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Happening today

● **THE ANNUAL** Jagannath Rath Yatra in Puri begins amid heavy security.

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Business as Usual

By EP UNNY

INSIDE PAGE 6

SEMICONDUCTOR MISSION 2.0 GETS CABINET NOD

CABINET CLEARS the Rs 1.27 lakh crore Semicon 2.0 programme, with the focus on subsidising the supply chain related to chip manufacturing.

RS 62,500-CRORE mobile phone manufacturing scheme to increase domestic production gets nod.

ALSO APPROVED: Two highway projects for Varanasi with estimated cost of Rs 25,446 crore to decongest the city; National Investment Policy for Urea-2026 to make the country self-reliant in the production of the fertiliser.

NPCIL: Kudankulam data breach not linked to nuclear security

Pratyush Deep
New Delhi, July 15

FOLLOWING REPORTS of a data breach at the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant, the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) said on Wednesday that the leaked information does not pertain to any nuclear safety or security systems.

In a statement, NPCIL said the compromised data relates only to the plant's conventional Balance of Plant (BoP) common service facilities, for which Reliance Infrastructure Ltd was awarded a contract in 2018.

Located in Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu, Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant consists of six units of Pressurised Water Reactors of VVER design, which were established in technical collaboration with Russia. The first two units (KKNPP Units-1 & 2) are already in operation, while Units 3 and 4 are still under construction and are due to be operational by 2027. The remaining two units are at different stages of progress.

The present data breach is related to Units 3 and 4.

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'HAVE CHANGED ROOM... I AM IN TRINAMOOL CONGRESS'

Day after ED summons family, Madan Mitra joins rebel TMC camp

Mamata slams her former close aide, defends Abhishek

Ravik Bhattacharya
Kolkata, July 15

MADAN MITRA, one of Mamata Banerjee's oldest and closest associates, who stood by her even before the formation of the Trinamool Congress, joined the rebel faction led by Ritabrata Banerjee on Wednesday.

The move comes a day after the Enforcement Directorate (ED) summoned Mitra's wife and two sons in connection with the alleged municipality recruitment scam.

Madan Mitra with Ritabrata Banerjee on Wednesday. ANI

Mitra visited the West Bengal Assembly and met with the rebel Trinamool Congress group, including Ritabrata, as well as legislators Akkhuzaman and Sandipan Saha.

"This is a signal for change, for a storm. I am in the Trinamool Congress. I just stepped out of one room and stepped into another. I have resigned from all posts (Mamata Banerjee camp). Today, I held the hand of Ritabrata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress," Mitra said after the meeting.

Ritabrata said they welcome him to the faction. "(This is a)

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AFTER U.S. INDICTS LAWRENCE BISHNOI

Apology is in order, says former envoy named in Nijjar case

Crime syndicate probe, Nijjar killing separate investigations: Canada police

Divya A
New Delhi, July 15

DAYS AFTER US authorities indicted gangster Lawrence Bishnoi for allegedly ordering the killing in 2023 of Khalistani separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada, former Indian High Commissioner Sanjay Verma, who was among those targeted

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Former Indian envoy to Canada Sanjay Verma. FILE

PLAYS DOWN CROSSOVER BUZZ

Delimitation Bill: Ahead of House session, Sule signals options open

Says INDIA bloc to take collective call

Alok Deshpande
Mumbai, July 15

SIGNALLING ANOTHER break in the Opposition ranks ahead of the Monsoon Session of Parliament, the Sharad Pawar-led NCP(SP)'s working president and MP Supriya Sule

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

NCP (SP) leader Supriya Sule in Mumbai, Wednesday. AKASH PATIL

Opp's worry: Others may lean towards NDA govt's proposal

Manoj C G & Liz Mathew
New Delhi, July 15

NCP (SP) LEADER Supriya Sule's signal Wednesday that her party could support the delimitation Bill for implementation of women's reservation if the government specifies that it will ensure a 50% increase in seats for all states, has triggered

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

NEW GOLD STANDARD: UK ENVOY

India-UK trade deal kicks in: PM says boost for farmers & MSMEs

Shubhajit Roy
New Delhi, July 15

THE INDIA-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), under which 99 per cent of Indian goods entering the UK and 90 per cent of UK goods entering India will either be duty-free or attract reduced tariffs, came into force on Wednesday.

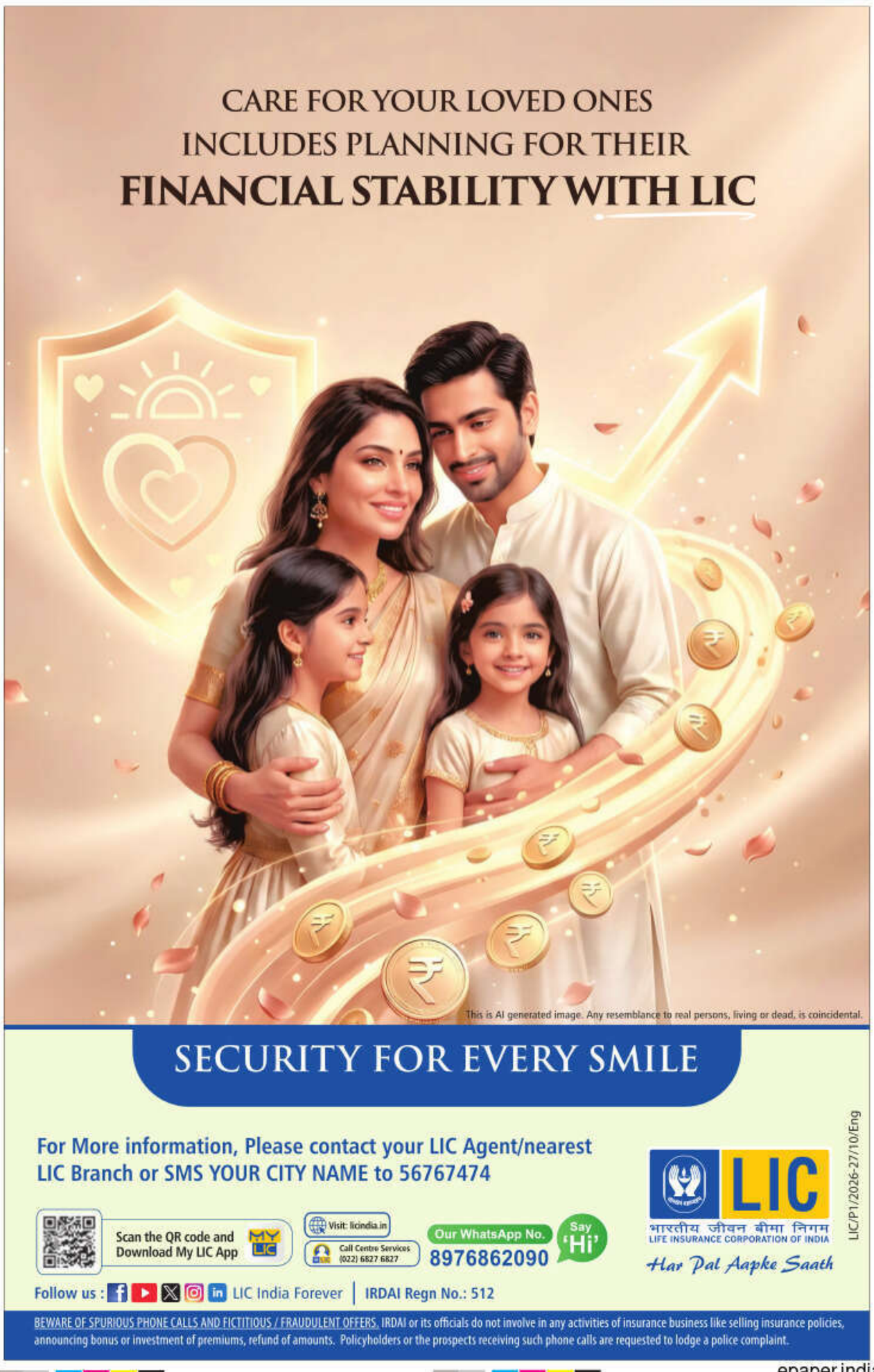
Prime Minister Narendra Modi described the operationalisation of the agreements as "a significant moment in the India-UK partnership". British High Commissioner Lindy Cameron called it the "new

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

British High Commissioner to India Lindy Cameron addresses the media in New Delhi on Wednesday. ANI

EXPLAINED

WHAT CHANGES FOR CONSUMERS AND INDUSTRY PAGE 14



Strategic Dialogue

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Belgium's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Maxime Prévot during the India-Belgium Strategic Dialogue in Brussels on Wednesday. PTI

UP cops seize Rs 100-cr Maharashtra mill linked to jailed ex-MLA

Manish Sahu
Lucknow, July 15

IN A first, the Uttar Pradesh Police has attached a property outside the state under the Gangsters Act, seizing a dal mill in Maharashtra valued at about Rs 100 crore that they allege was acquired using proceeds of crime linked to jailed former Uttar Pradesh MLA Vijay Mishra.

The attachment of the mill in Maharashtra's Dharashiv district marks a significant expansion of the state's anti-mafia drive. With this action, the value of assets seized in connection with Mishra and his alleged criminal network, under the Uttar Pradesh Gangsters and Anti-Social Activities (Prevention) Act, has risen to around Rs 241.5 crore. Police alleged that the mill was established by Mishra's son-in-law, Mukesh Tiwari.

Mishra, a four-time MLA from Bhadohi's Gyanpur constituency, has been lodged in Agra Central Jail since 2020. He is facing trial in several cases, including the 2010 bomb attack on Uttar Pradesh minister Nand Gopal Gupta alias 'Nandi', in which *The Indian Express* senior reporter Vijay Pratap Singh was killed.

Police said the attached property, Lalli Agro Industries, is located in Jakekur village of Dharashiv district and has been operational for nearly 15 years. They alleged that the facility, valued at Rs 100.25 crore, was built using illegally earned money by Mishra, his wife Ram Lali, son Vishnu and other alleged members of his gang.

According to police, the attachment was carried out after obtaining the required legal approvals and coordinating with authorities in Maharashtra. The Bhadohi Police secured permission from the local district administration before serving the attachment order.

Bhadohi SP Abhinav Tyagi said that the action was part of efforts to dismantle assets allegedly acquired through organised crime. Mishra's assets worth over Rs 241.29 crore have been attached in cases linked to him between 2022 and 2025 under the Gangsters Act, police said.

Mishra won the Gyanpur Assembly seat four times — on the SP ticket in the 2002, 2007 and 2012 UP elections, and on a NISHAD Party ticket in 2017.

According to police records, 87 criminal cases have been registered against him over the years. He has been convicted in seven cases, while several remain pending before courts.

In May this year, a Bhadohi court sentenced Mishra to 10 years' rigorous imprisonment for usurping a relative's property. His wife, a former MLC, and son were also sentenced to 10 years in the case, while his daughter-in-law, Roopa Mishra, was sentenced to four years. Roopa has since obtained bail, while the others remain in jail.

SUV runs over woman in Gurgaon, driver takes her to hospital, then brings body back to crash site

Abhimanyu Hazarika
Gurgaon, July 15

A DOMESTIC worker was killed after being run over by a Mahindra Thar while resting in the stilt parking area of a four-storey Gurgaon apartment building on Tuesday afternoon. Police said the woman driver initially rushed the 57-year-old to a private hospital, but after doctors declared her dead, allegedly brought her body back and left it at the accident spot.

The deceased, Guddi Devi from Mahoba in Uttar Pradesh, lived with her family in Bhondsi and worked as a domestic help at Ansal Versalia Society in Sector 67, where the incident took place.

The driver lives on the fourth floor of the building. She is yet to be arrested.

Police said the incident occurred between 2 pm and 2.20 pm. After finishing her work, Guddi was sleeping in the society's ground-floor stilt parking area when a woman reversed her Mahindra Thar and accidentally ran over Guddi.

"The vehicle ran over the victim's chest," said an officer.

Police said the driver raised an alarm, and alerted neighbours. Using her other car (an SUV), she rushed Guddi to a private hospital in Sector 68. "However, after doctors declared her dead, the driver returned to the society with the body, placed it at the exact spot where the accident occurred, and left," said the officer.

Police said Guddi's nephew alleged that the driver did not inform anyone about her death after abandoning the body.

Officers said the police were alerted by the victim's family, following which officers from the Sector 65 police station took possession of the body.

"An FIR has been registered against the woman driver under charges of causing death by negligence and rash driving. The Mahindra Thar has been seized, and we are examining CCTV footage from the location to ascertain the exact sequence of events," the officer said.

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

Sule

on Wednesday said her party would consider supporting the Centre's proposed delimitation Bill if it ensures a 50 per cent increase in the Lok Sabha seats in all states.

Sule's remarks came amid reports that sections of the NCP(SP)'s MPs and MLAs were increasingly pushing for a tie-up with the ruling BJP-led NDA.

There has been a buzz about the NCP(SP)'s next moves in the wake of a series of meetings between its leaders and senior BJP and government functionaries over the last several days.

With the Parliament session getting underway on July 20, the Narendra Modi government has stepped up its efforts to muster a two-thirds majority to push a fresh constitutional amendment Bill to advance reservation for women to 2029 – along with a delimitation Bill for expansion of the Lok Sabha from 543 MPs up to 850 – which was defeated in the Lower House in the April special session. Along with other INDIA bloc allies, the NCP (SP) had then voted against this constitutional amendment Bill.

On Wednesday, Sule told The Indian Express that "If the Union government amends the delimitation Bill by bringing a 50% increase in seats, then we will support it. This is not something new that I am saying. We have always maintained that we will support the Bill if these amendments are brought. There is no change in our stand."

However, later in the day, addressing a press conference, Sule appeared to water down her stance. "We haven't received any Bill on delimitation as of now. Previously, when the Bill was brought, the Opposition raised the amendment of increasing seats by 50 per cent. Whenever the Bill is presented to us, we will discuss it with the INDIA bloc parties. We will make a collective decision. It is important that the delimitation formula is also presented to us and we are told how new demarcation will be done," she said.

Hours later, Sule calibrated her position further. "Recent reports appearing in sections of the media regarding the stand of the NCP(SP) on the issue of delimitation are inaccurate and speculative. I wish to clarify that neither I nor the party has had any official discussion with any media organisation on this subject," she said in a post on X.

"As with every issue of constitutional importance, our party's position is determined only after detailed consultations within the party and with our allies – India alliance... Since no such Bill has yet been made available, any speculation regarding its contents or our position would be premature," said Sule, Pawar's daughter.

Sule also told the press conference that the demand to increase seats by 50 per cent had been raised by several Opposition parties, including the Trinamool Congress (TMC), Samajwadi Party (SP) and DMK, when the legislation was first introduced in Parliament. "All of us, including the TMC, SP and the DMK, had taken this position. It is not something that is being said for the first time," she said.

When asked about speculations about the NCP(SP)'s legislators looking to "cross over to the NDA" or "merge with the NCP", Sule said there was no such proposal before the party. "Nobody has asked about this, nor have any of our leaders expressed the desire to switch over. All stand united with Sharad Pawar and will follow every decision to be taken by Sharad Pawar," she said.

Sule played down reports about the NCP(SP)'s alleged proximity to the BJP, and also its state party president Jayant Patil's meeting with Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis late on Tuesday night.

"When I was in Lucknow for a Parliamentary committee meeting, I openly met Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. If our party really wanted to ally with the BJP, we would not be meeting openly," she said.

Patil had met Fadnavis hours after calling on Sharad Pawar at his Mumbai residence. Senior leaders of the BJP's ally NCP, Sunil Tatkare and Praful Patel, also met CM Fadnavis separately the same night, fuelling fresh buzz over political realignments.

Sources told The Indian Express that these meetings came against the backdrop of a "rethink" within the NCP (SP), with at least half of its 10 MLAs favouring a switch to the NDA while arguing that remaining in the Opposition has made it increasingly difficult to secure development funds and administrative clearances for their constituencies.

Patil, however, also sought to downplay his meeting with Fadnavis. "I met the Chief Minister to discuss the issue of disqualifying the chairman of the Islampur Municipal Council. I do not know about the meeting between Tatkare, Patel and the CM," he said. He dismissed reports of merger talks with the NCP. "I have not met Tatkare and Patel regarding any merger plans. After the death of Ajit Pawar, no such discussion has taken place," he said, adding he felt "sad" whenever the media discussed him leaving the party.

The political chatter over the NCP(SP)'s possible bid to switch to the NDA fold intensified after six Shiv Sena (UBT) Lok Sabha MPs recently joined the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena, citing better access to government approvals and development funds. That, sources said, has prompted sections within the NCP (SP) to argue that the party should also reconsider its position. Although the NCP (SP), with 10 MLAs and eight Lok Sabha MPs, is the smallest among Maharashtra's six major political parties, its parliamentary strength has assumed significance as the NDA looks to secure the support of a two-thirds majority in both Houses to ensure the passage of several key legislation, including a fresh women's quota Bill along with a delimitation legislation.

Trade

gold standard of trade deals". Alongside CETA, the Agreement on Social Security (Double Contribution Convention) exempts Indian professionals on temporary UK assignments of up to 60 months from making social security contributions in both countries, reducing costs for employees and employers.

"With the coming into force of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement and the Agreement on Social Security, our economic linkages are going to get even deeper. Together, these agreements translate our shared ambition into tangible opportunities for our people," Modi said in a post on X.

He said the trade pact would provide fresh momentum to farmers, entrepreneurs and micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), while giving several sectors "stronger access" to the UK market. He said it would deepen cooperation in technology, professional services and innovation, while supporting greater mobility for skilled Indian talent.

"The social security agreement will provide invaluable support to Indian professionals working temporarily in the UK and strengthen the competitiveness of Indian enterprises," Modi said. The Prime Minister added that the agreements reflected "the trust between our democracies and our resolve to build a forward-looking partnership driven by trade, technology, investment and innovation".

Cameron termed it as "the new gold standard of trade deals: pro-worker, pro-innovation, and pro-growth". "It's a force multiplier and a template for a future trade agreement," she said.

Citing UK Minister for Trade, Chris Bryant, she said the UK-India FTA (free trade agreement) "sends a message to the rest of the world that the rules-based order works, and I think those rules, when they are about international trade, are in everybody's interest and certainly very much in UK-India's interest". "The UK-India trade deal brings sweeping benefits for a wide range of sectors. From today, import duty on Scotch whisky has been cut from 150 per cent to 75 per cent, which should make a really significant difference to the price the consumer pays," she said.

Cameron also said that import duties on premium UK-built cars will begin to fall from over 110 per cent to 10 per cent, making British cars cheaper for Indian consumers.

To celebrate the occasion, a special package of select British goods arrived at the British Deputy High Commission in Mumbai on Wednesday morning aboard a British Airways flight. "The package contained goods from the UK benefiting from reduced tariffs, including cosmetics, food products and alcoholic beverages," said a statement.

The trade agreement, signed in July last year, is expected to benefit a wide range of sectors on both sides, including automotive, manufacturing, consumer goods, creative industries and medical technology. It lowers tariffs across sectors, including textiles, leather, gems and jewellery, engineering goods, marine products and pharmaceuticals while expanding market access for services, digital trade and government procurement.

According to government data, merchandise trade between the two countries stood at US$ 25.1 billion in 2025-26, while bilateral services trade was US$ 35.4 billion in 2024. The agreement is expected to at least double bilateral trade from about 48 billion pounds annually by 2030. "The agreement, which opens new avenues for trade, investment and innovation, will create unique opportunities for our businesses," Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on X.

Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal said goods worth US$ 140 million were shipped on the agreement's first day. **WITH PTI**

Kudankulam

NPCIL said the Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) contract for BoP common services package was awarded to Reliance Infrastructure Ltd in 2018 through a public tender process. The scope of the contract included engineering, procurement/supply, construction and commissioning of common service facilities.

"These facilities are of conventional nature and are typically found in thermal power plants as well as other process industries. They are not related to nuclear safety or nuclear security systems," NPCIL said.

NPCIL said it provided indicative drawings and technical specifications to the bidders as part of the public tendering process. "Based on these inputs and the requirements of the project, the EPC contractor, M/s Reliance Infrastructure Ltd, prepared detailed engineering drawings in consultation with the respective Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs). The designs proposed by Reliance Infra Ltd, meeting the technical specifications, are accepted by NPCIL after review," it said.

On Wednesday, Reuters reported that ransomware group World Leaks had published a large cache of files purportedly linked to the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant on the dark web. The leaked archive, reportedly online since June 11, contains nearly 19,000 files totalling about 14.3 gigabytes, it said.

The report said that the documents span the period from 2016 to mid-2025, and include blueprints, supplier information, meeting and inspection records, equipment reviews and insurance policies.

The Anil Ambani-led Reliance Group, whose subsidiary Reliance Infrastructure Ltd was awarded the EPC contract in 2018, told Reuters in a statement that there had been a "partial breach" of its data on a server hosted by third-party Indian data centre service provider Yotta, and the government had been informed about the incident.

Opp worry

a fresh churn in the INDIA bloc. With the alliance already battered by splits and desertions, its senior leaders expressed doubt about the Opposition unity that ensured the defeat of the legislation in April holding.

Since the defeat of the Constitution amendment Bill to increase parliamentary seats, 37 Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha MPs from four anti-BJP parties have defected to the ruling side — making it the largest floor crossing from the Opposition to the Treasury side in Parliament since the enactment of the anti-defection law in 1985.

Sule's remarks have virtually set the cat among the pigeons. Several Opposition leaders whom *The Indian Express* spoke to appeared unsure of the INDIA bloc standing together in the event of the NDA government making another bid to push through the Bill during the four-week-long Monsoon Session beginning Monday.

The NCP (SP) has nine MPs — eight in the Lok Sabha and one in the Rajya Sabha.

With three vacancies, the present strength of the Lok Sabha is 540, including two MPs who are in jail, making the two-third mark 360. In April, 528 MPs had voted and the two-third mark was 352.

The government had then secured the support of 298 MPs and the Opposition bagged 230 votes. The NDA had 293 MPs in the Lok Sabha then, and after the splits in the Trinamool Congress and Shiv Sena (UBT), its tally is now 319.

If the NCP (SP) supports the Bill, the NDA tally will go up to 327, 33 short of the two-third mark, with the BJP hoping to bridge the gap with support from more parties and abstentions by some.

In the Rajya Sabha, 242 of the 245 seats are occupied. By-elections to three seats from Bengal are to be held on July 24, and all three seats are set to go to the NDA. The two-thirds mark after this in the House will be 164, in case each member votes, and the NDA will be at 155 – just nine short of a simple majority. If the NCP (SP) also backs it, the NDA will cross it, reaching 156.

Sources in the government said it would bring back the Bill only after incorporating changes sought by the regional parties. Top ministers said the move would be made after ensuring a two-third majority in both the Houses.

Sources said Speaker Om Birla is likely to give official recognition to the breakaway factions of the Sena (UBT) and TMC in the Lok Sabha before Parliament meets on July 20.

Some Opposition leaders argued that Sule's remarks were only aimed at sending a message to her party MPs who are restive since the recent split in the Sena (UBT). "On the one hand, she is saying that if the revised Bill ensures a uniform 50% increase in seats across all states, there would be little reason to oppose it. At the same time, she is saying that her party has not taken a decision and a final view would be taken only after discussions within her party and the INDIA bloc... The message, it seems, is to her MPs, that they need not go to the NDA side...," a senior Congress leader said.

However, the concern in the Opposition camp is that other parties are coming around to the same view. "Many of the regional parties, especially those from the Hindi belt, were agreeable to the idea of a uniform 50% increase in seats. So I really don't know what stance the Samajwadi Party (SP) and JMM may adopt now," a leader said.

Asked about this, an SP MP said that the party cannot side with BJP-led government given that Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh are just months away.

However, another leader said that the alternative is also tricky for the party. "The SP cannot be seen as opposing legislation that will increase UP's representation in the Lok Sabha. So we are expecting a neutral stance, if not a favourable one."

One Opposition leader said there were also tactical options available such as staging a walkout. By reducing the total number of members required to be present and voting to pass the Constitution amendment Bill, this too would help the government.

A source in the government said: "Parties like the DMK agreed to the proposal (of increasing 50 % seats for every state) in our discussions. But they decided to vote against the Bill under pressure from the Congress. Now that most of the regional parties, including the DMK, SP, JMM and RJD do not seem to be in a mood to stay with the Congress, there is no reason for them to oppose the Bill if we add the clause."

Sources in the DMK said the party could "either back the Bill or abstain" depending on the government's response to their demands. Talking to *The Indian Express* earlier this week, DMK leader K Kanimozhi acknowledged her party has been in discussions with the BJP and the government over the proposed legislation.

The DMK, incidentally, was one of the most formidable voices in the INDIA bloc, particularly on the issue of delimitation. "It is for the party high command to state our position. And it will be only on July 19 that we will know which Bills the government wants to introduce. I can't say anything before that," DMK Rajya Sabha MP Trichy Siva told The Indian Express when asked about how the party would vote.

As it is, the Opposition benches in the Lok Sabha will sport a new look when the Monsoon Session begins.

The DMK, which has 22 MPs in the Lok Sabha, will sit separately, as demanded by it after the Congress decision to part ways with it and back the Vijay government in Tamil Nadu.

The TMC is a diminished party, with 20 of its 28 MPs now in the BJP-friendly rebel faction. The Sena (UBT) has taken a hit with six of its MPs joining the Shiv Sena, leaving it with three MPs. In the Rajya Sabha too, the Opposition is a depleted bloc, with seven MPs of the AAP, three of TMC and one of BJD having switched sides to the BJP.

WITH VIKAS PATHAK & JATIN ANAND

Madan Mitra

fight of the collective against the personal cult. He is a senior leader. This proved we are the real TMC."

Mamata reacted sharply to Mitra's departure, saying, "Some people have left. Even today, someone left. Those who are still there are my treasures. The one who left sent me a message saying that ED has summoned his wife and sons. I knew this was about to happen. I do not care. In 2004, I was alone (with only one TMP MP), and I rebuilt the party. I can do it now, too."

Asked about the ED summons, Mitra said, "My family members have been called by ED. They will cooperate with the investigation. My decision has nothing to do with that".

Mitra's exit from the Mamata Banerjee camp follows another loyalist, Chandrima Bhattacharya, joining the rebels on July 4.

It also comes at a time when Mamata is cornered politically, with 60 of her 80 MLAs choosing Howrah Madhya MLA Arup Roy as the party chairperson and the rebel camp "capturing" the party headquarters in Kolkata. The rebel camp has also laid claim to the party symbol and bank accounts, stating that it is the "real TMC" before the Election Commission of India, a claim the Mamata camp is fiercely resisting.

Of Mamata's 28 Lok Sabha MPs, 20 have also broken away from the party, led by Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar, to merge with the little-known Nationalist Citizens Party of India (NCPI).

Charges against Abhishek Banerjee

Mitra also targeted Abhishek Banerjee, the party's Lok Sabha MP and all-India general secretary. "I have respect for Mamata Banerjee, but I don't support the manner in which the party was run. We wanted to run the party differently after the Assembly poll loss. The BJP cannot be defeated by Abhishek Banerjee. Behaving like Hitler, he gets down from the plane and gives orders. In such a way, the party cannot be saved," Mitra, an MLA from Kamarhati and one of the joint state general secretaries of the Mamata-led party, said.

"What has happened to our party is because of Abhishek Banerjee. Workers are on the streets because of him. He should have resigned. I fear him more than ED. ED will interrogate me, but Abhishek will throw me somewhere. I have already spent time in jail," he said.

Mamata responded later, "They named Abhishek. It has become a lame excuse. Abhishek's wife has been called by the agencies. Abhishek has been called by the agencies. Even today, he has gone (to Bidhannagar court to give his voice sample). He is fighting like a tiger. He is resisting and tolerating it all. There are 25 to 30 cases against him. He could have gone for a setting and got relief from it all. But he did not. Those who are on the BJP's lap have a lot of baggage... Police are going to the leaders and telling them to either join the other camp or go to jail."

'An apology is in order'

by Ottawa in the case at the time, says "an apology is in order" now. Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Verma, who was named among "persons of interest" in the Nijjar killing and declared persona non-grata by Canada, also said that the then Canadian PM Justin Trudeau could have waited till investigations were over before pointing a finger at Indian officials in 2024.

Verma, who was subsequently recalled by India triggering a dip in bilateral ties, said: "Probably, the statement (by Trudeau in the Canadian parliament) should have waited for the investigation to be completed so that it would have been based on some kind of due process. And that is what a mature statesman should do. Probably the advisors let the former PM down and he was ready to announce something for which there was no credible evidence, no credible end of the investigation. Some more time should have been given before putting out such allegations against a friendly country."

Asked whether there was any communication from Canada over the past three years with Indian officials named in the case, including him, Verma said there has been no contact personally even though he "would love to have that kind of communication".

"Because it did not only destroy the relationship, it also affected the families of all the diplomats and officials who were asked to leave Canada. And the government of India was kind enough to call us back. All of us have suffered and we know that our prestige can never be restored, the way in which it has been maligned. But at least an apology is in order," said Verma, who retired earlier this year after 37 years in service.

Last week, the US Department of Justice indicted Bishnoi, who is in a Gujarat jail, for ordering Nijjar's killing after a coordinated action by law enforcement from the US, Canada and Europe led to the arrest of 24 people connected to three Indian crime syndicates.

Verma said multi-nation agencies had identified non-state actors behind the killing, and the indictment did not name the Indian government, its officials or diplomats, which was in line with India's stance on the incident. "They (the multi-nation investigating agencies) have identified non-state actors and clearly said which criminal gang has operated where and how and who are its members... So it is not just wild allegations against someone," the former envoy said.

"The investigation is very clear that the indictment which has been presented now in the public does not include the state of India, the government of India, Indian officials, or diplomats. So, therefore, the allegation part of it which used to be peddled earlier is no more valid post this indictment. Now, we should allow the investigation to move ahead, and the judicial process to take its course," he said.

Following the US indictment, with Canada saying there was no evidence of an Indian government link in the Nijjar killing, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Deputy Commissioner Lisa Moreland told CBC News: "There is no evidence to suggest that through this organised crime syndicate investigation and the charges laid forward that Indian government officials would be charged or involved in this... nothing has come out to link the Indian government."

Responding to queries from *The Indian Express* on the subject, the RCMP said that while no charges have been laid against an Indian official in the transnational organised crime case, the Nijjar homicide remains "the subject of a separate investigation".

In May 2024, the RCMP's Integrated Homicide Investigation Team (IHIT) had arrested four men in connection with the case. "They have each been charged with First Degree Murder and Conspiracy to Commit Murder. Karan Brar, 22, Kamalpreet Singh, 22, Karanpreet Singh,28 and Amandeep Singh, 22 are currently facing those charges in BC Supreme Court. Those proceedings are ongoing," said Jessica Kingsbury, Deputy Director, Media Relations, National Communications and Public Affairs, RCMP.

Asked about Deputy Commissioner Moreland's latest comments, Kingsbury said: "As noted by the RCMP, we can only stick with the facts at hand for this investigation as the matter is ongoing. To date, as noted by the FBI and the RCMP, no charges have been laid against a government official from India in this transnational organised crime file."

She said: "The homicide of Hardeep Singh Nijjar remains the subject of a separate investigation led by the RCMP Integrated Homicide Investigative Team (IHIT). As that investigation and related court proceedings are ongoing, the RCMP will not comment further at this time." Asked about the Canadian response, Verma said he would club the two investigations together. "There was a murder in Canada of a Canadian citizen. So, they had launched an investigation. There have been arrests, and trial is yet to begin. It has led to the arrest of four Indian nationals who used to be international students in Canada," he said. "The larger indictment which has come out from the US, where Canada was a partner as well, there the name has been clearly mentioned of the person who was killed in Surrey (as HNS or Hardeep Singh Nijjar). And then it says that they do not have anything to show that the Indian government, the state or officials or diplomats were involved in any way," he said.

"And that was spoken both in the indictment, also by the deputy commissioner of RCMP in a TV interview. So, I would put the two together," the former envoy said. "Even as they say that the investigation is on, but what has come in the (US) indictment clearly says that Canada was a partner in investigations. It very clearly says that the government of India, its officials or diplomats have no hands in this case," Verma said. "When I put them together, I would say what we have been saying from day one — it is not the policy of the government of India to interfere in the internal affairs of any other country," he said.

MARTYRS' DAY RALLY

Birla Planetarium, not Victoria House: HC orders Mamata camp to shift venue

Court cites traffic woes: 'City used to come to standstill on July 21 earlier'

Tanusree Bose
Kolkata, July 15

IN A first in 15 years, the Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress will not be observing the July 21 Martyrs' Day rally in front of the Victoria House at Esplanade. Instead, the Mamata-led faction will be holding the annual rally in front of the Birla Planetarium, as ordered by the Calcutta High Court.

The new venue, a few kilometres away from the old one, was suggested by the TMC counsel after the court refused their initial prayer of conducting the rally at Esplanade, citing traffic chaos at the busy road.

On Tuesday, the single bench of Justice Saugata Bhattacharyya directed the Kolkata Police to permit the public meeting on one flank of the road in front of Birla Planetarium while ensuring that the other flank remains open for traffic.

The court said in its order, "Effort has to be made to restrict the number of participants within 3000. Police authorities are to depute an adequate number of police personnel to ensure that no untoward incidents take place." The court also ordered that the event should be held between 12 pm to 3.30 pm, adding that the petitioner shall share the details of 20 volunteers with the Joint Commissioner of Police (Headquarters) by 4 pm on July 18.

The proceedings

The Mamata camp had approached the High Court alleging that despite applying for permission on June 27 to hold the 'Shahid Divas' rally at Victoria House, the police kept the application pending while granting permission to the Congress as well as the rebel TMC faction led by Ritabrata Banerjee for public meetings in the same vicinity.

Appearing for the Mamata camp, senior counsel Kalyan Banerjee submitted, "Section 163(2) of the BNSS has been imposed to restrict rallies, demonstration and sabhas. We challenge that as well. The main prayer is to seek permission for Sahid Divas (event)."

He said the rebel TMC faction has been given permission for the event near Gandhi Statue, while the Congress near Sahid Minar, adding that the Mamata camp could alternatively hold it near Metro Channel, Esplanade.

The Court observed that there is a division bench order restricting such events there.

The court added, "Considering the changed scenario, post declaration of election result faction has been created in TMC, so change your venue. This is the main arterial road from North Kolkata leading to Esplanade, don't block this road. Can you hold it in Hazra?"

Kalyan Banerjee said , "Earlier it was Victoria House... Dorina Crossing, Esplanade East, Red Road and Dharmatala places can also be considered."

Advocate General Surajit Nath Mitra opposed the request to hold the meeting near Victoria House, contending that two other organisations had already been granted permission for programmes in the area and that another gathering could create law and order concerns. The state suggested Wellington Square as an alternative venue, while also proposing Brigade Parade Ground if the expected crowd exceeded 10,000.

"Some distance has to be maintained between the other parties. A law and order situation may arise. There are schools, college and hospital near the Birla Planetarium. It can only accommodate 500-1,000 people. Subodh Mallick Square can be another option. It can accommodate 2,000 people. If participation is more than 10,000, they can go to Brigade (Ground)."

The petitioner counsel insisted that they wanted to hold the event in the Esplanade area due to historical significance. "We have intimated them three times, but no response. Those who made intimation later, they have been given Gandhi Statue and Sahid Minar. They don't have the intention to give permission. We will have 15,000 to 20,000 participants. No restrictions for other parties, and restrictions are there for me."

The single bench also observed that the city used to come to a standstill during the July 21 parade in the previous years. Adding that even the Calcutta High Court could not function.

The court granted the Mamata-led TMC faction to hold the rally near Birla Planetarium.

Why 'Sahid Divas' is significant to Mamata and her politics

The TMC has been holding the rally at Esplanade in Kolkata. FILE

ON JULY 21, 1993, Mamata Banerjee — the then president of Youth Congress — held a 'Writers' Chalo' protest march to the Writers' Building, the seat of the then ruling Left government. The protesters sought photo voter ID cards to be made mandatory to prevent election rigging.

The police opened fire on the protesters, resulting in the deaths of 13 Congress workers. Since then, the Congress, and subsequently the TMC under Mamata, has been marking July 21 as 'Martyrs' Day'. It remains Mamata's flagship political event, marking a huge annual gathering at the party rally in Esplanade.

Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari at Janata Darbar, Wednesday. EXPRESS

Will support Kamduni rape-murder victim's case in SC: Suvendu

Press Trust of India
Kolkata, July 15

CHIEF MINISTER Suvendu Adhikari on Wednesday said his government would cooperate with the Kamduni gang rape and murder victim's family in the Supreme Court, asserting that efforts would be made so that they get justice for the crime committed 13 years ago during the TMC era.

Adhikari made the remarks after meeting the victim's family at the 'Janata Darbar' organised at the BJP office here. Speaking to reporters after the meeting, he stated that the matter was currently pending before the Supreme Court and was not under the direct control of the state government or the police.

"The Barasat court had ordered capital punishment in the case. The previous government had transferred 16 public prosecutors so that the accused could be released," Adhikari said.

"The family has now moved the Supreme Court, and the matter is subjudice. I have told them that the counsel of the state will cooperate with them so that they get justice through the Supreme Court. We have already given necessary directions to the standing counsel," he added.

On June 7, 2013, a college student returning home in North 24 Parganas' Kamduni was dragged into a farm, gang-raped and murdered. Her mutilated body was found the next morning. The incident had triggered a huge outcry in the state amid concerns over women's safety.

Three years later, a sessions court sentenced three accused to death and three others to life imprisonment in the case. The Calcutta High Court later commuted the death sentences of two to life terms and acquitted a third death-row convict. It had reduced the life sentences of three other convicts.

The family members of the Kamduni victim, including her parents and brothers, attended the CM's 'Janata Darbar' programme. They were accompanied by two prominent faces of the protests that followed the incident, Tumpa Koyal and Mousumi Koyal, during the meeting. "The CM has assured us of justice. He said that he has a clear idea of the entire episode," the victim's mother said.

Abhishek gives voice sample in intimidatory speech case

Tanusree Bose
Kolkata, July 15

AFTER SKIPPING two appearances, TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee on Wednesday appeared before the Chief Judicial Magistrate of the Bidhannagar SDJM Court to record his voice sample in connection with the 2026 Assembly poll campaign intimidatory speech case.

Banerjee's four-car convoy arrived at the court at 11.50 am, amidst tight security, and the leader gave his voice sample in the presence of an Investigating officer and a technician at the magistrate's chamber, according to sources. After one and a half hours, the Trinamool leader left the court premises.

Since early morning, the police had deployed a huge force on the court premises, and did not allow any crowd to assemble at the gate from which Banerjee was to enter.

The authorities were on high alert to prevent a repeat of the Sonarpur incident where Banerjee was heckled by a group of protesters during his visit to a deceased party worker's house on May 30.

Last Friday, the Calcutta High Court had given strict instructions to the TMC national general secretary to give the voice sample, while making it clear that he was given legal protection because he had to cooperate in the investigation.

The High Court on Wednesday also directed the state to inform Abhishek about the number of police complaints against him across the state. The court was hearing his plea against alleged "unreasonable complaints for political vendetta" after the recent Assembly elections.

Diamond Harbour MP Abhishek Banerjee appears at Bidhannagar court to record his voice sample on Wednesday. PARTHA PAUL

Will rebuild party... have done earlier, will do it again: Mamata

Ravik Bhattacharya
Kolkata, July 15

AS ONE after another, Mamata Banerjee's closest aides abandoned her – the latest being Madan Mitra – the Trinamool Congress chief on Wednesday asserted that she would rebuild the party as she did in 2004.

Hours after Madan Mitra joined the rebel camp of the TMC and targeted Mamata's nephew and party's all-India general secretary, Abhishek Banerjee, the TMC supremo in a Facebook Live said, "In 2004, I was alone (the party had only one MP), and I rebuilt the party. I can do it now, too... I will rebuild the party. We have lakhs of party workers and youths who are with us. They will be our future leaders. I will act as an umbrella over them. I am not dying. I will live to fight on."

Claiming that the rebel TMC camp was being controlled by the ruling party, Mamata said, "Those who are on the BJP's lap have a lot of baggage. Those who are going to the (rebel) camp, which is controlled by the BJP, have a lot of luggage and baggage to protect..."

Mamata Banerjee addresses a social media live, Wednesday. PTI

She alleged that the BJP was using investigative agencies and police to engineer defections, and said that many leaders had crossed over out of fear. "We still have 18 MPs in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha. Those Parliamentarians who have joined the 'setting company' have done so because they are afraid of the police," she said.

The former CM said that she was with Sonam Wangchuk, who is on hungerstrike in New Delhi against the NEET paper leak, and demanding the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan.

"I spoke with him (Wangchuk) and enquired about his health. I had gone on a hungerstrike for 26 days protesting against forcible land acquisition (by the then Left Front government in Singur). As a result, we could give the land back to the farmers," she said, and urged party workers to attend the July 21 Martyrs' Day rally in Kolkata, which for the first time will be observed by her party near Birla Planetarium on the orders of the Calcutta High Court.

"For the past 40 years, we have observed July 21 Martyrs Day. They did not allow us to hold the rally in the Esplanade this time. However, I am grateful to the Calcutta High Court for allowing us to organise it near Birla Planetarium. I call everyone to be present there. However, I am telling our workers not to mistakenly go to other places (Mayo Road, where the rebel TMC will be holding a parallel programme). If police push you there, return to our venue," Mamata added.

Past corruption can land V-Cs in jail, says Minister

Press Trust of India
Kolkata, July 15

THE BJP government in the state sharpened its attack on the previous TMC dispensation over alleged corruption in the higher education sector, with higher education minister Jagannath Chattopadhyay hinting that the arrest of one or more university vice-chancellors for alleged irregularities under the former regime would not be surprising.

Chattopadhyay on Tuesday said the state's immediate priority was to create a "corruption-free and politics-free" education system after what he described as decades of "political interference, culminating in widespread irregularities during the Trinamool Congress' 15-year rule" in the state.

"You have already seen a former education minister go to jail. You have not yet seen university vice chancellors in jail. If in future you see one or two vice chancellors in Presidency, Dum Dum or Alipore (jails), there should be no reason to be surprised," Chattopadhyay said in an interview with news channel *ABP Ananda*.

Minister warns against neglect of Subhas Sarobar

Press Trust of India
Kolkata, July 15

URBAN DEVELOPMENT and Municipal Affairs Minister Agnimitra Paul on Wednesday expressed displeasure over the poor upkeep of Subhas Sarobar, alleging that the agency responsible for its maintenance had failed to deliver despite receiving lakhs of rupees every month from the government.

The minister visited the lake Wednesday morning to inspect the condition. "I had earlier visited Rabindra Sarobar, and today I inspected Subhas Sarobar. An agency has been entrusted with the maintenance of these places. Despite receiving lakhs of rupees, it is not doing the job. This state of affairs cannot continue," she told reporters.

During the inspection, she found heaps of garbage, inadequate water supply and lighting in public toilets, and a community hall that had remained neglected for a long time. She also interacted with regular morning walkers to take stock of the problems faced by visitors.

Paul said the government would not tolerate such negligence and warned of strict action against the agency.

Anubrata says Abhishek responsible for his jail stint

Press Trust of India
Kolkata, July 15

SENIOR TMC leader Anubrata Mondal on Wednesday launched a sharp attack on Abhishek Banerjee, alleging that the party's national general secretary was responsible for his imprisonment in the cattle smuggling case, and claimed he repeatedly urged Mamata Banerjee to sideline her nephew after the party's poll debacle.

The broadside came hours after veteran TMC MLA Madan Mitra formally joined the rebel camp led by Ritabrata Banerjee.

"Why did I go to jail? For whom did I go to jail? I went to jail because of Abhishek Banerjee," Mondal, already a part of the rebel group, told reporters while heading to a meeting of the Ritabrata-led faction.

Claiming that former chief minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee had called him four times after the TMC's crushing defeat in the assembly polls, the former Birbhum strongman said he had advised her to "listen with your ears, not your eyes" and remove Abhishek from the party's leadership structure.

"I told her, 'You don't see with your eyes, hear with your ears. Correct yourself. Remove Abhishek from the party'," he claimed.

TMC leader Anubrata Mondal

Mondal, arrested by the CBI in the multi-crore cattle smuggling case in August 2022 and later lodged in Delhi's Tihar Jail before securing bail, alleged that his imprisonment was the consequence of decisions taken by Abhishek, without elaborating on the basis of the charge.

The remarks marked a significant escalation in the internal war within the TMC, with the rebellion increasingly centring on Abhishek's leadership rather than directly targeting Mamata.

Mondal rejected similar suggestions in his case, insisting he had not changed sides because of any investigation.

Once the undisputed political heavyweight of Birbhum, Mondal had steadily lost organisational influence after returning from jail. His differences with district leader Kajal Sheikh became public, and he repeatedly complained of being kept away from poll management and campaign responsibilities during the assembly polls.

However, both Sheikh and Mondal have now joined the rebel TMC camp.

Following the TMC's defeat, Mondal had already blamed Abhishek and the election strategist I-PAC for the party's collapse.

• THE NEWSMAKER

In Cong, 'bit too colourful' Madan Mitra was in Mamata's rival camp; and now again

Larger-than-life public persona apart, Mitra was known for being most effective organiser and crowd mobiliser in TMC

Sweety Kumari
Kolkata, July 15

"A COLOURFUL boy who sometimes becomes a bit too colourful," is how former West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had once described one of her most "loyal footsoldiers" and former minister Madan Mitra, who on Wednesday crossed over to the "rebel" camp led by Leader of the Opposition Ritabrata Banerjee.

Mitra's move comes a day after the Enforcement Directorate (ED) summoned his family members for questioning in connection with the alleged municipal recruitment scam.

Born into an affluent business family in south Kolkata, Mitra studied History at Calcutta University, graduating in 1976. His political journey began in the turbulent student politics of the 1970s as a close aide of former Union minister Priyaranjan Dasmunsi. During his early years in the Congress, Mitra and Mamata belonged to rival factions despite being contemporaries.

By the 1990s, Mitra had emerged as a powerful Congress organiser in south Kolkata, challenging the Left Front's dominance. He built an extensive grassroots network by organising the taxi drivers' union, taking control of the influential staff union at SSKM Government Hospital, and cultivating close ties with neighbourhood youth clubs. He also developed a reputation for being accessible to residents irrespective of their political affiliation.

When Mamata floated the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) in 1998, Mitra joined her as a founding member. He was appointed the party's general secretary in 2000 and became president of the Trinamool Youth Congress in 2004. Within the party, he earned a reputation as one of its most effective organisers and crowd mobilisers.

Madan Mitra after being discharged from SSKM Hospital in 2021. FILE

Mitra first entered the West Bengal Assembly in 2011, winning from Kamarhati in North 24 Parganas after the TMC's historic victory and was inducted into Mamata's Cabinet, where he held key portfolios, including Sports and Youth Affairs and Transport.

His political career suffered a major setback on December 13, 2014, when the CBI arrested him in connection with the Saradha chit fund scam. Mitra spent over 27 months in custody, was briefly hospitalised in November 2015 after complaining of uneasiness, and secured bail in September 2016.

Unable to campaign personally because he was in jail, Mitra lost the 2016 Assembly election, with his son leading his campaign. He returned to the Assembly by winning Kamarhati in 2021 and retained the seat in the 2026 Assembly election.

Mitra has also cultivated a larger-than-life public persona. Unlike most politicians who favour white khadi, he is recognised for his brightly coloured outfits, designer sunglasses and distinctive footwear. He is highly active on social media, with around 740,000 followers on Facebook, frequently hosting Facebook Live sessions. He has also ventured into acting and singing, appearing in the Bengali film *Oh! Lovely*.

Announcing his departure, the three-term MLA said he had not left the party's ideology or symbol but blamed Mamata for "allowing her nephew Abhishek Banerjee to dominate the organisation". "I am not sad because I haven't left the party or its symbol. Mamata's biggest mistake has been prioritising Abhishek Banerjee. I was unable to work in a party which is run this way. All her soldiers are leaving because she no longer wants to run the party herself but only backs Abhishek. Even today, the TMC has the strength to fill the Brigade Parade Ground. More than the ED, I was scared of AB (Abhishek Banerjee)...," he claimed.

'Defaming Ayodhya unfair': Yogi on temple 'theft'

Express News Service
Lucknow, July 15

UTTAR PRADESH Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday said that the Ram temple donation 'theft' row has hurt the sentiments of Rambhakts and asserted that it should not be used to defame Ayodhya or the Ram Janmabhoomi movement.

Speaking at an event organised by *Aaj Tak* in Lucknow, the Chief Minister said, "Ayodhya *ki ghatna ne nischit hi hum sab Rambhakton ki aastha ko aahat kiya hai* (The Ayodhya incident has hurt the faith of every Ram devotee like us)."

This comes a day after Adityanath acknowledged the alleged theft of donations at the Ram Temple was "unfortunate" but said it was the BJP that established Ayodhya as the cultural capital of Sanatan Dharma.

Hitting out at the Opposition for targeting the BJP over the donation 'theft' issue, the CM on Wednesday said his government acted promptly and constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe allegations of the donation theft on the Temple Trust's request.

"The government has no right to interfere in the functioning of the trust. As soon as the SIT report came, the Trust started to take action. The six people, who were caught stealing in the CCTV footage, were arrested. Those who were helping them were also arrested. And along with the arrests, two resignations (of Trust general secretary Champat Rai and trustee Anil Mishra) were given on moral grounds.

"But to defame Ayodhya, to defame Shri Ram Janmabhoomi, and to attack the faith of Hindus using this incident — how is this justified? And that is why today the question arises that when these people were in power, they used to attack faith, they reached the peak of hooliganism, and in every possible way they carried out acts that hurt religious faith," added Adityanath.

Questioning the Congress and Samajwadi Party for raising the issue of faith in the theft case, Adityanath said, "Those who used to ban Kanwar Yatra, those who used to ban Ram Navami procession, Krishna Janmashtami, are today talking about faith. How ridiculous it is."

"Those who had bullets fired at devotees of Lord Ram talk about faith today... Those who filed an affidavit in the country's Supreme Court stating that Ram and Krishna never even existed are today talking about faith. Those who, under every circumstance, tried to ensure that the Ram Temple was not built in Ayodhya... are today talking about faith," he added. He added, "Those who, by getting namaz offered on the steps of the sacred Hanumangarhi, tried to vitiate the atmosphere. If you were secular, then if you were getting namaz offered at one place, you should also have had the Hanuman Chalisa recited in a mosque simultaneously.

Stone-pelting, arson as mob targets Assam Rifles camp in Manipur

Sukrita Baruah
Guwahati, July 15

TENSIONS ESCALATED in Manipur's Senapati district on Tuesday night, after a mob gathered at an Assam Rifles camp in Senapati town following the security force's launch of a search operation for suspected armed cadres of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah) (NSCN (IM)), said a defence spokesperson.

The mob resorted to stone-pelting, arson and vandalism at the camp, and security forces resorted to firing blank rounds and teargas grenades to disperse them, said officials.

Charred remains of a vehicle after a mob attacked an Assam Rifles camp late Tuesday in Senapati district, Manipur. PTI

According to a Ministry of Defence spokesperson, the Assam Rifles had launched an area domination patrol and search operation on Tuesday based on "credible intelligence inputs regarding the presence of armed cadres in the general area of Makuilongdi, approximately 2 kilometres west of the designated NSCN (IM) camp at Oklong" in Senapati.

The NSCN(IM) has been in a ceasefire agreement with the Centre since 1997, and according to the spokesperson, their intelligence inputs and posts on social media indicated the presence of armed cadres outside designated camps ,in violation of the Ceasefire Ground Rules.

The official Ceasefire Monitoring Group was also formally informed about this.

"During the course of the operation, the Assam Rifles columns approaching Makuilongdi and Oklong villages were obstructed by residents, involving women. The columns exercised maximum restraint and communicated with the local representatives, assuring that the operations were aimed solely at ensuring security and maintaining peace in the area and that the columns would not enter any village without the consent of the authorities," said an official.

Tensions continued to escalate, culminating in a large crowd gathering at Senapati town at around 9 pm and beginning to march towards the Assam Rifles camp, where they reportedly pelted stones and attempted arson. The Senapati police and CRPF were deployed to disperse the mob, and blank rounds and teargas grenades were fired.

"Later, while retreating, a section of the mob vandalised and damaged Assam Rifles vehicles. One light vehicle was set ablaze, while two trucks were overturned and damaged. A civil car was also reportedly burnt during the violence. Through the coordinated efforts of the security forces, Manipur Police and CRPF personnel, the situation was brought under control and the crowd fully dispersed by midnight. The situation in Senapati is presently peaceful and under control. No injuries or casualties were sustained by the local population or security force personnel," said the official.

पंजाब नैशनल बैंक (भारत सरकार का उपक्रम) pnb punjab national bank (Govt. of India Undertaking)

E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE

CO-SAMD: MALDA, BSNL OFFICE, 2ND FLOOR, COLLERCTRATE OFFICE MALDA, DISTRICT - MALDA
Pin - 732101, E-Mail : comaldarec@ pnb.bank.in

E Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets Under SARFAESI Act, 2002 and Proviso to Rules 8(6) r/w Proviso to Rule 9 (1) of the SI (Enforcement) Rules, 2002

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the constructive/physical/ symbolic possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of the Bank / Secured Creditor, will be sold on **"As is where is", "As is what is"**, and **"Whatever there is"** on the date as mentioned in the table herein below, for recovery of its dues due to the Bank/ Secured Creditor from the respective borrower (s) and guarantor (s). The reserve price and the earnest money deposit is mentioned in the table below against the respective properties.

Date / Time of E-Auction : 04/08/2026, 11:00 AM to 04:00 PM and Last Date of Deposit of EMD : 04/08/2026 till 3:00PM
CO-SAMD, Malda, Sangita Nayak, Chief Manager (Authorized Officer), Mobile No. 7752029885
E- Auction Collection A/c. Details : Account Name : RTGS-INTERBANK ACCOUNT, A/c. 9065003171165A (IFSC- PUNB0906500)

SCHEDULE OF THE SECURED ASSETS

LOT NO.	Name of the Branch / Name of the Account / Name & addresses of the Borrower/Guarantors Account	Description of the Immovable Properties Mortgaged / Owner's Name (Mortgagers of Property(ies))	A) Date of Demand Notice u/s 13(2) of SARFAESI ACT 2002 B) Outstanding Amount as on ..... C) Possession Date u/s 13(4) of SARFAESI ACT 2002 D) Nature of Possession Symbolic / Physical/Constructive	A) Reserve Price (Rs. in Lacs) B) EMD C) Bid Increase Amount
1.	**Gangarampur (Sol ID : 023620)** **Mantu Sarkar, A/c. No. 0236250325592** **Borrower & Mortgagor : Mr. Mantu Sarkar** S/o. Padendranath Sarkar Indranarayanpur (Dakshin Sahapara) P. O. & P. S. - Gangarampur District - Dakshin Dinajpur West Bengal, Pin - 732124	All that part and parcel of Land and building situated at J. L. No. 85, Ward No. 10, Previous Khatian No. 121 & Present L. R. Khatian No. 2450, Plot No. R. S. 401 L. R. 1195, Mouza - Indranarayanpur, P. S. - Gangarampur, District - Dakshin Dinajpur, Classification - Bastu, measuring total land area 6.00 Shatak as per Deed **in the name of Mantu Sarkar,** S/o. Padendranath Sarkar, mortgaged through registered Deed No. 04022/2009, Dated 12.08.2009. **Boundary as per Deed :** North - Basudev Sarkar, South - Arunava Das, East - Road, West - Basudev Sarkar.	A) **11.08.2025** B) **Rs. 8,31,529.53** (Rupees Eight Lakh Thirty One Thousand Five Hundred Twenty Nine and Paise Fifty Three Only) with Further interest, less recovery, if any w.e.f **01.08.2025** plus other charges C) **12.11.2025** D) **Symbolic Possession**	A) **Rs. 9.18 Lakh** B) **Rs. 0.918 Lakh** C) **Rs. 0.20 Lakh**
2.	**Gangarampur (Sol ID : 023620)** **Fajlur Rahman, A/c. No. 0236250326933** **Borrower : Mr. Fajlur Rahman** S/o- Panchkaria Sarkar, Village - Narasundar Para P. O. - Burudighi, P. S. - Gangarampur District - Dakshin Dinajpur, West Bengal, Pin - 733124. **Guarantor & Mortgagor : Mrs. Chhabina Bibi** W/o. Md. Fajlur Rahman, Village - Narasundar Para P. O. : Burudighi, P. S. - Gangarampur District - Dakshin Dinajpur, West Bengal, Pin - 733124	Mortgage of **land in the name of Chhabina Khatun,** situated at Mouza - Fulbari, P. S. - Gangarampur, District - Dakshin Dinajpur, J. L. No. 197, Khatian No. 732, Plot Nos. 90 & 91, measuring total area 0.17 Acre, Nature : Bastu, Deed No. 4122 of 2012. **Boundary -** North : Property of Samsuddin Sarkar, South : Baniya, East : Property of Gopinath Bharati, West - Basak.	A) **04.01.2022** B) **Rs. 20,07,156.49** (Rupees Twenty Lakh Seven Thousand One Hundred Fifty Six and Paise Forty Nine only) **as on 03.01.2022** with further interest at the contracted rate, less recovery if any, w.e.f. **04.01.2022** plus other charges, as mentioned in the Demand Notice. C) **11.05.2022** D) **Symbolic Possession**	A) **Rs. 26.01 Lakh** B) **Rs. 2.601 Lakh** C) **Rs. 0.20 Lakh**
3.	**Gangarampur (Sol ID : 023620)** **Ganesh Halder, A/c. No. 0236250333597** **Borrower & Mortgagor : Ganesh Halder** S/o. Late Mahadeb Halder Village - West Halderpara, Rajibpur P. O. & P. S. - Gangarampur, District - Dakshin Dinajpur, Pin - 733124 **Guarantor / Mortgagor :** **1. Annapurna Halder,** W/o. Mahadeb Halder **2. Smt. Papi Halder,** D/o. Late Mahadeb Halder **3. Smt. Chhabi Halder,** D/o. Late Mahadeb Halder **4. Sri Kartick Halder,** S/o. Late Mahdeb Halder **5. Smt. Papi Halder,** D/o. Late Mahadeb Halder **All are at :** Village - West Halderpara, Rajibpur P. O. & P. S. - Gangarampur, District - Dakshin Dinajpur West Bengal, Pin - 733124	All that part and parcel of property consisting of Land & Building situated at J. L. No. 84, L. R. Khatian Nos. 11630, 11631, 11632, 11633, 11634, L. R. Plot No. 178, Mouza - Rajibpur, P. S. - Gangarampur, District- Dakshin Dinajpur, Classification - Bastu measuring total Land area of 5.25 Decimal, **in the name of Sri Ganesh Halder**, S/o. Late Mahadeb Halder, **Sri Kartick Halder,** S/o. Late Mahadeb Halder, **Smt. Papi Halder**, D/o. Mahadeb Halder, **Smt. Chhabi Halder**, D/o. Late Mahadeb Halder, **Smt . Annapurna Halder**, W/o. Late Mahadeb Halder mortgaged through registered Deed bearing Deed No. 6837 Dated 18/12/1992 and Deed No. 6815 Dated 16/12/1992.	A) **27.09.2024** B) **Rs. 13,91,119.07** (Rupees Thirteen Lakhs Ninety One Thousand One Hundred Nineteen and Paise Seven only) **as on 31.08.2024** with further interest at the contractual rate, less recovery if any w.e.f **01/09/2024** plus other charges as mentioned in Demand Notice C) **20.12.2024** D) **Symbolic Possession**	A) **Rs. 26.14 Lakh** B) **Rs. 2.614 Lakh** C) **Rs. 0.20 Lakh**
4.	**Gangarampur (Sol ID : 023620)** **Sebika Medical Hall, A/c. No. 0236250321686** **Borrower : Sebika Medical Hall** **Proprietor - Sebina Sarkar** W/o. Abul Kalam Azad Uttarpar (Dhaldighi), P. O. & P. S. - Gangarampur Distrcit - Dakshin Dinajpur, West Bengal, Pin - 733124 **Guarantor / Mortgagor : Abul Kalam Azad** S/o. Jamil Miah Uttarpar (Dhaldighi), P. O. & P. S. - Gangarampur Distrcit - Dakshin Dinajpur, West Bengal, Pin - 733124	All that part and parcel of Land and Building situated at J. L. No. 84, Ward No. 17, previous L. R. Khatian Nos. 3379, 3380, 3381 & Present L. R. Khatian No. 8517, Plot No. R. S. 3830, L. R. 4952, Mouza - Rajibpur, P. S. - Gangarampur, District - Dakshin Dinajpur, Classification - Bastu, measuring total Land area 3.50 Decimal as per Deed (4.00 Decimal as per ROR), **in the name of Abul Kalam Azad**, S/o. Jamil Miah, mortgaged through registered Deed No. 02195/2008 dated 07/05/2008. **Boundary as per Deed :** North - Land of Nibaran Ch. Bhowmick, South - Black Top Road - Rabindra Sarani, East - Land of Ramendra Nath Bhowmick, West - Land of Nibaran Ch. Bhowmick.	A) **25.07.2025** B) **Rs. 9,56,132.30** (Rupees Nine Lakh Fifty Six Thousand One Hundrerd Thirty Two And Paise Thirty only) **as on date 30.06.2025** with further interest at the contractual rate, less recovery if any, w.e.f **01.07.2025** plus other charges as mentioned in Demand Notice C) **12.11.2025** D) **Symbolic Possession**	A) **Rs. 56.25 Lakh** B) **Rs. 5.625 Lakh** C) **Rs. 0.20 Lakh**
5.	**Kaliachak (Sol ID. 029320)** **M/s. Mr. Faruk Sekh, A/c. No. 0293210304450** **Borrower : Mr. Farukh Sekh** S/o. Late Jumman Sekh Village & Post - Bahadurpur, P. S. Kaliachak District - Malda, West Bengal, Pin - 732201 **Guarantor : Mrs. Duli Bibi** W/o. Md. Faruk Sekh Village & Post - Bahadurpur, P. S. Kaliachak District - Malda, West Bengal, Pin - 732201	All that part and parcel of land and building situated at J. L. No. 74, L. R. Khatian No. 692, Present Khatian No. 5560, Dag No. 1769, Mouza - Bahadurpur, P. S. -Kaliachak, District - Malda, Classification - Bastu, measuring total land area 6 Decimal, **in the name of Md. Farukh Sekh**, S/o. Late Jumman Sekh, mortgaged through registered Deed No. 6337/2010 registered on 26.03.2010. **Boundary as per Deed :** North - Property of Mulia Sekh, South - Property of Serajul Sekh, East - Property of Jahiruddin, West - Property of Irshad Sekh and Gram Panchayat Road.	A) **30.09.2015 & 19.06.2025** B) **Rs. 21,92,008.36** (Rupees Twenty One Lakh Ninety Two Thousand Eight and Paise Thirty Six only) **as on 31.05.2025** and interest thereon w.e.f. **01.06.2025,** less recovery if any & other charges as mentioned in Demand Notice C) **08.09.2025** D) **Symbolic Possession**	A) **Rs. 13.95 Lakh** B) **Rs. 1.395 Lakh** C) **Rs. 0.20 Lakh**
6.	**Kaliachak (Sol ID. 029320)** **Joni Hossain, A/c. No. 0293210304399** **Borrower : Joni Hussain** S/o. Naju Momin Baliadhanga (Ansaripara), P. O. - Kaliachak District - Malda, West Bengal, Pin - 732201 **Guarantor / Mortgagor : Naju Momin** S/o. Samir Momin Baliadhanga (Ansaripara), P. O. - Kaliachak District - Malda, West Bengal, Pin - 732201	All that part and parcel of property consisting of Land and Building situated at J. L. No. 72, R. S. Khatian Nos. 443, 437, L. R. Khatian Nos. 1073, 2028, 1829, 12/17, 3286, 1661, 7730, 3951 at present L. R. Khatian No. 7729, Plot Nos. 756, 772/2702, Mouza - Balidhanga, P. S. - Kaliachak, District - Malda, Classifification - Bastu, measuring total land area of (6.530 + 0.750 + 0.188 = 7.468 Decimal), **in the name of Naju Momin**, S/o. Samir Momin mortgaged through registered Deed bearing Deed Nos. 5765/2011, 5798/2011, 7588/2011,2571/2005 and Deed of Hebanama 4708/2013. **Bounded :** North - Property of Goleshtha Bibi & NH 34, South - Property of Dulal Ghosh, East - Property of Goleshtha Bibi, West - Property of Phani Dutta.	A) **31.03.2021 & 31.05.2025** B) **Rs. 7,68,949.24** (Rupees Seven Lakhs Sixty Eight Thousand Nine Hundred Forty Nine and Paise Twenty Four only) **as on date 31.03.2025** with further interest at contractual rate, less recovery if any w.e.f. **01.04.2025** plus other charges mentioned in Demand Notice. C) **25.08.2025** D) **Symbolic Possession**	A) **Rs. 72.98 Lakh** B) **Rs. 7.298 Lakh** C) **Rs. 0.20 Lakh**
7.	**Safanagar (Sol. ID 136620)** **Matleb Miah, A/c. No. 1366250031611** **Borrower & Mortgagor : Matleb Miah** S/o. Chhamad Miah Village & Post - Safanagar, P. S. - Kumarganj District - Dakshin Dinajpur, West Bengal, Pin - 733141	All that part and parcel of land and Building situated at J. L. No. 47, L. R. Khatian No. 346 (Old), Present Khatian No. 2337, Plot No. 6569, Mouza - Safanagar, P. S. - Kumarganj, District - Dakshin Dinajpur, measuring total Land area 11.00 Decimal converted & mortgaged area 10.00 Decimal, Classification in Bastu **in the name of Matleb Miah**, S/o. Chhamad Miah, mortgaged through registered gift Deed No. 3111/ 2013 dated 30/08/2013. Boundary as per NEC Dated - 14/01/2014. **Boundary as perv. Deed :** North - Moklej Mia, South - Bivash Das & Sribash Das, East - Santosh Sarkar, West - PWD Road.	A) **03.07.2025** B) **Rs. 15,09,617.05** (Rupees Fifteen Lakhs Nine Thousand Six Hundred Seventeen and Paise Five only) **as on 30.06.2025** with further interest at the contractual rate, less recovery if any, w.e.f. **01.07.2025** plus other charges as mentioned in Demand Notice C) **10.09.2025** D) **Symbolic Possession**	A) **Rs. 6.70 Lakh** B) **Rs. 0.670 Lakh** C) **Rs. 0.20 Lakh**
8.	**Dikul (Sol. ID 136120)** **Mamulka Pravin, A/c. No. 1361306710561** **Mrs. Mamluka Parvin** W/o. Mr. Enamul Islam, Village - Hanahar Para (Jothar), P. O. - Sihole P. S. - Kushmandi, District - Dakshin Dinajpur, West Bengal, Pin - 733121 **Legal Heirs of Deceased Co-Borrower & Mortgagor :** **Mr. Chhabedi Ali,** S/o. Mr. Ahammad Ali **Mr. Khademul Islam,** S/o. Late Mr. Chhabedi Ali **Mr. Jaherul Islam,** S/o. Late Mr. Chhabedi Ali **Mr. Anamul Islam,** S/o. Late Mr. Chhabedi Ali **All are at :** Village - Hanahar Para (Jothar), P.O. - Sihole P. S. - Kushmandi, District-Dakshin Dinajpur-733121 **Guarantor & Mortgagor : Mrs. Joyeda Bibi,** W/o. Md. Hazi Abdus Sahaid, Village - Khikhirbona, P. O. - Uttar Dariapur P. S. - Kaliachak, District - Malda, West Bengal, Pin - 732212 **Guarantor : Md. Mainul Hoque,** S/o. Abul Sahid, Village - Khikhirbona, P. O. - Uttar Dariapur P. S. - Kaliachak, District - Malda, West Bengal, Pin - 732212	All that part and parcel of land and building situated at J. L No. 195, L. R. Khatian No. 654, L. R. Plot No. 237/679, Mouza - Jothhar, P. S. - Kushmandi, District - Dakshin Dinajpur, Classification - Bastu, measuring total land area 2 Decimal, **in the name of Sh. Chhabed Ali,** S/o. Late Ahammad Ali, mortgaged through registered Deed No. 964/2007. **Boundary as per Deed :** North - Majidur Rahamn, South - Manchd Ali, East - Saidur Rahman, West - Pond.	A) **06.06.2025** B) **Rs. 4,15,457.86** (Rupees Four Lakh Fifteen Thousand Four Hundred Fifty Seven and Paise Eighty Six only), with further interest, less recovery, if any w.e.f. **01.06.2025** plus Other charges, as mentioned in Demand Notice **20.09.2025** C) **20.09.2025** D) **Symbolic Possession**	A) **Rs. 13.70 Lakh** B) **Rs. 1.370 Lakh** C) **Rs. 0.20 Lakh**

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

The sale shall be subject to the Terms & Conditions prescribed in the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002 and to the following further conditions :

1. The properties are being sold on **"AS IS WHERE IS BASIS"** and **"AS IS WHAT IS BASIS"** and **"WHATEVER THERE IS BASIS"**
2. The particulars of Secured Assets specified in the Schedule hereinabove have been stated to the best of the information of the Authorised Officer, but the Authorised Officer shall not be answerable for any error, misstatement or omission in this proclamation.
3. The Sale will be done by the undersigned through e-auction platform provided at the Website https://baanknet.com on date and time mentioned above.
4. The sale shall be confirmed in favour of the purchaser who has offered the highest sale price in his bid or tender or quotation or offer to the authorized officer and shall be subject to confirmation by the secured creditor.
5. For detailed term and conditions of the sale, please refer **https://baanknet.com & www.pnb.bank.in**
6. Details of Encumbrance known to the secured creditors: Not Known

Date : 14.07.2026
Place : Malda

Authorized Officer
Punjab National Bank, Secured Creditor

STATUTORY SALE NOTICE UNDER RULE 8(6) OF THE SARFAESI ACT, 2002

After performance review, a shake-up: MP minister loses his portfolio, CM takes over

Anand Mohan J
Bhopal, July 15

IN THE first significant reshuffle of responsibilities following a review of his ministers' performance, Chief Minister Mohan Yadav has withdrawn the Animal Husbandry and Dairy Development portfolio from Minister of State (Independent Charge) Lakhan Patel and placed the department under his own charge.

An order issued by the General Administration Department late Tuesday reassigned Patel to the Anand (Happiness) Department, making him its minister in place of the Animal Husbandry and Dairy Development Department. No official reason has been cited so far.

The decision came weeks after Yadav conducted individual performance review meetings with members of his Council of Ministers and assessed the functioning of their respective departments. Sources said the decision followed a review of Patel's performance after he failed to open cow shelters in the state under the Public Private Partnership (PPP) mode. The findings of those reviews are understood to have been shared with the BJP's central leadership, fuelling speculation of a wider Cabinet reshuffle in the coming weeks.

Patel, a second-term MLA from Patharia in Damoh district, was among the first-time legislators inducted into the Yadav ministry after the BJP retained power in the 2023 Assembly elections. An OBC leader from the Bundelkhand region, he had been handling the Animal Husbandry and Dairy Development Department since the formation of the government.

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav honours police personnel by pinning a star and ribbon during his Ujjain visit on Wednesday. ANI

With Tuesday's order, the chief minister has assumed direct control of the department, now maintaining direct oversight of a key sector linked to dairy production, livestock welfare and rural livelihoods. Raising the state's milk production to join the club of India's top producers has been one of the CM's objectives.

The change also marks the second time in two years that a first-time minister has lost a major portfolio. In July 2024, Cabinet Minister Nagarsingh Chouhan was divested of the forest department and shifted to the Scheduled Castes Welfare Department. The forest portfolio was then assigned to Ramniwas Rawat after he joined the BJP from the Congress ahead of the Lok Sabha polls. Chouhan had expressed his disappointment over the decision and even indicated that he was considering resigning from the ministry.

Tuesday's reshuffle is likely to intensify speculation that more ministers could see their responsibilities altered as the CM fine-tunes his Cabinet after the internal performance assessment. With the latest change, the CM now directly oversees 11 departments, including General Administration, Home, Public Relations, Industrial Policy and Investment Promotion, Narmada Valley Development, Aviation, Mineral Resources, Public Service Management, Non-Resident Indians, and Animal Husbandry and Dairy Development.

SC considers SOP to hear urgent liberty, life cases after working hours

Express News Service
New Delhi, July 15

THE SUPREME Court on Tuesday agreed to consider implementing a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to facilitate access to constitutional courts during off-duty hours in urgent matters involving questions of life and personal liberty.

A three-judge bench, presided over by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, issued notice on a plea filed by Advocate Maheravish Rein, who said that, as of now, litigants find it difficult to access the courts at night.

"My grievance is if I am a poor man, I want to have access to justice, I can only access the legal aid committee during the day, not at night. I can access the court only during the day, not at night," she told the bench, also comprising Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V Mohana.

She referred to Article 32(4) of the Constitution which says, "The right guaranteed by this Article (to move the SC for enforcement of fundamental rights) shall not be suspended except as otherwise provided for by this Constitution."

She submitted that even in urgent matters, when applications are filed, the litigants have to wait until the next morning for them to be heard.

Justice Bagchi pointed out that there have been instances when the SC has sat even at night, but counsel said this does not happen in every needy litigant's case.

IIT Bombay's new finding could make drug discovery 'faster, cheaper, more sustainable'

Amitabh Sinha
New Delhi, July 15

SCIENTISTS AT IIT Bombay have found a novel and efficient way to convert simple, abundantly-available, straight-chain carbon compounds into complex ring-shaped molecules that can be building blocks for medicinal or other valuable chemicals.

Their new method claims to solve a long-standing problem in synthetic chemistry: Conversion of long, straight-chain carbon molecules into ring-shaped molecules, which, at present, involves a multi-step process that is time-consuming and expensive. The research, led by Professor Debabrata Maiti of IIT Bombay, has been published in the prestigious Nature journal. Maiti said the newly-developed method could make drug discovery faster, cheaper and more sustainable.

Straight-chain carbon compounds like fatty acids are some of the most commonly available chemicals in nature. On the other hand, many of the biologically-relevant organic compounds, including several drugs, have ring-shaped molecular structures. Scientists often go through a multi-step process to convert the easily-available fatty acids into more useful molecules with a variety of applications.

E. EXPLAINED

Solving a problem in synthetic chemistry

Straight-chain carbon compounds such as fatty acids are some of the most commonly available chemicals in nature. On the other hand, many of the biologically-relevant organic compounds, including several drugs, have ring-shaped molecular structures. Scientists often go through a multi-step process to convert the fatty acids into more useful molecules. The new method solves this long-standing problem in synthetic chemistry.

In simple fatty acids, several carbon atoms are linked to each other in a long straight chain. Many of these carbon atoms are indistinguishable from each other. This makes it extremely difficult to chemically target any specific carbon atom in the chain from where the sequence leading to ring formation could be initiated. Usually, multiple sites in the chain could be affected. Because of this, conversion could be achieved only through a long process involving multiple steps.

The research team at IIT Bombay, which included Maiti's students Tanay Pal, Md Saimuddin Sk, Animesh Ghosh and Yazhinimuthu CM, was able to make a breakthrough with the development of a new chemical compound which proved to be crucial in the selective targeting of the desired carbon atom in the long chain. The use of this new chemical entity achieved the conversion in fewer steps, with much greater efficiency and significantly reduced chemical wastage. Somnath Kar from Bhabha Atomic Research Centre collaborated on the research.

Maiti told *The Indian Express* that the significance of the breakthrough lay in the fact that the method was not limited to conversion of any specific single molecule into a desired compound, but was a general process applicable to a wide array of organic compounds. "The method acts as a platform that can quickly convert simple saturated fatty acids into many different bioactive molecules. This could help scientists study and improve compounds used in traditional medicine systems such as Ayurveda, and speed up their development into modern drugs," he said.

In fact, researchers used their new method to synthesize more than 10 biologically and industrially relevant molecules that have applications in medicinal chemistry, chemical biology and the perfume and flavour industries. These included a molecule called muricatacin, which is naturally found in Laxman phal (sour-sop) and is believed to have anti-cancer properties. Extracting muricatacin from naturally-occurring substances is considered extremely difficult and inefficient. Only about 15 mg of muricatacin is obtained from about 15 kg of plant material, and that too is mixed with other substances, Maiti said.

The researchers were able to synthesize muricatacin in the laboratory in an easy and more efficient manner by converting other fatty acids. They were then able to modify this compound in such a manner that it exhibited anti-cancer properties comparable to muricatacin obtained from natural plants.

Names deleted from rolls still entitled to certain benefits: SC

Express News Service
New Delhi, July 15

OBSERVING THAT those deleted from the electoral rolls in West Bengal may still be entitled to some benefits like ration, the Supreme Court on Wednesday asked a man who sought non-cancellation of ration card to move the jurisdictional High Court.

"You are right. Even if your name is removed from the electoral roll, you are entitled to certain benefits. But those benefits can be granted by the High Court very well...", Chief Justice of India Surya Kant presiding over a three-judge bench remarked orally.

The bench also comprising Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V. Mohana was hearing a plea by West Bengal resident Mohibulla Mondal, seeking its intervention to prevent cancellation or suspension of his ration card.

He referred to a June 4 order issued by the state's Department of Food and Supplies last month and expressed apprehension that he may be denied ration as his name was deleted during the revision.

The petitioner added that his appeal challenging his deletion from voters list is pending before the appellate tribunal set by the SC.

Senior Advocate Shadan Farasat said the question would arise in several matters and the Supreme Court should clarify the position in any one matter.

The CJI said "...we will clarify in 100 matters if need be. But we are quite sure the High Courts will not give us a chance to clarify. They will understand this very well. You are entitled to certain benefits. Go through jurisdictional High Courts, they will grant it."

The Chief Justice of India added that if Mondal's appeal is allowed by the Tribunal, then the entire exercise would become academic. The Supreme Court, meanwhile, also asked the Tribunal to decide the appeal preferably in the next two months.

Odisha woman lost during Rath Yatra 10 yrs ago found in Bengal — with Ham radio help

The octogenarian was living in senior citizen home in Murshidabad

Antoreep Das
Kolkata, July 15

Bela Behera will reunite with her family this Rath Yatra. EXPRESS

NEARLY A decade after she disappeared while stepping out to buy flowers for Lord Jagannath during Rath Yatra, an elderly woman from Odisha is set to reunite with her family, thanks to the efforts of a government-run senior citizen home, a court directive and volunteers from the West Bengal Radio Club - HAM Radio.

Bela Behera, a resident of Ganjam district in Odisha, was around 70 when she went missing nearly 10 years ago after leaving home to buy flowers for worship. A flower seller by profession, she had raised her three sons, all now businessmen, and was living with her youngest son, Keshab, before she disappeared.

She was later rescued in West Bengal and, following a court order, admitted to the Central Government-run Tokiya Senior Citizen Home in Jiaganj, Murshidabad. Despite repeated attempts by police and the home's authorities, her identity remained unknown as she spoke only Odia and could not communicate in any other language.

Back in Odisha, her family continued searching for her. According to her sons, they stopped attending the annual Rath Yatra in Puri after her disappearance. Having visited the festival with their mother since childhood, they instead prayed to Lord Jagannath for her safe return, hoping they would one day make the pilgrimage together again.

The breakthrough came after the Berhampore Court recently directed the authorities to expedite efforts to reunite Bela with her family. Following the order, Arpita Lahiri, Superintendent of the Tokiya Senior Citizen Home, sought help from the West Bengal Radio Club.

Using the HAM radio network, volunteers traced Bela's native village in Ganjam district and located her family. During a video call arranged by the volunteers, Bela's youngest son saw his mother for the first time in nearly a decade. "You are Lord Jagannath's messengers. It is the Lord who has sent you to bring my mother back," he told the volunteers, breaking down.

The reunion comes amid personal tragedy. Bela's mother died just 10 days ago after spending her final days asking about her missing daughter and praying for her return. During the video call, Bela and her son struggled to speak as both were overcome with emotion.

Keshab is expected to travel to Murshidabad to complete the formalities and take his mother home to Odisha. The family now plans to visit Puri together during this year's Rath Yatra — a pilgrimage they had put off for nearly 10 years while waiting for Bela's return. For Bela's family, the reunion brings to an end a decade-long search sustained by hope and faith in Lord Jagannath.

ANTOREEP DAS IS AN INTERN AT KOLKATA OFFICE OF THE INDIAN EXPRESS

Police busts sex racket in Kolkata hotel; rescues minor

Press Trust of India
Kolkata, July 15

A 15-YEAR-OLD girl and two women were rescued after Kolkata Police busted an alleged sex racket operating from a hotel in the southern part of the city's Kasba area, leading to the arrest of four persons, a senior officer said on Wednesday.

Two traffickers and the hotel's manager and receptionist are among the arrested, he said.

The operation was carried out following a tip-off received through an NGO about alleged prostitution being run from the hotel, the officer said. Preliminary investigation revealed that customers were allegedly lured through social media, while girls and young women were brought to the city on the promise of jobs.

Detectives laid a trap and raided the hotel, rescuing the minor and two women.

MUNICIPAL CORPORATION OF DELHI
REMUNERATIVE PROJECT CELL
Office Of The Assistant Commissioner, E-1 Block, 25th Floor, Dr. S.P.M, Civic Centre, Minto Road, New Delhi-110002

E-TENDER FOR ALLOTMENT OF AUTHORIZED SURFACE PARKING SITES OF MCD ON MONTHLY LICENSE FEE BASIS.

PRESS NOTICE E-TENDER

E-Bids are invited on behalf of Worthy Commissioner, MCD from eligible bidders for allotment of 35 nos. of authorised surface parking sites (including 02 clusters) under the jurisdiction of MCD on Monthly License Fee (MLF) basis in two bid system (Technical and Financial) for a period of three years and extendable further up to two more years, subject to satisfactory performance of the firm and as decided by the Competent Authority vide Tender NIT No.767 dated 13.07.2026. The Schedule of bids are as follows :-

1) **Bid Download Start Date :** 14.07.2026 from 03:00 PM onwards,
2) **Pre-bid Meeting :** 23.07.2026 at 03:00 PM, MCD Conference Hall at 25th Floor, Civic Centre,
3) **Bid submission start date:** 14.07.2026 from 03:00 PM onwards,
4) **Last date of Submission of E-Tender:** 04.08.2026 upto 03:00 PM,
5) **Opening date of Technical Bids:** 05.08.2026 from 03:00 PM onwards at RP Cell/MCD at E-1 Block, 25th Floor, Civic Centre (For details visit MCDs website **www.mcdonline.nic.in** and **www.etenders.gov.in** Contact number : 011-23227514.

Assistant Commissioner, R.P. Cell/MCD

RO No. 19/DPI/MCD/2025-26

PROTEST AGAINST NEET PAPER LEAK

Wangchuk's condition stable, but next few days could prove critical: Doctors

Activist Sonam Wangchuk has been on a hunger strike since June 28. TASHI TOBGYAL

Pragynesh
New Delhi, July 15

MOST OF activist Sonam Wangchuk's days are now spent lying on the corner of a raised platform at Jantar Mantar, where supporters of the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) have been protesting for the last 20 days, demanding the removal of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan. Wangchuk has been on a hunger strike for 18 of those 20 days, surviving only on water and salt. Doctors say he remains stable, but the next few days could prove critical.

At least twice every day, a team of four to five doctors from Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital visits Wangchuk. They are accompanied by Dr Satish Lamba, who was the secretary of the Delhi Medical Association until this March. They monitor his blood pressure, blood sugar, weight and other vital parameters. "As of now, he is stable," Dr Lamba said. "But he has lost around 9 kg over the last 17 days. Since yesterday alone, he has lost another 400 gm and now weighs about 57.15 kg."

Dr Lamba said that the only silver lining is that Wangchuk does not have any underlying heath conditions, including hypertension and diabetes. While Wangchuk's blood pressure on Wednesday was 110/70 mmHg and his blood sugar measured 80 mg/dL, doctors said the prolonged fast is beginning to take a toll. He said that uric acid is increasing in Wangchuk's body, which means that he will soon start losing muscle if the fast continues.

On Wednesday, a PIL was filed in the Delhi HC by a lawyer, Rakesh Saini, seeking that Wangchuk be force-fed. The PIL states that Sonam might "lose his life in two days", as he continues to lose weight. It sought that he be shifted to a government hospital immediately, as his death would be a "matter of great shame for the country".

CENTRAL UNIVERSITY OF HARYANA
MAHENDERGARH (HARYANA) - 123031

WALK-IN-INTERVIEW

Ref. No.: CUH/2026/Estt.Sec./T/579 Date: 15.07.2026

The Walk-in-Interview for engagement of **Guest Faculty** in various departments will be held on **22, 23, 24 & 25th July 2026 at 09:00 AM** in the Administrative Block, Central University of Haryana, Mahendergarh. Details regarding departments, vacancies, reservation, eligibility, prescribed application form, and general instructions are available on the University website **www.cuh.ac.in.**

REGISTRAR

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Container Corporation of India Ltd. shall be auctioning scrap items, empty damage containers and unclaimed/uncleared imported cargo landed at the terminals of Area 1 and Area-IV those containers arrived on or before 31-12-2025 through e-auctionon 31-07-2026on "AS IS WHERE IS BASIS". All details along with Terms & Conditions of auction sale & cargo details will be available onwww.concorindia.co.in &www.mstcecommerce.com w.e.f. 16-07-2026. All importers including Government Undertakings/ Departments whose containers/goods are lying unclaimed/uncleared and falling in the said list uploaded in website at respective terminals, because of any dispute, stay by Court/ Tribunal/others or any such reason may accordingly inform the concerned Area Head at Area 1 & Area-IV-of CONCOR as well as Commissioner of Customs of the concerned Commissionaires, and file their objections/claims regarding disposal of such goods within 7 (Seven Days) of this notice failing which the goods will be auctioned on "AS IS WHERE IS BASIS" without any further notice. For full details please log on to www.concorindia.co.in & www.mstcecommerce.com

Area Head
Area - I

EXPRESS Careers

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Note: Any other website claiming to represent the University is unauthorized and not approved by the University.

REGISTRAR

Rath Yatra, a celebration defining Puri's spiritual identity

Rooted in Odhisa's spiritual legacy, the annual procession of Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra is a living tradition that celebrates devotion, craftsmanship and community.

Rath Yatra, the grand Chariot Festival, celebrates the annual journey of Lord Jagannath, his brother Balabhadra, and sister Subhadra from the Jagannath Temple to the Gundicha Temple. Celebrated on the second day of the bright fortnight in the Hindu lunar month of Ashadha, it features massive wooden chariots pulled by millions of devoted pilgrims.

The festival's roots in Odisha are ancient and deeply spiritual. During this vibrant observance, the deities leave the sanctum of the Shrimandir to visit their "maternal aunt's" home for a week. The architectural and engineering marvel of the chariots is a major highlight. The deities travel in three magnificent, newly constructed wooden structures:

Nandighosha: Lord Jagannath's towering chariot, soaring to 45 feet, draped in red and yellow.

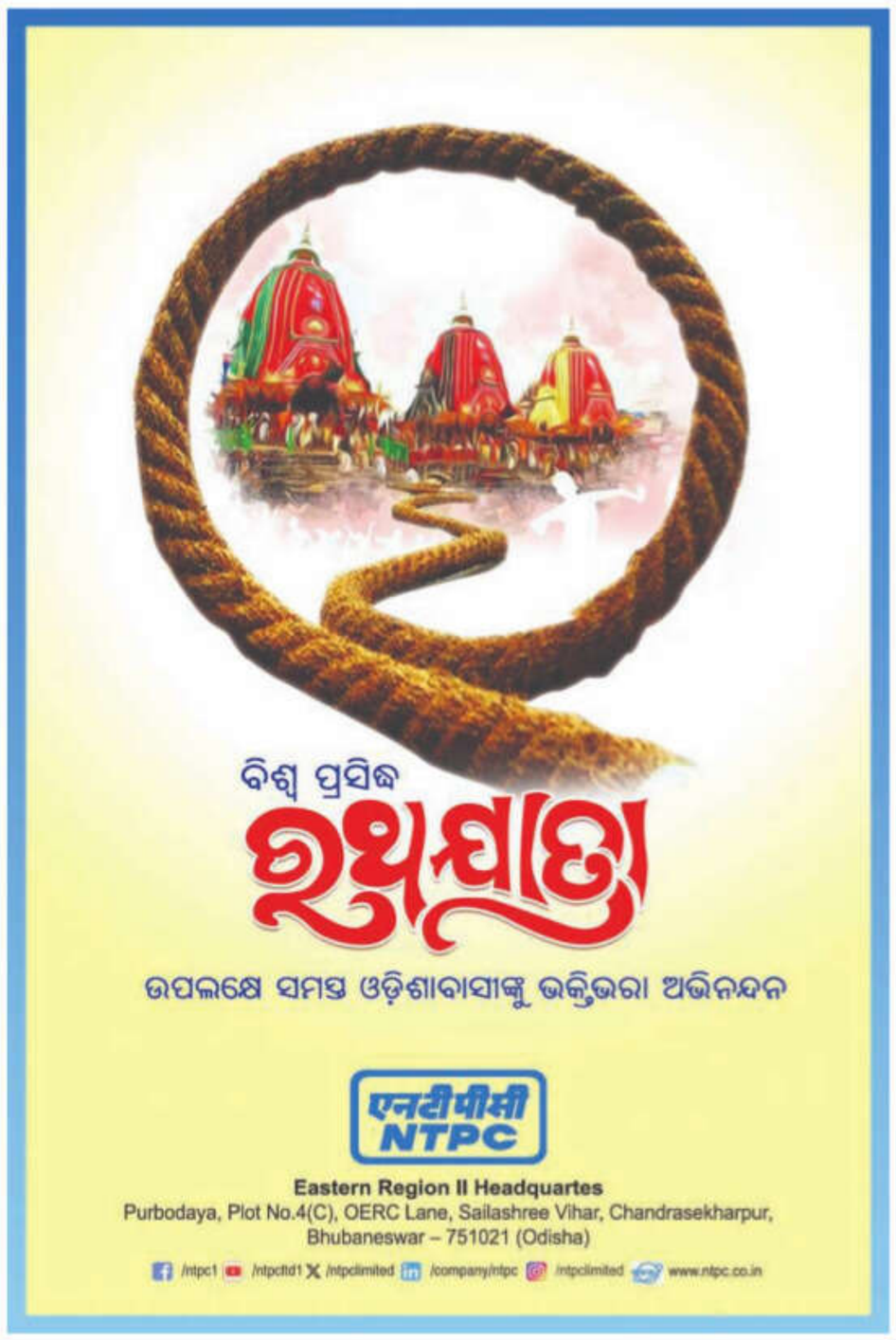
Taladhwaja: Lord Balabhadra's chariot, reaching 44 feet, is adorned in red and green.

Darpadalana: Goddess Subhadra's chariot, standing at 43 feet, is decorated with red and black fabrics.

The celebration officially begins with Chera Pahara, a deeply symbolic ritual where the Gajapati King of Odisha sweeps the path in front of the chariots with a golden broom. This act beautifully signifies that in the eyes of the divine, all individuals, regardless of their social standing or caste, are completely equal. Accompanied by the rhythmic beats of drums, cymbals, and enthusiastic chants, the heavily decorated chariots are drawn through the streets to the Gundicha Temple.

The deities reside at the Gundicha Temple for nine days, enjoying traditional sweets like Poda Pitha and Khaja. The festival officially concludes with the Bahuda Yatra (the return journey), when the deities return to the main temple. Witnessing Rath Yatra is considered a highly auspicious blessing, symbolizing the soul's journey toward the ultimate.

Rath Yatra is a centuries - old celebration of faith, humility, craftsmanship and community that continues to draw millions of devotees from across the world every year.



Rs 25,446 crore for 2 elevated highways to decongest Varanasi

Dheeraj Mishra
New Delhi, July 15

THE UNION Cabinet on Wednesday approved two elevated highway corridors along the rivers Varuna and Ganga in Varanasi at an estimated cost of Rs 25,446 crore.

The two projects are meant to solve the recurring problem of congestion in the city, which is consistently increasing after the religious tourism push by the government. Varanasi receives approximately 15 crore tourists annually, making the management of road traffic a challenging task.

The projects — 43-km link corridor along Varuna river connecting NH-31, and 46-km link corridor along the Ganga river connecting NH-19 — starting from Varanasi Ring Road will be developed under the Hybrid Annuity Mode (HAM). The Varuna river project will have a 6/4-lane predominantly elevated corridor with a design speed of 80-100 kmph.

Officials said that this will reduce travel time between NH-31 and Kashi railway station from 40 minutes to 20 minutes.

The Ganga river project will have a 6-lane elevated main carriageway with an iconic 910m cable-stayed bridge across the Ganga, a 1.32 km extradosed foot over bridge-cum-major bridge with a travelator providing pedestrian connectivity to the Kashi Vishwanath Temple, and a rail over bridge over the proposed Malviya Bridge.

The corridor has been conceived to decongest the road network of Varanasi and Chandauli and will also connect Varanasi Ring Road (NH-135B), Ramnagar, BHU, and other key centres. The project will decongest the NH-19 by diverting traffic away from the densely developed urban core.

> ***The projects — 43-km link corridor along Varuna river connecting NH-31, and 46-km link corridor along the Ganga river connecting NH-19 starting from Varanasi Ring Road — will be developed under the Hybrid Annuity Mode***

The Cabinet also approved two Railway infrastructure projects — doubling of 74-km Paradeep-Haridaspur line in Odisha and quadrupling of 71-km Rajkharsawan-Dangoaposi line in Jharkhand.

The Paradeep-Haridaspur line connects the Paradeep port to Howrah-Chennai high-density route at Haridaspur and further to Talcher coal fields, iron ore mines, and steel plants.

These are one of the most saturated freight corridors of the country and cover the transportation of commodities such as coal, iron ore, dolomite, limestone and gypsum, among others.

Eye on supply chain, Cabinet approves Rs 1.27 lakh crore semiconductor push

Rs 62,500-crore mobile making scheme cleared

Soumyarendra Barik
New Delhi, July 15

THE UNION Cabinet on Wednesday approved the second iteration of India's ambitious Semiconductor Mission, with an outlay of Rs 1.27 lakh crore. The fresh six-year initiative will focus on subsidising the supply chain related to chip manufacturing in order to attract companies producing commodities like gases and chemicals used in production.

The Cabinet also approved a Rs 62,500-crore mobile phone manufacturing push — a five-year follow-on to the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for smartphone assembly, which helped India successfully localise production. Compared to the first iteration of the India Semiconductor Mission (ISM), Government incentives have been slashed in the 2.0 version. For instance, the first scheme carried a uniform capex subsidy of 50% for fabrication and assembly plants. Under ISM 2.0, however, silicon plants will receive a subsidy of 40%, and other units 35%. Similarly, the incentive for advanced packaging has been kept at 35%, and 25% for the conventional version.

ISM 2.0 will also offer Government subsidies for research and development, and for talent development in the semiconductor sector. India's foray into semiconductor production and packaging has been outlined as a strategic move to insert itself into the global chip supply chain and deepen domestic value addition in its electronics sector. Used to power devices from toasters to fighter jets, semiconductors have become a critical resource amid heightened geopolitical tensions over the last few years.

Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw showcases 'Made in India' semiconductor chips during the Cabinet briefing in New Delhi on Wednesday. ANIL SHARMA

By 2029, India expects to achieve the capability to design and manufacture chips required for nearly 70-75% of domestic applications, and by 2035, the country aims to be among the top semiconductor nations globally. ISM 1.0, launched in 2021, was conceived as a state-backed push to build a full-stack chip ecosystem, from fabrication and packaging to design and display manufacturing. Under the scheme, cumulative investments of around Rs 1.64 lakh crore have been committed. In this year's Union Budget, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced ISM 2.0 to produce equipment and materials, design full-stack Indian IP and fortify supply chains.

Under ISM 1.0, the Government has approved a total of 12 chip plants, including various assembly and testing (ATMP/OSAT) plants being set up by the likes of Micron Technology, and a chip fabrication facility being developed by Tata Electronics in partnership with Taiwan's PSMC. These plants are being constructed in states including Gujarat, Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Odisha. At least three of these, including Micron, Kaynes Semicon and CG Semi, have started commercial production, though the fab is still under construction. These chips are also being exported.

The Indian Express first reported that the IT Ministry had prepared a blueprint for ISM 2.0 with an outlay of $15 billion — roughly equivalent to Rs 1.25 lakh crore at that time's forex rates. This newspaper had also reported that under the fresh scheme, the Government's focus for subsidies may shift to support the ancillary industry around chip manufacturing, and that incentives for assembly and testing plants may be slashed.

In the first iteration of the incentive policy, released in December 2021, the Centre had offered a 30% capex subsidy for chip packaging and testing plants. In September 2022, it raised the subsidy for such plants to 50%, reportedly as a precursor to Micron Technology's proposal, as the Government sought to facilitate the company setting up an assembly plant in India — eventually approved in June 2023. The PLI scheme for smartphone assembly was instrumental in attracting companies such as Apple to set up local production through their contract manufacturing partners, establishing smartphones as one of the country's biggest export categories. Following the scheme, India has managed to take local value addition in the sector to 24%, compared to China's rate of 38%.

Under the fresh scheme, the Government has focused on local sourcing to boost domestic value addition, and on design and R&D by Indian brands, along with incentives linked to the export of smartphones, Union IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said. In line with sales-linked incentives under the PLI for smartphones, the fresh scheme provides incentive support on eligible sales for manufacturing of mobile phones in India at differentiated rates ranging from 2.25% to 5%.

The scheme will also provide an additional incentive of up to 1.5% linked to domestic sourcing of key components/ sub-assemblies. For building Indian brands, an additional incentive at the rate of 3% on eligible sales will apply for design and R&D of the product. The scheme targets cumulative production of Rs 39 lakh crore during its tenure, up from Rs 22 lakh crore achieved under the previous PLI scheme. It aims to generate 60,000 direct jobs in mobile manufacturing and other sectors. Under the PLI scheme for smartphones, nearly 2 lakh jobs were created.

Vaishnaw said that under the PLI scheme, over Rs 19,000 crore was disbursed as incentives, while the Government collected direct taxes worth Rs 25,000 crore and Rs 3 lakh crore in GST from the smartphone industry.

National Investment Policy to boost urea production

Express News Service
New Delhi, July 15

THE CENTRE on Wednesday approved the National Investment Policy (NIP) for Urea-2026, which aims to make the country self-reliant in the production of fertiliser, Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw told the media on Wednesday.

A proposal of this effect was approved by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The CCEA approved the proposal piloted by the Department of Fertilizers. According to a statement, the policy will encourage new investments in the urea sector for setting up gas-based manufacturing units in India.

"Setting up of new urea manufacturing units will be covered under the NIP for Urea-2026 for Atmanirbhar Bharat (NIPU-2026)," the statement said, adding that under the New Investment Policy-2012, six new urea units have been set up, including four through Joint Venture Companies of nominated PSUs, and two by private companies. The period for new investment under NIP-2012 expired in October 2019. "There are 33 operational urea-manufacturing units with reassessed/installed capacity of 269.42 LMT. There is a need to increase the indigenous production of urea."

Metro Man Sreedharan's solar rail idea runs into Kerala govt roadblock

Shaju Philip
Thiruvananthapuram, July 15

THE CONGRESS-LED Kerala government has red-flagged metro man E Sreedharan's proposal for a Rs 60,000-crore solar rail corridor, flagging concerns over the project's economic and environmental feasibility.

Last month, the government constituted an expert committee to study the DMRC's interim report for the Kerala high-speed rail corridor between the state capital, Thiruvananthapuram, and Kannur in north Kerala. The state government has decided to take forward the DMRC proposal after winding up all steps related to the SilverLine, or K-Rail, project of the previous CPI(M) regime.

Chief Minister V D Satheesan told the media that the expert committee, in its report, has pointed out that the proposed project cannot be implemented in its current format. "The DMRC report is not a good economic model. The corridor has not stated anything about logistics movement -- it relies only on passenger movement. There is no clarity on the number of passengers once the project is completed. Without freight movement, the corridor will not be economically viable. The expert committee has also flagged Kerala's limited financial resources for a mega project of this nature," he said.

E Sreedharan

Satheesan said the government will study the expert committee's report before taking a decision. "While the previous government moved ahead with the K-Rail, SilverLine, project, we opposed it, raising environmental concerns. We do not want to repeat the dangers of K-Rail," he said.

The proposed Kerala High-Speed Rail (KHSR) is a 473.20-km double line from Thiruvananthapuram City (Poojapura) to Kannur (Mundayad), with 23 stations. It will connect all Kerala airports except Kannur, which will be linked through an exclusive 10-km road. The proposed travel time from Thiruvananthapuram to Kannur is 3 hours and 30 minutes.

EXPRESS special

Under proposed Bihar law, UG colleges will no longer report to Governor

Santosh Singh
Patna, July 15

THE BIHAR government is set to introduce a draft legislation in the upcoming Monsoon session to bifurcate degree colleges from state universities. Under the proposal, over 500 constituent colleges offering undergraduate degrees would come directly under the control of a newly created higher education department, leaving the Governor, who is also the Chancellor of universities, with control over only post-graduate courses.

Raj Bhavan has not yet publicly opposed the state government's move. Governor Syed Ata Hasnain, speaking at an event on July 12, confirmed that a new education bill would be introduced in the upcoming assembly session.

A Raj Bhavan press statement, issued the same day, stated, "The Governor said that serious efforts are being made to make the higher education system in the state more effective and quality-oriented. He expressed hope that a new bill related to higher education will be introduced in the upcoming assembly session. He added that the creation of any important law is the result of extensive study, deep deliberation, and continuous hard work."

Chief Minister Samrat Chaudhary during the inauguration of a new Government Degree College in Bhagalpur on Wednesday. ANI

Sources in Raj Bhavan and the higher education department told The Indian Express that under the new system, the Department of Higher Education would have direct control over both newly created colleges and older constituent colleges.

"All matters related to teachers will now be controlled directly from the Secretariat. Previously, there were two distinct legislative systems for universities in Bihar: the Patna University Act, 1976, and the Bihar State Universities Act, 1976. Now, both of these are being merged," an official from the higher education department said.

At present, Bihar has 21 state universities running both undergraduate and postgraduate courses.

The proposed education law has several other key facets, too:

Policy, administrative decisions, and promotions for college teachers and staff, previously managed by respective universities, will be overseen directly by the Department of Higher Education.

Teachers will not be permitted to participate in political activities, nor can they publicly support, write about, or propagate any political ideology.

A Higher Education Officer will be appointed to monitor colleges in each district, similar to the District Education Officer system for high schools.

A degree college teacher will no longer be eligible to transition into a university-level professor. Additionally, the minimum qualification for appointment as an assistant professor at a degree college will be a Master's degree with NET qualification, removing the mandatory PhD requirement.

A teacher at A N College, Patna, noted: "So far, Bihar has been one of the few states that followed the structural pattern of Delhi University. But Bihar had a distinct advantage – unlike DU, our degree college teachers could gradually rise to become university professors. The new Bihar education law will do away with that pathway."

When contacted, Bihar Higher Education Director N.K. Agrawal told The Indian Express. "It is not proper to talk about something that still lies in the womb. One will learn the details once it is officially released. We should wait for the cabinet's decision."

Incidentally, Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary on Wednesday inaugurated 211 new degree colleges – one in each block. The state government, which has promised to open a degree college in each of Bihar's 534 blocks, is now close to operating over 500 government degree colleges.

Auditor General finds Chhattisgarh's mining welfare fund strayed from its core purpose

Jayprakash S Naidu
Raipur, July 15

A COMPTROLLER and Auditor General (CAG) audit has exposed systemic lapses in the implementation of the Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana (PMKKKY) in Chhattisgarh, flagging governance failures, policy deviations, fund diversion, tender violations, unfruitful expenditure and transparency gaps in the utilisation of the state's Rs 13,101-crore District Mineral Foundation Trust (DMFT) fund between 2015-16 to 2023-24.

Launched in 2015, PMKKKY aims to implement development programmes for the welfare of mining-affected areas and people through District Mineral Foundation Trusts (DMFTs), which receive contributions from mining and quarry leaseholders.

DMFTs received Rs 13,101 crore up to 2023-24, of which Rs 10,253 crore (78%) was spent on various works in Chhattisgarh.

The audit found deviations in the CGDMFT Rules, 2015, diluting benefits meant for mining-affected communities. The definition of "Affected People" was expanded to include all people living or working in affected areas, extending coverage across mining-affected districts without specific limitations.

As a result, trusts allocated Rs 709.47 crore to distribute free items among people in directly and indirectly affected areas. Audit scrutiny of 30 cases worth Rs 28.11 crore found distributions were made without defined criteria or identified beneficiaries, resulting in funds being spent on broader community schemes instead of the intended mining-affected population.

Despite spending Rs 4,536.58 crore (81% of available funds), 754 (44%) of the 1,734 directly affected villages remained uncovered in 11 sampled districts.

Trust funds were also spent on non-eligible works such as welcome gates, gardens in collectorates, renovation and construction of government office buildings, office purchases, official vehicles and grants to private educational institutions.

Funds were utilised without preparing master plans, vision documents or annual plans to ensure sustainable livelihoods in mining areas. Affected areas were identified with delays ranging five months to five years after trusts were constituted, while Rs 1,060.70 crore was allocated before areas were identified.

Ahead of Kishor's electoral debut, party suffers setback as key leaders join BJP

Santosh Singh
Patna, July 15

PRASHANT KISHOR-LED Jan Suraaj Party (JSP) received a jolt Wednesday with some of its key leaders, including mathematician KC Sinha, joining the BJP in the presence of the party's state president, Sanjay Saraogi.

BJP candidate Neeraj Kumar Sinha is pitted against Rashtriya Janata Dal's Rekha Gupta and JSP's Prashant Kishor in the Bankipur bypoll, scheduled for July 30.

The bypoll was necessitated after BJP's five-time MLA and party national president Nitin Nabin was nominated to the Rajya Sabha.

Among those who crossed over to the BJP was renowned mathematician K C Sinha, who unsuccessfully contested last year's Bihar Assembly polls as the JSP nominee from the Kumhrar constituency. Other JSP leaders who joined the BJP included Ritesh Ranjan alias Bittu Singh, the party's candidate from Digha, Gopal Singh, its Maner candidate, and Braj Kishore Sinha, JSP's Kisan Morcha district president.

The Bankipur contest marks the electoral debut of Jan Suraaj founder Prashant Kishor. FILE

BJP state president Sanjay Saraogi welcomed the JSP leaders into the party and said they had shown how there was "a national wave of support for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's policies".

Mathematician KC Sinha said: "Our decision to join BJP was driven by national interest and a desire to contribute towards India's global leadership".

The Bankipur bypoll has assumed significance as it marks Jan Suraaj founder Prashant Kishor's electoral debut against the BJP in one of its strongest urban bastions. The BJP has held the seat since 1995.

Mudragada Padmanabha, face of Andhra Kapu quota stir who changed his name to protest Pawan Kalyan's win, dies

Sreenivas Janyala
Hyderabad, July 15

MUDRAGADA PADMANABHA, the controversial Kapu leader from Kakinada who spearheaded the demand for the inclusion of Kapus in Andhra Pradesh's Backward Classes (BC) list, died on Tuesday at a hospital in Hyderabad after a prolonged illness. He was 73.

Mudragada, who belonged to Kirlampudi in Kakinada district, had emerged as the face of the Kapu community's reservation movement after the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh in 2014. With Kapus constituting an estimated 15-18% of the state's population and traditionally not voting en masse for any one party, the community has long been seen as an influential electoral bloc capable of swinging election outcomes. After the state's bifurcation, Mudragada intensified the demand for BC status for Kapus. Both TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu, who became the first Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh after the undivided state's division, and later Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy, who became the CM in 2019, assured the community that Kapus' demand would be considered. However, neither government succeeded in securing the Kapu reservation, leaving Mudragada increasingly frustrated.

At the time, Mudragada was attempting to consolidate the Kapu vote — a political project that actor-turned-politician K Chiranjeevi had earlier pursued through the Praja Rajyam Party (PRP), launched in 2008. The party, which had hoped to ride largely on Kapu support, failed to make a lasting impact and merged with the Congress in 2011. Sensing growing discontent within the community, Mudragada escalated his agitation against the Naidu government. On January 31, 2016, a protest meeting he had called under the banner of "Kapu Garjana" near Tuni railway station in East Godavari district turned violent.

A four-time MLA and former TDP leader, he led the demand for Backward Class status for Kapus after bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh, which took a violent turn at Tuni railway station in January 2016. FILE

Protesters pelted stones at the Ratnachal Express as it entered Tuni station and later set several coaches ablaze. They also attacked railway property and the Tuni Rural police station. Scores of people were arrested in connection with the violence and arson. The Tuni incident marked a turning point in Mudragada's political career. Although he continued to champion the Kapu cause, he gradually withdrew from active public life. He later attempted to align with the TDP but, finding little political space, shifted his support to the YSRCP. However, he was unable to re-establish himself as a major political force.

By then, actor-turned-politician K Pawan Kalyan had emerged as the principal Kapu leader through the Jana Sena Party (JSP), steadily consolidating the grassroots support base that Mudragada had sought to mobilise. Ahead of the 2024 Assembly elections, disillusioned with the political parties he had associated with, Mudragada declared that he would ensure Pawan Kalyan's defeat. On April 30, 2024, he publicly vowed that if Kalyan won, he would change his name from Mudragada Padmanabham to Mudragada Padmanabha Reddy — a symbolic protest expressing his disappointment that Kapus continued to vote for leaders from other communities rather than backing someone who had championed their demand for BC status. He campaigned for YSRCP candidate Vanga Geetha in the Pithapuram Assembly constituency. Kalyan, however, defeated Geetha by a margin of 70,279 votes. Following his public pledge, Mudragada formally changed his name through a government notification.

The run-up to the elections also saw a public spat between Mudragada and his daughter Kranthi, who had said Kalyan was the leader of the community. An enraged Mudragada had said his daughter should not visit him even after his death.

EASTERN RAILWAY

Tender No. : BLS_EOT_Crane_40T_12 Date 13.07.2026. Divisional Mechanical Engineer/LOCO/IC/Purba Barddhaman, Pin-713101 invites e-Tenders against Tender No. BLS_EOT_Crane_40T_12 for the following work. Bidders will be able to submit their original/revised bids upto closing date and time only. Manual offers are not allowed against this tender and any such manual offer received shall be ignored. **Name of Work:** Annual Maintenance Contract (AMC) for 40/10 Ton EOT Crane at Barddhaman Loco Shed for a period of three (03) years. **Bidding System:** Single Packet System. **Advertised Value:** ₹ 8,78,715.83. **Earnest Money:** ₹ 17,600/-. **Tender Document Cost:** ₹ 0.00. **Period of Completion:** 36 months. **Validity of Offer:** 60 Days. **Bidding Start Date:** 20.07.2026. **Tender Closing Date & Time:** 03.08.2026 at 15.00 hrs. The details are available at website **www.ireps.gov.in**

HWH-217/2026-27

Tender Notices are also available at Website www.er.indianrailways.gov.in/www.ireps.gov.in

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E-Auction Notice

e- Auctions are invited for Ferry Ghats under Hariharpara Panchayat Samity in N.I.e.A. No.-01/HPS/FG/2026-27(2ND Call), 03/HPS/FG/2026-27(2nd Call), 04/HPS/FG/2026-27(2nd Call), 05/HPS/FG/2026-27(2nd Call), 06/HPS/FG/2026-27(2nd Call), 07/HPS/FG/2026-27(2nd Call), 08/HPS/FG/2026-27(2nd Call), 09/HPS/FG/2026-27(2nd Call) & 12/HPS/FG/2026-27(2nd Call). Documents and other details is available in the website eauction.gov.in. The last date of submission for all the auctions are up to 18.00 hours on dated 23/07/2026 & 31/07/2026 respectively. Further, contact with the office of the undersigned for any queries in the office hours.

Executive Officer
Hariharpara Panchayat Samiti
Hariharpara, Murshidabad

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PERMANENT CLOSURE OF CLOAK ROOM AT BARDDHAMAN STATION OVER HOWRAH DIVISION

NOTICE

It is hereby notified that the Cloak Room at Barddhaman Station over Howrah Division will be permanently closed with effect from **20.07.2026.**

The inconvenience caused to the passengers is regretted.

Senior Divisional Commercial Manager, Howrah

EASTERN RAILWAY

Follow us at : @EasternRailway @easternrailwayheadquarter

LEGAL NOTICE

I, Pari Biswas W/o Manaranjan Biswas of Madhya Para Natun Pally, Purba Putiary, P.S. Regent Park, Kolkata 700093 purchased a land of 01 Kh 04 Ch 23 Sft under Mouza Bansdroni, J.L. No. 45, Dag No. 1064, R.S. Kh No. 517, by Registered Deed of Conveyance, Being No 4092/2000 from Power of Attorney Holder Sumanta Das S/o Gurupada Das being 747/1096. If anybody has any objection on mutation of said land in my name, please inform office of BL&LRO, Kolkata, KMC Building, Room No. 328, 5, S.N. Banerjee Road, Kolkata – 700013, in written/email bllroatm@gmail.com, within one month from the date of this advertisement.

Tender has Invited by the Block Development Officer, Pursurah Development Block for Construction of PCC Road, Light & others **NIT NO. 02/PUR/BDO/2026-27, Dt-15.07.2026**, Tender ID No. **2026_ZPHD_1032598_1 to 15**, Last date for submission of Tender: **22/07/2026 up to 18.55 P.M. wbtenders.gov.in.**

Sd/- Block Development Officer
Pursurah Development Block, Hooghly

CANNING-II PANCHAYAT SAMTY
Jibantala, South 24 Pgs.

To Whom it may concern

Abridged Tender Notice **(e-NIT No. 01 of 2026-27, dated 14.07.2026)** Installation of Submersible pump with over head tank at South Patikhali near Biddyut Sangha and 3 no's other places under Canning-II Block Development Officer, Jibantala, South 24-Parganas (detail information will be available **www.etender.wb.nic.in** & **Office Notice Board or Engineering Section of this office**).

Sd/-
Executive Officer
Canning-II Panchayat Samity
South 24 Parganas

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Isarat Khatun W/o Firoz Khan, Residing at NJMC Z/45, P.S.-Sankrail, District- Howrah, West Bengal, Pin Code No.-711304 Shall henceforth be known as Isarat Khatun. That Isarat Khatun and Ishrat Khatun are the same and one identical person sworn before The First Class Executive Magistrate at Howrah Court vide Affidavit, dated: 15.07.2026.

DECLARATION

I, Silpa Bera, daughter of Dinabandhu Bera, residing at 27/2, M.M. Feeder Road, Ariadaha, P.S. - Belghoria, District - North 24 Parganas shall henceforth be known as Shilpa Bera as declared before the Notary Public Alipore Police Court, Kolkata - 700027, vide Affidavit / Notary No. -X/37 dated 14th July, 2026. Silpa Bera and Shilpa Bera both are same and identical person.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given to the general public that my client Shimla Restaurant Private Limited, (represented by it's Directors) intends to purchase a peace & parcel of land admeasuring 3 cottah 36 sft. together with G+III storied building standing thereon lying & situated at Mouza-Belgharia, J.L. No.3, R.S. Khatian No. 365 & 366, L.R. Khatian No. 2986, R.S. & L.R. Dag No. 18 & 17, under the Kamarhati Municipality, being Premises No. 15, B.T. Road, Ward No. 23, Present Holding No. 50, P.S.-Belgharia, Dist.- North 24 Pgs, Kolkata-700056, from its lawful owners namely (1) Sri Ananta Bikash Basu, s/o Late Asim Bikash Basu, (2) Smt. Sunada Basu (Dey), w/o Sri Ananta Bikash Basu, of 44A/E, Sharat Chandra Dhar Road. Any person, bank, financial institution, or authority having any claim, right, title, interest, objection, or dispute over the said property by way of sale, mortgage, lease, gift, inheritance, lien, trust, charge, or any other encumbrance is required to make the same known to the undersigned in writing. All objections must be supported by valid documentary evidence and delivered to the address below within 10 days from the date of this notice. If no objection is received within the specified period, the transaction will be completed. It will be deemed that no such claim exists, or that any existing claim has been waived.

Abdur Rakib, Advocate
High Court at Calcutta
E Mail: abdurraqeeb4@gmail.com
M:9830398694, Chamber-236, S.D. Chatterjee Rd. Areashree Build. 1st floor, Room No. 34, Baruipur, Kolkata-144

NOTICE

We Sri Anup Dey, S/o Lt. Atul Krishna Dey, Sri Shankar Basu S/o Lt Fanindra Nath Basu, P O- Baranagar, P.S- Baranagar, Kolkata-700036, had Purchased a Land /Property, Schedule Stated below, from power of attorney Holders Sri Biswanath Das, S/o Late Krishna Pada Das, & Sailen Das S/o Lt Baidya Nath Das, P. O.-Joteshibrampur, P. S.-Maheshtala, Kolkta-700141, POA no. 00478 /1992, POA no. 00432/1992, My Deed No. 003630/1993, MN/NO 2026/1630/3795, MN/NO 2026/1630/3796, A:D.S.R Behala, If any body has any objection on Mutation of said Land/Property, please in from office of B. L. & L. R. O Kolkata, Room No. 328, 5 No. S. N. Banerjee Road, Kolkata-700013, Land Schedule, Mouza- Parui, JL No-103, Khaitan NO.-101, 1247, 3068, 5029, Dag No. 2427, 2429, Land 3 kata 05ch. 05 Sft.

Notice is hereby given that the documents bearing Original Sale Deed No. 2044 for the year 1940 executed on 18.11.40, registered at Sadar Joint Sub-Register, Howrah of holding no. 22, Chotelal Missir Road, Ghusuri, Howrah-711107 has been misplaced on 05.07.2025 and not traceable yet. The reportof the same has been lodged at the Police Station Malipanchghora on 23.06.2026 vide G.D.E.-1258. If found kindly inform to **PRADIP DEY, Mobile No. 9748028107.**

Form No.14
See Regulation-33 (2) By Regd. A/D, Dasti failing which by Publication

OFFICE OF THE RECOVERY OFFICER-I/II
DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL KOLKATA (DRT 1)
9th Floor, Jeevan Sudha Building,
42-C, J. L. Nehru Road, Kolkata- 700071

DEMAND NOTICE

Notice under sections 25 to 28 of the recovery of Debts & Bankruptcy Act, 1993 and Rule 2 of Second Schedule to the Income Tax Act, 1961.

RC/9/2020 16.06.2026

PUNJAB NATIONAL BANK
Versus
M/S SUKDEB SAHA EXPORT & IMPORT AND ORS

To,

(CD 1) **M/s Sukdeb Saha Export & Import** A Proprietorship Company having its office at 10 C, Middleton Street Row, Kolkata – 700016

(CD 2) **Sri Sukdeb Saha Guarantor & Proprietor of M/s Sukdeb Saha Export & Import** LA – 23, Sector – III, Salt Lake, Kolkata – 700097

(CD 3) **Sri Bhaba Sindhu** Son of Biswambhar Mondal Guarantor, residing at Village Singhalgunj Abad, P.S. – Muragacha, Diamond Harbour, South Twenty Four Parganas, West Bengal – 743331

(CD 4) **Sri Sirish Chandra Mondal,** son of Sri Biswambhar Mondal Guarantor, residing at Village Singhalgunj Abad, P.S. – Muragacha, Diamond Harbour, South Twenty Four Parganas, West Bengal – 743331

(CD 5) **Sri Khitish Chandra Mondal,** son of Sri Biswambhar Mondal Guarantor, residing at Village Singhalgunj Abad, P.S. – Muragacha, Diamond Harbour, South Twenty Four Parganas, West Bengal – 743331

(CD 6) **Sri Swapan Kumar Mondal,** son of Sri Biswambhar Mondal Guarantor, residing at Village Singhalgunj Abad, P.S. – Muragacha, Diamond Harbour, South Twenty Four Parganas, West Bengal – 743331

(CD 7) **Awani Kumar Tiwari,** son of Late Krishna Tiwari Guarantor, residing at Village Gopinathpur, P.S. – Tehatta, District – Nadia, Pin – 741160

(CD 8) **Sri Jagannath Mondal,** son of Narayan Chandra Mondal Guarantor, residing at Mondal Para, Jhikuriaberia, Bishnupur, District – South Twenty Four Parganas, Pin – 743503

(CD 9) **Sri Biswajit Mondal,** son of Narayan Chandra Mondal Guarantor, residing at Mondal Para, Jhikuriaberia, Bishnupur, District – South Twenty Four Parganas, Pin – 743503

(CD 10) **Sri Parameswar Das,** son of Binoy Krishna Das Guarantor, residing at Sirbed Road Diamond Harbour, District – South Twenty Four Parganas, Pin – 743331

This is to notify that as per the Recovery Certificate issued in pursuance of orders passed by the Presiding Officer, DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL KOLKATA (DRT 1) in **OA/445/2012** an amount of **₹3,45,82,336.95 (Rupees Three Crore Forty Five Lakhs Eighty Two Thousands Three Hundred Thirty Six And Paise Ninety Five Only)** along with pendentellite and future interest @9 % Simple Interest w.e.f. **17/11/2012** till realization and costs of **₹1,50,000 (Rupees One Lakh Fifty Thousands Only)** has become due against you (Jointly and severally/ Fully/Limited).

2. You are hereby directed to pay the above sum within 15 days of receipt of this notice, failing which recovery shall be made in accordance with the Recovery of Debts Due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act, 1993 and the Rules there under.
3. You are hereby ordered to declare, by way of affidavit, the particulars of your assets on or before the next date of hearing.
4. You are hereby ordered to appear before the undersigned on **22/09/2026 at 10:30 a.m.** for further proceedings.
5. In addition to the aforementioned sum, you will also be liable to pay:
   (a) Such interest as is payable for the period commencing immediately after this notice of the certificate/execution proceedings.
   (b) All costs, charges, and expenses incurred in respect of the service of this notice and warrants and other processes, and all other proceedings taken for recovering the amount due.

Given under my hand and the seal of the Tribunal, on this date: **16/06/2026**

Recovery Officer-II
Kolkata Debts Recovery Tribunal No. - 1
Kolkata

SOUTH CENTRAL RAILWAY

Follow us on @SCRailwayindia
Details of the Tender Notices of S.C Railway can be seen on our website : www.scr.indianrailways.gov.in

No. E29CTrDSC_05-2026-27
Date: 14.07.2026

PUB/454

Chief Electrical Engineer, Construction, South Central Railway, Secunderabad invites e-tender on behalf of the President of India for the following works in **Two packet system** of tendering.

1. NIT No . : E29CTrDSC_05-2026-27 Dt. 13.07.2026 **Name of the work : E29CTrDSC_05-2026-27 Dt. 13.07.2026** "Design, Supply, Erection, Testing & Commissioning of 25kV, 50Hz single phase a.c. traction overhead equipment with 65 sq.mm catenary and 107/150 sq.mm contact wire, LT supply transformer stations including modifications to the existing OHE in view of proposed new lines in Akola yard in Nanded Division of South Central Railway." **Estimate Cost : (₹)** 2,06,36,496.50 **EMD/Bid Security : (₹)** 4,12,700.00 **Document Cost :** Online tender document can be downloaded free of cost. **Completion period :** 09 months **Date of closing :** 05.08.2026 at 15:00 hrs

1) For bid document and other details, please login to website **https://www.ireps.gov.in**

2) The Bidder will have to provide Bid Security through IREPS.gov.in or submitted as Bank Guarantee Bond from a scheduled commercial bank of India. The Bank Guarantee bond shall be as per Appendix-VII and shall be valid for a period of 90 days beyond the bid validity period. Manual payment through Demand Draft, Bankers cheque, Deposit receipts, FDR etc., are not allowed.

3) Tenderer can submit their offers online during tender submission period which is fifteen days period to closing of tender.

4) Tenderer should watch for any Corrigenda (issued online only) upto the date of commencement of the Tender submission period.

Chief Electrical Engineer,
Construction, Secunderabad

A534

For further tender conditions / details and for downloading the tender documents, Please visit website at https://www.ireps.gov.in or www.scr.indianrailways.gov.in

NAME CHANGE

I, Jyotishko Roy, S/o. Shyamalesh Roy residing at Hindustan Complex, Block - B, Flat 3E, 1458, Garia Main Road, Rajpur Sonarpur (M), P.S. - Sonarpur, Kolkata - 700084, West Bengal vide an Affidavit No. 55735 before the court of 1st class Judicial Magistrate at Alipore, dated - 18.06.2026 that Jyotishko Roy and Jyotishka Roy refers to one and same identical person.

OFFICE OF THE ENGINEER-IN-CHIEF (CIVIL), ODISHA

NIRMAN SOUDHA, UNIT-V, BHUBANESWAR
INVITATIONS FOR BIDS (IFB)
E-mail ID:cebuildings_orissa@yahoo.co.in
cebuildings@rediffmail.com, Tel. (0674)-2391523

34001/491/2627

File No.-B-III-Sports-12/2025/25477 / Bhubaneswar, the 14th July, 2026

Invitation for Bids
1st Corrigendum

Tender Reference No. CE-Bldg-1-15/2026-27

Name of the Work: Construction of Block Level Stadium (with Indoor Hall) in Bisoi Block under Mayurbhanj District.

The following changes have been made in Bid Identification No. **CE-Bldg-1-15/2026-27**

1. Bid documents such as DTCN / BOQ etc. can be seen / downloaded from the Govt. Website i.e. www.tendersorissa.gov.in, during the period from dt.28.07.2026 to 17.00 hours of dt.12.08.2026 instead of dt.13.07.2026 to dt.03.08.2026 for ONLINE BIDDING respectively.
2. Online bids shall be received till 17.00 Hours of dt. 12.08.2026 instead of dt.03.08.2026.
3. The technical bids will be opened at 11.30 A.M. of dt.13.08.2026 instead of dt.04.08.2026.

All other terms and conditions remain unchanged.

Sd/-
Chief Engineer, Buildings-I,
Odisha, Bhubaneswar

OIPR-34001/34117/1/26-27/0053

MALKAJGIRI MUNICIPAL CORPORATION

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER,
PROJECTS, MMC, HYDERABAD.

Tender Notice No.09/SE (Projects)/MMC/2026-27 (Re-Call), Dt:16.07.2026.

Item No.	Name of Work
1.	"Project management Consultancy Services for Proof checking, construction supervision, Quality Assurance, Quality Control & Quality Audit for the work of "Construction of RK Puram ROB Deposit work" under Engineering Procurement Construction (EPC)/Turnkey Basis"

Events	Date & Timings
Start Date	16.07.2026 03.00 PM
Pre-Bid Meeting	23-07-2026 at 03.00 PM Location: O/o Chief Engineer (Projects), MMC 1st Floor, Head Office, Tarnaka, Hyderabad.
Last Date & Time for receipt of Bids	01.08.2026 03.00 PM
Technical Bid Opening	01.08.2026 After 03.30 PM
Price Bid Opening.	03.08.2026 04.00 PM

Address of the officer concerned Smt. K.Rohini, SE (Projects), 9959442013. Superintending Engineer (Projects), Malkajgiri Municipal Corporation, 1st Floor, HMDA Complex, Tarnaka, Hyderabad. Further details can be seen at 'e' Procurement https://tender.telangana.gov.in.

Sd/-
Superintending Engineer
(Projects), MMC.

R.O. No. : 6150-PP/CL/ADVT/2026-27

बैंक ऑफ़ बड़ौदा Bank of Baroda

BAGHAJATIN BRANCH
Matri Bhawan, 90 E Block East
Baghajatin Station Road, Kolkata 700086
Email:BAGHAJ@bankofbaroda.bank.in

ANNEXURE-13
GOLD ORNAMENTS AUCTION SALE NOTICE

The under mentioned persons are hereby informed that they have failed to pay off the liability in the loan accounts. Notices sent to them by Registered Post have been returned undelivered to the Bank. They are therefore requested to pay off the liability and other charges and redeem the pledged securities on or before **24-07-2026** failing which the said securities will be sold by the Bank in public auction at the cost of the borrower at the Bank's premises at **01.00 P.M. on 28-07-2026** or on any other convenient date thereafter without further notice at the absolute discretion of the Bank.

SL No.	Date of Loan	Loan AC No.	Name & Address of the Borrower
1	19.04.2024	38300600001050	**Sudipto Mukherjee,** S/o Bikramjit Mukherjee, 60 Jiban Mohini Ghosh Park Haridevpur, Thakurpukur, Mahestola South 24 Parganas-700082

Date : 16.07.2026 **Branch Manager**

कार्यालय जिला परिषद, धौलपुर

बाड़ी रोड़, धौलपुर (राज.), Email id: pd-dho-rj@nic.in

क्रमांक :- जि.प.धौ./स्टोर/2026-27/23359713 दिनांक :- 10/07/2026

Notice Inviting Bid (NIB)

Bids for "Construction of Convention Centre, Opposite to Government Girls College, Bari, Dholpur" of estimated value INR662.00 Lacs are invited from interested bidders up to 31.07.2026 till 11.00 hrs. Other particulars of the bid may be visited on the **https://sppp.rajasthan.gov.in/** and **https://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in/** of the state.

UBN No. - ZDH2627WSOB00280
NIB No. - ZDH2627A0223

मुख्य कार्यकारी अधिकारी,
जिला परिषद, धौलपुर

राज.संवाद/सी/26/7021

SALUTE THE SOLDIER

BORDER SECURITY FORCE
CONSTABLE KARNAIL SINGH
182 BN BSF
25.05.1969 - 16.07.1993

Director General and all Ranks of Border Security Force remember its gallant Jawan Constable Karnail Singh on his Balidan Diwas. On this day, he sustained fatal injuries in a grenade blast, triggered by militants in Shopian area, J&K and made ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty.

CONSTABLE/TRADESMAN SANJAY DHAR, PMG
192 BN BSF
15.07.1980 - 16.07.2014

Director General and all Ranks of Border Security Force remember its gallant Jawan Constable/ Tradesman Sanjay Dhar on his Balidan Diwas. On this day, he sustained bullet injuries in Counterpart firing in area of BOP Pittal, R S Pura, Jammu. He fought bravely and made ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty. His sacrifice and gallant action have been aptly recognized by GOI by awardinghim with PMG (Posthumously).

SH DHARAM PRAKASH, COMDT, PPMG
30 BN BSF
05.08.1939 - 16.07.1992

Director General and all Ranks of Border SecurityForceremember its gallantofficer Sh. Dharam Prakash, Commandant on his Balidan Diwas. On this day, he sustained bullet injuries, while fighting militants in Nishat area, Srinagar, J&K. He fought bravely and made ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty. His sacrifice and gallant action have been aptly recognized by GOI by awarding him with PPMG (Posthumously).

HEAD CONSTABLE MAHAVIR SINGH, PMG
76 BN BSF
07.07.1952 - 16.07.1992

Director General and all Ranks of Border Security Force remember its gallant Jawan Head Constable Mahavir Singh on his Balidan Diwas. On this day, he sustained bullet injuries while fighting militants in Sopore area, J&K. He fought bravely and made ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty. His sacrifice and gallant action have been aptly recognized by GOI by awarding him with PMG (Posthumously).

INDO-TIBETAN BORDER POLICE (ITBP)
16 July, 2026

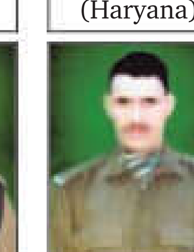
Head Constable Satbir Singh Vill.- Khatiwas Distt.- Jhajjar (Haryana)

Lance Naik Virender Singh Vill.- Budhpur Distt.- Rewari (Haryana)

Constable Ashok Kumar Vill.- Pharidpur Distt.- Siwan (Bihar)

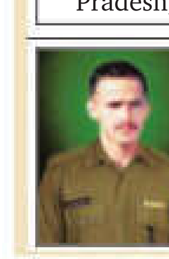
Constable Mangal Singh Vill.- Matena Distt.- Pithoragarh (Uttarakhand)

Constable Karam Chand Vill.- Chandran Distt.- Kangra (Himachal Pradesh)



Constable Raj Kumar Vill.- Kangu Kagehra Distt.- Mandi (Himachal Pradesh)

ITBP salutes its bravehearts Head Constable Satbir Singh, LNK Virender Singh, Constable Ashok Kumar, Constable Mangal Singh, Constable Karam Chand and Constable Raj Kumar of 22nd Battalion, who made the supreme sacrifice in the line of duty fighting bravely with the militants on this day in Punjab in 1995.



Constable Harish Singh Vill.- Musgaon Distt.- Pithoragarh (Uttarakhand)

16 July, 2026

ITBP salutes its braveheart Constable Harish Singh of 24th Battalion, who made the supreme sacrifice in the line of duty on this day in J&K in 1992.

VJTI MUMBAI

वीरमाता जिजाबाई तंत्रज्ञान संस्था
Veermata Jijabai Technological Institute
(Autonomous Institute of Govt. of Maharashtra)
H. R. Mahajani Road, Matunga (East), Mumbai - 400 019
Phone:+91 22 24198101/102 · Fax:+91 22 24102874. www.vjti.ac.in

Notice Inviting Tender

Tenders are invited from contractors/firms with relevant experience for the work "Renovation of 43 restroom facilities at VJTI Institute, Matunga, Mumbai."

The tender document & information is available on www.vjti.ac.in & https://mahatenders.gov.in

The last date for submission of the Tender is 27th July 2026 by 5.00 p.m.

Sd/-
Registrar, VJTI

KARNATAKA INDUSTRIAL AREAS DEVELOPMENT BOARD

(A Government of Karnataka Undertaking)
No.2, 2/1 and 2/3, Kalidasa Marg, 1st Main Road, Gandhinagar
Bengaluru-560 009. Phone No. 080-22265383
website : **www.kiadb.in**

No.IADB/ENGG/ETND-EP-25/2109/2026-27 Date:15.07.2026

SHORT-TERM NOTICE INVITING TENDER
(Through KPP Portal Only)

Turnkey Tenders under two cover system are invited as per the Karnataka Transparency in Public Procurement Act 1999 and Rules 2000 through electronic procurement from eligible Contractors (Civil) who have got adequate financial resources & sufficient past experience for the following works as per the schedule given below:

Name of the works: **Establishment, Commissioning of 10 MLD Sewage Treatment Plant followed by 5 MLD Tertiary Treatment Plant along with 2 modules of 1.50 MLD each Common Effluent Treatment Plant with 1.50 MLD Capacity RO System & ZLD Facilities on total turnkey basis, including Operation & Maintenance of entire Plant for a period of 10 years at KWIN City at Phase-1 in Nelamangala Taluk, Bengaluru Rural District (2nd Call).**

Last Date and Time for Receipt of Tenders: **01.08.2026 up to 4:00 pm**

Applicants May Download Bidding Documents from the Karnataka Public Procurement Portal **https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in**

Sd/- Engineer-In-Chief, K.I.A.D.B

SOUTH COAST RAILWAY

VISAKHAPATNAM
Follow us on @SCoRailway
Website: www.scor.indianrailways.gov.in

TENDER NOTICE No: VSKP-TRS-RT-04-2026-27

PUB/SCoR-070

Sr.DEE/TRS/VSKP acting for and on behalf of The President of India invites E-Tenders against Tender No VSKP-TRS-RT-04-2026-27 Closing Date/ Time 05.08.2026 @ 15:00 Hrs Bidders will be able to submit their original/revised bids upto closing date and time only. Manual offers are not allowed against this tender, and any such manual offer received shall be ignored.

Name of work with its location : Fitment of Trap Chamber in Three Phase locomotives (WAP-7 & WAG-9) for collecting coal/dust particles from BP train pipe during emergency brake application. **Value of Tender (₹) :** 11,14,606.55/- **Earnest Money to be deposited : (₹)** 22,300/- **Cost of Tender Form : (₹)** 2,360/- **Address of the office :** Sr. Divl. Electrical Engineer (TRS) Electrical Loco Shed South Coast Railway NAD Post Visakhapatnam - 530 009 **Completion period of the work :** One year (12 months) **Bidding system :** Single packet system (e-tendering) **Tender closing date and time :** 05.08.2026 at 15.00 hrs **Website particulars : http://www.ireps.gov.in**

Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer
(TRS)/Visakhapatnam

SCoRA078

For further tender conditions / details and for downloading the tender documents, Please visit website at https://www.ireps.gov.in

पंजाब नैशनल बैंक punjab national bank

...भरोसे का प्रतीक ! ...the name you can BANK upon !

E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE
Dated 04.08.2026

Asset Recovery Management Branch, Durgapur,
Nachan Road, Benachity, Durgapur-713213, Paschim Bardhaman,W.B. e-mail : cs8222@pnb.bank.in

SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES

LAST DATE & TIME OF TIME OF SUBMISSION OF EMD (Earnest Money Deposit) AND DOCUMENTS: UPTO 2.00 PM respective E Auction dated 04.08.2026

Sale of immovable property mortgaged to Bank under Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest (SARFAESI) Act, 2002 (No.54 of 2002)

E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 9(1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower (s) and Guarantor (s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the constructive/physical/ symbolic possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of the Bank/ Secured Creditor, will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is" on the date as mentioned in the table herein below, for recovery of its dues due to the Bank/ Secured Creditor from the respective borrower (s) and guarantor (s). The reserve price and the earnest money deposit will be as mentioned in the table below against the respective properties.

DESCRIPTION OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES [The Said Properties are under Constructive Possession/ Physical possession of the Secured Creditor]

Sl. No.	BRANCH NAME /Account Name & Address of the Borrowers / Guarantors	Description of the Immovable Properties Mortgaged, Owner's Name (Mortgagers of property(ies) & Possession	A) Date of Demand Notice u/s 13(2) B) Date of Possession C) Outstanding as on the date of 13(2)	A) Reserve Price B) EMD C) Bid Increase Amount (In Rs.)	Date & Time of E-Auction	Details of the encumbrances known to the secured creditors
1.	**BO-045020-CITY CENTRE (DURGAPUR) Account: M/S NTEC Engineers (P) Ltd Borrower/Co-Borrower/s/Guarantor/Partner: 1 M/S NTEC Engineers (P) Ltd.** Holding No. 230, Babu Road PO Madhyamgram North 24 Parganas, PIN 700128 **Sri Ashis Kumar Banejee, Gopapinathpur,** 145/N, PO- Bidhan Nagar, Durgapur-713212 **Sri Manojit Kr. Saha** S/o Late Bholanath Saha 17/1H, Seven Tank Lane, Po Belgacha, Kolkata 700030 **Sri Ranjit Kumar Saha** S/o Late Bholanath Saha 14G, Samar Sarani, PO- Sinthee Kolkata- 700050	All that piece and parcel of land and three storied residential building measuring about of landed area of 04 cottah 03 chittack 30sqft. Lying at 14G Samar Sarabu South Sinthee Road, Gram Dihipanchanna, Division No. 1, Sub Division No. 15, Holding No. 122 and 129 PS Cossipore, Kolkata- 700050 Being Deed No. 6658/1983 in the name of Ranjit Kumar Saha **Symbolic Possession**	A) 06.07.2021 B) 08.10.2021 Symbolic Possession C) of Rs.4,09,03,877.17 (Rupees four crore nine lakh three thousand eight hundred seventy seven and paisa seventeen Only) as on 30.06.2021	A) Rs.1,84,55,000/- B) Rs.18,45,500/- C) Rs.50,000/-	**04.08.2026 11.00 AM to 4.00 PM**	Not known to Bank at present.
2.	**B/O 473600-PANDABESWAR Account – M/S Star Enterprise Borrower/ Co-Borrower/s/ Guarantor/ Partner:- M/S Star Enterprise, Prop. Mrs. Sabita Ghosh**, Vill+ Po-Ramnagar, PS- Pandaveswar, Dist. – Paschim Burdwan 713346 **Mrs. Sabita Ghosh,** W/O Late Barun Kumar Ghosh, Vill+ Po-Ramnagar, PS- Pandaveswar, Dist. – Paschim Burdwan 713346 **Mr. Sagar Ghosh** S/O Late Barun Kumar Ghosh, Vill+ Po – Ramnagar, PS- Pandaveswar, Dist. – Paschim Burdwan 713346	All that piece and parcel of the property situated at District Paschim Burdwan, P.S. Pandaveswar, Mouza- Delurbandh, J.L.No. 4, L.R. Khatain No. of previous owner 1721, L.R. Kh. No. of the owner Sabita Ghosh 3569, R.S. & L.R. Dag No 540, measuring about 4.66 decimal as per deed of Gift as mentioned and the total measuring about 7 decimals as per L.R.R.O.R being deed no. 4342 for the year 2019 in the name of Sabita Ghosh. **Symbolic Possession**	A) 07.01.2025 B) 09.04.2025 Symbolic Possession C) Rs.71,64,675.11 (Rupees Thirty Seventy-One Lakh Sixty-Four Thousand Six Hundred Seventy-Five and Paise Eleven Only) as on 21.11.2024	A) Rs.58,80,000/- B) Rs.5,88,000/- C) Rs.10,000/-	**04.08.2026 11.00 AM to 4.00 PM**	Not known to Bank at present.
3.	**B/o 015800- DURGAPUR BHIRANGI) Account- M/s. Rudraksh Metal and Mineral Industries Borrower/Co-Borrower/Guarantor/Partner 1. M/s. Rudraksh Metal and Mineral Industries Partners: Byas Muni Gupta & Nityanand Gupta 2. Mr. Byas Muni Gupta,** S/o- Late Kishan Gupta **3. Mr. Nityananda Gupta,** S/o- Byas Muni Gupta, Address:-Gupta Bhawan, Philips Lane, Street No.27,Benachity, Durgapur- 713213	All that piece & parcel of land and building located at Mouza-Srirampur, JL No.25, Dag No. 263, Khatian No. 171,172,173, PS-Salanpur, Dendua, Chittaranjan Road, Dist-Paschim Bardhaman in the name of M/s. Rudraksh Metal and Mineral Industries having Area 37 Cottah or 61.5 decimal, covered by deed No. 09534 of 2010 **Symbolic Possession**	A) 09.07.2015 B) 27.11.2015 Symbolic Possession C) Rs.26,14,661.25 (Rupees twenty-Six Lakh Fourteen Thousand Six Hundred Sixty One and Paise Twenty Five Only)as on 28-02-2015	A) Rs.39,65,000/- B) Rs.3,96,500/- C) Rs.10,000/-	**04.08.2026 11.00 AM to 4.00 PM**	Not known to Bank at present.
4.	**B/O 015800-DURGAPUR BHIRANGI Account- AMIYA INDUTRIES Borrower/Co-Borrower/Guarantor/Partner : 1. M/s Amiya Industries, Proprietor: Mr. Falguni Kumar Mitra, 2. Mr. Falguni Kumar Mitra,** Address:- No1 Ambedkar Sarani, City Centre, Durgapur, Paschim Bardhaman, West Bengal-713216 **3. Tapas Kumar Sarkar Guarantor)** Purbo Nutan Pally, Durgapur, Paschim Bardhaman, , West Bengal-713101	All the pieces and parcels of the land and building located at 27 Ambagan Bhiringi, Ward-19, PS Durgapur 713213 West Bengal with survey no – Mouza Bhiringi JL NO 119, Khatian No- 9079 & 9080, Plot/Dag No. – 1733 ,1394 within DMC, Paschim Bardhaman, West Bengal-713213, Area 2912 Sq ft. as per deed no I-2071 for the year 2008 in the name of Falguni Kumar Mitra & Tapas Kumar Sarkar **Symbolic Possession**	A) 03.08.2024 B) 20.11.2024 Symbolic Possession C) Rs.95,19,136.44 (Rupees Ninety-Five Lakh Nineteen Thousand One Hundred Thirty-Six and Paise Forty-Four Only) as on 30.07.2024	A) Rs.96,15,000/- B) Rs.9,61,500/- C) Rs.30,000/-	**04.08.2026 11.00 AM to 4.00 PM**	Not known to Bank at present.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: :

The sale shall be subject to the Terms & Conditions prescribed in the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002 and to the following further conditions:

1. The properties are being sold on 'AS IS WHERE IS BASIS and "AS IS WHAT IS BASIS" and "WHATEVER THERE IS BASIS"
2. The particulars of Secured Assets specified in the Schedule hereinabove have been stated to the best of the information of the Authorized Officer, but the Authorized Officer shall not be answerable for any error, misstatement or omission in this proclamation.
3. The Sale will be done by the undersigned through e-auction platform provided at the Website https://www.baanknet.com on **04.08.2026 from 11.00 AM to 4.00 PM.**
4. For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to website: www.baanknet.com.
5. For any queries regarding the terms and conditions of the sale, the interested bidders may contact **Mr. Ashok Kumar (Chief Manager) Mob: 9102405790.**

STATURORY 30/15 DAYS SALE NOTICE UNDER RULE 8 (6) & RULE 9 (1) OF THE SECURITY INTEREST ENFORCEMENT AMENDMENT RULES, 2002.

Date: 15.07.2026
Place: Durgapur

Chief Manager & Authorised Officer
Punjab National Bank

STATUTORY SALE NOTICE UNDER RULE 9 (1) & 8 (6) OF THE SARFAESI ACT, 2002

Jammu varsity orders audit of all books in its libraries, offices

Arun Sharma
Jammu, July 15

THE UNIVERSITY of Jammu on Wednesday ordered a "comprehensive audit and inspection" of all its libraries, offices and digital repositories to ensure that "no book or publication containing anti-national, separatist or objectionable content exists within the campus".

In a circular issued by the Registrar, the university asked all rectors, directors and heads of teaching departments, as well as the in-charge librarian of the Dhanvantri Library, to establish a "robust mechanism" to ensure that no books, journals, magazines or other publications containing anti-national, separatist or objectionable content are procured, distributed or made available in their offices, departments or libraries.

Seeking submission of compliance reports to the Registrar, the circular said a committee would be constituted to formulate a comprehensive standard operating procedure for the procurement of books and academic materials. This will include framing a stringent screening mechanism, along with periodic random scrutiny by a panel of academicians to prevent objectionable content from entering the university, as well as regular examination of the university's websites.

AFTER FARM LOAN WAIVER

Maharashtra to write off Rs 48K-cr farm power dues

Shubhangi Khapre
Mumbai, July 15

NEARLY A month after announcing a farm loan waiver that is estimated to cost the exchequer over Rs 36,500 crore, the Maharashtra government on Wednesday announced a one-time waiver of Rs 48,000 crore in pending electricity dues of farmers.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis made the announcement at a function organised by the BJP in Mumbai to felicitate him for the recently announced farm loan waiver. Declaring that his government was committed to easing the burden on farmers, Fadnavis said all pending electricity bills of farmers using agricultural pumps of up to 7 HP would be written off.

"Since our government came to power, we have given free electricity to farmers using agriculture pumps up to seven HP. For this, we make an annual budgetary allocation of Rs 25,000 crore to compensate power companies. But old pending bills continue to remain in every farmer's name and they are asked to clear these dues when they seek a new electricity connection. To ensure farmers are not subjected to such pending bills, I announce a complete electricity waiver," Fadnavis said.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis being presented with a memento after he announced the Punyashlok Ahilyadevi Holkar Farmer Debt Relief Scheme, in Mumbai on Wednesday. ANI

The decision effectively clears the backlog of unpaid electricity dues accumulated over the years while continuing the state's existing policy of providing free electricity to agricultural pump consumers through an annual subsidy. With this scheme, the government will not only bear farmers' future electricity bills but will also absorb the entire stock of old dues, estimated at Rs 48,000 crore.

This is not the first time the state has announced relief on farm electricity bills. In the 2024-2025 budget that was presented ahead of the elections, the then Mahayuti government introduced free electricity for agricultural pump connections up to 7.5 HP, benefiting around 44 lakh farmers, while promising to take over the cost of their electricity consumption through a budgetary subsidy. The government also indicated that pending electricity dues of such consumers would be addressed. With Wednesday's announcement, the government is writing off these legacy dues completely.

The announcement adds another huge financial commitment to the state, coming close on the heels of the expanded Punyashlok Ahilyadevi Holkar farm loan waiver scheme. The Cabinet on July 10 approved changes to the scheme by removing the earlier Rs 50,000 cap for beneficiaries of the 2019 loan waiver programme. The revised scheme is expected to benefit 56 lakh farmers at an estimated cost of Rs 36,585 crore, with Fadnavis indicating that the outlay could eventually increase to around Rs 42,000 crore after the expanded eligibility criteria.

The Mukhyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin Yojana — state's flagship cash assistance scheme for women — has already cost the exchequer more than Rs 60,000 crore since its launch. The scheme covers over 1.5 crore women, down from a peak of around 2.43 crore after a verification drive identified more than 92 lakh ineligible beneficiaries. Payments made to beneficiaries later found to be ineligible are estimated at nearly Rs 14,000 crore.

"The government is making efforts to increase revenue through industry and the services sector. As our revenue grows, we will be able to make greater allocations for the agriculture sector," Fadnavis said.

EXPRESS special

Development to Ravidassia outreach: Why PM's Punjab visit is key to BJP's 2027 bid

Raakhi Jagga
Ludhiana, July 15

WHILE PRIME Minister Narendra Modi is set to unveil various development and railway infrastructure projects during his trip to Punjab's Jalandhar on July 17, his visit comes at a crucial time for the BJP, which has announced its intent to go solo for the state Assembly elections slated for February 2027.

On July 2, Union MoS for Railways Ravneet Singh Bittu made the announcement about the PM's Punjab visit. Within the next few days, however, the state's political narrative shifted dramatically.

On July 3, the Diljit Dosanjh-starrer film *Satluj*, based on the life of the slain human rights activist Jaswant Singh Khalra, was released on *ZEE5*. On July 5, however, the film was abruptly removed from the OTT platform, but not before thousands had downloaded it after Dosanjh, in a video message on July 4, warned that it could be taken down anytime.

Since then, the film has touched off a raging political storm. Its screenings are now being organised by the SGPC, Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), Akali Dal (Waris Punjab De) — an outfit floated by supporters of the jailed Independent MP Amritpal Singh — and several social organisations across Punjab.

The AAP has also criticised the curbs on the release of *Satluj*, saying the party-led Punjab government would not oppose its private screenings. The leaders of the principal Opposition Congress, too, have been facilitating its screenings in villages and towns in parts of the state.

BJP's stance

While *Satluj* centres on the alleged fake encounters during Punjab's militancy years under the President's rule and later the Congress government headed by then chief minister late Beant Singh — in the late 1980s and early 1990s — the BJP has increasingly come under attack over the film's removal from the OTT platform. The party has however consistently denied any role in it. However, the controversy has betrayed differences within the BJP. While Bittu has repeatedly criticised Dosanjh for presenting what he called a "one-sided account" of Punjab's tragedy that ignored the origins of militancy and the sacrifices of police personnel, several Sikh BJP leaders have taken a different stand.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to unveil various projects in Jalandhar on July 17. EXPRESS FILE

Senior BJP leader Iqbal Singh Lalpura publicly asked Bittu to "stay within his limits", even as Punjab BJP president Kewal Singh Dhillon has appealed for the row to end.

"The *Satluj* controversy must end now. Reopening these wounds serves no one. Punjab has bled enough and healing takes time... I appeal to the media to report with responsibility and restraint. Punjab's peace comes first," Dhillon said.

A BJP leader admitted that the party has found itself on the defensive over the *Satluj* row despite the point that the film largely portrayed events during the Congress regime. "Ironically, the movie is about the Congress period, yet it is the BJP which is being forced to explain itself..."

PM's development push

During his Jalandhar visit, Modi will inaugurate the redeveloped Jalandhar Cantonment railway station, from where he will also virtually unveil the redeveloped stations at Sahibzada Ajit Singh Nagar (Mohali), Sri Muktsar Sahib and Sri Anandpur Sahib in Punjab, among other such stations across the country. The timing of Modi's visit is significant.

This is his second Punjab visit this year, after having visited Dera Sachkhand Ballan in Jalandhar on February 1 on Guru Ravidas Jayanti. Sri Muktsar Sahib is the home district of SAD president Sukhbir Singh Badal, whose party had remained as the BJP's oldest ally until their alliance collapsed in 2020 over the now-repealed central farm laws.

Jalandhar is at the heart of the Doaba region where the BJP has been reaching out to the Ravidassia community, which accounts for a large chunk of the politically-influential SC groups in the region. Anandpur Sahib and Mohali are among Punjab's key urban and religious centres.

For BJP, the PM's July 17 visit appears to be an opportunity to reclaim the political narrative through development at a time when the *Satluj* controversy has reopened debates over Punjab's dark years.

While BJP has asserted it will contest the 2027 polls on its steam, the party has also maintained that its doors are not closed for an alliance.

Why Cong is keen on retaining Warring as Punjab unit chief

Asad Rehman
New Delhi, July 15

WHILE THE Punjab Congress continues to grapple with infighting, the party high command appears to have made up its mind to maintain a status quo with regard to its state leadership. Sources said the high command is in favour of Amrinder Singh Raja Warring continuing to helm the unit as he continues to enjoy the cadre's support.

Sources said the decision was taken as the party does not want to be seen as "weakening its organisational structure" ahead of the Assembly polls, due early next year. "Of 29 district presidents in the state, 25 are with Warring. He also has the support of four (of seven) MPs and 10 (of 18) MLAs," a source said.

AICC general secretary in-charge of Punjab Bhupesh Baghel, who met Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Wednesday, also indicated a status quo in Punjab. "I met leaders in Punjab... I met everyone... I have no control over what the media runs. This is not a game of puppets," Baghel said.

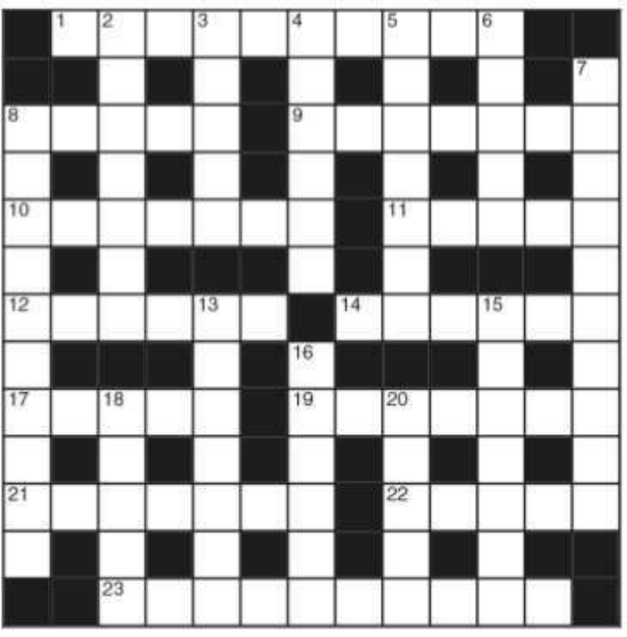
Amrinder Singh Raja Warring

Baghel earlier submitted a detailed report to the party leadership, highlighting the ground situation, particularly the firm stance of former chief minister Charanjit Singh Channi and senior leader Sukhjinder Singh Randhawa against Warring. Speculation had been rife over a possible leadership change, with sources even suggesting that Warring might consider stepping down.

The infighting in the Punjab Congress has intensified since the party high command announced earlier this month that Warring would continue as Punjab Congress president while appointing Channi as chairman of the campaign panel. The arrangement was seen as an attempt to balance competing power centres in the state unit.

However, Channi is learnt to have been unhappy with the decision, with sources saying he believed that after leading the party's campaign and emerging as one of its prominent faces in Punjab, he deserved a larger organisational role.

• CROSSWORD 6042



ACROSS
1 O Valentine! (4,6)
8 Won a hand and won the game (5)
9 Stops and fires (4,3)
10 Smirks that could be made to impress (7)
11 Name - and address? (5)
12 One can't do more than this (6)
14 He provides a new setting for the doctor (6)
17 Desist from putting back the clock? (5)
19 They drew the line at nothing here (7)
21 Get into bad shape (7)
22 Merchandise one may come up with (5)
23 Decays like sound trees becoming diseased (4,2,4)

DOWN
2 Best it is back to being silent after work (7)
3 Bear has no right to invest (5)
4 Join a silent assembly (6)
5 Make a fitting attempt? (3,2,2)
6 Where to find the rest of the fliers? (5)
7 Later chasing minors (10)
8 Ball made square possibly (10)
13 Take the chair (3,4)
15 Deserter's retreat? (3-4)
16 Dismissive order to a drummer perhaps (4,2)
18 Niggard who would be sad if able (5)
20 Does some pressing (5)

SOLUTIONS CROSSWORD 6041 ACROSS: 1 Weight, 4 Cresta, 9 Gladden, 10 Venom, 11 Outdo, 12 Concern, 13 Conscripted, 18 Ruffian, 20 Infer, 22 Panel, 23 Scowled, 24 Events, 25 Affair DOWN: 1 Wigeon, 2 Inapt, 3 Hideous, 5 Raven, 6 Sincere, 7 Almond, 8 Anachronism, 14 Offence, 15 Pair off, 16 Frappe, 17 Trader, 19 Islet, 21 Falla

JUMBLED WORDS

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective circles below. Select the letters in the shaded circles and jumble them to get the answer for the given quip.

Once in a while you have to _ _ _ _ and visit yourself.
- Audrey Giorgi (4,1,5)

LVAEE
GIINBT
KTAAR
AHISKK

SOLUTIONS: Leave, Karat, Biting, Khakis
ANSWER: Once in a while you have to **take a break** and visit yourself.
- Audrey Giorgi

• OVER THE HEDGE

BY MICHAEL FRY & T LEWIS

• CALVIN & HOBBES

BY BILL WATTERSON

• MARVIN

BY TOM ARMSTRONG

SUDOKU 6381

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

		9	1				7	2
				5				6
	7	1			4			
7				4	1	5	2	
		8				4		
	1	4	7	2				8
			3			8	9	
4				8				
8	9				2	7		

SOLUTION SUDOKU 6380

2	5	8	6	9	7	3	1	4
6	3	9	2	1	4	5	8	7
1	4	7	5	8	3	6	9	2
7	6	4	3	2	8	9	5	1
9	2	1	7	6	5	8	4	3
5	8	3	1	4	9	7	2	6
4	1	5	9	7	6	2	3	8
3	7	2	8	5	1	4	6	9
8	9	6	4	3	2	1	7	5

• ROYAL STARS

BY GEORGIA NICOLS

ARIES (MAR 21 - APR 20): It's a playful day. Enjoy socialising with others, especially romantic outings, sports and fun activities with children. Tonight: Get better organized.

TAURUS (APR 21 - MAY 21): Home, family and your private life are your priorities today. Restrict spending to food and gas because of the Moon Alert. Tonight: Socialise.

GEMINI (MAY 22 - JUNE 21): Be careful, because most of this day is a Moon Alert, which means avoid important decisions and restrict spending to food and gas. However, you're full of ideas today. You want to impulsively go off in a number of directions. Be careful. Tonight: Relax at home.

CANCER (JUNE 22 - JULY 23): Today's emphasis is on money, shopping, earnings and cash flow. However, most of this day is a Moon alert, which means restrict your spending to food and gas. This will require mindfulness and some self-discipline. Tonight: Discussions.

LEO (JULY 24 - AUG 23): Today the Moon Alert is in your sign for most of the day. This means it's a marvelous day to socialise and appreciate the arts. However, avoid important decisions and restrict spending money (except for food and gas). Tonight: Check your money.

VIRGO (AUG 24 - SEP 23): This is a popular time for you, especially because friends from the past are back in your world again. Enjoy talking with others. Don't agree to anything important. Tonight: You win.

LIBRA (SEP 24 - OCT 23): This is a great day to talk with others and enjoy the company of friends as well as groups and organizations. However, avoid important commitments. Get your information, but wait until the Moon Alert today is over. Tonight: Enjoy privacy.

SCORPIO (OCT 24 - NOV 23): Today you're noticed. Be aware of this in case you have to do some damage control. Meanwhile, there's a Moon Alert in effect for most of this day. Agree to nothing important. Restrict spending to food and gas. Tonight: Be friendly.

SAGITTARIUS (NOV 24 - DEC 22): Be patient with partners and close friends today, because Mars is opposite your sign. You're keen for a bit of adventure, which is why you want to meet new faces and see new places. Enjoy this day, but restrict spending to food and gas until the Moon Alert is over. Tonight: You're admired.

CAPRICORN (DEC 23 - JAN 20): Be cooperative with others today. Take a nap if you can, because you do need more sleep right now. Meanwhile, be aware of the fact that today the Moon Alert is taking place in one of your Money Houses. Restrict spending to food and gas. Tonight: Learn.

AQUARIUS (JAN 21 - FEB 19): Today you have to go more than halfway when dealing with others, which is not a big deal. It simply means you have to be cooperative and a bit conciliatory. Nevertheless, don't volunteer for anything and don't make important decisions. Check the Moon Alert. Tonight: Check your finances.

PISCES (FEB 20 - MAR 20): This is a playful time for you and, indeed, this is a lovely day to socialise. Note: Shortages might arise in your job. This is a poor day for important decisions related to your job or your health. Be aware of the Moon Alert. Tonight: Cooperate.

Air India crash: Media blame game affecting witnesses, apex court told

Express News Service
New Delhi, July 15

The Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB), which is investigating the Air India Dreamliner crash in Ahmedabad last year that killed 260 people, has told the Supreme Court that the "media speculation and narrative attributing blameworthiness to the pilots" for the June 12 incident have made some witnesses "restrictive and non-responsive".

In an affidavit filed on July 11, the AAIB director general said that investigators are currently at the stage of "evidence collection, technical examination and forensic examination which is the core fact-finding stage" and that the probe "in all probability" is "anticipated to be completed within approximately six weeks". The draft final report is expected to be ready approximately in October 2026, it added.

The affidavit was filed in response to a plea by Pushkar Raj Sabharwal, the father of one of the pilots who was flying the aircraft and lost his life in the tragedy.

The Bureau said that as part of the probe, the investigators can access and examine any aircraft and its components involved in the accident. "This stage ordinarily includes recovery and decoding of the recorders; collection of radar and ATC communications data; meteorological data; maintenance and operational records; crew training records; engine and structural component teardown; avionics and software forensic analysis; and consultation with technical experts and manufacturers, all under the authority and supervision of the IIC (Investigator-in-Charge). This process is ongoing and has not yet reached its conclusion," it added.

TARGETED CAMPAIGN, SAYS SAMAJWADI PARTY

Demolition order issued against 38 of 40 buildings at Azam's university

Manish Sahu
Lucknow, July 15

A DEMOLITION order was issued on Wednesday by the Rampur Development Authority (RDA) for 38 of the 40 buildings on the campus of Mohammad Ali Jauhar University, claiming they were constructed without permission from the competent authority.

The university has been given 15 days to remove the "unauthorised" structures and the administration will proceed with the demolition if the institution fails to comply within the stipulated period.

The order was passed by RDA vice-chairperson and Rampur District Magistrate Ajay Kumar Dwivedi under Section 27 of the Uttar Pradesh Urban Planning and Development Act, 1973.

The university is run by the Mohammad Ali Jauhar Trust whose chairperson is jailed former UP minister and senior Samajwadi Party leader Azam Khan. Dwivedi said the order was passed after a detailed hearing, examination of records and a review of legal provisions.

According to officials, the proceedings were initiated on the basis of a report submitted by the regional junior engineer.

The university has been given 15 days to remove the "unauthorised" structures. FILE/ENS

The officials said the RDA during the scrutiny of records found that only the university's medical college building and one academic block had valid building approvals.

The remaining 38 buildings, with a total built-up area of 82,309 square metres, were constructed without permission from the competent authority, it was stated.

The structures are located on land where their present use is not permitted under the applicable land-use regulations.

The violations cannot be regularised under the law and demolition was the only legally permissible course of action, the officials added.

The District Magistrate has directed the authorities to ensure the demolition proceedings do not adversely affect the students enrolled at the university, asking the regional higher education officer and the district inspector of schools to establish counselling camps on the campus to guide students and provide assistance needed to safeguard their academic interests, it is learnt.

Following a complaint, the RDA on June 28 and June 29 issued notices to the secretary of the Mohammad Ali Jauhar Trust and the university registrar, asking them to present their case.

The respondents filed a joint written reply on July 8.

Reacting to the demolition order, the Samajwadi Party termed the move as "unjustified", alleging the university was selectively targeted.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, SP national spokesperson Juhie Singh said the university is an important educational institution where a large number of students are pursuing studies at affordable fees. In many cases, students are also receiving fee reimbursement, she added.

Ordering the demolition of such a large educational institution reflects a targeted campaign against Azam Khan and the institution established by him, Singh alleged.

Referring to the government's claim that the structures lacked approved building plans, Singh said, "If that is the basis for the action, the government should conduct a similar exercise for educational institutions run by their own MLAs and MPs. If it does not have the details, the Samajwadi Party can provide them. The authorities should identify violations wherever they exist, and not target individuals selectively."

• BRIEFLY

The burnt car was removed from the tunnel on Mumbai Coastal Road after a blaze caused thick smoke on Wednesday. EXPRESS

MAHARASHTRA

Mumbai coastal road tunnel safety systems kick in after car catches fire

A CAR caught fire inside a tunnel on the Mumbai Coastal Road on Wednesday. The blaze was doused in about 20 minutes as various systems in the coastal road project kicked in to bring the situation under control. According to senior officials from the Mumbai Fire Brigade (MFB), the Mumbai coastal road project has a dedicated control room near the Amarsons Junction who received an emergency call. Additionally, the tunnel is equipped with a linear heat detection system – an automatic detection system – which sends an alert to the coastal road's control room. "We will be conducting an inquiry and investigating the cause of the fire," an official told *The Indian Express*. ENS

Juvenile escapes from Gorakhpur district hospital

A JUVENILE held in a theft case escaped from police custody on Wednesday at the Gorakhpur district hospital after allegedly pushing two policemen during a routine medical examination, police said. The police said the juvenile, a resident of the Rajghat area, was apprehended around 15 days ago in connection with a theft case and was subsequently sent to a juvenile correction home on court orders. The policemen were assigned to take three juveniles to the hospital when one took the opportunity to run away. Police rushed to the hospital and launched a search operation. PTI

2 dead, 22 injured as bus falls into gorge in Shimla

TWO PERSONS were killed and 22 others injured after a Himachal Road Transport Corporation (HRTC) bus plunged into a gorge near Shimla on Wednesday, said officials. The Rampur Bushahr-bound bus met with the accident around 6.30 pm after the driver reportedly lost control of the vehicle, they said.The injured were shifted to the Mahatma Gandhi Medical Service Complex in Rampur and the dead bodies for post-mortem.Deputy Commissioner Anupam Kashyap said assistance would be extended to the bereaved families and those injured in the accident. PTI

NEET-UG 2026 PAPER LEAK

111 of 136 questions on Latur tutor's phone matched NTA master set, CBI tells Delhi court

Nirbhay Thakur
New Delhi, July 15

THE CENTRAL Bureau of Investigation has submitted before a Delhi court that out of 136 handwritten questions recovered from the phone of an arrested Latur coaching centre owner, 111 matched the master question sets prepared by the National Testing Agency (NTA).

These questions were recovered from the cell phone of Shivraj Motegaonkar, who runs Renukai Chemistry Classes in Latur and a YouTube channel, Motegaonkar Sir's RCC, with 1.68 lakh subscribers.

"Investigation has revealed that Aditya Motegaonkar ... attended special classes of co-accused P V Kulkarni where leaked Chemistry questions were provided, he prepared handwritten notes from those questions. During the search, in a mobile phone used by Shivraj Motegaonkar, 36 images (5 duplicate images) containing 132 handwritten questions of Chemistry purportedly in the handwriting of Shivraj Motegaonkar were found," the CBI submitted before a Delhi court on Wednesday in reply to a bail plea filed by the accused.

"Prima facie, it was found that approximately 111 of these questions match with questions in the NTA master question sets prepared for NEET UG 2026," the CBI's reply added.

As per the CBI, the date of capture of these questions was April 23, 2026 — almost two weeks before the NEET UG exam was held on May 3.

As per the agency, Motegaonkar obtained the questions on the premises of Siddhivinayak Hospital in Latur, run by city-based paediatrician Manoj Shirure. The CBI has claimed that the questions were allegedly leaked by NTA panel member and translator P V Kulkarni.

According to the CBI, the PDF files of the leaked question papers were sold through Telegram for Rs 10 lakh. The CBI said a "guess paper" of 150 pages with 410 questions was circulated to some aspirants. Of those 410 questions, about 120 questions appeared in the chemistry paper of the exam. The "guess paper" was with students weeks before the examination, the agency has claimed. Till date, the agency has made 13 arrests in the case, including various teachers and students from Delhi, Jaipur, Gurgaon, Nashik, Pune, Latur, and Ahilyanagar.

Removing woman's salwar, pressing chest do not amount to attempted rape: Patna HC

Himanshu Harsh
Patna July 15

ATTEMPTING TO remove a woman's salwar and pressing her chest does "not unequivocally establish" an attempt to rape, the Patna High Court has held while setting aside the conviction of a man accused of attempting to sexually assault a client inside his photography studio.

Acquitting the appellant on July 9, the court held that the prosecution failed to prove the allegations, observing that even if its case were accepted "in its entirety", it would, "at best", make out an offence of assault or criminal force intended to outrage a woman's modesty under Section 354 of the IPC. Justice Purnendu Singh allowed the appeal of Himanshu Kumar Pathak alias Mithiya Pathak against his 2013 conviction by an Additional Sessions Judge in Banka.

The trial court had convicted Pathak under Sections 376/511 IPC and 342 IPC, sentencing him to three years' rigorous imprisonment for the former offence along with a fine of Rs 5,000, and six months' imprisonment for wrongful confinement. The sentences were to run concurrently.

According to the prosecution, the incident took place on January 19, 2008, when the complainant accompanied her father to a photo studio in Amarpur for a photograph. It alleged that the accused, who owned the studio, asked her father to remain outside on the pretext of viewing the photograph on a computer, bolted the studio door, attempted to remove the woman's salwar, undressed himself and physically molested her. The woman raised an alarm, following which her father forced open the door and the accused allegedly fled. An FIR was registered the next day.

> ***HC held there was an "absence of any evidence of penetration... or any overt act unequivocally constituting an attempt to commit rape"***

The HC noted that the prosecution examined five witnesses — the victim, her parents, a formal investigating officer and an independent witness who turned hostile. It also noted that the investigating officer who completed the probe was not examined during the trial and no medical officer was produced to prove any medical evidence.

On the merits, the HC held that there was an "absence of any evidence of penetration, even to the slightest extent, or any overt act unequivocally constituting an attempt to commit rape", and therefore the ingredients of Sections 375 and 376 read with Section 511 IPC were not attracted.

The court observed that the appellant was alleged to have confined the victim inside the studio, closed the door, attempted to remove her salwar and physically molested her by pressing her chest. According to the judgment, "these acts clearly establish the use of criminal force upon a woman with the intention, or at least the knowledge, that such acts were likely to outrage her modesty, thereby satisfying the essential ingredients of Section 354 IPC."

The judgment held that "even if the prosecution case is accepted in its entirety, the acts attributed to the appellant... do not unequivocally establish the commission of an offence punishable under Section 376(1) read with Section 511 of the IPC. At best, the allegations disclose an act intended to outrage the modesty of the victim, thereby attracting the ingredients of Section 354 IPC."

Pune sailor, missing since July 12 attack on ship off Oman coast, is dead: Dubai Consulate

Express News Service
New Delhi, July 15

A SAILOR from Pune, who had gone missing after the July 12 attack on the Cyprus-flagged MV GFS Galaxy cargo vessel off the coast of Oman, has died, the Indian Consulate in Dubai confirmed on Wednesday. This puts the death toll of Indians in the war in West Asia at 14 since it started on February 28.

There were 11 Indian crew members on the vessel, and 10 of them were rescued.

It said the Indian officials are closely coordinating with the UAE authorities and the shipping company to provide all possible assistance to the deceased sailor's family.

"We express our deepest condolences at the tragic demise of an Indian national due to an attack on the commercial vessel MV GFS Galaxy on 12 July 2026," the Mission said in a post on X.

The missing sailor, 30-year-old Herambh Karmarkar from Pune, was a third engineer aboard the cargo vessel when it was attacked. According to Gulf News, Karmarkar's family was informed by the shipping company on Tuesday evening that Oman's coast guard had recovered his body, nearly 60 hours after he was reported missing. "The Consulate is in touch with the bereaved family and is closely coordinating with the relevant UAE authorities and the shipping company to provide all possible support and assistance to the family," the Indian mission said.

"We are awaiting his mortal remains, which are currently with the Oman Navy. Herambh had been on the vessel for the last five months and was due to sign off soon," his father-in-law Vivek Tandon said on Wednesday. Karmarkar is survived by his wife, mother, and a younger sister. He had completed his marine engineering from the City of Glasgow College in the UK and had joined the merchant navy, Tandon added. WITH PTI

Tamil Nadu jail inmate death: Autopsy reveals injuries, 3 wardens held

Arun Janardhanan
Chennai, July 15

THE DEATH of a 35-year-old remand prisoner inside Nagercoil sub-jail in Tamil Nadu's Kanniyakumari district led to the arrest of three prison wardens on Tuesday turning what was initially described as a possible 'medical emergency' into a custodial death investigation.

The police arrested chief warder Jegan, and warders Sivakumar and Thiruvudai Nambi on Tuesday after the post-mortem of the remand prisoner, Sabari Varman allegedly revealed multiple injuries. He was a differently abled grocery shop owner who was arrested on July 9.

Varman, who was from Ethankadu near South Thamaraikulam, was arrested after the police alleged that he was found in possession of banned gutka products. The police said around 200 grams of the prohibited tobacco products, or 15 packets, were reportedly seized from his shop. He was produced before a magistrate, remanded to judicial custody, and lodged in the Nagercoil sub-jail. Prison authorities said Varman developed a sudden health problem early on Monday morning and was rushed to the Kanyakumari Government Medical College Hospital at Asaripallam, where doctors declared him dead on arrival.

His death immediately triggered protests by family members outside the hospital, with relatives alleging that he had been assaulted while in custody. They refused to receive his body, claiming they noticed injuries on it and demanding an impartial investigation. One relative said prison officials casually informed the family of his death, alleging they were "smiling" while conveying the news. The family rejected the initial suggestion that he had died of a heart attack, insisting he had no known pre-existing illness.

People losing sleep in big cities due to high night-time temperatures: Study

Anuradha Mascarenhas
Pune, July 15

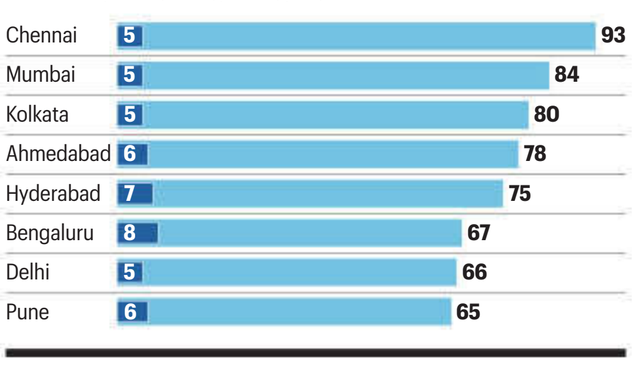
People in some of India's largest cities are losing between 65 and 93 hours of sleep each year because of climate change-induced increases in night-time temperatures, a new study has revealed.

Chennai was found to be the city with highest overall sleep loss in India, with residents losing an average of 93 hours of sleep annually, of which five hours could be directly attributable to climate change, according to the study by Climate Central, a US-based climate advocacy group. Residents of Mumbai and Kolkata are losing 84 and 80 hours of sleep respectively every year, the study said.

The study used an already-established relationship between night-time temperatures and sleep to assess loss of sleeping hours in more than 1,300 cities across the world.

It found that an average person in these cities lost nearly 56 hours of sleep per year in the 2020-2025 time period because of unusually high night-time temperatures.

• Sleep Loss Across Major Cities (2020–2025)



At least 10 per cent of this sleep loss could be directly attributed to human-induced climate change.

Unusually high night-time temperatures has emerged as a major concern in recent years, and the cause of many heat-related deaths. High temperatures at night prevent the human bodies from cooling down and recover from the heat stress experienced during the day, leading to loss of energy, discomfort and lack of productivity during day time. It is also a health hazard, increasing the risk of strokes and other cardiovascular conditions. Short and poor-quality sleep can also shorten life expectancy and increase the risk of accidents and injuries.

Due to climate change, night-time temperatures have increased at a faster rate compared to day-time temperatures across the world.

"Many people have been experiencing hotter summer nights, making it harder for the body to cool down before sleep. As a result, sleep quality suffers, which can lead to irritability, mental and physical fatigue. People living with chronic health conditions are particularly vulnerable to these effects," Abhiyant Tiwari, lead, climate resilience and health at the Natural Resources Defence Council (NRDC), an environmental advocacy group, said.

The study included over 100 Indian cities, and found substantial losses in sleeping hours everywhere. Delhi and Chandigarh were among the cities where the sleep loss was the lowest, about 67 and 62 hours every year. Bengaluru happened to be the city where the footprint of climate change was observed to be the highest, about 12 per cent of the 67 hours lost every year.

Bhagwat to deliver lecture on 'contemporary motherhood'

Express News Service
New Delhi, July 15

RSS CHIEF Mohan Bhagwat will deliver a lecture on "contemporary motherhood" and interact with women leaders at a two-day awareness meeting organised by Vishwa Mangalya Sabha in New Delhi on July 23-24.

The organisation said the July 24 interaction at the Dr Ambedkar International Centre on Janpath would mark the first time an incumbent RSS chief would hold a detailed dialogue with women on the theme of motherhood. The programme will include a question-and-answer session with participants.

Vishwa Mangalya Sabha national organising secretary Vrushali Joshi said the organisation has chosen "Yuganukul Matrutva (contemporary motherhood)" as its focus area for the coming years following consultations with women across the country.

Truck driver from Punjab, behind multi-vehicle fatal crash in US, gets 5 yrs in jail

Express News Service
Chandigarh, July 15

A 21-YEAR-OLD commercial truck driver from Punjab, who had been living illegally in the USA, was sentenced to four years and eight months in prison for causing a eight-vehicle crash on a California highway that left three persons dead.

Jashanpreet Singh, from village Purana Shalla in Punjab's Gurdaspur, was sent to California state prion on July 14 after pleading guilty to three counts of vehicular manslaughter with gross negligence.

San Bernardino County Superior Court Judge Shannon L. Faherty imposed the sentence in a hearing attended by families of the victims.

The case stems from a chain-reaction crash on October 21, 2025, on the westbound Interstate 10 Freeway in Ontario, California, near the Milliken offramp. Jashanpreet was driving a semi-truck when traffic ahead slowed.

According to witnesses and investigators, his truck did not brake, swerve, or take evasive action. It barreled at high speed into the vehicles, triggering an eight-vehicle pileup involving his semi-truck, three other semi-trucks, two pickup trucks, and two cars. Three people died in the crash. Four were injured, some seriously. Among the fatalities were Pomona High School Red Devils assistant basketball coach Clarence Nelson and his wife, Lisa Nelson.

● **WEB EXCLUSIVE**
'The bittersweet realities of the India-UK FTA.' — *By Anisree Suresh*
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Under certain circumstances, fasting is the one weapon God has given us for use in times of utter helplessness.
— *Mahatma Gandhi*

The Indian EXPRESS
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RAMNATH GOENKA
IN 1932
BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Government must talk to Sonam, that's its duty

AS SONAM Wangchuk's hunger strike at the capital's Jantar Mantar enters yet another day, the government holds on to its hard silence. Wangchuk is no stranger to the political establishment he seeks to address, again. Last year, the profusely awarded innovator, education reformer and climate activist was arrested after a section of the protests he led in Leh — demanding statehood and Sixth Schedule safeguards for Ladakh — turned violent. The man celebrated for breaking the mould was accused of instigating the violence, labelled "anti-national", slapped with the stringent NSA. In March this year, after about 170 days in jail, Wangchuk walked free after the government revoked his preventive detention, only days before it was to come up in court. It was actively engaging in a dialogue to address the people's aspirations and concerns in Ladakh, the government said, through a high-powered committee and other platforms. Today, Wangchuk's demand has changed — along with the Cockroach Janta Party, he is demanding accountability and educational reform in the wake of the NEET paper leak. But the government's instinct and playbook remain the same — it has set its face against the protesters. As of now, it is not clear whether or when it will take the next step and relent and engage.

The BJP-led government needs to reflect on its own response pattern. The Wangchuk-CJP protest cannot be compared to other instances, it is very much a product of its moment. But be it the farmers' agitation against the farm laws being pushed through without consultation, or demonstrations against a citizenship law more discriminatory — civil society protests have almost always shone a light on the government's inability to reach out. It cannot find the words and language to talk to those who disagree with it. This reinforces the impression that it is uncomfortable with anything that involves give and take. It is only at home talking to others, it seems, when it is striking deals with them in the political backrooms to add to its growing numbers in Parliament. Talking and listening, dialogue and negotiation, is a government's bounden duty in a democracy — not an instrument it uses only to swing a transaction. The government needs to talk to Wangchuk and his supporters at Jantar Mantar.

Whether it does so or not, Wangchuk has made his point. The NEET leak did not just affect those who took the exam, it has drawn attention to a broken educational system, and the need to set it right. Those changes will take patience — and more men and women like Wangchuk, dedicated to a cause that resonates wide and deep in a country of the young. That's why he must end the fast and why the government must find a way to talk to him.

Welcome back, Taslima Nasrin

THE INVITATION to Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasrin to return to Kolkata after nearly two decades to participate in a public event on August 1 is long overdue and enormously welcome. It is freighted with political symbolism. In 2007, the publication of *Dwikhondito*, the third instalment of Nasrin's memoir, had led to protests, forcing the writer to move out of the city that had been her home since her exile from Bangladesh following the publication of her novel *Lajja* (1993). Whatever the government's reasons now — the ruling BJP in West Bengal characterises it as a break from the "appeasement politics" of the TMC and Left — the invitation to her marks a heartening repudiation of what has been termed the heckler's veto: When the loudest or most easily offended voices determine what others may read, watch or discuss.

From Tamil author Perumal Murugan's *Madhorubhagan* to Honey Trehan's *Satluj* most recently, governments of various political persuasions have responded to outrage against art and artistes through pre-emptive censorship — book withdrawals, cancelled screenings, edits and cuts, and in some cases, criminal complaints against makers. In shielding citizens from discomfiting ideas, the boundaries of permissible speech get shrunk inexorably, leading to a narrowing of the public sphere. Nasrin's work has pushed against the grain, refusing the consolations of neat binaries. She has written against religious fundamentalism, misogyny and the social arrangements that deny women autonomy over their own lives. Her candour has provoked discomfort, fierce disagreement and criticism. But the pushback to controversial or offensive ideas cannot be exile, exclusion or the threat of violence. The response should come through conversations.

Ideas that unsettle certainties enlarge the moral and intellectual universes through which a society understands itself. The significance of the invitation to Nasrin, therefore, extends beyond one writer, or one occasion. It is a reminder that a democracy shows confidence in itself not by insulating citizens from ideas but by trusting them — even and especially when it is politically inconvenient or socially contentious to do so — to confront, own and debate them.

The sea has a seat at the table

THE SCOTTISH Association of Marine Scientists (SAMS) is amongst the world's oldest ocean research agencies. Founded in 1884 by the naturalist John Murray, it connected the early academic mapping of ocean floors with practical economic initiatives. Murray himself partnered with the British government to extract phosphate from oceanic islands. The father of oceanography may have found the latest move of the institution he founded eccentric — the Atlantic Ocean is now a trustee of SAMS.

Today, the idea of viewing nature as sentient doesn't sound as quirky as it might have in Murray's time. New Zealand has recognised the Whanganui River as a legal person, courts in Colombia recognise the Amazon rainforest as a rights-bearing entity, and Spain's law has extended personhood to the Mar Menor lagoon. Behind these developments lies a growing recognition that ecosystems have an agency of their own. Now, an institution most dedicated to studying the sea has recognised that expertise alone is not enough: Scientists can explain what is happening beneath the waves, but they cannot always ensure that institutional decisions reflect the long-term health of waters.

A fundamental question, though: Who exactly speaks for the sea? The marine ecologist? The fisherpeople? The octopus? The plankton? Perhaps all of them. Even before the era of climate change, the sea was never known for concise interventions. In the coming weeks and months, SAMS will be watched for how its board meetings translate tides and waves to talking points and currents to committee notes.

America's hubris has yielded a dramatically more dangerous world

SHASHI THAROOR

THE RESUMPTION of the Iran war, with a dramatic escalation of tit-for-tat military operations, has laid bare the realities of modern warfare. In hindsight, perhaps the US was itching to show the world that the MoU that inaugurated the truce was not the strategic disaster it was widely perceived to be. After all, the invading coalition launched "Epic Fury", premised on overwhelming force and decisive transformation, but the military campaign was regarded as an Epic Failure — a textbook example of how muddled objectives, fundamental misreading of adversaries, and alienation of international partners caused the offensive to boomerang on its orchestrators.

Rather than executing the regime change that was rashly announced as the principal objective, the war paradoxically fortified the targeted nation, expanded its geopolitical prestige, and left the international coalition pausing the conflict on significantly worse terms than when it began. The volatile 60-day negotiation framework that officially commenced on June 15, when US Vice President J D Vance and Iranian Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf signed a 14-point MoU, has collapsed, though peace talks are being attempted in Oman. Still, the war underscored the severe limitations of coercive military power in an era where asymmetric capabilities can disrupt global superpower superiority.

The primary turning point that shattered the coalition's military calculus was the sudden and highly effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz. For all the technological prowess brought to bear by Western forces, naval and military planners quickly discovered that in an era dominated by low-cost drone warfare, re-establishing total control over a critical maritime chokepoint is a challenging endeavour once an adversary has laid mines offshore and prepared its defences. By leveraging a simple yet far-reaching deterrent, the defending nation successfully held the global economy hostage, forcing a desperate rush toward diplomacy.

The resulting MoU, in exchange for merely returning to the status quo ante and allowing shipping lanes to reopen temporarily, granted sweeping concessions, including massive phased sanctions relief, Iranian export of over 40 million barrels of oil, the unfreezing of tens of billions of dollars in foreign assets, and the establishment of a historic multinational reconstruction fund, while details of the nuclear deal remain unclear. All this could have been achieved at the negotiating table without resort to war and without devastating the world economy. A core demand of the invasion, the eradication of Iran's ballistic-missile capacity, was omitted from the MoU, leaving the invaders to crow about reopening a waterway that was not even closed before their war began.

The humiliating MoU starkly contrasts with Barack Obama's JCPOA, scrapped by Donald Trump in 2018, which restricted Iran's nuclear capacity without a single bomb being dropped. By replacing nuanced diplomacy and international verification with reckless bombardment, the US removed the primary mechanisms of international oversight. Renewed bombing gives Iran a compelling incentive to rapidly accelerate toward full nuclear weapon status. After all, developing nuclear capacity attracted attacks; but North Korea actually has nukes, and is handled with kid gloves. Lesson: Get the bomb!

The collapse of diplomatic negotiations is due to the continuing Hormuz dispute. Flushed with its regional leverage, Iran attempted to institute a unilateral security mechanism to extract mandatory shipping transit fees from commercial vessels. This move has been firmly rejected by most of the world, who cite international freedom of navigation to block such extortionate demands over a natural waterway. (The Panama and Suez Canals are man-made and charge for services; straits like Hormuz or Malacca require no human intervention and are recognised in international law as global commons.) Iranian attacks on vessels attempting to evade the tolls provoked the latest US attacks, and now the renewed US blockade. The US charging tolls — a threat that Trump has now backed away from — is as unwelcome as the Iranians doing so.

> The humiliating MoU starkly contrasts with Obama's JCPOA, scrapped by Trump in 2018, which restricted Iran's nuclear capacity without a single bomb being dropped

The US retaliatory attacks have targeted coastal surveillance, air defence networks, drone and missile storage infrastructure, and logistics hubs (including tactical railway corridors and bridges) along Iran's southern coast to blunt its capability to obstruct maritime traffic. Iran immediately responded with a coordinated wave of drone and ballistic missile attacks against US bases in Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and Jordan.

The strategic failure has also exposed the fallacy of leadership decapitation. While initial strikes successfully targeted and eliminated high-ranking political and military figures, the entrenched institutional structure of the Iranian state proved remarkably resilient. Rather than inducing moderation or domestic collapse, the systematic assassination of the ruling elite simply cleared the path for a new, younger generation of leaders who are demonstrably more radical, fiercely angry, more sophisticated, and committed to regional dominance.

The economic ripple effects of this miscalculation extend far beyond the immediate combat zones, inflicting a ruinous toll on the Global South. Iran estimates that the conflict has set back its economy by roughly $200 billion, but energy-dependent nations like India have been hit almost as severely. As the conflict choked off regional trade, skyrocketing oil prices and rampant inflation severely strained fiscal balances, driving up import costs and weakening the rupee, compromising the economic security of millions who had nothing to do with the war.

The international community's endorsement of an integrated ceasefire across multiple fronts (and the MoU's failure to end regional proxy funding) had effectively formalised Iran's right to intervene politically and militarily in neighbouring states to protect proxies like Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Houthis. This is another reality the resumed attacks seek to undo.

Washington realises the conflict has severely diminished the geopolitical authority and credibility of the superpower that initiated it. Hence Trump's threat that 1,000 US missiles remain "locked and loaded" for immediate unleashing. Domestically, the architects of the war face intense public backlash for failing to deliver on promises of rapid peacemaking and minimal inflation, while internationally, global actors increasingly view the US not as a stable anchor but as an unpredictable risk to the global equilibrium. The disastrous current situation serves as a stark historical warning that military hubris, when detached from coherent objectives and historical reality, inevitably yields a fractured international order, severely compromised allies, and a dramatically more dangerous world.

The writer is a fourth-term Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) for Thiruvananthapuram and chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs

Australian uranium fuels next phase in India's n-programme

MANPREET SETHI

BHAWNA BUDHWAR

COMMON SECURITY concerns have made Australia and India discover a new relevance for their relationship. This was reflected in the forward-looking joint statement that came out of the two countries' recent summit. It lists many areas of cooperation, but what stands out is movement on uranium supplies from Australia to India's nuclear power programme.

Historically, Australia has maintained a strict policy of exporting uranium only to signatories of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). Canberra had frowned when India, a non-NPT member, concluded the nuclear cooperation agreement with the USA in 2008 and subsequently was exceptionalised by the Nuclear Suppliers Group to source uranium, nuclear equipment, technology and reactors from the international market. Australia's change of heart is good news. It holds the world's largest uranium reserves, approximately one-third of the global total. And the quality of Australian uranium far outstrips India's low-grade mineral, which exacts higher extraction costs and generates significant tailings that need to be safely managed to protect human health and the environment.

India's consistent non-proliferation credentials facilitated the shift in the Australian position. This began once India signed an Additional Protocol (AP) with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 2009, committing itself to a "separation plan" that bifurcated its nuclear facilities into civilian and military. India safeguarded its strategic autonomy while meeting the non-proliferation requirements of international civilian nuclear cooperation. Once the AP came into force in 2014, an Australia-India Nuclear Cooperation Agreement was concluded in 2015 to enable uranium exports.

However, commercial uranium exports did not start immediately because an Administrative Arrangement (AA) to implement the agreement had to be operationalised in Australia. This had to establish the practical procedures for tracking, accounting and reporting the use of Australian Obligated Nuclear Material (AONM), ensuring that the imported uranium would be used exclusively for peaceful civilian purposes in accordance with the bilateral agreement and IAEA safeguards. Consensus on the safeguards-related procedures governing the tracking of uranium was achieved after two years of intensive negotiations. This signals renewed hope that Australian uranium will make its way to India once commercial contracts are in place. Since 2008-09, India has been importing natural uranium ore concentrate from Canada, France, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and natural uranium dioxide pellets and enriched uranium from Russia. With the availability of Australian uranium, the kitty would further expand.

> Consensus on the safeguards-related procedures governing the tracking of uranium was achieved after two years of intensive negotiations. This signals renewed hope that Australian uranium will make its way to India once commercial contracts are in place

These developments are the building blocks for India's nuclear energy expansion, which aims to increase installed nuclear power capacity from 8.78 GW to 100 GW by 2047. To achieve this, the government has a two-pronged approach. One, a "fleet mode" expansion of large reactors led by India's nuclear operator, the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd (NPCIL). By itself and in partnership with NTPC, NPCIL is engaged in the construction of several 700 MWe indigenous nuclear reactors, with more to follow. Two, the government is supporting the research and development of low-carbon small modular reactors for energy-guzzlers such as steel/cement plants or AI data centres. The necessary legislative and regulatory changes have been effected through the SHANTI Act. The government will continue to control strategic and security-sensitive segments of the nuclear fuel cycle.

Keeping in view the planned large-scale expansion of all reactor sizes, India is pursuing a strategy to to build a strategic uranium reserve to guard against supply-chain disruptions that may be caused by black swan events like pandemics or the eruption of geopolitical hotspots. A new enthusiasm has gripped the nuclear power sector. While the government assures access to nuclear fuel, the nascent private industry must imbibe the highest standards of safety, security and safeguards. NPCIL will have to do the hand-holding to enable India to write a new chapter of its nuclear story.

Sethi is distinguished fellow and Budhwar is research associate, Centre for Aerospace Power and Strategic Studies

When gods become memory, and when they live with us

GEORGE JOHN

IN GOOD **faith**

> Greek mythology faded as religion but endured as beauty. Indian mythology endured because it remained inseparable from ritual, memory, place, language and moral imagination

CIVILISATIONS DO not lose their gods in a single afternoon. They lose them gradually, through conquest, conversion, reinterpretation, forgetfulness, and sometimes through the quiet transfer of sacred stories into museums and classrooms. This is why the contrast between Greek and Indian mythology is so fascinating. The Greek gods still dazzle the imagination. Yet for most modern Greeks, they are no longer objects of devotion. In India, by contrast, the figures of the epics and Puranas still shape worship, festivals, ethics, family life and public memory.

This is not because Indian myths are "truer" or Greek myths less profound. Greek mythology gave the world some of its most enduring reflections on fate, pride, suffering and moral blindness. Antigone, Oedipus, Prometheus and Odysseus remain permanent inhabitants of the human mind. But the religious world that sustained them was broken with the Christianisation of the Roman Empire. The old gods survived, but largely as culture.

India's story is different because its mythology was never sealed off from life. The Ramayana and Mahabharata travelled through recitation, performance, dance, music, and family storytelling. A Greek child may learn about Athena as part of the national or literary heritage. An Indian child may encounter Ganesha through a festival or Shiva through a family pilgrimage. The story is not presented as a relic. It is embodied in action.

There is a bigger philosophical difference. Greek mythology is often imagined as belonging to a heroic past. Indian sacred imagination moves more comfortably within cyclical time. The *yugas* suggest moral decline and renewal are recurring features of existence. This gives the epics continuing relevance. Kurukshetra is not only a battlefield in the Mahabharata. It is the battlefield of conscience. Ayodhya is not only a kingdom. It is an argument about duty, exile, loyalty, power and sacrifice. Indian deities also function at several levels, as personal gods, cosmic principles, psychological symbols and ethical provocations. This allows mythology to survive changes in education, science and politics because it need not be flattened into literalism.

Yet endurance is not automatically wisdom. Living myths require living interpretation. When used to exclude or dominate, they betray their own moral complexity. The Mahabharata is not a pamphlet for triumphalism but a tragic meditation on war, duty and the cost of victory. The Ramayana is not merely a tale of obedience. It is also a field of anguish, exile, loyalty, gendered suffering and moral debate. This is why the survival of Indian mythology should be understood not as a sign of cultural superiority but as a responsibility. A dead myth can be admired safely. A living myth can heal or wound. It can enlarge the soul or shrink the mind.

Greek mythology faded as religion but endured as beauty. Indian mythology endured because it remained inseparable from ritual, memory, place, language and moral imagination. Its test now is not whether it can survive modernity but whether it can continue to deepen our humanity rather than harden identities.

The writer is a retired psychiatrist

40 YEARS AGO

July 16, 1986

INDIAN EXPRESS

Intrusion by China in eastern sector

India to raise issue at talks

Hurdles in Colombo talks

Chinese incursion

INDIA IS to raise the issue of a border intrusion by about 40 Chinese nearly 7 km south of the McMahon Line in the eastern sector last month at the seventh round of official-level talks beginning in Beijing on July 21. A senior official of the Ministry of External Affairs said the intrusion had taken place in the Kameng division of Arunachal Pradesh in the vicinity of the Sumdorong Chu Valley.

Aid from West Germany

INDIA IS expected to receive development assistance of nearly DM 500 million (about Rs 287 crore) from West Germany. For the first time in seven years, Bonn will raise its financial assistance to the largest recipient of its development aid by 10 per cent as announced by Chancellor Helmut Kohl during his visit to New Delhi last April.

Hurdles in Colombo talks

THE POLITICAL Parties Conference, convened by Sri Lankan President J R Jayewardene to consider the government proposals to resolve the ethnic problem, ran into rough weather with one of the Tamil parties insisting that the conference take up the "fundamental demands" of the Tamil community first before going into the proposals. All-Ceylon Tamil Congress leader Kumar Ponnambalam questioned the wisdom of the conference setting up five committees on the functions to be devolved to the proposed provincial councils.

Tonne of hashish seized

THE DIRECTORATE of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) has seized about a tonne of hashish worth about 3.8 million dollars in the international market from a farmhouse at Mehrauli in South Delhi. The hashish was concealed on the floor of the outhouse of a farm located at Gadaipur in Mehrauli.

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

Israel's defense minister soldiers on against the army he leads.

— Haaretz, Israel

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One Nation, One Election will not fix what is broken

VIJAY KELKAR AND AJIT RANADE

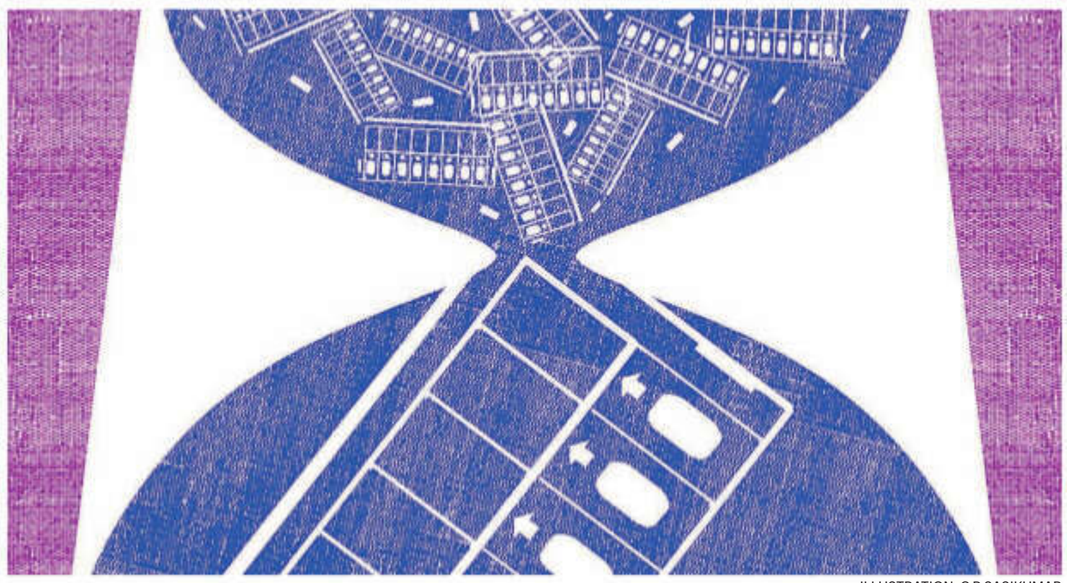

ILLUSTRATION: C R SASIKUMAR

INDIA'S PARLIAMENT is set to take up the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill to synchronise Lok Sabha and all state assembly elections, inserting a new Article 82A and amending Articles 83 and 172. The Bill requires a two-thirds majority in both Houses and ratification by half the states. After a High-Level Committee (HLC) chaired by former President Ram Nath Kovind, the government has committed to this push. The scale of the constitutional intervention demands rigorous scrutiny of the claimed benefits.

The HLC report rests on four pillars: Cost savings, relief from "policy paralysis" caused by the Model Code of Conduct, reduced burden on government manpower, and an economic growth dividend. Its economic anchor is a striking claim: Research by Prachi Mishra, N K Singh and colleagues finds that real GDP growth is approximately 1.5 percentage points higher following simultaneous election cycles. That single finding must be examined carefully.

The paper compares the simultaneous election era (1952–1967, partially until the mid-1980s) with the subsequent asynchronous period. But before reaching for the econometrics, consider the plain historical record. The era produced what economists call the "Hindu rate of growth": Around 3.5 per cent annually, decades of the licence raj, import substitution, and a closed economy. India's genuine high-growth era came entirely under asynchronous elections: The 8 to 9 per cent annual growth of 2003–2011 was achieved with staggered state polls running through every single year. If simultaneous elections drive growth, this history is very difficult to explain. The macro confounders — trade liberalisation, the IT boom, global capital flows, financial deepening, and the 1991 reforms — are too large to control away. More consequentially, the paper's own results show the growth effect operating partly through higher fiscal deficits and greater government spending: Structural improvement, or a political business cycle merely compressed in time? A constitutional overhaul cannot rest on correlations that India's own history contradicts.

On costs, the argument collapses once you ask a simple question: Who is actually spending? The government's election expenditure is not even 0.1 per cent of its own budget, as ECI accounts confirm. The "excessive" spending is by candidates and parties. But the telling detail is this: Per audited accounts submitted to the ECI, the average official expenditure by candidates is 50 per cent of the permissible ceiling. Candidates are, on paper, underspending, not overspending. The implication is inescapable: The real money is not in any account. It is black money, unaccounted and untraceable, which the Centre for Media Studies estimates at over Rs 1,00,000 crore for the 2024 Lok Sabha election alone. No electoral calendar reform can touch this. The same political economy of cash, patronage and opacity prevails whether elections happen every year or once in five years. ONOE does not reduce election spending; it merely concentrates it.

On the Model Code of Conduct: The MCC restricts government announcements for roughly 45 to 60 days per election. Because India holds state elections in a rolling fashion, NITI Aayog estimates some part of the country is under the MCC for about four months every year. Under ONOE, that rolling freeze becomes a single national freeze every five years, simultaneously halting developmental announcements across every state. The disruption is not eliminated; it is nationally concentrated and potentially more distorting. Calling this "policy paralysis" mistakes democratic restraint for administrative dysfunction.

> These require targeted reform: Mandatory disclosure of all donations, enforceable expenditure limits, disbarment of criminally tainted candidates, and a genuinely autonomous Election Commission

The deeper objections are constitutional. The Supreme Court in *Kesavananda Bharati* has held that parliamentary democracy and free and fair elections are part of the Constitution's basic structure, a threshold even amendments cannot cross. Three specific tensions arise. First, parliamentary government rests on collective responsibility: The executive holds office only so long as it commands legislative confidence. Under ONOE, a government losing its majority would either continue without a legitimate mandate or trigger President's Rule — neither is acceptable. The HLC's proposed "constructive no-confidence motion", requiring any no-confidence vote to be paired with a simultaneous confidence vote for an alternative, is borrowed from Germany and distorts India's parliamentary tradition. As Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy researchers point out, it would incentivise minority governments to cling to office despite lacking popular support.

Second, reaching the first synchronised cycle requires extending or curtailing multiple state assembly terms. Articles 83 and 172 deliberately use the words "no longer" — a phrase the Constituent Assembly inserted to bar extensions beyond five years. Extending terms without fresh mandate breaches the voters' contract; curtailing them denies voters the period they voted for. Either way, the electorate's will is overridden.

Third, simultaneous elections structurally disadvantage regional parties, and the republic's federal character. Research shows a consistent "wave effect" when national and state elections coincide. Voters tend to choose the same party at both levels, giving large national parties a decisive advantage. Regional concerns such as agrarian distress in Vidarbha, coastal livelihoods in Kerala, or flood management in Assam, find parliamentary voice through regional formations. Bundling elections risks submerging these voices under national campaigns.

The ONOE framework also ignores elections to India's constitutionally protected third tier of government. The 73rd and 74th Amendments placed panchayat and urban local body elections under State Election Commissions, not the ECI, guaranteeing their autonomy. These are not minor contests. Mumbai, Pune and Bengaluru have budgets larger than many Indian states, and their elections are high-stakes political battles. Folding them into ONOE would violate the spirit of these amendments; keeping them separate undermines ONOE's own rationale. Substantial expenditure, security deployment, and governance disruption would continue through every panchayat and municipal cycle, leaving the claimed savings largely illusory.

What makes this particularly dispiriting is that the genuine pathologies of elections go untouched: Unlimited party spending, cash distribution to voters, criminalisation of politics, and misuse of state machinery. These require targeted reform: Mandatory disclosure of all donations, enforceable expenditure limits, disbarment of criminally tainted candidates, and a genuinely autonomous ECI. All these reforms are achievable without touching the Constitution's federal and parliamentary foundations.

The ONOE Bill reorganises the democratic calendar. It does not fix what is broken.

The writers are respectively, vice president and senior fellow, Pune International Centre

A law to give women farmers their due

SOUMYA SWAMINATHAN AND DEVENDRA FADNAVIS

MAHARASHTRA HAS become the first state to enact a law for the empowerment of women farmers. The Maharashtra Women Farmers Empowerment Act, 2026 is a path-breaking initiative. Women across the globe do much of the work across agrifood systems from production to processing, yet their contributions are not recognised. They face challenges in access to credit, insurance, extension services, technology and markets. Government benefits are often linked to land ownership, usually held by men. It is against this backdrop that 2026 is being observed as the International Year of the Woman Farmer, calling for "fairer, more inclusive and sustainable agrifood systems for all."

Maharashtra is a state that has long shaped India's social reform movements with stalwarts like Savitribai Phule, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Maharshi Karve, Pandita Ramabai, Lokahitwadi Gopal Hari Deshmukh and Gopal Ganesh Agarkar working tirelessly for women's rights and gender equality. The state has also seen positive interventions in recent times. The Fourth Policy for Women, 2024 commits to facilitating gender-inclusive agriculture development, including "access to, control over, and ownership of land and other productive assets, as well as access to entitlements" and "enhancing the role of women in decision-making and control over agricultural income".

A large majority (82 per cent) of the rural female workforce in Maharashtra is employed in agriculture as compared to 58 per cent of rural men, according to the Periodic Labour Force Survey, 2025. (The corresponding all-India figures are 73 per cent and 47 per cent respectively). However, less than a fifth of operational landholdings are in the names of women. Late last year, the Government of Maharashtra embarked on the groundwork to give shape to a law for the empowerment of women farmers. The M S Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) has been a partner in this effort, together with the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy (Maharashtra).

Women farmers engaged in different agricultural and allied activities, civil society organisations and networks, bankers, lawyers, researchers and frontline government officials have all participated in the consultations. A special session was organised jointly with the state legislature on the occasion of International Women's Day. Following this, a committee was constituted to draft the Bill, which was presented and discussed at regional consultations. The feedback and suggestions received contributed to giving a final shape to the Bill that was presented in the Legislative Assembly after the cabinet's approval.

ILLUSTRATION: TANUSHRI MITRA

The Act adopts a broad definition of "agriculture" and "farmer" in line with the National Policy for Farmers (2007), and includes any person who is engaged in crop husbandry, animal husbandry, poultry, fishery, agro-forestry, vermiculture, mushroom cultivation, and primary processing, either as owner or labourer. A woman engaged in any of these activities can apply for a Woman Farmer Certificate (WFC) either to the gram sabha or nagar panchayat. This certificate will formally recognise the woman as a farmer and effectively de-links the requirement of owning land. Going forward, the WFC will give women farmers greater access to entitlements under government schemes, extension services, credit and market opportunities. It will help the government design gender-responsive schemes for skill development and provide targeted support for single women farmers.

A digital registry of women farmers backed by a special fund, a state level empowerment cell and designated officers at district and sub-district levels will facilitate the implementation of the law. A state-level monitoring committee headed by the chief secretary will facilitate coordination and ensure effective implementation. A governing council headed by the chief minister will provide guidance and oversee the implementation.

This landmark law is an important first step towards social change to address deeply entrenched inequalities in access to land, water and other natural resources. The increasing migration of men in search of employment is leaving women to shoulder the responsibility of food and nutrition security in the midst of the growing challenge of climate change and depleting natural resources. It is globally observed that women are among the strongest drivers of adaptation to climate change. Proactive policy support will enable them to play this role even better as we work together for inclusive and sustainable agrifood systems.

Swaminathan is chairperson, M S Swaminathan Research Foundation, and Fadnavis is Chief Minister, Maharashtra

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Deletion menace

DENYING PEOPLE whose names are missing from the voters' list the benefits of the state's welfare schemes and the renewal of passports reveals the government's hostility towards them ('One deletion, cascading civil disabilities', *IE*, July 15). This move contradicts the Election Commission's much-touted stand that the SIR is meant only for preparing electoral rolls and that deletion, apart from barring those affected from voting, will have nothing to do with other spheres. It is now spilling over into other walks of life: It is being used to deprive elderly persons of old-age pensions and poor families of various welfare benefits and medical facilities. It is thus playing havoc with people's lives.

S H Quadri, Bikaner

Caste data

WHILE CODIFYING caste census data can streamline data compilation, the core bottlenecks remain largely intact ('In Census, caste category must not be open-ended', *IE*, July 15). The overarching emphasis has always been on affirmative action. However, a core issue — demographic equity at the cost of earned merit — continues to be an administrative blind spot. Coupled with the implementation gaps in reservations under the EWS category and the application of the creamy layer principle, the prevailing systemic paradigm continues to erode trust.

— Raghvi Sharma, Sunam

J&K question

THE CENTRAL government had promised in no uncertain terms that the statehood of J&K would be restored ('Omar is spot on, doesn't need Trump clickbait', *IE*, July 15). However, the government's silence on the matter raises concerns that it may not walk the walk. J&K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah has rightly questioned the government for not following through.

— Aanya Singhal, Noida

OTP or fixed PIN? It's a question of security

AALOK THAKKAR

EVERY TIME you book a ride, your driver asks you for an "OTP". Increasingly, that OTP is no longer a one-time password. A quiet substitution has spread through India's ride-hailing apps. Rapido and Namma Yatri took the OTP and turned it into a standing PIN: One fixed value tied to the account, repeated on every trip. Uber has since adopted the same model in India while keeping a fresh per-ride code in the US. The question is: What can an OTP do that a fixed PIN cannot?

A PIN authenticates a person; it says that whoever offers it knows a secret belonging to the account. A one-time password authenticates an event; it says that this specific booking is the one this driver is about to begin. Three properties follow from this that no fixed number can reproduce.

The first is scope. An OTP is valid for a single booking, and only while it is live, so the same value is never correct twice. A PIN is correct for every ride an account will ever take, so it carries no information about which ride is which. It cannot tell apart the trip you booked from a trip booked in your name by someone else. The second is resistance to replay. An OTP expires when the trip begins. A PIN cannot be spent. This induces a deeper difference about threat actors: An OTP is built for a world in which the driver is an untrusted party. With a fixed PIN, the driver receives a secret that keeps working, and the rider's safety comes to depend on his choosing not to retain it. The third is freshness. Because an OTP is generated at the moment of booking and delivered to the rider separately, producing the correct one is evidence that its holder is the person who just booked and is present.

> An OTP limits the damage caused by insider threats, opportunistic data breaches, and leaked credentials

These properties share a virtue. Each lets the system assume less. A spent OTP is worthless, so even if someone breaches the booking database, they recover a pile of dead numbers. A standing PIN is a permanent credential, so that same database becomes a store of working secrets for every user. The static model assumes the backend will not be breached, or that a breach is survivable. Detection matters, too. Because each one-time code maps to one booking, misuse is visible in principle, and expiry cancels the code automatically. A leaked PIN produces a fraudulent ride indistinguishable from a real one, with no automatic revocation and no natural habit of rotation. Any case for the substitution has to be measured against these losses. The argument most often made is convenience: A fixed number spares the rider the effort of noting a new figure before each trip. But on a per-ride system, the code appeared on screen the instant the booking was made. The substitution removes only the act of reading a fresh number. The stronger arguments are engineering ones. Generating and delivering a fresh code for every booking is expensive at scale. Message delivery in some parts served by Uber is unreliable. A static code is a coherent answer to those constraints.

The point is not that the PIN is an objectively wrong choice, but that it carries a security cost the convenience framing hides. The right question is what threat model each design encodes. An OTP limits the damage caused by insider threats, opportunistic data breaches, and leaked credentials. The fixed PIN shifts more trust onto drivers, backend protections, and post-hoc fraud detection than a one-time code does.

The lesson is finally one about names. Calling a PIN an OTP blurs an information security boundary, and users tend to believe that the same trust assumptions hold behind the two. Whichever we choose, the choice should follow from an honest account of the threat model: Who the adversaries are, which assumptions we are willing to make about them, and what the cost of getting those assumptions wrong turns out to be.

The writer is assistant professor of Computer Science, Ashoka University. Views are personal

The long goodbye to Shahjahanabad

ADRIJA ROYCHOWDHURY

WHERE IS Shahjahanabad? In the mental map of the modern Delhiite, the name barely exists. One knows it as *Purani Dilli* or Old Delhi, sometimes as the Walled City — that part of the city with the famous *paranthe wali gali*. There is also Chandni Chowk, the name originally assigned to one square on the street that stretches out from the Lahori Gate of the Red Fort to Fatehpuri Masjid. Ask Google Maps for Shahjahanabad and it will redirect you to Old Delhi — one might be thankful that modern technology at least has some remembrance of the name that gave Old Delhi its unique character.

The Shahjahanabad Redevelopment Corporation was perhaps among the few formal government institutions to preserve the historic name of the city. With the body being renamed as the Indraprastha Virasat Punarvikas Nigam, the city has lost its last remaining link with Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, whose ideas of a glamorous imperial capital had given birth to Shahjahanabad.

One can read this as an obvious move by a government obsessed with renaming projects and streets. But the erasure of Shahjahanabad goes back to the time when the British established a new imperial capital adjacent to the Mughal city, increasingly referring simply to "Delhi" rather than Shahjahanabad. The walled city underwent a rapid transformation after the revolt of 1857. The British army captured the Red Fort and demolished a number of palaces, replacing them with barracks. Outside the fort, several shops, *havelis*, public buildings and mosques were destroyed. Among the demolished structures was the bustling marketplace built by Shah Jahan's daughter Jahanara Begum, on the street that we now know as Chandni Chowk. The name Chandni Chowk, in fact, was reserved for the marketplace alone, as seen in maps predating 1857. Maps of the city after 1911 show the entire street named as Chandni Chowk. By this time, the British had built New Delhi as their capital. Shahjahanabad increasingly came to be known simply as Old Delhi.

> Maps of the city after 1911 show the entire street named as Chandni Chowk. By this time, the British had built New Delhi as their capital. Shahjahanabad increasingly came to be known simply as Old Delhi

It saw another wave of changes after Independence, amid large-scale riots following Partition. With thousands of Muslims leaving for Pakistan and Hindu refugees coming in from West Punjab, the demographic character of Old Delhi underwent a significant shift. It accelerated the transformation of Shahjahanabad into a wholesale commercial district. Chandni Chowk emerged as its commercial centre, gradually becoming shorthand for Shahjahanabad itself.

In electoral geography, the entire area comprising Shahjahanabad came to be known as Chandni Chowk from 1956. After the 2008 delimitation, when the nearest Metro station was being named, it was on the insistence of traders' bodies and residents' welfare associations that it came to be called Chandni Chowk instead of "Delhi Main", the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation's suggestion.

The name Shahjahanabad encapsulates the grand ambitions of a ruler to move out of his father's shadow and build, brick by brick, a magnificent city of his own. That vision bears little resemblance to reality today. Centuries-old heritage coexists uneasily with chronic congestion, crumbling infrastructure, and mounting conservation challenges. Much in Shahjahanabad needs to be revamped. Retaining the name of its redevelopment body, however, might have served as a reminder of the urban imagination of the emperor who conceived the city.

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TEHRAN THREATENS TO SHUT MORE ENERGY EXPORT CORRIDORS, SAYS 'NO PLANS FOR NEGOTIATIONS'

US launches new strikes on Iran as escalation threatens shipping

'Saving it for last': Trump says US will hit energy targets

Reuters
Cairo, Dubai, July 15

THE US conducted a new wave of strikes against Iran's coastal defence systems and missile sites on Wednesday after reimposing a naval blockade of Iranian ports, while Iran threatened to shut off more regional energy exports.

The daytime strikes mark the latest escalation of attacks and counterattacks launched by the two sides as they vie for control of the Strait of Hormuz.

"At 6 am ET (1100 GMT) today, US Central Command forces began launching a wave of strikes against Iran," the US military said. "The strikes are designed to further degrade military capabilities Iranian forces have used to attack commercial shipping in the Strait."

Iran's *Mehr* news agency reported US projectiles had hit a location on Iran's Hengam Island in the Strait of Hormuz.

US Central Command said the military had attacked coastal defence systems and cruise missile storage and launch sites on Iran's Greater Tunb Island, and had completed the wave of strikes within around 90 minutes. That followed seven hours of strikes Tuesday in which the US said it had hit dozens of military targets near the Strait and Iranian coastal areas.

In response, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps said Wednesday it had struck US military targets in the region, including in Bahrain, Kuwait and Jordan. It also threatened to shut off more regional energy exports, saying the US "must brace for the closure of all other export corridors that benefit the US and its allies".

"We have no plans for negotiations at the moment and are focused on defence," *Tasnim* news agency quoted Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmaeil Baghaei as saying.

The IRGC said on Wednesday the Hormuz Strait would stay closed until what it described as "the end of America's evils". Analysts Iran is signaling it may use its Houthi allies in Yemen to shut Bab el-Mandeb, opening a new front against Washington and putting two of the world's most vital energy arteries at risk.

US President Donald Trump, who faces domestic pressure to avoid a full return to war, on Tuesday threatened to hit Iranian power plants and bridges next week unless Tehran resumes negotiations. "I'll save the energy targets for last, but ultimately we'll hit energy targets," Trump said.

People walk past a mural depicting the late leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, and late supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on a street in Tehran on Wednesday. AP

Democrats block $1.15tn defence bill over Iran war

Washington: US Senate Democrats blocked a $1.15 trillion annual defense policy bill on Tuesday, citing frustration with the Iran war and President Donald Trump's failure to consult with Congress about his decision to send US forces into the conflict.

"Trump started this war without authorization, without a strategy, and without an exit," Senator Chuck Schumer of New York, the Senate's Democratic leader, said in a Senate speech announcing he would vote no. **REUTERS**

Some ships 'refusing' US-military guided Hormuz transits after attacks

Five ships attacked in Omani waters since July 7: Data

Reuters
London, Athens July 15

SHIPPING COMPANIES are avoiding using a US military-guided transit scheme through the Strait of Hormuz after a wave of Iranian attacks on vessels sparked safety concerns, seven maritime security and shipping industry sources said.

For decades ships sailed into and out of the Gulf using a safe set of lanes down the middle of the strait established by the UN's shipping agency in 1968 dubbed the Traffic Separation Scheme.

Since the Iran war began on, Iranian forces have mined this area, forcing vessels to use one of two makeshift routes close to either the Iranian or Omani coast. In June, *Reuters* reported that the US military had helped vessels through as part of an operation involving scores of secretive ship-to-ship oil transfers to keep Gulf energy exports flowing, using aerial and water drones as well as helicopters to guide tankers.

The US-assisted initiative enabled the export of tens of millions of barrels of oil. Yet shippers are evaluating the route on the Omani side of the strait as increasingly dangerous after a wave of attacks on ships.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards on Tuesday claimed responsibility for attacks on two Emirati oil supertankers. Some five ships have been attacked since July 7 – three crude supertankers, one LNG tanker and one container ship – in Omani waters that fell under the US scheme, according to data from UN's shipping agency. It was unclear if all the ships were sailing under the US scheme, the sources said. "The US doesn't seem to have any control over the situation," one shipping source said.

"Iran's continued ability to target ships sailing through the Omani route means the Trump administration's proposed solution to keep ships moving is unlikely to work," said Torbjorn Solvedt, principal Middle East analyst with risk intelligence company Verisk Maplecroft.

White House officials did not respond to a request for comment. A US defence official said in the past seven days more than 100 vessels had directly coordinated with the US military to pass through the strait and over 300 had passed through the region more generally.

Warm Welcome Aboard ISS

A screengrab from a NASA video shows astronaut Anil Menon (giving a thumbs up) and Russian cosmonauts Pyotr Dubrov and Anna Kikina with fellow crew members after arriving at the International Space Station aboard the Soyuz MS-29 spacecraft on Wednesday. @NASA/YOUTUBE, PTI

Ukraine vows to protect exports as Russia targets Black Sea ports

4 big grain depots stop purchases after heavy attacks

Reuters
Kyiv, July 15

UKRAINE WILL do everything possible to protect seaports and guarantee grain exports at no less than last season's level, deputy economy minister, Taras Vysotskiy, told *Reuters* Wednesday.

Russia has sharply stepped up attacks in recent weeks on Ukrainian Black Sea ports' infrastructure and on cargo vessels entering Odesa ports to export grain and other agricultural goods. Brokers say shipowners are refusing to enter Ukrainian ports because of sharply increased war risks, while traders have suspended purchases.

"The state recognises the priority of maintaining agricultural exports," Vysotskiy said.

"It will be difficult, but we will do everything possible to preserve minimum guaranteed export volumes to support international food security at a level no lower than last year," he added.

Before the recent attacks, Ukraine forecast exports at around 43 million metric tons in 2026/27 season, which started in July. Last year it exported more than 37 million tons.

The country's main farmers' union, UAC, said the country had lost about a third of its capacity to export grain via its vital Black Sea ports due to intensifying Russian drone attacks.

More than four years into its war with Russia, agricultural exports like grains and vegetable oils remain Ukraine's biggest source of foreign currency earnings, with more than 90% shipped through three ports in the southern Odesa region.

Both Moscow and Kyiv are now stepping up attacks on key revenue sources, with Ukrainian forces hitting Russian energy infrastructure.

Zelenskyy backs energy chief as new Ukraine PM

Kyiv: President Volodymyr Zelenskyy endorsed the head of the state energy company on Wednesday to be Ukraine's new prime minister, while giving no clear answer on the future of the defence minister at a pivotal juncture in the war.

Zelenskyy pushed out Prime Minister Yulia Svyrydenko this week after a year on the job. Parliament accepted her resignation Tuesday and is expected to vote on her successor Thursday.

Zelenskyy has given little explanation for the move so far, apart from saying the aim is to refresh the leadership.

He said the CEO of the state-owned energy company Naftogaz, Sergii Koretskyi, was the best candidate for PM, because the priority was preparing for upcoming winter. **REUTERS**

Despite recent shootings, Trump gives ICE a thumbs up

Associated Press
Washington, July 15

THE IMMIGRATION and Customs Enforcement agency should continue vehicle stops after recent fatal shootings, President Donald Trump said on Wednesday, seeming to oppose a new suspension of the practice used as part of his immigration crackdown.

ICE is "doing a GREAT job, one that has to be done," Trump wrote on his social media site.

The Republican president said that to remove criminals he claims were let into the country under the previous Democratic administration "we must be strong, tough, and smart, and we CANNOT give up one of ICE's most important and effective Crime Fighting tools, THE TRAFFIC STOP!" Trump said, "Once we do, we are playing right into the criminal's hands."

Trump administration officials have told Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers to suspend most vehicle stops after two deadly shootings within a week, people familiar with the decision said Tuesday.

The suspension was ordered after an ICE officer shot and killed a Colombian driver Monday in Maine and a week after another officer shot and killed a motorist in Houston, renewing criticism of the agency's enforcement tactics that were widely condemned last winter after the killings of Alex Pretti and Renee Good in Minnesota.

In Florida on Tuesday, a third man in roughly a week died during an encounter with immigration officers. This time, a 28-year-old man was killed after he was hit by a tractor while running from immigration and federal officers, authorities said.

It's a narrative that has been repeated again and again since the Trump administration's immigration crackdown began, with federal officers confronting drivers and then saying they opened fire when the drivers' vehicles became a danger.

That's despite decades of warnings from policing experts that shooting into moving cars presents a danger of its own.

50 feared dead or missing as boat carrying migrants capsizes off Libya

Cairo: A boat carrying about 60 migrants, including women and children, bound for European shores capsized off the coast of eastern Libya in the latest maritime tragedy off the North African country.

At least 50 are dead or missing, authorities said.

The shipwreck occurred on Tuesday near Bardaa Island, off the coastal city of Tobruk, according to Coast Guard authorities in eastern Libya.

They said 10 survivors managed to swim to the island to save themselves. The search for others continues, the Coast Guard said.

It was the latest tragedy off Libya, one of the main departure points for migrants trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea and reach European shores for a better life there. Last month a shipwreck off eastern Libya left 51 migrants dead or missing.

Smugglers usually pack Europe-bound migrants into small and unsafe boats, with thousands dying during the perilous sea journey. **AP**

• BRIEFLY

UNITED STATES

Biden will publish his memoir *Promise me, America* mid Nov

Former President of the United States Joe Biden

FORMER PRESIDENT Joe Biden will publish a memoir this fall, publisher Little, Brown and Company told *The Associated Press*. *Promise Me, America*, which Biden says will touch upon everything from the economy to his decision to drop his bid for reelection, is scheduled to come out November 17. The timing of the book - two weeks after midterm elections in which Democrats seek to regain control of Congress - could raise concerns within his party. **AP**

VENEZUELA

EU gives extra $22mn in aid after earthquake

THE EUROPEAN Union is providing a further $22.8 million in humanitarian aid to help Venezuela deal with last month's earthquake, it said Wednesday. The EU said this latest package of aid, which would fund medical equipment and rescue. **REUTERS**

BRAZIL

22 charged with laundering for crime gangs

RIO DE Janeiro prosecutors have charged 22 people with operating a sophisticated money-laundering network for Brazilian criminal groups, authorities said on Wednesday, as police carried out raids across states of Rio de Janeiro. **REUTERS**

Congo Ebola cases top 2,000 as more health workers go on strike

Associated Press
Bunia, July 15

THE NUMBER of confirmed cases of Ebola in Congo has reached 2,011, including 754 deaths, according to government data released overnight in what authorities say is the fastest-growing outbreak on record.

Health workers at Bunia General Hospital, the region's largest medical center, went on strike on Wednesday and are the latest group to have walked off their job at the epicenter over payment issues. Health professionals and other front line workers barricaded the entrance of the hospital, claiming they have not received any compensation despite working under difficult conditions.

A health worker at an Ebola treatment centre in Bunia. FILE

The World Health Organization says more than 100 healthcare workers have been infected since the beginning of the outbreak.

The Central African nation has been battling the Ebola outbreak caused by the rare Bundibugyo virus since May 15. A total of 753 patients remain in isolation or in hospitals, while 366 have so far recovered, according to data from Congo's Ministry of Health. Contact tracing remains a challenge, with coverage of those exposed still at 67%.

UK PM-in-waiting Burnham to pick Mahmood as Chancellor: *FT*

London: Andy Burnham is set to name interior minister Shabana Mahmood as his Chancellor of the Exchequer when he becomes UK's prime minister next week, the Financial Times reported Wednesday, citing three people briefed on his thinking.

Sterling had rallied earlier on Wednesday to a one-year high against the euro on speculation that Mahmood, rather than the more left-wing energy minister, Ed Miliband, would succeed Rachel Reeves when Keir Starmer steps down as prime minister on Monday. A spokesperson for Mahmood declined to comment on the report, while there was no immediate response from Burnham's team

British Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood. FILE

Mahmood has little economic policy experience and has taken a tough line on immigration, but she is further to the right in the governing Labour Party than Miliband., whose promotion of net-zero emissions policies has been unpopular with some businesses. **REUTERS**

• THE LAWSUIT CLAIMS THE COMPANY USED INTERNAL A.I. SYSTEMS, KEYSTROKE AND ACTIVITY-MONITORING DATA, A.I. TOKEN-USAGE DASHBOARDS TO DETERMINE WHO WOULD BE LAID OFF

26 Meta staffers sue, say AI-driven layoffs targeted workers on medical, parental leave

Barbara Ortutay & Alexandra Olson
July 15

A GROUP of 26 Meta employees has sued the company, claiming it used artificial intelligence systems to select people for layoffs, disproportionately targeting those on medical, parental or family leave.

They are among the 8,000 employees, or about 10% of its workforce, Meta said it would lay off in May. The lawsuit filed late Monday in federal court in Oakland, California, claims the company used internal AI systems, keystroke and activity-monitoring data, AI token-usage dashboards and algorithmically assisted performance rankings, among other methods, to determine who would be laid off.

Many of these scores and ratings "by design, cannot be accumulated by an employee who is on protected medical or family leave, or whose output is reduced by a disability," the lawsuit says.

Meta, according to the lawsuit, did not account for protected leave when taking employees' scores into account and "did not pause the system for the individualized, leave- and accommodation-neutral review that the law requires."

As a result, people on protected medical or family leave were disproportionately selected for layoffs, the lawsuit says. Each of the 26 anonymous employees in the lawsuit took protected leave and requested or received a reasonable accommodation for disability.

Though they have been notified of their layoffs, all 26 remain employed by Meta, with separations set to begin July 22.

Many of the employees in the lawsuit took pregnancy or parental leave, during which time they wouldn't have worked and thus had their measured output reduced.

Others took medical leave — one disclosed a "serious health condition and disability" that was approved by Meta's own provider.

A Meta store in Burlingame at the San Francisco Bay Area. FILE

But according to the lawsuit, he was "discouraged and deterred from taking that leave by a manager" who warned that doing so would result in his selection for the anticipated layoffs. Meta offered no accommodation for his disability, the lawsuit says.

Meta said in a statement that the claims "lack merit and are not based on facts. Workforce management and organizational decisions were and are made by people, not AI."

About half the plaintiffs had taken leave for caregiving or pregnancy-related reasons.

Eight are women who had taken maternity or pregnancy-related leave, four are men who had taken parental leave and one is a woman who had taken leave to care for a family member and later bereavement leave.

The lawsuit says the layoffs violated several state and federal laws, including the Family and Medical Leave Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Pregnancy Discrimination Act and the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act.

The complaint also references "disparate impact liability," a longstanding civil rights concept that President Donald Trump's administration moved to abandon.

Disparate impact, codified in Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, holds that facially neutral policies or practices can be discriminatory if they disproportionately burden a protected class of workers and aren't necessary for the job.

The Trump administration has ordered federal agencies to deprioritise disparate impact liability enforcement, arguing that its use undermines "meritocracy" and encourages the assumption that any racial or gender imbalance in a workforce is the result of discrimination.

The order has led the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to drop discrimination cases on behalf of some workers.

However, the lawsuit against Meta underscores that companies remain vulnerable to disparate impact litigation in the age of AI despite the Trump administration's efforts to stamp out its enforcement. **AP**

INDIA IS THE SECOND-BIGGEST EXPORT MARKET FOR RUSSIAN CRUDE

US bill proposes 100% tariffs on top five buyers of Russian energy

Sukalp Sharma
New Delhi, July 15

A REWORKED bill, backed by a bipartisan group of US senators, proposes up to 100% tariffs on the top buyers of Russian oil and natural gas, which include India and China. The move comes amid renewed Gulf crisis with experts calling it impractical. The bill, initially backed by the late US senator Lindsey Graham, was aimed at squeezing Russia's revenue from oil and gas exports. Following Graham's sudden demise last week, the group of US senators on Tuesday unveiled the revised version of the Russia sanctions bill.

Although it remains to be seen whether the bill will turn into law in its current form — considering the original bill failed to move beyond the initial phases for over a year — the proposed legislation would certainly be a cause of concern for New Delhi. Notably, the new bill is a watered-down version of the original, and does offer some room for workarounds and concessions from Washington. India is expected to push for those, if at all, the bill is enacted, according to industry experts and analysts.

The new bill proposes tariffs of up to 100% on the top five buyers of Russian oil and natural gas, against the proposal of a blanket 500% tariff on buyers of Russian energy in the original version that had been hanging fire. While this reduction in proposed tariffs appears meaningful on paper, the cap is still too high for India, which is also working to finalise a trade deal with the US. Importantly, from New Delhi's perspective, the new bill gives powers to the US president to issue waivers on its provisions.

"India would almost certainly push for it (waiver), and it would make sense for the US to agree as a friendly concession, especially given how serious the situation is for New Delhi," Abu Dhabi-based energy analyst Natalia Katona told *The Indian Express*. She added that the bill "risks colliding" with the India-US trade talks.

That would be counterproductive for both Washington and New Delhi, which have made progress in negotiations after initial setbacks and hiccups. The use of tariffs under the proposed law as leverage by Washington cannot be ruled out. Any such ploy by the US would create additional pressure on India. Even for Washington, taking away millions of barrels of Russian oil from the market when energy flows from West Asia remain stifled wouldn't be prudent. That would worsen an already worrying supply situation, sending oil prices soaring, something that the Donald Trump administration wouldn't want ahead of the US midterm polls.

The new bill is a watered-down version of the original, and does offer some room for workarounds. REUTERS

Meaningfully reducing Russian oil imports is just not an option in the prevailing circumstances of global supply tightness amid the West Asia crisis. As per Kpler data, India's Russian oil imports rose to 2.6 million barrels per day (bpd) in June, accounting for over half of New Delhi's oil imports. July could match or even exceed June's volumes.

"From India's perspective, Russian crude has become the country's strongest energy security hedge, particularly since the Strait of Hormuz disruptions. Russian barrels have enabled Indian refiners to maintain high refinery run rates, ensure uninterrupted fuel supplies, and avoid the disruptions experienced by several other Asian refining systems," said Sumit Ritolia, modelling and refining manager at Kpler.

While there are calls from some US lawmakers to expedite the bill's passage, the prevailing energy market dynamics add an element of uncertainty. Nonetheless, India is expected to communicate its energy concerns to Washington, as was done last year as well when the original bill was mooted. Experts are also sceptical about the bill's prospects.

"The question is whether this bill is economically real at all. I simply do not see this bill passing, or remaining in its current form. It has already been diluted from a 500% tariff threat against virtually all buyers of Russian oil and gas to a maximum of 100% aimed at only the five largest. European exemptions and presidential waivers have also been added. That tells you the political slogan is already being adjusted to economic reality," said Katona.

FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

In a first, EPFO interest for FY26 credited in one go to 35 crore accounts

Ravi Dutta Mishra & Aanchal Magazine
New Delhi, July 15

FOR THE first time, the retirement fund body Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) has credited the interest for its nearly 35 crore member accounts by July 15, way ahead of the last year's disbursement completion in September. This marks the wrapping up of the interest crediting process by the EPFO after having migrated its 123 databases spread across its regional centres into a centralised national database, a senior official told *The Indian Express*.

Last week, Labour and Employment Minister Mansukh Mandaviya had said that the annual interest of Rs 1.44 lakh crore for the financial year 2025-26 was going to be auto-processed on the new portal and verified by field authorities before being credited to the EPF accounts by July 15. Of the nearly 35 crore accounts in total, the EPFO had credited the interest rate for 30 crore verified accounts till Tuesday, and the verification and interest credit for the remaining 5 crore accounts was set to be completed on Wednesday, the official said.

"This is for the first time in the history of EPFO that the interest has been credited by July 15. Last year, the interest crediting process was fully completed in September (2025), after having credited the interest for 80-90% of the member accounts till July-end. In the previous year, the process of interest credit disbursement went on till November. This time interest crediting has happened in one go," the official said.

What set apart this year's interest crediting process at the EPFO was the retirement fund body's move towards a revamped portal with a centralised database by merging information across all regional offices. Earlier, every regional office had its own database which made the process of verification before crediting of the interest a challenging process. The official said the EPFO first merged "123 databases into one single national database". "It involved migration of nearly 1,400 crore transactions and also of employer records. In total, 1,700 crore records were migrated as part of the exercise," the official elaborated when asked about the transition process.

Since the centralised database meant merger of financial data, the EPFO carried out additional steps to ensure verification of accounts and their balances for a complete matching of details before and after the migration process. "We finished the migration on June 30. We did interest calculations and credit on July 1 and July 2. We wanted our field officers to verify whether the migration from the old legacy system to this was properly done. So, they had a view of the old member ledger and the new member ledger, and they compared the opening balance with the closing balance plus interest. They checked whether it was all matching. We wanted to carry out this exercise so that everyone is assured and there is confidence that the entire migration process went off smoothly," the official said.

EPFO's assets under management are estimated to be Rs 32 lakh crore of assets for around 35 crore accounts, out of which roughly 8 crore are active contributing accounts.

The EPFO has rolled out its new revamped portal that enables automated processes, including crediting of interest, claim verification and informing members about the amount they are eligible to withdraw, aimed at reducing claim rejection rates. The EPFO portal was shut from June 26-28. Now that the portal has resumed, the EPFO has settled nearly 11 lakh claims in one go amounting to Rs 3,000 crore, the official said, adding that all the backlog of claims and current cases of advances will be cleared shortly.

The Ministry of Labour and Employment has revamped the EPFO portal under the CITES (Centralised IT Enabled Services) project, an initiative to modernise EPFO's service delivery through automation and rule-based processing.

• FASTER CREDIT

OF THE nearly 35 crore accounts in total, the EPFO had credited the interest rate for 30 crore verified accounts till Tuesday.

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WHAT SET apart this year's interest crediting process at the EPFO was the retirement fund body's move towards a revamped portal with a centralised database by merging information across all regional offices.

SBI Funds Management IPO subscribed 2.77 times on day 2

ENS Economic Bureau
Mumbai, July 15

THE RS 9,812-crore initial public offering (IPO) of SBI Funds Management Ltd witnessed healthy investor demand on the second day of bidding, with the issue being subscribed 2.77 times, led by strong participation from non-institutional investors (NIIs).

According to the cumulative subscription data available at the close of day 2, the NII category emerged as the strongest segment, receiving bids for 6.58 times the shares reserved for the category. The robust response reflects sustained interest from high net-worth individuals, who typically use leverage to participate in public offerings they expect to list at a premium.

Qualified institutional buyers portion was subscribed 1.50 times, indicating steady participation from domestic and foreign institutional investors. Institutional demand is often viewed as an important indicator of confidence in a company's long-term fundamentals. The retail investor segment was subscribed 1.61 times, suggesting healthy participation from individual investors despite mixed market conditions. The steady response from retail applicants points to continued appetite for businesses linked to India's expanding mutual fund industry and rising financial savings.

The employee reservation portion received bids for 2.27 times the shares on offer, while the shareholder reservation category attracted strong interest, with subscriptions reaching 3.98 times. The IPO will close on July 16.

SBI, Amundi to get over Rs 11,000 cr from IPO

The firm raised Rs 2,663 crore from 129 anchor investors, including marquee global names, earlier this week. SBI and French asset manager Amundi, the joint venture partner, are expected to raise around Rs 11,700 crore from the IPO. The IPO is offer for sale (OFS) and there is no fresh issue of shares. As there is no fresh issue of shares, the company will not receive any capital from the IPO, and the offering will not result in dilution of the existing share capital.

Amundi is expected to get Rs 4,400 crore from the OFS. Amundi became SBI's foreign partner in the mutual fund in 2011 after acquiring the stake held by Societe Generale for Rs 173.9 crore following the merger of the asset management businesses of Credit Agricole and Societe Generale.

SBI Funds Management, India's largest mutual fund with assets under management of Rs 12,57,352 crore, is backed by the State Bank of India and has built a strong presence across equity, debt and hybrid mutual fund schemes. The company has benefited from the rapid growth in systematic investment plans, increasing retail participation in capital markets and rising household investment in mutual funds over the past few years.

FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

Permit pvt bikes, stagger bike taxi electrification, says consumer group

The bike taxi sector is emerging as a key part of urban mobility, offering relatively affordable last-mile connectivity. REUTERS

ENS Economic Bureau
New Delhi, July 15

STATE GOVERNMENTS should explicitly permit online transport aggregators such as Uber, Ola and Rapido to onboard private motorcycles for usage as bike taxis, and rather than mandating a permanent commercial conversion, should recognise such vehicles through "lightweight permit models," a recent research report has said.

The report titled 'Harmonising Bike Taxi Regulations in India,' prepared by consumer-advocacy group CUTS International, also batted against state governments from enacting policies that require fleet electrification immediately, and instead called for a phased implementation approach.

The bike taxi sector is emerging as a key part of urban mobility, offering relatively affordable last-mile connectivity amid patchy public transportation networks across the country. It is also creating livelihood opportunities for lakhs of gig workers. The sector could be a $1.46 billion market by 2030, and offer more than 5 million gig work opportunities.

However, a fragmented regulatory landscape has constrained its growth, with states adopting divergent policies despite the Centre's Motor Vehicle Aggregator Guidelines, 2025 enabling them to permit bike taxis. A central friction point is whether private, 'white number plate' motorcycles should be allowed to carry out commercial activities, when groups such as auto rickshaw and cab drivers have to pay additional licence fees and other statutory dues to drive commercial vehicles.

Electrification has been another major sore point. Though some states are allowing private motorcycles to be used as bike taxis, there is an increasing insistence on fleet electrification. Delhi's Motor Vehicle Aggregator and Delivery Service Provider Scheme, for instance, proposes that only electric bike taxis be permitted.

FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

China's second qtr economic growth cools to 3-1/2-year low

Beijing/Singapore: China's economy expanded at its slowest pace in more than three years in the second quarter, missing forecasts, with weak household consumption clouding strong manufacturing and exports and intensifying concerns over the long-term sustainability of its unbalanced growth model.

At 4.3%, gross domestic product growth in April-June eased from the first quarter's 5.0%, landing below the lower end of China's 4.5% to 5.0% full-year target.

The data adds pressure on Beijing to deliver more stimulus. But many analysts say a closely watched end-July meeting of the Communist Party's Politburo, a top decision-making body, may not flag major steps due to concerns over ballooning debt. Economists argue the bigger challenge is not the pace of growth but its composition. REUTERS

RBI nod to HDFC chair appointment

ENS Economic Bureau
Mumbai, July 15

THE RESERVE Bank of India (RBI) on Wednesday approved the appointment of former Finance Secretary and ex-Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar as the Part-Time Chairman of HDFC Bank for a period of three years, effective July 15, 2026.

The appointment has been made under Section 10B(1A)(i) of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949, the bank said in a regulatory filing.

Kumar, 66, is a 1984-batch IAS officer, who served as Finance Secretary to the Government of India before being appointed Chief Election Commissioner in 2022. He retired from the Election Commission in February 2025.

Keki Mistry, who was interim Part-time Chairman, will continue to serve as a Non-Executive Non-Independent Director on the bank's board.

Kumar succeeds former Part-time Chairman Atanu Chakraborty, who resigned with immediate effect on March 18.

In his resignation letter, Chakraborty said that "certain happenings and practices within the bank are not in congruence with my personal values and ethics," without elaborating further.

• BRIEFLY

BRICS adopts India-led labour declaration

Hyderabad: Union Labour Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Wednesday said a progressive declaration was adopted at the 12th BRICS Labour and Employment Ministers' Meeting here, which would further cement the alliance as an effective forum. Mandaviya welcomed the consensus on BRICS CONNECT, an initiative proposed by India that establishes a collaborative platform for knowledge sharing and strengthens cooperation among BRICS countries. PTI

Apr-May current account surplus at $2.8 bn: RBI

Mumbai: India recorded a current account surplus of $2.8 billion during April-May 2026, compared with a deficit of $4.1 billion in the corresponding period last year, mainly aided by higher inward remittances from abroad and a rise in services exports, the Reserve bank of India (RBI) data showed on Wednesday. However, the country's overall balance of payments registered a deficit of $11 billion during the first two months of the current fiscal year, compared to a surplus of $5 billion in the same period last year, according to the data. PTI

Youth joblessness at 16.2% in June, a series high: Govt

New Delhi: India's unemployment rate for people aged 15 years and above remained unchanged at 5.5% in June despite a jump in joblessness among the youth, data released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) on Wednesday showed. Youth unemployment — for those aged between 15 and 29 years — jumped to a 16.2% in June, the highest in the current Periodic Labour Force Survey series, which has data from April 2025. FE

HDFC Life Q1 profit rises 12% to Rs 611 crore

New Delhi: HDFC Life Insurance Company on Wednesday reported a 12% year-on-year increase in its net profit to Rs 611 crore for the quarter ended June 30, 2026. The insurer's net profit stood at Rs 546 crore a year earlier. HDFC Life's net premium income rose to Rs 16,548 crore during the June quarter of FY27 from Rs 14,466 crore a year ago, according to a stock exchange filing. Its assets under management (AUM) expanded by 13% to surpass the Rs 4 lakh crore mark. The Value of New Business grew by 9% to Rs 879 crore in Q1 FY27. PTI

• SINCE MID-JUNE, VESSEL MOVEMENTS THROUGH THE STRAIT HAD RISEN MEANINGFULLY, EVEN CROSSING 90 ON JUNE 24

Vessel transits via Hormuz crash to pre-MoU levels. Here's why

Sukalp Sharma
New Delhi, July 15

WITH THE US and Iran trading blows again, the movement of vessels through the Strait of Hormuz has dropped to its lowest in nearly a month, to levels seen before the US-Iran Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) took effect in June.

According to the latest available vessel tracking data from commodity market analytics firm Kpler, there were just 14 vessels crossing the strait on July 12 (Sunday), down from 24 on July 11 and 19 on July 10.

As per data from S&P Global, the last time ship transits were lower than this level was on June 14, three days before the US and Iran inked their peace deal on June 17.

The fall in maritime traffic through the strait, which usually accounted for a fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) flows before the West Asia war broke out on February 28, has also sent oil prices higher. As of Wednesday evening, Brent futures were at about $85 per barrel, having risen around 8% over the past one week.

Since mid-June, vessel movements through the strait had risen meaningfully, even crossing 90 on June 24, with the average being between 40 and 50 on most days, industry data shows.

But these were still lower than the pre-war levels of up to 140 daily transits.

Stark differences in MoU interpretation

Since the June MoU with the US, Iran has been insisting that vessels should cross the strait only through the routes designated by it, and that too after seeking its permission. Tehran also plans to impose a service fee for transits, but at a later date.

US President Donald Trump too announced a 20% transit fee, only to renege later.

The US and its allies have been encouraging vessels to use the strait's waters abutting Oman as an alternative to Tehran-designated lanes. The stark differences in the MoU's interpretation and the vagueness in its terms have now emerged as the flashpoints in the uneasy ceasefire. Maritime data shows that ever since last week's fare-up, even the vessels crossing the strait are mostly doing so using paths designated by Iran.

"Confirmed Strait of Hormuz crossings declined by around 52% week-on-week over 10 to 12 July, with traffic reverting to more defensive routing patterns. Use of Iranian and dark routes increased while activity on IMO (International Maritime Organization) and Omani corridors almost disappeared," Kpler noted.

Dark shipping refers to vessels moving while keeping their Automatic Identification System (AIS) transponders off in a bid to avoid detection.

"The escalation is no longer confined to the Strait. Iranian retaliation has reached four Gulf states and Jordan, Qatar has suspended all maritime activity for the first time in the conflict, and the southern corridor, sustained through most of the reopening period by US escort under Project Freedom, has effectively collapsed, with only one of 12 outbound vessels using it on July 11," maritime intelligence provider Windward said in a note on Sunday.

FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

• OIL SHOCK

INDIA IS among the three most vulnerable Asian economies to high oil prices in terms of import bill and current account balances, the other two being Thailand and South Korea, according to a report by Nomura.

EVERY 10% oil price increase typically widens India's current account deficit by 0.4% of the GDP, it said.

• MARKETS

Sensex 77,185.43 130.49 0.17%	NIFTY 24,078.50 26.45 0.11%	Gold ▲ ₹1,41,908	US Dollar ▲ ₹96.27
		Silver ▼ ₹2,19,711	Oil ▲ $82.69

NOTE: GOLD, SILVER RATES AS PER INDIA BULLION AND JEWELLERS ASSOCIATION DATA GOLD PER 10G, SILVER PER 1 KG; CRUDE OIL (INDIAN BASKET) AS OF JULY 14, 2026

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explained@indianexpress.com

• POLICY

Green energy push, 7.5-GW capacity target: Gujarat's data centre policy

Ritu Sharma
Ahmedabad, July 15

THE GUJARAT government last week announced a data centre policy for 2026-29, targeting investments of Rs 6 lakh crore and the creation of 7.5 gigawatts (GW) of capacity, which it says would be the highest in the country.

The policy lays out a wide range of incentives for investors, including duty and tax exemptions, relief in Floor Space Index (FSI), uninterrupted water and power supply and relaxations in building norms.

The Viksit Gujarat Data Center Policy (2026-29) follows Reliance Industries Ltd's announcement last month of a partnership with Meta to lease its first AI-enabled data centre in India, at Jamnagar in Gujarat.

Telangana was the first state in the country to announce a data centre policy in 2016, followed by Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Odisha, Maharashtra, Haryana and Andhra Pradesh.

Stress on green energy

Gujarat has claimed that its policy is among the most ambitious state-level frameworks for hyperscale, AI-ready data centres, with a strong emphasis on green energy. The policy aims to enable the establishment of up to 7.5 GW of data centre capacity. Under the policy, a data centre entity must ensure that at least 51% of the electricity consumed for core operations comes from green and renewable sources.

This comes amid a larger push for green energy in the industry. Google has announced plans to build an AI data centre campus in Andhra Pradesh powered entirely by clean energy. The Adani Group has announced a 5 GW data centre platform across India through its AdaniConneX joint venture, which will be powered by the Adani Green Energy park at Khavda in Kutch district. P Bharathi, Secretary of Gujarat's Department of Science and Technology (DST), told *The Indian Express*: "Gujarat is the first state to announce the largest capacity (hyperscale) data center as well as the first to have a dedicated policy in the country specifically designed for green AI data centres. More importantly, other states are working on a case-to-case basis and not under a dedicated policy like Gujarat."

Financial incentives

The Gujarat government has offered to exempt stamp duty and registration fee for leasing or buying land. It has also offered 100% reimbursement of electricity duty for 20 years and a subsidy at the rate of Re 1 per unit of power consumed by a data centre entity for 20 years, both starting from the date of commencement of commercial operations. The policy provides full reimbursement of eligible expenses on plant and machinery, building infrastructure and services for up to 20 years. It offers financial assistance for desalination plants to meet the sector's high water requirements.

DHOLERA CALLING

- The state government is looking to attract data centres to the Dholera region, 100 km southwest of Ahmedabad.
- To do this, the government has offered a capital subsidy of 2.5% on eligible fixed capital investment. This includes core technical and infra expenses but excludes the cost of land, land development and chips.

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Centre	हिंदी माध्यम	English Medium
Karol Bagh	22 जुलाई | शाम 6:00 बजे	28 July | 6:00 PM
Noida	15 जुलाई | दोपहर 3:00 बजे	10 July | 6:00 PM
Indore	27 जुलाई | शाम 5:30 बजे	27 July | 8:00 AM
Lucknow	20 जुलाई | शाम 6:00 बजे	17 July | 8:00 AM
Prayagraj	30 जुलाई | सुबह 8:00 बजे	3 August | 5:30 PM
Ranchi	14 जुलाई | शाम 5:00 बजे	7 July | 5:30 PM
Patna	16 जुलाई | शाम 5:30 बजे	30 July | 8:00 AM
Jaipur	6 अगस्त | सुबह 8:00 बजे	11 August | 5:00 PM

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• GOVERNANCE

Ladakh's 7 councils & the decentralisation debate

Why are Ladakh civil society groups against all seven of its districts getting a hill development council, even when they support local governance?

Deeptiman Tiwary

THE LADAKH administration's decision to constitute Autonomous Hill Development Councils (AHDCs) in the Union Territory's seven districts has reopened a debate over how political power should be distributed in the region.

While the administration says the move will deepen grassroots governance, the two civil society groups negotiating with the Centre — the Apex Body, Leh (ABL) and the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) — argue it could weaken the representative political structure they demand under Article 371. The disagreement also reflects a widening trust deficit between Ladakh's leadership and the Centre since the region became a Union Territory in 2019.

What has the administration announced?

On Monday, the Ladakh administration announced that an Autonomous Hill Development Council would be constituted in each of the Union Territory's seven districts. Until now, such councils existed only in Leh and Kargil. The move follows the creation of five new districts — Drass, Sham, Nubra, Changthang and Zanskar — in April.

Chief Secretary Ashish Kundra said the new councils represented "a major step towards democratic decentralisation". He also said discussions with the Centre had broadly agreed on creating a Union Territory-level representative body under a customised framework under Article 371, which would exercise legislative, executive, financial and administrative powers.

The administration argues that the two initiatives are complementary. Section 3 of the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council Act provides for the constitution of a council in every district, and officials say the creation of seven districts logically necessitates seven councils.

The government also points to Ladakh's unique geography. Spread across nearly 60,000 sq km but home to barely 3 lakh people, it is India's largest Union Territory by area and among its least densely populated regions. Many villages are separated by mountain passes and several hours of travel, making decentralised administration a longstanding demand.

Why are Ladakh's civil society groups opposing the move?

Neither the ABL nor the KDA disputes the need for decentralised administration. Their objection is to what they call the fragmentation of political authority at a time when negotiations are underway over a representative political framework for Ladakh.

ABL co-chairman Chherring Dorje Lakruk argues that empowering seven district councils could leave little meaningful authority with the proposed representative body under Article 371. "This is a plan to dilute the powers of the proposed representative government that is going to take shape under Article 371. If all the powers are going to be given to the hill councils, what will the representative government do?" he told *The Indian Express*.

KDA co-chairman Sajjad Kargili termed the move "maximum government and minimum governance", questioning how seven councils would improve governance when, according to him, even the existing councils have steadily lost powers.

Civil society leaders argue that once seven hill councils, Panchayati Raj institutions, the Union Territory administration and a future Article 371 representative body all coexist, the lines of political accountability may become blurred. "With so few people and so many representative institutions, what meaningful role will eventually remain for the territorial government? And where does Panchayati Raj fit into this?" said a Ladakh leader associated with the negotiations.

Their opposition has also been sharpened by procedure. According to Ladakh leaders, the proposal for seven hill councils figured in the Minutes of the May 22 meeting between the Centre and Ladakh representatives. They refused to sign that version, after which a revised record, without the proposal, was prepared and signed. They now argue the Centre has proceeded with the announcement without consulting them.

Why such distrust?

The initial enthusiasm following Union Territory status gave way to disappointment after it became clear that, unlike Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh would not have a legislature. Negotiations over Sixth Schedule-like safeguards and later an Article 371 framework have moved slowly, with civil society leaders accusing the Centre of delaying substantive political reforms.

Relations deteriorated after the September 2025 violence during protests in Leh, the detention of climate activist Sonam Wangchuk under the National Security Act, and remarks by political leaders that were interpreted locally as questioning Ladakh's patriotism. The mistrust deepened when the Voice of Buddhist Ladakh emerged claiming to represent Buddhist interests. ABL leaders alleged the organisation had been encouraged to weaken the joint movement of Leh and Kargil — an allegation the administration denies.

The creation of five new districts in April triggered another controversy, with the KDA alleging that the new administrative map disproportionately favoured Buddhist-majority districts.

What powers do the hill councils have, and how functional are they?

On paper, the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils are among the more powerful statutory district bodies in India, if territorial authorities under the Sixth Schedule are kept out.

The 1997 Act makes them responsible for district planning and development, preparation of budgets and district plans, implementation of development schemes, management of land vested in the councils, collection of certain local taxes and functioning as the district planning and development board. In practice, however, political leaders across party lines say the councils have steadily lost relevance after Ladakh became a Union Territory.

Congress leader and Leader of Opposition in LAHDC-Leh, Tsering Namgyal, told *The Indian Express* last year that decision-making had shifted to the Lieutenant Governor's secretariat and departmental secretaries, with councils often excluded. He said council recommendations on land were frequently ignored, council staff were increasingly deployed for the UT administration, and budgets had been reduced.

Lakruk similarly described the councils as "virtually defunct", alleging that even where the law gives councils authority over land, recommendations often remain pending with the district administration and elected representatives are bypassed.

The paradox, therefore, is that while the administration now proposes expanding the number of hill councils from two to seven, many elected representatives argue that the existing councils themselves first need to be made genuinely functional.

• GOVERNING LADAKH: LARGEST UNION TERRITORY

60,000 sq km — Ladakh's size, making it India's largest Union Territory by area

3 lakh — Its population, making it among the country's least densely populated regions

How do Ladakh's hill councils compare with similar bodies elsewhere?

- Autonomous District Councils under the Sixth Schedule in Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura can make laws on subjects such as land, forests, village administration and customary practices, subject to the Governor's assent.
- But Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils do not enjoy constitutional status, independent legislative powers or judicial authority over customary matters.
- They are broadly comparable to statutory autonomous councils in states such as Manipur, though experience there also illustrates the limitations of statutory autonomy.

THE QUESTION: Ladakh's geography requires administrative decentralisation. But how fragmented should representative politics be in a Union Territory with barely three lakh people?

Procedure problem

According to Ladakh leaders, the proposal for 7 hill councils figured in the Minutes of the May 22 meeting. They refused to sign that version, after which a revised record, without the proposal, was signed.

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They now argue the Centre went ahead with the announcement without consulting them.

• ECONOMY

India-UK FTA kicks in: What changes for consumers and industry

Ravi Dutta Mishra
New Delhi, July 15

AMID A fracturing world trade order, the India-UK free trade agreement (FTA) came into effect on Wednesday. The deal, negotiated over four years and marked by major political volatility in London, is India's first comprehensive deal with a developed country. The deal laid the framework for India's negotiations with the European Union.

With the deal, India's labour-intensive goods exports, such as textiles, footwear and gems and jewellery, could get a boost. Indian consumers can access British cars, scotch and chocolates at lower prices. India has reduced tariffs on around 90% of products and the UK has eliminated tariffs on 99% of Indian exports.

Changes for consumers

For the first time, India has given major concessions to imported cars and alcoholic beverages in an FTA, reducing tariffs for British cars from up to 110% to 30% in year one. The duty will go down to 10% by year five of the deal coming into effect. The annual quota for British cars starts at 20,000 vehicles and peaks at 37,000 by year five.

India has also given major concessions to British alcoholic beverages by reducing tariff from 150% to 75% initially and then to 40% by year 10. According to Delhi-based think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI), this is a major concession as India is one of the world's largest and fastest-growing spirits markets and the UK is the world's largest whisky exporter.

Indian textile exports currently face tariffs of up to 10% in the UK. The trade deal could place India on a more level playing field with competitors such as Bangladesh, thereby boosting exports. India's gems & jewellery exports, along with footwear exports, will also get a boost as duty in the UK has been eliminated from up to 12% and 16% respectively.

Customs changes

For the first time in an FTA, India has allowed a system of self-declaration of origin by exporters or producers in the United Kingdom, replacing the conventional system of certificates issued by designated authorities, which often causes delays and hurdles. Experts said this could become the custom norm for exporters in developed countries such as the EU and US, making it comparatively easier for them to ship goods to India.

This customs change comes as India is also aiming to reduce its dependence on Chinese and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) exporters.

India's dependence on Chinese medical devices has been a concern. Now, New Delhi has removed up to 14% tariffs on the UK's medical devices, with phased tariff reductions for some sensitive items.

Quota on steel exports

Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agarwal at a press briefing said quotas allocated by the UK will ensure that India's iron and steel exports go up. A government official said India's iron and steel exports will grow from around $850 million to over $1 billion.

The curbs on steel imports announced by the UK after the trade negotiations had become a major flash point before the deal came into effect.

Concessions for professionals

The Commerce and Industry Ministry said that the deal on social security contributions would benefit 75,000 Indian Professionals and around 900 firms by providing exemption from contribution to UK National Insurance for five years. It covers the most important element of avoiding double contribution, exempting employees of Indian companies in the UK from contributing to the UK system.

The challenges

A commerce and industry ministry official said the labour and environment chapter of the India-UK agreement is not binding. Experts said this is a big win for India, as western countries have strong labour and environment norms that tend to act as a non-tariff barrier for exports from developing nations. However, India did not get an exemption from the UK's proposed Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (a pricing framework to ensure imported carbon-intensive goods face a carbon cost comparable to domestic products), which come into effect from January 1 next year.

More choices, lower prices

- Indian consumers can access British cars, scotch and chocolates at lower prices.
- Tariffs for British beauty and cosmetics and sports equipment have also been removed or reduced.

• GLOBAL

In China's new ballistic missile test, the worries for Indo-Pacific region

EXPERT EXPLAINS

Suyash Desai

POLITICAL SCIENTIST AND NON-RESIDENT FELLOW WITH THE FOREIGN POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE, PHILADELPHIA

CHINA TESTED its sea-based long-range intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) last week (July 6), marking its first-ever test of a submarine-based ballistic missile in international waters. This is the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) second launch of a ballistic missile in international waters since 1980. China conducted a land-based ICBM test on September 21, 2024.

The latest test missile was reportedly launched from a submarine in the South China Sea. It was carrying a dummy warhead that covered a distance of 7,300 km, reportedly flying over the Philippines, before landing in the Southern Pacific Ocean. The dummy warhead landed within an area designated under the Treaty of Rarotonga's South Pacific nuclear-free zone (where testing or stationing of nuclear explosive devices is barred), after it flew over the Exclusive Economic Zones of Micronesia, Nauru, Kiribati and Tuvalu.

What is known about this missile test?

It is difficult to determine if the missile was Ju Lang 2 (JL-2) or the latest Ju Lang 3 (JL-3). Both JL-2 and JL-3 are submarine-launched ICBMs, jointly developed with DF-31 and DF-41, respectively. ICBMs generally have a range of at least 5,000 km, and the JL-2 is capable of travelling 8,000-9,000 km. The JL-3 reportedly has a range of over 9,000 km. Both delivery systems can be paired with China's Type 094 SSBNs (nuclear-powered submarines with ballistic missiles).

Why is Beijing testing now?

Since the turn of the decade, and especially in the past two years, Beijing has not shied away from overtly tom-tomming its improving nuclear capabilities.

The ICBM being tested on July 6. X/@MND_CHINA

It has constructed multiple missile silos — without camouflaging them and with the awareness that they will be noticed by American satellites. Additionally, it displayed new and advanced nuclear delivery systems in its 2025 military parade and carried out a land-based ICBM test in the Pacific Ocean in 2024.

China wants the world, and the US in particular, to take note of its improving nuclear capabilities. These developments can be attributed to factors such as China's efforts to demonstrate the construction of its nuclear triad (having the capability to deliver nuclear weapons via land, sea and air).

It could also be attributed to China attempting to improve its second-strike capabilities, which are an extremely important part of its deterrence posture, since only India and China are the two declared "No-first-use" nuclear weapons states.

Beyond these simplistic explanations, these developments could also be attributed to China's attempts to construct a nuclear shield, attain great-power status, or improve theatre-level nuclear dominance in the Indo-Pacific region.

Do these developments mean China's nuclear strategy has changed?

No. The important pillars of China's declaratory nuclear strategy are: i) No-first-use nuclear policy, ii) Assured retaliation, iii) Not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon states or in nuclear-weapon-free zones.

However, China also subscribes to a "minimum nuclear deterrent" posture. With recent changes in size, diversity, accuracy, and posture, there is evidence that China is shifting away from its minimum nuclear deterrence approach.

For instance, China could possess around 1,000 nuclear warheads by 2030. It is shifting at least a part of its force towards a "launch on warning" operational readiness posture, which Beijing refers to as "early warning counter-strike" — wherein Beijing initiates a counter-strike once a launch warning has been received but before targets in China have been hit.

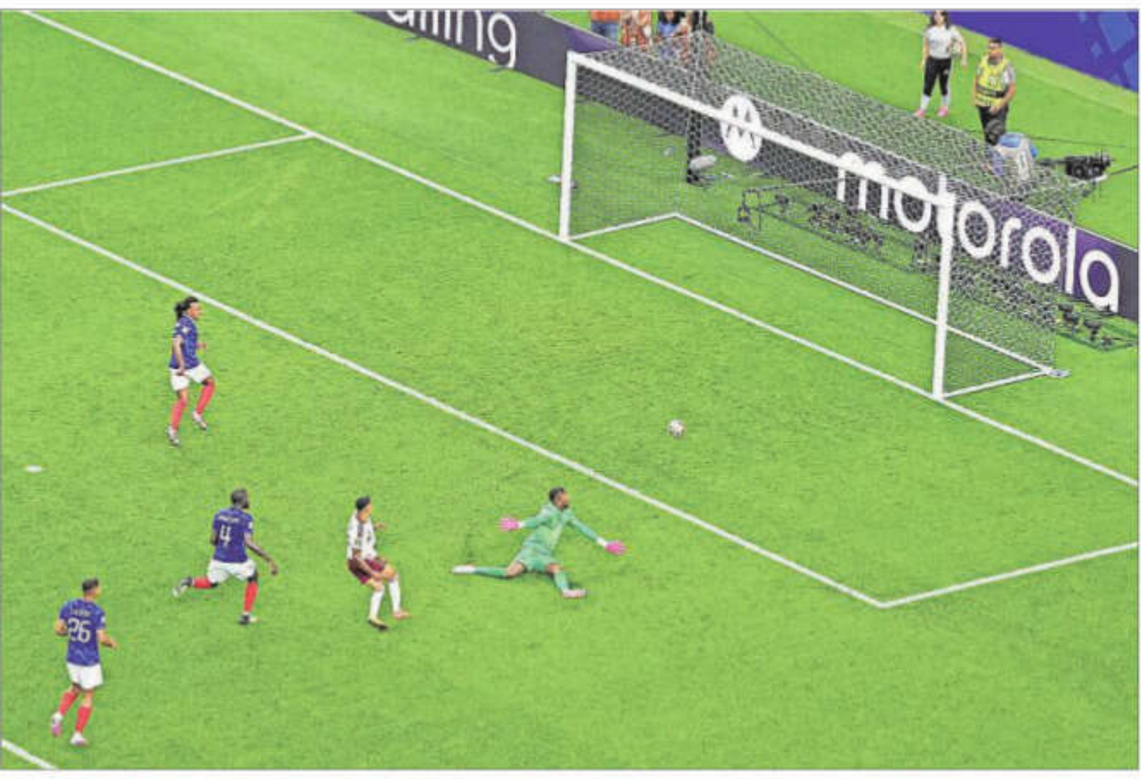
What are the implications for Indo-Pacific actors, including India?

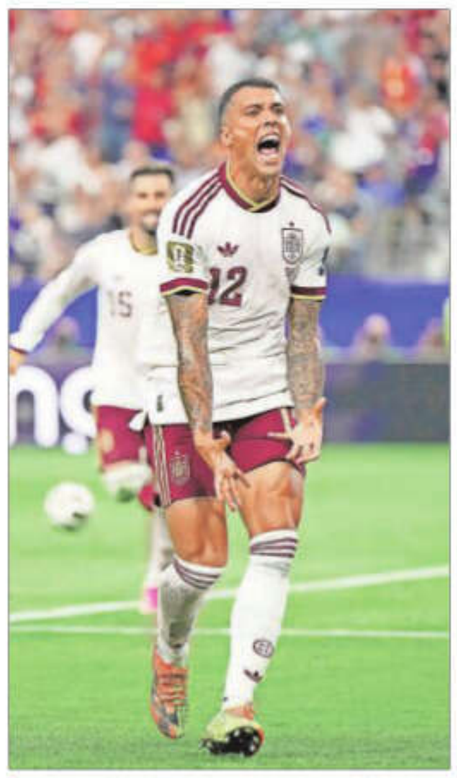
For New Delhi, the recent test reinforces the widening strategic gap between India and China's nuclear arsenal and delivery capabilities — both qualitatively and quantitatively. While India has operationalised its nuclear triad by activation of the Arihant-class SSBNs, its submarine-launched ballistic missiles have shorter ranges.

The Chinese demonstration adds urgency for India to deploy its longer-ranged K-5 and K-6 missiles to ensure parity in second-strike survivability. With the launch of the JL missile from the fortified South China Sea, Chinese submarines reduce their detection risk. Thus, India needs to expand its anti-submarine warfare capabilities and seabed domain awareness, at least across the Indian Ocean Region.

Regional actors would also be aware that China's improved capabilities raise the cost of outside intervention in its sphere of influence during any contingency.

The test, however, comes at a time when, under Donald Trump, uncertainty around expectations of US military support has heightened. For the US and the rest of the world, the launch was a direct demonstration of the maturation of China's nuclear triad and its improved deterrence capabilities. It complicates US missile defence planning and may compel it to refocus its attention and resources from West Asia to East Asia.





No jail break on Bastille Day

Pedro Porro's strike just 12 minutes into the second half all but ended France's hopes of a comeback as the 2018 champions failed to register a single big chance after falling 2-0 down (left); Porro celebrating after his side inched closer to their first World Cup final since 2010 (right). AP

COMPLETE CONTROL

Spain's tactical masterclass

Goals from Oyarzabal and Porro seal the deal in De la Fuente's strategic coup over Deschamps' men in the semifinals

Sandip G
Atlanta, July 15

THE CRUELLEST punishment Spain imposed on France was not that they upended them and progressed to the final; or that they reduced them to futile escape artistes in an airless glass box, or that they imprisoned France's vaunted forward-line in an iron cage, but that they pushed them to utter hopelessness.

Spain sucked the fight out of France, they infused an irrevocable sense of fatalism into a group smattered with high-class football artistes. A bunch that features the most expensive footballer, the Ballon D'or and Champions League winners.

The match, a 2-0 victory achieved through the goals of Mikel Oyarzabal and Pedro Porro, wouldn't be remembered for its electrifying thrills or its riveting drama or suspense, but for the tactical coup, for the flawless technical showmanship.

It's place is not so much among the World Cup classics album as it would be in a football academy's tutorial video or textbook. It was a treatise on subduing a buzzing, smoldering offensive team without resorting to unholy dark arts, a demonstration of taunting authority that makes Spain an unassailable force.

This was France. The critics whispered. This was an unstoppable force, the realists sighed. But this was Spain, too, shapeshifting perfectionists, who study their opponents to its minutest details. It required a perfect symphony, and Spain produced one. The fundamental idea was simple, as all grand thoughts are. To give France as little time on the ball as possible; or better to not give them the ball at all. Even Van Gogh needs a canvas to paint his masterpieces. And France is a team that loves as much time on the ball as possible to transform it into a cannonball from their feet.

Kloppian principle

So France starved for the ball in their first act — death by pressing, where once it was death by passing. The more France were without the ball, the more they couldn't enjoy quality time on the ball.

The raw numbers don't reveal much. Spain enjoyed marginally better possession than France (51-49). The press was vigorous, reminiscent of Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool heyday. They lived by the Kloppian principle that "the best moment to win the ball is immediately after your team just lost it." Pressing relentlessly is exhaustive, but Spain had the will and energy.

Most top sides press, and know how to remain press-resistant. But what emboldens Spain's pressing is the superlative passing range of their players. Simple scything passes that tore the heart and belief of France.

The moment a blue shirt snatched the ball, be it in their own box, they buzzed incessantly, suffocatingly close to their body, with more than one man around them. The French sought a sideways route, or they slapped the ball back. The ball is a footballer's oxygen. It was destruction by disruption. A worse feeling than not getting the ball is perhaps losing the ball. France's frustration grew louder; the brains of their creative heads scrambled. Mbappe, forlorn and fumbling, mustered three wayward shots. None of them were on goal, all of them were bereft of venom. His xG (expected goals) was .09, and undoubtedly it was his worst World Cup night.

France were looking to reach their third consecutive World Cup final. REUTERS

> ***The fundamental idea was simple, as all grand thoughts are. To give France as little time on the ball as possible; or better to not give them the ball at all***

Michael Olise (0 shots and one touch in the opposition box), France's ingenuity plank, was so ragged that coach Didier Deschamps ousted him in the 72nd minute. None of Ousmane Dembele, Desire Doue, or Bradley Barcola could script a moment of magic. Deschamps, a picture of unease, rolled his carousel of gifted forwards with little consequence. For, Spain was magically methodical. It's not a happenstance that all French lieutenants chose the worst afternoon to underperform; it was simply Spain's effect on them that they looked horrendously out of depth.

The audience might misinterpret France's bluntness as a lack of urgency. Even after Spain netted their second in the 58th minute, France did not exhibit the belief that they could overturn the deficit. Perhaps, all their hopes had been nipped by then. But it was how Spain made them look. The clarity and stability, the contentedness, was startling.

Covering spaces

Marshalled by Rodri, putting in his most impactful shift since his Ballon D'Or year (2024), they doubled-up and often tripled-up, especially when Mbappe or Olise, had the ball. Spain were supremely athletic and foresightful, in covering the spaces and snuffing the potential danger. Aymeric Laporte and Pau Cubarsi dust up memories of Alessandro Nesta and Paolo Maldini in their presence and personality, in their superhuman anticipation of a potential move. Always in control, few last-ditch tackles, or seldom caught out of possession, they form an unbudging wall of defiance that takes some heavy artillery to break. To define Spain's dismembering of France as a defensive masterclass is to belittle their penetrativeness upfront.

The first goal stemmed from Lucas Digne's unawareness of Lamine Yamal nudging behind him. It was a soft and clumsy penalty to concede, but there were numerous other times when Yamal and Dani Olmo stretched France's back-line. Yamal's pace continued to spook Digne so much so that he was tracking Yamal when Pedro Porro enjoyed a literally free run towards the box for his goal, and slashed home a delectable touch-pass from Olmo. France tried to regroup after the goal. Mbappe exhorted his teammates to be calm. But their faces were tired and sullen. They knew their fate. They had no hope. And that's the worst kind of defeat. To lose without hope.

Rodri: The mastermind who dismantled France

Sandip G
Atlanta, July 15

Rodri (R) was a powerhouse in the Spanish midfield. AP

RODRI LIKES to break moulds and counsel. When he was a teenager, growing up in Madrid's commuter suburb of Villanueva de la Cañada, his father Antonio shouted at him to be more selfish, score more goals. A defender himself for a countryside club, he used to advise him: "No one remembers tackles, they will only remember the yellow cards and sending offs." Rodri didn't listen. His comfort space was the midfield. "I could watch the game, I could read the game," he would say.

Years later, Pep Guardiola would instruct him: "You are moving too much. The holding midfielder has to be there. Don't move. Be there." The weight of the world's most deified manager carries more weight than an amateur footballer. He listened and became the bulwark of Pep's treble-winning season and one of the finest players of the world; he became a rare player the Spanish managing guru over depended on.

But in Dallas, against France in the World Cup semi-final, the Spanish captain eschewed Pep's advice. In Spain's 2-0 win the goal-scorers were Mikel Oyarzabal and Pedro Porro but it was Rodri who wore the costume of an all-action hero. He was there, here, and everywhere. His pitch map is akin to green ink spread over a blank sheet, blotches splashed from France's box to under the nose of Spain's goal-keeper.

No flashy moments

Yet, when you try to recreate his standout moments, you would scratch your head. None of the long-range screamers in clutch hours; none of the rasping headers; no lung-busting runs, no smouldering hubris. A classical Rodri image is him dispensing instructions, exhorting his men to keep the shape and order, urging them to keep calm and ride the storm.

He doesn't produce iconic images; he can't be measured through numbers, even though numbers are suggestive of his dominance. Against France the stats read: 87% pass accuracy, 15 carries, 4/4 aerial duels contested, 4 tackles, 2 clearances and recoveries apiece.

His World Cup numbers are even more glowing: Most distance covered (83.47 km), most passes completed (629 with 94% accuracy) and most line breaking passes (62).

Then he vanishes from the screen. For, he has found a pocket of space left unoccupied by a defender who had advanced; for, there is unmanned real estate where he could man so that the forward with the ball has a passing outlet; or there is a channel that needs reinforcement.

He is the defensive screen, the auxiliary defender, the stopgap attacking forward, the one-stop-solution for shape stability and shape sustenance. In trouble, when short of ideas, they simply pass to him, or just gaze sideways. Often he understands his colleagues' needs even before they do. He is beside them even before they realise he is.

• Running the show

Metric	Value (Rank)
Distance covered	12.63 km (1st)
Passes attempted	65 (2nd)
Touches	82 (3rd)
Aerial duels won	4 (2nd)

Numerous times in the semifinal, when Kylian Mbappe and Pau Cubarsi were locked in a tussle for the ball, Rodri would be by Cubarsi's side, as an extra man and a figure of assurance. Mbappe is wary too, he feels suddenly inhibited by Rodri's persona.

He lets him breathe, or any one around him, be it the attritional Marc Cucurella the fullback, or the attacking forward Fabian Ruiz or Dani Olmo or Lamine Yamal.

With his positioning, timing and movements, he makes deep midfield control into a kind of physical art form. He makes those around him shine brighter, bringing out the best in all those around him.

Pep once explained: "Just his presence, not even touching the ball? The other 10 players feel safe, better. They play better even if he doesn't touch the ball. Just the fact that he is there." He modulates the game's tempo, switches it back and forth, like in an orchestra, improvises and innovates. Guardiola would also praise his "character when the situation is going wrong."

Low-key figure

He shirks away from all the limelight. He doesn't leave social media footprint, seldom woos scandals, drove a humble second hand Opel Corsa for much of his Villarreal days. He stayed in university dormitories so that he could complete a Business Studies and Economics degree. He watched as many games on television as possible to understand how football worked. "When I was a kid, I was more interested in understanding football than enjoying it. I was interested in how it worked. I could see that if I understood the game I would have an advantage, especially at a young age when few players have that conceptual understanding," he told *El Pais*.

Yet, years ago no one thought he would be this superlative a footballer. When an Atletico Madrid scout picked him from a local club CF Rayo Majadahonda, the club's youth thought he was too small to be a defensive midfielder. He was skinny and not too tall. Nonetheless, they took him in the U14 squad, where he left coach Maurico Elena wowed with his intelligence. "He was small, but you could see he was a boy who had vision and intelligence. He was quick. He was already able to read the game in a way that wasn't normal for players of his age," he told ESPN Spain.

> **"Just his presence, not even touching the ball? The other 10 players feel safe, better. They play better even if he doesn't touch the ball. Just the fact that he is there"**
>
> **PEP GUARDIOLA,**
> FORMER MANCHESTER CITY BOSS

Though schooled in the academies of Atletico and Villarreal, with philosophies antithetical to Barcelona', his footballing precepts were Barcelona's. "In 2008 I was watching Marcos Senna and Xavi Hernández, Andrés Iniesta and Santi Cazorla: they were the ones that imposed that winning style on the team, a style which evolved and won us the World Cup," he once said. "I watched (Sergio) Busquets especially closely. He, and others, laid down a model of playing I knew I had to follow."

Busquets, the Barcelona metronome, was his idol. Yet, he did not blindly copy him. But redefined the holding midfielder role (even though it is an inadequate description) in his own way. His genius is that he strips down his functions to details and processes which one he should prioritise against which team.

Against France, he had to be an all action hero. He became one, even if he moved too much, breaking his guru's advice.

• GOOD, BUT NOT GOOD ENOUGH

Deschamps falls short on big stage in front of Spanish collectivism again

Shashank Nair
New Delhi, July 15

ONE OF the lasting images of World Cup knockout games are those final lingering shots, the camera trailing the faces of some of the best to be a part of the sport, in their most disappointing moments.

Didier Deschamps' final moments as coach for France are yet to come, with a third-place playoff, which hardly any team looks forward to, still to be negotiated. But the steady flow of red that kept rushing to his face until the final whistle in the semifinal against Spain was in effect his goodbye to managing France. The abject French surrender was a crushing end to the reign of a man used to collecting records as player and manager.

Deschamps may leave with a feeling of 'what could have been'. Fourteen years of handling probably the most talented group of footballers in international football, arriving pristine out of the Clairefontaine conveyor belt, should have resulted in a stacked trophy cabinet. The French managed to win a World Cup, but the loss to Argentina in the 2022 final, Tuesday's ouster thanks to Spain, and a solitary UEFA Nations League title may not do justice to the resources at his disposal.

At the European Championships, Deschamps 'only' managed a final and a semifinal appearance with his abundance of riches, even though his stint would be considered historic for any country not named France. There are three losses that will forever grate the Frenchman. Each of them against Spain; each a different version of his team and his riches that he put out, playing out various permutations and tweaking the combinations. The solution never arrived.

France invested heavily in the players. Kylian Mbappe holds unimaginable political power in his country, more so than possibly any player in the prime of their career. Michael Olise was given a free hand over midfield and for all games bar one, the London-born artist painted freely. Ousmane Dembele won two Champions League crowns and the Ballon d'Or, reinvigorating his career when it seemed lost. A team of individual winners, each successful in their own right.

On the other hand, Spain invested in the team. Luis de la Fuente had a hand in nurturing, training and leading many of the Spanish midfielders that lined up against France in the semifinal, throughout age-group football. There have been different occasions at this World Cup where De la Fuente has shun humility and declared Spain as the best midfield in the world.

Didier Deschamps (R) is set to leave the French team after 14 years. AP

It wasn't arrogance, rather pride. He kept faith in Unai Simon when most would have wanted a goalkeeper from a bigger club for Spain. He banked on the quiet determination of Fabian Ruiz over the overflowing gifts of Pedri. He placed faith in the ingenuity of Dani Olmo over the promise of Ferran Torres. He brought on Mikel Merino in moments of need, and most of all, banked on what he knew that he himself had built.

No answer

Deschamps, in the 2024 European Championship semifinal, understood the rise of Spain quicker than most and set a team to hold steady against that force. But Lamine Yamal wandered into the heart of the French midfield and curved his gifted left foot, concocting a curl and a dip that brought the world to its knees.

In the Nations League semifinal, France were fed the deception. Down by four unanswered goals, they went through an hour of public humiliation before Spain let up. Rayan Cherki came on and the French scored four goals but still lost to Yamal's winner. That game led Deschamps to the idea that France needed to go all out in their offence. It was a fatal error by a coach who failed to recognise the prevailing trend in international football.

Spain came up with the antidote to France at this World Cup. It was to cut the supply to their superstars, starve the best of the ball and watch the team that has run through every defensive set-up thrown at it with ease, gasp for air; chasing rather than dictating. Deschamps fell into the same trap Alex Ferguson had done in the 2011 Champions League final against Barcelona – that contending with the Spanish style of play was more important than the win itself. That the name was bigger than the collective and that Mbappe, Olise, Dembele and Desire Doue could provide an answer. It wasn't to be then and was not so now either.

France 2026 now line up with Hungary 1954, Netherlands 1974 and Brazil 1982 – all talent, no title. There is an argument to be made that this might be the most gifted group of individuals to ever have come up second-best in a World Cup knockout game. But spare a thought for Deschamps.

The game moved on right in front of his eyes. International football at the top level is shifting, moving towards collective teams. France remains an outlier among Spain and Argentina.

There is no scope of redemption now. All that's left is to wistfully look into the camera one last time before walking away.

ICC announces revamp of ODI and T20 World Cup formats

Express News Service
Mumbai, July 15

THE INTERNATIONAL Cricket Council (ICC) has approved a comprehensive overhaul of its men's global tournament structure, introducing new formats for the men's ODI World Cup and men's T20 World Cup to make every match more competitive and meaningful.

World Cup revamp

While the 50-over World Cup will continue to feature 14 teams, the tournament will adopt a new three-stage competition format intended to ensure meaningful contests from the opening match through to the final. Under the revised structure, the tournament will begin with a new "Super Series" involving the teams ranked 12th, 13th and 14th in qualification. These three teams will compete in a round-robin format, with only the winner advancing to the next stage.

The successful team will then join the remaining 11 qualified nations in the second phase, where two groups of six teams will contest 30 matches. The top three teams from each group, along with the next highest-placed team across both groups, will qualify for the newly introduced Super 7 stage.

The Super 7 will see all seven qualifying teams play each other in a single round-robin league comprising 21 matches. The top four teams will progress to the semifinals, with the first-placed side facing the fourth-ranked team and the second-placed side meeting the third-ranked team. The winners will advance to the final.

Previously, the tournament featured two groups of seven teams, with the top three from each group advancing to a Super Six stage before the semifinals.

"The increased consequence and enhanced competitive intensity promises to enhance the overall experience for fans while continuing to provide emerging teams with the opportunity to compete on cricket's biggest stage," the release added.

The ICC also approved significant changes to the Men's T20 World Cup. The opening stage will now consist of five groups of four teams instead of four groups of five, reducing the number of group-stage matches from 40 to 30. The top two teams from each group will advance to the newly created Super 10 stage.

In the second phase, the 10 qualifying teams will be divided into two groups of five. Each group winner will secure an automatic place in the semifinals. A new eliminator round has also been introduced to increase the importance of matches towards the end of the Super 10 stage. Teams finishing second in each Super 10 group will play the teams finishing third in the opposite group, with the winners of those eliminators completing the semis lineup.

Luis de la Fuente in discussion with Spain players on Tuesday. REUTERS

SPAIN 2-0 FRANCE

How De la Fuente out-thought and outclassed Deschamps

Spain laid traps across the pitch that the French fell into repeatedly, in a tactical semi-final masterclass for the ages

Shuvaditya Bose
New Delhi, July 15

BEFORE PEDRO Porro slotted his shot past Mike Maignan, before Mikel Oyarzabal's penalty nestled into the corner, and before Lucas Digne kicked Lamine Yamal inside the box, France had an opportunity.

Ousmane Dembele found Kylian Mbappe through on goal. It was the only occasion where the Spanish defence was caught napping — Pedro Porro was approximately 15 metres behind Mbappe. And yet, an incredible recovery run prevented the French captain from scoring.

This might look like an isolated moment, but the accumulation of many such moments led to Spain's 2-0 semi-final win over France. The scoreline does not flatter to deceive. The French, blessed with the most intimidating front quartet of this tournament, created 0.48 expected goals. Only three attempts on target — two in injury time. The very French who had scored in all of their last 19 matches. Nullified. Blunted.

Spain goes left

Spain went left against France, and it proved to be the right decision.

La Roja had built primarily down their right flank in the previous two matches. Against Belgium, they entered the final third 37 times from the right compared to 28 from the left. The simple explanation for this is a flourishing partnership between Pedro Porro and Lamine Yamal on the right. Add Pau Cubarsí's line-breaking passing from right centre-back — the highest in Spain's squad entering the match — and the route seemed obvious.

But Deschamps anticipated it. Mbappe was instructed to pin Cubarsi and block passing lanes, while Bradley Barcola replaced Desire Doué to track Porro's overlapping runs better with his pace. For the first 20 minutes, it worked. Spain created 0.05 xG. What Deschamps underestimated was De la Fuente's patience.

Spain were content with a 0-0 slugfest. France, given all their attacking riches, were not. A switch was inevitable. And so it happened — Ousmane Dembele and Michael Olise swapped positions.

That was the invitation Spain had been waiting for.

Olise's defensive work has never matched his elegance on the ball. Sensing vulnerability down France's right, Spain overloaded the left flank. Cucurella ventured forward to be a left-winger, while Alex Baena drifted inside, dragging his marker, Jules Kounde, alongside. With Cubarsi pinned back, Aymeric Laporte assumed responsibility for breaking lines.

The opening goal emerged directly from that adjustment. Laporte released Cucurella, whose unchallenged cross found Lucas Digne scrambling into a clumsy foul. Penalty. 1-0.

The false 9 of a false 9

Against Deschamps' man-to-man defence, de la Fuente devised an ingenious plan. Spain's highest player was often not Mikel Oyarzabal, but Dani Olmo.

The positional confusion paved the way for the second goal.

Oyarzabal's decoy run drew his marker with him, opening the central lane for Olmo to combine with Porro before the full-back calmly finished beyond Mike Maignan.

Olmo was also the lynchpin of the Spanish press. One such sequence almost yielded another goal when Maignan, hurried under pressure, sliced a clearance straight to Baena.

Simon's complete night

Unai Simon will rightly receive the acclaim for becoming the first goalkeeper to keep six clean sheets in a single World Cup, but his influence extends far beyond shot-stopping.

Simon ranked second among 32 players for attempted line-breaks (26). His long ball in the 35th minute found Baena unmarked, and would have elicited a penalty, had the winger timed his run to perfection.

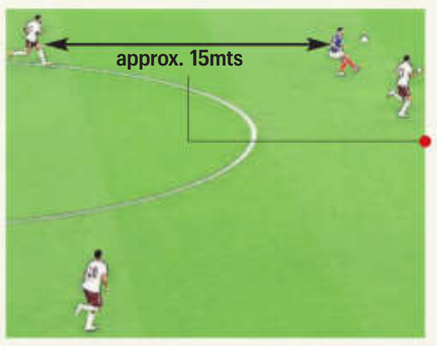
That aside, his outings have been impeccable. In the 42nd, 81st and 82nd minutes, he thwarted three possible goals.

The non-negotiable

Among de la Fuente's key postulates is equality in defending. "Defending is everyone's responsibility," he said during the 2021 U-21 Euros. Not even Lamine Yamal is exempt. In the 76th minute, he tracked Mbappe and tackled the French captain. Contrast this with Spain's second goal. Despite coming only seconds earlier, Doue does not track his runner, Porro. "We were up against one of the best teams in the world, but they were up against the best team in the world," de la Fuente said.

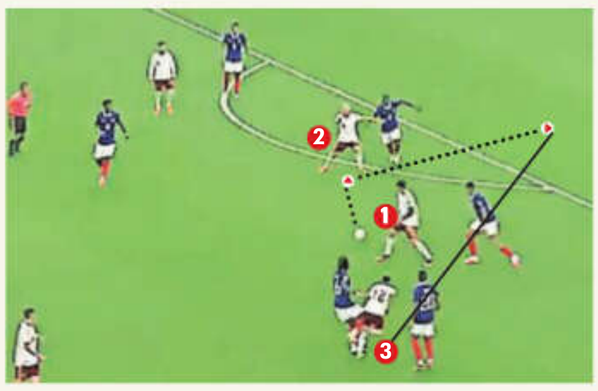
Indeed, Spain are looking like their 2010 selves. And, they are 90 — possibly 120 — minutes away from being the undisputed best team in the world.

How Spain nullified France's strengths



Despite starting approx. 15 metres behind Mbappe, Porro's incredible recovery run prevented the French captain from scoring his 9th goal of this World Cup.

1 Alex Baena drifts inside, dragging Jules Kounde with him.
2 Marc Cucurella occupies the vacant left-winger's position.
3 Aymeric Laporte's pass finds Cucurella unmarked.



1 Mikel Oyarzabal drags his marker Maxence Lacroix with a decoy run.
2 Space opens up for Dani Olmo to play a one-two with Pedro Porro.
3 Porro finds himself through on goal at the end of the sequence.

WORLD IN AWE OF SPAIN'S DOMINANCE

2024 European champions dispatched tournament favourites France in style, reaching their second World Cup final

Spanish newspaper *Marca* celebrated how their national team dismantled France.

***MARCA* — UN BAÑO HISTÓRICO**

'Total domination,' reads the headline of *Marca*. It is fitting, considering Spain dominated France in every facet of the semi-final. Despite their enormous wealth of attacking prowess, France tested the Spanish goalkeeper, Unai Simón, on only three occasions. Notably, Spain had even fewer attempts on target — only two — but still found the back of the net on a couple of occasions. *Marca* opined: "France had shed its image as an overly conservative team to become the most explosive side in the tournament. The numbers backed it up: 16 goals, the highest attacking output of the championship, and a squad brimming with talent in the final third. Spain dismantled that argument from the ground up.

Brazil's *O Globo* praised Spain's collectivism.

***O GLOBO* — SPAIN'S COLLECTIVE FOOTBALL OUTCLASSES FRENCH TALENT**

It has been a while since Brazil bid farewell to this tournament, but it does not stop *O Globo* — among the nation's leading newspapers — from praising Spain's collective effort against France. Despite not having a representative among the top five scorers or assist providers, Spain have reached their second World Cup final owing to their collectivism, which captain Rodri alluded to after the match. "It was a collective effort from everyone. We did the best performance so far. Every single minute was key. I cannot say one player, everyone who played and everyone who came on did it. We showed the character we have in the team and how mature we are in big moments," he said.

***THE TIMES* — FRANCE PASSED TO DEATH AS SPAIN DELIVER PERFORMANCE OF TOURNAMENT**

NO TEAM has attempted more passes than Spain at the 2026 FIFA World Cup. In fact, no team comes even close to Spain's figure of 4592 passes. The strategy of killing opponents with their relentless passing proved efficacious yet again on Tuesday — as *The Times* has highlighted in its headline. Luis de la Fuente's team made 427 accurate passes in Dallas, as opposed to France's 395. "Spain pretty much had it won inside the hour given the totality of their dominance. Had Lamine Yamal not strayed narrowly offside when skinning an utterly outmatched Lucas Digne for what would have been the third, the margin between the teams could have been embarrassing. Instead, Spain had to make do with the cushion of Pedro Porro's second goal, scored after 58 minutes just at the point when France would have hoped to apply comeback pressure.

> **Here was the performance of the tournament so far, delivered by what may be its most complete team. Spain delivered a masterclass in cancelling out a potentially superior opponent, playing the game on your terms, and, most of all, winning it."**
>
> ***THE TIMES*, LONDON**

Bumrah's return brings old magic back

Venkata Krishna B
Chennai, July 15

THE SIGNS were there long before the wickets came. Jasprit Bumrah's opening spell at Edgbaston yielded nothing on the scoreboard, but it had everything else - pace that kept climbing, movement through the air, relentless accuracy and an England top order scrambling for answers. By the time the breakthroughs arrived, the damage had already been done.

Facing most of the brunt and remaining unscathed was Ben Duckett. Of the four overs, he alone faced 19 deliveries, scoring 7. But it was in those remaining 16 deliveries that Bumrah showed why he remains the best all-format bowler of this era.

The first one of the morning struggled to touch 129kmph and Duckett happily defended. But there was a cue. He was already getting to angle the ball away. The next two were beaten with both landing almost in a blind spot and missing the outside edge by millimetres.

More importantly, as he grew into the spell, the speedometer kept climbing as Duckett and Jacob Bethell survived a spell

Jasprit Bumrah. CREIMAS

that they may not frequently confront in ODIs.

There was movement from the pitch and through the air. Add the precision at which Bumrah operated, denying any sort of width, and the remarkable consistency he maintained with his length, and this had everything to get at least a couple of wickets. The only instance he provided a bit of width and was on the fuller side, Duckett drove him. And in the first instance, he sprayed a bit down the leg-stump line, and he tickled him for a couple of runs.

Once the two openers perished, Bumrah gained the rewards for his first spell. Harry Brook had watched Bumrah take the ball away from the left-hander delivery after delivery, so when he faced the seamer in the first over of his second spell, he committed to play him. But Bumrah has too many recipes. So he went with an outswinger, and the extra bounce – caused by his ability to hit the deck hard—meant Brook could only edge to Rohit Sharma at first slip.

The freshness in Jasprit Bumrah was hard to miss at Edgbaston. Since bowling his heart out on November 19, 2023, Bumrah hadn't featured in ODIs. With India's white-ball focus shifting to T20s, he gave everything even if it meant being used sparingly in Tests.

Throughout the summer, Bumrah had been off-colour. The speedometer showing his pace had slowed down. But more than a month's break later, Bumrah showed signs of his old self. If India had missed one player on this UK trip, it was Bumrah. And before the toss, there were debates on air about whether they would straight away draft Bumrah into the XI. He was returning from a break, after an IPL he would prefer to forget: just four wickets in 13 matches. A year earlier, before India arrived for the Test series, he had made a hyperbolic statement. "I know what he's going to do to me, and the good thing about that is I know what skills he has. There's going to be nothing that surprises me. It's going to be challenging," Duckett had claimed.

With Prasidh Krishna too being spot on with his length and line, England's start was sedate. Apart from the one boundary that Duckett hit, the next one came via byes, as in the first seven overs, till Bumrah operated, there were 32 dot deliveries. And the moment India brought in Gurnoor Brar as the first change, both Duckett and Bethell went on a rampage, taking 38 off the next four overs.

But despite being taken apart, Brar showed why India are beginning to invest heavily in him. With pace and bounce, he can generate movement as well. He cramped Bethell for room with a short delivery, compelled him into a pull that went straight to Washington Sundar at deep square-leg. A delivery later, he made Duckett pick Bumrah at third man, with one that kept climbing and leaving the left-hander in no control of the shot.

Gukesh and Abdusattorov face off again

Amit Kamath
Chennai, July 15

NODIRBEK ABDUSATTOROV recently found himself searching for a hotel in Mahabalipuram. He was readying himself to travel for the Chennai Grandmasters tournament that starts on Thursday. It wasn't as if he didn't have a place to stay during the tournament. What Abdusattorov was really after was pleasant memories.

Four years ago, Abdusattorov was at the forefront of the young Uzbekistan chess team that travelled to India for the Chess Olympiad and upset the equally young and hungry home team on the way to winning the title. Abdusattorov's own personal duel on the top board with India's D Gukesh had decided the India-Uzbekistan contest which resulted in them winning the Olympiad while India had to settle for a bronze medal.

"I have good memories with this city," Abdusattorov said on Wednesday. "I even checked how far away the hotel is where I stayed four years ago so I can go there to relive some good memories. But it's an hour from here."

Nodirbek Abdusattorov will face D Gukesh in Round 4. FILE

The strongest field assembled for a classical tournament in India features India's Gukesh, Arjun Erigiasi, Nihal Sarin and Pranesh as well as Abdusattorov, Hans Niemann, Alireza Firouzja and Dmitry Andreikin. But the biggest clash will be the Sunday evening showdown in Round 4 between Gukesh and Abdusattorov.

Plenty has changed since that Gukesh-Abdusattorov encounter in Round 10 at the Olympiad four summers ago. Gukesh has taken over the world champion's throne. India has claimed the Olympiad team gold.

Abdusattorov, on the other hand, is yet to compete in the Candidates, but another young Uzbek, Javokhir Sindarov, will challenge Gukesh for the crown at the end of this year.

Premier battle

However, Gukesh versus Abdusattorov still remains a premier battle in the sport.

Just look at their contest at the Tata Steel Chess tournament in Wijk aan Zee at the start of the year. Just like he had at the 2022 Olympiad, Gukesh had committed an unseemly blunder that had led to a painful resignation from the Indian. That loss hurt Gukesh so much that he spent five minutes on the board trying to come to terms with it even as Abdusattorov tried to engage him in small talk. Gukesh then walked into the press room and spent over 10 minutes staring in silence into a coat rack.

"I cannot even explain how it happened," Gukesh had said later. That blunder had led Gukesh to lose his next game against Anish Giri as well before he stabilised.

A pattern has emerged since that 2022 Olympiad: Uzbek players doing well in India, and Indians repaying the favour. Sindarov's route to securing a World Championship battle passed through Goa, where he won the FIDE World Cup in 2025. R Praggnanandhaa, in 2025, snatched the UzChess Cup in Tashkent from under the noses of Sindarov and Abdusattorov. A year before that, Sarin won the President Cup in Tashkent.

"This happens due to the pressure local players are under. When you play on your opponent's soil, you have extra motivation to prove yourself," reasoned Abdusattorov.

It's a pattern that the Indian quartet will be hoping to defy starting Thursday.

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