon onset over Kerala is most likely to be on June 4.

“Conditions are favourable for further advance of southwest monsoon into Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Lakshadweep, some more parts of the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal on June 4,” the India Meteorological Department said.

The normal date for the monsoon onset over Kerala is June 1, with a standard deviation of seven days.

This year, the monsoon onset over the Andaman Sea and neighbouring areas was realised on May 16. Since then the monsoon has made timely progress.

According to the Meteorological office’s forecast on Tuesday, Kerala’s Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Pathanamthitta, Alappuzha, Kottayam, Ernakulam, Idukki and Thrissur districts are on “orange” alert (be prepared to take action) ahead of the heavy to very heavy rainfall (60-200 millimetres in 24 hours) forecast on Wednesday and Thursday.

TALKS FOCUS WILL BE ON ENERGY, TRADE TIES

Venezuela’s Rodriguez arrives today on India visit, to meet PM

Shubhajit Roy
New Delhi, June 2

ACTING PRESIDENT of Venezuela Delcy Rodriguez is coming to India for a five-day visit from June 3 to 7. The visit assumes significance as it comes five months after Venezuela President Nicolas Maduro was captured by the US forces on January 3, and Rodriguez, formerly Venezuela’s Vice-President, was appointed the country’s Acting President.

Announcing the visit, the official spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs, Randhir Jaiswal, said Tuesday: “Acting President Rodriguez, who was earlier scheduled to visit India to participate in the International Big Cats Alliance summit on June 1 which has been deferred, will pay a working visit to India.”

It is important to note that the MEA identified Rodriguez as the “Acting President”, and not President of Venezuela — given the unusual transition of power after Maduro’s capture. Many countries, including Russia, have criticised the US action and called it “illegal”.

Rodriguez will be accompanied by several ministers, including the minister of foreign affairs, economy and finance, science and technology, communication and information and transportation.

She has visited India several times in the past in her capacity as the Foreign Minister of Venezuela in 2015, as also in her capacity as the country’s Vice-President in 2019, 2023, 2024 and 2025. “This will be her sixth visit to India. So, she has had a long association with us,” the MEA spokesperson said. During the visit, Acting President Rodriguez will hold bilateral discussions with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

“The discussions will involve the full spectrum of India-Venezuela relations and involve and explore revenues for further co-operation in the areas of energy, trade, investment, pharmaceuticals, healthcare, transportation and renewable energy,” the MEA spokesperson said.

India is an important partner of Venezuela in the areas of energy and investment. Indian public sector



This will be Venezuela Acting President Delcy Rodriguez’s sixth visit to India. FILE

undertakings have made significant investment in Venezuela in the energy sector, and they are keen to explore more opportunities to further enhance their presence, the MEA spokesperson said.

India — specifically private sector refining giant Reliance Industries (RIL) — was a regular buyer of Venezuelan crude prior to the imposition of US sanctions on Caracas in 2019.

Following the sanctions, oil imports from Venezuela stopped within a few months.

E. EXPLAINED

Regime change & bilateral ties

On January 30, Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke with Venezuela’s Acting President Delcy Rodriguez and the two leaders agreed to take the bilateral relations to new heights in the years ahead. The phone call from Rodriguez to Modi was the first since the capture of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and his wife by the United States in the first week of January. Energy was one of the topics covered in the leaders’ conversation.

As per India’s official trade data, Caracas was New Delhi’s fifth-largest supplier of oil in 2019, providing close to 16 million tonnes of crude to Indian refiners. The bilateral trade between India and Venezuela was \$6.40 billion in 2019-20, of which Indian imports — pri-

marily crude oil — were worth \$6.06 billion.

In October 2023, the US eased sanctions on Venezuela’s petroleum sector, authorising oil exports without limitation for six months. This led to RIL and a few other Indian refiners restarting oil imports from the country. But imports stopped as the sanction waiver was not extended by Washington after its understanding with Caracas on the conduct of free and fair presidential elections in Venezuela broke down.

A few months later, RIL was able to restart Venezuelan oil imports after obtaining a sanctions waiver from the US. But in the summer of 2025, the company halted oil imports from Venezuela after the Trump administration threatened higher tariffs on countries buying Venezuelan crude.

Since February, after Maduro was captured and Rodriguez became the Acting President, India has resumed oil imports from Venezuela, especially after the war in West Asia has disrupted the energy supply passing through the Strait of Hormuz.



Outside the hospital in Gurdaspur on Tuesday. EXPRESS

Grenade attack at Gurdaspur hospital; one held with links to ‘foreign-based handler’

Kamaldeep Singh Brar
Amritsar, June 2

A GRENADE attack at a private hospital in Gurdaspur on Tuesday shattered windowpanes and glass door of its emergency ward, police said, adding they have arrested the main perpetrator with links to a foreign-based handler. Director General of Police Gaurav Yadav said the breakthrough came within six hours of the incident.

“Gurdaspur police and the Counter Intelligence Wing jointly solved the grenade attack case at Kalanaur, Gurdaspur within six hours of the incident. Acting swiftly on technical and human intelligence inputs, the main perpetrator responsible for the attack has been apprehended. Preliminary probe reveals the involvement of a foreign-based handler,” said Yadav.

He added that further probe is underway, and both forward and backward linkages are being thoroughly examined to identify and dismantle the entire network behind the attack.

Gurdaspur SSP Aditya identified the accused as Dhaminder alias ‘Tindi’ (24), from Tarn Taran. He was earlier booked in cases registered under the

NDPS Act. Asked about the motive, the SSP said investigators are questioning the accused and technical checks are being made to establish why the attack was carried out and whether it was intended to spread fear or to extort money. Kalanaur police station received information about a loud sound at Multani Hospital, located near the bus stand area, around 2.40 pm.

“Police team found shattered glass at the spot. Forensic teams collected the evidence,” the SSP said. In CCTV footage, a suspicious man could be seen standing near the hospital. The doctor who operates the hospital told police that he had been receiving extortion calls for the past year and that he had been provided security. The SSP said those calls had been acted upon by police and action was taken.

Gurdaspur MP Sukhjinder Singh Randhawa termed the “explosion” as extremely worrying and demanded a probe. “According to the information received so far, this was a grenade attack; if this information is correct, then it is not just a matter of negligence in security, but also raises a big question on the security of sensitive places related to people’s lives.”



CJI Surya Kant administers the oath of office to senior advocate V S Mohana as a judge of the apex court, in Delhi on Tuesday. ANI

With 5 new judges, SC’s strength increases to 37

Express News Service
New Delhi, June 2

FOUR FORMER High Court Chief Justices and a senior advocate were sworn in as Supreme Court judges Tuesday.

Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant administered the oath of office to former Punjab and Haryana High Court Chief Justice Sheel Nagu, former Chief Justice of Bombay High Court Shree Chandrashekhar, former Chief Justice of Madhya Pradesh High Court Sanjeev Sachdeva, former Chief Justice of High Court of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh Arun Palli, and Senior Advocate V S Mohana at a ceremony.

With this, the Supreme Court now has a working strength of 37 judges against a sanctioned strength of 38.

The elevation of senior advocate Mohana to the bench takes the number of women judges of the court to two. Before this, the court had one woman judge, Justice B V Nagarathna, who is due to be CJI in September 2027.

The Supreme Court colle-

gium, headed by CJI Kant, had decided to recommend five names for elevation in meetings held on May 22 and 27.

More vacancies will arise in the top court this year, with at least four judges expected to retire. In March this year, CJI Kant had recommended to the government that the sanctioned strength of Supreme Court judges be increased from the present 34 to 38 so that a permanent constitution bench could be put in place to hear pending matters.

The government accepted the suggestion, and on May 5, it approved the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Bill, 2026, which sought to amend the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Act, 1956, to increase the strength of the court by four.

The last time the strength of the court was increased was in 2019, when an amendment raised it from 30 to 33, excluding the CJI. Originally, the Act had provided for a maximum of 10 judges, excluding the CJI, which was increased to 13 in 1960 and then 17 in 1977.

Cultural ties to Gen Z’s role in politics: Nepal’s RSP delegation holds talks with BJP chief

Express News Service
New Delhi, June 2

FROM GRASSROOTS engagement and participation of ordinary citizens in the democratic process to the potential of Gen Z in politics, several issues came up for discussion during a meeting between a delegation of Nepal’s ruling Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) and the BJP on Tuesday.

Held as part of the ‘Know BJP’ initiative, the RSP delegation led by Chairman Rabi Lamichhane met BJP president Nitin Nabin and leaders from the national capital, including Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta.

This was followed by the Nepalese delegation calling on Union Home Minister Amit Shah and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, who said that the discussions focused on the India-Nepal development partnership and people-to-people ties.

Welcoming the delegation, Nabin highlighted close and historic ties between India and Nepal, which he said were rooted in shared civilisational heritage, cultural bonds, and strong people-to-people relations. According to sources, he said that such interactions in help strengthen democratic dialogue and deepen party-to-party engagement between the BJP and RSP.

In a post on X, Nabin said, “There was also an extensive discussion on how the BJP’s governance model, under the leadership of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, centres on development and public



Nepal’s ruling Rastriya Swatantra Party president Rabi Lamichhane ahead of a meeting with BJP national chief Nitin Nabin at the party’s headquarters in New Delhi on Tuesday. ABHINAV SAHA

service.”

BJP foreign affairs department in-charge Vijay Chauhan said Nabin shared with Lamichhane insights related to the party’s journey, ideology, organisational structure, and its people-centric approach to political engagement. He said both leaders also discussed the “growing role and potential of Gen Z in politics”, particularly in shaping democratic participation, public discourse and future leadership.

According to the BJP, Nabin explained the party’s organisational model from the national level to the booth level and highlighted the importance of the party’s workers in maintaining “a direct and

continuous connect with people at the grassroots”.

During the interaction, the BJP said, the RSP delegation was keen to learn about the BJP’s membership process, candidate selection system, and mechanism for identifying and connecting with grassroots workers.

The BJP chief responded to their queries and “explained how the BJP’s organisational strength is built through continuous public outreach, booth-level engagement and participation of ordinary citizens in the democratic process”, the party said.

The Nepal delegation also visited the BJP Media Centre and the Central Library at the party’s DDU headquarters.

No role for third party in border dispute: India

Express News Service
New Delhi, June 2

TWO DAYS after Nepal’s Prime Minister Balendra Shah raised the boundary dispute with India in his speech at the country’s parliament and sought involvement of China and the UK to address the long-standing dispute, India on Tuesday categorically rejected any role for third parties to resolve the issue and underlined that there are “bilateral mechanisms” to deal with it.

Ministry of External Affairs’ official spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said on Tuesday, “We have seen the remarks of the Prime Minister of Nepal concerning India-Nepal boundary as well as the subsequent statement issued by Nepali foreign ministry on this matter.”

“While close to 98 per cent of the India-Nepal boundary has been demarcated, there are some unresolved segments. The shifting of the course of the Gandak river has resulted in this situation,” he said. “In addition, there are cases of cross-border occupation and encroachment of no-man’s land in demarcated segments of the boundary which are currently being mapped jointly,” he said.

“We have established bilateral mechanisms to deal with all aspects of boundary matters. It should be clear to all concerned that there is no role for any third party in a bilateral matter between India and Nepal.”

Nepal and India have had an old boundary dispute over Lipulekh, Limpiyadhura and Kalapani. India maintains that the territories are part of Uttarakhand and that the issue should be addressed through bilateral talks.

‘Will be deported soon’: 30 Indians living and working illegally in US as truck drivers arrested

Yoshita Singh
New York, June 2

ABOUT 30 individuals from India, found to be living in the US illegally and working as commercial truck drivers, have been arrested as part of a federal operation, and will soon be deported, officials said.

The US Customs and Border Protection said in a statement Monday that between May 11 and May 15, Border Patrol agents from Yuma Sector in Arizona arrested 52 individuals during ‘Operation Checkmate’ for being in the US illegally, including 36 who were found to be driving semi-trucks.

Of the 36 illegal semi-truck drivers held, 30 were from India, while the remaining six were from Mexico, El Salvador and Russia. They had commercial driver’s licences from states such as California, New York, Washington and Virginia while some did not possess any form of driver’s licence.

Most of them possessed employment authorisation documents, which were obtained during the Joe Biden administration, and were no longer valid. All individuals were processed in accordance with federal law and will be deported, the statement read.

‘Operation Checkmate’ is aimed at enhancing public safety through enforcement of immigration statutes to detect and arrest illegal persons operating commercial motor vehicles in the country. ‘Operation Checkmate reflects our commitment to safeguarding communities and roads from unlawfully present drivers who pose significant risks to the public safety,’ Dustin Caudle, Acting Chief Patrol Agent of the US Border Patrol’s Yuma Sector, said.

Federal agents are on patrol daily to “ensure that we stop these individuals, and prevent more deadly crashes from occurring on the road across the US”, the statement said. PTI

ZEENAT WAS BROUGHT TO ODISHA RESERVE FROM MAHARASHTRA TO DIVERSIFY GENE POOL AT SIMILIPAL, WHICH IS HOME TO PSEUDO-MELANISTIC TIGERS BELIEVED TO BE THE RESULT OF SEVERE INBREEDING

How runaway tigress’s cubs could save big cat population in Odisha’s Similipal

Sujit Bisoyi
Bhubaneswar, June 2

WHEN THE tigress Zeenat arrived in Odisha’s Similipal Tiger Reserve in late 2024, wildlife officials hoped it would help balance the gene pool at what is the only home in India of a rare tiger population.

Then, Zeenat vanished. Within days of being released into its new home, the three-year-old tigress slipped out of the reserve, crossed state boundaries, wandered through forests in Jharkhand and West Bengal, and triggered a frantic three-week operation that kept wildlife officials in three states on alert.

For months after its eventual recapture and return to Similipal, Zeenat remained under close watch, its every movement tracked through a radio collar as forest officials

wondered whether the ambitious translocation experiment would ultimately succeed.

This week, they got some good news. Camera traps installed deep inside the forests of Similipal have captured images of Zeenat carrying four cubs, offering what officials describe as a major milestone in Odisha’s efforts to strengthen the reserve’s tiger population.

“The cubs are believed to be around three to four weeks old and their movements are being continuously monitored,” Similipal Tiger Reserve Field Director Prakash Chand Gogineni told *The Indian Express*. For conservationists, the significance of the photographs extends far beyond the birth of four cubs.

Zeenat was brought to Similipal from the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra in November 2024 as part of

a carefully planned effort to diversify the gene pool of tigers in the reserve. Similipal, spread across northern Odisha, is home to India’s only known population of pseudo-melanistic tigers — popularly called black tigers because of the unusually thick black stripes that merge across their coats. Scientists believe the trait became common because the tiger population remained geographically isolated for generations, resulting in extensive inbreeding.

While the striking appearance of Similipal’s tigers has drawn global attention, conservationists have long worried about the genetic consequences of such isolation. Officials said Zeenat’s relocation was intended to introduce fresh genetic material into the population and reduce the prevalence of inbreeding-linked traits that



Zeenat with its cubs at Similipal Tiger Reserve. X/@MOHANMODISHA

could threaten the long-term survival of the reserve’s tigers.

“As Zeenat is from Tadoba, it does not carry the genetic trait commonly found among Similipal tigers. Its cubs are therefore expected to have a broader genetic base, which was the primary objective of the translocation programme,” Gogineni said.

Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) P K Jha said after Zeenat was released free into the wild in April 2025, it mated with a resident male but did not conceive. “The tigress moved freely inside Similipal and formed a territory in the core area. Once again, it mated with a resident male in January

2026,” said Jha. He said the birth of the tigress’s cubs marks the achievement of the primary objective of the tiger translocation project, which was increasing the genetic diversity of Similipal tigers. Zeenat’s offspring with a male tiger from Similipal Tiger Reserve will have high genetic diversity and be helpful in securing the future of Similipal’s tiger population, Jha said.

The achievement comes after a turbulent beginning. Soon after being released into a soft enclosure in Similipal’s northern division, Zeenat began an unexpected journey that took her nearly 300 kilometres across three states. Its movements became a daily source of anxiety for forest officials as it moved through forest corridors, crossed human settlements and repeatedly evaded capture teams.

After 21 days on the move, Zeenat was finally tranquillised near Gosaindih village in West Bengal’s Bankura district. It was initially taken to Kolkata’s Alipore Zoo before being brought back to Similipal in accordance with guidelines issued by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA). Officials subsequently housed it in a larger enclosure before releasing it again into the wild under intensive monitoring.

Since then, its radio collar has provided forest officials with a near-continuous stream of information about its movements and adaptation to the Similipal landscape. Now, with Zeenat successfully raising cubs in the wild, officials believe the tigress has finally made Similipal her home. The birth of the cubs has also prompted discussions on whether the radio collar, fitted

during the translocation project, should be removed.

Forest officials said any decision would be taken by a high-level committee comprising representatives of the Odisha government and the NTCA. “For now, monitoring will continue for some more weeks,” said a senior forest department official. “A decision on removing the collar will be taken once the cubs begin moving independently.”

Odisha CM Mohan Charan Majhi called the development a “proud chapter” in Odisha’s wildlife conservation efforts. “This success not only signifies an increase in the tiger population in the state but also stands as an excellent testament to our administrative foresight in protecting biodiversity and creating a safe and robust habitat for wildlife,” Majhi wrote on X.

The Big Picture

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 3, 2026



At a temple in Vijnigiripalem, a village in Visakhapatnam, women dismiss the idea of cash incentives for childbirth. NIKHILA HENRY

Andhra Pradesh says have more children.

“Why not ask women what they want?”

A 23-year-old job-seeker, an 18-year-old widow with a toddler, a 70-year-old grandmother of nine and a 36-year-old expecting her third child. As Andhra Pradesh encourages couples to have more children to counter falling fertility rates, NIKHILA HENRY travels to Visakhapatnam and finds that the policy may come up against something fundamental: women's autonomy

HER ANKLETS chime as she softly carries a tune on board the Hyderabad-Visakhapatnam Vande Bharat. When she is ready to talk, she does it just as casually. “I have PCOS (Polycystic Ovary Syndrome) and mood swings. I become happy when my uterus is happy and sad when my uterus is sad. I don't want to bear children,” says S Mounika. “Hush,” says her friend, Ramya, from across the aisle, turning to look at the other passengers who have turned curious about the conversation.

The 23-year-olds, both Bsc Computer Science graduates from Visakhapatnam, are on their way home to Pithapuram, in Kakinada district of Andhra Pradesh, after a job interview with a cargo firm in Hyderabad. Mounika goes on, “It's been three years since I graduated. No job. The Chief Minister should think about creating employment for the youth rather than asking us to have more children.”

In response to the state's Total Fertility Rate (TFR) or the number of children per adult woman of 1.4, among the lowest in the country, the Andhra Pradesh government in March introduced a draft Population Management Policy, which aims to encourage families to have two or three children. After announcing Rs 25,000 last year for families that bear a second child, at a public meeting in Narsannapeta, Srikakulam, on May 16, Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu rolled out more incentives. “We will provide Rs 30,000 for a third child and Rs 40,000 for a fourth child. Isn't this the right decision?”

The audience of mostly men whistled and clapped. He then turned to where the women sat and said, “What do you think? Isn't this the right decision?” The video pans to show some of them smiling. The demographic and economic argument behind Naidu's appeal — that a falling birthrate will have long-term consequences for the state's productivity and strain the government's finances — may, however, come up against something far more fundamental: women's autonomy. No where is that expressed with better clarity than in Visakhapatnam — at 1.3, the district with the one of the lowest TFRs in Andhra Pradesh — and few say it as firmly as Mounika.

The daughter of a lorry driver and a homemaker, she says, “I want a government job, so I am trying to clear the Staff Selection Commission exams. I want to take care of my parents; not sacrifice everything for marriage and children. Someday, I might adopt a girl child, though. Do you think I will get a life partner who thinks like me? I really hope so. Fingers crossed, fingers crossed.” She holds up both her hands, the fingers in a desperate knot.

The cost of raising a child
In Visakhapatnam's Appanapalem village, which sits below the famous Simhachalam temple, Papiamma, 70, talks of a time when having children wasn't about choice. “Whatever God gave, I accepted. Those days, everyone had four children or more,” says the mother of four, sitting in a room on the terrace of the two-storied house her late husband built, and where she now lives with her children and grandchildren.



“I want a government job... I want to take care of my parents; not sacrifice everything for marriage and children. Someday, I might adopt a girl child, though...”

S MOUNIKA, 23
BSC GRADUATE

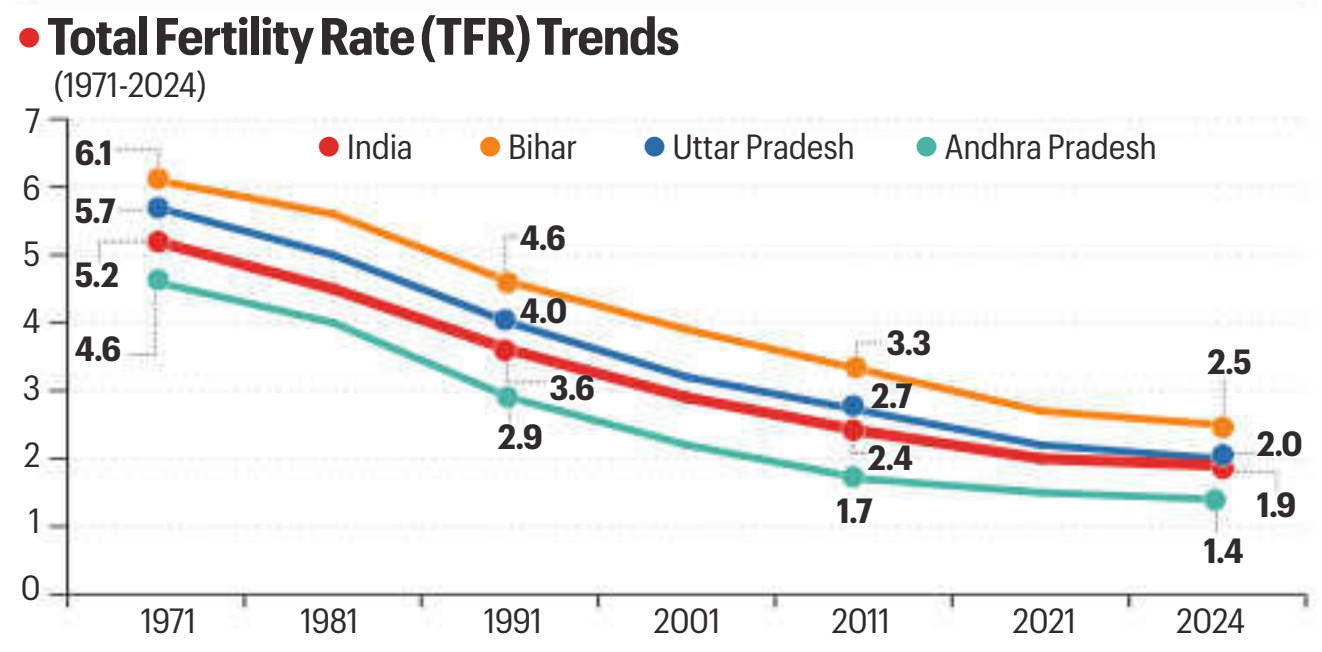
Sitting beside her on the cot, her son Appal Raju, 52, talks of the impact of a government policy from a different time. “I have three children because of my wife's insistence. But because of that, I was not able to contest the local body elections,” he says. Until 2024, the state's two-child norm banned people with more than two children from getting elected to public offices. Now, in a reversal of expectations, just when the government wants people to have more children, Raju says his eldest daughter, who got married recently, is clear she won't have more than one. “She says her husband's brother and wife too have just one child. What can you do? Children decide on their own nowadays,” he laughs.

The family's fortunes had turned in the early 2000s, when the price of their two-acre family land shot up. With nine grandchildren to bring up, Papiamma says, the family sold most of the land, except for the little patch surrounding their house. “My sons were farmers, but now, they do nothing. Our lives depend on the fortunes of my grandchildren,” she says. All of them, she says, have studied beyond graduation but none have jobs. “Instead of providing jobs, the CM says have more children. Seems like he is mocking people like us,” she says.

“Potti prapancham,” says Raju in Telugu, referring to the dogged rat race that his children will have to endure. Since 2018, Naidu has been publicly expressing concern at the state's declining fertility rates that's far below that of states such as Bihar (2.5) and Uttar Pradesh (2), and in line with that of its neighbours in the south. While the other southern states have framed the issue in terms of delimitation and the potential impact on their representation in Parliament, Naidu has justified his population policy on economic grounds.

In Adavivaram village, L Muthiyamma, 40, and her neighbours have an economic argument of their own. Bringing up children is no small feat, says the mother of three — two girls and a boy. “Had I not wanted a boy child, I would have stopped with two,” says Muthiyamma, who sells the coconut she grows, earning less than Rs 100 a day.

Her children, she says, are educated enough not to risk multiple pregnancies. “My daughters speak of having one child each, though they are yet to be married. We are dependent entirely on farming and cattle, and they know how expensive it is to bring up children,” says Muthiyamma. In neighbouring Vijnigiripalem, a group of 15 women sits on the floor of a local temple, discussing children and choice. Swearing by the presiding deity, Lord Hanuman, they say they don't want cash incentives for childbirth because bringing up children costs a lot. “At least two lakh ru-



Note: TFR values are three-year averages for 1971-2011 and annual estimates for 2021 and 2024. Source: Sample Registration System (SRS) Statistical Reports/Compendium (1971-2013 Compendium, SRS 2019 & SRS 2024)

pees a year goes into just education and healthcare,” estimates Appalarasamma, 62, who raised her four daughters, and got them married.

She has a counter incentive for the government. “Let Chandrababu Naidu assure us that the firstborns in each family will be given a government job. Then these young girls can consider the offer,” she says.

Her friend B Jayalalitha says she raised her three children with her husband's earnings from his cycle repair shop. “We took loans to educate them up to B.Tech. I can't imagine any of them sacrificing so much to bring up their own children,” she says.

Her younger neighbour M Shyalama, 32, is a mother of two. “I can't think of having more children. Ayyo, I have had enough already... My body won't allow me to raise more children. I am tired all the time.”

‘If I make it alive...’

The Andhra Pradesh government calls its policy, titled *Pillale Sampada* or ‘Children are Wealth’, a shift — from the earlier population control to population management, “a rights-based approach” that emphasises reproductive health and rights, informed choice, and individual well-being.

Officials involved in the policy and Telugu Desam Party leaders pointed to a government note that read, “It is not an initiative to increase the number of children, but an initiative that adopts population care — a rights-based, voluntary framework that enables informed choices.”

While calling the draft policy's emphasis on population management an “important shift”, Professor K S James, former director of the International Institute of Population Studies who is currently at the Centre for Health and Wellbeing at Princeton University, USA, says government population policies often do not address underlying factors for lower fertility rates. “In the West, population drop was caused by a drop in the number of marriages. That's not the case in India — people are getting married, but late. Here, men and women are struggling to get jobs to secure their future. Any public policy should be aimed at creating jobs which will help young couples to marry and have children

as per their choice,” he says. Those working on women's causes say the policy does not adequately consider its consequences for women's well-being.

“There could be women who are forced to bear a child just so the family can receive the incentive. The burden of raising the child will ultimately fall on women, and this is not in line with reproductive choice and autonomy. The government should support women through long-term childcare, stronger health systems, and services that allow them to make free and informed choices,” says Poonam Muttreja, academic and Executive Director at Population Foundation of India.

At the government-run King George Hospital, an obstetrician attending to patients in the Out Patient Department says on condition of anonymity, “Women insist on tubectomy after they have one child or two children. All this while, we also have been encouraging this because it is a healthier option for young women.”

A senior doctor, however, said there are several women who deliver more than two children at the hospital.

“These days, every second pregnancy is a C-section, which costs more than Rs 1 lakh. What will we do with a one-time grant of Rs 30,000 or 40,000?” says one of the women queuing up to meet the doctor.

Not far from the hospital, Nehru Nagar, an urban slum in Dondaparthi area of Visakhapatnam city, is bustling — children running around noisily, women playing board games, some cooking inside tiny kitchens. In the melee, stands Shanthi, 36, heavily pregnant, her hands supporting her tired back. She had two children, both girls, in quick succession — a two-year-old and a one-year-old — and is now seven months into her third pregnancy. Sinking into a chair, Shanthi says, “I am happy the government has announced Rs 30,000 for a third child. I will get the money if I make it out of the labour room,” she says.

“Tch tch... what are you saying,” says one of the elderly women in the group. “She hardly eats anything. She is always sick”.

“There could be women who are forced to bear a child just so the family can get the incentive. The burden will fall on women,” says Poonam Muttreja of Population Foundation of India

Shanthi says she decided to have her third child out of “family compulsions”. Her husband's siblings have one child each. “They got the sterilisation procedures done. Now, the family thinks we should have more children,” she says.

Would she consider giving birth to a fourth child? She sits up with a start. “No. I am weak. I cannot do it again”.

The other women take over, talking of how child rearing responsibilities are never shared. “We have husbands who are either dead or as good as dead because they just lie around drinking,” says Gauri, 40, adding she had filed a domestic violence case against her husband to make him “mend his ways”.

G Revanthi talks of how her husband died of alcoholism and her daughter Sharon's husband too met with the same end, leaving the 18-year-old with a 2-year-old.

As she tries to feed her baby who is perched on her hip, Sharon says, “I cannot think of marrying or giving birth to children again”. Would she want to study further? “Yes, I would like that,” she smiles.

There is less of a consensus among a group of women workers of the TDP who have assembled at the party office in Visakhapatnam's Ramnagar.

Jujuvarupu Hema, 54, says she got a tubectomy done after the birth of her daughter. “After winning the 1994 elections, Chandrababu Naidu garu had announced, ‘One child is enough for us.’ I am such a hard-working member of the TDP that I just informed my husband and got the tubectomy done. Now that the CM is talking about the state's falling population, I have told my daughter, an MBA graduate, to bear at least three children”.

Others quickly step in to disagree. “I am speaking from my experience of having three daughters. We need free education, healthcare and other government plans to support the children we bear. In this day and age, we need at least a house of our own to bring up children,” says Soutjanya, another TDP worker.

The women cadre raise a rabble as they vie with each other to explain what it takes to raise more children. “There should be some job security,” says B Lalitha.

Away from the candour at the party office, TDP's doctor-turned politician Gottipati Lakshmi takes a more disciplined party line. “What the government is advocating is child planning. It's futuristic because women are at the centre of the policy. It's not coercive because the government is clear that the policy is only suggestive.”

‘Children... not on my mind’

At an upscale coffee shop by the sea, politics is not a great starting point for a conversation — certainly not the subject of having more, or any, children.

Nitya, 20, a BBA graduate, says, “Children... That's not on my mind. I'm thinking of studying in Canada and earning a lot before I turn 30. And then, maybe I'll come back and settle down in Vizag. I'm working to a plan.”

For most of them, children are nowhere part of that plan.

“My mother suffered a stroke after delivering my third sibling. I don't want to risk my health or body by bearing more than one child, if at all,” says Nitya, sipping on iced tea.

Sitting at an adjoining table are Rohan Shaji and Srisai Bhavya Karri, MBA graduates and friends who are “looking for jobs”. “How can anyone think of raising children without financial security?”, says Shaji. Karri has an idea. “Before framing a policy, why not ask the women what they want?”

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• LEGAL

Parentage over privacy: Why SC upheld DNA test in paternity case

Amaal Sheikh
New Delhi, June 2

THE SUPREME Court recently dismissed a challenge to orders that directed a man to undergo a DNA test in a civil suit filed by a person claiming to be his biological son and, in doing so, reiterated an understanding of when the courts can and cannot direct such tests.

The bench of Justices Sanjay Karol and N Kotiswar Singh held that “as far as the right of privacy is concerned, we are balancing, in this case CP’s privacy with [alleged son’s] desire for closure on a question that has loomed large on his life throughout”.

The claim arose from a civil suit filed by the respondent who attained majority, which sought a declaration of paternity and a share in the property of the father, who had denied the claim of his parentage since 1999.

The bench noted that three questions determine whether a DNA test can be directed: if paternity is “directly in issue”, if there is “any other evidence-on-record” capable of substituting for it, and if ordering the test is “in the best interest of the parties and/or justice”.

The court held that the alleged father, CP, had denied paternity consistently for over two decades, and there was no other evidence on record to answer the question. Weighing his right to privacy against the alleged person’s interest in establishing parentage and pursuing inheritance rights, the court thus upheld the DNA testing of CP to determine paternity.

The legal framework

In paternity disputes, Section 112 of The Indian Evidence Act (now Section 116 of the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam) is invoked, which states that any child that is born during a valid marriage or within 280 days since the dissolution of the marriage is the legitimate child of the husband “unless it can be shown that the parties to the marriage had no access to each other at any time when he could have been begotten”.

The intent of the section is to grant legitimacy to every child born in wedlock. When a presumption applies, the courts have held that dislodging it requires proof of non-access which is not merely suspicion or assertion.

BALANCE OF INTERESTS

In *Ivan Rathinam v. Milan Joseph* (2025), the top court held that courts must protect the parties’ rights to privacy and dignity by evaluating whether the social stigma from one of them being declared ‘illegitimate’ would cause them disproportionate harm, as against the child’s legitimate interest in knowing their biological father.

Previous SC cases

There is no provision expressly authorising courts to order DNA testing. The jurisprudence emerges on a case-by-case basis and is framed through precedent.

In 1993, the Supreme Court in *Goutam Kundu v. State of West Bengal* held that a DNA test “cannot be ordered as a matter of course” by the courts and that applications that seek DNA testing “in order to have roving inquiry” cannot be entertained. It also observed that “no one can be compelled to give sample of blood for analysis”.

In *Dipanwita Roy v. Ronobroto Roy* (2014), the court permitted DNA tests where it is necessary to resolve the dispute, but also noted that “if the direction to hold such a test can be avoided it should be avoided. The reason is that... the legitimacy of a child should not be put to peril.”

In *Aparna Ajinkya Firodia vs Ajinkya Arun Firodia* (2023), the bench held that parties must first present evidence, after which a DNA test may be ordered when the court finds it “impossible to draw an inference based on such evidence”. The court held that “children have the right not to have their legitimacy questioned frivolously before a Court of Law. This is an essential attribute of the right to privacy. Courts are therefore required to acknowledge that children are not to be regarded like material objects, and be subjected to forensic/DNA testing, particularly when they are not parties to the divorce proceeding.”

The bench of Justices Sanjay Karol and N Kotiswar Singh had, in *Nikhat Parveen v. Rafique* (2026), reiterated that “the common thread that has run through all these judgments is a well-placed hesitation to order or to give an imprimatur to orders directing DNA test to be conducted”.

• HEALTH

Don’t take that puff: ‘Herbal’ cigarettes are not healthy alternatives to tobacco

Ritu Sharma
Ahmedabad, June 2

IN RECENT years, several supposedly “healthy” alternatives to cigarettes have been growing in popularity. Among these products are tobacco-free “herbal” cigarettes that market themselves as “safer”, “natural” alternatives that can help you with everything from depression to anxiety to stress.

At first sight, this safety claim would appear to make sense. After all, the most harmful part of conventional cigarettes is the nicotine in its tobacco. So wouldn’t a product made with herbal ingredients be less harmful? A recent study, however, has busted the claim that tobacco-free means risk-free.

Here’s a look at what herbal cigarettes are, what the study found about their claims of safety, and how they are falling through the regulatory cracks in India.

What are herbal cigarettes?

Herbal cigarettes, unlike regular ones, do not use tobacco as fillers. They instead

use herbs and dried flowers — such as clove, basil, mint and cinnamon — that impart different flavours.

And while regular cigarettes use paper as wrappers, herbal cigarettes use *tendu* (ebony) leaves — just like *bidis*, India’s most widely consumed smoking product. Herbal cigarettes are generally longer than a *bidi* but shorter and thinner than a cigar.

What did the study find?

The study, titled “The Lure of ‘Healthier Smoke’: Comparative physical, chemical, and oxidative potential characterization of emissions from herbal and tobacco cigarettes”, was published on May 17 in the *Journal of Hazardous Materials*, a peer-reviewed international journal.

Alok Kumar Thakur, the study’s lead author who is currently pursuing post-doctoral research on air quality emissions at Colorado State University, told *The Indian Express* that several of the herbal cigarettes they tested were marketed with claims such as relieving cough, improving sleep

or easing anxiety. However, studies on their emissions and toxicological impacts have been limited, he pointed out.

This study compared emissions from two of India’s highest selling tobacco brands and four popular herbal varieties containing combinations of basil, clove, cinnamon, mint, green tea, water lily and chamomile.

It found that emissions from herbal cigarettes were comparable to or exceeded those from tobacco cigarettes on nearly every metric measured. “That finding is important because many consumers associate nicotine-free products with reduced harm,” said co-author Vishal Verma, an Associate Professor of Environmental Engineering in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

How did the study measure impact?

The researchers combusted each cigarette inside a sealed, two-chamber rig designed to replicate human inhalation. They then funnelled these emissions into instru-

ments and collected samples, whose oxidative potential they quantified as a proxy for toxicity. Oxidative potential refers to the capacity of a product to generate reactive oxygen species. These are aggressive molecules that drive inflammation, lung tissue remodelling and the vascular changes behind heart disease.

The particulate matter from herbal cigarettes recorded significantly higher oxidative potential than that from tobacco cigarettes. Leaf-wrapped herbal variants turned out to be the most hazardous. Their oxidative potential was roughly 49% higher than paper-wrapped versions.

Chemical analysis also revealed that one herbal cigarette, filled with basil, had the highest lead concentration, despite being marketed as “chemical-free with 100% natural filler for a healthy lifestyle”.

The researchers found that herbal smoke emitted sub-500-nanometer particles — less than one-hundredth the width of a human hair — at approximately 20% higher concentrations in herbal smoke

than in tobacco smoke. These fine particles are increasingly linked to cardiovascular and respiratory disease.

Aside from the health impact, the study also found that the combustion produces pollutants such as particulate matter, carbon monoxide and hydrocarbons.

Dr Harshal Ramesh Salve, Centre for Community Medicine at AIIMS Delhi, told *The Indian Express* that herbal cigarettes are as hazardous to health as conventional ones, especially for youngsters who are their major targets. “From a public health aspect, all sorts of cigarettes are harmful. While tobacco cigarettes always have nicotine content, the other forms of e-cigarettes or herbal cigarettes, which are promoted as an alternative to traditional cigarettes, might develop carbon particles which are equally harmful,” he said.

The regulatory gaps

Owing to the limited scientific evidence on long-term health impacts, herbal cigarettes often fall into regulatory grey areas.

• TECH

How Nvidia chip reshapes AI for personal computing



Soumyarendra Barik

NVIDIA, THE major semiconductor company powering the AI boom with its graphics processing units (GPUs), has announced a new “superchip” for personal computers, as the hardware giant looks to directly take aim at the likes of Apple and Intel.

Nvidia has partnered with Microsoft to launch the new chip, called the Nvidia RTX Spark, and it will power computers made by the likes of Dell, Asus, and HP. With the new chip, Nvidia — known for its dominance in AI infrastructure so far — is pushing beyond its traditional graphics cards into integrated chips that power the whole PC.

Nvidia is unrivalled in the AI space because of its powerful GPUs — the demand for which has skyrocketed — and has pushed once dominant companies such as Intel to the fringes. Today, Nvidia is the biggest chipmaker in the world, with a market cap of over \$5 trillion.

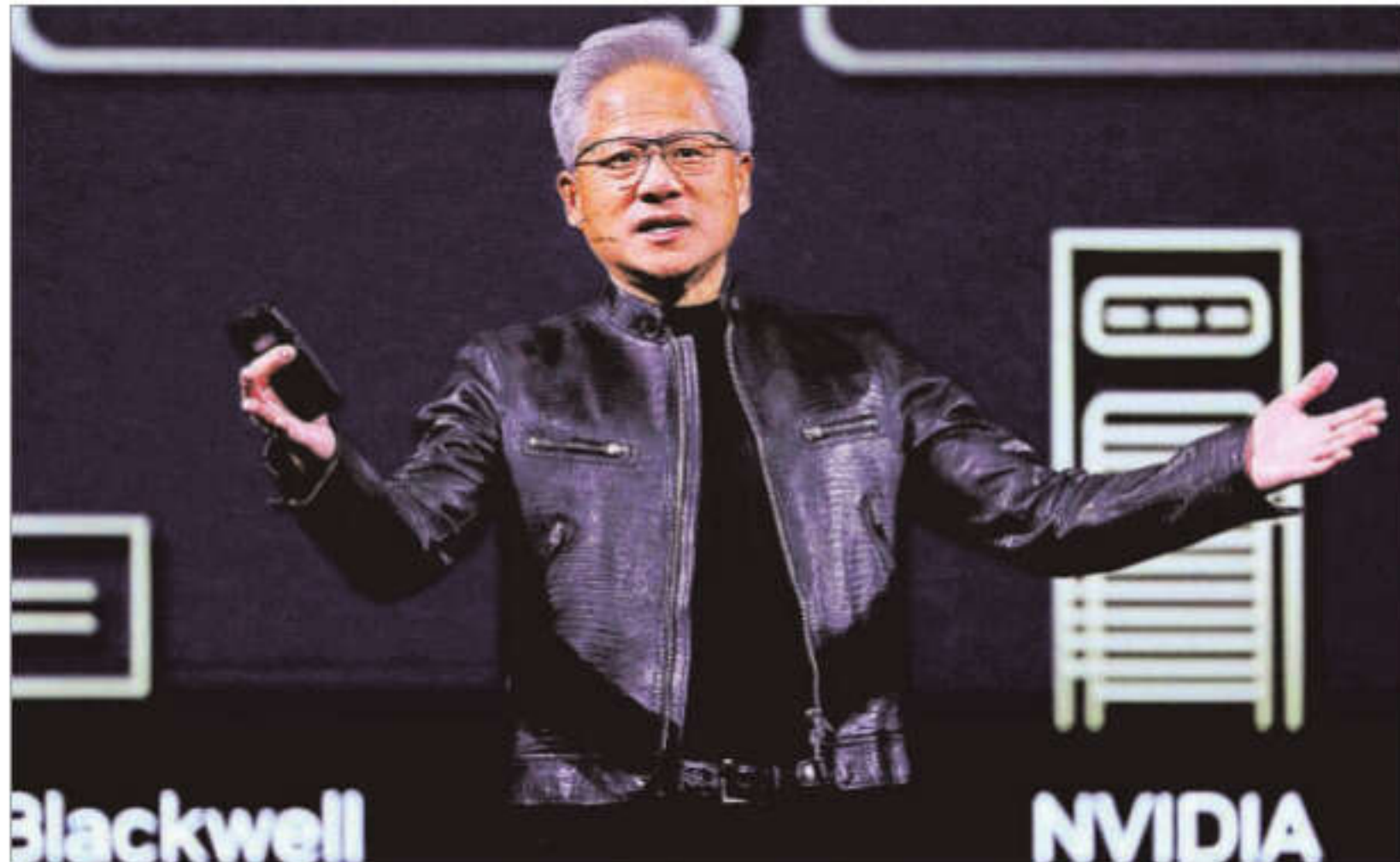
In 2020, Apple shook the world with its own line of chips with the launch of Apple Silicon, a move that also saw it break away from its long-term partnership with Intel, which had supplied chips for its computers since 2005. Intel, the legacy chipmaker for personal computers, has meanwhile struggled to keep pace with the AI boom and has lost market share to the likes of AMD and Apple.

RTX Spark

The Nvidia RTX Spark is a purpose-built superchip for Windows AI laptops and compact desktops. It fuses a 20-core Arm central processing unit (CPU) and a Blackwell RTX GPU (6,144 CUDA cores) via NVLink-C2C. It delivers 1.1 petaFLOP of AI performance and supports up to 128GB of unified memory, enabling it to run 120-billion parameter local AI models.

In simple terms, all this just means that it packs enough computing and memory power into a single chip to run advanced AI models locally on a personal computer. Here’s what these acronyms mean:

CPU is a computer’s brain-like component that performs calculations, executes instructions, and manages the flow of data



Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang in Taipei on Tuesday. AP

across the system.

GPU is a specialised electronic circuit designed to rapidly manipulate memory and perform complex mathematical calculations at incredibly high speeds. A CPU processes tasks sequentially, whereas a GPU can execute many calculations simultaneously since it is designed for parallel processing.

CUDA CORE is a specialised parallel processing unit inside Nvidia graphics cards. **NVLink-C2C** is Nvidia’s chip-to-chip interconnection technology that allows CPUs and GPUs to communicate and share data with each other.

FLOPS, or Floating-Point Operations per Second, is a commonly used metric to measure processing power and efficiency. Floating-point operations are a certain kind of mathematical calculation using real numbers with fractional parts.

UNIFIED MEMORY refers to a computing architecture where all processors — be it CPU, GPU, or specialised AI processors — share a single pool of memory.

The chip, built on Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company’s 3-nanometre architecture, is expected to power more than 30 laptops and 10 desktops. The key pitch that Nvidia is making with the new chip is that it will power Windows PCs “purpose-built for personal agents”.

“The PC is being reinvented,” said Jensen Huang, founder and CEO of Nvidia.

Behind Nvidia’s dominance

Intel, the legacy chipmaker for personal computers, has struggled to keep pace with the AI boom.

Nvidia is unrivalled in the AI space because of its powerful GPUs, the demand for which has skyrocketed.

“For forty years, you launched apps. Click. Type. With RTX Spark and Microsoft Windows, you ask — and the PC does the work. RTX Spark brings everything Nvidia has built — CUDA, RTX, our AI platform — into a single superchip. Local agents. Frontier models. Creative workflows. RTX games. All on a laptop. This is the new PC. The personal AI computer.”

Huang’s comment essentially suggests that AI agents, powered by the chip, could become the primary way that people interact with their computers.

“The strategic significance (of the chip) is that Nvidia is monetising its CUDA software moat in a new market, the roughly 250M (million) unit annual PC business, where it previously sold only discrete GPUs... Putting the full CUDA stack into a laptop means on-device AI development now runs end to end on Nvidia from notebook to data centre, and that developer lock-in is the real prize, more than unit margin,” said Patrick Moorhead, chief analyst at tech consultancy firm Moor Insights and Strategy.

The RTX Spark superchip features an Nvidia Blackwell GPU, with a Grace CPU, which Nvidia has designed in collaboration with Taiwan’s MediaTek. The launch partnership with the likes of Dell, Asus, and HP is expected to place the processor in the hands of millions of users worldwide, as these companies account for over 70% of

global PC shipments. Computers from Acer and Gigabyte will also soon launch with these new chips.

Nvidia said that laptops powered by the RTX Spark will boast “all-day battery life”, and added that Adobe was remaking its Photoshop and Premiere software from the ground up for the chips to deliver twice as fast AI and graphics performance compared to current alternatives.

The new chip wars

Intel dominated the computer chip market for several decades, but started losing ground to competitors such as AMD, Nvidia, and Qualcomm as it failed to adapt to changing customer trends towards mobile and AI. Intel made chips that powered devices running both Microsoft and Macintosh, but was handed a major blow in 2020 when Apple announced its own line of semiconductor chips and announced it would phase out its Intel-powered computers.

Apple’s current generation of Silicon, the M5 line, is widely considered to be the leading consumer laptop processor chip, equipped to run AI apps locally on a device. Apple has since cornered a nearly 15% market share in the PC market, which has come entirely at the expense of Intel.

Nvidia now poses a new threat to the fledgling chipmaker. Having already established itself as one of the most influential companies behind the AI boom through its expansive AI infrastructure across hardware and software, the semiconductor giant is now coming after Intel’s key business, Windows PCs, where it continues to hold a majority market share, especially at the budget end.

“It could pressure Intel and AMD in client CPU in the long-term. The caveat is that the Windows-on-Arm software-compatibility challenge is real and unresolved, so first-generation volume hinges on Microsoft’s ecosystem work, not the silicon,” Moorhead said.

The wide consensus on Intel chips has been that they failed to pivot from its traditional CPUs to GPUs, bet on the wrong internal AI architectures, and ignored software ecosystems. These strategic missteps, paired with manufacturing delays, allowed Nvidia to capture a near-monopoly on AI hardware.

Intel is working to launch its own AI chip that uses cheaper memory and cooling technology than rival offerings from Nvidia and AMD by the end of this year, the *Financial Times* had reported.

• ECONOMY

FDs over savings account: What’s behind changing preference

George Mathew
Mumbai, June 2

THE COMPOSITION of bank deposits in India has undergone a significant shift over the past five years, with savers increasingly moving their money from low-yield savings accounts to higher-return term deposits, according to the Reserve Bank of India’s (RBI) latest data.

The RBI said that the share of savings deposits in aggregate bank deposits declined sharply from 34.6% in March 2022 to 28.7% in March 2026, reflecting changing preferences among depositors in a rising interest rate environment. In contrast, the share of term deposits rose from 55.2% to 61.6% during the same period, indicating that customers were increasingly willing to lock in funds for fixed tenures in exchange for better returns, the RBI’s ‘Annual Basic Statistical Return on Deposits’ report says.

Low interest rates

The trend of declining savings bank rates gathered momentum during 2025-26 as banks continued to offer attractive rates on fixed deposits to mobilise resources and support credit growth. As a result, overall

deposit growth strengthened across the banking system. Banks now offer low interest rates on savings bank accounts. SBI, the largest bank, offers just 2.5% interest on savings accounts. Savings rates have fallen from around 6-7% in the last ten years.

SBI, on the other hand, offers 6.25% on one-year FDs and 6.45% on two-year deposits. HDFC Bank also offers 6.25% on one-year FDs and 2.5% on savings bank accounts. ICICI also offers 2.5% on savings accounts. Savings account rates declined as the RBI slashed the repo rate — the rate at which it lends money to commercial banks — from 6.50% to 5.25% since January 2025.

Purchasing power erodes

When the savings bank deposit rate is below retail inflation, the real return on savings is negative. In simple terms, this means the purchasing power of money in a savings account is eroding over time.

The current savings bank rates of banks are nearly 100 basis points lower than the April retail inflation level of 3.48%. One basis point is one-hundredth of a percentage point.

Demand deposits (savings and current account) of the banking sector were Rs 31.65

Medium-term fixed deposits

• The share of term deposits with an original maturity of one to three years rose from 50.4% in March 2022 to 69.8% in March 2026

• During the same period, the share of deposits with maturities of up to one year declined sharply to 8.8% from 16.7% during the same period.

• The trend suggests that customers sought to lock in favourable interest rates for longer periods.

lakh crore and term deposits Rs 225.23 lakh crore as of May 15, 2026, as per RBI data. Current accounts don’t offer any interest rate.

Savings account deposits provide customers with easy access to their money, allowing withdrawals at any time without penalties or loss of principal. This high degree of liquidity makes them the preferred choice for households to meet day-to-day expenses and maintain funds. For banks, savings deposits have long served as a stable and low-cost source of funding, since the interest rates paid on these accounts are substantially lower than those offered on fixed or term deposits. Consequently, savings deposits help banks mobilise funds at a relatively lower cost while ensuring depositors retain flexibility over their savings.

The RBI data indicates that while households continue to anchor India’s deposit base, savers are increasingly favouring fixed deposits over traditional savings accounts, reshaping the liability profile of banks and strengthening the role of term deposits in the financial system.

Households largest source

Households remained the single largest source of bank deposits despite a modest

decline in their share. Deposits from the household sector accounted for 59.3% of total deposits at the end of March 2026, the RBI report says. However, households are increasingly turning to mutual funds and equities as preferred investment avenues, attracted by the prospect of higher returns compared to traditional savings instruments like FDs. The contribution of other sectors increased. The share of deposits from the non-financial sector rose to 18.5% from 17.7% a year earlier, while deposits from financial corporations increased to 7.8% from 6.8% over the same period.

Larger FDs dominate

A look at term deposits shows that larger deposits continued to dominate. Deposits of Rs 1 crore and above accounted for 46.3% of total term deposits as of March 2026. Within this category, deposits of Rs 5 crore and above alone constituted 34.8%, underscoring the growing importance of high-value depositors in banks’ funding base. At the other end of the spectrum, deposits of up to Rs 5 lakh accounted for 17.8% of total term deposits, according to the RBI report.

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In navigating Trump's US & Xi's China, Japan is imagining a new Asia story



RAJA MANDALA
BY C RAJA MOHAN

SINCE WORLD War II, Japan has deliberately defined itself as a peaceful nation. Relying on the US for its security, Tokyo built one of the world's largest economies while renouncing nuclear weapons, avoiding the use of force, and refusing to project its conventional military power. That era is now drawing to a close.

China's growing regional assertiveness and America's ambivalence in Asia, especially regarding the defence of Taiwan against potential Chinese aggression, have caused much of Asia to complain about the Donald Trump administration and mutter about its likely abandonment of the region. Tokyo, however, is not wringing its hands; it is acting to defend itself and help others secure themselves against Chinese expansionism and the US volatility.

At the annual Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore last week, Japanese Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi unveiled three broad directions of a new security policy: To step up national defence spending and military modernisation, increase defence cooperation with friendly nations, and lift restrictions on the export of arms. The shift marks one of the major transformations in Asian geopolitics since the end of the Cold War.

For decades, Japan's defence industry

was largely inward-looking. Strict policy controls limited arms exports and constrained military cooperation with foreign partners. Tokyo has now reached a very different conclusion. It argues that preserving peace in Asia requires active participation in shaping the regional balance of power. The result is a historic relaxation of arms exports announced in April this year.

The most visible symbol of this change is the agreement last month to supply 11 upgraded *Mogami*-class frigates to Australia. The contract, estimated at nearly \$7 billion, is the largest defence export in Japan's post-war history, and goes beyond a simple commercial transaction. It creates a framework for Japan's long-term defence-industrial collaboration with Australia and other regional partners. It also points to the construction of regional defence networks that are not dependent on Washington.

In Singapore, Koizumi announced that New Zealand is also interested in the purchase of *Mogami*-class frigates from Tokyo. The emerging Japan-Australia-New Zealand security triangle is not a formal alliance but part of a new web of defence cooperation involving production, logistics, technology sharing and interoperability. Similar conversations are unfolding between Japan and the Philippines, as well as with other maritime states anxious about the changing balance of power in Asia.

Koizumi rejected China's high-pitched accusations about Japan's militarism and rearmament. Pointing to China's expanding nuclear arsenal and growing conventional military power, Koizumi gently suggested that "the pot is calling the kettle black". China can't dramatically build up its own military capabilities, indulge in co-

ercion of all kinds and accuse others of rearmament and militarism.

What is driving Tokyo's new military doctrine is not nostalgia for great-power status in the imperial era, but anxiety about the future balance of power in Asia. The Taiwan question has sharpened these concerns. Under Prime Minister Sanae Takachi, Japan has moved closer than ever to publicly acknowledging that its own security is linked to peace in Taiwan.

Tokyo is not breaking from its One China policy. But it has increasingly signalled that a military conflict over Taiwan would have direct consequences for Japan. Chinese reactions have been predictably fierce, with Beijing accusing Tokyo of crossing red lines and interfering in China's internal affairs.

But Takaichi's Japan is not willing to quiver under Chinese bullying. Tokyo believes preservation of peace in the Taiwan Strait is critical to regional stability. This does not mean Japan seeks confrontation. Rather, it reflects a growing belief that deterrence requires both clarity and capability.

The Taiwan issue has become a litmus test for Japan's strategic evolution. For decades, Tokyo preferred ambiguity. Today, it believes peace in Taiwan is critical for Asian security. That the US Secretary of War, Pete Hegseth, tiptoed around the question of Taiwan at the Shangri-La Dialogue is widely viewed as part of President Trump's effort to please China's leader, Xi Jinping, after the Beijing summit last month.

To be fair, Hegseth reaffirmed the US commitment to the balance of power in Asia; he also argued that the US will not allow China to exercise hegemony over Asia. But the way Trump is going about it

has triggered anxieties all around. Hegseth also called on the allies and partners to do more for themselves.

On its part, Japan is trying to reconcile two strategic imperatives. The first is preserving the American alliance, which has been the foundation of its security. The second is reducing excessive dependence on the United States by strengthening regional security partnerships and creating Asian defence-industrial networks.

The imperatives for Delhi are similar — engage Washington on defence where beneficial, but also simultaneously enhance strategic collaboration with regional powers like Japan, South Korea, Australia, and the ASEAN countries. Plans for bilateral and regional defence collaboration already exist in Delhi. What India needs is an urgent and purposeful transformation of plans into concrete outcomes.

Unlike China, India has long welcomed Japan to play a larger security role in Asia. What has changed is Tokyo's willingness to act upon that logic. The old Japan was an economic giant and a military minimalist. The new Japan seeks to be something different: A security partner, a defence-industrial power and an active participant in shaping the balance of power in Asia. Tokyo's strategic reorientation is not merely a Japanese story. It is part of Asia's wider search for a new equilibrium in an era of Chinese power and American reorientation.

The writer is a contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express. He is a distinguished professor at the Motwani Jadia Institute of American Studies, Jindal Global University and holds the Korea Foundation Chair on Asian geopolitics at the Council for Strategic and Defence Research, Delhi

Tokyo is not breaking from its One China policy. But it has increasingly signalled that a military conflict over Taiwan would have direct consequences for Japan

From Ladakh, a sea buckthorn parable about enterprise



CHIRAG PASWAN

ON A recent visit to Ladakh, I drove from Leh to Tirth, a village in Nubra, crossing Khardung La to reach a food processing unit in one of the remotest corners of the country. The drive explained the place's economics better than any report could. Here, altitude, weather and distance are not background conditions; they are built into the price of every product that must leave the valley. Inside the unit, there were no sea buckthorn berries.

It was May, and the harvest had ended months earlier, in the short autumn window when the fruit comes off the bush. What stood there instead were juice and pulp sealed and labelled, and dried berries packed from last autumn's harvest. The unit also had mobile aseptic processing capacity. That detail stayed with me because it demonstrated the enterprise's practical intelligence. They had understood the problem clearly: In Ladakh, the crop is brief, the road is long, and the berry cannot wait. So the first act of processing had to be brought closer to the harvest.

Food processing is usually discussed in the language of large plants, investment figures and export targets. In Tirth, the point was narrower and more immediate. The unit showed that enterprise in a remote region is often an answer to necessity.

I had seen the same point earlier in Leh, in the work of Deachen Angmo. A few years ago, she earned Rs 8,000 a month as a wage labourer. Today, she runs K-Top Food Processing, a unit built around sea buckthorn, one of Ladakh's most difficult crops. She buys the berry from local collectors, turns it into juice, pulp, dried berries and jam under her own brand, and sells to markets well beyond the Union Territory.

Sea buckthorn brings the difficulty and the opportunity into one plant. The shrub grows over cold, thorny ground. The berries are small, soft and hard to pick. The harvest window is short, and once the fruit is off the bush, it cannot wait for processing somewhere distant. It has to be cleaned, pulped, dried or preserved quickly. Delay costs quality, and

lost quality costs price. Deachen's unit grew because the support she received met the crop's actual needs. Under the Pradhan Mantri Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises Scheme, she accessed finance and invested in the machinery needed to process sea buckthorn quickly, package it properly and sell it under her own brand.

A woman who once worked as a wage labourer now runs an enterprise with a turnover in crores, employs workers, and sustains a supply chain linked to local collectors and families in her own community. Her unit also points to the larger gap. To make such examples less rare, local processors need finance, machinery and formal support before a perishable crop can become a marketable product. PMFME has helped create that starting point in Ladakh: Under the scheme, 101 loans have been sanctioned, and 89 have been disbursed to micro food processing units across the Union Territory, and seed capital assistance of Rs 1.81 crore has been approved for 651 SHG members.

A single enterprise may process a local crop, but it cannot alone provide storage, testing, packaging, branding, market access and larger shared facilities. That requires common infrastructure. Under PMFME, common incubation centres have been approved for sea buckthorn processing in Leh and apricot processing in Kargil, giving local producers access to facilities that would otherwise remain beyond their individual reach. Shared infrastructure addresses one part of the gap. Collective support and product identity address another. That is why branding and marketing support have been approved for sea buckthorn products under "Wonder Berry" and apricot products under "Kargil Gold".

Deachen Angmo's journey from a wage labourer to the head of a thriving multi-crore enterprise is powerful proof of what happens when local potential meets the right institutional support. The ultimate goal of our efforts is not just to celebrate a single success story, but to replicate it across every valley.

The writer is Cabinet Minister of Food Processing Industries of India

When a distorted autopsy denies justice



VRINDA SHUKLA

A YOUNG married woman found hanging by the noose is adjudged "dead due to uncertain causes" by the doctor conducting the autopsy, who goes on to preserve her viscera samples. Despite the registration of an FIR alleging a dowry death, the autopsy report makes it impossible for the police to make arrests until the viscera testing results are received, which could take more than a year. Despite a visible ligature mark on the victim's neck, the doctor, ignorantly or deliberately, takes no stand on whether the hanging was ante mortem or post mortem. A police appeal to review the autopsy report is dismissed as infeasible due to the unavailability of videography and the body having been cremated. Such subversion of the importance of forensic evidence is common, particularly in cases of homicide or while trying to distinguish homicide from suicide. The distortion in the autopsy report may be due to incompetence, malfeasance or lack of resources.

It takes the national outrage over the death of the educated, vibrant Twisha Sharma, allegedly a victim of torture by a lawyer husband and a mother-in-law, a former judge, to persuade a high court to order a repeat autopsy. Even then, while her family appealed for a second autopsy, her body was kept in the mortuary at -4°C — way higher than is needed to preserve a body for a longer duration — with no preservation facilities in the state capital.

Without prejudice to the facts of the case of Twisha Sharma, there is no denying that the collection of forensic evidence, particularly autopsies, is vulnerable to distortions. In most states, medico-legal autopsies are carried out only at government hospitals or medical colleges. Government doctors, fatigued from their tremendous patient load and a huge number of routine autopsies on account of accidental deaths, working in decrepit post-mortem houses, carry out perfunctory procedures with compromised quality. Only in sensitive cases do the police request that the autopsy be conducted by a panel of doctors with videography. However, the output of such videography by untrained persons is amateurish and hardly useful for a constructive review of the autopsy.

There is an urgent need to consider allowing private hospitals with state-of-the-art infrastructure and well-trained doctors to conduct autopsies. This would ease the load on government facilities and help launch advanced forensic programmes at private institutions, ultimately producing more qualified experts. A regulatory and supervisory framework can be put in place to ensure these private hospitals are held accountable.

There is also an urgent need to upgrade and standardise the district-level physical infrastructure where autopsies are conducted to ensure proper ventilation, sufficient lighting and requisite tools. Ceiling- or wall-mounted videography systems, programmed to professionally record the process, enabled with AI models like Claude for superior video analytics, are a pressing necessity. Finally, what is most imperative is that cases of wilful tampering or negligence in the collection and handling of forensic evidence be held to account. Else we risk jeopardising even the sanctity of science as a potent aid in the pursuit of justice.

The writer is an IPS officer. Views are personal

There is an urgent need to consider allowing private hospitals with state-of-the-art infrastructure and well-trained doctors to conduct autopsies

Delhi's death traps sap spirit of young aspirants

THE BUILDING collapse in Dehi's Saidulajab that claimed six lives evokes a sense of terrible *déjà vu*. The five-storey building shouldn't legally have had more than three floors. When it gave way on Saturday, the structure was undergoing more illegal construction. Unauthorised floors, weak foundations, use of poor-quality materials and deviations from approved plans seem to have become commonplace in Delhi. In response to a question in the Lok Sabha in 2023, the Ministry of Urban Affairs said that authorities in the city had identified 55,000 constructions that violate norms. The city has seen a worrying trend of building collapses and fires over the last decade. Yet, more often than not, it takes a catastrophe or a court order for officials to book the violators or call for accountability. Even then, the governance deficits that cause calamities such as the one in Saidulajab remain unaddressed.

The latest tragedy is particularly heartbreaking because most of the victims were students, including medical and engineering college aspirants. Delhi has several hostels, paying-guest accommodations and low-cost rental housing that cater to people seeking a better future in the Capital. However, in their haste to cash in on the commercial opportunities from such migration, many property owners compromise on safety. Preliminary investigations have revealed that such shortcuts were behind the Saidulajab tragedy. A strong inspection mechanism could have averted it. But as tragedy after tragedy — the hospital fire in 2024, the flooding of an UPSC coaching centre the same year, numerous building collapses — have shown, the enforcement of such basic municipal protocols remains at a premium in the Capital.

These shortcomings should resonate with Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta. As a three-time municipal councillor, she has first-hand knowledge of the systemic weaknesses that have persisted in civic bodies across political regimes. The Delhi CM's background as a popular student leader could have informed policies sensitive to the difficult conditions faced by young migrants. After the public uproar over the Saidulajab incident, municipality officers have reportedly said that they will conduct an audit of unsafe buildings. The city's authorities need to do more. The proper tribute to the victims would be to ensure that death traps such as the one in Saidulajab do not come up in the first place.

In and as Suman Kalyanpur

THE STORY of Hindi playback music is almost always that of its most recognised voices. Excellence at the craft didn't always mean popular recognition. Suman Kalyanpur, who passed away in Mumbai on May 31, exemplified this contradiction. Despite a silken voice, remarkable artistry and some very popular songs to her credit, Kalyanpur almost always remained outside the pantheon of the great women playback voices of her time.

Kalyanpur's entry in the industry coincided with the firming of hierarchies in Hindi playback music. On Radio Ceylon, singer names were often not announced before and after a song. Kalyanpur was compared to Lata Mangeshkar to the extent that she was rarely heard as an artiste in her own right. But her songs — the wistful 'Na tum humein jaano' (*Baat Ek Raat Ki*), the haunting 'Mere mehboob na ja' (*Noormahal*), the flirtatious 'Na na karte pyar' (*Jab Jab Phool Khile*), the classically sound 'Ajahun na aaye baalma' (*Saanjh aur Saveri*) and the delightful duet, 'Aaj kal tere mere pyar ke charhe' (*Brahmachari*) with Mohammad Rafi, and many others — speak of Kalyanpur's range, which deserved more recognition than she actually received.

Get the "other Lata", composers would say if Mangeshkar was not available. But a keen ear to those recordings, in more than 100 films, can set the record straight. Suman Kalyanpur's rightful place is among the more accomplished voices of the golden era of Hindi film songs.

40 YEARS AGO

June 2, 1986



Cong-I panel to discuss Tripathi

THE CONGRESS (I) Working Committee was scheduled to meet in New Delhi to consider possible action against the party's working president, Kamalapati Tripathi. The committee was also expected to review the political situation, adopt a resolution condemning divisive and anti-national forces, and discuss a code of conduct for party members.

Plane bombing plot foiled

INDIAN DIPLOMATIC sources in Washington said the arrest of five Sikhs accused of plot-

ting to bomb an Air India flight had occurred only hours before the plan could have been carried out. The suspects were allegedly preparing to plant explosives on Air India Flight 112 from New York to Delhi, which was carrying Finance Minister V P Singh and Minister of State for External Affairs K R Narayanan.

Reliance debenture issue

PUNJAB NATIONAL Bank (PNB) rejected loan applications from several companies seeking funds to purchase debentures issued by Reliance Industries Ltd, citing RBI rules that prohibit advances for speculative purposes.

Israel replaces attorney general

THE ISRAELI cabinet replaced Attorney General Yitzhak Zamir, who had been pressing for the prosecution of the head of Israel's internal security service in connection with the deaths of two Palestinians. Zamir was succeeded by Yossef Kharish, who indicated that the police investigation into the alleged killings and subsequent cover-up would probably be delayed.

There was no edition on June 3, 1986. The above stories are from the June 2, 1986 edition.



WHAT THE OTHERS SAY
Authoritarian states are increasingly shutting off or throttling access to the internet.
— The Guardian

Take the right reform lessons from Indonesia, don't dress up a flawed system



SURJIT S BHALLA

IN AN earlier article ('BJP is winning the elections, but losing the economy,' *IE*, May 21), I had expressed worry and concern over declining private investment in India. I had suggested that the large reduction in the share of private investment was a decade-old problem, and one most likely caused by a worsening investment climate in India. I suggested that the investment climate had deteriorated following (induced by?) the stringent rules against foreign direct investment (FDI) enacted by the 2015 Model Bilateral Investment Treaty. The government constructively answered, via CEA Ananth Nageswaran ('We need to speed up economic reforms, but pessimism obscures, doesn't illuminate,' *IE*, May 23). In this article, I use Indonesian and Indian BITs for illumination.

Indonesia: A tale of triumph: In 2014, Indonesia made a bold announcement that it was scrapping every one of its existing Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs) and starting over with a new model. The trigger was a pair of foreign mining companies — Churchill Mining and Newmont — who had sued the Indonesian government for alleged violations of foreign investment law. Indonesia won both cases.

The Churchill Mining affair is especially instructive. The Indonesian government proved in court that Churchill's local partner, the Ridlatama Group, had forged documents — including mechanically reproduced signatures of local government officials — to fraudulently obtain mining concessions. Ridlatama was well-connected, but Indonesia's anti-corruption agency, the KPK, had real teeth. It deployed phone-tapping and financial-tracking powers to hunt down the regional politicians who had traded mining licences for campaign cash. By 2016, the KPK had indicted over 30 senior officials — among them six parliamentarians, three governors, and four district heads — for accepting bribes to fabricate resource permits. The corrupt officials went to jail. The Ridlatama Group was dissolved and its mining licences revoked, effectively shutting the door on prosecution of its executives while delivering the same result: The company ceased to exist.

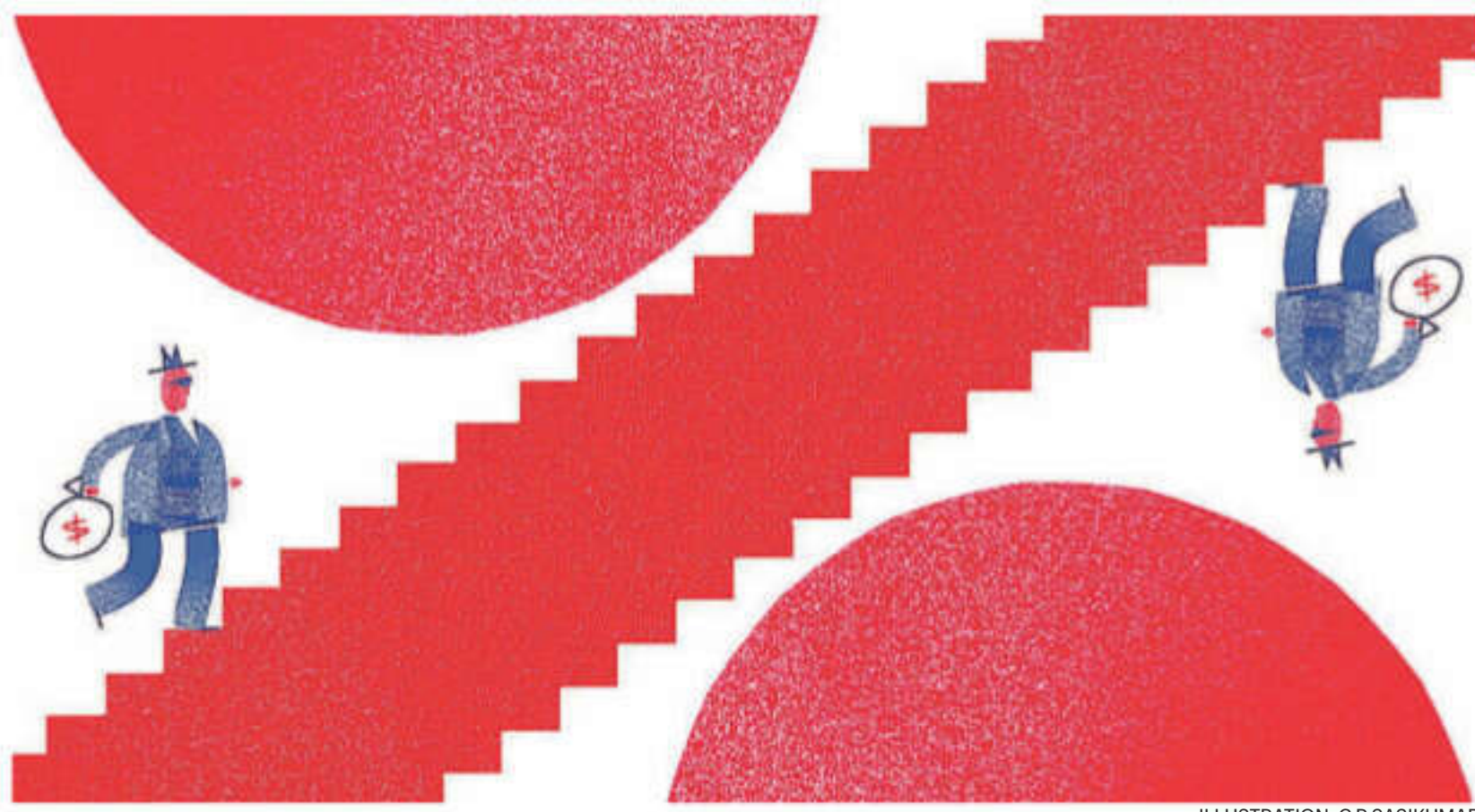


ILLUSTRATION: C.R SASIKUMAR

The international business community warned Indonesia that taking on powerful multinationals would scare off the foreign investment it badly needed. That warning has not aged well. In the decade before 2015, Indonesia attracted an average of \$14 billion a year in inward foreign direct investment (FDI), with net FDI running at 1.1 per cent of GDP. In the decade since its new approach, inward FDI has risen to \$20 billion a year, and net FDI to 1.4 per cent of GDP — even as global FDI flows became more competitive, rising from \$0.65 trillion in 2004 to \$1.6 trillion today.

Indonesia has since signed only two new BITs, one of them with Singapore. That treaty reveals the country's new philosophy: A cooling-off period of just 12 months, followed by a three-judge panel — one chosen by each party,

Two new governments in 2014 — Indonesia and India. Both wanted reform of BITs. One chose the forward path. The other chose regression. One gained international investors' respect and money. The other gained contempt and exodus

and a presiding judge agreed upon by both, who must be a national of neither country. It is lean, neutral, and fast.

India: A tale of self-inflicted woes: India watched Indonesia and drew the wrong lessons. Like Indonesia, India cancelled its existing BITs in 2016, prompted by a dispute with an Australian mining company, White Industries. But the Indian case had a twist: The domestic party was not a private firm but Coal India — a company owned by the Indian government itself. White Industries had won an arbitration award of just \$2.2 million. Yet thanks to crushing backlogs and procedural gridlock in the Calcutta and Delhi High Courts, a decade passed with no result, and no award. In 2011, White Industries sued the Government of India, won, and the Supreme Court ordered Coal India to pay interest and legal costs on top of the original sum.

India's response to this embarrassment was to pass a new Model BIT in 2015 that is the most restrictive one passed by any government — it is a model of defensive state protection. In contrast to Indonesia's requirement of a 12-month cooling-off period, the In-

dian BIT required 60 months. Sixty months in Indian courts before any international arbitration could begin. This was not reform — it was retrenchment.

Ten years on, the Finance Minister announced in the 2025 Budget that India would finally revise 2015 Model BIT policy. That revision has yet to materialise. It appears that the government's idea of a concession is trimming the mandatory court reconciliation period from five years to three years — while still routing disputes through Indian courts and possibly through a tribunal chaired by an Indian judge.

Two new governments in 2014 — Indonesia and India. Both wanted reform of BITs. One chose the forward path. The other chose deep regression. One gained the respect and money of international investors. The other gained contempt and exodus.

The Chief Economic Adviser has made two arguments in India's defence: That BITs have "weak or no effect" on FDI inflows, and that inward FDI hit a record in 2025–26 in any case.

Both deserve scrutiny. Yes, gross inward FDI reached a nominal record of \$94.5 billion in 2025–26. But the more meaningful figure — net inward FDI, after subtracting repatriated profits and capital — was \$41 billion, marginally below the \$41.7 billion recorded in 2008–09. Meanwhile, Indian companies sent a record \$33.3 billion out of the country as outward FDI in the same year (2025–26) — money that might otherwise have been invested at home. When measured as a share of GDP, net FDI stood at 0.77 per cent — the second-lowest on record, with only 2004–05 coming in lower at 0.73 per cent.

Indonesia bet on the rule of law, a cleaned house, and watched investment flow in. India dressed up a flawed system in new paperwork and called it reform — and capital has responded accordingly. When a country cannot persuade the world that a \$2-million arbitration award will be honoured without a decade of courtroom theatre, the numbers in the FDI ledger are not a mystery. They are a verdict.

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

On WhatsApp we hear ourselves. It's time to have a keen ear for others



SHIVANI SIBAL

A FRIEND'S husband mentioned casually the other day that he was not on WhatsApp. I told him this was male privilege. It was a joke, but not entirely. If I left WhatsApp, several parts of my children's lives would collapse almost immediately. Plans would be missed. School updates would vanish into thin air. Birthday invitations, dress-up days, tuition-teacher coordination — all gone. The little joy left in my life after all this is done, in the form of — what else — a WhatsApp group with my besties where we take down our enemies, moan about insignificant problems, discuss outfits, and speculate about who is likely on Ozempic — also gone. My school friends and I, divided by continents but united on a WhatsApp group, would have no space to co-exist in the identity DPS class of 1998. Neighbours would remain anonymous. Countless small businesses in the country run on WhatsApp. What presents itself as a messaging app has become the invisible infrastructure of community living.

That ubiquity is what makes WhatsApp hard to think about clearly. To dismiss it as trivial, or to blame it for everything, is simplistic. In real life, it is both indispensable and corrosive. It has become the village square, the building noticeboard, the school diary, the complaint book, the emergency alert system, and a space where every minor irritation can suddenly acquire the moral seriousness of a public issue.

I am old enough to remember a time when we had to suffer small inconveniences in silence, without a forum to turn them into a dispute. You grumbled to your spouse/sister/best friend, raged privately, got a voodoo doll of the offending party, whatever. Then, you cooled down, or you forgot. Now every inconvenience arrives before a readymade focus-group audience. A noisy neighbour? Rage on the colony WhatsApp group. Your child's school bus is late, or you don't like the teacher? Rage on the school WhatsApp group. Every small action in this very large world can be instantly narrated, circulated and dissected. The very act of typing it out enlarges it. Irritation



hardens into grievance by virtue of being witnessed. I don't think this is because we have become worse people. It is because the medium has altered the temperature of ordinary feeling. WhatsApp has collapsed the distance between annoyance and expression. It has removed the cooling-off period in which proportion once had a chance to intervene. Trivial matters and passing feelings, once fleeting, now arrive before a jury and audience. They are no longer merely experienced; they are performed.

And performance, of course, changes behaviour. We would not dream of speaking to our neighbours in person in the tone we casually use on WhatsApp. There is a Hindi phrase, *aankhon ki sharam*. Face to face, the body intervenes. Shame does some useful work. We hear ourselves. We see the other person's expression. We remember that living together peacefully depends on proportion of response. On WhatsApp, all of that falls away. Hostility can dress itself up as administration.

And yet it would be one-dimensional to demonise WhatsApp. The same platform that magnifies a particular breed of pettiness also enables fellowship. The same group that left you feeling judged and persecuted at 8.05 am can rescue you at 8.10.

In addition to the multiple personalities we all carry, we develop a specific one just for WhatsApp. A is the one who always knows; B the one who always reminds; C is the peacemaker, smoothing over friction. And of course, there are the watchers, always reading, never commenting. There is support here, undeniably, but also pressure, pressure to remain responsive, to remain informed, to have a wisecrack ready, and so on.

What is striking is how few people are truly free to opt out. The man who is "not on WhatsApp" is charmingly old-school, above the nonsense. A mother who does the same is irresponsible and aloof. Her absence would not be construed as independence; it would be called negligence.

WhatsApp did not create grievance, self-importance, loneliness, nosiness or the need to be heard. But it did provide a highly efficient delivery system for all of them. The question is not whether we should all leave; that is no longer really an option. The question is whether we can recover any sense of scale inside the groups themselves — whether support can remain support without sliding into pressure, performance and moral theatre. Or, as a neighbourhood elder in my colony WhatsApp group implored "Good Morning, be Lavish to appreciate, Be a Miser to criticise".

Sibal is the author of Equations (2021)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Listing Tata Sons

THE AUTHORS frame the listing debate with appropriate nuance ('To list, or not to list Tata Sons, that is our question,' *IE*, June 2). Transparency and accountability are legitimate public interests, but do not automatically require an IPO. Tata Sons has demonstrated that unlisted structures can sustain institutional integrity across generations, balance commercial ambition with social responsibility, and maintain governance standards that many listed Indian companies have failed to match. If the concern is disclosure, mandatory reporting frameworks can achieve that without the short-termism that public markets introduce. The decision should rest with the company's board.

M Barathi, Bengaluru

RCB's teamwork

THE IPL title victory means more to RCB than just a trophy ('RCB is Kohli, and much more', *IE*, June 2). For nearly two decades, RCB carried the weight of unfulfilled promise, which made this win cathartic. The season demonstrated that sustained success requires collective depth, not dependence on one player's brilliance. Patidar's consistency, the bowling unit's discipline, and the coaching staff's willingness to redistribute responsibility were decisive. That structural evolution is what separates a one-season triumph from a lasting competitive identity.

S.M.Jeeva, Chennai

Dignified work

ALGORITHMIC MANAGEMENT has effectively reproduced piece-rate labour conditions on an enormous scale while avoiding the regulatory scrutiny traditional employment attracts ('New algorithms, same old exploitation of gig workers', *IE*, June 2). The threshold at which incentives begin, set only above a punishing baseline, is not a design flaw but a design choice. India's gig workforce numbers in the tens of millions. Portable benefits, transparent disclosure of performance metrics, and minimum earning guarantees are the minimum conditions for dignified work.

Swathi Senthilkumar, Coimbatore



RAJA MENON

ALTHOUGH INDIA is not a direct combatant in the Iran war, it has been impacted by inflation, fiscal stress, slower growth, supply chain disruption, pressure on agriculture, and a large outflow of capital. Has something similar happened before?

In 18th-century Europe, Great Britain and France were locked in a struggle for supremacy. France had over twice the population of Britain and three times its GDP. Yet between 1750 and 1800, Britain's economy tripled. That growth financed victory over France and the loss of its colonies in America and India. The usual explanation is the Industrial Revolution and the Bank of England. But later scholarship has questioned both claims. The Industrial Revolution, it is argued, began only around 1770, and the agricultural surplus said to have funded it has never been convincingly established.

A more persuasive explanation lies in the empire. British power was built not simply at home but through the capture of wealth abroad, especially in India. The first Indian force trained to European standards was raised at Madras by Stringer Lawrence and Robert Clive. Sailing up the Hooghly on Royal Navy ships, they defeated the Nawab of Bengal at Plassey in 1757. The resulting treaty gave the East India Company the right of *diwani*, or land revenue, in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, a region whose population exceeded that of Great Britain. After 1857, the British Crown replaced the Company, but the logic remained the same. India's textile trade

Don't forget the economy in military strategy

was destroyed and replaced by Lancashire cloth made with Indian cotton. India was conquered by sea by a country one-tenth its size, 5,000 miles away, while it remained tied to a continental outlook and treated the oceans as *kala pani*.

Can something like that happen again? Not in the same way, but the deeper logic has returned.

Around 2015, China-watchers began to notice that the Chinese Dream, the 13th and 14th Five-Year Plans, and the National Security Strategy of 2015 together pointed to a grand strategy aimed at strategic pre-eminence. Basil Liddell Hart defined grand strategy as an all-of-government approach to strategic competition in which war is the least desirable option. China's version is different. It seeks influence through economic dependence, infrastructure finance, market access, energy corridors, supply-chain dominance, control of digital nodes and the ability to deny them, pressure on cable landing stations, and efforts to weaken the dollar and bypass SWIFT.

Nowhere is this more evident than in China's use of proxies, especially Pakistan and Iran. Beijing has supplied military assistance to Pakistan, which allowed it to obtain targeting data during Operation Sindoor. Iran, too, received similar support to target US installations in the Gulf. This is modern strategic competition: Not conquest by massed armies, but influence, denial and remote reach.

China's aim has not been territorial annexation. It has been to tie India down south of the Himalayas

Chinese thinking also reflects Sun Tzu's enduring insight: The greatest victory is won without fighting. Another is that distant conflicts are decided by shaping the environment without battle. From enabling Pakistan to develop its nuclear weapons to the border crises at Sumdorong Chu, Doklam and Galwan, the pattern for India has been unmistakable. China's aim has not been territorial annexation. It has been to tie India down south of the Himalayas, consuming its attention and limiting its freedom of action.

India must therefore think strategically, not sentimentally. Its real leverage against China's \$20-trillion economy is not a Himalayan stalemate but its maritime geography. India sits astride the Indian Ocean and can influence the status of the Strait of Malacca, the Strait of Hormuz, the Red Sea and the Suez Canal. Negotiating with Beijing over the land boundary, a secondary issue in its grand design, without the backing of hard power at sea, would be another capitulation. And the idea of a tri-service, five-domain theatre command against a declining player with a GDP lower than Tamil Nadu's would be another error of judgment.

History does not repeat itself in the same form. But its methods, adapted to new technology and new instruments of power, do return. India should remember that before it confuses tactical activity with strategic wisdom.

Menon is a retired rear admiral and author of The Long View from Delhi



KAMINI WALIA

THE RECENT approval of Zaynich by the US FDA marks a watershed moment for the Indian innovation ecosystem. For decades, India has been recognised as the "pharmacy of the world", supplying affordable medicines and vaccines at scale. With Zaynich, it has demonstrated something equally important: The ability to discover, develop, and globally commercialise a novel antibiotic that meets the standards of one of the world's most demanding regulators.

This comes at a critical time. Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is among the most serious threats to global health, and India bears a disproportionate share of this burden. Zay-

nich's development has been informed by the realities of AMR in India. Resistance mechanisms prevalent in Indian healthcare settings, and clinical and microbiological data generated from Indian patients and institutions, have helped shape the product's development. In many ways, this is a medicine designed with some of the world's toughest resistance challenges in mind.

The FDA approval sends a powerful message: Indian drug innovators have arrived on the global stage. Indian firms are no longer confined to manufacturing generic medicines or incremental improvements. They are increasingly capable of undertaking the high-risk, scientifically demanding journey of discovering and developing new therapeutics with global relevance. This is precisely the transformation policymakers have long sought to encourage.

India now has an opportunity to ensure its regulatory framework keeps pace with its innovation ambitions. It would be paradoxical if a drug developed with substantial Indian scientific contributions and approved by a stringent international regulator were to face prolonged delays before reaching Indian patients. The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation should consider an expedited pathway for innovative antibiotics

The CDSCO should consider an expedited pathway for innovative antibiotics that address critical unmet medical needs and have already undergone rigorous evaluation by trusted regulators

that address critical unmet medical needs and have already undergone rigorous evaluation by trusted regulatory authorities.

Such a pathway need not compromise scientific rigor. Regulatory reliance models, increasingly adopted around the world, allow regulators to focus on issues of local relevance while avoiding duplication of assessments already completed to internationally accepted standards.

India should also recognise the strategic importance of rewarding innovation. Drug discovery is expensive, uncertain, and time-consuming. Every successful product creates confidence among investors, researchers, academic institutions, and biotechnology start-ups that India can compete globally in pharmaceutical innovation. A responsive regulatory pathway would signal that India values and supports those will-

ing to undertake this challenging journey. At the same time, expedited access must be accompanied by strong antimicrobial stewardship. Novel antibiotics are precious resources that must be used judiciously to preserve their effectiveness. Accelerated approval should therefore be linked to appropriate stewardship measures, surveillance, and post-marketing monitoring.

Zaynich symbolises the maturation of India's life-sciences ecosystem and demonstrates that Indian innovation can address global health challenges at the highest level. By ensuring rapid, responsible access to such breakthroughs, India can reinforce its emergence not only as the world's pharmacy but also as one of its innovation engines.

The writer is senior scientist and programme officer, AMR, ICMR

SOUTH KOREAN STOCK MARKET CAP ROSE 86% THIS YEAR

India slips to 7th spot in global stock market cap ranking



This AI boom has led the Taiwanese and South Korean markets to rally 69-109% so far this year. REUTERS

Akash Mandal
Mumbai, June 2

INDIA SLIPPED to seventh spot in the global stock market capitalisation rankings as South Korea — buoyed by semiconductor giants Samsung and SK Hynix — replaced it from the sixth spot.

In just one week, India has slid from fifth to seventh place, yielding the sixth spot to Taiwan along the way.

This steep decline comes as the Indian markets battle against persistent foreign outflows, lack of artificial intelligence (AI) plays, geopolitical uncertainties and lagging earnings growth.

The total market cap of the South Korean stock market has climbed 86% this year to breach the \$5 trillion mark, while India's market cap is at around \$4.8 trillion, data compiled by Bloomberg showed.

Taiwan's market cap which stands at around \$5.2 trillion overtook India last week. The US, Japan, China and Hong Kong make the top 4.

Both the South Korean and Taiwanese markets have massively benefited from global investors chasing AI-related opportunities, a sector earmarked to be the biggest growth driver

going ahead.

Meanwhile, Indian corporates have been known for underinvesting in AI-related research and development despite sitting on significant cash reserves, leaving the market behind the AI curve.

This AI boom has led the Taiwanese and South Korean markets to rally 69-109% so far this year, with a majority of their benchmark indices being dominated by a handful of AI stocks. Chipmakers SK Hynix and Samsung each have a market cap of over \$1 trillion and together account for almost half of South Korea's Kospi index.

These stocks have more than tripled so far.

TSMC, the world's largest semiconductor manufacturer, has a market cap of over \$2 trillion and makes up over 40% of Taiwan's TAIEX index.

Its stock price has already jumped 1.5 times so far this year. In fact, at 14.21%, TSMC on its own now has a greater weight in MSCI's emerging markets index than India, underscoring the value investors are putting on AI-related opportunities.

The US Nasdaq Composite index, which is the biggest tech index in the world, has also

THE AI PLAY

CHIPMAKERS SK Hynix and Samsung each have a market cap of over \$1 trillion and together account for almost half of South Korea's Kospi index

TSMC, THE world's largest semiconductor manufacturer, has a market cap of over \$2 trillion and makes up over 40% of Taiwan's TAIEX index

IN FACT, at 14.21%, TSMC on its own now has a greater weight in MSCI's emerging markets index than India

risen by around 17% this year.

Nvidia, which accounts for 10-12% of the index, has gained 20%. Other big AI and semiconductor names such as Intel, Micron, and AMD have also surged 128-228%.

Meanwhile, the benchmark Sensex rose 0.52%, or 382 points, to 74,649.84 on Tuesday. The NSE Nifty index gained 0.43%, 101 points, at 23,483.55 on buying support.

The Indian stock markets are down 10-12% this year, with traditional IT services companies taking a beating due to their lack of innovation and focus on integrating existing AI models in their services.

These firms, which include the likes of TCS, Infosys, and Wipro, have a weight of 8.48% on the NSE's Nifty 50 index.

This lack of AI-related opportunities, combined with the rupee falling to multiple lows against the dollar, has accelerated the flight of foreign capital from the Indian stock markets.

Foreign institutional investors have dumped Indian equities worth \$22.6 billion in the past three months, taking the total capital outflow to \$26.4 billion so far in 2026, already surpassing the \$18.9 billion seen in 2025.

Data upgrade: New WPI, PPIs on June 15

Siddharth Upasani
New Delhi, June 2

THE COMMERCE ministry, on June 15, will release the new Wholesale Price Index (WPI) series with 2022-23 as the base year, starting with data for May as well as a back-series from April 2023 onwards.

However, this new year series will in all likelihood be discontinued after five years and the output Producer Price Index (PPI) will become the main measure of non-retail inflation. While CPI inflation is used by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to decide interest rates, the WPI is crucial too and used in price escalation clauses in the supply of raw materials, machinery, and construction work. For example, in long-term sales and purchase contracts, WPI is used by companies as an indexing tool to adjust terms to account for changes in prices in the future. The Ministry of Finance's Department of Expenditure will issue a circular on the same, Praveen Mahto, Principal Economic Adviser in the commerce ministry's Department for Promotion of Industry and

Items to weights: How the WPI is changing

	WPI-2011/12 series		WPI-2022/23 series	
	No. of items	Weight	No. of items	Weight
Primary Articles items	115	22.62%	129	22.76%
Fuel & Power items	18	13.15%	25	14.11%
Manufactured items	564	64.23%	803	63.13%
TOTAL ITEMS	697	100%	957	100%

SOURCE: MINISTRY OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY

Internal Trade (DPIIT), said on Tuesday.

"The purpose of the circular would be to tell users of WPI that the government has decided we'll be transitioning from WPI to PPI in a period of 5 years. So now, when you enter into any fresh contract which is of long-term nature and will go beyond 2031, then you have to start using PPI," Mahto said. He did not specify when the Department of Expenditure will issue the aforementioned circular.

Statistical overhaul continues

The new WPI series as well as the release of an output PPI continues the government's

overhaul of India's official statistics. Earlier this year, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) not only updated the base years for CPI and GDP data but also improved the methods used to calculate these key economic indicators.

On Monday, MoSPI released its revised Index of Industrial Production (IIP) series, with 2022-23 as the base year. MoSPI is also working on the services sector counterpart of the IIP.

Output, input PPIs

Along with the new WPI series, the commerce ministry will, on June 15, also release three different types of Producer Price Indices. These in-

clude the monthly output PPI — for May as well as a back-series starting from April 2023 — and a monthly input PPI for the manufacturing sector on an experimental basis starting with March. It is expected the input PPI trial will last for around a couple of years, during which the quality of data is examined and feedback from the users of data and other stakeholders are discussed.

The output PPI helps measure the prices received by producers and excludes net tax as well as trade and transport margins. To begin with, the output PPI will contain 125 items. Once the WPI is discontinued, the items in the output PPI will be disaggregated and rise to around 1,500. Meanwhile, input PPI measures the prices paid by producers to buy inputs, which includes trade and transport margin. PPIs also cover services, while the WPI basket only contains goods.

According to officials, while the output PPI is similar to the WPI, the input PPI is closer to CPI. Economists and organisations such as the International Monetary Fund have repeatedly called on the govern-

ment to develop PPIs to appropriately 'deflate' nominal GDP into real GDP.

So far, MoSPI has been using a combination of WPI and CPI to adjust GDP in current prices to compute the real GDP, although the new GDP series is expected to use the output PPI once the new index is found to be stable and reliable. To be sure, the government has repeatedly said India's WPI with 2011-12 as the base year is not too different from an output PPI.

While both WPI and output PPI are calculated using prices received by producers, the latter is seen as being more consistent with the national accounts framework and aligned with global best practices.

Finally, a Services Producer Price Index will also be released on June 15 for seven services: banking, securities transaction, management of pension funds, insurance, railways, air (passenger) and telecom. The services PPI will be on a quarterly basis and the first number will be for January-March 2026.

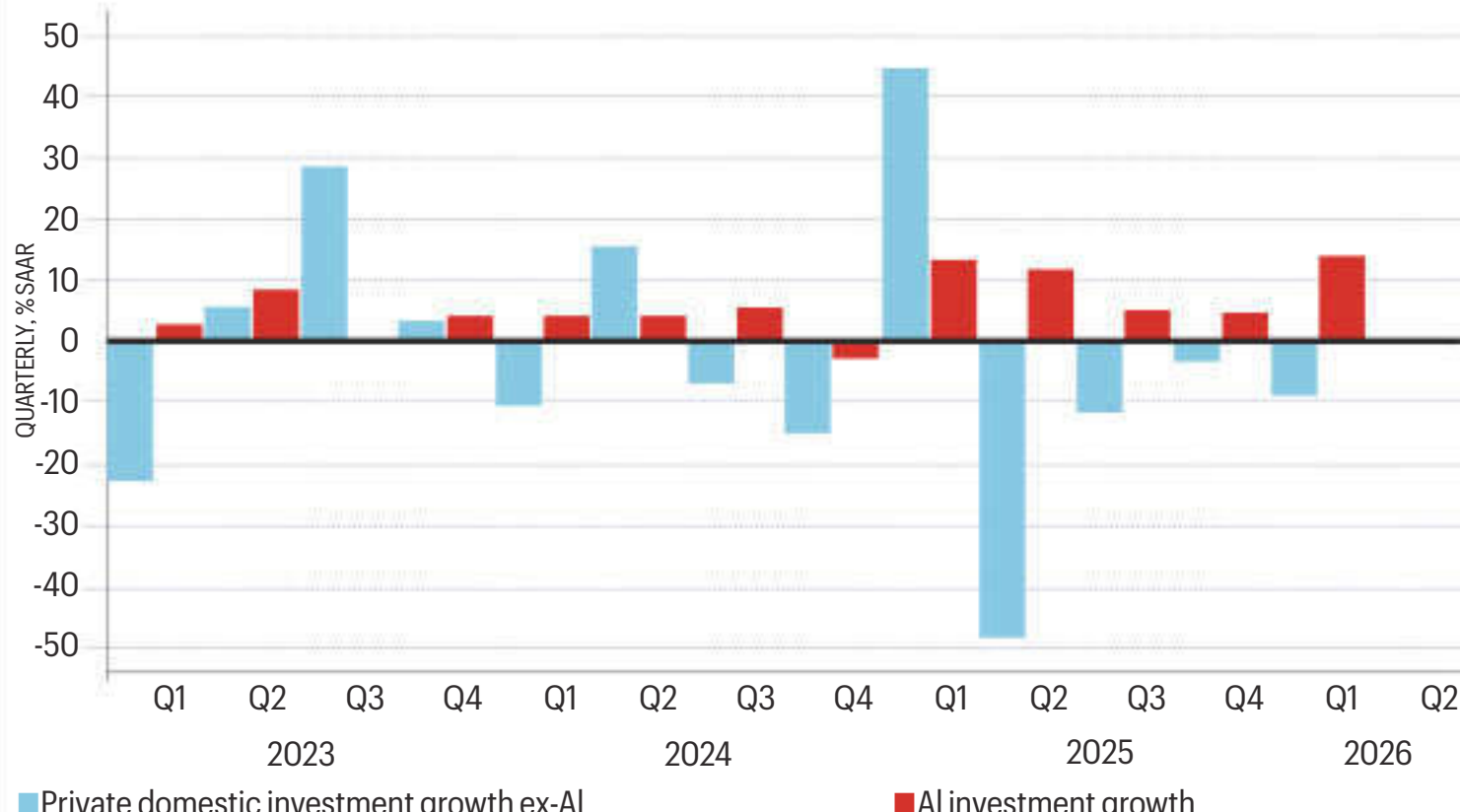
Like the WPI, all the three varieties of the PPI will have 2022-23 as the base year.

US economy unbalanced amid AI investment boom

Last week, the US' GDP growth for January-March was revised down to 1.6% from 2%. But the underlying numbers were worse, with ANZ economists noting that growth excluding AI-related investments was "lacklustre" as private investment added 1.19 percentage points (ppt) to the headline GDP growth figure — more than the 0.95 ppt contributed by personal consumption expenditure, which makes up nearly 70% of GDP.

1: Within private investment, the contribution to GDP growth from investment in information processing equipment was 0.87 ppt, software investment 0.49 ppt, and research and development spending 0.12 ppt.

2: "The economy is unbalanced," ANZ economists said on Monday, adding that most households are constrained by high overall prices, which are causing "affordability issues".



SOURCE: BEA, BLOOMBERG, MACROBOND, ANZ RESEARCH

India, UK discuss ways to resolve CETA deadlock

New Delhi: A delegation of UK trade officials, led by Secretary of State for Business and Trade Peter Kyle met Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal amid new irritants emerging in the path of operationalising the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between the two countries.

"Had great conversations on charting the next phase of India-UK economic engagement, advancing shared business priorities, and further strengthening our robust and forward-looking partnership," Goyal who led the Indian delegation posted on X.

The operationalisation of CETA as been delayed because the UK introduced surprise

steel duties. Otherwise, both sides expected CETA to enter into force by April. Indian officials had earlier said both countries are trying to find a way around the steel measures.

On 19th March the UK announced a new steel trade measure. From 1 July 2026, the UK government decided to limit tariff-free steel imports, reducing overall quota volumes by 60% compared to the steel safeguard measure. Any imports above these levels will then face a 50% tariff. The measure will apply to imports of steel products that can also be made in the UK. These measures were announced by the UK government on 19th March this year. FE

BRIEFLY

Oyo gets SEBI nod for its IPO

New Delhi: Prism, the parent firm of global travel tech unicorn Oyo, has secured clearance from markets regulator Sebi to raise Rs 6,650 crore through its initial public offering (IPO). The proposed public offering is expected to value the company at \$7.8 billion, they added. Oyo's parent entity Prism filed the preliminary IPO papers with SEBI in December-end 2025 using the confidential route. PTI

Govt appoints V Packirisamy as PFC Director

New Delhi: The government has appointed V Packirisamy as Director (Commercial) at Power Finance Corporation Limited (PFC), effective June 2, a statement said on Tuesday. He was serving as Executive Director, Entity Appraisal & IT, PFC, the company said in an exchange filing. Packirisamy brings over three decades of extensive experience in the power sector and infrastructure finance. He holds a BE (Mechanical) and an MTech (Management and Systems) from IIT Delhi. The official began his professional career in 1989 and joined PFC in 1997. PTI

Govt begins search for 2 whole-time SEBI members

New Delhi: The government has invited applications to fill two whole-time member posts at markets regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI). Currently, there are four whole-time members (WTMs), including Kamlesh Chandra Varshney, Amarjeet Singh Sandip Pradhan and KVR Murthy. Varshney and Singh will complete their three-year tenure in September, although they are eligible for reappointment since the upper age limit for a SEBI WTM is 65 years. PTI

US announced tariff cut on some equipment: GTRI

New Delhi: The US administration has announced a reduction in tariffs on selected industrial and agricultural equipment containing steel, aluminium or copper from 25% to 15%, think tank GTRI said on Tuesday. For India, the changes offer limited benefits, it said. While exporters of engineering goods, HVAC equipment, electrical equipment and agricultural machinery may gain from the reduced 15% tariff, some manufacturers could potentially qualify for the new 10% rate. PTI

Adani group reports \$16 bn capex in FY26

George Mathew
Mumbai, June 2

THE ADANI group on Tuesday said it undertook capital expenditure of Rs 1.53 lakh crore (\$16.1 billion) in the financial year 2026 (FY26), describing it as the highest annual capex by any Indian corporate group.

The conglomerate said nearly 80% of the investments were directed towards its core infrastructure businesses spanning energy, utilities, transport and logistics. As a result, the group's asset base expanded to Rs 7.85 lakh crore (\$82.2 billion), reflecting an accelerated investment cycle.

The group reported earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation (EBITDA) of Rs 94,834 crore (\$10 billion), an all-time high and 5.6% more than the previous year. Core infrastructure businesses accounted for 87% of the EBITDA, providing sta-

bility and visibility to earnings, it said in a statement.

Several large projects commissioned during the year are expected to contribute more significantly to revenues and profits from FY27 onwards, the group said.

"The scale of capital deployment during the year is comparable to the asset base we built over our first 25 years, reflecting both the infrastructure opportunity before India and the group's confidence in its long-term growth trajectory," it said. Among the major assets that became operational during FY26 and thereafter were 5.1 GW of renewable energy capacity and 1.38 GWh of battery energy storage systems in the energy and utilities segment. Battery storage capacity has since increased to 3.37 GWh.

In the transport and logistics business, key projects commissioned included the Navi Mumbai International Airport,

BUILDING THE CORE

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CORE INFRASTRUCTURE businesses accounted for 87% of the EBITDA

the Guwahati Terminal and the Ganga Expressway, which became operational in April 2026.

The group also commissioned its copper smelter project under the primary industries segment. According to the

company, these projects are expected to drive growth, earnings and cash flows over the coming years. The group said it maintained adequate liquidity across its portfolio companies to meet debt servicing obligations for at least the next 17 months.

As of March 2026, the Adani portfolio had a cash balance of Rs 55,852 crore, equivalent to about 15% of its gross debt.

During the year, flagship company Adani Enterprises raised Rs 24,930 crore through a rights issue, strengthening the group's equity base. Adani Airports handled 95.3 million passengers across its eight airport assets during FY26. The group said borrowing costs declined to 7.8% in FY26 from 9% two years ago, supported by consistent rating upgrade and a decline in interest rates in the banking sector.

FULL REPORT ON
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

Coca-Cola explores IPO of India bottling unit in '27

New Delhi: Global beverages major the Coca-Cola Company is exploring the listing of Hindustan Coca-Cola Holdings Pvt Ltd (HCCCH), the parent entity of its Indian bottling arm HCCB, in 2027 on BSE and NSE, a statement said.

Besides, it is considering selling a part of stake in HCCCH. "Initial preparations are underway for a potential listing on the Bombay Stock Exchange and National Stock Exchange of India, subject to market conditions and applicable regulatory and other approvals," the statement by US-headquartered beverages major said.

The development comes almost a year after Coca-Cola sold its 40% stake in HCCB to Jubilant Bhartia Group.

However, Coca-Cola is yet to reveal the financial details of the transaction. The Coca-Cola Company in

its global statement, said: "It is exploring a potential public listing in India of HCCCH, the parent company of the largest Coca-Cola bottler in India, HCCB, in 2027, and the sale of a portion of its shareholding in HCCB in connection with the listing."

This potential listing of HCCCH will be a significant milestone, completing the re-franchising of HCCCH and positioning it well to capitalise on the opportunities in the Indian market. The Coca-Cola Company as its asset-light strategy, is divesting its bottling assets globally.

India is the fifth-largest market for Coca-Cola globally. In 2024, The Coca-Cola Company had franchised its bottling operations to its existing bottlers in three key markets - Rajasthan, Bihar, Northeast, and parts of West Bengal. PTI

NET PROFIT OF NIFTY 50 FIRMS ROSE 6.6% ON-YEAR, COMFORTABLY AHEAD OF FORECASTS OF A 2% GROWTH

Firms beat Q4 profit estimates, but Iran war dims outlook

Reuters
Bengaluru, June 2

INDIAN COMPANIES posted a surprise earnings beat for the three months ended March, as domestic activity hummed along boosted by consumption tax cuts and easy monetary policy, but the Iran war-led energy shock is expected to weigh on profitability.

As Indian markets slip to seventh place in market value rankings amid a record foreign fund exodus, analysts warn that elevated oil prices and supply chain disruptions linked to the three-month-long Iran war threaten to derail the fragile recovery in corporate earnings.

panies posted single-digit percent profit growth for the eighth straight quarter.

Net profit of Nifty 50 firms rose 6.6% year-on-year in the three months ended March 31, according to Kotak Institutional Equities, comfortably ahead of forecasts of a 2% growth. Banks and financial companies, metal producers and oil marketing companies drove much of the earnings growth.

While stable asset quality and improving credit growth helped lenders, metal firms got a boost from rising global prices, and oil refiners enjoyed favourable margins.

Firms beyond the blue-chips also did well. Nomura's universe of 256 companies



Led by financials, metals, Nifty 50 firms beat profit estimates. REUTERS

posted a profit-after-tax rise of 18%, while 359 companies tracked by Motilal Oswal delivered a 16% growth. Both these lists include Nifty 50 constituents.

Mid-cap firms' earnings grew about 35%, while those for small-caps advanced nearly 20%, significantly outpacing larger peers and helping wider market indexes outperform

benchmarks. While earnings of automobile and telecom companies improved during the quarter gone by, IT firms' revenue growth stayed tepid amid mounting concerns over AI-driven disruption and pharmaceutical companies grappled with weakness in the US generics market. Cement, consumer staple and durable goods makers showed signs of pressure from rising raw material and freight costs.

The path ahead for Asia's third-largest economy could be a rough one as the energy shock starts rippling across the economy, hurting activity and raising prices.

"Q4 may have marked a temporary relief, but does not yet signal improved momen-

tum for quarters to come," Bernstein said, adding that persistently high commodity prices could pressure both corporate profitability and broader economic conditions.

A prolonged period of elevated crude prices could squeeze corporate margins, worsen the macroeconomic outlook and complicate monetary policy for a country that is the world's third-largest importer and consumer of crude oil.

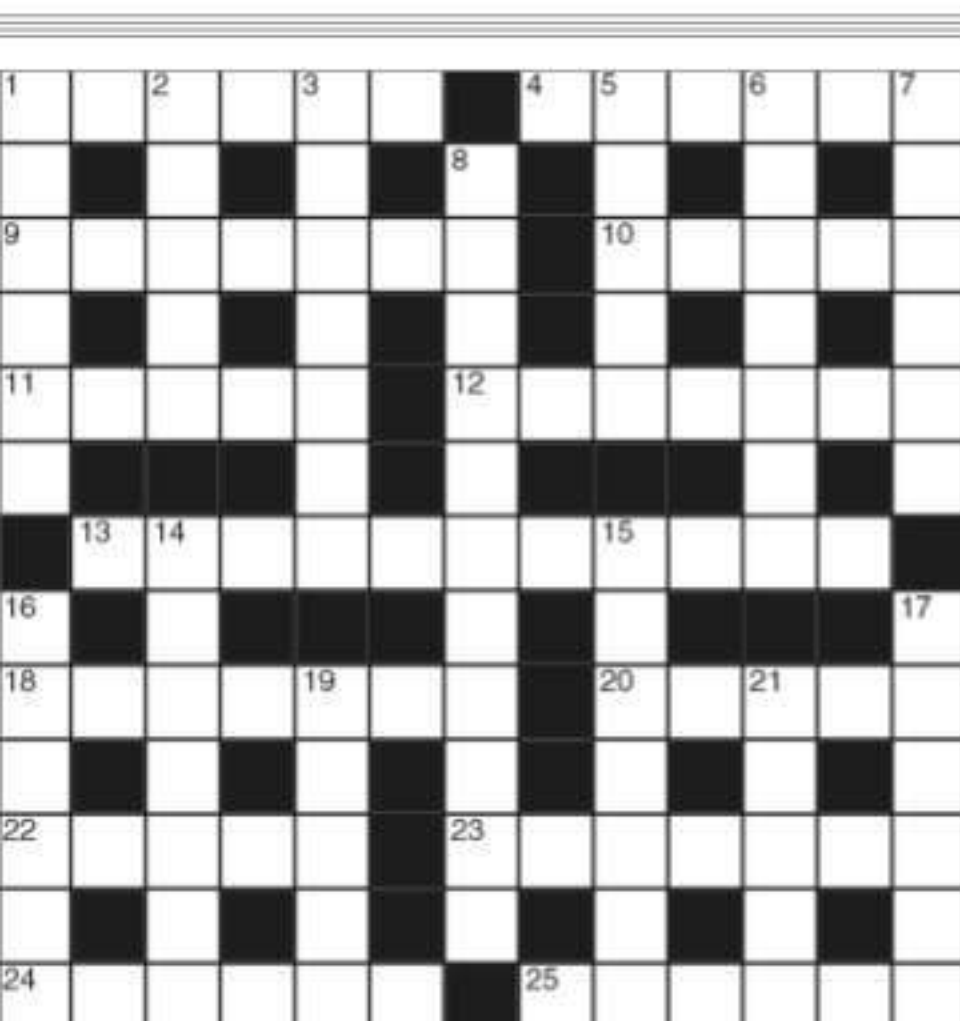
"Notwithstanding strong earnings for 4QFY26, consensus earnings estimates for FY27/28 have been revised lower," Nomura analysts led by Saion Mukherjee said, reflecting growing concerns over oil, commodities and the broader fallout from the Iran conflict.

MARKETS

Sensex 74,649.84 382.50 0.52%	NIFTY 23,483.55 100.95 0.43%	Gold ▲ ₹1,56,294	US Dollar ▲ ₹95.27
		Silver ▲ ₹2,65,300	Oil ■ \$96.60

NOTE: GOLD, SILVER RATES AS PER INDIA BULLION AND JEWELLERS ASSOCIATION GOLD PER 10G, SILVER PER 1KG; CRUDE OIL (INDIAN BASKET) AS OF MAY 29, 2026

CROSSWORD



ACROSS
 1 Fish-eating bird is thus seen returning with victim (6)
 4 High range of service provided (6)
 9 Loud and biased form of amusement (7)
 10 Players take their time watching it (5)
 11 Unexpected defeat for team ahead initially (5)
 12 Get lean in order to be graceful (7)
 13 Bus operator and trainer to a golf club (5,6)
 18 Far too much for bridge perhaps (3,4)
 20 Is violent and ruins the gears (5)
 22 One way to apply a finish to education (5)
 23 Like an egg it's blown (7)
 24 She works in order to do good (6)
 25 Go up in the world? (6)

DOWN
 1 Remnant is standard needing price reduction (6)
 2 Years for some evergreen trees (5)
 3 I holds things up for hours at a stretch (7)
 5 Blame fracture for mount's pace (5)
 6 This is properly defined as lying (7)
 7 Excellent to include it within limits (6)
 8 A question of sentry duty? (6,2,3)
 14 No mortal abode could be so lumpy (7)
 15 Hostile incursions where the fleet lies at anchor? (7)
 16 Stewed hash may suit the countryman (6)
 17 Is left and right in the water (6)
 19 Sinuous slave dance (5)
 21 Appearance of men it is said (5)

SOLUTIONS CROSSWORD 6004 ACROSS: 1 Conceit, 5 Pop up, 8 Out of practice, 9 Reign, 10 Diner, 11 Regain, 12 Arrest, 15 Lookout, 17 Venal, 19 Two-edged sword, 20 Dine, 21 Dudgeon **DOWN:** 1 Choir, 2 Nothing to go on, 3 Effendi, 4 Tirade, 5 Picks, 6 Private income, 7 Prevent, 11 Related, 13 Revised, 14 Attend, 16 Order, 18 Laden

JUMBLD WORDS

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective circles below. Select the letters in the shaded circles and jumble them to get the answer for the given quip.

Verse, singing, and speech have a _____. — Jean-Philippe Rameau (6,6)

FPOOR **CANNOT**

DMIIIO **ANUGMM**

SOLUTIONS: Verse, singing, and speech have a common origin. — Jean-Philippe Rameau

6005

OVER THE HEDGE



BY MICHAEL FRY & T LEWIS

ROYAL STARS

BY GEORGIA NICOLS

ARIES (MAR 21 - APR 20): This is a disconcerting day because family discussions will be confusing and out of touch with reality. You're keen to converse and talk about your concerns. Don't agree to anything important today and don't withhold information. Tonight: Be cautious.

TAURUS (APR 21 - MAY 21): You might be tempted to keep secrets today believing that this is the best course. It isn't. Avoid misrepresentation or distortion of the truth. Tonight: Double-check information.

GEMINI (MAY 22 - JUNE 21): This is a poor day for financial negotiations and money decisions. You could be the victim of misrepresentation. Postpone decisions, including major purchases. Tonight: Check your finances.

CANCER (JUNE 22 - JULY 23): Today Mercury is in your sign at odds with fuzzy Neptune, which will contribute to confusion. Communications with others might be misunderstood. Your ideas might never even reach their goal. Postpone important decisions. Tonight: Keep things light.

LEO (JULY 24 - AUG 23): You might be tempted to withhold information today because you think it's the best thing to do. But, it is not good to do this. It will only add to further confusion. Be open and honest. Tonight: Be helpful.

VIRGO (AUG 24 - SEP 23): A friend or a member of a group might tell you something that you want to believe because it's a pie-in-the-sky solution or an intriguing temptation. If something looks too good to be true today, it definitely is. Tonight: Relax.

LIBRA (SEP 24 - OCT 23): Tread carefully when talking to people in authority today because what you say might not be true. Or it might be misunderstood or misconstrued. Perhaps you don't have the right facts, or you have been deceived. Tonight: Focus on home and family.

SCORPIO (OCT 24 - NOV 23): This is not the day to pitch your ideas to someone, to teach a new concept to someone, or to embrace a new philosophy or political ideology. Express these ideas, you might lose credibility with others. Tonight: Think before you speak.

SAGITTARIUS (NOV 24 - DEC 22): This is a poor day for financial discussions or agreements pertaining to wills, inheritances or shared property. You might be misinformed. You might not have all the facts. Whatever the case, do not sign important papers today. Tonight: Save your money.

CAPRICORN (DEC 23 - JAN 20): Discussions with partners, spouses and close friends will be subject to misunderstandings today. For some reason, a distortion of the truth is highly likely today, and it might be innocent or not. Be forgiving. Tonight: Be cautious.

AQUARIUS (JAN 21 - FEB 19): This is a challenging day at work. You might have the wrong information and waste time doing a fruitless task. Someone might purposely deceive you or they might innocently misinform you. Agree to nothing important today. Tonight: Listen.

PISCES (FEB 20 - MAR 20): Today it's easy to fall for a "great idea" or think that something is too good to believe. Keep all your communications and thinking clear when talking to others. If you get the feeling that something fishy is going on, it is! Tonight: Observe.

CALVIN & HOBBS



BY BILL WATTERSON

MARVIN



BY TOM ARMSTRONG

DIFFICULTY LEVEL 2s INSTRUCTIONS

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

DIFFICULTY LEVEL

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

SUDOKU 6338

9	8			4				
4	3	6	8	1				
6				7				
	9	8	2	6	1			
		4	5					
5	7	3	1	4				
1				5				
9	6	1	7	4				
2								1

SOLUTION SUDOKU 6337

9	8	6	4	5	2	7	1	3
5	3	4	7	1	9	8	6	2
1	2	7	3	8	6	9	4	5
7	9	3	6	4	8	2	5	1
4	6	5	1	2	7	3	9	8
8	1	2	9	3	5	4	7	6
2	5	9	8	6	4	1	3	7
6	7	1	2	9	3	5	8	4
3	4	8	5	7	1	6	2	9

EASTERN RAILWAY

The following e-Tenders are invited by Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer (General), Eastern Railway, Sealdah, 2nd Floor, Remote Control Building, DRM Building, Kaizer Street, Sealdah, Kolkata-700014 for the following works: **Sl. No. : 1. Tender No. ELEG-OT-1334-2026-27, dtd. 29.05.2026. Particulars of the work :** Fabrication, supply and installation of IV Coupler Male Crotch Safety Chain in LHB power car and LSLRD. **Tender value :** ₹ 4,72,000.00. **Earnest Money :** ₹ 9,400/-. **Completion period :** 06 Months. **Sl. No. : 2. Tender No. ELEG-OT-1328-2026-27, dtd. 29.05.2026. Particulars of the work :** Provision of EFT & BCT in LHB Non-AC Coaches in Chitpur & Sealdah Coaching Depot. **Tender value :** ₹ 84,25,200.00. **Earnest Money :** ₹ 1,68,500/-. **Completion period :** 06 Months. **Sl. No. : 3. Tender No. ELEG-OT-1319-2026-27, dtd. 29.05.2026. Particulars of the work :** At Bhyabala Halt - Provision of additional IRS type shed (16.00 M x 5.00 M) over Platform (12 Nos) with Platform bench under Platform shed. Provision of water booth with pipe water supply, for additional Passenger amenities with all other ancillary works under SSE/W/Barasat. **Tender value :** ₹ 19,86,704.00. **Earnest Money :** ₹ 39,700/-. **Completion period :** 12 Months. **Sl. No. : 4. Tender No. ELEG-OT-1320-2026-27, dtd. 29.05.2026. Particulars of the work :** Raising of platform at Bisharpara Kotaditya, Bahira Kalibari, Beliaghata Road, Bhasila, Matania Anantpur, Udairampur, Nishchindapur Market, Nishchindapur, Ghutiani Sharif, Habra, Bamangachhi, Matla (Total-16 Nos) with cement concreting with all ancillary works under the jurisdiction of Sr. DEN/II/Sealdah. **Tender value :** ₹ 92,27,559.00. **Earnest Money :** ₹ 1,84,600/-. **Completion period :** 12 Months. **Sl. No. : 5. Tender No. ELEG-OT-1332-2026-27, dtd. 29.05.2026. Particulars of the work :** Provision of new Air Conditioning machines (Split-1.5TR/2TR, Window-1.5 TR) as and when required basis over Sealdah Division (Phase-II). **Tender value :** ₹ 35,80,662.50. **Earnest Money :** ₹ 71,600/-. **Completion period :** 12 Months. **Sl. No. : 6. Tender No. ELEG-OT-1335-2026-27, dtd. 29.05.2026. Particulars of the work :** Annual Maintenance Contract of Split / Window type AC Machines, Water Coolers of different capacity, Cassette type AC of capacity 3TR - 5 nos and Ductable Split unit of capacity 5TR-2 nos under jurisdiction of SSE(E/G)/IC/Sealdah-I for Three (03) years. **Tender value :** ₹ 27,15,378.64. **Earnest Money :** ₹ 54,300/-. **Completion period :** 36 Months. **Tender Publication Date on IREPS :** 29.05.2026 (for each). **Bidding Start Date :** 11.06.2026 (for each). **Tender Closing Date & Time :** 25.06.2026, 14.00 hrs. (for each). Details of Tender Notice and corrigendum issued from time to time are available at website www.ireps.gov.in (SDAH-61/2026-27). **Tender Notice is also available at websites :** www.e-proc.rajasthan.gov.in / www.sppp.rajasthan.gov.in

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER ELECTRICAL CIRCLE (R&B) NIRMAN SOUDHA BHUBANESWAR

E-mail: seec.bbsr2010@gmail.com
Bid Identification No.S.E.E.C (R&B) 15/2026-27 No: 2445 /Date 01.06.2026

The Superintending Engineer, Electrical Circle (R&B) Odisha, Bhubaneswar on behalf of the Governor of Odisha invites percentage rate bids for E.I. works which are to be received through online bidding, double cover system as detailed in :<https://tendersorissa.gov.in>. The details of bid documents will be available in the above website from dt.05.06.2026 at 05.00 P.M. to dt.20.06.2026 up to 05.00 P.M. The bidders must possess compatible Digital Signature Certificate of Class II or III. Bids received online shall be opened dt.22.06.2026 at 11.30 A.M. in the Office of the Superintending Engineer, Electrical Circle (R&B) Odisha, Bhubaneswar. Further details can be seen from the e-procurement portal www.tendersorissa.gov.in.

Addendum / Corrigendum, if required, will be available only in the Website.

Sd/-
 Superintending Engineer,
 Electrical Circle (R&B) Odisha, BBSR
 OIPR-34001/34006/1/26-27/0015

MAHARASHTRA STATE SEEDS CORPORATION LIMITED (PROCESSING MATERIAL WING)

Regd. Office : "Mahabej Bhawan", Krishi Nagar, Akola 444 104 (Maharashtra)
 Phone Off: 2258480, 18002338877 CIN No. U01200MH197655GC018990
 E-Mail : hppmw@mahabej.com. Visit us at : <http://www.mahabej.com>.

Re-e-TENDER - NOTICE
 Sealed e-Tenders (in Two Bid System) are invited for the supply of following Packing Material required for Raib-2025-26 Season.

Item No.	Name of the Item	Approx Quantity	Normal EMD for SSI's etc. in Rs.	Limited EMD for paper in Rs. (Incl GST)	Cost of Tender paper in Rs. (Incl GST)
1.	Size 26 x 39 cm	0.10 Lakh	1300/-	650/-	200/-
2.	Thiram 75% WS/WDP (ISI Mark)	45 M.Ton	247000/-	100000/-	12000/-

Note : Note : e-Tender documents containing the terms and conditions of supply and detailed specifications can be downloaded from the e-Tendering portal of Govt. of Maharashtra at www.mahateenders.gov.in. Help desk No. 7588609407 / 7588609668. The last date of online submission of e-Tender form is **10.06.2026 (Wednesday) up to 13.00 Hrs.**

AKOLA Date : 02.06.2026

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER PWD DN SIMALWARA DISTT DURGAPUR (RAJ)

Notice Inviting Bid No.02/2026-27
 NIBCode: PWD2627A0775

Bids for Rate Contract of Various works while Patch Repair are invited from interested bidders upto 11.06.2026,06:00 P.M. Other particulars of the bid may be visited on the procurement portal (<http://www.e-proc.rajasthan.gov.in> and <http://www.sppp.rajasthan.gov.in>) of the state, the approximate value of procurement is Rs. 964.83 Lacs.

UBN No:-
 1. PWD2627WSRC0368, 2. PWD2627WSOB0359, 3. PWD2627WSRC0370
 4. PWD2627WSRC0371, 5. PWD2627WSRC0372

Sd/-
 Executive Engineer
 PWD Dn. Simalwara

DIPR/C/9462/2026

Office Of The Municipal Board Malpura District Tonk (Raj.)

Sr.No. NPM/2026-27/1848 Date :- 29.05.2026

Notice Inviting Bid
 Nagar Palika Malpura Bids For 15/2026-27 Nib No DLB2627A2406of subject matters of procurement are invited from interested bidders Last Submission End Date 08.06.2024 Other Particulars of the bid may be visited on the procurement portal www.e-proc.rajasthan.gov.in & www.sppp.rajasthan.gov.in.

UBN :-DLB2627WSOB06020
 Executive Officer
 Municipal Board Malpura
 Raj.Samwad/C/26/3949

EASTERN RAILWAY

Notice No. Sig_W_5_Policy, dated 01.06.2026. Open e-tender is invited by Sr. Divisional Signal & Telecom. Engineer, Malda, Eastern Railway, Malda, Malda Town Office Building, P.O. Jhajhalla, Dist. Malda, Pin-732102 (W.B.) for the following work : **e-Tender No. : MLDT_SNT_26-27_05_OT, dated 01.06.2026. Name of the Work :** Sujnipara - Provision of 2nd detection at Sujnipara (SPLE) for reliability improvement. **Tender Value :** ₹ 2,95,45,354.39. **Earnest Money :** ₹ 5,90,900/-. **Date & Time for submission of e-tender :** Upto 11.00 hrs. of 23.06.2026 from 09.06.2026. **Website particulars and Notice Board :** www.ireps.gov.in **Notice Board :** Sr. DSTE office, DRM building, Malda. (MLD-69/2026-27) **Tender Notice is also available at websites :** www.e-proc.rajasthan.gov.in / www.sppp.rajasthan.gov.in

f@easternrailwayheadquarter

DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL, SILIGURI

Present Address: 2nd Floor, PCM Tower Building, 2nd Mile, Sevoke Road, Siliguri - 734001
SUMMONS/ NOTICE
T.O.A. No. 122 of 2026
 (Arising out of O.A. No. 112 of 2019)
UCO BANKApplicant
 Vs.
DEBRAJ ROY AND ANR.
Defendants

DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL, SILIGURI

Present Address: 2nd Floor, PCM Tower Building, 2nd Mile, Sevoke Road, Siliguri - 734001
SUMMONS/ NOTICE
T.O.A. No. 76 of 2026
 (Arising out of O.A. No. 97 of 2015)
UCO BANK.....Applicant
 Vs.
SMT. SAROJ DEVI AGARWALA AND ORS.Defendants

DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL, SILIGURI

Present Address: 2nd Floor, PCM Tower Building, 2nd Mile, Sevoke Road, Siliguri - 734001
SUMMONS/ NOTICE
T.O.A. No. 104 of 2026
 (Arising out of O.A. No. 54 of 2023)
UCO BANK.....Applicant
 Vs.
APARNA SAHA AND ORS.
Defendants

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APARNA SAHA AND ORS.
Defendants

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SUMMONS/ NOTICE
T.O.A. No. 73 of 2026
 (Arising out of O.A. No. 56 of 2024)
UCO BANKApplicant
 Vs.
MR. SEKH AZIZULDefendants

DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL, SILIGURI

Present Address: 2nd Floor, PCM Tower Building, 2nd Mile, Sevoke Road, Siliguri - 734001
SUMMONS/ NOTICE
T.O.A. No. 143 of 2022
 (Arising out of O.A. No. 143 of 2022)
UCO BANKApplicant
 Vs.
GOBINDA DAS PALDefendants

DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL, SILIGURI

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SUMMONS/ NOTICE
T.O.A. No. 102 of 2026
 (Arising out of O.A. No. 102 of 2026 due to change in jurisdiction from DRT-II, Kolkata to DRT, Siliguri.)

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"IMPORTANT"

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JUNE 11-JULY 19

48 TEAMS, 16 CITIES, 3 COUNTRIES

The 2026 FIFA World Cup, spread across the United States, Mexico, and Canada, is the biggest the sport has ever staged. There are the personalities — the players and powerbrokers who have shaped the four years since Qatar. There is the geography — Mexico and the United States have hosted this tournament before — and the nostalgia of what happened on those pitches. And in this edition, there are some things happening for the first time.

Gianni Infantino became FIFA president promising reform, but the bald Swiss lawyer will be known for his close proximity to power as he moves between presidential palaces and royal courts

Mihir Vasavda

IN MAY 2015, as dawn broke over Zurich, plain-clothed FBI agents moved through the corridors of the luxurious Baur au Lac hotel. Curtains were drawn to shield embarrassed football officials from television cameras as they were escorted out. The images travelled around the world: FIFA, football's untouchable empire, finally under siege.

{ 22 >>> 26 }

The arrests marked the beginning of the end for the old order. Sepp Blatter would soon be gone. Michel Platini's succession plans would collapse. FIFA, battered by corruption scandals and criminal investigations, needed a new face.

When those curtains were eventually pulled back, another figure emerged from the wreckage: Gianni Infantino. The Swiss lawyer — with a perfectly round bald head — whom most football fans recognised only as the man standing on stage during UEFA Champions League draws, reaching into glass bowls to pull out little balls containing team names.

A functionary and master of ceremonies was nobody's idea of the most powerful man in world sport. But a decade later, Infantino has become precisely that. He is close enough to US President Donald Trump to be greeted as "my boy Gianni" in public. Close enough to Vladimir Putin to receive Russia's Order of Friendship. Close enough to Qatar's ruling establishment to defend the country with a fervour that often sounded more political than sporting.

When Infantino campaigned for the FIFA presidency in 2016, he promised reform. Instead, his presidency has come to be defined by something else: proximity. Not merely proximity to football's centres of power, but proximity to power itself.

His relationship with Trump is particularly revealing. FIFA presidents have always dealt with presidents and prime ministers. Yet, Infantino's relationship with Trump feels unusually warm, unusually public and unusually personal.

When Trump established a White House task force for the 2026 World Cup, Infantino was a prominent presence. The FIFA Club World Cup trophy appeared in the Oval Office. The pair has repeatedly shared stages, exchanged compliments and publicly praised one another.

Opening doors

The relationship has also taken Infantino into arenas far removed from football. At Trump's invitation, he stood alongside world leaders during the signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Declaration — another reminder that the FIFA presi-



ILLUSTRATION: SUVAJIT DEY

THE POWER HUNTER

dency under Infantino increasingly resembles a diplomatic posting. When the Nobel committee gave Trump a royal snub, Infantino conjured up a FIFA Peace Prize out of thin air and awarded it to the gleeful American president.

When critics questioned the closeness, Infantino defended it openly, arguing that FIFA needed a strong relationship with the US president to ensure a successful World Cup in North America.

However, the pattern had emerged long before Trump. Ahead of the 2018 World Cup, Infantino developed a notably cordial relationship with Putin. Russia was already under scrutiny over Crimea, election interference allegations and a state-sponsored doping scandal. Yet FIFA's public posture remained one of enthusiastic partnership.

Infantino repeatedly praised Russia's preparations. Putin publicly thanked FIFA for keeping politics out of football. Infantino declared the 2018

World Cup to be the "best ever", a phrase he would later recycle for subsequent tournaments. After the event, Putin awarded him the Order of Friendship, one of Russia's highest state honours.

For critics, the symbolism was uncomfortable. Football's governing body was not merely staging a tournament in Russia. It often appeared to be helping burnish the country's international image.

Then came Qatar. No World Cup host has faced greater scrutiny in modern times. Questions about migrant workers, labour rights, LGBTQ+ rights and the enormous costs of hosting dominated the headlines leading up to the 2022 tournament.

In Doha, on the eve of the tournament, Infantino delivered one of the most remarkable speeches ever made by a sports administrator. "Today I feel Qatari," he declared. He went on to say he felt like a migrant worker, disabled and gay, while accusing Western critics

of hypocrisy.

The speech lasted nearly an hour. It instantly became one of the defining moments of the World Cup.

Right place, right time

Whether in Moscow, Doha or Washington, Infantino has displayed an uncanny instinct for identifying where influence resides and ensuring football remains closely aligned with it. Supporters would argue this is simply practical politics. World Cups require governments. Borders need opening. Security arrangements need coordinating. Stadiums need building. No FIFA president can afford to antagonise heads of state.

There is truth in that argument. Yet, previous FIFA leaders generally maintained the appearance that football stood above politics, however imperfectly. Infantino often appears fascinated by politics itself.

His public appearances increasingly resemble those of a travelling diplomat rather than

a sports administrator. He moves between presidential offices, royal palaces and international summits carrying one of the world's most valuable commodities: football's legitimacy.

Meanwhile, FIFA has grown richer and more powerful than ever.

The men's World Cup has expanded from 32 to 48 teams. The Club World Cup has expanded dramatically. Revenues have surged into billions. Development money has flowed to member associations across the globe. Many federations remain fiercely loyal because Infantino has recognised one of FIFA's oldest political truths: success in football governance is measured not by headlines but by votes. And votes often follow money.

In that sense, Infantino has been extraordinarily successful. He has consolidated power more effectively than many of his predecessors while avoiding the scandals that consumed them. Yet, there remains a lingering irony.

The man who arrived promising to restore trust in FIFA may ultimately be remembered less for reform than for relationships. The administrator, once known for pulling balls from a glass bowl during UEFA draws, now spends his time navigating presidential palaces, royal courts and the Oval Office.

His greatest achievement was not inheriting football's power. It was understanding where power already lived — and making sure he was standing beside it when the cameras rolled.

The Divine Ponytail and the penalty that never left him

Roberto Baggio dragged Italy to the 1994 World Cup final almost single-handedly. But one skied kick defined him

Shivani Naik

{ NOSTALGIA }

THE POPSTAR knew before the pundits did.

Madonna, sporting her own scrunched power-high ponytail and a No 15 Italy jersey, had already made her call on Roberto Baggio. On her Blonde Ambition Tour in Rome, just two days after the 1990 World Cup, she had spoken proper football: "That goal against Czechoslovakia was marvellous." Football snobs scoffed when she added, "I didn't know his name then, but that goal and his big green eyes conquered me." By 1994, she had anointed him the "Cutest." The rest of the world was catching up.

The footballing flock called him the Divine Ponytail — Il Divin Codino — after he embraced Nichiren Buddhism in 1985 following a career-threatening knee injury in Campania so severe he was told he might not walk normally again. The faith he found in recovery was not incidental — it became the stillness you could see in him under pressure, the composure that looked almost unreasonable given the moments he was asked to produce it in.

Unlike 2026, Norway had pestered the Azzurri plenty in the group stage, but it was the non-related Dino Baggio, who scored Italy's only group win. By the knockouts, coach Arrigo Sacchi was being hectorated to bench Roberto. He had struggled to score. Italy had scraped through.

What followed over the next three matches became something else entirely.

It started against Nigeria in the Round of 16. Italy trailing 1-0, 88th minute, tournament effectively over, Sacchi's selections being loudly questioned, one man left to answer.

Angular strikes

Roberto Mussi, the versatile defender who could swap full back for centre back, turned to play the ball back, and Baggio used the inner foot — the calcaneus, cuboid and metatarsal working together — to rattle an equaliser into the side netting. He then converted the overtime penalty to send Italy through. Four of his five goals at that tournament were

angular strikes aimed at the side meshing — geometrically the most efficient way to beat a goalkeeper with the inner foot. The precision was a pattern, not an accident.

In the quarter-final, Spain dominated the second half. Spanish striker Julio Salinas had a one-on-one and missed. "We controlled the game," he would say afterwards. "But Italy got only the one play."

Dino Baggio floated a pass over midfield, Giuseppe Signori picked it up and redirected it a moment before being tackled, and Roberto moved with sudden sharpness to get inside. Zubizarreta, considered among Europe's best goalkeepers, came out to close the angle. Baggio drifted past him as if the decision had already been made, and found the corner. Italy were in the semi-finals.

At Giants Stadium in East Rutherford, 77,000 watching, semi-final stakes, against Bulgaria. Baggio produced the tournament's finest goal. He turned past Yankov, left Hubchev behind with a feinting dribble, and curled the ball around Ivanov into the bottom corner — Mihaylov beaten again. Three of his four knockout

goals had come when Italy needed them most, in the dying stages, the pattern of late rescue so consistent it stopped feeling like luck. Three quarters of the Italian squad were cramping by the final whistle. Brazil waited in the final.

When the goalless final went to penalties, context matters. Franco Baresi and Daniele Massaro had both missed — the third and fourth kicks — making it Brazil 3, Italy 2 going into the fifth. Had Baggio scored, Italy would still have needed Brazil to miss their last kick to win. It was not, in the arithmetic, decisive. But Baggio, who had been finding corners and side netting all tournament, shellacked it over the crossbar. The image — hands on hips, jersey half tucked, head hanging — went around the world and never really left. "I'll never forgive myself," he would say.

Italy went out on penalties in all three World Cups he featured in. The wound stayed open. Italy tried, in its way, to help him close it. Sonnets and songs were written about his odyssey. Advertisers made films with alternate endings where he scores. Sitcoms had priests solemnly chanting his name alongside Alessandro Costacurta — "grant unto them eternal rest" — delivered with entirely straight faces. Italian creatives wrote him into the Mickey Mouse universe, into Duck Tales. Japan, his spiritual home as a Buddhist, worked him into the iconic Captain Tsubasa manga — and gave him a different ending.

In 2010, Shakira's Waka Waka, the anthem of that year's World Cup, monogrammed his 1994 heroics prominently — penalty miss included.

Not erased. Because by then the world had decided that the miss was part of the story, not the end of it.

Madonna had seen it first. The ponytail, the green eyes, the goals. She just didn't know yet what the penalty would add. Just short of Divine, he became the people's adored Ponytail.



{ FIRST TIME }

Will biggest be the best? How a 48-team draw changes dynamics of a World Cup

Lot of great players never played on the greatest stage; the biggest argument for the 2026 tournament is its inclusivity

Shashank Nair

HERE'S A sentence that might not have been possible in a 32-team World Cup: Norwegian striker Erling Haaland lines up against Iraq at Boston's Gillette Stadium for their group opener. The presence of one of the best strikers in the contemporary game will be new, and so will be the Asian team, and he goes up against.

For long, the FIFA World Cup has excluded some of the game's greatest players and el-

IN NUMBERS

104

With a total of 104 matches in 39 days, the 2026 FIFA World Cup will be the longest ever, eclipsing Qatar 2022 by 40 games.

Ryan Giggs and George Best were never part of the biggest show on the planet because Liberia, Wales and Northern Ireland never qualified for the World Cup during their time. But a 48-team World Cup's most convincing argument is its inclusivity.

Biggest beneficiaries

Ten teams from Africa and nine from Asia — two continents that have never produced a World Cup winner now get to share the stage with Europe's 16

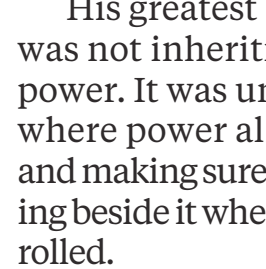
and South America's six. The four extra slots that Europe received has resulted in teams like Norway and Turkey making it — helped in no small measure by the presence of Haaland and, in Turkey's case, Real Madrid star Arda Guler.

A 48-team World Cup rewards countries who had been on the periphery of a World Cup till now. Uzbekistan is a country that comes to mind as a beneficiary of a larger World Cup, bringing Manchester City's Abdurkadir Khusanov to a tournament they would have found tough to reach earlier.

A tournament of excess

It's going to be the biggest

EXPERT SPEAK



ARSENE WENGER, FIFA CHIEF OF GLOBAL FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT

"I believe that 48 teams is the right number. It's less than 25% of 211 countries who are affiliated to FIFA. That means one team out of four has a chance to participate. That means still 75% of the teams are not there."

FIFA World Cup — more host cities, more teams, more games — as well as an extra knockout stage.

The 2026 edition will take place across the vast expanse of the United States of America, Canada and Mexico.

Who misses out?

Most notably three-time champions Italy. They were expected to seal their spot considering more European places were on offer. Missing out from Africa would be Cameroon and Nigeria — both with multiple

past appearances. From Europe, Denmark, Wales, Serbia and Poland will be some of the other teams that didn't make the cut. But if FIFA were to be asked, the biggest teams to miss out would be China and India.

An unwritten goal of the 48-team World Cup was to welcome the two countries, and their combined populations of over three billion, into the fold — a pipe dream for now.

RIP: Group of Death

A 48-team World Cup reduces the likelihood of a group stage where three teams of roughly similar strength are pooled together to create some jeopardy. This iteration of the

World Cup, with its 12 groups, will see two of the best teams from each group progressing to the Round-of-32.

Following them would be the eight best third-placed teams — essentially reducing the excitement that surrounds the last group-stage days at a World Cup. At the 2026 World Cup, a team could lose their first two games, and still manage to make it to the Round-of-32 based on the result from their last game. The urgency that came with a loss to Saudi Arabia forced Argentina to tinker their team against Mexico, which gave them the balance that ultimately won them the World Cup in Qatar.

INTERVIEW: GRZEGORZ GAJEWSKI

'Meeting expectations of former world champs not Gukesh's goal'

The man who has been in Indian GM's corner speaks about his form and responds to criticism from the greats

Amit Kamath
Oslo, June 2

IN THE past 18 months, the crown of world champion seems to be weighing heavy on D Gukesh's head. There seems to be a constant target on the back of the youngest champion in history. The results have sagged, winning chances squandered.

Consequently, the cacophony of criticism has been deafening. Former world champions like Garry Kasparov, Magnus Carlsen, Vladimir Kramnik and Anatoly Karpov have offered unsparing comments about the boy who's just turned 20.

If one wondered how all that has affected the young man, his coach is not too perturbed.

"I don't think meeting the expectations of former world champions is his main goal as a professional chess player," says Grzegorz Gajewski, the man who has been a constant corner man for Gukesh since 2023.

"I don't think the comments affected him at all. They have the right to their opinions. It's your responsibility as a professional chess player, especially of his calibre, to simply focus on your job."

Since coming together in 2023, Gukesh and Gajewski have ridden the roller-coaster of fortune together. The partnership led to a Candidates

win at their first attempt and then a history-making World Championship triumph. Then, the slump began.

All not well

Gajewski admits all's not well with the Indian's form. "Obviously, his classical results were very disappointing. Even if you look at his recent results from the rapid and blitz event of the Grand Chess Tour in Warsaw, they were not mind-blowing. People thought he was over-performing for a 17-year-old. After that, he's been fairly under-performing. But it's just a matter of time for him," the Polish grandmaster adds.

Gajewski, who once helped Viswanathan Anand as a second in his World Championship battles, was introduced to the youngster by the five-time world champion to help improve Gukesh's opening repertoire. Since then, his role in Gukesh's career has evolved. For the last few years, a challenge that both of them have tried to work on is time-management during games.

"We've done a lot of work that was focusing on elements that are somewhere between chess and psychology. The work never ends really. We've done a lot of work on the time management thing, but it's a problem that can never be fully solved.

"It's his (Gukesh's) nature to think (calculate during games). So this is not some-



Grzegorz Gajewski admits that all is not well with D Gukesh's form but believes an uptick is just a matter of time. X/DGUKESH

thing that can be just solved for good. It's a constant challenge for him," says Gajewski.

Keep fighting

Ask him how Gukesh has improved in recent months, and Gajewski says: "For me, it's mainly the resilience he's shown. Because he had a couple of good games in Tata Steel (at the start of the year) and that was it. The rest of the tournament was bad. Then, Prague Masters was also bad.

It's not like he's playing some great chess here at Norway Chess. He's playing normal chess. It's not his A game for sure."

Gajewski says that while it's easy to perform well when a player is at his A game, when a player is not there, the important thing is to maintain a level.

"Allow yourself to make mistakes, or to spoil even some winning positions, that he did here. The important

"We've done a lot of work on the time management thing, but it's a problem that can never be fully solved. It's his (Gukesh's) nature to think (calculate during games). It's a constant challenge for him."

GRZEGORZ GAJEWSKI,
D GUKESH'S COACH

thing is to get over every game and do your best in the next game."

He does point out that there are moments when the decisions that Gukesh makes upsets him. But he makes peace with them.

"Internally, I get angry but I always remind myself I'm not the one playing, these are not my results. It's important for me not to be too emotionally engaged. I do my job, he does his job, and that's it. Whatever decision he makes, he thinks it's for the best."

With the World title defence coming in six months' time, Gajewski is hopeful that an improvement in form is just around the corner.

"There are many aspects in his play which have improved. And while these might not yet be reflected in the results, I think it's just a matter of one good confidence boost that will allow him to show his full potential," he adds.

(THE WRITER IS IN OSLO AT THE INVITATION OF NORWAY CHESS)

Zverev continues Slam quest; Andreeva sails into semi-final

Reuters
Paris, June 2

ALEXANDER ZVEREV continued his quest for a maiden Grand Slam title as he recovered from a shaky start to brush aside Spanish teenager Rafael Nadal 7-6(3) 6-1 6-3 and reach the French Open semi-finals on Tuesday.

The German second seed, who has a golden chance of finally claiming a major title in the absence of the injured Carlos Alcaraz and with both world number one Jannik Sinner and 24-times Grand Slam winner Novak Djokovic eliminated, rallied back from a break down in the opening set to book his place in the last four at Roland Garros for the fifth time in the last six years.

He will next face Czech Jakub Mensik or Brazil's Joao Fonseca for a place in the final. Asked if he was happy to be in the semi-finals again, Zverev made clear he was looking beyond the last four.

Andreeva prevails

Russian teenager Mirra Andreeva returned to the French Open semi-finals with a 6-0 6-3 win over Romanian veteran Sorana Cirstea on a rainy Tuesday to continue her run in a Roland Garros draw stripped of many big names.

Now among the leading contenders for a maiden Grand Slam title with defending champion Coco Gauff and four-times winner Iga Swiatek out, the Russian next faces the winner of the all-Ukrainian clash between Elina Svitolina and Marta Kostyuk.

The 19-year-old wasted little time asserting herself with ultra aggressive tennis in front of a sparse crowd beneath the Court Philippe Chatrier roof, racing through the first set in only 24 minutes.



Alexander Zverev has a great chance to win the French Open with the exit of top names. REUTERS

Zverev has a golden chance of finally claiming a major title in the absence of Carlos Alcaraz and with both Jannik Sinner and Novak Djokovic eliminated

"I'm super happy I was able to play aggressive," said Andreeva, who became the teenager with the most Paris main draw victories this century with her 16th win.

"The last time I played her, it was a very tough battle. Every practice with her is very tough. We've practised 10 times already this year and we know each other well. I knew it wouldn't be easy and I'd have to 200% of my intensity and focus, as she would look to be aggressive and pressure me whenever she could."

Cirstea, playing her third Grand Slam quarter-final in her final year on the circuit, steadied herself early in the second set and recovered a break at 3-3, but the 36-year-old could not halt the Andreeva juggernaut.

Sindhu off to flier at Istora

Express News Service
Mumbai, June 2

PV SINDHU took her dominance over Thailand's Busanan Ongbamrungphan to 21-1 head-to-head after advancing to Round 2 of the Indonesia Open Super 1000. The Indian who made Top 10 this week got into a bit of a muddle in the first set, but won 25-23, 21-16 to extend her sway over the retrieving Thai.

However, she could immediately run into Korean World No 1 An Se-young, who has a 9-0 strange record over Sindhu. However, given that earlier is better in facing up to the dominant figure, Sindhu will try to make her good form work for her and make inroads into her game on Thursday. This was Sindhu's 11th straight win over Busanan. Playing at the sport's mightiest coliseum, the Istora Senayan, India's No 2 men's doubles pair of MR Arjun and Hariharan Amsakarun also registered a straight sets victory over Malaysia's 2016 Olympic medalist Tan Wee Kiong and his current partner Nur Mohd Azriyn.

Arjun-Hari hit the groove and managed a straight sets win over the experienced Malaysian duo with a 21-18, 21-10 scoreline in just 33 minutes. Malvika Bansod was outclassed 21-12, 21-10 by another Thai, Pornpawee Chochuwong, who is seeded seventh. Returning to the circuit after Treesa Jolly suffered a court collision with her mixed doubles practice partner and was injured a day before leaving for Uber Cup, India's top WD pair are still easing their way back, having dropped to World No 41 and lost 21-14, 21-12 to Indonesia's Febriana Dwipuji Kusuma and Meilysa Trias Puspitasari.

Lakshya Sen frittered a tight comeback in Set 1 before losing to Indonesian Alwi Farhan 21-19, 21-16. Finding himself on the tougher court side with the local crowd egging on their new talent, who beat Shi Yuqi last week, Sen copped an early exit.

INDIA & WORLD ECONOMY AMID THE WAR

Jahangir Aziz
Co-Head of Macroeconomic Research, J.P.Morgan

In conversation with

Siddharth Upasani
Deputy Associate Editor
The Indian Express

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