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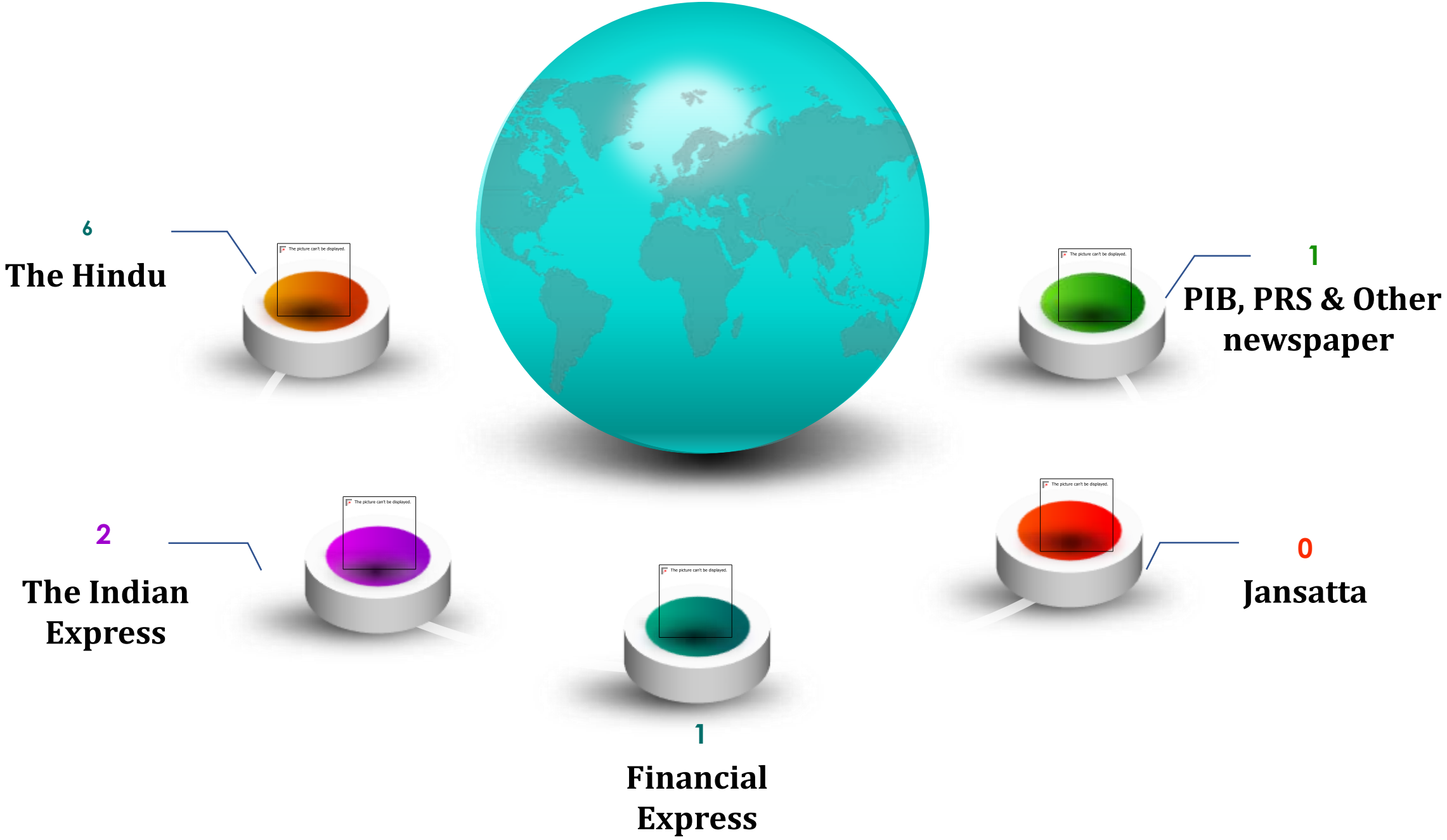
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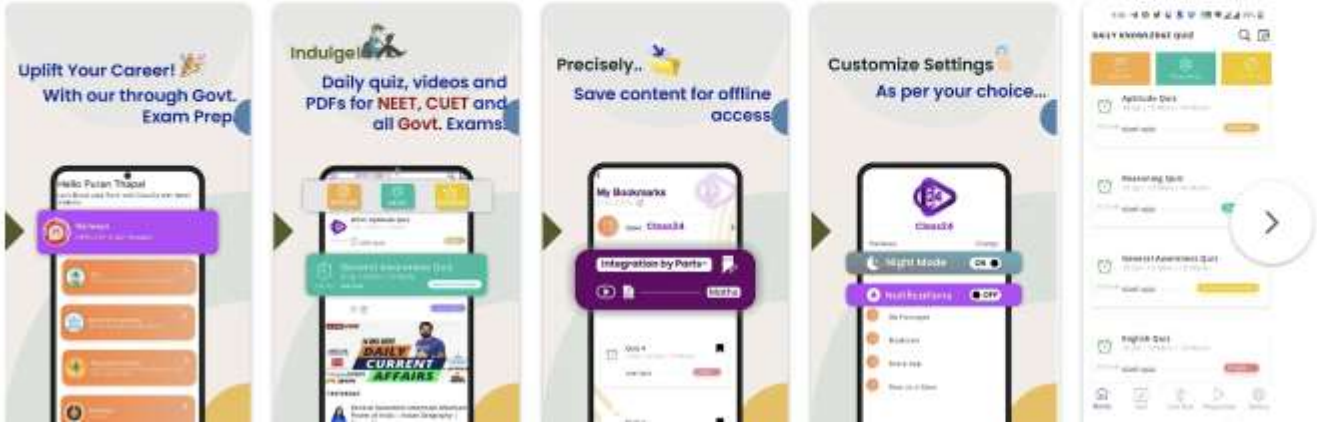


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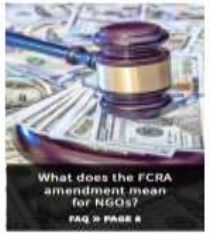

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### Maharashtra TET postponed over 'paper leak'

MUMBAI
The Maharashtra government on Saturday postponed the Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) 2026 over allegations of a "paper leak". Around six lakh candidates were expected to appear for the exam scheduled on Sunday. » PAGE 3

### Explosion, gunfire rock Karachi; 3 personnel killed

KARACHI
At least three paramilitary soldiers were killed on Saturday after militants rammed an explosives-laden vehicle into the provincial headquarters of the paramilitary Pakistan Rangers. » PAGE 12

### SIR in Delhi and four States to begin on June 30

NEW DELHI
The enumeration phase for the SIR of electoral rolls in Karnataka, Meghalaya, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, and Delhi is set to begin from June 30. The final list will be out on October 7. » PAGE 3

### Shah attacks cab aggregators for 'unfair' model

NEW DELHI
Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday launched a sharp attack on private app-based cab aggregators such as Uber and Ola, alleging that their business model exploits drivers and commuters. » PAGE 3

# Ram Temple Trust general secretary resigns

- Member Anil Mishra also submits resignation; Trust promises fair investigation into incident
- Trust assures devotees that their offerings are safe, reiterates that the guilty will be punished
- Congress demands the arrest of Champat Rai and alleges that the State government is shielding him

Mayank Kumar
LUCKNOW

Amid the uproar over the Ram Temple donation embezzlement case, the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust on Saturday announced that its general secretary Champat Rai and member Anil Mishra had submitted their resignations.

"At its next meeting, the trust will take a decision on their resignations," Trust treasurer Govind Dev Giri said in a statement on Saturday.

The statement comes a day after the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) denied reports of Mr. Rai's resignation. Mr. Rai is also the vice-president of the VHP.

In its first public statement amid the controversy, the Trust, which administers the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, said it would ensure a fair investigation into the incident.

"We are deeply pained, shocked, and extremely saddened by the incidents that have come to light in recent days at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya. As agents of all Ram devotees and Ram sevaks serving the lord, we are committed to ensuring a fair investigation and restoring the confidence of devotees," the statement added.

Mr. Rai and other Trust members are facing criticism over the donation theft case in which eight people have been arrested on charges of embezzlement, criminal conspiracy, fraud and breach of trust.

In the statement, the Trust said silver bricks, jewellery, and other offerings that the devotees had personally handed over to its officials are "safe and fully accounted for".

**'Truth will come out'**

"As regards the alleged embezzlement of money from the temple's donation boxes, an FIR has been filed, based on the interim report submitted by the Special Investigation Team (SIT). Legal proceedings are under way, truth will come out and the guilty will be punished," reads the statement.

The Ram temple Trust general secretary, Champat Rai, and other members are facing criticism over an embezzlement case. PTI

However, the war of words over the episode intensified on Saturday, with the Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav vowing to "restore and nurture the eternal glory of Ayodhya as a centre of faith and devotion".

He claimed that a new SP-led Uttar Pradesh government will develop 'Ayodhya' as a unique and exemplary religious city, where devotees will experience true spirituality.

Congress leaders continued to demand the arrest of Mr. Rai and alleged that the government was shielding him.

"Champat Rai is a small fish of the whole nexus, the real thieves are sitting in Delhi. The whole BJP-RSS ecosystem stole money from common devotees and used it to generate hate in society against marginalised sections," senior U.P. Congress leader Anil Yadav said.

It was on June 25 that the Ayodhya police registered a first information report (FIR) in the case, on the basis of a petition from the Trust. Eight accused were booked on charges of embezzlement, criminal conspiracy, fraud and breach of Trust under sections 305, 306, 317, 317 (5), 61 and 3(5) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS).

All the eight - Avinash Shukla, Anukalp Mishra, Lavkush Mishra, Manish Kumar Yadav, Karunesh Pandey Rama Shankar Mishra, Subhash Srivastava, Rama Shankar Yadav alias Tinnu - were arrested the same day and sent to judicial custody for three days till June 29.

DISSOLUTION DEMAND
» PAGE 4

# Two BJP-ruled States question VB-G RAM G financial burden

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

At least three States, two of them with BJP-led governments, have raised concerns over the increased financial burden on them under the new rural employment programme, the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G), which comes into effect on July 1.

Under the scheme, a majority of the States have to bear 40% of the total expenditure, in contrast to its predecessor legislation, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

Under MGNREGA, the Centre bore 100% of the wage bill and the States had to pay only a part of the material bill, which accounted for only 10% of the total budget.

As per a Right to Information (RTI) reply, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh — both ruled by the BJP — and Jharkhand have explicitly asked for a reconsideration of the funding pattern with analysis showing that the 40% share of interim allocation under the scheme will be inadequate to keep the promise of 125 work days.

The Union Rural Development Ministry shared this information on a RTI application filed by Chakradhar Buddha of the National Campaign for People's Right to Information (NCPRI).

Mr. Buddha had asked for records relating to meetings and consultations organised by the Centre with the States regarding VB-G RAM G.

**Early clearance of dues**

In its reply, the government shared responses of only 13 States. Of them, almost all States had pointed to delays in wage and related payments, seeking early clearance of dues.

Even States such as Sikkim and Uttarakhand, which fall under the 90:10 Centre-State sharing pattern (applicable to the northeastern and Himalayan States), had sought a review of the clause.

STATES SEEK REVIEW
» PAGE 4

# Iran accuses U.S. of violating peace agreement; both sides exchange fire

Agence France-Presse
TEHRAN

Iran on Saturday accused the U.S. of violating their deal to end the war, after Washington launched strikes on Iranian territory and Tehran responded with attacks on U.S. targets in the Gulf.

The trading of fire, which came after Washington accused Tehran of attacking a cargo ship in the Strait of Hormuz, raised doubts about efforts to keep the crucial waterway open while both sides negotiate a final deal.

U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) said the latest American strikes, which targeted Iranian missile and drone storage sites and coastal radar positions, were a response to "unwarranted aggression against commercial shipping by Iranian forces" that "clearly violated the ceasefire". It described the latest strikes as "a powerful response" to the "attack on a commercial ship that was transiting the Strait of Hormuz".

Vessels seen in the Strait of Hormuz near Bandar Abbas in Iran following the signing of the deal with U.S. to end the war. REUTERS

"Violence will be met with violence" if Iran carries out any further attacks, U.S. Vice-President J.D. Vance said.

Iran said "these brutal attacks... are a blatant violation" of the deal to end the war, which began with U.S.-Israeli strikes on Iran in late February. Its Revolutionary Guards said they had struck U.S. sites in the Gulf region and that "if the aggression is repeated, our response will be broader".

**Strikes in Bahrain**

Bahrain said it was targeted by several Iranian drones early on Saturday and accused Tehran of "sabotaging peace efforts".

Also on Saturday, British maritime security agency UKMTO said an "unidentified projectile" damaged an oil tanker in the strait.

On the U.S. strikes, Iranian media reported an explosion at a pier in the southern city of Sirik late on Friday. It quoted a military source saying a "projectile impact" caused the blast. "Sirik Port is operating normally," Mehr news agency later said.

U.S. President Donald Trump had earlier denounced what he described as an Iranian drone strike on the vessel as "a foolish violation of our ceasefire agreement".

Iran has warned vessels not to enter or leave the Gulf through the strait without permission, but ships have continued to move, some using a route not authorised by Tehran.

A SHIPWRECKED HEGEMON
» PAGE 9
'GRAVE BLUNDER'
» PAGE 12

# Screenplay maestro and everyday hero of Tamil cinema takes his last bow

B. Kolappan
CHENNAI

Renowned Tamil actor, director, writer, and screenwriter K. Bhagyaraj, whose mastery over screenplay was widely acknowledged and who created a storytelling formula that has influenced generations of filmmakers, died on Saturday. He was 73.

Sources said he suffered a massive heart attack. Speaking at his residence, actor Suhasini Maniratnam said Bhagyaraj had returned to Chennai on Friday night after attending actor Khushboo's daughter's wedding in Goa.

On Saturday morning, he went for a walk with his wife Poornima, but complained of chest pain on his return home. He was rushed to Apollo Hospital and efforts were made to resuscitate him, but they proved futile.

Bhagyaraj directed, produced and starred in numerous hit films celebrated for their engaging storylines, memorable songs, and relatable characters. *Mounageethangal*, *Antha Ezhu Naatkal*, and *Munthanai Mudichu* are some of his films being studied even today. Nearly every film of Bhagyaraj spoke loudly about an idea which found an echo within Tamil society.

An assistant of Bharathiraja, who also died recently, he forever changed the perception of the Tamil film hero by proving wit, intelligence, and ordinariness could be as compelling as physical prowess and a striking presence. He combined qualities of a hero and a comedian, making his bespectacled appearances as hero both entertaining and deeply human.

His idea of a hero was not even the man next door, but one among the many on the streets.

He also tried his hand at politics, being an ardent fan of M.G. Ramachandran, though he was not very successful in this sphere. He edited the Tamil weekly magazine *Bhagya* and authored several novels as well.

K. BHAGYARAJ (1953-2026)

His funeral will be held on Sunday afternoon at the Besant Nagar Crematorium with State honours.

He began working in the film industry in the mid-1970s as an assistant director under Bharathiraja, working in iconic films such as *16 Vayathinile*, *Kizhakke Pogum Rail*, and *Sigappu Rojakkal*. He developed his skills as a dialogue and screenplay writer.

**Prolific career**

His debut as a hero was in the movie *Pudhiya Vaarpugal*, co-starring Rati Agnihotri, and his directorial debut was with the film *Suvarilladha Chithirangal*.

In 1981, he married co-star Praveena, but she died in 1983. The next year, he married Poornima, his co-star from movie *Darling, Darling, Darling*. He has directed 27 feature films across the Tamil and Hindi languages. When the hit Tamil film *Oru Kaidhiyin Diary* (1985) — originally directed by Bharathiraja and starring Kamal Haasan — was remade in Hindi as *Aakhree Raasta* (1986), Bhagyaraj was roped in as the director.

Following this success, Bhagyaraj went on to direct *Mr. Bechara* (1996), the Hindi remake of his own hit Tamil directorial venture, *Veetla Visheshanga* (1994), casting Anil Kapoor and Sridevi in the lead roles.

He later helmed *Papa the Great* (2000), a Hindi remake of his 1998 Tamil film *Vettiya Madichu Kattu*, starring Krishan Kumar and Nagma. However, this particular venture failed to make a mark at the box office.

In the subsequent phase of his directorial career, the only film that stood out was *Chokka Thangam*. Beyond his work behind the camera, Bhagyaraj has had a prolific acting career, appearing in over 80 films across Tamil and other regional languages.

Demonstrating his versatility, he also composed the music for five films.

His corneas were donated to an eyebank in Chennai.

*(With inputs from K. Muralidharan and Ramya Kannan)*

RELATED REPORTS ON
» PAGE 16

# Two BJP-ruled States question VB-G RAM G financial burden

**Sobhana K. Nair**
NEW DELHI

At least three States, two of them with BJP-led governments, have raised concerns over the increased financial burden on them under the new rural employment programme, the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G), which comes into effect on July 1.

Under the scheme, a majority of the States have to bear 40% of the total expenditure, in contrast to its predecessor legislation, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

Under MGNREGA, the Centre bore 100% of the wage bill and the States had to pay only a part of the material bill, which accounted for only 10% of the total budget.

## Budget concern

States are required to bear **40% of the total expenditure** under the VB-G RAM G scheme

| | Current share* | For 125 days of work |
|---|---|---|
| Bihar | ₹4,477 cr. | ₹15,939 cr. |
| M.P. | ₹4,168 cr. | ₹20,037 cr. |
| Jharkhand | ₹1,804 cr. | ₹9,293 cr. |

**The new scheme is set to come into effect on July 1**

*As per interim fund allocation

As per a Right to Information (RTI) reply, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh – both ruled by the BJP – and Jharkhand have explicitly asked for a reconsideration of the funding pattern with analysis showing that the 40% share of interim allocation under the scheme will be inadequate to keep the promise of 125 work days.

The Union Rural Development Ministry shared this information on a RTI application filed by Chakradhar Buddha of the National Campaign for People's Right to Information (NCPRI).

Mr. Buddha had asked for records relating to meetings and consultations organised by the Centre with the States regarding VB-G RAM G.

### Early clearance of dues

In its reply, the government shared responses of only 13 States. Of them, almost all States had pointed to delays in wage and related payments, seeking early clearance of dues.

Even States such as Sikkim and Uttarakhand, which fall under the 90:10 Centre-State sharing pattern [applicable to the northeastern and Himalayan States], had sought a review of the clause.

**STATES SEEK REVIEW**
» PAGE 4

| Topic | Details |
| --- | --- |
| **Scheme Name** | Viksit Bharat–Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) |
| **Effective From** | **1 July** |
| **Ministry** | Ministry of Rural Development |
| **Objective** | Rural employment generation with **125 days of guaranteed work** (higher than the previous guarantee). |
| **Issue** | Several States have expressed concern over the increased financial burden due to the revised Centre–State funding pattern. |

| Feature | Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act | VB-G RAM G |
|---|---|---|
| Employment Guarantee | 100 days | 125 days |
| Wage Cost | Centre bore **100% wage cost** | States contribute to total expenditure |
| State Contribution | Mainly material component (~10% of total budget) | **40% of total expenditure** (majority of States) |
| Financial Burden | Lower on States | Significantly higher |

| State | Government | Current Share (Interim Allocation) | Requirement for 125 Days |
|---|---|---|---|
| Bihar | BJP | ₹4,477 crore | ₹15,939 crore |
| Madhya Pradesh | BJP | ₹4,168 crore | ₹20,037 crore |
| Jharkhand | State Government | ₹1,804 crore | ₹9,293 crore |

## Key Concerns Raised by States

- States argue that **40% cost sharing** is too high.
- Interim allocation is insufficient to provide **125 days of employment**.
- States requested reconsideration of the funding formula.
- Many States also highlighted:
  - Delay in wage payments.
  - Delay in clearance of dues.
  - Need for timely release of Central funds.

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## Special Provision

| Category | Centre : State Share |
|---|---|
| Most States | 60 : 40 |
| Northeastern & Himalayan States | 90 : 10 |

Even States such as **Sikkim** and **Uttarakhand**, which receive assistance under the **90:10** pattern, reportedly sought a review of the clause.

# SIR enumeration in Delhi and four States to begin on June 30

There are about 19.79 crore voters in Karnataka, Meghalaya, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, and Delhi; final electoral lists post the SIR will be out on Oct. 7

Sreeparna Chakrabarty
NEW DELHI

Door-to-door: In the ongoing third phase of the SIR, over 3.94 lakh Booth Level Officers will verify 36.73 crore electors.

The enumeration phase for the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Karnataka, Meghalaya, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, and Delhi is set to begin from June 30.

There is a total of 19,78,94,740 voters in these four States and Delhi as of May 12. The final voter lists for these States post the SIR process will be published on October 7.

The ongoing third phase of the SIR is being conducted in 16 States and three Union Territories. Over 3.94 lakh Booth Level Officers (BLOs) will go house to house to verify 36.73 crore electors, assisted by 3.42 lakh Booth Level Agents (BLAs) appointed by political parties in this phase.

## Pruning the rolls

With this phase, the exercise will cover the entire country except Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh. The SIR schedule for these will be announced later after considering the completion of Phase-II of the Census and due consideration of the weather in the upper reaches or snow bound areas, the Election Commission of India (EC) said.

When the second phase of the SIR was announced for 12 States/UTs by the EC on October 27, 2025, their cumulative voter base stood at more than 50.99 crore. It now stands at 45.81 crore post the SIR, a decline of over 5.18 crore or a 10.2% cut in the electoral rolls of these States and UTs.

With a number of those States going to the polls in subsequent months, the SIR exercise triggered acrimony between the Opposition and the poll body, and has been challenged in courts as well.

In March, however, the Supreme Court unanimously upheld the constitutional validity of the EC's move to carry out the SIR.

# NIA chargesheets 3 more accused in Red Fort blast case

Devesh K. Pandey
NEW DELHI

With this, 13 persons, including the prime accused who died in the blast, have been chargesheeted

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has chargesheeted three more accused, including an absconder, in connection with the November 2025 car bomb explosion near the Red Fort.

In its supplementary charge sheet, the NIA has named Zameer Ahmad Ahanger, Tufail Ahmad Bhat, and Muzafar Ahmad alias Faraz/Zafar, all from Jammu and Kashmir, as accused. This takes the number of persons chargesheeted to 13, including the prime accused, Umer Un Nabi, who died in the blast.

"Absconding accused Muzafar Ahmed, a paediatrician (MBBS, MD), has been identified as the elder brother of co-accused Dr. Adeel Ahmed Rather and a founding member of Ansar Gharwat-ul-Hind (AGuH) – an offshoot of al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS)," the agency said.

According to the NIA, Mr. Muzafar could be one of the prime architects, along with co-accused Umer, Muzammil, Adeel, and Mufti Irfan, of the conspiracy that led to the vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (IED) blast on November 10, 2025.

"One of the founding members of AGuH Interim, Mr. Muzafar, had attended the secret Eidgah meeting at Srinagar in June 2022, during which the terror module AGuH Interim was established," it said.

The agency alleged that Mr. Muzafar was deeply involved in the manufacture, testing and safekeeping of TATP (triacetone triperoxide)-based IEDs at a clandestine facility run by Umer and Muzammil at Al-Falah University in Haryana's Faridabad. A non-bailable warrant has been issued against him.

As per the NIA, Mr. Zameer is an Overground Worker (OGW) of AGuH Interim. "Tufail, a former OGW of the proscribed Lashkar-e-Taiba terror organisation, had procured ammunition and delivered them to the main accused Dr. Umer Un Nabi," it said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Seychelles President Patrick Herminie and others during the handing-over ceremony of a fast petrol vessel at the Coast Guard Base, in Victoria, Seychelles. PTI

# Modi hands over 'Made in India' vessel to Seychelles

Press Trust of India
VICTORIA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday handed over a 'Made in India' Fast Patrol Vessel to the Seychelles Coast Guard, reaffirming New Delhi's commitment to strengthening the archipelago nation's maritime capabilities.

Mr. Modi and Seychelles President Patrick Herminie participated in the handover ceremony at the Coast Guard Base in Victoria, Seychelles, during Mr. Modi's three-day visit to the Indian Ocean archipelago.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said the vessel, *PS LESPWAR*, will strengthen Seychelles' maritime surveillance and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) patrol capabilities.

Mr. Modi on Saturday described the India-Seychelles friendship as "steady, strong and long-lasting" and said the two countries would "together win the race" as he addressed a state dinner hosted by Mr. Herminie.

Addressing the dinner, Mr. Herminie affirmed the enduring bond between the two nations. "India has been a steadfast friend to Seychelles, a sentiment warmly reciprocated by our people and our vibrant Indian diaspora," he said.

The dinner was attended by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, Seychelles Speaker of the National Assembly Azarel Ernesta, Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Diaspora Barry Faure.

The Prime Minister received a ceremonial Guard of Honour.

]Mr. Modi also visited a giant tortoise enclosure at the Seychelles National Botanical Garden.

# Maharashtra govt. puts off TET over alleged 'paper leak'

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

The Maharashtra government on Saturday postponed the Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) 2026 over allegations of a "paper leak". Around six lakh candidates were expected to appear for the examination scheduled on Sunday across 1,728 centres in the State. "This decision was taken to make the examination transparent," the government stated in a press release. The new date for the examination will be announced later.

The Opposition slammed the government over the decision and called for a thorough probe into the alleged leak. "Why is the government not capable of holding a single exam transparently? If it does not act strictly, we will hit the streets," State Congress president Harshwardhan Sapkal said.

The decision to postpone the exam a day before the scheduled date was taken after an investigation by the Bhiwandi police in Thane district found people in possession of questions similar to those in the TET paper.

"Officials of the Maharashtra State Examination Council (MSEC) were immediately called to the spot. They verified the seized papers. During the investigation, it was observed that some of the questions found with the suspects and the questions in the TET paper were the same. A case has been registered in this regard at the Bhiwandi police station," the government statement said.

"The process of organising an examination of this scale typically takes around three weeks. Candidates who had already registered for the examination will not have to register again. Since the candidates are not at fault, no re-registration fee will be charged," MSEC Deputy Commissioner Priya Shinde said.

An FIR has been registered against three persons, and the police are conducting further investigation, she said, adding that strict action will be taken against those found responsible.

## 'Strict action needed'

The new date for the examination and other related information will be published on the official website of the MSEC. Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde called for strict action against the accused.

# Parliament was misled by govt. on casualties during Operation Sindoor: Cong.

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

...the House was told our soldiers suffered no loss... a year later, the govt. itself released names of 6 soldiers who made the supreme sacrifice. Is this how the govt. chooses to honour them?

GAURAV GOGOI
Congress MP

A day after the government officially released the names of the soldiers who died during Operation Sindoor, the Congress on Saturday accused Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh of misleading Parliament by stating that no Indian soldier had died during the military operation.

The government's disclosure had exposed a contradiction between the Defence Minister's statement in Parliament and the official record, the party said, demanding the Centre place the complete facts relating to the operation before the House during the forthcoming monsoon session.

The Congress's deputy leader in the Lok Sabha Gaurav Gogoi said that during the parliamentary debate on Operation Sindoor, he had urged the Defence Minister to present "the complete truth" before the Parliament and the nation.

"Instead, the House was unequivocally told that our soldiers had suffered no loss," he said in a post on X. A year later, the government itself had officially released the names of six personnel who had made "the supreme sacrifice" during the operation, Mr. Gogoi added.

## 'Stark contradiction'

"The government's own admission exposes a stark contradiction. Parliament was misled on a matter of the highest national importance. The families of our martyrs deserve the truth. Our brave soldiers deserve to have their sacrifice acknowledged with honesty and dignity. Is this how the government chooses to honour those who gave their lives in service of the nation?" he said.

Congress general secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala also attacked the Centre, alleging that it had failed to speak the truth even on the issue of soldiers' sacrifices. "The age of a lie is short, the truth of martyrdom is indelible. Those who do not speak the truth even for martyrdom, what respect will they show to the martyrs! Those who shamelessly lie in the temple of democracy, who will believe them!" Mr. Surjewala said on X.

Casualties were an inevitable possibility in military operations, senior Congress leader and Chandigarh MP Manish Tewari said, questioning why the government had sought to conceal the facts.

"In a kinetic action casualties do happen. Why obfuscate the facts and dissimulate, and that too to Parliament – the supreme legislative institution of the nation?" he said.

"If there are some other facts pertaining to Operation Sindoor, government should squarely put them on the table of Parliament during the ensuing monsoon session without demur," Mr. Tewari said.

# Defence Minister's remarks being taken out of context: govt.

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

The Union government on Saturday rejected the "misleading social media claims" that Defence Minister Rajnath Singh had stated that no Indian soldier was killed during Operation Sindoor, asserting that his remarks in Parliament had been selectively quoted and stripped of their context.

On July 28, 2025, while speaking before the Lok Sabha, Rajnath Singh stated that no Indian soldiers were harmed during Operation Sindoor. While speaking for 55 minutes during the 16-hour-long discussion, he said, "If you want to raise a question, then ask whether any of our brave soldiers were harmed in this operation. The answer is, no, none of our soldiers were harmed."

"When the objectives are high then our attention should not be on irrelevant issues. Because by focusing on irrelevant issues at times, our attention gets diverted from important issues related to national security and morale of soldiers," he had said.

## 'Misrepresented words'

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) clarified in a statement that certain social media posts had misrepresented the Defence Minister's address in Parliament, by isolating a portion of his speech to falsely suggest he denied any Indian military casualties during the cross-border operation.

According to Saturday's clarification, Mr. Singh's remarks were specifically intended to counter a widely circulated false narrative at the time claiming that Indian Air Force pilots had been killed during the operation. "It was in direct reference to this specific and mischievous narrative that the Defence Minister made the statement in question," the MoD said, adding that his remarks were a targeted response to false claims and not a denial of casualties suffered by the armed forces.

The statement emphasised that the Defence Minister's address in Parliament highlighted the success of Operation Sindoor, during which Indian forces carried out precision strikes against terror infrastructure and military targets across the border. It said the operation resulted in the elimination of more than 100 terrorists and Pakistani soldiers, while inflicting significant damage on Pakistani air bases and military infrastructure along the Line of Control.

# Despite dip in global fuel prices, Centre is denying relief: Kharge

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Saturday accused the Narendra Modi government of refusing to pass on the benefit of falling global crude oil prices to consumers, alleging that the Centre was treating the public as a source of tax revenue rather than providing relief.

In a post on X, Mr. Kharge said international crude oil prices had fallen to pre-West Asia war levels, but petrol, diesel and LPG prices remained high.

Describing it as the BJP's "habit of looting and pickpocketing", he alleged that while crude oil prices had tumbled, the government had continued to "tighten the reins" on household savings instead of reducing fuel prices.

Posing a series of questions to the Centre, Mr. Kharge said that when the conflict in West Asia had pushed crude oil prices to about $138 a barrel, petrol was selling at a retail price of ₹94.77 a litre and diesel at ₹87.67 a litre. With crude oil now down to about $70.71 a barrel, petrol was still being sold at ₹102.12 a litre and diesel at ₹98.20 a litre, he said.

# Plea in SC seeks fire safety protocol for high-risk buildings

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

A petition has been filed in the Supreme Court seeking the creation of a National Minimum Fire and Life Safety Framework for high-risk public occupancy premises, including schools, coaching centres, hotels, hospitals, and commercial complexes.

The petition, filed by advocate Narendra Kumar Goswami, comes in the wake of two devastating fire incidents in June – the Malviya Nagar guest house fire in Delhi and the Aliganj coaching centre fire in Lucknow, which together resulted in at least 37 deaths.

Mr. Goswami has argued that the recurring pattern of preventable fire fatalities constitutes a systemic constitutional failure.

"The right to life under Article 21 is not a right to be rescued after the fire; it is a right not to be knowingly exposed to preventable fire-death by a regulatory State that has the power, the codes, and the duty to prevent such danger," the petition said.

Rescue operations under way at the building where a massive fire erupted in Aliganj, Lucknow, a few days ago. ANI

The plea sought directions from the court to the government to introduce a system of time-bound fire and electrical safety audits for high-risk public premises; create a centralised, public digital portal displaying valid Fire NOCs, occupancy certificates, and audit compliance status; prohibit the use of basements, rooftops, and temporary structures for classrooms, coaching, or public assembly without explicit safety approval; introduce tamper-proof, QR-coded fire safety certificates carrying severe penal consequences for false certification; constitute District Fire and Life Safety Enforcement Committees headed by District Magistrates; and establish a strict liability compensation protocol for victims of fires occurring in non-compliant premises.

The plea said isolated FIRs and post-facto inquiry committees were constitutionally insufficient.

The petitioner has also asked the Supreme Court to retain a "continuing mandamus" of the fire safety issue until the first national audit cycle and public disclosure portal are fully operational.

# Police hunt for accused in narco-terror case

The Hindu Bureau
SRINAGAR

The J&K Police's special wing, the State Investigation Agency (SIA), on Saturday executed proclamation proceedings against a local who is allegedly "absconding and wanted in a cross-border narco-terror case".

An SIA spokesperson said the proclamation was executed at the residence of the accused, identified as Bilal Shabir Awan, a resident of Dildar in Kupwara, "in the presence of the Executive Magistrate and independent witnesses".

The SIA said a case was initially registered at the Parimpora police station, Srinagar, in January 2025 following the seizure of a substantial quantity of heroin during a cordon-and-search operation at Barthana in Srinagar.

The police invoked the provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in the case.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Seychelles President Patrick Herminie and others during the handing-over ceremony of a fast petrol vessel at the Coast Guard Base, in Victoria, Seychelles. PTI

# Modi hands over 'Made in India' vessel to Seychelles

**Press Trust of India**
VICTORIA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday handed over a 'Made in India' Fast Patrol Vessel to the Seychelles Coast Guard, reaffirming New Delhi's commitment to strengthening the archipelago nation's maritime capabilities.

Mr. Modi and Seychelles President Patrick Herminie participated in the handover ceremony at the Coast Guard Base in Victoria, Seychelles, during Mr. Modi's three-day visit to the Indian Ocean archipelago.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said the vessel, *PS LESPWAR*, will strengthen Seychelles' maritime surveillance and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) patrol capabilities.

Mr. Modi on Saturday described the India-Seychelles friendship as "steady, strong and long-lasting" and said the two countries would "together win the race" as he addressed a state dinner hosted by Mr. Herminie.

Addressing the dinner, Mr. Herminie affirmed the enduring bond between the two nations. "India has been a steadfast friend to Seychelles, a sentiment warmly reciprocated by our people and our vibrant Indian diaspora," he said.

The dinner was attended by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, Seychelles Speaker of the National Assembly Azarel Ernesta, Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Diaspora Barry Faure.

The Prime Minister received a ceremonial Guard of Honour.

]Mr. Modi also visited a giant tortoise enclosure at the Seychelles National Botanical Garden.

| Topic | Details |
| --- | --- |
| **News** | India handed over a **Made-in-India Fast Patrol Vessel (FPV) – PS LESPWAR** to Seychelles. |
| **Handed Over By** | Narendra Modi |
| **Recipient** | Patrick Herminie |
| **Location** | Victoria |
| **Occasion** | PM Modi's **three-day visit** to Seychelles. |
| **Purpose** | Strengthen Seychelles' maritime security and deepen India–Seychelles strategic partnership. |

ARABIAN SEA
SOMALIA
KENYA
SEYCHELLES
TANZANIA
VICTORIA
ATLANTIC OCEAN
COMOROS
MADAGASCAR
MOZAMBIQUE
INDIAN OCEAN
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CHINA
INDIA
ARABIAN SEA
BAY OF BENGAL
SEYCHELLES
MALDIVES
Assumption Island
DIEGO GARCIA
Agalega Islands
MAURITIUS
MADAGASCAR
AUSTRALIA
INDIAN OCEAN

| Particular | Details |
| --- | --- |
| **Name** | **PS LESPWAR** |
| **Type** | Fast Patrol Vessel (FPV) |
| **Built In** | India |
| **Recipient Agency** | Seychelles Coast Guard |
| **Role** | Maritime surveillance, EEZ patrol, anti-smuggling, anti-piracy, search & rescue, coastal security |

| Particular | Details |
| --- | --- |
| **Name** | **PS LESPWAR** |
| **Type** | Fast Patrol Vessel (FPV) |
| **Built In** | India |
| **Recipient Agency** | Seychelles Coast Guard |
| **Role** | Maritime surveillance, EEZ patrol, anti-smuggling, anti-piracy, search & rescue, coastal security |

| Aspect | Details |
|---|---|
| Diplomatic Relations | Established in **1976** |
| Strategic Importance | Indian Ocean Region (IOR) partner |
| Defence Cooperation | Patrol vessels, Dornier aircraft, coastal radar network, military training |
| Development Partnership | Infrastructure, healthcare, education, digital connectivity |
| Diaspora | Small but influential Indian-origin community |

| Factor | Importance |
| --- | --- |
| Location | Western Indian Ocean |
| Maritime Routes | Close to major Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) |
| EEZ | Around **1.3 million sq. km** despite small land area |
| Security | Important for anti-piracy operations |
| Indo-Pacific | Key maritime partner for India |

| Particular | Details |
| --- | --- |
| Capital | Victoria |
| Continent | Africa |
| Ocean | Indian Ocean |
| Currency | Seychellois Rupee (SCR) |
| Official Languages | English, French, Seychellois Creole |
| Independence | **29 June 1976** (from the United Kingdom) |
| Government | Presidential Republic |

## IN BRIEF

### Vigil stepped up over security threat to Delhi, Uttarakhand

Intelligence agencies have issued a security alert for Delhi and Uttarakhand following a possible Khalistani terror threat, with key religious sites, government establishments and police installations put under heightened surveillance, sources said on Saturday. According to sources, the alert was triggered after an email surfaced warning of possible attacks in the coming days. This threat comes in the backdrop of a standoff at the Nagrani gurdwara in Uttarakhand's Rudraprayag district between a group of Nihangs and the authorities. Sources said the Delhi Police have launched a probe into the email to ascertain its authenticity and trace its origin. PTI

### Civilian dies in explosion near LoC in Jammu and Kashmir

A civilian was killed in an explosion near the Line of Control (LoC) in the Gulmarg area of north Kashmir's Baramulla district on Saturday, officials said. Officials identified the victim as Zabir Ahmad Bajad, son of Mohammad Rafiq Bajad, a resident of Baramulla district. Initial official assessment suggested that the civilian died after an unexploded shell went off. However, the Army and the police could not provide details about the exact circumstances leading to the blast. The unexploded shell was apparently lying close to the Asha Post near the LoC in Gulmarg.

### 4 killed, 8 injured in lightning strikes in Madhya Pradesh

Four people were killed and eight others injured in two separate incidents of lightning strikes in Chhindwara district of Madhya Pradesh, police said on Saturday. According to the police, Balhar police station in-charge said Satish Walke (18) and Lucky Mevati (18) died on the spot after being struck by a bolt from the sky, while Jhaam Singh Taram (34) succumbed to injuries during treatment in the hospital. He said that two seriously injured people have been shifted to the district hospital, while four are undergoing treatment at Balhar Hospital. Chandravati Pusam (30), was also struck by a bolt from the sky in the Garhi police station area. PTI

### Assam police arrest 2 ULFA(I) members, avert 'terror strike'

The Assam police claimed it averted a major terror strike by apprehending two members of the banned United Liberation of Asom (Independent) in Tinsukia district on Friday. They were identified as "second lieutenant" Humenjyoti Baruah (27), and "second lieutenant" Papu Moran (30). Tinsukia's Superintendent of Police, Mayank Kumar, said the duo was caught with the help of central agencies near Arunachal Pradesh border. Two AK-56 assault rifles, two hand grenades, 172 rounds of AK ammunition, opioids, and jungle survival kits were recovered from them. "Preliminary investigations revealed that the ULFA(I) had tasked them to target and kill people in Tinsukia town indiscriminately to create terror," he said.

## SUDOKU

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| | | | | | | 2 | 9 | |
| 7 | | 6 | | | | | 2 | |
| | | 1 | | | | | | 6 | 5 |
| | 9 | | 6 | | 5 | | | |

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

# How saving elephants helps forests breathe easier

**Rahul Karmakar**
GUWAHATI

Protecting the endangered Asiatic elephant (*Elephas maximus indicus*) indirectly helps safeguard India's forests as powerful carbon stores, a new scientific study has said.

The research, however, warned that long-term carbon stabilisation cannot be ensured merely by declaring more areas as elephant reserves but by improving habitat quality, restoring wildlife corridors, and strengthening forest management. Carbon stabilisation, a vital mechanism for removing greenhouse gases and mitigating climate change, is the process of trapping atmospheric carbon and locking it into stable, solid forms (such as in soil or organic matter). This helps resist decay, erosion, or the release of carbon back into the atmosphere.

The study, published in the latest issue of the *Journal of Threatened Taxa*, assessed the relationship between elephant conservation efforts, the expansion of elephant reserves, and wildlife-associated carbon stock enhancement in India from 1992 to 2023. Nokia-based Amity University's Tarun Kalyada and Tanu Jindal are its authors.

The researchers found that India's elephant reserve network expanded from 18,397 sq. km. (across three elephant reserves) to 80,777 sq. km. (33 elephant reserves), while the elephant population increased by about 6.7% from 25,604 estimated during 1992-93. Despite the marginal increase in the number of pachyderms, the estimated carbon stored within the elephant reserves increased by 38%.

The increase should not be interpreted as the elephants directly creating more forest biomass, the researchers said, as it "primarily reflects enhanced protection and reduced degradation of pre-existing forest carbon stocks."

Elephants remain ecologically vital, despite their limited contribution to faunal biomass, the researchers said. THULASI RAMAT

The study estimated that about 95% of the increase in carbon storage resulted from the expansion of protected forest areas. However, elephant reserves are not uniformly conserved in the same manner as legally designated national parks or tiger reserves.

**Ecosystem engineers**

Elephants, often described as ecosystem engineers, remain ecologically vital, despite their limited contribution to faunal biomass, the researchers said. The gentle giants, they pointed out, disperse seeds, enrich soils with dung, create space for diverse vegetation, and help maintain healthy forests capable of storing carbon over the long term.

The researchers also found a weak relationship between the number of elephant reserves and the elephant population growth, suggesting that administrative declarations alone cannot secure the species' future if habitats remain fragmented or poorly managed.

**Declining numbers**

The study further underlined a worrying trend — the decline in elephant numbers under a new census methodology called Synchronised All India Elephant Estimate (SAIEE) 2021-25, while the number of elephant reserves has stabilised. The SAIEE count of 22,446 was 4,065 elephants fewer than the 2017 estimate, but the enumerators asserted that the two different counting methods should not be compared.

Comparable patterns were observed in the African savannah ecosystems, where mega-herbivore management improved vegetation carbon stocks by 20-30%. "Such consistency across regions supports the ecological principle that mega-fauna protection complements forest-carbon goals," their study said. "Policy integration of these results can strengthen India's commitments to achieve 2.5-3 billion $tCO_2$ (total carbon dioxide) equivalent additional carbon sink by 2030. Incorporating wildlife-inclusive accounting within REDD+ frameworks could generate measurable ecosystem-service credits while ensuring co-benefits for biodiversity," the study said. REDD expands to 'Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation'.

## U.S. names Indian firm, CEO in Sudan sanctions

**Press Trust of India**
WASHINGTON

The U.S. imposed sanctions on eight persons and entities, including an Indian national associated with an explosives manufacturing firm, for allegedly fuelling the civil war in Sudan.

The U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) on Friday said the targeted networks enabled both the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) to expand and intensify civil war in the African nation and created the "world's worst humanitarian crisis and provided space for terrorist groups to operate".

Among the sanctioned individuals is Alok Choudhari of Raipur, the Chief Executive Officer of SBL Energy Limited, also known as Amin Explosive Private Limited, which allegedly supplied over 200 shipments of explosives and materials to a company that maintained the SAF's arsenal.

The Treasury Department also imposed sanctions on Raipur-based SBL Energy Limited.

# Shah attacks cab aggregators over 'unfair' business model

**Union Minister says newly launched cooperative ride-hailing platform Bharat Taxi is an alternative that will safeguard interests of drivers, passengers; it will expand to over 500 cities within 2 years**

**Abhinav Deshpande**
AHMEDABAD

Union Cooperation Minister Amit Shah on Saturday launched a sharp attack on private app-based cab aggregators such as Uber and Ola, alleging that their business model exploits both drivers and commuters through practices that prioritise corporate profits over fair treatment. He said the newly launched cooperative ride-hailing platform, Bharat Taxi, was conceived to provide an alternative that safeguards the interests of drivers while ensuring better service for passengers.

Addressing the launch of Bharat Taxi in 14 cities across Gujarat, Mr. Shah, without naming the companies, alleged that private platforms deduct hefty commissions from drivers, delay payments and suspend their registrations based solely on passenger complaints without giving them an opportunity to present their case.

He said the cooperative model was introduced to eliminate such practices and ensure that drivers are treated as stakeholders rather than service providers dependent on private companies.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah takes a taxi ride during the launch of 'Bharat Taxi' in Gujarat. PTI

**Competitors' challenge**

"I received phone calls today and some newspapers have reported that Bharat Taxi's fares are higher. I want to tell customers across the country that wherever Bharat Taxi begins operations, competing companies immediately slash their fares and are prepared to incur losses. Our intention is not to inflict losses on anyone, but reducing fares and offering higher commissions to *auto rickshaw* (drivers) is being done only to prevent Bharat Taxi from entering the market," he said.

"They want Bharat Taxi to fail so they can once again function arbitrarily," he said, adding that such strategies would not succeed in India, where "the spirit of cooperation and the desire to work for the welfare of others are the greatest strength".

Bharat Taxi, which was soft-launched in Gujarat last December, is being projected as India's first cooperative-owned, driver-led ride-hailing platform. Operating on a zero-commission model, it allows drivers to retain the entire fare while also giving them ownership in the platform.

The platform was formally launched in Ahmedabad, Surat, Vadodara, Rajkot, Dwarka, among other cities across Gujarat. It will initially offer services in three categories — two-wheelers, auto-rickshaws and four-wheelers.

Mr. Shah said Bharat Taxi would begin operations in Nagpur, Pune, Mumbai, Lucknow, Chandigarh, Jaipur and Kolkata before July 31, and services would be extended to more than 500 cities and towns over the next two years.

Addressing the drivers, he said they had become part of the country's larger cooperative movement, which already includes crores of farmers.

## Second body recovered after floods in Arunachal

**The Hindu Bureau**
GUWAHATI

Rescue teams on Saturday recovered the body of one of the four persons missing after a cloudburst and resultant flash floods hit a hydropower project colony in Arunachal Pradesh's Keyi Panyor district on June 24.

The district's SP, Angad Mehta, said locals identified the victim as 30-year-old Ballari Marak, hailing from Meghalaya's Ri-Bhoi district. He's was the second body recovered after that of Nirmala Gupta, 35, a teacher at NEEPCO's Vivekananda Kendriya Vidyalaya, on the day of the disaster.

"The State Disaster Response Force and Keyi Panyor police personnel are continuing the search and rescue operations for three other missing persons, despite adverse conditions," Mr. Mehta said.

He also said the strategic Potin-Kimin Road, a lifeline for six districts of Arunachal Pradesh, remained blocked due to persistent landslide activity, and continuous slippage of earth and debris, despite repeated clearance efforts.

## Govt. to launch affordable digital management system for clinics

**Bindu Shajan Perappadan**
NEW DELHI

Aimed at helping small outpatient clinics that face challenges with manual processes and lack of affordable digital solutions, the Union Health Ministry is all set to launch the e-Sushrut@Clinic.

eSushrut@Clinic is a light Hospital Management Information System (HMIS), created by Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) to address these challenges by providing a simple, affordable, and user-friendly digital solution specifically tailored for small outpatient clinics.

"Large HMIS are often too complex and costly for these clinics and this results in small clinics struggling with inefficiencies in digitisation of the health system," said a release issued by the Ministry.

It added that the need of having a government-backed and affordable

**Ministry proposes to open light HMIS for govt. primary health centres, sub-centres and private clinics**

HMIS has been coming from various interested participants in spite of a large number of private HMIS players. Many States/Union Territories have also expressed interest to use a light HMIS for their public facilities.

The Ministry proposes to open the light HMIS for government primary health centres, sub-centres and private clinics, etc.

**C-DAC implementing it**

Currently, over 800 health facilities are onboarded on eSushrut@Clinic, generating over 680 health records. C-DAC is also implementing the eSushrut software, which is being installed at more than 18 AIIMS and in various State government hospitals.

Listing the features, the Ministry said that *e-Sushrut@Clinic* provides a lightweight, cloud-based HMIS designed specifically for outpatient clinics which simplifies tasks like patient registration, billing, etc., thus making work easier and reducing mistakes. C-DAC will take care of maintenance and upgradation of the software.

"It is designed to be simple and intuitive, with no technical expertise needed from clinic staff. Also, this simple platform can be accessed from any device, without needing complex setups," said the release.

The cost of eSushrut@Clinic is estimated to be ₹499 per month for five users. A discount of ₹200 will be given making the effective rate to be ₹299 per month. The software will be offered at no cost for the initial three months. Each additional user beyond the included five-user limit will be charged at a rate of ₹50 per user.

## CGHS enhances financial powers of officials to expedite treatment

**Bindu Shajan Perappadan**
NEW DELHI

In a move aimed at reducing delays in medical treatment and reimbursement under the Central Government Health Scheme (CGHS), the Union Health Ministry has now substantially enhanced the financial powers of senior CGHS officials to approve cashless treatment, settle medical reimbursement claims and sanction unlisted investigations and procedures.

The revised delegation of powers enables additional directors heading CGHS cities and zones, as well as senior officials at the CGHS headquarters, to approve significantly higher-value cases than before. The changes are expected to reduce the number of proposals that require referral to higher authorities, speeding up decisions on treatment approvals and claim settlements.

Under the revised delegation, additional directors heading CGHS cities and zones can now sanction medical reimbursement claims and hospital bills at approved rates — up to ₹15 lakh, compared with the earlier limit of ₹7 lakh, for directors the revised power stands at ₹25 lakh from ₹15 lakh, and for Additional Secretary and DG, CGHS has revised financial approval power of ₹50 lakh, up from ₹25 lakh.

**Changes expected to benefit pensioners, elderly, accounting for a substantial share of CGHS users**

Cases exceeding ₹50 lakh shall continue to be referred to the Union Health Ministry for approval with the concurrence of the Integrated Finance Division.

For unlisted investigations/procedures and implants, additional directors heading CGHS cities and zones, director, and additional secretary and DG, have revised approval powers up to ₹2 lakh, ₹5 lakh and ₹10 lakh respectively.

The order, dated June 25, now raises the financial limits for settling medical reimbursement claims submitted by beneficiaries after treatment. Such claims, particularly those involving high-cost procedures or emergency care, have often required multiple levels of scrutiny before reimbursement could be sanctioned.

Speaking about the revision, a senior health official said the changes are expected to particularly benefit pensioners and elderly beneficiaries, who account for a substantial share of CGHS users and often require costly tertiary care.

Delays in administrative approvals and reimbursement of medical expenses have remained among the most common grievances of beneficiaries.

# Shah attacks cab aggregators over 'unfair' business model

Union Minister says newly launched cooperative ride-hailing platform Bharat Taxi is an alternative that will safeguard interests of drivers, passengers; it will expand to over 500 cities within 2 years

**Abhinay Deshpande**
AHMEDABAD

Union Cooperation Minister Amit Shah on Saturday launched a sharp attack on private app-based cab aggregators such as Uber and Ola, alleging that their business model exploits both drivers and commuters through practices that prioritise corporate profits over fair treatment. He said the newly launched cooperative ride-hailing platform, Bharat Taxi, was conceived to provide an alternative that safeguards the interests of drivers while ensuring better service for passengers.

Addressing the launch of Bharat Taxi in 14 cities across Gujarat, Mr. Shah, without naming the companies, alleged that private platforms deduct hefty commissions from drivers, delay payments and suspend their registrations based solely on passenger complaints without giving them an opportunity to present their case.

He said the cooperative model was introduced to eliminate such practices and ensure that drivers are treated as stakeholders rather than service providers dependent on private companies.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah takes a taxi ride during the launch of 'Bharat Taxi' in Gujarat. PTI

### Competitors' challenge

"I received phone calls today and some newspapers have reported that Bharat Taxi's fares are higher. I want to tell customers across the country that wherever Bharat Taxi begins operations, competing companies immediately slash their fares and are prepared to incur losses. Our intention is not to inflict losses on anyone, but reducing fares and offering higher commissions to *sarathis* (drivers) is being done only to prevent Bharat Taxi from entering the market," he said.

"They want Bharat Taxi to fail so they can once again function arbitrarily," he said, adding that such strategies would not succeed in India, where "the spirit of cooperation and the desire to work for the welfare of others are the greatest strength".

Bharat Taxi, which was soft-launched in Gujarat last December, is being projected as India's first cooperative-owned, driver-led ride-hailing platform. Operating on a zero-commission model, it allows drivers to retain the entire fare while also giving them ownership in the platform.

The platform was formally launched in Ahmedabad, Surat, Vadodara, Rajkot, Dwarka, among other cities across Gujarat. It will initially offer services in three categories – two-wheelers, auto-rickshaws and four-wheelers.

Mr. Shah said Bharat Taxi would begin operations in Nagpur, Pune, Mumbai, Lucknow, Chandigarh, Jaipur and Kolkata before July 31, and services would be extended to more than 500 cities and towns over the next two years.

Addressing the drivers, he said they had become part of the country's larger cooperative movement, which already includes crores of farmers.

| Topic | Details |
| --- | --- |
| **News** | Amit Shah launched **Bharat Taxi**, a cooperative ride-hailing platform. |
| **Launch State** | Gujarat |
| **Launch Cities** | Ahmedabad, Surat, Vadodara, Rajkot, Dwarka and other cities |
| **Expansion Plan** | More than **500 cities and towns** within **2 years** |
| **Operating Model** | Cooperative-owned, driver-led, zero-commission ride-hailing platform |

| Feature | Details |
| --- | --- |
| Ownership | Driver-owned cooperative platform |
| Commission | **Zero commission** from drivers |
| Beneficiaries | Drivers and passengers |
| Platform Type | App-based ride-hailing service |
| Initial Services | Two-wheelers, Auto-rickshaws, Four-wheelers |
| Objective | Fair earnings for drivers and affordable rides for passengers |

## Why is Bharat Taxi in News?

According to Amit Shah, private ride-hailing companies:

- Deduct high commissions from drivers.
- Delay payments.
- Suspend driver registrations based only on passenger complaints.
- Prioritize corporate profits over driver welfare.

The cooperative model aims to:

- Give drivers ownership.
- Eliminate intermediary commissions.
- Increase driver income.
- Improve passenger service quality.

## Bharat Taxi vs Private Aggregators

| Parameter | Bharat Taxi | Private Aggregators (General Model) |
|---|---|---|
| Ownership | Driver Cooperative | Private Company |
| Commission | **Zero** | Commission charged to drivers |
| Profit Distribution | Drivers retain full fare | Company retains commission |
| Driver Role | Owner & stakeholder | Service provider |
| Objective | Welfare + Sustainability | Commercial business |

## Planned Expansion

| Timeline | Cities |
|---|---|
| Initial Launch | 14 cities in Gujarat |
| Before 31 July | Nagpur, Pune, Mumbai, Lucknow, Chandigarh, Jaipur, Kolkata |
| Next 2 Years | **500+ cities and towns** |

## What is a Cab Aggregator?

A **cab aggregator** is a digital platform that connects passengers with independent drivers through a mobile application.

### Examples

- Uber
- Ola
- Rapido

These companies generally do not own the vehicles; instead, they facilitate bookings through technology.

---

## Cooperative Model in India

| Aspect | Details |
|---|---|
| Ministry | Ministry of Cooperation |
| Established | **2021** |
| Cabinet Minister | Amit Shah |
| Motto | *Sahakar Se Samriddhi* (Prosperity through Cooperation) |
| Purpose | Strengthen India's cooperative movement |

## What is a Cooperative?

A cooperative is an organization:

- Owned by its members.
- Democratically managed.
- Operated for members' economic and social benefit rather than maximizing profits for external shareholders.

Examples include dairy, agriculture, banking, housing, and now ride-hailing cooperatives.

## Potential Advantages

| For Drivers | For Passengers |
|---|---|
| Higher income | Potentially lower fares |
| No commission | Transparent pricing |
| Ownership in platform | Better accountability |
| Faster payments | More driver retention |

## Possible Challenges

# Possible Challenges

| Challenge | Explanation |
|---|---|
| Scaling technology | Building a reliable app and network |
| Competition | Competing with established platforms |
| Customer acquisition | Attracting riders at scale |
| Driver onboarding | Expanding the cooperative network |
| Financial sustainability | Funding operations while maintaining zero commission |

# Why is Delhi's EV policy 2.0 facing opposition?

Who is concerned and on what grounds? What do proponents say? Is the power grid ready for the impact?

**Kunal Shankar**

**The story so far:**

Building on the momentum gained from its 2020 Electric Vehicles (EV) policy, which led to Delhi achieving almost 14% EV penetration by 2025, compared to the national average of 8%, the Delhi government issued the revised draft EV Policy in early April. Currently under stakeholder consultation, the policy envisages a complete ban on the registration of new internal combustion engine (ICE) three-wheelers from January 1, 2027. It also proposes a ban on new ICE two-wheeler registrations from April 1, 2028. The rationale behind the latter is straightforward: 67% of Delhi's registered vehicle stock comprises two-wheelers, and if the national capital is to achieve cleaner air in the foreseeable future, this segment requires targeted attention to enable the transition. The revised draft policy also proposes electrification mandates for school buses — with a target of 30% electrification by 2030 — fleet aggregators such as cab-hailing platforms and delivery services, as well as government transport fleets. While the number of vehicles in these segments is considerably lower than private two-wheelers, their pollution burden is disproportionately higher because of their daily utilisation.

**Who is objecting to the policy and why?**

Industry executives and people familiar with the stakeholder consultations say manufacturers represented by bodies such as the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers have expressed reservations about their ability to scale up production of electric variants within the proposed timelines. They worry about the possibility of losing market share and argue that the market is not yet ready to pivot to an all-electric paradigm, as economies of scale have not yet reduced EV prices sufficiently to compete with comparable ICE two-wheelers.

> Industry bodies argue that the market is not yet ready to pivot to an all-electric paradigm, as economies of scale have not yet reduced EV prices sufficiently

They also point to gaps in both public and private charging infrastructure. While there has been considerable progress in the former through charger deployment mandates, service delivery and reliability remain a concern, with breakdowns, theft of charging equipment, and power outages reported at several locations. As for private charging, there has been persistent hesitation among Resident Welfare Associations and apartment complexes in permitting community charging stations.

Stakeholders also point to the lack of competitive financing, particularly for electric light commercial vehicles, quality after-sales service, and the decline in resale values of used EVs. Battery replacement costs and India's continued dependence on imported battery technologies are also being flagged, particularly as much of the global EV battery supply chain remains concentrated in China.

Automobile manufacturers have therefore argued for a more market-led transition, driven primarily by demand-side incentives.

**What are supporters of the revised EV policy saying?**

Proponents argue that regulation — much like the Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency norms that pushed manufacturers to improve fuel efficiency in conventional vehicles — must sometimes push the envelope in pursuit of a larger public good. In this case, they argue, the public good is Delhi's clean air. Indeed, the aim of both the 2020 policy and the revised draft policy is to address the contribution of road transport to Delhi's winter air pollution.

Think tanks and critics have also applied a social justice and labour lens, arguing that the policy must address the underbelly of the sector — the vast network of after-sales service providers built around ICE vehicles which will now have to pivot to a new technology. Many of these small businesses may be ill-equipped to make that transition within two years unless the State government also mandates large-scale reskilling programmes, ensures easier financing for small workshops, and provides incentives to upgrade their equipment as part of the broader EV transition.

**Is India's power grid ready for the impact?**

Another urgent issue must be addressed if such a rapid scale-up is to succeed — the ability of Delhi's electricity grid to handle peak-time charging loads and the substantial increase in power demand that widespread transport electrification will bring. Here, however, there is some reassurance. Studies by WRI India, CEEW, and other energy think tanks suggest that if charging is managed through smart charging, time-of-day tariffs, and staggered charging patterns, the additional electricity demand from EVs is unlikely to overwhelm Delhi's grid in the near term. They argue that the larger challenge lies in strengthening local distribution infrastructure, particularly transformers and distribution feeders, rather than overall generation capacity.

# Which document proves Indian citizenship?

Why is the Indian passport not considered a conclusive proof of Indian citizenship? What purpose does Aadhaar serve? Does presence on the electoral rolls or possession of an Electoral Photo Identity Card determine citizenship? What happens in case of a dispute?

**Rizni Lia M.**
**Priscilla Ishrat**

**The story so far:**

The Indian passport is not a "document of citizenship," a senior official of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in response to a query from *The Hindu* this week. So, if a passport is not proof of citizenship, what is?

**Is it a new development that a passport cannot be used as a document to prove Indian citizenship?**

A passport by itself is not conclusive proof of Indian citizenship, and this is not a new development or announcement. Last week, the senior MEA official was responding to a question from *The Hindu* on whether the Indian passport can be used to challenge exclusion from the voters' list through the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls that is currently underway in 16 States. The official said: "The passport is a travel document, not a document of citizenship, and theoretically speaking, that distinguishes the passport from other documents. Even though while travelling abroad, the passport attests to your nationality, it is not a document of citizenship."

This stance is based on existing law. The government's Passport Manual says that "a passport provides evidence of the holder's nationality, but this is placed in the same category as any other evidence of the citizenship status of an individual". In other words, a passport is strong evidence that its holder is an Indian citizen. However, in law, it is not treated as conclusive proof of citizenship. If a person's citizenship is disputed, courts may examine it alongside other relevant evidence.

According to *Maneka Gandhi v Union Of India* (1978), issuance of passport is based on conclusive proof that the holder is an Indian national, and is "entitled by virtue of their Indian nationality and passports to the protection of the Indian Republic and assistance of its Diplomatic Missions abroad."

> India does not prescribe one universal citizenship document. An effort to create such a document through the National Register of Citizens became politically contentious

Under Section 5(2)(a) of the Passports Act, 1967, the authorities can refuse a passport if the applicant is not a citizen of India. But under Section 20 of the Act, the Union government may issue a passport or travel document to a person who is not a citizen of India if it thinks that it is necessary to do so in public interest.

The MEA's response distinguishes between evidence of citizenship and conclusive proof of citizenship. While citizenship is determined under the Citizenship Act, 1955, and passports are issued under the Passports Act, 1967, the existence of a passport cannot by itself be called a conclusive or definitive proof of citizenship in a dispute.

**Can the Aadhaar card be used to prove Indian citizenship?**

When the Aadhaar was introduced one and a half decades ago, it was promoted as a one-stop digital identification document which could replace the many documents that Indians had to furnish to avail themselves of benefits from multiple government schemes. However, from the beginning, the Unique Identification Authority of India has emphasised that Aadhaar can only be treated as proof of identity and address, not of citizenship. In fact, non-Indian citizens who are legally resident in India are eligible to get an Aadhaar, and often require the identity card to avail themselves of many basic services, from banking to cooking gas.

In its judgment of May 27 this year, when the Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of the SIR, it held that an Aadhaar card does not constitute proof of citizenship and, therefore, cannot be relied upon for that purpose. However, it is among the documents which may be produced for the limited purpose of establishing the identity of a person, it said.

**Does a voter ID prove Indian citizenship?**

Only Indian citizens are eligible to vote in Indian elections, but one's presence on the electoral rolls or possession of an Electoral Photo Identity Card does not determine citizenship or conclusively prove it.

In the case of *Lal Babu Hussein v Electoral Registration Officer* (1995), the Supreme Court unequivocally held that electors whose names appear on electoral roll are entitled to a presumption of citizenship, and that this presumption cannot be displaced except by following the procedure prescribed by law.

However, in this year's SIR judgment, the Court emphasised that the Election Commission's role is confined to determining eligibility for electoral rolls. It cannot adjudicate citizenship, and the citizenship of an individual under the Citizenship Act will not cease on account of their ineligibility to register in the electoral rolls, pursuant to the SIR.

In fact, the passport was one of the 11 'indicative' documents listed by the Election Commission as proof of citizenship. Some voters purged from the draft SIR in Uttar Pradesh, for instance, used their passports to prove that they are citizens of India and should be included in the final electoral roll. However, there have been reported cases of people in West Bengal who hold Indian passports, but who were still deleted from the draft electoral lists during the SIR.

**So what document proves citizenship?**

While responding to a question in the Lok Sabha on August 12, 2025, the Home Ministry did not specify the "categories of valid documents" required for people to prove citizenship in India. "The citizenship of India is governed under the provisions of the Citizenship Act, 1955, and rules made thereunder," the Minister of State for Home, Nityanand Rai, said in a written reply.

Under the Citizenship Act, citizenship can be acquired by birth, by descent, by registration, by naturalisation and by incorporation of territory.

Citizenship certificates are generally issued to people who acquired citizenship by registration or naturalisation, and can act as a conclusive proof document. The majority of Indians, however, are citizens by birth or descent, and do not have a citizenship certificate. Instead, they rely on different evidence that prove their date of birth, place of birth, or their parentage, depending on the context of the dispute.

Anyone born in India between January 26, 1950 and July 1, 1987 is a citizen by birth, irrespective of their parents' nationality. Such people would have to produce documents proving their place and date of birth to establish their citizenship. Given that mandatory birth certificates were not issued in this period, many people use a combination of other documents, including educational certificates and Aadhaar.

For those born between July 1, 1987 and December 3, 2004, proof of their own place and date of birth is insufficient as they must also prove that at least one parent was an Indian citizen. For those born on or after December 3, 2004, one parent must be an Indian citizen while the other should not be an illegal migrant, complicating the documentary proof required.

India does not prescribe one universal citizenship document. An effort to create such a document through the National Register of Citizens became politically contentious amid fears of a nationwide verification exercise that could exclude many due to incomplete documents. As former Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao said in a post last week, the lesson is that "India needs stronger and more comprehensive civil registration, universal birth registration and reliable archival records so that citizenship can never become hostage to missing or inconsistent paperwork."

An Indian passport. GETTY IMAGES

# What do the amended FCRA Rules say?

How does the Ministry of Home Affairs regulate foreign donations? What are the key changes in the FCRA Amendment Rules, 2026? How do the new Rules affect the purposes for which NGOs can receive foreign funds? What penalties apply for violations?

**Vinita Singh**

**The story so far:**

On June 22, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) notified the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Rules, 2026, to amend the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Rules, 2011. This is the tenth amendment to the Rules under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010 (FCRA).

**How does the MHA regulate foreign donations?**

The MHA regulates foreign donations in India through the FCRA to ensure that such funds do not adversely affect the country's internal security. The legislation was first enacted in 1976. In 2010, it was repealed and replaced with a new legislation. The 2010 Act came into force on May 1, 2011 and has been amended in 2016, 2018, and 2020. The FCRA registration is valid for five years, after which the NGO has to apply for a renewal. Since 2018, the FCRA registrations of more than 18,000 NGOs have been cancelled. As on June 22, there are 14,456 FCRA-registered NGOs active in the country.

**What are the broad amendments proposed to the FCRA Rules?**

All NGOs and associations registered under the FCRA, 2010, are required to disclose their specific activities and the geographical scope of their programmes. The Rules no longer allow general permission under the FCRA and indicate tighter scrutiny on how NGOs utilise foreign funds.

> The Rules impose a fee for registration for each specified purpose and for each State or U.T. in which an NGO operates

Any new registration will have to follow the said norms. The Rules further broaden the definition of 'key functionary' of an NGO beyond office bearers and directors to include trustees, partners, the Karta of a Hindu undivided family, governing body members, or anyone controlling or managing the organisation.

They also require NGOs to mandatorily disclose social media accounts, websites, and declare whether the association or its key functionaries has brought out any publication during the year, which includes books, magazines or newspaper articles.

The Rules also impose a fee for registration for each specified purpose and for each State or Union Territory (U.T.) in which an NGO operates. So, NGOs operating across multiple sectors or regions now face higher registration costs.

**What amendments apply to the programme or purposes for which an NGO intends to receive foreign donations?**

NGOs can receive foreign contributions for social, educational, religious, economic, and cultural programmes. The amended Rules state that the certificate of registration or the application form for new registrations shall specify the purpose or purposes for which registration is granted, chosen only from the list of purposes as specified in the Schedule appended to the rules, and the States or U.T.s in which the NGO proposes to undertake activities.

Those with existing FCRA registrations are expected to update the purpose and intimate the Central government within a year. Some categories specifically exclude political activities.

The educational purpose lists 23 activities, but adds the qualifier "strictly non political in nature" to the category covering awareness programmes on constitutional rights, fundamental duties, and civic responsibilities.

Under cultural purpose, there are 18 categories, including "promotion of contemporary arts inspired by Indian traditions." The Rules specify that these must exclude political or ideological content.

As many as 16 categories of religious activities have been permitted which includes "conduct of religious education, moral instruction, satsangs, discourses, and meditation retreats (excluding proselytisation)" and "burial/ cremation ground development and maintenance."

There are 19 categories under the economic purpose and 30 items under the social category.

**What are the penalties for violations?**

The MHA has also notified an order specifying penalties for FCRA violations, including excess administrative spending, speculative investments, misuse of funds, unauthorised receipt or utilisation of foreign contributions, and the use of funds for unspecified purposes or in States/U.T.s not covered by an NGO's registration or prior permission.

Any utilisation of funds for purposes other than those for which they were received can attract a penalty of up to 30% of the amount misused or ₹1 lakh, whichever is higher. Likewise, using foreign contributions for purposes or in areas not covered by an NGO's registration or prior permission invites a penalty of 30% of the amount involved or ₹1 lakh, whichever is higher.

In addition, spending beyond the permitted administrative expense limit or engaging in speculative use of funds will be penalised with fines calculated as a percentage of the amount involved, subject to a minimum of ₹1 lakh.

**What is the Opposition saying?**

Opposition members have said that the new Rules will adversely affect the functioning of civil society organisations. Congress General Secretary (Organisation) K.C. Venugopal said that forcing NGOs to choose from a "rigid, government-mandated list" of activities and restricting their operational geography would undermine their ability to respond to emergencies. John Brittas, Communist Party of India (Marxist) Rajya Sabha member, wrote to Home Minister Amit Shah raising constitutional concerns. "Collectively, these changes signify a decisive shift from regulating foreign contribution to regulating voluntary organisations themselves," he wrote.

File photo of Opposition MPs demanding the withdrawal of the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026. AN

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| Question | Answer |
| --- | --- |
| Is an Indian Passport conclusive proof of citizenship? | **No** |
| Is Aadhaar proof of citizenship? | **No** |
| Is Voter ID proof of citizenship? | **No** |
| Is being on the Electoral Roll proof of citizenship? | **No (presumption only, not conclusive)** |
| Does India have one universal citizenship document? | **No** |
| Which law governs Indian citizenship? | Citizenship Act, 1955 |

# 1. Is an Indian Passport Proof of Citizenship?

| Point | Details |
|---|---|
| Passport is a | Travel document |
| Issued under | Passports Act, 1967 |
| Evidence of nationality | Yes |
| Conclusive proof of citizenship | **No** |
| Reason | It is evidence of nationality but does not conclusively determine citizenship if a legal dispute arises. |

## Important Legal Provisions

| Section | Provision |
|---|---|
| Section 6(2) | Passport authority may refuse a passport if the applicant is not an Indian citizen. |
| Section 20 | Government may issue a passport/travel document to a non-citizen in public interest. |

**Exam Point:** A passport is **strong evidence**, but **not definitive proof** of citizenship.

# 4. What Actually Determines Citizenship?

Indian citizenship is governed by the:

- Citizenship Act, 1955
- Rules framed under the Act.

Citizenship may be acquired by:

| Mode | Meaning |
|---|---|
| By Birth | Born in India, subject to the applicable legal conditions. |
| By Descent | Through Indian parent(s). |
| By Registration | Registration under the Citizenship Act. |
| By Naturalisation | After fulfilling prescribed conditions. |
| By Incorporation of Territory | When new territory becomes part of India. |

## If There Is a Citizenship Dispute

There is **no single mandatory document** that settles every dispute.

Authorities or courts may examine a combination of evidence such as:

- Birth certificate
- Parentage documents
- School or educational records
- Passport
- Aadhaar
- Other official records

The appropriate evidence depends on the legal basis of the citizenship claim.

---

## Important Court Judgments Mentioned

| Case | Significance |
|---|---|
| Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India (1978) | Discussed the nature of passports as evidence of nationality rather than conclusive proof of citizenship. |
| Lal Babu Hussein v. Electoral Registration Officer (1995) | Electoral roll inclusion creates a presumption of eligibility to vote but is not by itself conclusive proof of citizenship. |

| Document | Identity | Address | Nationality | Citizenship (Conclusive) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Passport | ✓ | Limited | ✓ | ✕ |
| Aadhaar | ✓ | ✓ | ✕ | ✕ |
| Voter ID (EPIC) | ✓ | Limited | Indicates voting eligibility | ✕ |
| Birth Certificate | Supports citizenship claim | ✕ | Depends on context | ✕ (by itself in every case) |
| Citizenship Certificate (issued in registration/naturalisation cases) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ for those to whom it is issued |

# Toshakhana in India

ROLEX

| Particular | Details |
| --- | --- |
| Meaning | Repository for gifts received by public officials during official visits and diplomatic engagements. |
| Origin of Word | **Persian** – *Toshakhana* means **Treasure House** or **Storehouse of Gifts**. |
| Nodal Ministry | Ministry of External Affairs |
| Division | Establishment Division of the Ministry of External Affairs |
| Purpose | Receipt, valuation, storage, retention and disposal of official gifts |

**Why is Toshakhana Needed?**

It ensures:

- Transparency
- Accountability
- Prevention of corruption
- Proper record keeping
- Protection of government property
- Uniform protocol for diplomatic gifts

- Official receives gift
- ↓
- Gift reported to MEA
- ↓
- Professional valuation
- ↓
- Recorded in Toshakhana
- ↓
- Official chooses:
- • Deposit it
- • Purchase it (if permitted)
- • Government auctions it
- • Museum/official display

# Toshakhana Rules, 2024

The Ministry of External Affairs has revised the **Toshakhana Rules, 2024** to improve transparency and disposal procedures.

## Major Features

| Provision | Details |
|---|---|
| Digital records | Better inventory management |
| Transparent valuation | Independent assessment of gift value |
| E-auction | Disposal of selected items through public auction |
| Revenue | Credited to the Consolidated Fund of India |

## Current Auction (2026)

| Particular | Details |
|---|---|
| Number of Items | About **300** |
| Auction Start | **8 June 2026** |
| Auction End | **30 June 2026** |
| Mode | Online e-auction |

## Examples of Auction Items

The auction catalogue reportedly includes:

- Rolex Yacht Master II watches
- Silver daggers from Oman
- Gold jewellery
- Apple MacBook Pro laptops
- Antique silver boxes

Price range:

- Approximately **₹2,385**
- Up to around **₹17 lakh** (with some listed items valued close to **₹19 lakh**)

## Where Does Auction Money Go?

All proceeds are deposited into the:

### Consolidated Fund of India

---

## Consolidated Fund of India

| Feature | Details |
|---|---|
| Constitutional Provision | **Article 266(1)** |
| Nature | Main account of the Union Government |
| Contains | Taxes, government borrowings, loans received and other revenues |
| Withdrawal | Only after parliamentary authorization through appropriation made by law |

## Who Receives Gifts?

Examples include:

- President
- Vice-President
- Prime Minister
- Union Ministers
- Governors
- Diplomats
- Senior civil servants
- Officials during foreign visits

---

## What Kind of Gifts Are Deposited?

Examples:

- Gold ornaments
- Silverware
- Paintings
- Carpets
- Decorative items
- Luxury watches
- Electronic gadgets
- Handicrafts
- Traditional artefacts

## Can Officials Keep Gifts?

Generally:

- Gifts received in an official capacity belong to the Government.
- Subject to the applicable Toshakhana Rules, an official may be permitted to retain certain gifts after following prescribed procedures, including payment where required.

---

## India vs Pakistan Toshakhana

| Aspect | India | Pakistan |
|---|---|---|
| Managed by | Ministry of External Affairs | Cabinet Division |
| Disposal | E-auction, retention as per rules, official use | Governed by Pakistan's Toshakhana rules |
| Objective | Transparency and accountability | Similar objective of managing official gifts |
| Public Attention | Administrative reforms and auctions | Frequently discussed due to political controversies |

# India Sets Record with Seven Schools in World's Best School Prizes 2026

| Topic | Details |
| --- | --- |
| **News** | India has **7 schools shortlisted** for the **World's Best School Prizes 2026**. |
| **Achievement** | Highest number of shortlisted schools by any country in a single year since the awards began. |
| **Announcement Date** | **25 June 2026** |
| **Award Founder** | T4 Education |
| **Awards Started** | **2022** |
| **Final Winners** | To be announced in **November 2026** |

## What are the World's Best School Prizes?

| Feature | Details |
|---|---|
| Founded By | T4 Education |
| Nature | International education awards |
| Purpose | Recognize schools creating outstanding impact in education and society |
| Selection | Independent Judging Academy |
| Coverage | Schools from across the world |

## Five Award Categories

| Category | Objective |
|---|---|
| **Innovation** | Innovative teaching methods and educational practices |
| **Community Collaboration** | Strong engagement with parents and the local community |
| **Environmental Action** | Sustainability and environmental initiatives |
| **Supporting Healthy Lives** | Student health, wellbeing and mental wellness |
| **Overcoming Adversity** | Excellence despite social, economic or geographical challenges |

# Indian Schools Shortlisted (2026)

| School | City/State | Category |
|---|---|---|
| PCMC Chhatrapati Shahuji Maharaj English Medium School | Pune | Innovation |
| Army Goodwill School Wuzur | Anantnag | Innovation |
| Healthy Planet TGA Early Years School | Noida | Community Collaboration |
| Inventure Academy | Bengaluru | Community Collaboration |
| Seth M.R. Jaipuria School | Lucknow | Community Collaboration |
| EuroSchool Bannerghatta | Bengaluru | Environmental Action |
| Seth Anandram Jaipuria School | Lucknow | Supporting Healthy Lives |

| Category | Number of Indian Schools |
| --- | --- |
| Innovation | 2 |
| Community Collaboration | 3 |
| Environmental Action | 1 |
| Supporting Healthy Lives | 1 |
| Overcoming Adversity | 0 |
| **Total** | **7** |

| State/UT | Schools |
|---|---|
| Karnataka | 2 |
| Uttar Pradesh | 2 |
| Maharashtra | 1 |
| Jammu & Kashmir | 1 |
| **Total Schools** | **7** |

| Particular | Details |
| --- | --- |
| Organisation | T4 Education |
| Founded | 2020 |
| Headquarters | London |
| Mission | Improve education through collaboration, innovation and recognition of best practices worldwide |
| Flagship Awards | World's Best School Prizes |

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# Indian Ocean a shared responsibility: Modi

- PM meets Seychelles President, stresses 'security, sustainability and prosperity' of the region
- Two sides unveil 19 outcomes in areas, including defence, maritime, space, and digital payments
- Modi attends the golden jubilee celebrations of National Day of Seychelles as Guest of Honour

**Press Trust of India**
VICTORIA

India envisioned an Indian Ocean where maritime security was ensured alongside economic prosperity and where partnership was defined not by size, but by mutual respect and trust, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday during his visit to the Seychelles.

Mr. Modi, who held wide-ranging talks with President Patrick Herminie of the archipelago, said they agreed that the Indian Ocean was "our shared home" and therefore "its security, sustainability and prosperity are our shared responsibility".

"Our vision is to make the Indian Ocean an ocean of opportunity," Mr. Modi said after delegation-level talks with Mr. Herminie, during which they took stock of the economic partnership between the two countries and discussed new opportunities in industries, connectivity, technology, digital infrastructure, and other areas.

After the talks, the two sides unveiled 19 outcomes, expanding cooperation in areas ranging from defence and maritime security to digital payments, space, healthcare, agriculture, and education.

The two sides also announced the gifting of a fast patrol vessel to the Seychelles, the handover of 10 utility vehicles and five Laser Radial class boats to the Seychelles Defence Force, the completion of the refit of *PS Zoroaster* for the Seychelles Coast Guard and the upgrading of a Dornier aircraft with a glass cockpit.

**Sea of opportunities:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses the National Assembly of the Seychelles in Victoria on Sunday. ANI

## Climate impact

Mr. Modi also addressed the National Assembly of the country, where he emphasised that the Global South, especially island nations, was the most impacted by climate change.

He reiterated that those who had contributed the least to climate change should not bear the greatest burden of its consequences and said climate action must be guided by "fairness, responsibility, and equity".

"The Global South, and especially the island nations, are the most impacted by climate change. Its effects are already visible on our coastlines, in the marine ecosystems, in weather patterns, and in our communities," he said.

"We will continue to explore new opportunities for the industries of both our countries. We will also work towards enhancing connectivity between India and the Seychelles. This will not only boost our bilateral trade but also strengthen our ties with East Africa and the Indian Ocean region," he said.

The Prime Minister, who is on a three-day visit to the archipelago, attended the golden jubilee celebrations of the National Day of Seychelles as the Guest of Honour.

Earlier in the day, at a special ceremony, Mr. Modi was also conferred with 'Guardian of the Blue Horizon' by Mr. Herminie for his "green leadership and efforts towards advancing the interests of developing countries and his long-standing commitment towards promoting the blue economy".

The outcomes after the talks on Sunday included an extradition treaty, an agreement on cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space, an agreement to advance UPI-based digital payments in the Seychelles, an umbrella line of credit agreement with the Export-Import Bank of India and an agreement for preliminary preparations for a new the Seychelles National Hospital, according to the Ministry of External Affairs.

## Win-win partnership

"Our cooperation in the fields of energy and climate action continues to advance steadily. We will further strengthen our win-win partnership in emerging areas of clean energy, including green hydrogen. The Blue Economy is a natural and strategic pillar of our relationship," he said.

"The true strength of India-Seychelles relations lies in our people-to-people ties," Modi said.

He said the popularity of Yoga and the Indian film industry in the Seychelles reflected the deep cultural connection between the peoples of the two countries. "In the same spirit, we will continue our efforts to enhance people-to-people exchanges, particularly among the youth of our two countries."

Addressing the National Assembly later, the Prime Minister said the Seychelles "occupies a special place in India's vision for the Indian Ocean."

"Our vision recognises that our futures are interconnected and inter-dependent. And, we will continue to work together for a safer and more secure Indian Ocean region," he said.

The Prime Minister last visited the Seychelles in 2015, while President Herminie visited India earlier this year.

ARMY EVENT
» PAGE 4

INSIDE

### Two more killed in Russia as Kyiv keeps up assault

KYIV
Ukraine kept up its heavy drone assault on Russia, setting fire to a major oil refinery in the south and killing at least two people, Russia said on Sunday. Ukraine has markedly stepped up its attacks on Russian industries and energy facilities, aiming to cut Moscow's revenue for its invasion. » PAGE 14

### CJP stir: Sonam Wangchuk goes on fast in Delhi

NEW DELHI
Environmentalist and educator Sonam Wangchuk began a hunger strike on Sunday afternoon at the Jantar Mantar here, where the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) has been protesting since June 20, demanding the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan for multiple irregularities in the examination system. » PAGE 4

### After 15-year wait, CRPF officers get first promotion

NEW DELHI
More than 250 officers of the country's largest paramilitary Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) finally received their first career promotion after a 14-15-year wait, officials said on Sunday. Their elevation came about after prolonged litigation and conditional resolution of pending service issues related to seniority and vacancies. » PAGE 4

***Flaunting colours***

**Owning identity:** LGBTQIA+ community members and allies hold a pride march in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, on Sunday. R. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

# Govt. rejects Pak. charges of Indian role in Karachi attack

**Kallol Bhattacherjee**
NEW DELHI

The Centre on Sunday "categorically" rejected "baseless allegations" Pakistan has made about India being involved in an attack on a security installation in Karachi.

"We have seen Pakistani reports making baseless allegations against India regarding the recent incident in Karachi. We categorically reject them. Instead of pointing fingers at others, Pakistan would do better to look inwards, take credible actions [against] the terror infrastructure on its territory and rid itself of its proclivity to rely on terrorism as an instrument of state policy," said Randhir Jaiswal, spokesperson of External Affairs Ministry.

Pakistan security personnel inspect the rooftop of a compound in Karachi on Sunday following an alleged militant attack. AFP

Saturday's attack in Karachi's Gulistan-e-Jauhar neighbourhood killed at least three and injured four personnel of Pakistan Rangers (Sindh), the country's DGISPR had said. "The assailants, after a blast at the main gate of the camp, attempted to breach the perimeter security," it said.

Following Saturday's attack, Pakistan's Information Minister Mohsin Naqvi had said, "These terrorists are normal terrorists. India is supporting them."

Multiple attacks rocked Pakistan this weekend that spread from Karachi to Balochistan where groups such as Jamaatul Ahrar and Baloch Liberation Army were allegedly involved.

# Ayodhya embezzlement row: houses of 8 accused searched

**Mayank Kumar**
LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh Police on Sunday searched the residences of all eight accused in the alleged embezzlement of Ram Temple donations.

The residences of Ramashankar Yadav, one of the accused and a close aide of Champat Rai, the general secretary of Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust who submitted his resignation on Saturday, were among those searched. The police questioned his family members present on the premises.

The police teams were accompanied by local magistrates. The development came two days after all the accused, who were associated with keeping track of the donations at the temple, were remanded in judicial custody till Monday by a court in Ayodhya.

## CM, SP chief lock horns

The war of words between Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav intensified, with Mr. Yadav questioning how the CM who frequently visited Ayodhya was not aware of the wrongdoings and corruption and Mr. Adityanath accusing the previous SP government of "firing upon Ram *bhakts*".

"...How many times has he gone there, and yet he has no news of this. What are the State intelligence agencies and police force doing? This shows complete lack of competence," said Mr. Yadav.

In response, Mr. Adityanath said, "Those who speak of making Ayodhya a religious city should first look at their own history. The SP government that had Ram devotees fired upon, opposed the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, stopped Shri Krishna Janmashtami celebrations, and even banned the Kanwar Yatra is today talking about making Ayodhya a religious city."

'JURISTIC PERSON'
» PAGE 4

# DGS stands by lifting of curbs on Indian shippers

**S. Vijay Kumar**
**M. Kalyanaraman**
CHENNAI

India's maritime regulator will stand by its June 26 directive removing curbs on Indian seafarers and ship owners operating in the Persian Gulf, despite a fresh surge in regional hostilities.

The Directorate General of Shipping (DGS) clarified its stance as the International Maritime Organization (IMO) halted its evacuation of stranded ships following recent attacks.

Indian officials say that negotiations are under way on restarting the IMO's plan and expect a resolution soon. The Friday notification superseded a June 13 notification that imposed restrictions after the U.S. attacks on *Marivea*, *Settebello*, and *Jolveer* carrying Indian crew and was based on the Indian government's threat assessments and advice from the Ministry of External Affairs.

Some Indian-flagged vessels are waiting for transit permission from Omani authorities and Iran's Persian Gulf Strait Authority. AFP

Some Indian-flagged vessels have asked for transit permission from Omani authorities and Iran's Persian Gulf Strait Authority, and approval is awaited, said an official.

These vessels are LPG carrier *BW Loyalty*, container ships *CMA CGM Manaus* and *CMA CGM Diamond*, and Volvox dredger.

While removing restrictions, the DGS has asked Masters of vessels operating in or transiting through the Gulf region, including the Strait of Hormuz and adjoining waters, to maintain heightened security vigilance, closely monitoring navigational warnings and other warnings or instructions received from security agencies. Indian-flagged vessels have been advised to coordinate with the United Kingdom Marine Trade Operations and Maritime Information Cooperation Centre and keep the Indian Navy, missions in respective countries, as well as the DGS updated on transit.

Calling the DGS notification a mature one, Anil Devli, CEO of Indian National Shipowners Association, said every shipowner would be vigilant and proceed only after doing a total risk assessment.

IMO Secretary-General Arsenio Dominguez , said shipowners had to make their own risk assessment before transiting either of the two routes available.

### Iran launches new attacks, threatens to halt discussion

DUBAI
Iran on Sunday launched drone and missile attacks targeting Bahrain and Kuwait in response to U.S. air strikes against the Islamic Republic, and threatened a "complete halt" in negotiations to end the war if Washington continues its attacks. » PAGE 14

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"Our vision recognises that our futures are interconnected and inter-dependent. And, we will continue to work together for a safer and more secure Indian Ocean region," he said.

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ARMY EVENT
» PAGE 4

| Topic | Details |
| --- | --- |
| **Event** | PM Narendra Modi's visit to Seychelles (3-day visit) |
| **Main Theme** | "The Indian Ocean is our shared home; security, sustainability and prosperity are our shared responsibility." |
| **Counterpart** | President Patrick Herminie of Seychelles |
| **Major Outcomes** | **19 agreements/outcomes** across defence, maritime security, digital payments, space, healthcare, education, agriculture and technology |
| **Defence Assistance** | India announced a fast patrol vessel, 10 utility vehicles, Laser Radial class boats, refit of PS *Zoroaster*, and upgrade of a Dornier aircraft for Seychelles |
| **Digital Cooperation** | Agreement to introduce **UPI-based digital payments** in Seychelles |
| **Space Cooperation** | Agreement on peaceful uses of outer space |
| **Healthcare** | Preparatory agreement for a new Seychelles National Hospital |
| **Finance** | Umbrella Line of Credit through the Export-Import Bank of India |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Climate Change** | Modi stressed that island nations are among the worst affected and called for climate action based on **fairness, responsibility and equity** |
| **Blue Economy** | India and Seychelles agreed to deepen cooperation in clean energy, green hydrogen and the Blue Economy |
| **Connectivity** | Both countries will improve maritime and economic connectivity to strengthen ties with East Africa and the Indian Ocean region |
| **People-to-People Ties** | Greater cultural exchanges, youth exchanges, Yoga and Indian cinema cooperation |
| **Special Honour** | Modi attended Seychelles' National Day as **Guest of Honour** and received the **Guardian of the Blue Horizon** award for leadership on the Blue Economy |

| Parameter | Details (2024) |
| --- | --- |
| **Total Trade** | **~US$ 94.2 million** (High Commission of India Seychelles) |
| **India's Exports to Seychelles** | **US$ 91.73 million** (Seychelles data) / **US$ 76.19 million** (India FY 2023–24 data) (High Commission of India Seychelles) |
| **India's Imports from Seychelles** | **US$ 2.46 million** (Seychelles data) / **US$ 8.69 million** (India FY 2023–24 data) (High Commission of India Seychelles) |
| **Trade Balance** | Large **trade surplus in India's favour** (High Commission of India Seychelles) |

| Initiative | Purpose |
| --- | --- |
| UPI-based Digital Payments | Promote digital transactions and tourism. |
| EXIM Bank Line of Credit | Finance infrastructure and development projects. |
| Maritime Cooperation | Enhance port, shipping and defence collaboration. |
| Special Economic Package | India announced a **US$175 million** package (credit + grants) for infrastructure, housing, maritime security and capacity building. (Indian Council of World Affairs) |

## INBRIEF

### Arunachal Pradesh landslide dams river; Assam on alert

A massive landslide caused by heavy rainfall blocked the flow of the Siji River in Arunachal Pradesh's Lower Siang district on Sunday, endangering lives and infrastructure downstream. District officials said rainfall-induced water accumulation had increased the possibility of the dam giving way and causing a flash flood. The district authorities have alerted residents of Libaballi town and villages along the Siji river, which becomes the Gai river in Assam. People have been advised to stay away from riverbanks, avoid unnecessary movement near the river, evacuate low-lying and flood-prone areas if instructed by the authorities.

### DGCA begins probe after propeller hits trainee pilot

Aviation watchdog Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) is probing the incident of a trainee pilot sustaining injuries after being hit by a running propeller of a trainer aircraft at the Kanpur airport on Friday. The incident occurred after the trainee pilot debarded the twin-engine Tecnam P2006T aircraft VT-NBV, and the instructor concerned has been detoned from flying training duties pending investigation, the DGCA said in a statement on Sunday. The DGCA also said it has issued directions that the aircraft concerned should not be utilised pending investigation. The trainee pilot is admitted to a hospital in Kanpur. PTI

# From seas to skies, India is becoming self-reliant: Modi

PM highlights indigenously built missile systems, says June was a 'landmark month' for India's defence sector; he thanks people for responding to his call for austerity amid the West Asia crisis

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday hailed India's growing self-reliance in defence manufacturing, pointing to the maiden flight of the first made-in-India C-295 transport aircraft and the successful test of the indigenous Long-Range Land-Attack Cruise Missile (LRLACM). He also thanked citizens for supporting his appeal for austerity amid the West Asia crisis.

Addressing the nation in his monthly radio programme *Mann Ki Baat*, Mr. Modi said June had been a "landmark month" for India's aviation and defence sectors.

**'Indigenous' industry**

Referring to the C-295 programme, he said 40 aircraft are being manufactured in India, giving a major boost to the country's MSMEs and aerospace industry while creating employment opportunities.

The first C-295 transport aircraft manufactured in India completed its maiden flight on June 10. The Indian Air Force is procuring 96 aircraft under a ₹21,935-crore deal, with 40 being manufactured by Tata Advanced Systems Limited in partnership with Airbus at a facility in Gujarat's Vadodara.

The Prime Minister cited the successful flight-test of the indigenous LRLACM conducted by the Defence Research and Development Organisation earlier this month.

"From the seas to the skies, our India is becoming increasingly secure and self-reliant," he said, adding that all major subsystems of the missile had been indigenously developed.

Mr. Modi referred to the recent induction of *INS Dunagiri*, *INS Shamshak*, and *INS Agrya* into the Indian Navy, saying the warships were designed and built entirely in India.

> As many as 40 such aircraft (C-295) are being built right here in India and this is giving new strength to MSMEs and the aerospace sector ... From the seas to the skies, our India is becoming increasingly secure and self-reliant
>
> NARENDRA MODI
> *Prime Minister*

**West Asia conflict**

The Prime Minister thanked citizens for responding positively to his appeal for conserving resources amid the conflict in West Asia. He said many people had begun carpooling, using public transport, postponing foreign travel and increasing the use of natural fertilisers. He noted that several families had decided to recycle old gold instead of buying new jewellery for weddings.

"I am grateful to every citizen of the country; not only have they supported my appeal, they are also actively cooperating in every way," he said.

Highlighting environmental conservation, Mr. Modi praised the efforts of biologist Purnima Devi Barman in changing public perceptions about Assam's *hargila* bird (greater adjutant) and lauded community initiatives in Meghalaya to preserve the State's living root bridges, for which India has sought UNESCO World Heritage status.

The Prime Minister commended women in Madhya Pradesh's Rajgarh district for converting plastic waste into eco-bricks used for beautifying public spaces and praised Nagaland's 'Baby League' football initiative for children aged five to 12.

**'The PM praised Nagaland's 'Baby League' football initiative for children aged 5 to 12'**

For Ganesh Chaturthi, Mr. Modi urged people to purchase idols crafted by Indian artisans, calling on buyers to check the both the material used and the country manufacture before making their purchase.

# Sanskrit University introduces B.Tech. in AI and data science

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

In the first instance of a Sanskrit university in India entering engineering education, the Central Sanskrit University has introduced a B.Tech. programme in artificial Intelligence and data science from 2026-27.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his *Mann ki Baat* address on Sunday, said this was a significant effort to prepare the youth for new technology while keeping them rooted in their heritage.

The B.Tech. programme, on lines of the National Education Policy, 2020, is designed to transform Sanskrit institutions into multi-disciplinary centres of learning. The programme is AICTE-approved and has a total sanctioned intake of 66 seats: 60 regular seats and six supernumerary ones.

**AI tools in Sanskrit**

The programme is expected to support development of AI-enabled tools for Sanskrit and Indian languages, strengthen language technologies, enable digitisation and preservation of classical texts and promote inter-disciplinary research linking AI with Indian Knowledge Systems.

"This marks a crucial step towards integrating modern technology with India's traditional knowledge. It will facilitate the development of new AI tools for Indian languages and accelerate the digitisation and preservation of our ancient texts and manuscripts," the Prime Minister said.

**Traditional domains**

The programme will also provide opportunities to apply modern computational techniques to traditional domains such as Ayurveda, Yoga, Jyotisha, Nyaya, and other classical disciplines.

The technical components of the programme include artificial intelligence, machine learning, data science, python programming, statistics, cloud computing, data analytics and deep learning, an official spokesperson of the Education Ministry said.

The language and knowledge system components include natural language processing, computational linguistics, machine translation, speech recognition, conversational AI, language technologies, knowledge representation and optical character recognition (OCR) for ancient manuscripts.

# New Anaemia Mukt Bharat norms seek early action

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

The Union Health Ministry is set to launch revised operational guidelines for the Anaemia Mukt Bharat Abhiyaan (AMB) on Monday, expanding the national programme's strategy to include a new beneficiary group, greater emphasis on dietary interventions, and digital tracking of beneficiaries.

The guidelines, to be released by Union Health Minister J.P. Nadda during the 16th meeting of the Central Council of Health and Family Welfare at Vigyan Bhawan in Delhi, mark the transition of the programme from Anaemia Mukt Bharat to Anaemia Mukt Bharat Abhiyaan.

**New framework**

The revised framework seeks to strengthen anaemia control through improved testing, treatment, monitoring and community participation.

Treat and track: The Ministry proposed a digital ecosystem to monitor anaemia services.

The revised programme adds low birth weight babies (0-6 months) as a seventh beneficiary group, recognising the need for early intervention.

A new "eating right" component has been introduced as the seventh intervention to promote the healthy consumption of iron-rich and diversified diets. The seventh institutional mechanism focuses on strengthening monitoring and evaluation through digital tracking. The guidelines also replace the existing T3 with a T4 strategy of Test, Treat, Talk, and Track, which emphasises routine haemoglobin testing, treatment according to national anaemia management protocols, systematic tracking of beneficiaries for referral and follow-up, and counselling on healthy dietary practices.

The Ministry has also proposed an integrated digital ecosystem for monitoring anaemia services.

The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) shows that 67.1% of children aged six to 59 months, 57% of women aged 15 to 49 years, 52.2% of pregnant women, and 89.1% of adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 years are anaemic.

# Advisory issued for pilgrims undertaking Mansarovar Yatra

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The External Affairs Ministry has advised Indian citizens undertaking the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra through private tour operators to exercise caution, asking them to verify if their operator is duly registered.

"This Ministry is in receipt of several requests for help and assistance from Indian citizens stuck in Nepal while undertaking Kailash Mansarovar Yatra without the required entry permit and visas for China, through tours organised by private tour operators," the Ministry said in an advisory issued on Saturday.

"Citizens are advised not to commence their journey from India until all required travel documents have been obtained for undertaking the complete journey," it said.

Commencing travel without confirmed documentation or in anticipation of obtaining the necessary documentation "increases the likelihood of being stranded".

"Pilgrims are also strongly advised to verify that their tour operator is duly registered and authorised," the Ministry said.

In April, the Ministry had announced that the annual Kailash Mansarovar Yatra was set to take place from June to August this year via two routes – Lipulekh Pass in Uttarakhand and Nathu La in Sikkim.

The tour resumed last year after a gap of nearly five years as part of efforts to normalise the relations between India and China.

It was suspended because of the military standoff between the two sides in eastern Ladakh.

# Police recreate crime scene with accused at Pune fort

Press Trust of India
PUNE

The police on Sunday took Siya Goyal, an accused in the alleged murder of her fiancé and Pune realtor Ketan Agarwal, to Lohagad Fort to reconstruct the crime scene, using a dummy to recreate the moment he was pushed to his death, an official said.

The exercise was aimed at establishing the exact chain of events of the June 18 incident, when the 25-year-old victim was allegedly killed by Ms. Goyal, 20, and her alleged lover, Chetan Chaudhary, 22, he said.

"A crime scene recreation was conducted this morning. The accused was taken to the actual spot where the incident took place," a senior official from the Pune rural police said. He said that a dummy body was created, and police officials asked Ms. Goyal to demonstrate how she pushed Mr. Agarwal from the location. She also showed the route taken to reach the spot, he said.

The police is investigating various aspects of the case including the digital footprint of the two accused. PTI

Mr. Chaudhary would be taken to the fort separately for a similar reconstruction, he added.

Ms. Goyal and Mr. Chaudhary have been arrested for allegedly conspiring to kill Mr. Agarwal and pushing him off Lohagad Fort in Pune district.

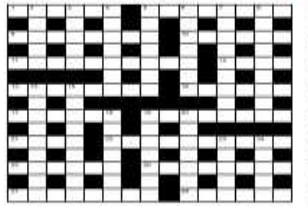
Mr. Goyal has allegedly told the police that she did not want to marry Mr. Agarwal, and hence plotted with Mr. Chaudhary to kill him as she thought calling off the wedding would bring disrepute to the family.

Investigators are probing various aspects of the case, including the planning, the movements of the accused before and after the incident, their digital footprint, and the motive behind the murder, a senior police official said.

## THE CROSSWORD + 14832

(Set by Pixie Nutt)

Solve this puzzle online and access more puzzles at https://thehindu.com/crosswords



**Across**

1 Perhaps the sort city folk (6)
5 Drug seller is quick creating damage (8)
9 Clueless Inspector General's brazen overwhelming new officer at first (8)
10 Is this creator redesigning pantries? (6)
13 Surprisingly, strange associate quits subsequently in support (10)
12 Member cycling around a storm (4)
13 Like a stag, colony resident aged - abandoning last trace of shame (8)
16 Hence the French people, heartless and glum (6)
17 Florida completes uniformly chosen constructions (8)
19 Most insensitive subset to hunt (8)
21 Magnificent huskies smuggled in this manner (4)
22 Quarrelsome Finny ruled out (10)
26 Character without bit of loyalty and grace (6)
28 In comparison, some vital errands partly withdrawn (8)
27 Anxious playing direct repeatedly? (6)
28 Come, rise, dance exhibiting revolutionary passion (6)

**Down**

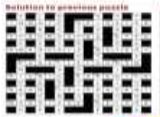
2 Close tense contest! Missed the beginning (5)
3 Discovered snoop uses net (6)
4 German supporting family blunder (7)
5 Spotted Fanny at church with journalist (7)
6 A lecturer flags planks (7)
7 Receives from post-graduate doctor and grey-haired saint (9)
8 Wild dance around large infinite pole in Christian festival (8)
14 Point of Mathematician or the astronomer (9)
15 Rock's tipping point, Mark switching places with Lira (9)
18 Son leaves carrying revolver finally and shoots (7)
19 Advanced deer? (7)
20 Delighted Harry quit and laughed in a high-pitched voice (7)
23 Records Spooner's accents (5)
24 Celebrate climbing bar (5)

## SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY RATING

Solution to previous puzzle



Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

## FAITH

### Temples, replica of Vaikunta

One may wonder, in today's state of mereshabousness, what the purpose of a temple is. God resides in Vaikunta, which is the supreme abode, and we cannot experience it in our mortal lives. Temples, a replica of Vaikunta, are accessible to us and their purpose is to give the devotees an opportunity to experience the Lord while on this earth, said Tirukkudanthai Dr. Venkatesh.

As mortals, we are unable to ascend to Vaikunta; therefore, Perumal has descended to us in temples, to give us a chance to experience the bliss of Vaikunta. The rajagopuram which we behold first is symbolic of the rajagopuram of Vaikunta. In his Tiruvaimozhi, Nammazhwar says, *Kodi mel nedu magizh gopuram*, referring to the gopuram in Vaikunta. Similarly, Chandogya Upanishad details the *Aramnandu kulam* (pond) in the celestial abode of Perumal. Echoing this, the temple ponds or pushkarants are a representation of the heavenly water body. The same text also specifies presence of a sacred ashwatha tree (Somasavana) there, which is represented by the sthalavriksham in temples. The Vrakha upastambham in Vaikunta is depicted in temples by the dwajastambham, the flag pole. The sanctum sanctorum of the God in temples is the equivalent of the Golden Hall where Maha Vishnu resides in Vaikunta. The many samidhis surrounding the main deity in temples are the eternal servants, the Nithya Suris, who serve the Lord in the celestial strata, who enjoy their own chambers in a temple. When Perumal descends, the Nithya Suris accompany Him, to serve Him. They also guide devotees to Him, progressively. In short, temple visits are a virtual experience of Vaikunta for devotees.

A.V.V.

# Sanskrit University introduces B.Tech. in AI and data science

**The Hindu Bureau**
NEW DELHI

In the first instance of a Sanskrit university in India entering engineering education, the Central Sanskrit University has introduced a B.Tech. programme in artificial Intelligence and data science from 2026-27.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his *Mann ki Baat* address on Sunday, said this was a significant effort to prepare the youth for new technology while keeping them rooted in their heritage.

The B.Tech. programme, on lines of the National Education Policy, 2020, is designed to transform Sanskrit institutions into multi-disciplinary centres of learning. The programme is AICTE-approved and has a total sanctioned intake of 66 seats: 60 regular seats and six supernumerary ones.

**AI tools in Sanskrit**

The programme is expected to support development of AI-enabled tools for Sanskrit and Indian languages, strengthen language technologies, enable digitisation and preservation of classical texts and promote inter-disciplinary research linking AI with Indian Knowledge Systems.

"This marks a crucial step towards integrating modern technology with India's traditional knowledge. It will facilitate the development of new AI tools for Indian languages and accelerate the digitisation and preservation of our ancient texts and manuscripts," the Prime Minister said.

**Traditional domains**

The programme will also provide opportunities to apply modern computational techniques to traditional domains such as Ayurveda, Yoga, Jyotisha, Nyaya, and other classical disciplines.

The technical components of the programme include artificial intelligence, machine learning, data science, python programming, statistics, cloud computing, data analytics and deep learning, an official spokesperson of the Education Ministry said.

The language and knowledge system components include natural language processing, computational linguistics, machine translation, speech recognition, conversational AI, language technologies, knowledge representation and optical character recognition (OCR) for ancient manuscripts.

| Aspect | Details |
| --- | --- |
| News | Central Sanskrit University (CSU) has launched India's **first B.Tech. programme in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Data Science** in a Sanskrit University. |
| Effective From | **Academic Session 2026–27** |
| University | Central Sanskrit University (CSU), New Delhi |
| Approval | **AICTE-approved** programme |
| Total Intake | **66 seats** (60 regular + 6 supernumerary) |
| Policy Alignment | Designed in line with the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** |
| Objective | Integrate **modern technology with India's traditional knowledge systems** while preparing youth for emerging technologies. |

| Objective | Explanation |
| --- | --- |
| AI for Indian Languages | Develop AI applications for Sanskrit and other Indian languages. |
| Digital Preservation | Digitise and preserve ancient manuscripts and classical texts. |
| Knowledge Integration | Combine AI with Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS). |
| Interdisciplinary Research | Promote research linking AI with traditional disciplines. |
| Heritage + Technology | Balance technological advancement with cultural heritage. |

# How NDR built a warehouse empire

MD Amrutesh Reddy cites the introduction of GST as the turning point for the warehousing industry. BIJOY GHOSH

T E Raja Simhan

India's warehousing sector has transformed dramatically over the past decade, driven by the roll-out of GST, rapid growth in e-commerce, rising consumption and the formalisation of supply chains. Among the companies that have capitalised on this shift is the Chennai-based NDR Group, which launched nearly six decades ago with a rice mill and has evolved into one of the country's largest warehousing platforms.

The group's development arm, NDR Smart Spaces, is currently constructing around 7 million sq. ft of space across the warehousing and industrial park segments. This is part of a 13 million sq. ft land and development pipeline scheduled for eventual transfer to the group's infrastructure investment trust (NDR InvIT), valued at ₹6,650 crore, says N. Amrutesh Reddy, MD, NDR Warehousing Pvt Ltd.

The rice mills set up in the 1960s by the company's founder, Naidu Dasaradharami Reddy, ran only during the crop seasons and the storage space remained idle for a significant part of the year. Fertiliser companies began using the space during the off-season, creating an opportunity that eventually developed into a dedicated warehousing business.

Mr. Reddy credits his father and group Chairman, Adikesavulu (son of Dasaradharami), for the growth of Continental Warehousing, the group's integrated multimodal logistics company. Today, their focus is on the free trade warehousing zone (FTWZ) business under NDR Infrastructure Pvt. Ltd., he says.

He cites the introduction of GST as the turning point for the country's warehousing industry. In the absence of GST, companies maintained warehouses across multiple states largely for tax optimisation. GST enabled businesses to redesign supply chains around fewer, larger regional distribution centres, he says. This helped reduce inventory and transportation costs while improving operational efficiency.

Anticipating this shift, NDR had focused on developing large, compliant warehousing facilities in major consumption hubs. As demand for regional distribution centres increased, the company's warehousing portfolio expanded sharply from around 3 million sq. ft in 2016 to more than 21 million sq. ft within seven years.

The group's growth received a further boost in 2021 when global asset manager Investcorp invested about ₹300 crore to accelerate the expansion of the platform's logistics infrastructure. It hit a major milestone in February 2024 with the launch of India's first listed warehousing InvIT, with 17 million sq ft of completed warehousing space and around 2 million sq ft under development – cumulatively valued at ₹3,800 crore. Since then, acquisitions and business expansion have significantly increased the platform's scale.

The InvIT now manages around 22 million sq ft of warehousing and industrial assets, serving over 100 customers, with no single client contributing more than 5% of revenue. The company recently raised around ₹800 crore from institutional investors for more acquisitions.

*(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)*

# How smart tech is replacing oily tawas

**The shift is led by consumers who want convenience, wellness and personalisation even as household chores transition to becoming gender-neutral; the advent of robotics and Artificial Intelligence in home appliances is, in turn, reshaping the strategies of consumer appliance makers**

NEWS ANALYSIS

Meenakshi Verma Ambwani

The rhythmic beeps of air fryers are slowly overtaking the ubiquitous whistles of pressure cookers in Indian households. Smart tech is replacing the greasy *tawa*.

From induction cooktops to electric pressure cookers and all-in-one robotic and smart cooking appliances, the assortment on kitchen countertops is changing. The shift is led by consumers who want convenience, wellness and personalisation even as household chores transition to becoming gender-neutral. The advent of robotics and AI in home appliances is, in turn, reshaping the strategies of consumer appliance makers.

Anil Dua, COO, Usha International, says there is a clear evolution in how younger consumers approach kitchen appliances today. "While earlier purchase decisions were driven primarily by functionality and durability, today's consumers are looking for solutions that align with their preferences around health and everyday efficiency." He adds that Usha is witnessing a strong growth in demand for induction cooktops, iChef range of air fryers, blender heater, steam ovens, electric pressure cooker, programmable electric kettle and Trienergy+ mixer grinders.

The flip side: Automation alone cannot woo Indian consumers. Perhaps this is why the microwave segment's penetration remains low. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

Appliance makers say Indian consumers are increasingly seeking products that are multi-functional, sleeker, more compact and quieter.

Pooja Baid, Chief Marketing Officer, Vernuni India, points out that young consumers are no longer buying appliances but buying outcomes and experiences. Inspired by digital content and global cuisines, Gen Z and millennial consumers are seeking convenience, wellness, versatility and an ability to experiment with food.

But this does not mean they are giving up their quest for authentic flavours and traditional textures. For instance, the air fryer has become so popular in Indian homes because not only does it reduce oil consumption but also preserves the taste and texture of samosas and kebabs, argues Ms. Baid.

> Consumers no longer want clunky machines hidden away in cabinets but beautiful and compact appliances that look great
>
> RAVI SAXENA, Founder and CEO, Wonderchef

"One of our biggest learnings came when we introduced Philips air fryers in India. While the technology offered a healthier alternative to deep frying, consumers kept asking us a simple question: "Can it make a good samosa?" People were not looking to replace their favourite foods – they wanted a healthier way to enjoy them," she adds.

Moreover, automation alone cannot woo Indian consumers. Perhaps this is why the microwave segment's penetration remains low.

**Flavours and trends**

On the rationale behind the launch of the all-in-one OneChef that can air-fry, stir-fry, roast, bake and steam, Baid says, "India is perhaps the world's most passionate biryani market. Biryani preparation involves multiple appliances and several stages, and the recipe changes every few hundred kilometres. Consumers want a simpler way to prepare these dishes at home without compromising authenticity. OneChef was born from that insight."

Ravi Saxena, founder and CEO, Wonderchef, says the transformation is "structural and generation-led", as consumers no longer want clunky machines hidden away in cabinets but beautiful and compact appliances that look great on open-kitchen countertops. Cookware earlier accounted for 70% of Wonderchef's revenues, but today appliances are the primary growth driver.

"We have localised smart technology with Chef Magic, our all-in-one kitchen robot, and Chai Magic, the world's first automatic tea maker. We will continue to pioneer the smart appliance layer," he adds.

Asna Khursheed, General Manager-E-commerce and Marketing, INALSA Home Appliances says, "Indian consumers are demonstrating a growing willingness to trade up. Appliances in the mid- to premium-price range are growing in demand significantly faster than those at entry-level tier, and we see substantial headroom in variants with superior build, design, and smart features."

**Zero-labour homes**

AI is a major change factor. LG Electronics is championing a Zero Labour Homes concept, where intelligent machines will handle everyday chores. At CES 2026, it showcased LG CLOiD, an AI-powered home robot for handling household tasks like cooking and laundry, powered by the LG ThinQ ecosystem.

"LG already has extensive experience and expertise in this space. This gives us strong capabilities not only in hardware, but also the software and user experience required to seamlessly integrate robots into daily life," Youngjae Kim, Leader of Robotics Platform Advanced Research Task, LG Electronics, told *businessline*.

He next foresees the entry of humanoid robots in the kitchen. Quick commerce platforms are reflecting this changing demand landscape in kitchen appliances.

"Platforms like Blinkit, Instamart, and Zepto, are contributing over a third of our online sales. Buying a kitchen appliance used to be a highly deliberated, multi-weekend family errand. Today, the decision window has shrunk considerably. A consumer decides they want a healthy smoothie or an air-fried dinner, opens an app, and a Wonderchef appliance arrives in 10 to 15 minutes. Urban consumers value instant gratification so highly that they are comfortable making high-ticket durable purchases in a split-second, mobile-first environment," sums up Mr. Saxena of Wonderchef.

*(The writer is with The Hindu businessline and was in Korea at the invitation of LG)*

# How football has inspired marketers over the years

Harish Bhat

The ongoing FIFA football World Cup brought up a charming old memory – me as a young boy in the 1970s, eating ice cream from a football-shaped plastic container. This was popularly called "ball ice-cream" and marketed by Joy Ice Creams. After eating this delicious treat, I would carefully preserve the plastic football, and dream about the legendary Brazilian footballer Pele.

My childhood ball ice-cream indulgence is just one example of hundreds of brands that have been inspired by football, the beautiful game that is watched by around 5 billion people across the world. First and foremost are the products such as shoes, which are integral to playing the game. Global brands such as Adidas, Puma and Nike are wedded to football, each in their own way. Take Adidas, for instance. Ever since its founder, Adi Dassler, equipped the German football team with revolutionary lightweight boots featuring screwed-in studs, Adidas has been part of the legend of this game.

Limited edition: This year, Coca-Cola has launched bottles shaped like soccer balls, adorned with geometric patterns. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The Adidas Samba shoe, designed to help footballers train on hard surfaces, has sold over 35 million pairs worldwide. The Puma King and Nike Phantom offer similar stories of football inspiration.

Then there are the brands that may not have a direct functional connect with football, but ride the bandwagon smartly.

Many use advertising as the key connection – for instance, Apple's celebrated advertisement featuring Lionel Messi, or Samsung's advertisements for its Galaxy 11 phones. Closer home, Tata Motors and Tata Power have both used football beautifully in their advertising.

I am most intrigued by brands that have used packaging innovatively to signal their football connect. This year, Coca-Cola has launched bottles shaped like soccer balls, and adorned with bold geometric patterns. These limited edition bottles have become highly desired keepsakes. Tesco, the global groceries and general merchandise retailer, has wrapped lettuces in a clear packaging with hexagonal prints, making the whole resemble a football. What lovely ideas!

Labels promoted by famous footballers constitute yet another stream of brands that ride the fame of this game. Christiano Ronaldo has his famous CR7 brand spanning apparel and shoes, and since expanded to hotels and gymnasiums. David Beckham has his grooming line House 99, launched in partnership with global beauty brand L'Oreal. Apart from hair and skin-care, the line interestingly also features beard care and tattoo care products, which smartly reflect Beckham's personality. Lionel Messi has entered the world of fashion with The Messi Store, which offers premium garments with a sporty feel.

Then there are the football teams and clubs, which are globally famous brands themselves. Real Madrid, FC Barcelona and Manchester United are perhaps the most popular and have huge followings – Real Madrid, for instance, has over 600 million followers on its social media channels. Their branded merchandise, including football jerseys, are hugely sought after and command premium pricing. They also earn significant amounts of money from sponsorship tie-ups with other brands, broadcast and media rights for their games, and ticket sales.

*(Harish Bhat is an avid marketer and bestselling author)*

# Gujarati blockbuster *Laalo*'s word-of-mouth triumph

Naveen Chandra

The power of talk in building excitement for a regional film, making it an improbable hit

Films lead an incredibly chaotic, short life. No other product sees as much intense competition for survival as films do. Every week there's a new film that threatens to draw audiences away from the films released the previous week.

Most films, therefore, front-load their marketing effort with advance bookings, meet-and-greets with the stars, premieres, and special screenings to build a big opening weekend at the box office. Generally they achieve predictable results. A good Friday leading into more tickets sold on Saturday, and peaking on Sunday before tapering off during the week for a repeat in the coming week, but with subdued numbers, as theatres give away more screens to newer films.

Consider the daily box-office collection of *Dhurandar 1* and *2*. A similar chart, except that the large number of people who saw the first part created much buzz and drew even more numbers for the sequel, giving it a much higher opening. But the blistering start tapered off within two weeks, as expected.

**Reversing the script**

The sleeper hit Gujarati film *Laalo: Krishna Sada Sahaayate*, however, followed a different curve. The story of an autorickshaw driver who encounters Lord Krishna as he tries to manage his miserable life, made on a tight budget of ₹80 lakh, grossed an incredible ₹120 crore at the box office.

Highest grossing: On day 30, it clocked ₹13 crore at the box office, a record single-day collection for a Gujarati film. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The day-wise collection chart shows an inexplicable porcupine-shaped behaviour. For nearly 19 days after its release across 280 screens there wasn't any collection, and it had been removed from most screens, crashing to a low of seven screens on day 8, with occupancy less than 10%. For the next week the film's director, Ankit Sakhiya, booked 15-16 shows every day and started showing the film to select audiences. Since these were closed audience sets, the occupancy clocked 65-70% during the week.

The people who watched it spread great word-of-mouth praise about the film. PVR and other theatres waived the virtual print fee (VPF) that the producer pays theatres to exhibit the film, substantially reducing the cost of distribution.

On day 18, incredibly, the shows picked up to 40 and, by day 20, *Laalo* was playing in 100s of theatres. On day 30, it crossed 2,500 shows with a 70% occupancy and clocked ₹13 crore at the box office – a record single-day collection for a Gujarati film.

There's been no comparable example of such a performance by a film, given that it wasn't dubbed or sub-titled in any other language. Months later, when the producers dubbed and released the film in Hindi, the tacky production values got them a tepid response.

It catalysed *Deolband 2*, a Marathi adaptation of *Laalo* with a similar storyline, which collected ₹80 crore across over 800 shows in its fourth week.

Other than possibly Lord Krishna's hand in the film's tremendous success, there are two interesting aspects to it. One is the role of strong word-of-mouth buzz about the film, which gave it more screens as the weeks went by. Second, the poor performance of the films released in the subsequent weeks made survival easier.

Similarly, Imtiaz Ali's new film, *Main Vaapas Aaunga*, opened with a whimper, collecting just ₹1.5 crore on the first day and ending the first week with ₹6 crore, an abysmal low for a Hindi film. In an incredible turnaround, collections surged to ₹15 crore in the second week, reaching ₹10 crore by day 10, following solid word-of-mouth recommendation.

When a film becomes widely discussed online, people feel pressure to watch it simply to participate in conversations. Remember how the videos of audiences crying while watching the film *Saiyaara* became so much of a pull that if you hadn't seen the movie then you were out of the social chatter.

*Laalo* is a low-budget film with low production values. But the universal problem of poverty, debt, relationship issues, the Junagadh landscape, the fight between greed and honesty, and the advice of Lord Krishna touched an emotional chord.

The film had travelled beyond its core audience. When a film becomes popular, its popularity itself becomes a marketing tool.

*(Naveen Chandra is the founder and CEO of 91 Film Studios, a Mumbai-based company that produces and distributes regional language feature films)*

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| Aspect | Details |
| --- | --- |
| **Film** | *Laalo: Krishna Sada Sahayate* |
| **Language** | Gujarati |
| **Type** | Low-budget regional film |
| **Director** | Ankit Sakhiya |
| **Budget** | Around **₹50 lakh** |
| **Box Office Collection** | Around **₹120 crore** |
| **Return on Investment (ROI)** | Nearly **240 times** its production budget |
| **Release Pattern** | Started with very few shows but gradually expanded due to strong audience demand. |
| **Record** | **₹13 crore single-day collection on Day 30**, the highest ever for a Gujarati film. |

| Stage | What Happened? |
| --- | --- |
| Initial Release | Released in only a few theatres with very low occupancy. |
| First 19 Days | Collections remained modest; many theatres removed the film. |
| Word-of-Mouth Growth | Positive audience reviews spread rapidly. |
| Day 18–20 | Shows increased from a handful to around **40**, then **100+ theatres**. |
| Day 30 | Around **2,500 shows** with nearly **70% occupancy** and **₹13 crore** single-day collection. |

| Factor | Explanation |
| --- | --- |
| Strong Word-of-Mouth | Viewers recommended the film widely through personal conversations and social media. |
| Emotional Storytelling | Connected emotionally with audiences. |
| Cultural Theme | Based on Gujarati culture and spiritual values. |
| Affordable Production | Demonstrated that compelling content can outperform high budgets. |
| Theatre Support | PVR and other theatres waived Virtual Print Fee (VPF), reducing distribution costs. |
| Social Media Buzz | Online discussions created a fear of missing out (FOMO), attracting more viewers. |

| Film | Performance |
| --- | --- |
| **Laalo** | Became a blockbuster due to exceptional word-of-mouth. |
| **Main Vaapas Aaunga** (Hindi) | Opened with about **₹1.5 crore** on Day 1 and around **₹6 crore** in its first week, showing comparatively weaker performance. |

| Rank | Movie | Year | Budget (₹ Cr) | Worldwide Gross (₹ Cr) | Approx. ROI (x) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Dangal | 2016 | 70 | 2,024 | **29x** (Scribd) |
| 2 | Secret Superstar | 2017 | 15 | 850–965 | **57–64x** |
| 3 | The Kashmir Files | 2022 | 15 | 340 | **22.7x** (Scribd) |
| 4 | Uri: The Surgical Strike | 2019 | 25 | 342 | **13.7x** (Scribd) |
| 5 | The Kerala Story | 2023 | 25 | 303 | **12.1x** (Scribd) |
| 6 | Aashiqui 2 | 2013 | 15 | 109 | **7.3x** |
| 7 | Tanu Weds Manu Returns | 2015 | 39 | 258 | **6.6x** |
| 8 | Stree | 2018 | 24 | 180 | **7.5x** |
| 9 | Andhadhun | 2018 | 32 | 450+ | **14x** (boosted by China release) |
| 10 | Kahaani | 2012 | 8 | 104 | **13x** |

**Cages to care:** Dogs rescued from slaughter facilities at an animal shelter in Paju, South Korea. AFP

# Canines disappear before a dog meat ban in South Korea

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PYEONGTAEK

Electric prods rest against the wall near rusty cages containing dog skulls in an abandoned canine slaughterhouse in a South Korean town.

The deserted site in Pyeongtaek, south of Seoul, offers a glimpse into an industry rapidly disappearing as South Korea's landmark dog meat ban enters into force next year. It also begs a question: what happened to the hundreds of thousands of dogs once bred for human consumption?

Historically regarded as a summer stamina booster — particularly among older and rural people — dog meat has steadily fallen out of favour as younger Koreans embrace dogs as pets and public attitudes shift.

In January 2024, the country passed a law banning the breeding, slaughter and sale of dogs for food. Once it takes effect next February, violators will risk prison sentences of up to three years.

As the ban looms, the industry is disappearing much faster than many expected.

Government figures show between 4,00,000 and 4,80,000 dogs were being raised for meat in 2024. Today, the Agriculture Ministry estimates just 20,000 are on farms. To help farmers transition, the government offered up to 6,00,000 won (about $390) for every dog they got rid of. But where the animals went was not tracked.

Data obtained by a lawmaker showed that by February just 623 dogs had been adopted, and just under 500 were sent to shelters.

Most of the rest were likely killed, animal welfare groups and former farmers believe.

"If large numbers of rescued dogs had entered adoption programmes, animal groups like us would know about them," said Kim Young-hwan, a representative of animal rights group CARE.

# China's role in Bangladesh's Teesta plans, and India's strategic worries

**Following discussions last week over a Teesta project in Bangladesh, China is expected to expedite a feasibility study for a plan aimed at turning the river into an artery of economic development; the increased Chinese presence so close to a sensitive Indian region has raised eyebrows in New Delhi**

NEWS ANALYSIS

Kallol Bhattacherjee

Bangladesh Prime Minister Tarique Rahman has received assurance from China on building the Teesta River Comprehensive Management and Restoration Project. The discussion in this regard took place when Mr. Rahman visited Beijing during June 24-26 and met top Chinese officials, including Premier Li Qiang, President Xi Jinping and Chinese Water Resources Minister Li Guoying.

China has harvested its major rivers for power generation and irrigation, and is considered a major dam builder among the world powers. It is expected to expedite a feasibility study of the Teesta project that aims to change the physical nature of the Teesta inside Bangladesh and turn it into an artery of economic development.

Bangladesh has been in talks with China about managing and developing the Teesta river region for nearly a decade, and the discussion has spanned the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, which has been taken forward by the current government of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party.

In January this year, under the interim government led by Prof. Mohammed Yunus, Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) and the Chinese state-owned power generation company POWERCHINA signed an extension to an MoU that revived the Bangladesh-China cooperation on the river.

The original MoU in this project was signed in 2016 under the Sheikh Hasina government, which had suggested river bank erosion control, flood management, disaster reduction, land reclamation, transportation and environment preservation as some of the features of China's plans for Teesta.

**Diplomatic outreach:** Tarique Rahman arrives for a meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing on Friday. REUTERS

### Massive plans

The MoU included dredging of 140 million cubic metres of riverine sediment, reclamation of 171 square km of land, repairing of 110 km of embankment, constructing 124 km of new embankments and developing 324 km of road network. The project would lead to building of 82 jetty facilities along the Teesta. As a lower riparian project, the Chinese plans cannot disrupt the Teesta upstream in India and it aims to create conditions for Bangladesh to better utilise the water that it gets from India at present.

Teesta's water is essential for the farmers of northern Bangladesh, covering districts like Nilphamari, Rangpur, Dinajpur, Bogura, Joypurhat and Gaibandha. Bangladesh's main complaint is that Teesta's water reduces to a trickle in the winter months between December and February, when water is required for sowing of paddy and vegetables.

To deal with its water requirements, Bangladesh built the Teesta Barrage, the largest irrigation project of the country, in the 1980s. The Teesta Barrage Irrigation Project (TBIP) was built to help the northern region of Bangladesh, as it had a history of being hit by Teesta's floods, followed by a long spell of dry season, both of which used to disrupt the local agricultural cycle.

India has built barrages and electricity projects upstream in the Teesta that allow it to harvest Teesta's waters for requirements in West Bengal, Sikkim and Assam. Most prominent among these is the barrage in Gajaldoba in West Bengal, which is a major irrigation project that is controlled by West Bengal.

Whenever India holds water for its needs in Gajaldoba or its power generation units in Sikkim, Bangladesh claims that the part of the Teesta on its side goes low on water. For example, last year in November, TBIP had to shut all its gates as the water flow on the Teesta had reduced. The TBIP is used to store water for nearly 55,000 hectares of land, but the reduction of water on the river causes concern for it as lack of water affects both irrigation as well as commercial activities on the river.

Teesta originates from the spectacular high altitude Cholamu or Tso Lhamu Lake (5100 metres) in the Himalayan range in Sikkim. As the river flows down, it gathers volume from multiple glaciers and streams, and India has built multiple power generation projects on the river.

### Deal with India

Bangladesh's main demand from India has been getting what it considers to be a fair share of the Teesta's water so that the irrigation project in North Bangladesh can run smoothly.

The two sides had negotiated the issue of sharing of Teesta's water for decades, and it was taken up again in 2010 when India prepared a set of principles for sharing of Teesta's water, and the two sides agreed to an interim deal.

However, the agreement was not sealed when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited Dhaka in 2011, mainly because of objections from Mamata Banerjee, who had spoken about the matter during her election rallies that year.

Ms. Banerjee became Chief Minister that year after defeating the Left.

A joint statement issued on September 7, 2011, in Dhaka said, "The two Prime Ministers welcomed the fact that there has been progress on the principles and modalities of interim agreements on sharing of waters of Teesta and Feni Rivers on a fair and equitable basis. They directed the concerned officials to work towards concluding the agreements at the earliest." At the end, it was clear that Kolkata's objection prevailed over Delhi's plans. Subsequently, Sheikh Hasina repeatedly raised the issue during her visits to Delhi and discussed this matter in June 2024 when a technical committee was planned to take the matter forward.

Before that visit, Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra had visited Dhaka and conveyed the Indian offer of financing the $1 billion project to dredge and manage the Teesta in Bangladesh. That was the last attempt by India to deal with the issue, as the two sides did not discuss the matter during the 15-month-long interim rule in Dhaka, which was followed by the BNP government led by Prime Minister Rahman.

The area of Nilphamari and Rangpur is near Jalpaiguri of India, which is where the "chicken's neck" is located. POWERCHINA, which has revived the MoU with Bangladesh, is a large organisation experienced in river projects, but it is also related to the strategic sectors of China.

Stationing a large number of Chinese professionals so close to a sensitive area of India will raise eyebrows in India. However, Bangladesh has several internationally supported projects, including the Ruppur nuclear power plant that has engineers and technicians from multiple countries, including Russia and Ukraine.

## An electric touch

**Bolt from the blue:** After a week of record-breaking temperatures, lightning strikes the Eiffel Tower during a thunderstorm in Paris. French weather authorities have issued thunderstorm alerts in the capital city. AFP

# Trump's proposal to pit Syria against Hezbollah unsettles Lebanon, Israel

Associated Press
BEIRUT

As the White House has soured on Israel's war with Hezbollah in Lebanon, U.S. President Donald Trump has shucked many in the region by pushing an alternative: let Syria fight the Iran-backed militant group instead.

He has suggested that the battle-hardened and Islamist-led insurgents who overthrew Syria's autocratic President Bashar Assad a year and a half ago and formed a new government would do a better job of rooting out Hezbollah than the Israeli Army.

Syrian President Ahmad al-Sharaa has said he has no interest in doing so, and has asserted that Mr. Trump's comments were misconstrued. But Mr. Trump has doubled down on the idea.

**Balancing act:** Syrian President Ahmad al-Sharaa has rejected suggestions that Syria plans to intervene in Lebanon. AP

The prospect of a Syrian invasion has raised alarms in Lebanon — and also in Israel, which regards Mr. al-Sharaa's Islamist-led government with suspicion and has seized control of a strip of southern Syria since he took power.

Syria has also become the site of rising tensions between Israel and Turkey — a main backer of Mr. al-Sharaa's government — with each seeking to limit the other's influence in the neighbouring country.

Top Israeli security officials convened a meeting on the subject on Wednesday, according to an official.

Syrian officials scrambled to do damage control. In a speech in Damascus on June 13, al-Sharaa said, "There are people spreading rumors that Syria will intervene in Lebanon. This is not true. We are calling for a permanent end to the war."

Mr. Trump "spoke about Syria's role in finding a safe and peaceful solution, but the statement was misinterpreted as if Syria were going to invade Lebanon tomorrow morning," Mr. al-Sharaa said.

The official who spoke anonymously said while Israel is closely watching developments between Syria and Lebanon, its main concern is Hezbollah.

# Inside Albania's 'Flamingo Revolution' against a Kushner-linked development

Associated Press
TIRANA

Albania's rallies against a coastal development project have garnered global attention, both for their connection to Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner and because of their curious mascot.

The luxury project has two components: a small resort on the uninhabited island of Sazan and a coastal development in the nearby Narta Lagoon area, which is a wildlife reserve frequented by wetland species including flamingos.

Every evening for weeks, protesters have marched by the thousands in the capital Tirana, holding up cut-outs of flamingos. The result has been a nickname for their fledgling movement: "The Flamingo Revolution."

Here are some of its members.

Fatma Paja, 28, lives in Tirana and runs a creative studio with her two sisters. She's part of a group of artists who created the cut-out flamingos that have become a fixture at the nightly rallies.

"I have long used art as a means to express the injustices and dissatisfaction associated with everyday civilian life in Albania," Paja told AP on Friday.

Ms. Paja's group also organises drawing and colouring activities for children during the protest, so that willing parents are able to join.

At the demonstrations, she leads chants through a loudspeaker. "Albania is not for sale!" she shouts, and "Don't touch Narta!"

The project has sparked outrage because of the location's pristine nature and unique habitat that would be irreversibly devastated, according to environmentalists.

Citizens are demanding the project's halt, citing a lack of transparency and concerns that in many similar projects environmental standards were not met.

"I am against a pro-elitist project that is blocking a fully protected area and destroying it," Ms. Paja said. "It is a project that has no legal basis and has not been supported by any study on the damage it would cause to the environment and nature." She said she is optimistic, believing the protest has already produced results.

"This protest has motivated people to speak up and react," she said, adding that, because it was not affiliated with political parties, it fostered trust and solidarity.

**Colourful dissent:** Protesters hold flamingo-shaped placards as they demonstrate against the government in Albania. REUTERS

Although unaffiliated with a specific party, protesters are almost universally calling for the resignation of Prime Minister Edi Rama.

Arben Kola, one of the first protesters in the "Flamingo Revolution," has worked as a tour guide for more than a decade. He takes visitors to historic and nature sites around Albania — including the area around the prospective development.

Tourism in Albania has seen a sharp increase in recent years, with people relishing the nation's vast, undeveloped coastline. Among those who have been impressed were Mr. Kushner and Mr. Trump's daughter, Ivanka Trump. She explained on a podcast last month that they discovered the site of the planned development while on a friend's boat and stopping for a swim.

It was yet another example, for Kola, of the government abusing its power, and he couldn't stomach it any longer. He joined the nascent protest movement when it was just getting started.

"Albania is facing a high level of corruption, with the privatisation and giveaway of land, beaches, valleys and rivers," the 46-year-old said in an interview while leading a tour group through Tirana.

Albania's anti-corruption agency has opened an investigation related to the project. The government says the land is privately owned, but rival claims over its privatisation have emerged.

In an interview with the AP this month, Mr. Rama dismissed environmental objections as the result of misinformation and said the development was turning Albania from a country ignored by investors into one "where the big capital wants to come and the big investors want to come."

It is unclear exactly what Mr. Kushner's investment role is in the project's development, but Mr. Rama confirmed his involvement. The Prime Minister said a formal environmental impact assessment has not started because the plan for the development has not been finalised. He said international architects and environmental specialists are still shaping the proposal.

Mr. Kola says it looks to him like the project is already moving full steam ahead. He is furious that work has already begun to clear land inside a nature reserve with excavators and other heavy machinery. Today, Mr. Kola is one of the people who organises the crowds by speaking to them on a loudspeaker. He's still floored by just how much the demonstrations have grown.

"We didn't believe the protest would reach this size," he said, adding that people repeatedly ask him whether the movement will continue. "It depends on the people," he says.

# Inside Albania's 'Flamingo Revolution' against a Kushner-linked development

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| Aspect | Details |
| --- | --- |
| **Country** | Albania |
| **Movement Name** | **Flamingo Revolution** |
| **Location of Protest** | Narta Lagoon and Sazan Island, Albania |
| **Reason for Protest** | Opposition to a proposed luxury tourism development project in an ecologically sensitive coastal area |
| **Developer Linked To** | Jared Kushner (son-in-law of former US President Donald Trump) |
| **Key Concern** | Destruction of protected wetlands, flamingo habitat, and lack of environmental transparency |

Serbia
Montenegro
Kosovo
Bulgaria
Macedonia
Adriatic Sea
Tirana
Albania
Italy
Greece

## What is the Project?

| Component | Description |
|---|---|
| Luxury Resort | Planned on the uninhabited **Sazan Island** |
| Coastal Development | Proposed near **Narta Lagoon**, a protected wetland |
| Investment Goal | Promote tourism and attract foreign investment |
| Opposition | Environmentalists, artists, local residents, and tourism workers |

## Why is Narta Lagoon Important?

| Feature | Significance |
|---|---|
| Type | Coastal lagoon and wetland ecosystem |
| Biodiversity | Habitat for flamingos and numerous migratory birds |
| Ecological Status | Protected natural reserve |
| Economic Value | Supports eco-tourism and local livelihoods |

## Why is it Called the "Flamingo Revolution"?

| Reason | Explanation |
|---|---|
| Symbol | Protesters carry **pink flamingo cut-outs** during demonstrations. |
| Meaning | Flamingos represent the threatened ecosystem and biodiversity of Narta Lagoon. |
| Nature of Movement | Peaceful, artistic, and environmental protest. |

## Main Demands of Protesters

| Demand | Explanation |
|---|---|
| Stop the Project | Prevent irreversible ecological damage. |
| Transparency | Make project details and environmental studies public. |
| Environmental Assessment | Conduct a proper Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). |
| Protect Wetlands | Preserve biodiversity and migratory bird habitats. |
| Accountability | Allegations of corruption and misuse of public land are investigated. |

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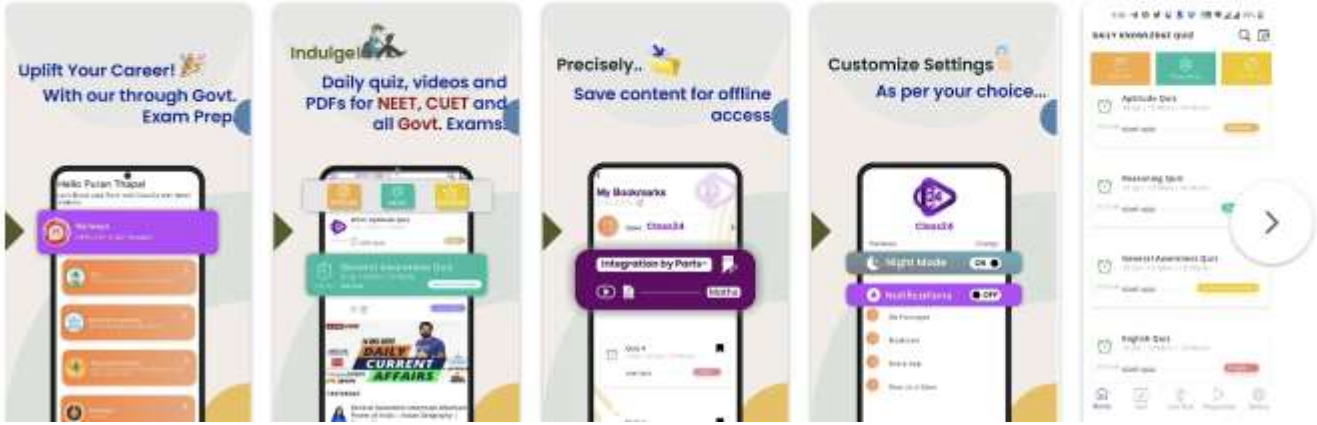


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