



INSIDE



Uneasy calm in Manipur a day after clashes

**GUWAHATI**  
An uneasy calm prevailed in Manipur on Wednesday, a day after protesters clashed with security personnel on the streets of Imphal leaving more than 50 students injured. There were no reports of violence either in the Imphal Valley or in the peripheral hills. » PAGE 4

Cong. promises five guarantees, Statehood in J&K

**SRINAGAR**  
Announcing "five guarantees" for Jammu and Kashmir at an election rally in Anantnag on Wednesday, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said the party "will not only strive for J&K's Statehood but also restore the bicameral House system". » PAGE 5

Everyone aged 70 and over to get health coverage

**NEW DELHI**  
The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Wednesday approved health coverage to all senior citizens aged 70 and above irrespective of income under the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY). » PAGE 6

U.K. sanctions Russian 'shadow fleet' of tankers

**LONDON**  
The U.K. government, on Wednesday, announced sanctions on a "shadow fleet" of 10 Russian oil tankers that it has alleged were circumventing Western oil sanctions. » PAGE 14

# Kolkata doctors set fresh terms, continue stir

Protesters demand meeting in the presence of CM to be telecast live on news channels; State Health Minister questions if the doctors are being guided by politics, asks them to resume duty; representative for WBJDF says demands are clear and conducive to an open and productive discussion and adds there is no political colour in the demands

**Moyurie Som  
Shrabana Chatterjee**  
KOLKATA

The impasse between protesting resident doctors and the West Bengal government over resumption of duty in public medical institutions continued for the second day on Wednesday, with the former setting fresh conditions for holding talks. They included the demand that no fewer than 30 representatives be allowed at the State Secretariat for a meeting to be held in the presence of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and televised live on news channels.

Chief Secretary Manoj Pant said the government was disheartened with the response of the junior doctors setting conditions for talks, which did not result in a discussion with an open mind.

West Bengal Minister of State for Health Chandrima Bhattacharya asked if the doctors were guided by politics, and wondered if they wanted justice for the rape and murder of the resident doctor at the R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital.

Responding to the Minister's charge, a representative of the West Bengal Junior Doctor's Front (WBJDF), Kinjal Nanda, said, "There is no political colour in this demand. An open mind is a subjective choice. We believe our demands are conducive to an open and productive discussion. Our demands are clear."

**Chief Secretary's email**  
The conditions were set in response to an email by Mr. Pant on Wednesday, urging the doctors to resume duty immediately in adherence to a Supreme



**Firm on stance:** Junior doctors on the second day of the sit-in protest at Swasthya Bhawan in Kolkata on Wednesday. PTI

Court appeal to them to return to work by 5 p.m. on Tuesday.

"It is important to take a serious note that the common people have been deprived of your vital services... It is expected that

good sense will prevail and you will resume duties immediately in compliance with the Hon'ble Supreme Court's order," he said.

The email included a fresh invitation to a delegation of 12-15 junior doctors

for a discussion at the Secretariat at 6 p.m. on Wednesday.

At a press conference later in the evening, Ms. Bhattacharya joined Mr. Pant in saying that as law-abiding citizens, everyone

should adhere to the Supreme Court order. Asked if the State government would take action, the Minister said people would come to know when the government acted.

A three-judge Bench of the Supreme Court led by Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud had on Monday said that doctors cannot remain oblivious to the needs of the community they are intended to serve and appealed them to return to work by 5 p.m. on Tuesday.

"But if they [resident doctors] do not start work, we will not be able to restrain the State from taking action, because that is entirely within its jurisdiction," it had said.

Amid the ongoing slugfest between the State government and doctors, thousands of junior doctors continued the demonstration outside Swasthya

Bhawan, the headquarters of the Health Department on Wednesday. Parents of the rape and murder victim had also visited the protest site.

In addition to their earlier demands, they also sought the resignation of the Principal Secretary, Health, as well as the Director of Health Services and Director of Medical Education.

On Tuesday, Ms. Bhattacharya had said Chief Minister Banerjee was waiting for a meeting with the doctors till 7.30 p.m.

"Last evening, we found out from the media that the Chief Minister was waiting to meet us at the State Secretariat. We want to make it clear that in the email we received from the Health Secretary, there was no mention of the Chief Minister waiting for us," Dr. Nanda had clarified.

## GS - 2 Governance & Health Centre withdraws nod for eye drops over 'false' claims

**Zubeda Hamid  
C. Maya**  
CHENNAI/  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation has suspended permission given to the Mumbai-based ENTOD Pharmaceuticals to manufacture and market its eye drops which it said can help those with presbyopia do without reading glasses.

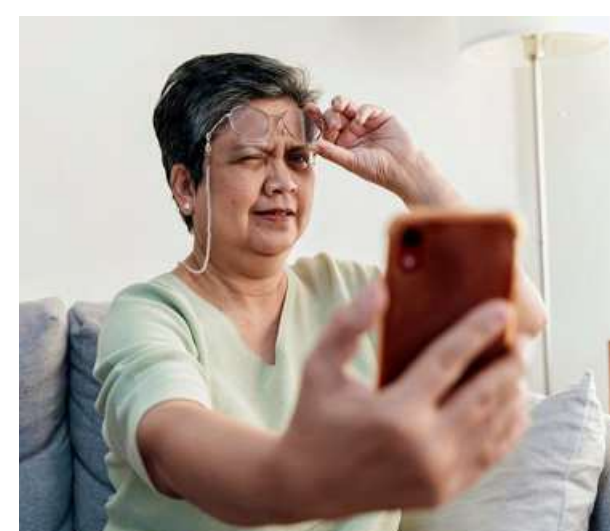
In a notification on Tuesday, the CDSCO said permission was suspended as the company's claim was likely to mislead the public, and had violated provisions of the New Drugs and Clinical Trial Rules, 2019. The permission given on August 6 was "for the treatment of presbyopia in adults", and it said no other claims may be made without approval.

In a statement on Wednesday, the firm said it would challenge the suspension in a court. Its chief executive officer, Nikhil K. Masurkar, said the company had not made any unethical or false presentation of facts with regard to PresVu Eye Drops. He said media reports on the product launch went viral and "public imagination led to an unusual escalation for which ENTOD Pharmaceuticals is not responsible".

He also said the Drugs Controller-General of India approval was based on a valid controlled clinical trial in 234 patients.

The trial, he said, was successful in showing efficacy and safety of the eye drops in patients with presbyopia.

The pharmaceutical firm had issued a press release about its PresVu eye drops, developed to reduce dependence on read-



The pharma firm had claimed the PresVu Eye Drops would help people with presbyopia do away with reading glasses. GETTY IMAGES

ing glasses for individuals affected by presbyopia, a common age-related vision condition typically seen in those over the age of 40.

On September 4, it tweeted that "PresVu was the first DCGI-approved proprietary prescription eye drops to eliminate the need for reading glasses". Tagging Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the post, it further said the drug was "a proud Indian innovation that could help millions of Indians see better and that too at an affordable price".

### Alarms sounded

Following widespread interest, multiple ophthalmologists began sounding a cautionary alarm and the company was asked for an explanation for its "unethical and false representation of facts". Ophthalmologists pointed out that the active ingredient used in the eye drops, pilocarpine, had been used for decades to treat another eye condition, glaucoma, but had since been replaced with newer, better drugs. They pointed out that the use of pilocarpine could cause several side effects.

"We do not use pilocarpine anymore as it is known to cause some discomfort to the eye and also because we have better drugs available in the market for glaucoma. The miosis or constriction of the pupils induced by pilocarpine helps people to see objects close to them better and is, at best, only a temporary solution for presbyopia," said Sreeni Edakhalon, an ophthalmic surgeon based in Thalassery, Kerala. He said the All India Ophthalmological Society had now constituted an experts' group to discuss the possible adverse effects of the newly marketed drug and to frame guidelines for the public.

Babu K.V., an ophthalmologist and public health activist, has written to the Union Health Minister stating that the tweet by ENTOD Pharmaceuticals was a gross violation of Section 3 (d) of the Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act, 1954, which specifically prohibits the advertisement of drugs for the treatment of diseases and disorders of the optical system.

## Modi wilted under Chinese pressure, says Rahul

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

The Congress's approach is in sync with the Narendra Modi government on major foreign policy issues, including India's relationship with the U.S.; no talks with Pakistan unless the flow of terrorism is stopped; and the rise of extremist elements in Bangladesh and Israel, the Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi said on Tuesday.

Mr. Gandhi, who concluded his four-day trip to the U.S., made these observations during an interaction with presspersons at the prestigious National Press Club at Washington.

While Mr. Gandhi talked of continuity in foreign policy issues, he was sharp in his criticism of the Modi government's handling of the border face-off with

China. "We have got Chinese troops occupying land the size of Delhi in Ladakh. I think that's a disaster. Media does not like to write about it," he said. "How would America react if a neighbour occupied 4,000 square kilometres of your territory? Would any President be able to get away with saying that he has handled that well?"

### Position on Pakistan

However, he endorsed the government's position on Pakistan. "We are not going to accept Pakistan carrying out terror acts in our country. We are just not going to accept it. And until they keep doing that, there are going to be problems between us," he said. Asked if the Kashmir issue is holding the two South Asian nations away from a dialogue, Mr. Gandhi replied in the negative.



Lok Sabha LoP Rahul Gandhi during an interaction with the media at the National Press Club in Washington, U.S. on Wednesday. PTI

"I don't see Mr. Modi is diverting very much from our approach with the U.S. I don't see ourselves changing direction very much from what he's doing," he said, indicating a bi-partisan approach towards the U.S.

Covering a wide spectrum of topics, the Opposition leader also talked about the state of democracy in India and how its

fighting back, his party's difficulty in fighting the elections with "frozen bank accounts", and being "the only person in Indian history to get a prison sentence for defamation".

"I can say to you that Indian democracy for the last 10 years was broken. It is fighting back, but it was broken," Mr. Gandhi said.

"We fought an election with our bank accounts

frozen. I don't know any democracy where that has happened. Maybe that type of thing happened in Syria or used to happen in Iraq. But we literally sat during our election and spoke to our treasurer and he says, well, we have no money. Now, you can have a resilient voter. You still need to run campaigns. You still need to have conversations. You still need to have meetings," he said.

But the Opposition leader made it clear that the fight for democracy was India's internal fight. "The fight for democracy in India is an Indian fight. With all due respect, it has nothing to do with anybody else. It's our problem. And we will take care of it. We will make sure that democracy is secure," he said.

**'HURTING SENTIMENTS'**  
» PAGE 4



## IN BRIEF



## PM to inaugurate Phase II of Ahmedabad metro on Sept. 16

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate Phase II of the Ahmedabad-Gandhinagar Metro Rail Project on September 16. The new metro line will connect Gujarat National Law University, Pandit Deendayal Energy University, GIFT City, and Gandhinagar's Sector-1 to improve urban mobility between Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar. The Phase II extension will cover a 21-kilometre stretch. After its inauguration, the total length of the metro will be 33.5 km from APMC at Vasava in Ahmedabad to Gandhinagar Sector-1.

## Villagers to be evacuated ahead of DRDO missile test

The district administration in Odisha's Balasore on Wednesday geared up to evacuate people from six villages close to the Integrated Test Range (ITR) at Chandipur ahead of a scheduled missile test by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), officials said. The district administration on the advice of the DRDO has made elaborate arrangements to temporarily evacuate 3,100 people from six villages adjacent to the launch pad of the ITR to nearby shelters. All temporarily affected people will be compensated as per rule, they said.

## Court awards life term to 12 in U.P. religious conversion case

A special NIA Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) court in Uttar Pradesh on Wednesday awarded life sentence to 12 people, including Islamic preachers Maulana Kalim Siddiqui and Mohammed Umar Gautam, in a 2021 case of an illegal religious conversion racket. Special Judge Vivekanand Sharan Tripathi, in his order, gave a 10-year jail sentence to four others. The accused were running an outfit involved in converting students with hearing disabilities and poor people to Islam with suspected funding from Pakistan's intelligence agency ISI, officials said.

## 8 held for gang-rape, kidnap of orchestra dancers in U.P.

Police have arrested eight men in connection with the abduction and gang-rape of two orchestra dancers at gunpoint in Uttar Pradesh's Kushinagar district. The accused forced the victims into their vehicles and took them to a house where the crime was committed, police said. They were identified as Nagendra Yadav, Ashwan Singh, Krish Tiwari, Arthak Singh, Ajit Singh, Dr. Vivek Seth, Nisar Ansari and Aditya Sahni. According to police, a cache of weapons, including illegal firearms, were recovered from them.

**Reliable IAS**  
Tejashwari promises 200 units of free electricity if voted to power

The Hindu Bureau  
PATNA

Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader Tejashwi Yadav on the second day of his *Karyakarta Samvad Yatra* in Samastipur promised to give 200 units of free electricity to consumers if voted to power in the 2025 Assembly election in Bihar.

"If our government is formed, we will give 200 units of free electricity. Despite having a double engine government and decades of National Democratic Alliance rule, the people of Bihar are suffering from steep power bills and smart meter glitches," Mr. Yadav, who is the Leader of Opposition in Bihar Assembly, told reporters on Wednesday.

The RJD leader had on Tuesday embarked on the *yatra* from Samastipur. In the first phase of his march, he will travel to Darbhanga, Madhubani and Muzaffarpur. The second phase will start after Durga Puja.

## GS - 2 Governance

### Railway eviction in Haldwani: SC gives Uttarakhand govt. two months to finalise rehabilitation

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday gave the Uttarakhand government two months to finalise a rehabilitation scheme for families facing eviction by the Railways in Haldwani.

A Bench headed by Justice Surya Kant, in a hearing on July 24, had asked the Uttarakhand Chief Secretary to meet with the Railway authorities and the Ministry of Urban Affairs to iron out a "fair and equitable" rehabilitation project for the families.

#### 'Fair and equitable'

The court had underscored the need to strike a balance between railway infrastructure development in Haldwani, considered to be the doorway to the hills in Uttarakhand, and the fundamental right to shelter of nearly 50,000 people accused of illegally living on railway land.

## I-T Dept. to confiscate Mukhtar's 'benami' asset

Press Trust of India  
NEW DELHI

The Income Tax Department will soon confiscate a ₹12-crore asset of deceased gangster-politician Mukhtar Ansari after the adjudicating authority constituted under the anti-benami assets law confirmed a 2023 attachment of the property, official sources said Wednesday.

The authority has held that the immovable property, a land parcel, located at 'Mauja Kapurpur NZA under Sadar Tehsil' in Ghazipur district of Uttar Pradesh is a "benami" asset.

The investigation wing of the I-T Department in Lucknow had issued a provisional order in April 2023 under the provisions of the Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Amendment Act of 2016 to attach the property.

## Shimla mosque dispute: protesters break barricades, clash with police

10 people, including policemen, left injured; some protesters, including Hindu Jagran Manch secretary Kamal Gautam, detained; case *sub judice* and no one will be allowed to take law into their hands, says State Minister Vikramaditya Singh

Press Trust of India  
SHIMLA

Protesters demanding the demolition of an 'illegal' portion of a mosque in Shimla's Sanjauli area clashed with security personnel on Wednesday, breaking barricades and pelting stones as police used water cannons and baton charge to disperse them. At least 10 people, including policemen, were injured.

Raising slogans of "Jai Shri Ram" and "Hindu Ekta Zindabad", hundreds of protesters gathered at the Sabzi Mandi Dhalli area and marched towards Sanjauli market, defying prohibitory orders and ignoring warnings by the administration. They broke



A policeman hurt in the clash with protesters in Shimla on Wednesday. ANI

barricades erected near the Dhalli tunnel while another crowd gathered at Sanjauli Chowk.

As the protesters, gathered on the call of some Hindu groups, entered Sanjauli and broke a second barricade near the mosque, police resorted to

baton charge and used water cannons to disperse them.

Police detained some protesters, including Hindu Jagran Manch secretary Kamal Gautam, and erected the barricade near the mosque again but the protesters refused to leave and

continued raising slogans against the administration.

The clashes left school students in Sanjauli, Dhalli and adjoining areas stranded. Residents vented their anger at the administration for not ordering the schools to remain closed for the day despite being aware of the demonstration.

In a protest against the baton charge on the demonstrators, the Shimla Beopar Mandal has called for a bandh on Thursday.

State Minister Vikramaditya Singh said everybody has the right to protest peacefully but no one would be allowed to take law into their hands.

Addressing media persons here, he said as far as the issue of unauthorised

construction in the mosque is concerned, the case is pending in the court of Shimla Municipal Corporation Commissioner and action would be taken under the ambit of law once the decision comes.

#### 'No politics'

"If the construction is unauthorised, the structure would be demolished according to law," he said, adding the case is pending since the past 10 years and there were Mayors of CPI (M) and BJP also in the past, so no politics should be done on the issue.

"Everybody lives peacefully in Himachal which is also known as 'Dev Bhoomi' and I appeal to the people not to take law into their hands," Mr. Singh said.

## Excise policy case: Durgesh Pathak gets bail, Kejriwal's judicial custody extended

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

Two persons, including senior Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader and Delhi MLA Durgesh Pathak, arrested in connection with the now-withdrawn Delhi excise policy for 2021-22, were granted bail by different courts in the Capital on Wednesday.

A Rouse Avenue court, while granting relief to Mr. Pathak, extended the judicial custody of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, a co-accused in the case, till September 25.

The court had, last month, allowed the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to prosecute Mr. Kejriwal and Mr. Pathak in connection with the alleged scam. The agency had filed its final chargesheet in July in which it termed the Delhi CM the "kingpin" of the case.

Meanwhile, the Delhi High Court granted bail to



AAP MLA Durgesh Pathak.

Hyderabad-based businessman Arun Ramchandra Pillai, against whom the Enforcement Directorate (ED) had initiated an excise policy-related money laundering probe. The ED had arrested him on March 6 last year, claiming him to be a close aide of Bharat Rashtra Samithi leader K. Kavitha and the frontman for the 'South Group'. Ms. Kavitha, who was also arrested by the probe agencies in connection with the excise case, was granted bail by the Supreme Court last month.

Soon after securing bail, Mr. Pathak interacted with the media, accusing the BJP of attempting to break the AAP.

"The Prime Minister wants to finish off AAP. We are seeing this unfold over the past 2-3 years. However, all their plans are slowly getting exposed. AAP leaders are now getting bail in the excise policy cases and are walking out of the jail one by one," he said, adding that the Central investigating agencies do not have any "substantive proof" against AAP leaders.

In response, a Delhi BJP spokesperson said, "Kejriwal is in jail while (former Delhi Deputy CM) Manish Sisodia, (Rajya Sabha member) Sanjay Singh, and (former AAP communication in-charge) Vijay Nair are all out on bail, and now Pathak has also joined this list. All these accused will soon be convicted after the trial concludes."

## Four T.N. fishermen injured as Sri Lankan naval ship rams boat

The Hindu Bureau  
NAGAPATTINAM

Four fishermen were injured after a Sri Lankan naval ship rammed a Tamil Nadu fishing boat, causing it to capsize on Tuesday evening. They were admitted to the Government Medical College Hospital in Nagapattinam.

#### Fishing gear lost

Their fishing gear, GPS equipment and mobile phones, worth ₹6.50 lakh, were washed away in the sea.

The incident occurred off the coast of Kodiyakkara, when Sakthivel, Devraj, Karthikeyan, and Sathesh, of Seruthur, were fishing on a fiberglass boat owned by Dharman, of the same hamlet.

They told the Nagapattinam Marine Police that they had put out to sea two days earlier.

They were injured and tangled in their nets. Yet, the naval officers picked



The fishermen said they were tangled in nets and injured after their boat sank.

them up and questioned them for about six hours, they alleged. After they protested that they were fishing in Indian waters, the Sri Lankan Navy handed them over to some other Tamil Nadu fishermen who had arrived at the scene. These fishermen brought the injured ones to the Seruthur fish landing site and retrieved their capsized boat.

Sources in the Nagapattinam marine police said they had recorded the fishermen's statements and would conduct an inquiry.

## Gujarat clash over religious flags, FIR filed against 20

Press Trust of India  
BHARUCH

Members of two communities indulged in a violent clash over the issue of installation of religious flags in a locality in Gujarat's Bharuch city, leaving two persons injured, police said on Wednesday.

Seventeen persons have been detained in connection with the incident which took place on Tuesday night in Gokul Nagar area, it said.

"People from the two sides gathered in large numbers and then hurled stones at each other, which left two persons injured and caused damage to some vehicles parked there," said Bharuch Superintendent of Police Mayur Chavda.

"We have registered an FIR against 20 persons for engaging in violence and detained 17 of them for further investigation. The situation is under control at present," Mr. Chavda said.

## MVA seat-sharing talks on track, consensus reached on over 125 Assembly seats: Thorat

Vinaya Deshpande Pandit  
MUMBAI

Seat-sharing talks among the three constituents of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) for the Maharashtra Assembly poll are on track and consensus has been achieved on over 125 seats, State Congress Legislature Party leader Balasaheb Thorat told *The Hindu* in an exclusive interview.

Mr. Thorat exuded confidence that the Opposition alliance will come to power with over 180 seats in the 288-member Assembly. He said the talks will resume after Anant Chaturdashi on September 17, and that the campaign strategy will be drawn up thereafter.

Days after Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray's visit to Delhi fuelled speculation about the alliance's CM face, the Congress leader said the candidate will be picked after the poll. Congress sources have said in the past that the CM face is likely to be picked from the constituent that secures the most



BALASAHEB THORAT  
Congress leader

number of seats in the election. "We have held three rounds of talks, but there has been a gap due to Ganeshotsav," he said.

#### 'Will be a straight fight'

On speculation about a third front emerging in Maharashtra politics, Mr. Thorat said: "The BJP's way of politics is never straightforward. They try to bring about a division of votes to win. They use some organisations. This is the experience that people have for all these years. But this time, it will be a straight fight between the MVA and the *Mahayuti*."

The statement assumes significance as Vanchit Ba-

Various sections of society feel deceived. They feel that the BJP gives them its word but does not keep it. And this discontent will reflect in the poll

hujan Aghadi leader Prakash Aghadi had announced at a recent press conference that an alliance of Dalits, OBCs, and Adivasis will bring about political transformation in the State and that Adivasis will not dance to the tunes of either the Congress or BJP.

Slamming the *Mahayuti* over the recent visit of Union Home Minister Amit Shah to Mumbai, Mr. Thorat said the differences between the constituents of the ruling alliance are out in the open. "There is tremendous tussle over seats, administrative issues, and clearing of files. Corruption has reached unprecedented levels. The BJP has

been trying to encroach on the seats of its allies. People can see all these things for themselves," he said.

The Congress leader also spoke about the impact that Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange-Patil, who has threatened to resume his stir from September 16, will have on the election.

"There are two aspects to it. Earlier, there was a celebration over Jarange-Patil's demands being accepted, but nobody knows what assurance was given. Whatever be it, the *Mahayuti* government should fulfil it. Secondly, the discontent is not only within the Maratha community but also within other communities in the State," he said.

Mr. Thorat said the Dhangars, for example, feel cheated as they were also given an assurance by the government. "So, various sections of society feel deceived. They feel that the BJP gives them its word but does not keep it. And this discontent among different communities will reflect in the poll," he said.



## I will continue as CM, the post is not vacant, says Siddaramaiah

**The Hindu Bureau**  
BENGALURU

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Wednesday asserted that there should be no doubt over his continuation in the post.

This comes as the Congress is grappling with politically ambitious talk over the chief ministerial post by nearly half a dozen Cabinet Ministers since Mr. Siddaramaiah's name was dragged into the issue of alleged irregularities in the allotment of sites by the Mysuru Urban Development Corporation (MUDA).

Attempting to put to rest speculation around the post, he said such a discussion does not matter when the post is not vacant. "There is no question of such a discussion (on leadership change) when the Chief Minister's post is not vacant. There should be no doubt over my continuation as the Chief Minister," he told presspersons here. He also pointed out that Ministers were also saying that he would continue as the Chief Minister.

### MLCs seek action

Mr. Siddaramaiah's statement came after multiple Congress leaders highlighted the damage being caused to the government and the party by Ministers publicly declaring their chief ministerial ambitions. A few MLCs have also sought action against the Ministers and leaders who have joined the conversation on leadership change publicly. They in-



Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah

clude Ministers M.B. Patil, Satish Jharkiholi, and G. Parameshwara besides senior Congress leaders R.V. Deshpande and Basavaraj Rayaraddi, who have at different points in time publicly stated their chief ministerial ambition despite the party asking leaders to not speak on the issue.

The speculation over a change of leadership has intensified after Opposition BJP and Janata Dal (Secular), targeted the Chief Minister for his alleged involvement in the MUDA scam and sought his resignation. So far, the Congress has been backing the Chief Minister and has accused the Opposition and Governor Thaaarachand Gehlot of attempts to destabilise the government.

It may be noted that following complaints by a few persons, the Governor has given permission for an inquiry into the alleged irregularities in MUDA involving the Chief Minister's wife. The issue is now before the Karnataka High Court as Mr. Siddaramaiah has challenged the Governor's action.

## Kerala govt. all set to host Finance Ministers' conclave

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan to open today event that will see participation by Ministers of Telangana, T.N., Karnataka, Kerala and Punjab, besides leading economists and planning experts

**The Hindu Bureau**  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Centre-State financial relations, grievances regarding cuts in allocation, and the need for a united front to secure a fair share in the 16th Finance Commission will take centre stage in Thiruvananthapuram on Thursday at a one-day conclave to be attended by Finance Ministers of four southern States and Punjab.

Kerala, which is organising the Conclave of Finance Ministers, sees it as a platform for States ruled by BJP rivals to thrash out their positions with respect to the 16th Finance Commission headed by Arvind Panagariya.

Telangana Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka, Karnataka Revenue



**K.N. BALAGOPAL**  
Kerala Finance Minister

Minister Krishna Byre Gowda, Punjab Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema, Tamil Nadu Finance Minister Thangam Thennarasu and Kerala Finance Minister K.N. Balagopal will attend the conference along with leading economists and planning experts.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan is scheduled to open the conclave at Hotel Hyatt Regency here at 10 a.m.

Leader of the Opposition V.D. Satheesan will also address the conclave.

Mr. Balagopal said the conclave is being organised against the backdrop of the Union government's stance that contradicts the spirit of fiscal federalism and sustainable Centre-State relations.

Preserving the sanctity of tax devolution, the Centre's increasing reliance on cesses, Finance Commission norms for the

division of resources, and surcharges and States' grievances concerning borrowing limits are expected to come up in the discussions.

Mr. Balagopal said a "vertical and horizontal" imbalance persists in the transfer of resources.

"Kerala is taking the lead to organise this conclave in the context of the challenges that fiscal federalism faces today. Ideation with regard to presenting the development and financial issues faced by the States before the 16th Finance Commission is the primary aim of the conclave. A report of the 15th Finance Commission has observed that States shouldered 62.4% of the aggregate expenditure, while 63% of the revenues goes to the Centre. States should receive at least 50%," Mr. Balagopal said.

## Khan seeks report on wiretap accusations

**The Hindu Bureau**  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala Governor Arif Mohammad Khan on Wednesday waded into the political controversy unleashed by Left Democratic Front (LDF) Independent legislator P.V. Anvar by accusing Additional Director-General of Police, Law and Order, M.R. Ajith Kumar of il-

legally ordering a wiretap on leading politicians and government figures, allegedly including Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and Cabinet members.

According to the Raj Bhavan, Mr. Khan sent a letter to the government underlining the gravity of the MLA's accusations, given their implications for national security, adminis-

trative transparency, human rights, and privacy.

Mr. Khan reportedly demanded a government report on the phone-tapping scandal and recommended that the police take cognisance of the legislator's imputation.

Officials said Mr. Khan also pointed out that the MLA's averments cast doubt on the public's per-

ception of how the government and law enforcement conducted their official business and the administration needed to clear the air.

Mr. Khan also reportedly expressed concern about whether unauthorised persons, as claimed by Mr. Anvar, had access to police wiretaps or could carry out such illegal missions in a private capacity.

## Central team reaches A.P. to assess flood damage

**The Hindu Bureau**  
VIJAYAWADA

A six-member Central team arrived here on Wednesday to assess the damage caused by the recent spell of heavy rain and floods in Andhra Pradesh.

The Inter-Ministerial Central Team (IMCT) was led by Anil Subramaniam, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs.

### '7 districts affected'

Before the Central team began its field visit, Andhra Pradesh Government Special Chief Secretary (Disaster Management) R.P. Sisodia and Water Resources Department Chief Engineer Venkateswara Rao gave a presentation on the flood fury and the prevailing weather conditions, at the office of the State Disaster Management Authority (APSDMA) at Kunchanapal-



Special Chief Secretary R.P. Sisodia explaining the weather conditions to the Central team members on Wednesday. G.N. RAO

li in Guntur district.

They pegged the preliminary estimate of the losses caused by the floods at approximately ₹6,880 crore. They said agricultural crops in 2.06 lakh hectares and horticultural crops in 19,686 hectares were damaged, affecting nearly three lakh farmers.

Mr. Sisodia told the team that a total of seven districts - West Godavari, Eluru, Krishna, NTR, Guntur, Bapatla and Palnadu - were affected by the rain, which triggered massive inflows into the Prakasam Barrage in Vijayawada, and caused breaches to the Budameru rivulet.

## Relax guidelines for rehabilitation: Chief Secretary of Telangana

**The Hindu Bureau**  
HYDERABAD

Telangana Chief Secretary A. Santhi Kumari has requested the Centre to ensure that guidelines pertaining to relief and rehabilitation of families affected by calamities such as floods are made liberal enabling the State government to extend relief to the needy.

The Chief Secretary briefed the Central team led by Col. K.P. Singh about the extensive damage caused in most parts of the State due to the unprecedented rainfall that lashed

the State from August 31 to September 3.

The six-member Central team held discussions with the Chief Secretary and senior officials on Wednesday.

Special Chief Secretary of State Disaster Management Arvind Kumar gave an overview of the damage caused and the measures initiated by the government to provide immediate relief to the affected people. The initial estimate of damage due to the heavy rain and floods was pegged at ₹5,438 crore and the actual enumeration was under way.

## A.P. High Court directs special court to give NOC for five-year passport to former CM Jagan

**The Hindu Bureau**  
VIJAYAWADA

Justice V.R.K. Krupa Sagar of the Andhra Pradesh High Court on Wednesday directed the Special Court for Trial of Criminal Cases Relating to Elected MPs and MLAs in Vijayawada (Special Court) to issue a no-objection certificate (NOC) / permission to the former Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, to obtain a passport for a period of five years.

With this, the court disposed of the petition filed by Mr. Reddy by duly mentioning that the rest of the conditions imposed by the Special Court stand intact. Mr. Reddy had moved



Jagan Mohan Reddy

the Special Judge for CBI cases in Hyderabad and filed necessary applications for passport, and the said court directed the Special Regional Passport Officer (RPO), Vijayawada to issue a passport for five years, subject to certain conditions, but the RPO

sought an NOC from the Special Court since a case filed by Municipal Administration Minister P. Narayana under Sections 499 to 502 and 34 (defamation) of the Indian Penal Code was pending.

At this juncture, Mr. Reddy filed a criminal miscellaneous petition in the Special Court for permission to travel to the United Kingdom (U.K.) to celebrate his daughter's birthday, from September 3 to 25, but it allowed the grant of NOC for issuance of a fresh passport / renewal only for one year on complying with the conditions thereof. Aggrieved by it, Mr. Reddy filed the present petition in the High Court.

## Protect privacy of survivors who deposed before Hema panel, WCC urges Kerala CM

**The Hindu Bureau**  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Women in Cinema Collective (WCC) has requested the Kerala government to ensure the privacy of those who deposed before the K. Hema Committee constituted to study the issues faced by women in the Malayalam film industry.

WCC members Revathy, Bina Paul, Rima Kallingal and Deedi Damodaran met Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Wednesday and expressed the hope that the Special Investigation Team (SIT), which is probing the allegations, would be more considerate to the survivors by making the



Rima Kallingal, Revathy, Bina Paul and Deedi Damodaran leave after meeting Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan. S. MAHINSHA

procedure transparent and releasing the terms of reference. Mr. Vijayan assured them that the government would address their concerns.

The meeting comes a day after the Kerala High Court directed the govern-

ment to hand over the entire Hema committee report to the SIT and file a report on what action can be taken on the basis of it.

The Kerala High Court had, following the WCC's interventions, mandated that internal complaint

committees be formed on all film sets. However, only a 27-member monitoring committee led by the film chamber and consisting of representatives of various film organisations was formed.

The WCC has now asked for this committee to be reconstituted as a statutory committee as per the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 with a woman as chairperson.

Another major suggestion was for more representation of women in key posts of the Kerala State Chalachitra Academy and the Kerala State Film Development Corporation.

## 'Film Producers' Association failed to help women members'

**The Hindu Bureau**  
KOCHI

Film producers Sandra Thomas and Sheela Kurian have called for a change in the leadership of the Kerala Film Producers' Association (KFPA) alleging that it has failed to address the concerns of women members.

In a letter sent to the secretary of the association, they alleged that a meeting convened here on September 6 to discuss the problems faced by women producers was an eye-wash.

The president of the association did not attend the meeting while the secretary left after signing

the minutes of the meeting. "We had recorded our differences over the content of the letter sent by the KFPA to Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan in response to the Hema Committee report on the problems faced by women in Malayalam cinema. But we were told by a member that the letter had already been sent to the Chief Minister. We had learnt that the majority of the executive committee members were unaware of the content of the letter," they said.

### 'Elect new committee'

They stated that the producers' body, which had remained silent after the Hema committee report

was made public, responded within hours when allegations of sexual misconduct were raised against actor Nivin Pauly. This showed that the association was working to protect the interests of a few only. The association is being controlled by a few external forces. A change was inevitable and a general body meet should be called to elect a new executive committee, they said.

The producers asked whether the Association of Malayalam Movie Artists (AMMA) was controlling the KFPA.

The association should take a serious position on the Hema committee report, they said.

## Filmmaker Prakash gets bail in sexual assault case

**The Hindu Bureau**  
KOCHI

The Kerala High Court on Wednesday granted anticipatory bail to filmmaker V.K. Prakash in a sexual assault case registered based on a complaint of a woman scriptwriter.

Justice C.S. Dias, while allowing the anticipatory bail petition, observed that Mr. Prakash's custodial interrogation was not necessary and that he had no criminal antecedents.

The court directed the filmmaker to surrender before the investigation officer within two weeks for interrogation.



## Manipur Police book valley-based rebels for CRPF camp attack

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The Manipur Police have filed a *suo motu* case against valley-based armed miscreants who attacked a Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) camp on September 8, amid renewed violence in the State.

At least 11 people have been killed since September 1 in the hill and valley districts of Manipur.

The first information report (FIR) registered at the New Keithelmanbi police station in Kangpokpi district said the company commander of the CRPF camp at Laimaton Thangbuh village had complained that on September 8, "unknown valley-based armed miscreants attacked the camp by indiscriminately firing from 5.30 p.m. to 6.40 p.m."

### One villager killed

It added that an inquiry revealed that a 46-year-old woman identified as Nengjakhol Lhungdim, a resident of the village, died of bullet injuries on the spot while three homes were burnt down. A case of attempt to murder has been registered.

A police official said the attack was reportedly carried out by cadres of the KYKL under the umbrella of G5 - five valley-based banned Meitei insurgent groups. The groups are

**'KYKL cadres under the umbrella of G5 - five banned Meitei groups - were behind the attack'**

UNLF(K), KYKL(O), PRE-PAK, KCP and KYKL(S).

"The CRPF retaliated strongly and one militant was likely injured. Inputs suggest that he succumbed to his injuries but we are yet to trace his body," said the official.

The civil society groups and students in the Meitei-dominated valley districts staged protests on Tuesday, often clashing with the police and the Central security forces, to demand the removal of Director General of Police Rajiv Singh and Security Adviser Kuldip Singh, who is also the chairperson of the Unified Command, which is responsible for all security-related decisions in the strife-torn State.

The protesters demanded that the Unified Command, which also steers the Central security forces, be headed by Chief Minister N. Biren Singh.

Ethnic violence between the tribal Kuki-Zo and the Meitei people erupted in the State on May 3, 2023. As many as 237 people have been killed and more than 60,000 people have been displaced in the violence.

## A day after clashes, uneasy calm prevails in Manipur

Students hold peaceful demonstrations at several places across five districts where mobile and other Internet services remained suspended for second day; police defend firing of tear gas shells

The Hindu Bureau  
GUWAHATI

An uneasy calm prevailed in restive Manipur on Wednesday, a day after protesters clashed with security personnel on the streets of the State's capital Imphal leaving more than 50 students injured.

There were no reports of fresh violence either in the Imphal Valley comprising five districts - almost the central part of the State dominated by the non-tribal Meiteis - or in the peripheral hills where the tribal Kuki-Zos are a majority.

An indefinite curfew was imposed in three of these districts in the valley - Imphal East, Imphal West, and Thoubal - while mobile and other Internet services were suspended temporarily in all five districts on Tuesday. There are no restrictions in the hill districts.

The State government said these steps were taken "to thwart the design and activities of anti-national and anti-social elements, maintain peace and communal harmony and prevent any loss of life or danger to public/private property".

Security personnel patrolled the streets of Im-



Strict watch: CRPF personnel deployed at Gamgiphai, the inter-State check post boundary, after the recent violence in different areas in Kangpokpi, Imphal West on Wednesday. ANI

phal and the valley beyond as most people remained indoors and small groups of students held peaceful sit-in demonstrations at some places demanding resolution of the ongoing ethnic conflict.

Amid the prevailing tension, Manipur University postponed all scheduled postgraduate and undergraduate examinations until further notice.

On the day, Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya left Imphal for Guwahati. He is the Governor of Assam with the additional charge of Manipur.

The Manipur Police de-

fended the firing of tear gas shells and stun grenades to disperse protesters on Tuesday. According to local media, the police said that some of the protesters - mostly students - used petrol bombs, firearms, and slingshots with iron balls.

"The protest rallies taken out by the students were peaceful until certain elements instigated them to resort to violence. At least 10 of our personnel were injured," a senior police officer told journalists in Imphal on Wednesday.

Students across the Imphal Valley have demand-

ed the removal of the State's security adviser Kuldip Singh and Director General of Police Rajiv Singh for failing to protect the lives and properties of citizens. Many of them, including juveniles, have camped at the all-women's market in Imphal's Khwairamband area since Monday.

Meanwhile, unknown gunmen attacked the residence of veteran journalist Yambem Laba in Uripok Yambem Leikai of Imphal on Wednesday. They fired about 10 rounds, some of which hit the wall of his bedroom.

## Shah failed to control Manipur violence, he must resign: Congress

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

Stepping up its attack on the Union government over the renewed violence in Manipur, the Congress on Wednesday said Home Minister Amit Shah had been a "total failure" in controlling the violence, and demanded his resignation.

Party spokesperson Supriya Shrinete, Manipur Congress chief K. Meghachandra, Lok Sabha member from Inner Manipur A. Bimol Akoijam, and AICC in-charge of Manipur Girish Chodankar held a joint press conference in which they also questioned Prime Minister Narendra Modi for not visiting the strife-torn State even once in the past 16 months.

**'Burning for 16 months'** They said the Prime Minister was more concerned about crises and conflicts in other parts of the world than in his own country. "A State of this country has been burning for the last 16 months and the Prime Minister of this country does not have even a minute to go to Manipur," Ms. Shrinete said.

"I am proud of the fact that my leader Rahul Gandhi has gone to Manipur thrice and has made an appeal for peace. Where is the PM? Why should I not say that there should be an inquiry on the PM, Prime



Supriya Shrinete

Minister's Office. Why should I not say that the Home Minister be sacked, he has been a total failure," she added.

Ms. Shrinete said 11 to 12 people had died in the past 10 days, and rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) and drones were now being used to target civilians.

Mr. Akoijam said post-Independent India had not seen the kind of violence that Manipur had witnessed in the past 16 months. "The constitutional mechanism has completely collapsed - 60,000 people have been displaced and the situation is akin to Partition. Our Prime Minister is more concerned about crises and conflicts in other parts of the world than in his own country. Perhaps he doesn't even consider Manipur a part of the country," he said.

"The government of India is solely responsible for the subversion of the Constitution and the tragedy," Mr. Akoijam alleged.

## 'Rahul hurting sentiments with baseless anti-India remarks abroad'

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The Centre and the BJP on Wednesday mounted a scathing attack on the Congress and Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, who is currently on a U.S. visit, accusing him of joining hands with anti-India forces abroad, making anti-national remarks on foreign platforms, and supporting anti-reservation agenda.

In a post on X, Home Minister Amit Shah said that it had become a "habit" for Mr. Gandhi and his party to stand with forces that conspired to divide India and make anti-national statements.

Mr. Shah said that by speaking about "abolishing



I want to tell Rahul Gandhi that as long as the BJP is there, neither can anyone abolish reservation nor can anyone mess with the nation's security

AMIT SHAH  
Home Minister

reservation in the country", Mr. Gandhi had once again brought the Congress's anti-reservation face to the forefront. "I want to tell Rahul Gandhi that as long as the BJP is there, neither can anyone abolish reservation nor can anyone mess with the nation's security," he said.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh joined in, ac-

cusing Mr. Gandhi of making misleading and baseless remarks that "hurt the dignity of India". "He has said that the Sikh community in India is not allowed to wear turbans in gurdwaras, they are being prevented from behaving according to their religion. This is completely baseless and far from the truth. The entire country recognises

and respects the great role played by the Sikh community in protecting the culture of India. It is not befitting an Opposition leader to make such false statements about them," said Mr. Singh.

The BJP leader said Mr. Gandhi's claim that the NDA government wanted to scrap reservation was also completely baseless.

At a press conference, BJP national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi targeted Mr. Gandhi over his meeting with "anti-India" member of the U.S. Congress, Ilhan Omar, and other such persons in the U.S.

Mr. Trivedi alleged that the Congress leader had now got the support of pro-Khalistan activist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun.

## Prelims - Defence & Infrastructure

### 'Developed border areas act as deterrent to adversary's claims'



Dinakar Peri  
NEW DELHI

The objective of the government is to transform villages along the northern borders, especially in Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, and Arunachal Pradesh, which are suffering from limited connectivity and infrastructure, into model villages, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Wednesday. "We aim to connect them to the mainstream of development," he added.

Describing border area development as a core component of national security, Army chief General Uppendra Dwivedi said a developed area with a strong economic and tourist activity acts also as a deterrent



Army chief General Uppendra Dwivedi presents a memento to Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Wednesday. ANI

to the adversary. "It basically discredits adversary claims or who otherwise claim this is theirs. People are there on ground to confirm what is correct and what is not," he said.

The Union government has approved the Vibrant Village Programme (VVP)

in the States of Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Uttarakhand, and Union Territory of Ladakh.

Talking of the progress achieved in border area development, Mr. Singh said, "The Border Roads Organisation has constructed over 8,500 km of roads and more than 400 permanent bridges. Atal Tunnel, Sela Tunnel and Shikun-La Tunnel, which is going to be the world's highest tunnel, will prove to be milestones in border area development." He said the ongoing efforts have not only ensured prompt military deployments in sensitive regions, but have also connected the people residing in border areas with the rest of the country.

## Army officers attacked, their woman friend raped in M.P.

Press Trust of India  
MHOW

Two young Army officers and their two women friends were attacked, and one of the women was raped by a group of men during a picnic in Indore district, Madhya Pradesh on Wednesday.

The officers, aged 23 and 24, were undergoing Young Officers course at the Infantry School in Mhow, and had gone out for a picnic late on Tuesday. Seven unidentified men attacked the officers and the women near Mhow-Mandleshwar road. The victims were taken to Mhow Civil Hospital, where it was found that the accused had raped one of the women. "A case has been registered and man-hunt is on," the police said.

## Damaged smartwatch key to probe in murder of Bangladesh politician

Vijaita Singh  
NEW DELHI

A damaged smartwatch found on the body of senior Awami League leader Ishaque Ali Khan 'Panna' could provide investigators vital clues about the Bangladesh politician's murder, a senior government official told *The Hindu*.

His body was found on August 26 at a betel nut plantation in Meghalaya's East Jaintia Hills, around 1.5 km from the Bangladesh border.

India will continue to probe the murder case and if needed the findings will be shared with the Bangladesh authorities, the official said.

"He was throttled to death, following which a case of murder has been registered. The smartwatch has been sent for fo-



BSF Director-General Daljit Singh Chaudhary during a visit to India-Bangladesh border, in North 24 Parganas district. PTI

rensic examination. We could not switch it on. We identified him with the help of the passport the deceased had on his body," a police official said on condition of anonymity.

The police official added that the place where the body was found did not have any network connectivity and since it was raining that day, the scene of

crime was disturbed. After Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina stepped down and escaped to India on August 5, violence erupted in the neighbouring country and in several cases, members of the Hindu community, temples and shops were specifically targeted.

Several leaders of Ms. Hasina's Awami League

have been killed, arrested or attempted to flee the country since August 5. Explaining the circumstances around Mr. Khan's killing, the official said it was suspected that he was trying to flee Bangladesh and was carrying a huge amount of money but no cash was found near the body.

"It is possible that he may have been killed along the border and body dumped in India. The area where the body is found has lot of plantations," the official said.

The official said the smartwatch would help in tracing the trail taken by the deceased before he was killed. "There are reports that he was with a judge who was to come to India from Bangladesh. The judge was however apprehended by the Border Guards Bangladesh."

## BSF jawan injured in firing by Pakistani troops across border

The Hindu Bureau  
JAMMU

A Border Security Forces (BSF) jawan was injured in "an unprovoked firing incident" by Pakistani troops from across the International Border in the Akhnour area of Jammu on Wednesday.

The incident took place around 2.35 a.m. Constable Durba Jyoti Das sustained injuries in the attack. A befitting response was given by the BSF, officials said. The BSF has been put on alert "to avert any aggression by enemy".

### Militants killed

Two unidentified militants were killed in an anti-militancy operation in Kathua district on Wednesday.

An Army spokesman said the two terrorists

"were neutralised in the ongoing operation at Khandara in Kathua". "The operation carried out by troops of the Army's Rising Star Corps is in progress," the Army said.

Earlier in the day, the troops of the Rising Star Corps "established contact with the terrorists in the general area Khandara, Kathua". The troops engaged the hiding militants in a firefight.

The killing of militants comes at a time when Jammu and Kashmir is preparing to hold its first Assembly election as a Union Territory later this month.

The ceasefire violation between the two countries has been very rare ever since India and Pakistan renewed the ceasefire agreement on February 25, 2021.

## Concerned over safety, say Bengal judicial officers

The Hindu Bureau  
KOLKATA

A letter signed by three judicial officers of the Diamond Harbour subdivisional court in West Bengal, expressing concern over safety, provided a fresh handle to the Opposition parties to target the Trinamool Congress government over the law and order situation in the State.

In the letter addressed to the District Judge, South 24 Parganas, the judicial officers have stated that a person was found loitering in the judges' housing complex, and a policeman was sending people inside the complex to disconnect electricity.

The letter requested immediate measures to ensure the judges' safety and security.





## INBRIEF



## Delhi HC seeks NADA's stand on Bajrang Punia's plea

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday asked the National Anti-Doping Agency to respond to a petition filed by wrestler Bajrang Punia challenging his suspension from participating in competitions after he refused to give samples for a dope test. The court issued notice to the agency on the plea moved by Mr. Punia, who was one of the wrestlers at the forefront of last year's protest against then Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) president Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh. NADA's counsel said a disciplinary panel had been constituted and it was looking into the issue. Mr. Punia's counsel pressed for an interim relief citing the upcoming Senior World Wrestling Championships in Albania. However, the court said no formal application had been filed for the same.

## Cabinet gives nod for building 62,000 km of rural roads

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the proposal of the Ministry of Rural Development for implementation of the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana-IV (PMGSY-IV) from financial year 2024-25 to 2028-29. The financial assistance is to be provided for the construction of 62,500 kilometres of all-weather roads for providing new connectivity to eligible 25,000 unconnected habitations along with construction and upgrading of bridges on the new connectivity roads, an official statement said. The flagship rural road construction programme has been provided with a total outlay of ₹70,125 crore, of which the central share is ₹49,087.50 crore and States' share is ₹21,037.50 crore. PMGSY-IV road alignment planning will be undertaken through the PM Gati Shakti portal.

## Centre gives clearance for 'Mission Mausam'

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet approved 'Mission Mausam' on Wednesday with an outlay of ₹2,000 crore over two years.

The Ministry of Earth Sciences will be the nodal body implementing the mission. The aim of the programme will be to bolster research and development, and capacity in atmospheric sciences, weather surveillance, modelling, forecasting, and management.

Critical elements of Mission Mausam will include deploying next-generation radars and satellite systems.

## GS - 1&amp;2 Social Issue &amp; Education

## Madrastas 'unfit' for proper education, NCPCR tells SC

Including a few NCERT books in the curriculum is a mere guise in the name of imparting education and does not ensure that children are receiving formal and quality education, it says

Krishnadas Rajagopal  
NEW DELHI

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), the top child rights protection body in the country, has told the Supreme Court that madrasas are "unsuitable or unfit" places for children to receive "proper education".

The NCPCR, represented by senior advocate Swarupama Chaturvedi and advocate Abhaid Parikh, made the submission in response to petitions challenging an Allahabad High Court judgment which struck down the Uttar Pradesh Board of Madrasa Education Act, 2004.

The commission said the textbooks in madrasas "profess supremacy of Islam". "Merely teaching a few NCERT books in the curriculum is a mere guise in the name of imparting education and does not ensure that the children are receiving formal and quality education," it argued.

The NCPCR highlighted issues of curriculum, eligibility of teachers, opaque funding, violation of land laws, and failure to provide children a holistic environment as problems associated with madrasas.

"The teachers appointed in madrasas are largely



The NCPCR highlighted issues of curriculum, eligibility of teachers, opaque funding, and others. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

dependent on the conventional methods used in learning Koran and other religious texts. The 'scanty and unregularised' working in madrasas creates a haywire system which just stands alone on the conventional ground of religion," it said.

"Majority of madrasas have no idea as to how to plan social events or extracurricular activities, such as field trips, that could provide students with some level of experiential learning... Madrasa education is neither all-encompassing nor thorough. It is not helping children advance since it lacks so many crucial components of learning. Madrasas infringe on children's fundamental right to a good education by failing to provide these basic requirements. Children are denied not only a suitable education

but also a healthy atmosphere and improved opportunities for growth," the commission said. It said children from faiths other than Islam were also studying in madrasas in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, and Uttarakhand. Providing Islamic religious education to non-Muslims was a violation of Article 28(3) of the Constitution, which upholds the right against forced participation in religious instruction or worship.

The High Court had ordered the transfer of madrasa students to regular schools. The top court stayed the implementation of the High Court decision in April. On Wednesday, a three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud said the petitions would be taken

up for a detailed hearing soon.

Taking Uttar Pradesh's case, the NCPCR drew the court's attention to the Darul Uloom Deoband Madrasa founded in Deoband in Saharanpur district.

"According to the information available the Deoband Madrasa fanned out across South Asia and has also set up seminaries, or madrasas, teaching an austere version of Islam, particularly along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border... it has also been alleged by Taliban extremists groups to have been influenced by the religious and political ideologies of Darul Uloom Deoband Madrasa... the Deoband Madrasa issues fatwas online as well as offline and has a very strict and conservative interpretation of Sharia, as evidenced by its issuance of roughly 2,50,000 fatwas which restrict followers in terms of faith, life, and many other aspects," the NCPCR submitted.

"Though madrasas dot the country, only States such as Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand have Madrasa Boards. Large number of children attend madrasas that are either unrecognised or unmapped," the commission observed.

## Cabinet approves health cover for all aged 70 and above

Bindu Shajan Perappadan  
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Wednesday approved health coverage to all senior citizens aged 70 and above irrespective of income under the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY).

This will benefit nearly 4.5 crore families with six crore senior citizens by providing ₹5 lakh free health insurance cover on a family basis.

## New card

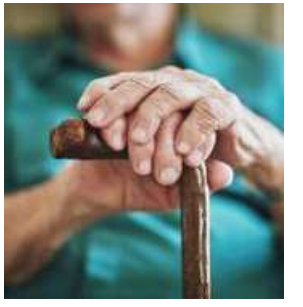
This scheme was one of the promises made in the BJP manifesto.

With this approval, persons aged 70 and above, irrespective of their socio-economic status, will be eligible to get the benefits under the AB PM-JAY.

The eligible senior citizens will be issued a new distinct card under the scheme.

Senior citizens belonging to families already covered under the AB PM-JAY will get an additional top-up cover up to ₹5 lakh per year for themselves (which they do not have to share with other members of the family who are below the age of 70).

All other senior citizens aged 70 and above will get a cover up to ₹5 lakh per year on a family basis. Senior citizens who are already getting benefits of other



Eligible senior citizens will get a new distinct card under Ayushman Bharat scheme.

public health insurance schemes such as the Central Government Health Scheme (CGHS), Ex-Servicemen Contributory Health Scheme (ECHS), and Ayushman Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) may either choose their existing scheme or opt for AB PM-JAY.

It has been clarified that senior citizens aged 70 and above who are under private health insurance policies or Employees' State Insurance scheme will be eligible to get benefits under the AB PM-JAY.

"The AB PM-JAY is the world's largest publicly funded health assurance scheme, which provides health cover of ₹5 lakh per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalisation to 55 crore individuals corresponding to 12.34 crore families," the Union government said in a release.

The expansion of cover to persons aged 70 and above was announced by Mr. Modi in April.

## GS - 3 Environment

## Centre to nudge banks to fund green energy projects

Jacob Koshy  
NEW DELHI

To help meet India's ₹30 trillion funding requirements for installing 500 GW of non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030, the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy is in talks with financial institutions, public and private sector banks, urging them to commit a portion of their loans to renewable energy projects.

At the forthcoming Re-Invest summit, scheduled in Gandhinagar next week, all major banks and financial institutions will be giving "shapath patra" (promissory notes) about their proposed loans or funding plans in the renewable energy sector, Union Minister for New and Renew-



At an upcoming energy investment summit, all major banks and finance institutions will give notes about proposed loans. FILE PHOTO

able Energy Pralhad Joshi said at a press briefing on Wednesday.

Such a "shapath patra" would be given by developers, manufacturers and private equity investors, he added.

"We have not specified any targets but banks are

expected to give firm commitments. Only with the participation of banks and industry can India hope to attract finance to facilitate the renewable energy sector," said Mr. Joshi.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to inaugurate the conference.

## Hindu, Muslim groups urge people to send views on Waqf Bill to House panel

Ishita Mishra  
NEW DELHI

With just two days left for submitting suggestions to Parliament's Joint Committee on Waqf (Amendment) Bill 2024, Muslim and Hindu organisations have intensified campaigns to ensure that people send their feedback.

Organisations such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the All India Muslim Personal Law Board are sharing Google forms on social media and messaging platforms to encourage people to submit their suggestions.

Small gatherings are also being organised to promote awareness of the Bill and the joint panel. Muslim groups are using Friday

prayers as a platform to reach out, while Hindu groups are spreading the word through Ganesh puja pandals, evening prayers at temples, and resident welfare associations.

Maulana Khalid Rasheed Firangi Mahali, a member of the AIMPLB, said that a QR code had been uploaded on the website of the organisation which can be scanned by people to get a pre-drafted message on the objections to the Waqf Bill.

"We made a call to people to use our QR code to send suggestions to the committee through Friday prayers on September 6 and six lakh people used it within two hours," said Mr. Mahali. He added that till 1 p.m. on Wednesday,

82,70,231 mails had been sent to the committee.

## 'For and against'

The pre-drafted message of the AIMPLB says that the Bill should be "rejected completely". It says the proposed provisions indicate that the Bill has been designed to remove Waqf properties from their status as Waqf and to diminish the control of mutawallis (caretakers). It says the Bill violates the freedom of religion granted by the Constitution.

A similar appeal to reject the Bill was also made by Zakir Abdul Karim Naik, a religious leader who is abroad.

Reacting to the call of Mr. Naik, Minority Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju took

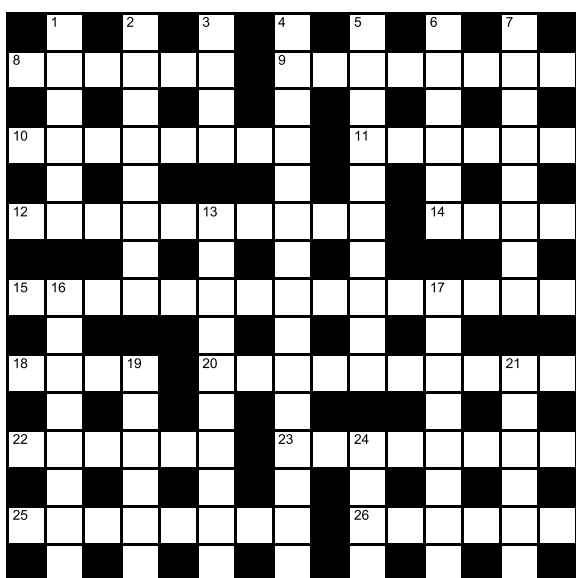
to X and said that people should not mislead innocent Muslims.

A pre-drafted letter is also being shared on WhatsApp and social media asking Hindus to send their suggestions to the panel in favour of the Bill. The letter has a reference to Tiruchendurai village in Tamil Nadu, which has a 1,500-year-old Hindu temple that was claimed as Waqf property. It points out how a survey of Waqf properties is done using taxpayers' money but no civil courts in the country can pass an order on Waqf disputes.

Vinod Bansal, spokesperson of the VHP, said the organisation was discussing the issue at small gatherings and through social media.

## THE CROSSWORD + 14278

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



## Across

- Compulsion to wear clothes hiding uniform (6)
- Dutiful old boy coming to pass on English book (8)
- Repeatedly in favour of 'mum' as a matter of courtesy (3,5)
- Important stuff in part to push buttons (6)
- Showman fighting over primaries (10)
- Hide son with relatives (4)

- A constant nuisance, one coming from the Rose Garden? (5,2,3,5)
- Objects laid getting rid of Yankee cracksmen (in the US) (4)
- Stuff intercepted by port ends in Germany breaking coded message (10)
- Feel at home in London when Mafia boss drops in to pray (6)
- Chess expert acting lame to sacrifice (8)
- Ready to accommodate adult wanting length adjusted to look stylish (3,1,4)
- Authority to wield overwhelming power (6)

## Down

- Question to duck before strange people necessary to carry on business (6)
- Say Magellan's notice delivered to king securing passage cost (8)
- Customer is one who exploits? (4)
- 'Eyesore' from retinopathy intermittently agitates cast (3,1,6,5)
- Point in time when easily influenced people in tow make merry (4,6)
- Oracles retreating piously, bishop pinches some (6)
- Usual practice, insurance covers and settles (8)
- Sense to check plugs to brand electrical equipment (10)
- Superior piping above spotless counter (6-2)
- Spillers conceding runs, sadly including good fielders (3,5)
- Society journal with a new catchphrase (6)
- Places where religious rites are performed making a base for reforms (6)
- Chaps taking one look (4)

## SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

## Solution to previous puzzle

C	O	M	E	I	N	O	M	N	I	V	O	R	E
A	E	N	A	E	N	A	X						
M	A	R	S	E	L	L	E	L	Y	R	I	C	
P	R	E	B	T	E	S	U						
S	N	I	F	I	L	E	I	S	T	H	M	U	
I	E	A	R	N	E	E							
T	H	R	O	B	T	A	G	A	L	O	N	G	
E	E	E	G	O	R	E							
A	N	T	E	R	I	O	R	G	E	N	I	T	
C	U	N	O	F	I	S	O	N	G				
L	A	C	R	I	S	O	P	S	I	N	G		
L	I	C	A	T	N	L	S						
Q	U	A	R	T	E	N	D	E	A	V	O	U	
U	S	C	T	I	S	T	M	I					
E	L	E	P	H	A	N	T	S	E	C	E	D	

## Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

## FAITH

## Steely resolve of Mahabali

In His avatars like Matsya and Kurma, Lord Vishnu slayed the rakshasas who were His foes. But in the Vamana avatar, He spared King Mahabali, grandson of Prahlada, because Lord Narasimha assured Prahlada that He would not kill his progeny.

Sengalipuram Sri Damodhara Dikshitar said in a discourse that His manifestation of Vamana (as a dwarf) was so handsome.

Had the Lord thought, He would have descended as a celibate straightaway, but He chose to be born as the son to sage Kashyapa and his wife Adhithi and cherished following religious procedures.

The difference between 'dharma' and 'dhana' is that in the former, charity is given without expecting anything in return, while in the latter, it is given with anticipation. In the sacrificial performance of King Mahabali, the Lord appeared as a young celibate.

The king asked Him what He wanted and the dwarf said He required just three feet of space. The king promised to give the same.

Sukracharya, the king's guru, ascertained the true identity of the alm-seeker and tried to prevent the king from executing his promise.

The guru said telling lies in times of danger is not a sin, and so he wanted the king to tell God that he told a lie and could not uphold his promise.

But the king refused the Acharya's command and said telling lies would plunge a person into danger and fulfilled his promise.



GS - 3 Science & Technology

Organ-on-chip tech could boost BioE3 objective to personalise medicine

Researchers currently take a decade and \$2.3 billion on average to bring a drug from lab to the market. One big roadblock is that drugs that clear animal-testing in a clinical trial's early stages often fail when tested with humans. Organ-on-chip technology offers a solution to this problem

Manjeera Gowravaram  
Viraj Mehta

In August 24, the Government of India announced the 'BioE3' policy to drive innovation in the biotechnology sector by establishing biomanufacturing facilities, bio-AI hubs, and bio-foundries. ('AI' stands for artificial intelligence.) A key focus area of the policy is precision therapeutics, which involve developing and administering drugs according to the needs of individual patients. The policy also aims to boost the development of biologics such as gene therapy and cell therapy.

Recent advancements in human-relevant 3D culture models, also known as 'new approach methods' (NAMs), have shown promising results in the field of precision therapeutics. These models include 3D spheroids, organoids, bioprinting, and organ-on-chips.

The global organ-on-chip market is expected to be worth around \$1.4 billion by 2032. This expansion is the result of increasing investments in R&D within the field of NAMs, particularly in organ-on-a-chip technology. Since its invention, this technology has acquired significant momentum and stands poised to revolutionise the healthcare sector by integrating cells derived from a human body with a well-defined *in vitro* biological environment (i.e., in the lab) that mimics the body's conditions.

A major driving factor in the organ-on-chip market is the increasing demand to replace the use of animals to test drugs.

In April, an English company named CN Bio raised \$21 million from venture capitalists to expand its R&D in organ-on-chip technology. In the U.S., Vivodyne raised \$38 million in seed funding to integrate large-scale automation and AI with organ-on-chips. These are just two recent examples to illustrate the growing interest in this technology and its commercial value.

Drug testing and development

In the current and traditional drug development process, researchers take almost a decade and an average cost of \$2.3 billion to bring a new drug from the lab to the market. However, many drug candidates also fail in the final stages of clinical trials. One major reason is that in the early stages of trials, these drugs are tested on animal models – animals genetically engineered to respond to a drug the way a human organ (or organs) might. Drugs that succeed on these animals often fail in humans, however.

Organ-on-chip technology offers a potential solution to this problem by providing a more accurate and efficient platform for testing drugs without involving animals or humans in preclinical testing. An organ-on-chip is a small device designed to recreate the dynamic functions of some human organ in a controlled microenvironment. They are expected to be better than the cell cultures and animal models researchers currently use for testing the effects of a drug. The results from the use of these devices would in turn provide a better understanding of the drug-candidate's efficacy and toxicity, reduce the use of animals, and pave the way for personalised treatment.

The technology could also reduce the time and cost of drug development,



Organ-on-chip technology offers a platform for testing drugs without involving animals or humans in the preclinical stages. JANET STEPHENS

bringing drugs to the market faster and potentially at lower prices.

Investments in technology

Researchers first reported the usefulness of an organ-on-chip model in a 2010 study. Two years later, the U.S. National Institutes of Health allocated \$100 million in funding for scientists to develop specific organs-on-chip devices, including for the kidneys, intestines, and the heart, as well as body-on-chip devices that could simulate the effects of a drug on multiple organs at once.

The technology's potential for drug development was quickly clear, and as a result, there are several organ-on-chip companies around the world today focussing on developing microphysiological systems for various organs. In addition to those above, chips exist today to mimic the liver and the lungs.

The U.S. government further boosted this field by passing the FDA Modernisation Act 2.0 in September 2022. The Act allows researchers to develop, use, and qualify organs-on-chips as a suitable alternative wherever applicable, including to test drugs at the preclinical stages of drug development. A year earlier, the members of the European Union had resolved to phase out the testing of cosmetics on animals. The bloc is currently working towards a regulatory framework for the use of NAMs, including organ-on-chips.

Many international pharmaceutical companies are also testing the waters. For instance, Bayer is collaborating with TissUse for a liver and multi-organ-on-a-chip model. Roche is using chips developed by Mimetas to study the effects of inflammatory bowel disease and hepatitis B virus infections. AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson are using several chips made by Emulate Bio



Organ-on-chips are devices designed to recreate the functions of human organs. They are expected to be better than the cell cultures and animal models researchers currently use for testing the effects of a drug

for their biological research. According to one recent estimate, at least 30 pharmaceutical companies worldwide are evaluating organ-on-chip models in a bid to move away from animal testing.

Challenges for India

India also took a step in this direction by amending the New Drugs and Clinical Trials Rules 2019 to permit the use of human organs-on-chips and other NAMs prior to and in conjunction with animal testing when evaluating new drugs. In July this year, the CSIR-Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, Hyderabad, and the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation hosted a workshop on the latest scientific and regulatory developments in the field of NAMs.

Developing an organ-on-chip technology requires experts from diverse fields – such as bioengineering, pharmacology, biotechnology, computer science, and clinical medicine – to work together. Currently, more than 80 laboratories are working on NAMs, including developing 3D culture models for various applications. To fully harness the technology's potential, India needs to establish dedicated centres that facilitate such collaboration.

Second, the presence of such centres will help to converse between industry and academia. In particular, personalised medicine requires NAMs to accommodate

genetic differences between Indian populations for which a NAM is being tailored and the populations on which a given drug or therapy has already been tested.

Third, researchers will have to contend with regulatory bodies and their requirements and navigate regulatory frameworks pertaining to the development, standardisation, and qualification of organ-on-chip devices. The centres could streamline this process and ensure chips make it from the lab bench to the factory floor without a glitch.

Since these centres will host a dedicated and qualified team of researchers, they could also build a new skill base for the next generation of scientists and engineers and help ensure a steady flow of talent to drive the development of organ-on-chip technology forward. The centres could even create opportunities for an industry-linked doctoral programme to help graduate and postgraduate students to move seamlessly between academia, research, and industry after completing their education.

As medical research advances rapidly, it is important for the Indian government, the business and investment communities, and policymakers and regulators to facilitate the establishment of organ-on-chip centres that improve the healthcare system whilst boosting the economy. By supporting these technologies and centres, India could also increase its self-sufficiency in a domain of developmental and strategic importance.

(Manjeera Gowravaram has a PhD in RNA biochemistry and is a freelance science writer. Viraj Mehta has a PhD in biomedical engineering and supports pharmaceutical companies and CROs in establishing NAMs or microphysiological systems based assays for drug discovery and development. gmanjeera@gmail.com virajmehta64@gmail.com)



Churchill lures people eager to see its plentiful polar bears. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

World's 'polar bear capital' prepares for climate challenges

GS - 3 Climate Change

Associated Press

Churchill is a remote town some 1,700 km north of Winnipeg, Canada. It's a place where forests meet the tundra on the shore of Hudson Bay. The town lures people eager to see its plentiful polar bears, but as climate change edged into the picture, the locals began designing more flexible buildings and seeking to entice more varied visitors if, as scientists fear, shrinking sea ice sent the bear population crashing.

Residents, government officials, and experts say the town is a model for coping with dramatic shifts and attribute it to a rural mindset that focusses on fixing, not complaining.

The town once had thousands of people before the military base and a rocket research launch site shut down decades ago. Those sites fell into decay, and what had been a bustling port closed. Train service stopped for more than a year as weather shattered poorly maintained tracks.

As the town dwindled, bears began coming to town more often, no longer frightened by noise from the base and rocket launches and made desperate as climate change shrank the Hudson Bay ice they depend on as a base for hunting.

A local mechanic built a fat-tired, souped-up recreational vehicle to see

The town was once busy until a rocket research launch site shut down. As the town shrank, bears began coming in more often, no longer frightened by noise from the launches

bears safely. Photos and documentaries attracted tourists, who spend \$5,000 a visit on average and millions of dollars overall. Churchill now bills itself as the polar bear capital of the world, and though it has no stoplights, it features upscale restaurants and plenty of mom-and-pop hotels.

If that comes to an end, Churchill hopes to be ready.

The town is promoting tourism for beluga whales, although those too may be harmed as the entire Hudson Bay ecosystem, including the food the belugas eat, shifts to one usually seen further south. It's also highlighting visitors' prospects for seeing the northern lights, spotting birds they can't see at home, and even trying dogsledding.

Mike Spence, the mayor since 1995, grew up with the military installation, "and all of a sudden it closes, and then all of a sudden you get the tourists, the abundance of wildlife, and the aurora. That's where you take advantage of it. You sort of tweak things, and you improve life."

The shuttered port and the damaged train tracks? The town took them over and got both running again. Ground sinking because the weather is getting rainier and permafrost is thawing? New buildings have metal jacks that can be adjusted when a corner sinks nearly half a foot in five years.

Lauren Sorkin, executive director of the Resilient Cities Network, said every city should have a plan to adapt to climate change's effect on the economy and tourism.

"Churchill is a standout example of a city that is planning ahead to protect communities and preserve our natural environment and its biodiversity," she said.

For feedback and suggestions for 'Science', please write to science@thehindu.co.in with the subject 'Daily page'

THE SCIENCE QUIZ

The science of sound-making

Siva Shakthi A.

QUESTION 1

Warner Bros. Pictures released the first talking film, *The Jazz Singer* in 1927. It used a device that drove an audio disc and a film with the same motor so that the sound synchronised with the picture. What was the device called?

QUESTION 2

A record is a medium to store sound data in the form of a flat disc cut with slim grooves. Until 1895, all records were made of wax or hard rubber. Both these materials were prone to defects, so they

were'n't durable. German-American inventor Emile Berliner overcame this issue by making records using \_\_\_\_\_, a synthetic compound until then being used in electrical components. Fill in the blank.

QUESTION 3

For a short time after they were invented, compact disc players used semiconductor lasers that emitted light of wavelength X to read audio data encoded in compact discs. What was the value of X? Hint: it's the upper end of the visible light range.

QUESTION 4

\_\_\_\_\_ is an algorithm to

losslessly compress data. It works by assigning a code to different input characters based on the frequencies of these characters to create MP3 files. Fill in the blanks.

QUESTION 5

This device converts audio to electrical signals and imprints them on a magnetic material for playback later. It was inspired by the magnetophone, an audio record-cum-playback device developed by German engineers during World War II. Name the device.

Answers to September 5 quiz:

1. Transplantation procedure between individuals of different

species – Ans:

Xenotransplantation  
2. Radiation discovered by German scientist in November 1895 – Ans: X-rays

3. Biological element implicated in Swyer, de la Chapelle, and Klinefelter syndromes – Ans: X-chromosome

4. Plants evolved to survive with very little liquid water – Ans: Xerophytes

5. Horizontal line in system René Descartes invented in the 17th century – Ans: X-axis  
Visual: Xenon  
First contact: Aakanksha Parihar | Varshinidevi K. | Thejasvi M. | Vaibhanshi Chaudhary | Sasireka Manivel

Answers to September 6 quiz:

1. Brain wave type associated with relaxation – Ans: Theta waves  
2. Fatty acid crucial to maintain synaptic plasticity – Ans: Omega-3 (DHA)

3. Neurotransmitter with important role in learning and memory – Ans: Dopamine

4. Bilingualism increases plasticity in this part of the brain – Ans: Prefrontal cortex

5. Principle that "neurons that fire together wire together" – Ans: Hebbian plasticity  
Visual: Hippocampus  
First contact: P.N. Moorthy | Anmol Agrawal | Seema Das

Please send in your answers to science@thehindu.co.in



## GS - 2 Polity



## Public accounts

The PAC must assert its role as an instrument of parliamentary oversight

Over the last decade, the Central government, with a comfortable majority in Parliament, has evaded meaningful parliamentary accountability. Now, however, the BJP heads a coalition that is dependent on allies, and the Opposition is stronger. The changed situation is an opportunity for the renewal of parliamentary oversight over the executive's functioning. The proactive beginning of the newly constituted Public Accounts Committee (PAC) is a case in point. On September 2, it notified 161 subjects it had picked for deliberations during its term, most of them based on CAG reports. The panel has picked five subjects *suo motu* – reforms in the banking and insurance sectors; review of the implementation of centrally sponsored welfare schemes; policy measures underway for transition in the energy sector; performance review of regulatory bodies established by Acts of Parliament, and the levy and regulation of fees, tariffs, user charges, on public infrastructure and other public utilities. The PAC, headed by Congress Member of Parliament K.C. Venugopal, has made use of the rule which clearly states that its functions can go "beyond the formality of expenditure to its wisdom, faithfulness, and economy". This rule has been used only rarely and to make a political point. Though the subjects picked by the PAC have political undertones, the overarching public interest involved is unmistakable.

The constitutional scheme envisages that Parliament controls the finances of the country. Any tax may be imposed only by passing legislation. All expenditure of the government needs prior sanction from Parliament through Appropriation Bills. The CAG is a constitutional office that examines and audits the financial functioning of all government departments. All its reports are sent to the PAC, one of the oldest and most significant parliamentary panels. Government measures that pick the winners of the economy have led to serious allegations of crony capitalism in recent years. The government has refused to investigate the serious charges against SEBI Chairperson Madhabi P. Buch and the Adani Group, which controls seven Indian airports. Public sector banks and regulatory bodies have a lot to answer for. The BJP has already opposed any PAC investigation into these questions. The 22-member PAC has 13 members from the BJP-led NDA and nine Opposition MPs, including four from the Congress. The committee's assertive posturing could be undermined by the ruling coalition's majority. The PAC, and the Department Related Standing Committees, many of which are yet to be constituted, should assert their role as instruments of parliamentary authority and the enforcer of the executive's accountability to the people.

## One-man rule

Maduro must realise socialist rhetoric is no substitute for popular support

Venezuela's disputed July 28 presidential election and the subsequent crackdown on the Opposition by the regime of President Nicolás Maduro have deepened the political divisions in the oil-rich country. According to the National Electoral Council, Mr. Maduro, President since 2013 upon the death of Hugo Chavez, won 51%, while his main opponent Edmundo González secured 43%. But the Opposition claims that the tally sheets issued by electronic voting machines, suggested Mr. González's hands down victory. The Opposition claim was backed by the U.S. and other western countries, while Mr. Maduro got confirmation of his victory from his hand-picked Supreme Court. Rejecting calls to quit, he has unleashed the crackdown. At least 24 people have been killed and 2,400 arrested in relation to the protests since the results, according to the Human Rights Watch. Last week, police surrounded the Argentine embassy in Caracas where some Opposition figures had taken refuge. Mr. Maduro had already sacked Argentina's diplomatic mission after its President, Javier Milei, supported Mr. González. Mr. González, a retired diplomat who faces charges for incitement of protests left for Spain on September 7.

The election has not been fair from the beginning. The Opposition's original pick to counter Mr. Maduro was María Corina Machado, a former lawmaker. After she was banned by the comptroller-general, a Maduro ally, from holding public office, Mr. González was chosen later. The election process itself was disputed, and three weeks after the vote was held, the authorities are yet to release results by individual polling stations. Mr. González's flight could be a temporary victory for Mr. Maduro, who has tightened his grip over every branch of the state, but his challenges are far from over. Venezuela, which is also under U.S. sanctions, has seen rapid economic decline and a rise in extreme poverty. About 7.7 million people have fled in recent years amid hyperinflation, economic contraction and scarcity for food and medicine. Mr. Maduro has also seen growing regional pressure, with even left-wing governments of Brazil, Chile and Colombia urging him to publish the full results. The tensions between Venezuela and Brazil came out in the open when the Maduro regime revoked Brasilia's authorisation to manage and represent the Argentine embassy. With his legitimacy in question, Mr. Maduro, grappling with a sanctions-hit, mismanaged economy, a divided polity at home, and growing isolation abroad, is behaving like a dictator. He has turned Chavez's popular Bolivarian project into a one-man rule with socialist rhetoric. This allows him to cling on to power, for now, but at a great cost to the people of Venezuela.

## GS - 2 Bilateral Relations

## Instability and uncertainty stalk Bangladesh



M.K. Narayanan

a former Director, Intelligence Bureau, a former National Security Adviser, and a former Governor of West Bengal

It is often mentioned that the fate of individuals and nations hang by a slender thread. On August 5 this year, even as Muhammad Yunus (the current head/chief adviser of the interim government in Bangladesh) was to be arraigned before a court of law for certain alleged actions against the State, the then Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, was compelled to resign and flee the country to neighbouring India. This was a sequel to several weeks of protests over a 'quota system', reserving a percentage of all government jobs to descendants of 'freedom' fighters involved in Bangladesh's 'war of independence'. The government's heavy-handed measures to suppress the student demonstrations had led to a groundswell of protest against the government, and Sheikh Hasina herself. Even after the proposal for the 'quota system' was withdrawn, massive protests continued, signalling the depth of anger against the government, and Sheikh Hasina personally, compelling her to flee.

Bangladesh currently has an interim government headed by Mr. Yunus, an economist, which has the backing of the Army, and with students functioning as the 'storm-troopers'. In quick succession, the Chief Justice, the central bank governor, a host of university vice-chancellors and other key personnel were compelled to step down. The main charge levelled against Sheikh Hasina is that she had become a virtual dictator, trampling on the civil liberties of citizens and embarking on high handed actions against her political opponents.

## Still early days but much can happen

It would be invidious to characterise Sheikh Hasina's ouster as a victory for 'democratic forces'. No doubt, it has some of the characteristics of the 'Prague Spring' that rocked Czechoslovakia in the mid-20th century, but the world does not have to be reminded of how the revolt was snuffed out within a short time frame. There may be no equivalent of the 'Warsaw Pact Powers' (which ended the Prague students' revolt) on the horizon in Bangladesh as of now. Today's major powers, essentially the United States and China, however, have a huge stake in how matters turn out and are not averse to meddling in Bangladesh.

What happened in Bangladesh does not conform to a classical 'colour' revolution instigated by the U.S. or the West, but it has provided scope for the 'Big Powers' to meddle in the affairs of Bangladesh, anxious to secure a base for themselves in South Asia, as part of their larger designs.

Much will depend on the turn of events. In the first flush of exuberance and anger against Sheikh Hasina, vandalism seemed to reach its apogee, with images of Sheikh Hasina and even the statue



The troubles in Bangladesh are by no means over and India may need new strategies to deal with the situation to its east

of the nation's founding father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, becoming targets of riotous mobs. The position of Mr. Yunus itself appears tenuous at this stage, and it is uncertain how long the Army would support the present arrangement. Pressure from political parties to hold early elections is already evident, and if and when elections are announced, it could shatter the surface calm.

## Areas of danger

The real concern is whether the 'democracy deficit', which Sheikh Hasina helped perpetuate to overcome political obstacles, can be offset democratically, or whether it would lead to another round of violent events. A worrying aspect is the increasing role of Islamist parties in Bangladesh which, in recent years, has become a potent force. An India intent on maintaining a balance between religion and politics would find the growing presence of radical Islamist entities a potent danger.

What India can at present possibly hope for is that the people of Bangladesh would continue to remember India's role in the early 1970s, which led to the creation of an independent state of Bangladesh. Also that any and future governments would display the same degree of warmth as the outgoing Sheikh Hasina regime. While many in India have not forgotten the 'dark days' of the early 1970s – when India had to fight a war with Pakistan on the one hand and cope with a hostile U.S. at another level, intent on detaching India from Russia – so as to bring about the independence of East Pakistan (later to become Bangladesh), India can only hope that similar sentiments still prevail in Bangladesh, notwithstanding the degree of hostility towards Sheikh Hasina and the Awami League.

For its part, India must acknowledge, and be grateful for, the support extended by Bangladesh over the years in dealing with militant groups belonging to India's northeast, that had sought sanctuary there and become a scourge for India's security establishment. Under Sheikh Hasina these militants could no longer find sanctuary in Bangladesh. A prolonged period of uncertainty in Bangladesh following recent developments could well result in the regrouping of, and revival of militant activities in India by groups such as the United Liberation Front of Asom, the Mizo National Front and the NSCN.

Meanwhile, the West, which generally views events across the globe through the prism of geo-politics, is already putting out the idea that Bangladesh might well become the crucible for the next phase of conflict between India and China. Undoubtedly, both India and China have important stakes in Bangladesh. More recently, Bangladesh has begun to make certain overtures to China to accommodate its economic and

defence needs. It is quite possible that with the eclipse of Sheikh Hasina, the successor regime in Bangladesh might well seek to strengthen its China connection, even as Sheikh Hasina was seen to be manifestly pro-India. All this is, however, in the realm of conjecture, and it may be too early to view Bangladesh through the prism of geo-politics – China, India, the U.S. *et al.*

## Compounding problems for India

For an India, wrestling with the problem of having to deal with difficult and uncertain situations along much of its periphery, specially to the west and the northwest, the Bangladesh developments could not have come at a worse time. In the east, it now confronts a Bangladesh that appears set to shift from being a friendly neighbour to a problem state. The vexed issue of the Rohingya Muslims, which needed an early solution, will, in all likelihood, be put on the back burner for now.

Myanmar is currently controlled by a clutch of generals (who are not above being enticed by western military advisers), and while the generals may not be overtly hostile to India at present, they do not see themselves as being in step with it. Lurking in the background are again certain external forces – not only China and Pakistan – who are likely to fish in these troubled waters. This could exert a pincer-type stranglehold on India's ambition to achieve a peaceful and prosperous South Asia.

India may, hence, need to devise a new set of strategies to deal with the emerging situation. One myth that has already been exploded is that India had little to fear from developments to its east and south. Both regions have today become highly problematic, to say the least. The threat from China also looms larger than ever before if, as is being anticipated, it could secure a beachhead in a post-Sheikh Hasina Bangladesh. A simultaneous strengthening of the China-Pakistan axis would thereafter pose a threat of a kind that had not existed for several years. More than anything else, it is the spectre of Islamist radicalism that could well haunt the entire region – more so in Bangladesh at this time alongside the threat of a possible link up between radical Islamist elements in Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand and Southeast Asia.

The troubles in Bangladesh are by no means over. Violent street protests are usually a precursor for events that seldom have a good ending. The experience of other countries is that students seldom achieve through protests what they seek. This has been the recent experience in Europe and elsewhere. Movements of this kind tend to be usually taken over by forces inimical to democracy. Consequently, India faces a moral and security dilemma in the wake of recent events in Bangladesh.

## Perils of decentralisation with Chinese characteristics

## GS - 2 IR &amp; Polity



Pranay Kotasthane

a researcher at the Takshashila Institution, an independent centre for research and education in public policy



Manoj Kewalramani

a researcher at the Takshashila Institution, an independent centre for research and education in public policy

In his Independence day speech this year, the Prime Minister urged States to compete with each other to attract investors. In sharp contrast, extreme subnational economic competition seems to have run its course in China. Here is why decentralisation, once celebrated as a reason for China's economic miracle, has turned counter-productive.

Unlike India, where city-level governments account for less than 3% of total government spending, a staggering 51% of government spending in China happens at sub-provincial levels. Local governments also have a much broader qualitative mandate. They are almost exclusively responsible for unemployment insurance and pensions, subjects Indians generally associate with the national government.

Yet, China's extreme decentralisation does not make it a federal country. A key feature of a federal system is that higher-level governments cannot extinguish the powers given to lower-level governments, as the Constitution protects them. No such provision exists in China's Party-state system. After Deng Xiaoping's Southern Tour caused local governments to go on a spending spree, the central government severely and immediately restricted their ability to raise money through the Tax-Sharing Reform of 1994.

## Overcapacity is structural

Local governments had to find a way out. Since economic growth was an important determinant of local leaders' political prospects, they started prioritising industrial construction over the provision of public services. They offered industrial land at deep discounts compared to residential land in the hope that industrial outputs would increase regional economic growth and also become a source for future local tax revenues. Local governments attracted investors with attractive land rights. Firms accepted the offer, churned out goods at low rates because of cost advantages, and exported to the world.

This investment-led model is structurally prone to overcapacity. This model of competitive sub-national growth is akin to a car having two

accelerators and no brakes. The arrangement worked well till the Hu Jintao period. The central leadership set broad priorities and targets while local governments experimented and competed. The process of crossing the river while feeling the stones created tremendous wealth, while also generating structural overcapacity, wasteful investment, and loss-making entities.

The overall trend remained net positive for two reasons. First, the directives were broad enough for local governments to try different ways to achieve growth or reform goals. For instance, Guangdong interpreted the central goal of economic opening by experimenting with special economic zones. Other regions were free to follow alternate models. Likewise, the central leadership permitted local innovations in the housing sector, rather than imposing a particular solution. This policy innovation process was locally determined and not micromanaged by the centre.

Second, a salubrious geopolitical climate was crucial. Foreign markets were willing and able to absorb China's ever-increasing capacity. China's steel sector's expansion is a case in point. Starting from the turn of the millennium, within six years, China went from being a net steel importer to the largest steel manufacturer and a net exporter. By the beginning of the 2010s, tackling overcapacity in the steel sector had become a prominent policy objective. While many Chinese companies failed along the way, several rode this wave, generating tremendous value for employees and the government.

## The car encounters a slope

However, this model began to reach a tipping point around the time Xi Jinping came to power. Researchers at the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) in 2014 estimated that half of all investment between 2009 and 2013 was "ineffective", amounting to a waste of nearly \$6.9 trillion. Mr. Xi's solution to this predicament was to strengthen central control and establish traffic lights to direct state and private capital in desirable domains.

Since then, central directives have become

narrower. The desire for self-sufficiency has further resulted in them focusing on specific product lines. For example, the drive to localise the entire supply chain for semiconductors is divorced from market-based demand and the comparative advantages of the Chinese industry. The "Big Fund" began in 2014 intending to build a self-sufficient semiconductor industry. Drawing on this, many local governments indiscriminately poured money into chip-making firms. Ten years later, China has not mastered the production of advanced chips. Nevertheless, many firms continue to milk local governments for funding. The Economist reports that 30% of all industrial firms were making losses at the end of June 2024, beating the previous worst performance during the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s.

Another reason is that other governments now see China's overcapacity as a national security threat. This is evident in the geopolitical wrangling underway over tech-enabled Chinese products such as electric vehicles and telecom equipment. Moreover, China's bad international conduct has exacerbated the negative perceptions of Chinese products and investments.

## Shortcomings in the BRI approach

Mr. Xi planned to substitute western markets with increasing domestic demand and find new international markets through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Increasing domestic demand has not worked out because this is unfamiliar territory for a structure obsessed with supply-side stimuli. The BRI approach has not worked because the participating countries are not economically strong enough to generate huge demand.

In short, overcapacity and export orientation are baked into Chinese-style decentralisation. This model has now reached its limits due to China's arrogant approach to international relations and its drive towards self-reliance. Though we might see a jump in exports for some sectors, China faces an economic decline if it does not transform its political and economic relations with the world's major countries.

India must note that decentralisation, once celebrated as a reason for China's economic miracle, has turned counter-productive

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Unrest in Manipur

Over the past year, Manipur has experienced turmoil, with multiple instances of clashes between communities. The situation has now escalated to a point where students are demanding the removal of top public servants for their

failure in protecting the lives and the properties of citizens. The situation now has some resemblance with the unrest being experienced in Bangladesh. The current government must focus on the issues in Manipur. We have already witnessed the tragic loss of

lives due to these community clashes. **Gaddam Yeshwanth**, Hyderabad

## U.S. speech

The Leader of the Opposition paying a visit to the United States is fine up to the point where his

public connect is friendly from the perspective of India as a whole. But criticising the government in a foreign land, or unfurling a political agenda does undermine the government. Rahul Gandhi's criticism of the government is totally acceptable but this

must be within India. He is now the Leader of the Opposition and must carefully calibrate his speeches while outside. **Kirti Wadhawan**, Kanpur

**Peace and an Indian role** It is good tidings that India

could be playing a global role in mediating peace between Russia and Ukraine (September 11). The 'four-point principle' mooted by India must succeed and ensure peace and tranquility. **Mani Natarajan**, Chennai



# GS - 2 Governance & Health

## India's sickle cell challenge

Last year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the National Sickle Cell Anaemia Elimination Mission to eliminate sickle cell disease as a public health problem by 2047, from Shahdol, Madhya Pradesh. Mr. Modi has seen this debilitating condition from close quarters during his term as Chief Minister of Gujarat, where sickle cell disease is a major public health concern. In this article, we highlight the many opportunities to build on this momentum.

**Challenges in India**  
With over a million people affected with sickle cell disease, India bears the world's second largest burden of this condition. A majority of the patients are concentrated in the tribal belt running across Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra.

Sickle cell disease is caused by a genetic abnormality: if both parents carry the sickle cell trait, the child has significant chances of being born with the disease. While healthy individuals have disc-shaped red blood cells, those with sickle cell disease have red blood cells that take on a crescent or sickle-like shape. The lifespan of these patients is significantly shortened (to about 40 years) and their quality of life is curtailed due to the range of health complications caused by sickle cells, including sickle cell anaemia, recurrent infections, pain, swelling, and damage to vital organs. In addition to health issues, patients also suffer from the social stigma that is attached to this disease. They can sometimes be deemed "genetically inferior" and ostracised. Some of them are told that this disease is "God's curse". In some areas, the condition is attributed to "black magic". Due to the hereditary nature of sickle cell disease, patients also face diminished marital and social prospects.

With the launch of the Mission in 2023, the Central government's attention to the disease is high.



**Dhananjay Vaidyanathan Rohini**

Partner, Alstonia Impact, a global public health consulting firm



**Gautam Dongre**

Secretary of National Alliance of Sickle Cell Organisations and board member of Global Alliance of Sickle Cell Disease Organisations



With over a million people affected with sickle cell disease, India bears the world's second largest burden of this condition

Among other efforts, a large-scale screening programme is underway nationwide. Hydroxyurea, a vital medicine for treating sickle cell disease, been included in the essential medicines list; this has increased access to it. While measures such as these will help detect and treat sickle cell disease, there are still many challenges.

Our estimates suggest that only 18% of the people affected by sickle cell disease in India are receiving consistent treatment. This is because patients drop out at all stages of treatment: while getting screened for the disease, while getting diagnosed, while starting treatment, and while trying to adhere to treatment.

The largest drops occur at the diagnosis and treatment adherence stages. Getting a correct diagnosis is a challenge as many people hesitate to seek support due to the stigma associated with the condition. They often consult traditional healers, who frequently misdiagnose the condition. While the public system has a stronger diagnostic capacity for sickle cell disease, there is a historic mistrust of it in tribal areas. As a result, few patients get tested.

The second big drop is around treatment adherence. No permanent cure is available for sickle cell disease. Ongoing research in gene therapy is promising, but will be unaffordable for most of the affected population even when it becomes available. At present, relatively inexpensive drugs such as hydroxyurea are effective for most patients if administered with the right dosage and frequency. However, there is seldom a regular and convenient supply of medicines, along with adherence support (such as that provided to TB patients). Key medicines sometimes go out of stock.

Patients have also said that they need to travel long distances to pick up their medicines. In a State in central India, a healthcare professional noted that patients travel for more than 200

kilometres to seek treatment. Further, coverage of several vaccinations, which reduce the frequency of infections and improve the quality of life for patients, remains poor.

**The way ahead**

The Mission can build on its initial successes by tackling some of these challenges. First, it is important to reduce the stigma related to the disease and build trust in public health institutions. Awareness should be raised through targeted media campaigns to bust specific myths (which vary by region and tribe). For this, India could draw from its experience in tackling polio and HIV. With reduced stigma, the chances of sickle cell trait carriers concealing their carrier status may also reduce, which would in turn lead to fewer women giving birth to children with the condition.

Second, given that cases are often missed and diagnosis delayed, there could be increasing screening for newborns. This strategy is low-cost with a high pay-off and would especially be effective in areas where the condition is endemic.

Third, drugs as well as adherence support must be available close to patients, in the nearest health and wellness centres. For complications, interdisciplinary centres of excellence at the district/division levels should be made operational.

Fourth, ensuring that all known patients receive approved vaccines will be crucial; this may require catch-up vaccination programmes.

Fifth, health in tribal areas should be operationally strengthened by factoring in conditions unique to these areas. Healthcare should also be adequately funded.

Finally, research should be conducted to better understand the disease and its pathways in India, and to develop new treatments. Philanthropists and members of civil society must play a catalytic role, and work with the Central and State governments.

## The multi-agency war against corruption

The perception in Telangana is that the government is tackling graft head-on

**STATE OF PLAY**

**Serish Naniseti**  
serish.n@thehindu.co.in



There is a perception in Telangana that the Congress government is doing its best to stamp out corruption.

In the aftermath of the 2023 Assembly elections that saw the end of the decade-long rule of the Bharat Rashtira Samiti (BRS), corruption was identified as a source of disenchantment among voters. A CSDS-Lokniti post-poll study indicated that corruption had emerged as a prominent source of dissatisfaction. Recognising this, the Congress government has shown that it is willing to act against it.

First, the Telangana Drugs Control Administration conducted raids on medical stores, manufacturing firms, and practitioners of fake medicine. The inspections showed fake medicines as well as the channels through which they are coming into the State. The department released a steady stream of information about the malpractices and highlighted how these medicines and practitioners pose threats to health. The government shut down factories and charged practitioners under relevant sections of the law.

Then, teams of the Commissioner of Food Safety started visiting restaurants, cafes, hostels, and cloud kitchens. The outcomes of the inspections were shared on social media with the names of well-known restaurants and their shortcomings.

Until now, these two departments had been accused of not doing their job or looking the other way. By cleaning up two key industries where trust is paramount, they have

created a shift in perception.

The Anti-Corruption Bureau, which is tasked with checking graft in the official machinery, also began nabbing officials who were taking bribes. The previous BRS government had a business-friendly air about it. The TS-IPASS (Telangana State Industrial Project Approval and Self-Certification System) assured time-bound clearances for projects, failing which they were deemed to be approved. The TG-bPASS (Telangana Building Permission Approval and Self-Certification System) provided instant approval for residential plots up to 75 square yards and buildings up to 7 metres in height. The approvals came thick and fast, and corruption crept in.

As a result of the Anti-Corruption Bureau's efforts, a bureaucrat who had assets of more than ₹100 crore was nabbed in January. Another was caught with ₹6 crore. An additional collector of Rangareddy district was caught taking a bribe of ₹8 lakh. The impact of the photos of cash on social media has helped shape the positive narrative about the government.

In July, the Revanth Reddy government constituted the Hyderabad Disaster Response and Asset Protection Agency (HYDRAA). Armed with a broad range of powers from demolitions on government land to relief and rescue operations, the organisation quick-

ly started using earthmovers to level encroachment on lake beds and buffer zones. It demolished a 30,000 sq ft convention hall that is partly owned by Telugu actor, Akkineni Nagarjuna, in the upscale Madhapur area. HYDRAA officials said that the hall was built in the buffer zone of a lake and proved it with a 2014 map showing the encroachment. They also razed properties belonging to a Congress leader, a Bharatiya Janata Party leader, and leaders of the All India Majlis Ittehadul-e-Muslimeen. Some of these leaders were detained for a short while while the demolitions were carried out.

Of these four agencies involved in the fight against corruption, three are headed by Indian Police Service officers and one by an Indian Administrative Service officer. While political parties and other stakeholders are searching for "an agenda" for this multi-agency, multi-pronged attack on corruption, the people are happy. Property owners and prospective buyers who did not think twice about the location are now circumspect. Government officials who believed that everything was business-as-usual are equally guarded as some of them have been booked in criminal cases for malfeasance.

The government's initiative, which affects people across parties and industries in Telangana, is a welcome change, especially since the fight against graft in India generally looks like a political witch-hunt, orchestrated for a select audience with a stated outcome. The hope is that this will become the norm and there is no agenda. But the question is: will the spectre of corruption go away while stodgy paperwork remains the norm in bureaucracy?

# India's increasing competitiveness at the Chess Olympiad

The current team in the Open event in Budapest is India's strongest ever and second only to the U.S. in ELO ratings

**DATA POINT**

**Srinivasan Ramani**  
**Vignesh Radhakrishnan**

As the 45th Chess Olympiad is being held in Budapest, we look at historical performances in the Open section of the most prestigious event of team chess. India has been participating in the biennial event since 1956 and has played in every Olympiad since 1980. The Olympiad was dominated by the erstwhile Soviet Union, which won 18 gold medals. Russia and the U.S. have won six gold medals each, while India has got two bronze medals, in 2014 and 2022 (Table 1).

In Budapest, India's team comprising Grandmasters Arjun Erigaisi, D. Gukesh, R. Praggnanandhaa, Vidit Gujrathi, and P. Harikrishna is the strongest one ever fielded by the country (Table 2). The average ELO rating for India (2753) is just four points behind the U.S., rated the No. 1 team.

This squad also boasts the highest starting ELO rating for an Indian team. In 2018, the squad had an average of 2724 (Chart 3).

D. Gukesh won an individual gold in 2022, scoring 8 points in 11 games for a points per game (ppg) score of 0.82. Among all the players who played a substantive number, the Soviet great, Mikhail Tal, remains the best performer with 0.81 ppg in 101 games, followed by former world champion Anatoly Karpov (Table 4).

For India, GM Krishnan Sasikiran has been a warhorse, scoring 0.62 points per game in 113 games, while talisman V. Anand played 87 games (0.66 ppg) (Chart 5). Rafiq Khan scored 0.69 ppg in 29 games and won India's first medal, a silver, in the Malta Olympiad in 1980.

In terms of performance ELO rating that captures the level of competition, Vidit Gujrathi leads with 2698.7 ELO points among Indians who played at least 30 games in the Olympiad (Chart 6).

## The gathering Indian storm

Data for Chess Olympiads were sourced from olimpbase.org

**Table 1:** Historical performance in the Chess Olympiad (Open)

Rank	Nation	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
1	Soviet Union	18	1	0	19
2	U.S.	6	6	8	20
3	Russia	6	3	3	12
4	Hungary	3	7	2	12
5	Armenia	3	1	3	7
6	Ukraine	2	2	3	7
7	China	2	1	0	3
...					
20	India	0	0	2	2

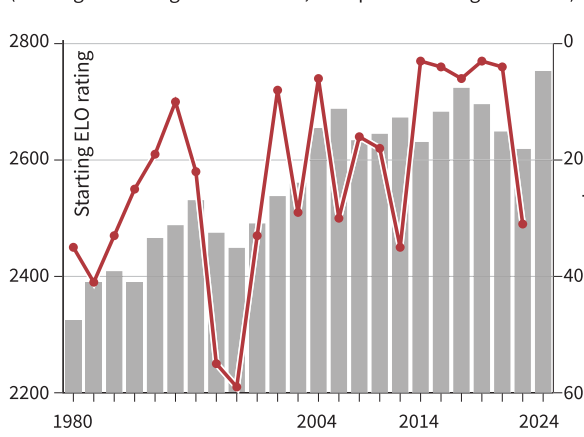
**Table 2:** Average ELO ratings for teams in the Open section in the Budapest Olympiad being held currently

Country	Average ELO
U.S.	2757
India	2753
China	2724
Uzbekistan	2690
Netherlands	2682
Norway	2670
Germany	2667
England	2665
Hungary	2663
Iran	2659



Rafiq Khan won India's first medal, a silver, in the Malta Olympiad in 1980

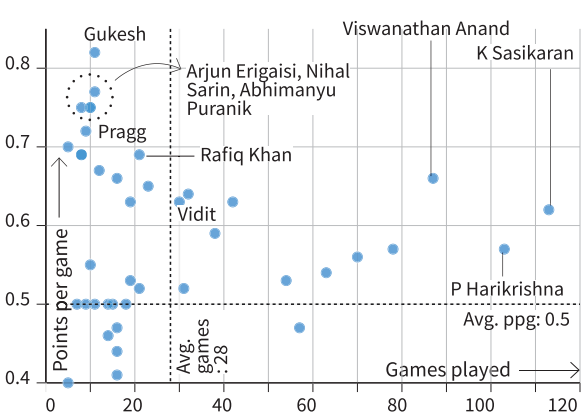
**Chart 3:** India's performance in Chess Olympiads since 1980 (starting ELO rating in left axis, final position in right axis)



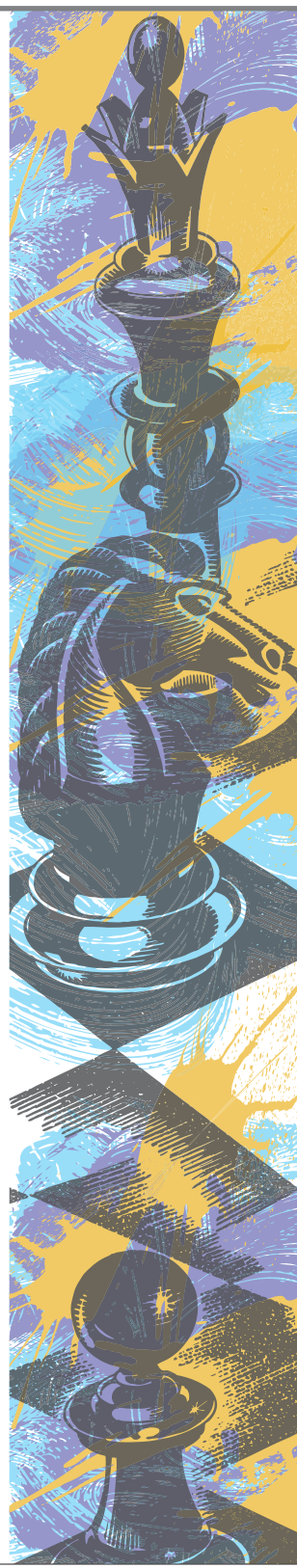
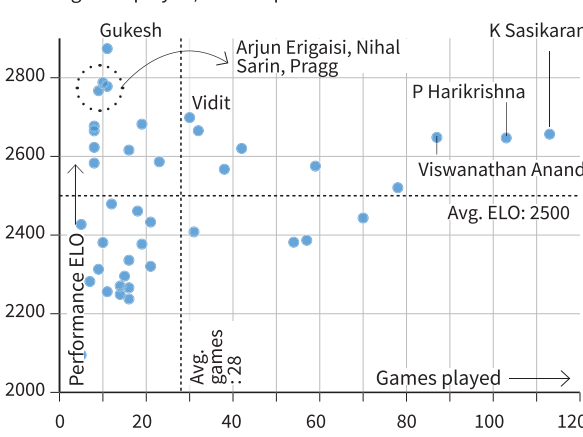
**Table 4:** Best individual performers across Olympiads (Open)

Rank	Player	Games	Points per game
1	Mikhail Tal (USSR)	101	0.81
2	Anatoly Karpov (Russia)	68	0.80
3	Tigran Petrosian (USSR)	129	0.80
4	Isaac Kashdan (U.S.)	79	0.80
5	Vasily Smyslov (USSR)	113	0.80
6	David Bronstein (USSR)	49	0.80
7	Garry Kasparov (Russia)	82	0.79
8	A Alekhine (France)	72	0.78
9	Matulović (Yugoslavia)	78	0.77
10	Paul Keres (Estonia)	141	0.76

**Chart 5:** Indians who played in the Open section in Chess Olympiads (points per game: ppg versus games played)



**Chart 6:** Indians at the Chess Olympiad (performance ELO ratings versus games played) in the Open section



**FROM THE ARCHIVES**

The *Hindu*

FIFTY YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 12, 1974

## Bhutto cites Sikkim to get U.S. arms aid

Washington, Sept. 11: Prime Minister Bhutto of Pakistan apparently intends to cite India's "annexation" of Sikkim as yet another argument to persuade the United States to resume arms supplies to Pakistan, lifting the existing U.S. ban. In an interview given to the New Delhi correspondent of the Washington Post, Mr. Bhutto said that by "swallowing up" Sikkim, India has given new credibility to Pakistan's demands for U.S. military assistance. He has indicated that the arms aid issue would be raised when the Secretary of State, Dr. Henry Kissinger, visits Islamabad late next month in the course of his tour of capitals in the subcontinent.

The Post correspondent writes that though Dr. Kissinger and other senior U.S. officials have disagreed with Mr. Bhutto's contention that the U.S. has a commitment to rearm Pakistan (as a fellow member of CENTO) "knowledgeable sources" have told him that Mr. Bhutto's appeals for U.S. arms are getting "serious consideration" in Washington. (This runs contrary to the assurances reportedly received by the Indian Ambassador here from Dr. Kissinger in recent conversations, to the effect that the U.S. has no intention of getting involved in an arms race in the sub-continent).

Mr. Bhutto, who ever since May has been trying to use India's explosion of an underground nuclear device as an excuse to extract arms from the U.S., told his American interviewer: "Kissinger ought to consider Sikkim when he comes here. But this must be something he does on his own. I can't keep telling him what India's intentions are, showing him the maps. We stand vindicated by our analysis. Half of our country is gone. Half of Kashmir is gone. They (India) marched into Goa. They have gone nuclear. And now they have swallowed up Sikkim."

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO SEPT. 12, 1924

## Rains in East Rajputana

Bombay, Sept. 11: A communique from the General Traffic Manager, B.B. and C.I. Railway Bombay, states: - In consequence of the recent heavy rain in East Rajputana, the B.B. and C.I. Railway between Bayana and Pingora on the Nagada-Muttra section and between Bandikui and Bharatpur on the metre gauge section has been considerably ravaged by floods.



IN BRIEF



## Ceat aims to capture 12% market share in 2 years: CEO

Tyre major Ceat Ltd. aims to increase its market share in the domestic market by 50% and is targeting ₹17,000-crore revenue over the next two years, said CEO and MD Arnab Banerjee. "Currently, we have a market share of 7-8% and we would like to increase it to 12-13% over the next two to three years," he told the media. On Wednesday, Mr. Banerjee announced the commissioning of a ₹670-crore Truck Bus Radial (TBR) tyre plant near Chennai.

## Govt. taking inputs to amend MSME Development Act

The Centre plans to amend the MSME Development Act 2006, said officials of the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME). The Ministry was holding meetings with stakeholders to get inputs in this regard, the officials told *The Hindu* in Coimbatore on Wednesday. At an interactive meeting held with industry associations on Tuesday, the officials said several inputs presented by the industry would be considered when the Act is amended.

## Lemonn app builds 5 lakh user base in 5 months

Investment app Lemonn, started in April 2024 by PeepalCo, said it had built a user base of five lakh in the first five months. Lemonn said about 36% of the total users were first-time investors. The app offers options to invest in mutual funds, direct stocks, IPOs, and trade in Futures and Options. "Our goal is to make investing accessible for everyone. Reaching five lakh users in just five months is a strong indicator that we are on the right path," said co-founder Ashish Singh.

## Will protect interests of 100 million small retailers, says Goyal

Press Trust of India  
NEW DELHI



Piyush Goyal

Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal on Wednesday said the government will protect the interests of 100 million small retailers, who are facing competition from major e-commerce players. Last month, the minister lambasted the e-commerce companies, questioning their business models that have been impacting the small retailers. "I assure you that we will continue to work with you to meet the aspirations of 1.4 billion Indians for a better quality of life... the aspiration of a 100 million small retailers, the small mom-and-pop stores, that have disappeared from the

U.S. landscape, which we are at least making an effort to protect to some extent," he said. Mr. Goyal was addressing members of the India-U.S. business council. He also said that the U.S.-India CEO forum will meet on October 2-3 in Washington to further their commercial dialogue.

## ₹25,000-cr. worth investments underway in paper mills: IPMA

N. Ravi Kumar  
HYDERABAD



Pawan Agarwal

Paper and paperboard manufacturers in India are implementing capacity expansion, de-bottlenecking as well as technology upgradation projects involving an investment of ₹25,000 crore, a top leader of Indian Paper Manufacturers Association (IPMA) said. "A million tonne in capacity will be added. But it's not as much about capacity as the focus on modernisation, de-bottlenecking and replacing old technology. Around ₹5,000 crore of the investment will be on new technology to help lower car-

bon footprint," IPMA president Pawan Agarwal said on Tuesday. His company Naini Papers, of which he is the managing director, is setting up a 1.25 lakh tonne plant with ₹2,000 crore investment in Uttarakhand to make paper pouches that will replace single use plas-

## Northern Arc Capital to open bids for IPO on Sept. 16

The Hindu Bureau  
MUMBAI

Northern Arc Capital Limited will open bids for an Initial Public Offering (IPO) to raise new equity worth ₹500 crore on September 16, the company said in a statement. The Chennai-based debt platform's initial shareholders would also offer for sale 10.5 crore shares. Northern Arc fixed the IPO price band between ₹249 and ₹263. The company, which will close bids for the IPO by September 19, said that it planned to use the proceeds of the fresh issue "to meet future capital requirements towards on-ward lending".

## Wet grinder makers seek lowering of GST rate to 12%, from 18%

The Hindu Bureau  
COIMBATORE

Wet grinder manufacturers sought a GST rate reduction, from 18% to 12%, at a meeting with MSME Ministry officials on Tuesday. But some officials were not aware of this kitchen appliance that is popular across south India. So industry representatives explained a wet grinder's use — to make idli/dosa batter. C. Balachandran, president of the Coimbatore Wet Grinders Accessories Manufacturers Association, said the appliance that has a Geographical Indication tag, is mainly made in Coimbatore by about 150 MSME units. When GST was intro-



duced, it attracted 28% duty. However, the atta chakki used in north India attracted only 5% GST. This anomaly was pointed out to the Central government and the wet grinder's GST rate had been reduced to 12% and then to 5% in 2019. But in 2022 it was again revised to 18% for both wet grinders and chakkis.

## Zebra develops crime probe tools for police

Mini Tejaswi  
BENGALURU

Zebra Technologies, a U.S.-based \$4.58 billion firm that offers mobile computing products, barcode printers and scanning solutions to enterprises and governments in India and across the globe, has developed two high-tech solutions to help the police. These are: a digital police investigation tool kit code named Yatharth, which Zebra Technologies developed in collaboration with Sanpri Technologies and a 3D Forensic Mapping Solution developed at its Bengaluru R&D centre. The digital police investigation tool kit captures

still images and videos of crime scenes with GPS locations and prepares digital statements with date and time accurately stamped to prevent any kind of evidence tampering, the company said. Digitally-recorded statements created by this kit allows witnesses and investigation officers to refresh memories of panchamas during court trials and also deter witnesses from turning hostile. The second platform viz. 3D Forensic Mapping Solution helps in collecting crime and crash scenes faster and more comprehensively without missing any critical details helping in reducing human error.

## Tata Steel inks £500 million grant accord with U.K. govt.

The Hindu Bureau  
MUMBAI

Tata Steel Ltd. announced the signing of a £500 million grant funding agreement with the U.K. government allowing it to proceed at pace with the project to install an electric arc furnace at the Port Talbot steelworks in Wales. The £1.25 billion project will safeguard U.K.'s steel sovereignty, secure steel making in Port Talbot and preserve 5,000 jobs, the Tata group company said in a statement.

## Modi reaffirms plan to back chip facilities

The Hindu Bureau  
NOIDA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday reaffirmed a commitment to pump in tens of thousands of crores into establishing a domestic base for manufacturing integrated circuits and other associated components in India. India was not following a "let the chips fall where they may" attitude, but was instead focussed on "increasing the number of chips produced in India," Mr. Modi asserted at the Semicon India summit. Citing India's record in-



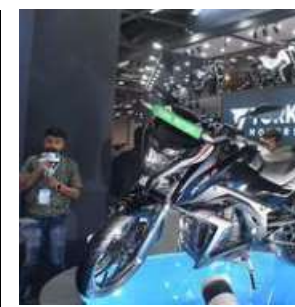
Narendra Modi

crease in mobile phone assembly as an encouraging statistic, the PM also cited resilience as a factor, saying: "We want to create a world that continues to operate without stopping, even in times of crisis."

## SC to hear appeal against Byju's BCCI deal Sept. 17

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday agreed to hear on September 17 an appeal filed by U.S.-based creditor Glas Trust Company LLC against an order of the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) allowing edtech firm Byju's to pay a settlement amount of ₹158 crore to the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud fixed September 17 as hearing date.



## Indian EV market to soar to \$120 bn by 2030: experts

The Hindu Bureau  
CHENNAI

The Indian EV market is projected to surge from \$3.8 billion in 2024 to \$120 billion by 2030, with batteries fuelling advancements in EVs and renewable energy storage, according to industry experts. "India's economic growth and focus on clean energy are driving a surge in battery demand," Informa Markets in India MD Yogesh Mudras said during a media roundtable. "Government initiatives such as relaxed FDI norms and the establishment of Khanij Bidesh India [a joint venture between three PSUs to ensure mineral security of the nation] to secure critical minerals, are reducing reliance on imports and strengthening the country's position in the global market," he said. The speakers said Tamil Nadu emerged as India's leading auto-manufacturing hub, contributing 40% of the EV output last year. They also announced the second edition of Battery Show India to be held with the 17th edition of Renewable Energy India Expo at Greater Noida for three days from October 3.

## MARKETS

## MARKET WATCH

	WEDNESDAY	% CHANGE
Sensex	81,523	-0.49
US Dollar	83.99	-0.01
Gold	74,600	0.67
Brent oil	70.27	-1.72

## NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Enter.	2937.85	-48.55
Adani Ports	1430.60	-22.80
Apollo Hosp.	6900.25	-21.30
Asian Paints	3367.45	72.40
Axis Bank	1186.10	-1.10
Bajaj Auto	11420.75	433.00
Bajaj Finserv	1332.15	-8.65
Bajaj Finance	7345.55	103.70
Bharti Airtel	1577.80	-0.05
BPLCL	340.25	-5.70
Britannia Ind.	6008.65	38.75
Cipla	1628.35	-3.65
Coal India	483.95	-7.15
Divis Lab	5439.30	12.85
Dr Reddys Lab	6612.50	-37.90
Eicher Motors	4726.65	-10.55
Grasim Ind.	2681.15	-21.40
HCL Tech	1778.75	-0.35
HDFC Bank	1643.90	-4.45
HDFC Life	700.15	-2.75
Hero MotoCorp	5654.45	-15.25
Hindalco	647.70	-11.80
Hind Unilever	2894.15	-5.55
ICI Bank	1236.35	-0.95
IndusInd Bank	1421.20	-14.35
Infosys	1910.15	-2.15
ITC	514.35	-0.75
JSW Steel	927.75	-11.00
Kotak Bank	1789.25	-2.35
L&T	3536.95	-59.20
LTIMindtree Ltd.	6299.30	-44.05
M&M	2654.25	-35.75
Maruti Suzuki	12242.60	-20.80
NestleIndia	2526.85	-8.65
NTPC	389.65	-6.65
ONGC	285.30	-10.30
PowerGrid Corp.	333.20	-0.95
Reliance Ind.	2893.00	-20.05
SBI Life	1859.15	-5.70
State Bank	768.60	-14.05
Shriram Finance	3279.90	19.85
Sun Pharma	1845.70	-9.35
TataConsumerPro-	1204.40	0.25
duct	976.30	-59.50
Tata Steel	148.17	-1.25
TCS	4479.35	-28.50
M&M	1602.60	-4.80
Titan	3711.10	-16.30
UltraTech Cement	11487.45	-53.60
Wipro	514.35	-11.40

## EXCHANGE RATES

Indicative direct rates in rupees a unit except yen at 4 p.m. on September 11

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	83.78	84.10
Euro	92.58	93.33
British Pound	109.64	110.07
Japanese Yen (100)	59.10	59.33
Chinese Yuan	11.78	11.83
Swiss Franc	99.00	99.38
Singapore Dollar	64.32	64.58
Canadian Dollar	61.68	61.92
Malaysian Ringgit	19.34	19.43
Australian Dollar	55.85	56.07

Source: Indian Bank

## U.S. consumer prices rise moderately, underlying inflation remains sticky

Reuters  
WASHINGTON

U.S. consumer prices rose slightly in August, but underlying inflation remained sticky amid higher rents and costs for some services, which could discourage the Federal Reserve from delivering a half-point interest rate cut next week. The mixed inflation report from the Labor Department on Wednesday followed data last week showing the labour market still cooling in an orderly fashion in August, with the unemployment rate retreating from near a three-year high touched in July. Financial markets



No green shoots: The consumer price index rose 0.2% last month after rising by a similar margin in July. GETTY IMAGES VIA AFP

boosted the chances of a quarter-point rate cut next Wednesday on the inflation data and sharply lowered the probabilities of a 25 basis points reduction. "The road to normal inflation hit a bump in August as lingering pressures for housing and service costs once again cropped up," said Ben Ayers, senior economist at Nationwide. "This should clinch a smaller, 25 basis points rate cut from the Fed next week as Fed officials remain wary to feed any lingering price momentum for the economy." The consumer price index rose 0.2% last month after rising by a similar margin in July, the Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics said. Food prices edged up 0.1% after climbing 0.2% in each of the past two months. Grocery food prices were unchanged as increases in the costs of meat, fish, eggs and dairy

products were offset by decreases in the prices of non-alcoholic beverages, fruits and vegetables. **Energy products drop** The cost of energy products dropped 0.8% after being unchanged in July. Gasoline prices fell 0.6%, while electricity was 0.7% cheaper and natural gas prices declined 1.9%. In the 12 months through August, the CPI advanced 2.5%. That was the smallest year-on-year rise since February 2021 and followed a 2.9% increase in July. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast the CPI gaining 0.2% and rising 2.6% year-on-year. Though inflation remains above the U.S. central bank's 2% target, it has slowed considerably, allowing policymakers to focus more on the labour market in their quest to sustain the economic expansion. Government data last

week showed non-farm payrolls rising below expectations in August but unemployment rate falling to 4.2% from near a 3-year high of 4.3% in July. The labour market is cooling amid a significant moderation in hiring, reducing the risks of inflation reigniting. **Higher rents** Financial markets saw a roughly 15% probability of a 50 basis points rate cut at the Fed's September 17-18 policy meeting, down from 29% before the CPI data was published, according to CME Group's FedWatch Tool. The central bank has maintained its benchmark overnight interest rate in the current 5.25%-5.50% range for a year, having raised it by 525 basis points in 2022 and 2023. Excluding volatile food and energy components, the CPI climbed 0.3% in August after rising 0.2% in July.





## GS - 3 Food Security African Group seeks solution for PSH issue



**Food for thought:** A permanent solution would allow developing nations to exceed WTO-MSP limits. THE HINDU

**Amity Sen**  
GENEVA

The African Group considers public stock holding (PSH) as a crucial food security tool for sustaining production and consumption support to meet critical food security objectives and is seeking a permanent solution for the problem at the WTO, separate from the agriculture negotiations, a top official from Nigeria said. This is in line with what India and other developing country members, including the G-33 group, have been demanding at the WTO and reflects continued alignment of the African Group with the stated position.

A permanent solution would allow developing nations to exceed WTO-prescribed MSP limits without subscribing to onerous conditions.

Small-scale farmers from developing and developed countries need price support and other policy initiatives to deal with global price volatility and uncertain global market, argued trade experts at a session on 'trade rules for supporting small-scale farming as contributors to green trade in agriculture' at the WTO Public Forum here.

"With 84% of the world's farmers cultivating on less than 2 hectare, small-scale farming is the dominant form of agriculture and the one that receives the lowest wages although they offer higher yields and greater biodiversity outcomes than large-scale agriculture," said Jonas Jaccard, policy officer, Humundi, a Belgium-based civil society organisation.

(The Hindu Businessline reporter is in Geneva on WTO invitation)

# India's bid to match China's factory heft gets a reality check

After four years of restrictions on Chinese investments, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government is looking to pivot closer to the Asian rival; his government's heightened vetting of all Chinese investment since 2020 effectively turned away billions of dollars and created new layers of red tape

### NEWS ANALYSIS

**Reuters**  
NEW DELHI

India's push to become a factory titan has hit a snag: to become a credible alternative to China for global firms, it first needs to warm up to its long-time rival.

Ties between the world's two most populous countries have been strained since the border clash in 2020, slowing the exchange of capital, technology and talent, despite exploding demand for electric vehicles, semiconductors and artificial intelligence.

The Modi government's heightened vetting of all Chinese investment over this period effectively turned away billions of dollars from the likes of BYD, Great Wall Motor and created new layers of red tape for Indian firms with Chinese stakeholders.

But now, New Delhi is looking to loosen some of these restrictions as businesses struggle to scale up manufacturing, even with a host of government subsidies designed to boost local production.

"There is a realisation that you cannot be part of any major supply chains, especially in high technology products and certain areas like solar cells, EVs, where it is not possible for



**Supportive climate:** The Centre is considering easing investment rules introduced in 2020. REUTERS

you to do anything without being part of Chinese supply chains," said Sushant Singh, lecturer at Yale University.

#### Recognizing the need

Even businesses that have supported barriers on Chinese imports acknowledge the need for key inputs from up north.

Naveen Jindal, head of one of the country's largest steel firms Jindal Steel & Power and a federal lawmaker, has backed tariffs on Chinese steel but also sees the need for a pragmatic approach to trade.

"A lot of steel companies import equipment and technology from China," Mr. Jindal said. "China is the world's largest producer of steel and in certain



There is a realisation that it is not possible for you to do anything without being part of Chinese supply chains

**SUSHANT SINGH**  
Lecturer, Yale University

areas they are very good, but not in every area."

Now, after four years of restrictions on Chinese investments and visas, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government is looking to pivot closer to the Asian rival and breathe new life into his ambitions to "Make in India".

"The government is considering easing invest-

ment rules that were introduced in 2020 for countries that India shares land border with as we need more investments," an official privy to government discussions told Reuters.

New Delhi is now planning to add a clause that investments from firms with up to 10% Chinese shareholding will no longer require government approval, a move that could help global companies that have supply chain partnerships with Chinese firms easily invest in India.

To address security concerns, the government is also planning to set up a post-investment monitoring framework driven by crime and fraud investigation agencies and the banking regulator.

The move would encourage greater Chinese investment, which analysts say is critical to India joining global supply chains in high-technology sectors such as solar cells, EVs and battery manufacturing. The proposed easing is still being pushed by Mr. Modi's office with various sticking points between government ministries being ironed out, a second official, with direct knowledge of the matter said.

Following industry lobbying, India has already eased visa issuance for Chinese nationals and is expediting visa approvals to Chinese engineers for sectors that get federal subsidies to manufacture locally.

It has likely approved nearly 2,000 short-term visas to Chinese professionals, who accounted for most applications between November last year and July this year, another government official said.

Minister of External Affairs S. Jaishankar said this week that the country is not "closed to business from China" but noted the issue was rather in which sectors and on what terms Beijing did business, without elaborating further.

#### Inevitable

After the 2020 clash with China, to lure Apple, the Indian government gave quick approvals to joint ventures between the U.S.

giant's Chinese suppliers and Indian firms.

The move has led to the phone maker moving 14% of its global iPhone assembly to India in the fiscal year 2023/24. In the same year, India's mobile exports increased 42% to a record \$15.6 billion.

However, even with such a shift there are doubts India's factories were big enough to match the investment or achieve the productivity gains of their Chinese counterparts.

Chief Economic Adviser V. Anantha Nageswaran said it was inevitable India would need to plug itself into China's supply chains.

"Whether we do so by relying solely on imports or partially through Chinese investments is a choice that India has to make," Mr. Nageswaran said in July.

A sharp decline in foreign investment into India has also prompted the rethink on trade barriers.

Away from politics, Indian demand for Chinese goods remains robust, even with the targeted curbs.

Goods imports have surged 56% since the 2020 border clash while India's trade deficit with China has nearly doubled to \$85 billion. China continues to be India's biggest source of goods and was the largest supplier of industrial products last year.

## Braking on outlook



**Speed breaker:** The logo of German carmaker BMW can be seen on a car in Munich, southern Germany. BMW said it was recalling about 1.5 million vehicles due to problems with their brakes, prompting the German luxury carmaker to cut its outlook for the year. The auto giant said vehicle deliveries in 2024 would now come in slightly lower than the previous year, after having earlier expected an increase. It also lowered its guidance for profitability. AFP

# Lawmakers review plan to raise retirement age in fast-greying China

**Reuters**  
HONG KONG

China's top legislative body this week assessed an official plan to delay the country's retirement age, among the world's lowest, taking a key step towards changing decades-old labour laws and easing economic pressures stemming from a shrinking workforce.

The ruling Communist Party said in July that China would gradually raise the country's retirement age. The retirement age is now 60 for men, about six years below that in most developed economies, while for women in white-collar work it is 55, and 50 for women who work in



**Lost dividend:** China's working-age population which needed to support the elderly is shrinking. REUTERS

factories.

Having people work for longer would abate some pressure on pension budgets with many Chinese provinces already reeling from large deficits, but that would also delay pension

payouts and require older workers to stay at their jobs longer, which may not be welcomed by all.

The topic was a top trending item on Chinese social media after the official Xinhua news agency

reported that top National People Congress members discussed the topic in Beijing on Tuesday, with many expressing concerns about more job seekers chasing insufficient openings.

"It is an inevitable choice for China to adapt to the new normal of population development," Mo Rong, Director of the Chinese Academy of Labour and Social Sciences told the People's Daily.

Reform is urgent with life expectancy in China rising to 78 years as of 2021 from about 44 years in 1960, and projected to exceed 80 years by 2050. At the same time, the working population needed to support the elderly is shrinking.

# 'Blunt' interest rates pose questions about U.S. Fed easing

**Mike Dolan**  
LONDON

If steep interest rate hikes failed to slow the U.S. economy much in recent years, it is reasonable to ask whether their reversal will prove as toothless in a downturn.

One of the puzzles of the past two years has been how five percentage points of tightening by the Federal Reserve between March 2022 and July 2023 had so little effect on the overall economy.

Despite the borrowing squeeze, U.S. real GDP has clocked annualized growth rates in excess of 2% in seven of the eight quarters since the middle of 2022—and is on course to add to that tally in the three months through the end of

September.

And for all its seasonal wobbles, the stock market is close to record highs.

This suggests that the economy has become increasingly desensitized to changes in short-term borrowing costs. If that is the case, then policymakers should be anxious that any slowdown from here—or even a cyclical recession—might also be inured to monetary policy easing.

#### Sensitivity low

Interest rates are clearly set to come back down, with the Fed widely expected to start its easing next week. But given the limited economic impact of rates on the way up, some analysts have argued the U.S. central bank might need to push rates ex-



**Even lower:** The Fed might now have to push rates extremely low to stimulate the economy. REUTERS

tremely low to stimulate the economy if a recession does indeed unfold.

Others may argue that the impact of higher rates has just been delayed and

that the lagged effect over the past two years is evident in the erosion of cash levels on some household and corporate balance sheets.

But corporate borrowers are having little trouble rolling over their debt, even if they have to refinance at higher rates.

Some investors think

this complex picture should inject much more caution into the Fed's thinking than markets are currently pricing in.

Yves Bonzon, the chief investment officer at Julius Baer, reckons uncertainty regarding the transmission of monetary policy to the private sector is "very high," largely because, as he argues, interest rates rose primarily to rein in "an income-driven rather than a debt-driven economic expansion."

"If the real economy's sensitivity to interest rates is unusually low, it is not clear how asset prices will react should the Fed meet market expectations and cut aggressively."

Mr. Bonzon's main point is that Fed easing in the absence of recession may

well stimulate already accelerating private-sector credit growth, spur the housing market and related sectors and even revive the rate-stricken leveraged buyout and private equity market.

"In that context, the Fed would be mindful to avoid an asset price boom-and-bust cycle," he said, adding that three quarter-percentage-point rate cuts to start would be more than enough while the Fed continues to assess things.

For BlackRock credit strategists Amanda Lynam and Dominique Bly, it all hinges on what you think the Fed is actually doing here.

Is it easing to offset signs of looming recession or just recalibrating now that inflation rates have

moderated?

If it's the former, then that could result in deep policy rate cuts, but could also see a near doubling of high-yield credit spreads amid fears of a downturn.

On the other hand, the BlackRock strategists figure that if the Fed is just "normalizing" here, its terminal rate will likely end up much higher, around 3.5%, and credit spreads stay where they are.

Whatever your take, it's clear that no one—including the Fed—can be completely sure how this story will unfold over the coming year. That means investors should expect more edgy months like the one we are in right now.

(The opinions expressed here are those of the author, a columnist for Reuters)





GS - 2&3 IR & Economy

# Afghanistan set to begin work on TAPI pipeline

The \$10-billion natural gas pipeline traversing Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India is the most significant development project for Taliban authorities since they seized power in 2021

Agence France-Presse  
ISLIM CHESHMA

Afghanistan said on Wednesday that work would begin on a \$10-billion gas pipeline traversing South Asia as officials joined dignitaries in neighbouring Turkmenistan to celebrate its completion on that side of the border.

Progress on the TAPI pipeline – running through Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India – has been repeatedly delayed because of security issues in conflict-ravaged Afghanistan.

“From today the operations will start on Afghanistan’s soil,” Taliban government spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid said in comments broadcast by Afghan state television.

At the border ceremony in Islam Cheshma in Turkmenistan, officials on both sides, including Afghan Prime Minister Hassan Akhund, hailed the project.

“This project will benefit not only the economies of the countries participating but also the countries of the whole region,” the President of Turkmenistan Serdar Berdimuhamedow said in a video broadcast live at the ceremony.

However, experts warned that the project – which is still not fully funded – is unlikely to be operational for another decade.

In the Afghan border province of Herat, a public



Slow progress: Work on the pipeline has been delayed by security issues in Afghanistan. FILE PHOTO

holiday was declared to mark the occasion, with posters celebrating the project plastered around the capital of the same name.

The pipeline will see around 33 billion cubic metres of natural gas each year extracted from the Galkynsh gas field in the south-east of Turkmenistan.

It will be pumped through a 1,800-kilometre pipeline traversing Afghanistan, including Herat and Kandahar in the south, before crossing into restive Balochistan province in Pakistan and ending in Fazilka in Punjab of India.

Pakistan and India will each purchase 42% of the gas deliveries, and Afghanistan 16%, while Kabul will

also benefit from lucrative transit fees of around \$500 million per year, according to Afghan media.

Work on the Turkmen side began in 2015 and was initially scheduled to start in Afghanistan in 2018, but has been repeatedly delayed.

Stumbling blocks

India’s commitment to the pipeline has also previously been questioned over its relationship with Pakistan and easy access to liquified natural gas markets, which are seen as potential stumbling blocks.

It is the most significant development project for Taliban authorities since they seized power in 2021, ending their two decade-long insurgency against

the foreign-backed government.

The pipeline gives the government, which is not officially recognised by any nation, a strategic role in regional cooperation between Central Asia and South Asia, which is facing huge energy deficits.

Afghanistan, although still under economic and financial sanctions from the West, is currently trying to relaunch ambitious projects, particularly in energy, mines and infrastructure.

At the end of July, Afghanistan and China officially relaunched a major copper-extraction project in the world’s second-largest known deposit, near Kabul, which had been bogged down since 2008.

# Blinken, Lammy visit Kyiv as Ukraine seeks to hit deep in Russia

Associated Press  
KYIV

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and British Foreign Secretary David Lammy arrived in Kyiv on a joint visit on Wednesday, as Ukraine presses the West to allow it to use long-range missiles against Russia.

The top diplomats reached the Ukrainian capital by train from Poland hours after the U.S. presidential debate during which Vice President Kamala Harris and former President Trump sparred over the war in Ukraine.

Mr. Blinken traveled from London, where he accused Iran of providing Russia with Fath-360 short-range ballistic missiles, calling the move a “dramatic escalation” of the war.

For months, Ukraine has been requesting approval to use long-range weapons from the U.S. and Western allies to strike targets in Russia, and is expected to press harder given Russia’s latest reported weapons acquisition.

“We hope that long-range equipment for strikes on the territory of our enemy will be reached and we will have it,” Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal told Mr. Lammy. “We hope for your help and support in this issue.”

Mr. Shmyhal described the meeting with Mr. Lammy in Kyiv as “intense” but gave no other details in the post on his Telegram channel.

At a news conference on



Antony Blinken, right, and David Lammy arrive at Kyiv on Wednesday. AFP

Tuesday, Mr. Shmyhal said that “if we are allowed to destroy military targets or weapons prepared by the enemy for attacks on Ukraine, it would certainly bring more safety for our civilians, our people, and our children...We are working towards this and will continue to push for it every day.”

‘Ensure safety’

Referring to the missiles from Iran, he added: “Russia’s use of weapons from its terrorist allies to strike at Ukraine continues their genocidal war and terrorism on our territory. We must be able to respond to such terrorism in kind by destroying military targets on their territory to ensure greater safety for our citizens.”

The diplomats’ visit comes ahead of British Prime Minister Keir Starmer’s upcoming trip to Washington, where he will meet President Joe Biden on Friday. Ukraine’s request for permission to strike Russian targets is due to feature in the discussion.

# Brazil’s Lula visits Amazon as fire ‘pandemic’ rages

Agence France-Presse  
BRASILIA

Brazil President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva announced new measures on Tuesday to alleviate drought in the Brazilian Amazon, as his government faces mounting pressure to combat a “pandemic” of fires.

Brazil has been parched by a historic drought that experts link to climate change, sparking fires that have spread more easily and produced clouds of smoke that have reached neighbouring Uruguay and Argentina.

The country’s Supreme Court has ordered immediate government action to contain what it has called a “fire pandemic”, which is also threatening to destroy the biodiversity-rich wetland sanctuary of Pantanal. “We take the need to combat drought, deforestation, fires, very seriously,” Lula said in the northern State of Amazonas.

Accompanied by several Ministers, the President visited riverside communities living in the world’s largest rainforest, which are suffering from the worst drought in 70 years to Brazil. The high temperatures have dried up rivers used by isolated communities for navigation, food and water supply. The Brazilian government announced dredging works on the Amazon River and other waterways and the delivery of water purifiers.

With more than 5,000 active fire outbreaks on Tuesday, Brazil accounted for 76% of the areas affected by fires in South America, according to data from the National Institute of Space Research (INPE) published by official media. So far this year, some 6.7 million hectares have burned in the Brazilian Amazon, amounting to 1.6% of the rainforest, according to official figures.

# HRW urges Latin American countries to boost protection for Haitians, Venezuelans

Associated Press  
BOGOTA

Human Rights Watch (HRW) on Wednesday called on Latin American governments to improve protection schemes, grant legal status and reverse “onerous visa requirements” for millions of Haitians and Venezuelans who have struggled to find work, access to health care and education in South American host countries, forcing them to increasingly seek asylum in the United States.

In a report describing the situation of Haitian and Venezuelan migrants, HRW said that “limited” integration and regularisation policies in South America are forcing vul-

HRW report said that ‘limited’ integration policies are forcing vulnerable people to head to the U.S.

nerable people to head to the U.S. every month. To reach the U.S. border, many make a long, dangerous journey that includes crossing the Darien Gap, a roadless swath of jungle between Colombia and Panama. The group urged governments to implement a “region-wide protection regime that would grant all Venezuelans and Haitians legal status for a fixed but renewable term of adequate duration,” even if they may not qualify for refugee status under domestic law.

The report also calls for governments to eliminate barriers that hinder the integration of migrants and refugees, including legislation that prevents people from getting work permits, while they seek asylum in other countries.

“While some Latin American governments have made commendable efforts to receive migrants and asylum seekers, efforts to regularise migration in the region have often fallen short due to restrictive timelines, complex procedures, onerous document requirements, and administrative delays,” said the report, which reviewed asylum policies in countries including Panama, Colombia, Brazil, Peru and Chile.

# Beyond the limelight



Stage faces: Performers of a Taiwanese Opera team prepare backstage before a show in New Taipei City, Taiwan on Monday. REUTERS

# Australian anti-war activists clash with police

Associated Press  
MELBOURNE

Anti-war protesters in Australia clashed with police on Wednesday outside a military arms convention in the city of Melbourne.

Protesters hurled bottles, rocks and horse manure, a police statement said. They also sprayed officers with liquid irritants, some of which were identified as acid, police said.

Police retaliated with pepper spray, flash distraction devices and rubber bullets. At least 24 officers required medical treatment. Police arrested 39 protesters for offences such as assault, arson and blocking roadways. Around 1,800 police officers have been deployed to a Melbourne convention centre where the Land Forces International Land Defence Exposition is taking place through Friday.

Students for Palestine national co-convenor Jasmine Duff blamed police for the protest violence.

“They used serious weapons on peace activists that should be banned for use on demonstrators, including pepper spray, which is classified as a chemical weapon,” Ms. Duff said in a statement.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese called on protesters to show respect for police. “People have a right to protest peacefully, but you don’t say you’re opposed to defence equipment by throwing things at police,” Mr. Albanese told Seven Network television.

The organizer of the biennial convention, AM-DA Foundation, said it would not comment on protester activity.

# U.S.-Russia battle to influence Africa plays out in Central African Republic

Associated Press  
BANGUI

Hours after late Russian mercenary leader Yevgeny Prigozhin rebelled against his country’s top military leaders, his private army’s biggest client in Africa panicked, turning for help to his foe in the West.

Officials from Central African Republic, where some 1,500 of Prigozhin’s shadowy Wagner Group mercenaries were stationed, wrote a letter that day, requesting to “rapidly” arrange a meeting with a private U.S. security firm to discuss collaboration.

Dated June 23, 2023, the day Prigozhin launched the armed rebellion, the letter sparked a series of

private meetings, culminating in a deal with the African nation and Bancroft Global Development. That sparked backlash from Russian mercenaries, according to a dozen diplomats, local people, and analysts.

The tensions in Central African Republic are a window into a larger battle playing out across the continent as Moscow and Washington vie for influence.

The Russian mercenaries – using success in staving off rebels in this impoverished nation as a model for expansion – have long been accused by local people and rights groups of stripping natural resources such as minerals and tim-

ber and are linked to the torture and death of civilians. In the wake of Prigozhin’s rebellion and suspicious death in a plane crash, the Russians are recalibrating their Africa operations.

The U.S., which has been largely disengaged from the region for years, is attempting to maintain a presence and stymie Russian gains as it pushes African countries to distance themselves from the mercenaries.

“If the U.S. cannot regain a foothold, it could give Russia greater economic and political leverage,” said Samuel Ramani of the Royal United Services Institute, a defence and security think tank. “If



Bouquets laid at a statue of Russian mercenaries as a tribute to late Wagner leader Prigozhin in Bangui, Central African Republic. AP

Russia loses Central African Republic, its flagship model on the continent, there could be a domino effect in other countries.”

In recent years, Russia has emerged as the security partner of choice for a growing number of govern-

ments in the region, displacing traditional allies such as France and the U.S.

Moscow aggressively expanded its military cooperation by using mercenaries like Wagner, who have operated in at least half a dozen countries since around

2017. They are tasked with protecting African leaders and in some cases helping fight rebels and extremists.

Human rights concerns

They are also plagued by their human rights record. Two years ago in Mali, Wagner and the army were accused of executing about 300 men – some suspected of being Islamist extremists, but most civilians – in what Human Rights Watch called the worst single atrocity reported in the country’s decade-long armed conflict.

After Prigozhin’s death, Russia moved quickly to take control of Wagner’s assets, and the Defence Ministry told countries where Wagner operated that it

would take over. The country and its military intelligence arm have taken a more direct role in Africa operations, deploying more official detachments from its army.

Russia is trying to rebrand the mercenaries, creating Africa Corps, a parallel group that could absorb Wagner, said John Lechner, a Wagner expert.

In Central African Republic, it’s still unclear how much sway the Russian state has with the mercenaries, who are beloved by many and embedded in society, brewing beer and visiting markets. Still, they largely keep to themselves, walking through streets with faces covered and driving in unmarked cars.