

28/08/2025		
Ex Farm Broiler Chicken Rate	₹ 66	per kg
Retail Sale Rate LIVE	₹ 94	per kg
Dressed (with skin) Rate	₹ 114	per kg
Retail Sale Rate* for Eggs	₹ 70	per 12 eggs

NAMED BY U.S. IN PANNUN CASE

Two days later, court cancels non-bailable warrant against ex-R&AW officer

NIRBHAY THAKUR
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 27

TWO DAYS after a Delhi court issued a non-bailable warrant (NBW) against Vikash Yadav, the former R&AW officer who was named by the US as a conspirator in an alleged plot to kill pro-Khalistan separatist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, the court cancelled it on Wednesday.

Additional Sessions Judge Saurabh Partap Singh Laler of Patiala House Courts had issued the NBW on Monday, noting that Yadav had failed to appear before the court in a case of alleged kidnapping and extortion despite repeated calls. "Issue NBWs against accused... and notice to his surety under Section 491 Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (the procedure when bond has been forfeited) for October 17," he had said.

On Wednesday, Yadav's CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

TRUMP, MODI HAVE VERY GOOD RELATIONSHIP: BESSENT

As 50% tariffs begin, US treasury secy says: End of day, we will come together

Communication lines with US open... also in touch with industry to soften impact: Commerce Ministry officials

SUKALP SHARMA
& RAVI DUTTA MISHRA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 27

ON THE day 50 per cent US tariffs on Indian goods became effective, US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said the India-US relationship is a "complicated" one, but he believed that "at the end of the day" the two countries will "come together".

"This is a complicated relationship. President Trump and Prime Minister Modi have a very good relationship at that level. It's not just over the Russian oil.



US Treasury Secy Scott Bessent

The Indians came in early after Liberation Day to start negotiating on tariffs and we still don't have a deal. I thought we would have a deal in May or June. I thought India could be one of the earlier deals and they kind of tapped us along in terms of the negotiations and then there is

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

SHUBHAJIT ROY
CANBERRA, AUGUST 27

LAUNCHING A broadside that has left many in Delhi bristling, US President Donald Trump, while repeating that he brokered a ceasefire between India and Pakistan in May, Wednesday claimed that he spoke to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Pakistan and said the US will not do "any (trade) deals with you", that "we are going to put tariffs on you that are so high, your



Trump repeats claim of brokering India-Pak ceasefire

head's going to spin" if the fighting doesn't stop.

He claimed he stopped the India-Pakistan conflict from "going nuclear".

"I am talking to a very terrific man, Modi of India. I said, 'What's

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Australia does not back tariffs, says Wong, flags shared aims as Quad partners



Penny Wong: Important time for India, Australia to keep working together

SHUBHAJIT ROY
CANBERRA, AUGUST 27

UNDERLINING THAT Australia wants a "deep, strong and trusted partnership" with India, Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong said on Wednesday that her country "doesn't support tariffs".

On the US administration's tariffs on India, Wong said: "I'll leave you to comment on your bilateral relationships. I can tell you what Australia's position is... we don't support tariffs. We believe in the logic of the post-war economic order, that openness can enable growth, and our economy is a testament to that. Australia has developed our economy and advanced over these last decades because we have traded with the world in large part."

Asked about US President Donald Trump's turn against India in recent months, Wong said: "What we would want as

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



A vehicle stuck in debris in Jammu on Wednesday. PTI

Jammu rain: Toll rises to 41, many Vaishno Devi pilgrims among dead

ARUN SHARMA
& BASHAARAT MASOOD
JAMMU, SRINAGAR, AUGUST 27

AT LEAST 41 people, most of them Vaishno Devi pilgrims, died in Jammu's Reasi and Doda districts between Tuesday and Wednesday as the heaviest-ever

rainfall recorded during 24 hours in Jammu province left a trail of death and devastation.

Thirty-four people died near Adhikunwari en route to the shrine on Tuesday afternoon following a cloudburst in the area, while four died in the hilly Doda district due to rain and flash floods earlier in the morning.

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THE EDITORIAL PAGE

THE BIG PICTURE
Even as India continues trade talks with the US, it must reiterate red lines, push ahead on domestic reforms
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EXPRESS NETWORK

U.S. WELCOMES INDIA CALL TO SCRAP 11% COTTON DUTY

INDIA POLICY SHOULD BE GLOBAL TRADE FREE OF PRESSURE: BHAGWAT **PAGES 6, 7**

Lutnick says green card to change, DeSantis calls H-1B visas a scam

SHUBHAJIT ROY
CANBERRA, AUGUST 27

AMID THE strain in ties, the Trump administration has opened a new front, targeting skilled Indian professionals on the H-1B visa programme, a move that is expected to hit middle-class Indians in the US.

Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick has said the US intends to modify the current immigration system, specifically the H-1B visa programme and green cards. He said the Trump

BUSINESS AS USUAL

By UNNY



EXPLAINED

ECONOMICS
H-1B VISA DEBATE IN U.S. P12

administration plans to introduce a "gold card" programme. It will allow wealthy foreigners to invest \$5 million in exchange for US residency.

"I am involved in changing the H-1B visa programme. We are going to change that

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

'We are being lied to... responding to request to hate each other'

PAROMITA CHAKRABARTI
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 27

MOTHERHOOD, IN much of the subcontinent's storytelling, comes wrapped in sentiment — a shorthand for nurture and sacrifice, for safe harbour, for the first and most abiding of refuges. Arundhati Roy, 63, was not raised inside that fable. Her mother,




Arundhati Roy's new book, *Mother Mary Comes to Me*, is set to release today. PRH




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‘PARTITION HORRORS REMEMBRANCE DAY’

IHC slams NCERT modules: Distorted polarizing history fed to schoolchildren’s minds

EXPRESSNEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 27

TERMING NCERT’s new modules on ‘Partition Horrors Remembrance Day’ as “false-hoods, with a clear communal-intent,” a resolution by the Indian History Congress (IHC)—an association of historians — said that “distorted polarizing history” is “being fed to tender minds of school going children.”

The resolution, dated August 25, said, “Turning history completely upside down, the modules hold not only the Muslim League but also the Indian National Congress responsible for the Partition of the country. Quite in tune with the loyalist stance of the communal forces during the freedom struggle, the British colonial rulers are given a clean chit in these modules.”

The NCERT modules – short publications on specific topics –

on Partition Horrors Remembrance Day were released earlier this month, one for the secondary stage (Classes 9 to 12), and another for the middle stage (Classes 6 to 8).

The module states that three actors were responsible for Partition: “1. Jinnah, who demanded it. 2. The Congress, which accepted it. 3. Mountbatten, who formalized and implemented it.”

The IHC resolution stated that the “reality is very different from what the modules argue.”

“The partition of India was the result of a long-term strategy of the British pursued since the 19th century of divide and rule, particularly after the revolt of 1857, which Hindus and Muslims fought together, shoulder to shoulder...” it said.

“All descriptions in the modules refer to Hindus and Sikhs killed and humiliated and no mention of the retaliatory horrors inflicted on Muslims,” it added.

● Jammu rain: Toll rises to 41

Eighteen of the 34 bodies brought to the Government Medical College Hospital’s mortuary in Jammu from Katra have been identified as residents of Punjab, Delhi, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

Later, with the recovery of three bodies – of a BSF jawan in Pargwal, an Irrigation Department employee in Lakhampur, and an unidentified woman in Akhnor – the toll touched 41.

J&K Lt Governor Manoj Sinha, who visited a hospital in Katra to enquire about the health of 13 injured pilgrims there, said, “A cloudburst occurred and devotees at Ardhkuwari were caught in it. It was a heart-wrenching natural calamity in which we lost precious lives. We are providing all possible assistance to their families.”

Pointing out that the yatra was suspended on Tuesday due to the weather, he announced ex gratia relief of Rs 9 lakh to the families of the deceased.

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, while expressing grief over the deaths, asked why officials did not stop pilgrims from treading the track when there was a weather warning. “We will have to talk about it later. When we knew about the weather, should we not have taken certain steps to save those lives? The weather warning had come to us a few days ago,” he told the media.

“Why were these people on the track? Why were they not stopped? Why were they not moved to a safe place? This has to be discussed later. We feel sorrow over the loss of precious lives,” he said.

Significantly, Lt Governor Sinha is the chairman of the Shri Mata Vaishnodevi Shrine Board, which monitors the pilgrimage in the Trikuta Hills.

The pilgrimage was suspended after pilgrims, who had taken refuge under an iron shed due to the rains, were buried in a landslide around 3 pm on Tuesday.

The landslide struck halfway along the winding 12-km trek from Katra to the shrine.

There are two routes up to the shrine. While the yatra had been suspended on the Himkoti trek route since Tuesday morning, it was allowed on the old route until 1:30 pm, when authorities decided to suspend it until further notice.

In view of the devastation, the school education department in the UT had closed schools last week, while the State Board of School Education postponed class 11 and 12 exams across J&K.

Official sources said that in just a 24-hour period, Jammu recorded 380 mm of rainfall on Tuesday. This is the maximum rainfall ever recorded in Jammu in a 24-hour period since 1910, when the observatory was established, they said. The previous record was 270.4 mm recorded on September 25, 1988.

Omar also visited a fourth bridge on the Tawi River, which was damaged due to flash floods, and emphasised the need for its technical evaluation as it had been damaged during the 2014 floods as well. He directed BSNL and other private telecom operators, such as Jio and Airtel, to immediately restore internet and telecom services.

Vehicular traffic on the Jammu-Pathankot, Jammu-Srinagar and Batote-Doda-Kishtwar national highways was suspended following damage due to the landslides and flash floods.

Incessant rains during the past three days also created a flood-like situation in various parts of Jammu, prompting the NDRF, SDRF, police and Army to use boats to rescue people. More than 5,000 people were evacuated.

The Indian Army Aviation evacuated 22 CRPF personnel along with three civilians who had been stranded near Madhopur Headworks since Tuesday.

Meanwhile, in Srinagar, the Jehlum river’s water level was close to the danger mark. Devastated by the massive floods in 2014, the city is on high alert.

Divisional Commissioner, Kashmir, Anshul Garg, said precautionary measures are in place and the water levels are being monitored. “All our deputy commissioners in south Kashmir and central Kashmir are on the ground,” he said.

The government has announced that all schools and colleges in the Valley will remain closed on Thursday.

The Valley also saw a communication breakdown as both wired and mobile internet, as well as calling facilities, were disrupted. Officials said this was because of damage to the optical fibre cable along the national highway where landslides struck.

SpaceX rocket places Indian startups’ satellites into orbit

ANONNA DUTT
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 27

THREE HYPERSPECTRAL imaging satellites developed by the Indian startup Pixel were successfully placed in orbit by SpaceX’s Falcon 9 rocket early Wednesday morning. The launch of the three satellites, along with the three launched earlier in January, marked the completion of the first phase of the Firefly constellation.

The same Falcon-9 mission also launched the payloads based on the P-30 satellite bus developed by Indian startup Dhruva Space. Dhruva’s LEAP-1 (Launching Expeditions for Aspiring Payloads) contains two payloads: an advanced AI module and a hyperspectral imager.

Pixel plans to create an 18-24 satellite constellation, depending on customer needs. With the first

six satellites, the company will be able to provide global coverage every 24 hours. The satellites will provide high-resolution images of the Earth at a 5-metre resolution, captured in 135 spectral bands.

The basic RGB images are captured in three spectral bands of visible light. A multi-spectral image is captured in four to 12 bands, ranging from visible to near-infrared light, while hyperspectral images are captured in 37 to more than 100 spectral bands, ranging from visible to short-wave infrared light. This produces detailed images that enable consumers to monitor Earth’s ecosystems with extreme accuracy.

While many earth observation satellites can inform consumers about crop health, hyperspectral images can tell which nutrients are missing from soil and can distinguish between different species and subspecies of crops.

FROM PAGE ONE US treasury secy: End of day, we will come together

also the aspect of the Russian crude purchases which they’ve been profiteering on,” Bessent said in an interview to television news channel Fox Business.

“There’s many levels going on here. I do think India’s the world largest democracy; the US is the world’s largest economy. I think at the end of the day we will come together. I think a lot of it by the Indians has been performative. I’ve said it all along during the tariff negotiations. The US is the deficit country. When there is a schism in trade relations, the deficit country (is) at an advantage. It’s the surplus country that should worry. So, the Indians are selling to us. They have very high tariffs and we have a very large deficit with them,” the US Treasury Secretary said.

In New Delhi, Commerce Ministry officials said the communication lines with the US have not been severed and that they were also in touch with the industry to explore how to soften the impact of tariffs. US negotiators were expected to come to India on August 25 for talks to conclude the trade deal. However, the talks were called off after US President Donald Trump announced 50 per cent tariffs on India on August 6.

On being asked if he was worried that India is going to do trade using the rupee, instead of the dollar, with the BRICS countries, Bessent said, “There are a lot of things I worry about. The rupee

becoming a reserve currency isn’t one of them. I think the rupee is near an all-time low versus the US dollar.”

As trade talks were on, India’s hefty imports of Russian crude suddenly surfaced as a major irritant for the Trump administration. Earlier in August, Trump announced an additional 25 per cent tariff—over and above the 25 per cent tariff announced on Indian goods in July — as a penalty for Russian oil imports. The cumulative 50 per cent US tariff on goods took effect on Wednesday.

Bessent said the US could use more assistance from Europe on pressuring India over its Russian oil imports, given that much of the refined petroleum products exported by India go to Europe. “Our European allies need to step up. I don’t see them threatening the tariffs on the Indians. As a matter of fact, they’re the ones buying the refined products that’s made from the Russian oil,” Bessent said. He said only Canada was willing to join the US in applying secondary tariffs to pressure countries like India.

India-US trade deal negotiations had started in February this year soon after Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Washington. Both leaders had announced plans to sign a bilateral trade agreement by the end of the year. The two countries had also signed the terms of reference (ToR) for the trade deal. But,

● Lutnick says green card to change, DeSantis calls H-1B visas a scam

programme because that’s terrible, right? We are going to change the green card,” Lutnick said during an interview with Fox News.

Florida’s Governor Ron DeSantis also criticised the H-1B visa programme, calling it a “total scam”. He said it allows companies to replace American workers with foreign labour.

During an interview on Fox News, DeSantis claimed that companies often train American workers alongside H-1B visa holders, only to lay off the Americans and hire the foreign workers. This practice, he said, is unacceptable and hurts American workers.

Asked by anchor Laura Ingraham on the divide in the Trump cabinet over the issue of H-1B visas, DeSantis said, “I think you are right to say the H-1B... has become a total scam. These companies game the system. Some of these companies are laying off large numbers of Americans while also hiring new H-1B workers and renewing existing H-1B visas. Often, people used to say, ‘We are getting the cream of the crop from all around the world.’ The reality is that’s not actually what H1Bs are.”

● Court cancels non-bailable warrant against ex-R&AW officer

lawyers filed an application stating that the NBW was issued while a lawyers’ strike was underway, which is why they could not attend the hearing on Monday.

ASJ Laler then said the NBW against Yadav was cancelled in view of the facts stated in the application moved by his lawyers. He also restored the bail bond surety and directed Yadav to appear in person or through his counsel on October 17, which is the next date of hearing.

Yadav was arrested on December 18, 2023, by the Delhi Police Special Cell after an FIR was filed against him on a complaint from a Rohini resident, ac-

cusing him of extortion and kidnapping, and linking him to gangster Lawrence Bishnoi. The arrest came three weeks after Yadav’s name was listed in the Pannun case by US authorities. Yadav was later released on bail even as a chargesheet was filed by the police.

Yadav had been moving applications before the Delhi court seeking exemption from appearance citing a “threat to his life”, which were approved. But he did not move a fresh application on Monday, prompting the court to take action.

Lawyers in Delhi have been protesting against a notification

EXPLAINED
Blowing hot and cold

THE INDIA-US relationship is a complex one, but has evolved over years, with both countries aware of the nuances. Given that talks started in February, a deal was expected soon; but that was not to be. There are many things going on, and as Bessent says, the two will ‘come together’.

India’s stance to maintain protection for its agriculture and mid-sized vehicles has created differences between trade negotiators.

New Delhi has said the targeting of India over the purchase of Russian oil was “unjustified and unreasonable” and said these imports began as its traditional supplies were diverted to Europe, with the US having “actively encouraged such imports by India for strengthening global energy markets stability”.

Washington has also been frustrated over protracted trade deal negotiations with New Delhi, given that India was initially seen as one of the front-runners for a trade pact with the US. India’s stiff resistance to American demands of greater access to the country’s farm and dairy sectors are among the major roadblocks in the ne-

during a joint news conference with Oracle CTO Larry Ellison, Softbank CEO Masayoshi Son and OpenAI CEO Sam Altman, Trump said: “I like both sides of the argument, but I also like very competent people coming into our country, even if that involves them training and helping other people who may not have the qualifications they do. But I don’t want to stop – and I am not just talking about engineers, I am talking about people at all levels.”

“We want competent people coming into our country. And H-1B, I know the programme very well. I use the programme. Maitre d’, wine experts, even waiters, high-quality waiters – you have got to get the best people. People like Larry, he needs engineers, Masa also needs... they need engineers like nobody’s ever needed them,” he said.

“So, we have to have quality people coming in. Now, by doing that, we are expanding businesses and that takes care of everybody. So I am sort of on both sides of the argument, but what I really do feel is that we have to let really competent people, great people, come into our country. And we do that through the H-1B

issued by Lieutenant-Governor V K Saxena, allowing police to virtually present evidence in courts from stations. In a circular issued last Thursday, the Coordination Committee of All District Court Bar Associations in Delhi said all lawyers would abstain from work and those seen in courts would be penalised. Wednesday marked the fifth day of the strike.

On Monday, Yadav’s alleged associate Abdullah Khan had moved an application before the court for extending the release of his passport, claiming his father was diagnosed with blood cancer for which he had to visit

gotiations.

The renewed pressure from the US and other Western powers—pressuring India to cut down on imports from Russia—is aimed at forcing the Kremlin’s hand into ending the Ukraine war. For Trump, who wants the three-year-old Russia-Ukraine war to end within days, this is an opportune time to pressure India over its Russian imports, given the long-drawn-out trade pact negotiations between New Delhi and Washington have been hit by impediments.

Russia is currently the largest source of crude for India, accounting for 35-40 per cent of New Delhi’s oil imports. When Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, Moscow’s share in New Delhi’s oil imports was less than 2 per cent. While Trump has slapped additional tariffs on India as a “penalty” for buying Russian crude, it has not taken any such action so far against China—the top buyer of Moscow’s oil.

Despite the extra tariffs, New Delhi continues to maintain it will buy oil from wherever it gets the best deal, as long as the oil is not under sanctions. Russian oil is not under sanctions, and is only subject to a price cap imposed by the US and its allies that applies if Western shipping and insurance services are used for transporting the oil. Indian refiners and the government maintain that they have been adhering to the price cap on Russian oil.

programme,” he said.

It was the second time since his election that Trump had supported the H-1B programme that allows businesses in the US to employ skilled foreign nationals.

While much of the focus of the crackdown is against illegal immigration, there is some apprehension here that the far-right MAGA Republican voices may force a tightening of the legal immigration channels as well.

Since Indian professionals and students go to the US in large numbers to live, work or study there, along with Indian tourists, there has been some concern about how those visa categories may be affected.

Indians are the biggest beneficiaries of the H-1B visas. Between October 2022 and September 2023, 72 per cent of the nearly 41 lakh visas issued under the H-1B programme went to Indian nationals. During the same period, top four Indian IT majors with a presence in the US – Infosys, TCS, HCL and Wipro – obtained approval for around 20,000 employees to work on H-1B visas, according to the latest US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) data.

Dubai, Singapore and the UK for medical opinion. “In view of sub-missions made, extension of release of passport is allowed till next date of hearing on October 17,” the court said on Wednesday.

A third accused, Dubai-based Jalaluddin alias Sameer, was arrested on July 1 for his alleged role in the kidnapping-extortion case. He is also out on bail. A fourth person, Bikram Gogoi, has moved an anticipatory bail plea in Patiala House Courts saying that he knew Jalaluddin since his school days in Delhi, but wasn’t aware of his criminal antecedents.

● ‘Australia doesn’t back tariffs’

friends of both countries, and as, very obviously, we’re an alliance partner of the United States, is to say we share so much, we share not just history, but we do share very clear objectives about the attributes of the (Indo-Pacific) region in which we live. We always encourage dialogue, and we are strong supporters of the Quad.”

The Quad grouping comprises India, Australia, the US and Japan.

Interacting with a visiting delegation of Indian journalists, Wong, when asked about India’s efforts to repair ties with China, said Beijing is a great power and is asserting its interests as great powers do, adding that some of those interests may not align with Australia’s interests.

“There will be differences in the relationship. We also have areas where we can cooperate... We cooperate where we can. We disagree where we must. And we engage in the national interest. It describes a way of dealing with the relationship which recognises that there would be areas of differences, and recognises there will be areas of cooperation, and also recognises the importance to both our countries for mature engagement. Now, that’s the approach we (Australia) take, and from my observation, it’s the approach that India seeks to take,” she said.

“I want to emphasise the value we place, the priority we place on our relationship with India. I met with Dr Jaishankar more than any other counterpart, which reflects the priority we give to this relationship,” Wong said. “We are at a time of great change. I think what you see in Australia is a very reliable, stable partner that shares a great deal of your strategic objectives, which are, what I describe as, a peaceful, stable and prosperous region in which everyone’s sovereignty is respected,” she said.

She said there are many areas where there is “strategic alignment”, and pointed out the presence of Indian diaspora.

On the impact of tension between India and the US having an adverse impact on the Quad, she said: “We are strong supporters of the Quad, and obviously I’ll leave it to others to deal with, engage bilaterally on, issues that they want to deal with. But I would always say that... it’s good for all of us to remember what we share. And we do have a lot of shared objectives around the Indo-Pacific. And we are Quad

● ‘Called Modi, Pak, said stop war’

going on with you and Pakistan?”. Then I am talking to Pakistan, on trade. I said what’s going on with you and India? And the hatred was tremendous. This has been going on for a hell of a long time, like, sometimes with different names for hundreds of years,” he said.

“I said, I don’t want to make a trade deal with you... You guys are going to end up in a nuclear war... I said, call me back tomorrow. But we are not going to do any deals with you, or we are going to put tariffs on you that are so high, your head’s going to spin,” he said.

“Within five hours, it was done. Maybe it starts again, but I will stop it if it does,” he said.

Trump also claimed that “seven jets or maybe more” were shot down – he did not say which country’s aircraft he was referring to.

Talking to the press at the White House two days ago, Trump had claimed that he stopped seven wars around the world, including the one between India and Pakistan. He

partners not just because we’re Quad partners, but we are Quad partners because we have those shared strategic objectives.”

On the bilateral front, she recalled Quad meetings and bilateral meetings between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. “We want a deep, strong and trusted partnership with you... We can talk through the gamut of the whole breadth of our relationship... we do a lot together, but I think fundamentally, it comes back to this. We are in a time where the world is, the global order is, being reshaped, the regional order is being reshaped, and we have a responsibility to influence that reshaping. And we want to work with India, because we see a lot of convergence and alignment in the sort of outcomes we want from that reshaping. We see the attributes of the region that we want as being shared... So, it’s a very important time for us to keep working together,” she said.

On the recent visa fee hikes faced by international students in Australia, including Indian students, she said: “What we have is education exports... So international students coming to Australia is a very important part of our economy, and it’s also a very important part of our bilateral relationships and our regional relationships. My father was a Colombo Plan scholar to Australia. So, I’ve known through my own life the importance of that experience of education, and what that means long-term for our bilateral relationship. There have been various reforms in the education area; they are about trying to improve the quality of the educational offer, and we have been really clear. And we will continue to welcome international students, but we have sought to improve the quality of that education and also to stabilise the numbers, which obviously spiked as a consequence of post-Covid.”

On Australia’s support for India after the Pahalgam terror attack, she said: “I spoke to your foreign minister after that, and you saw, as you said, my public comments. We welcomed the ceasefire. We welcome efforts to assure peace and stability, and often, obviously, one of the key aspects of that is to counter terrorism.”

(The reporter is in Australia at the invitation of The Australian Foreign Ministry.)

said that of the seven wars he stopped, four were because he used tariffs and trade to negotiate with the parties involved in the conflict.

His latest remarks, being viewed in Delhi as the most personalised attack on the Prime Minister, have led to a fair amount of disquiet in Delhi.

Delhi has fact-checked the US President in the last few months, but it has not stopped Trump from claiming credit for brokering an end to the hostilities between India and Pakistan.

Modi had told Trump that there was no conversation between them on trade. On July 30, Trump announced the imposition of 25 per cent tariff on Indian goods, and followed it a week later by announcing an additional 25 per cent tariff over Indian purchase of Russian oil.

India and the US have had a difficult relationship and the ties have been hit adversely in the last few months over the tariffs and the India-Pakistan military confrontation.

are new books,” she says. It has done nothing to alter her commitment to speaking up against injustices. She has been accused at various points of time in her career of not showing India in “proper” light, but if there’s a light worth shining, she says, it is always the stark glare of truth. “We are living in an age where we are constantly being lied to, constantly being ambushed, constantly responding to the request to hate each other. I think we have plenty to be ashamed of. And we should not be ashamed of saying so,” she says.

In the week preceding the interview, allegations of “vote chori” by the Opposition and the press conference of the Election Commission of India dismissing them as malicious have dominated national news. What happens when distrust becomes the leitmotif of public life, denying citizens the respect and space to disagree? Roy says the metastasis has been in the making for a long time. “Sometimes I think that a society that practises caste has already institutionalised a lack of empathy

because of this hierarchical social structure and then introduced ethnic and religious violence, corporate capitalism and a complete cold-heartedness towards the poor. I don’t think there is any society like Indian society in the world today which is so cruel and so uncaring of each other. One of the biggest things that we have to overcome is that kind of hierarchical thinking which closes out the possibility of your feeling something for someone who does not belong to whatever tiny group you claim you want to belong to. It’s political, it’s social, it’s economic but it’s also psychological,” she says.

The answer, she says, does not lie in a utopian imagination of reversal. “You can’t return. You have to move on and come to a new place. It won’t happen soon but I sense a fatigue with the kind of shabby fascism that is being imposed on us. The whole world is in a dangerous place right now. The way people have been controlled – the digital world is a world of surveillance and control and people think that they are free – it will take time,” she says.



DEVOTION CONNECTS ALL

A replica of Kerala's Padmanabhaswamy Temple, created by Dagdusheth Halwai Ganpati Trust, illuminated as Ganeshotsav began on Wednesday. *Arul Horizon*

PMC set to designate fixed feeding spots for stray dogs

ARYESH CHAKRABORTY
PUNE, AUGUST 27

THE PUNE Municipal Corporation (PMC) is preparing to designate fixed feeding points for stray dogs across the city, following the recent Supreme Court ruling on the issue and the Animal Birth Control (ABC) Rules, 2023.

The Supreme Court last week prohibited the feeding of stray dogs in the streets and in public places, and directed civic authorities to create dedicated feeding spaces for strays in each municipal ward.

Dr Sarika Funde, Chief Veterinary Officer, PMC, said that a committee comprising PMC officials, the police, members of the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), housing society representatives, and dog feeders has been formed to identify suitable locations.

"We want to bring all volunteers onto one platform. Work has already begun on a format where feeders can register the number of dogs, timings, and locations of feeding to ensure everything is proper. Cleanliness and hygiene at feeding points will be strictly maintained," Dr Funde told *The Indian Express*.

PMC aims to roll out the initiative by the end of September,

after consultations with volunteers, many of whom are already working with organisations like Shashwat Foundation, among others.

Dr Funde clarified that the cost of setting up feeding points will not require a major budget allocation and can be managed through existing resources.

Dog feeders in Pune have welcomed the move but stressed the need for transparency.

"Every location has its own volunteers. Instead of picking up dogs randomly for sterilisation, if PMC can coordinate with one local representative, it will help keep track of which dogs are picked, sterilised, and dropped back," Tina Malkani of Karmanye Foundation, who feeds nearly 300 dogs in Kharadi, said.

She also pointed out that dogs are territorial, and therefore multiple feeding points will be needed within a locality to avoid conflict among packs.

"If packs are forced to mix at one spot, there will be fights, and then people will call the dogs aggressive. Proper distribution of feeding spots is essential," she clarified.

Dr Ankita Chandra, a maxillofacial surgeon and dog feeder from Viman Nagar, welcomed the move.

"This is a very good decision by the Supreme Court and PMC.

Strays should not suffer. But at the same time, the public must be educated about sterilisation, vaccination, and rabies prevention," said Dr Chandra.

While some dog feeders have faced harassment from residents in Delhi and other cities despite court orders, PMC officials have assured that such complaints will be handled strictly as per ABC rules.

"Community dogs are allowed to be fed, and both feeders and residents must comply with the law. We will verify complaints thoroughly and ensure proper enforcement," Dr Funde said.

Dr Funde had told *The Indian Express* a few days ago that Pune has an approximate stray dog count of 1.8 lakh.

"We are yet to conduct a census, but with the merger of villages, we anticipate the stray dog population to rise to at least 2.5 lakh," she added.

In 2024-2025, as per data from the civic body, 56,537 stray dogs were sterilised and vaccinated; the count was 57,444 in 2023-2024. From April to June this year, 14,297 stray dogs have been sterilised and vaccinated.

In light of the ongoing Ganpati festival, the PMC is expected to hold online and offline meetings with dog feeders in the coming weeks before finalising the locations for feeding spots.

KATRAJ-KONDHWA ROAD

Pune civic body earmarks Rs 470 crore for land acquisition for road-widening

AJAY JADHAV
PUNE, AUGUST 27

THE MUCH-DELAYED road development project connecting Katraj to Kondhwa is set to receive a vital boost as the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) has decided to allocate Rs 470 crore for land acquisition, which will enable the completion of road work by December next year.

The Katraj-Kondhwa road

has been in poor condition and frequently witnesses fatal accidents due to the presence of heavy vehicles and an increase in smaller vehicles, caused by rapid urbanisation in the area.

The civic body approved the Katraj-Kondhwa road expansion in 2018, but it had not progressed due to land acquisition issues and a lack of funding.

"The Katraj-Kondhwa road was planned to be 84 metres wide, but now it has been decided

to be widened up to 50 metres. The land acquisition will be undertaken soon, and Rs 470 crore will be allocated to the district administration for this purpose. The PMC plans to complete the road work by December next year," said Municipal Commissioner Naval Kishore Ram.

The municipal commissioner said the road is among the 50 civic projects included in the PMC 'war room' for regular tracking and acceleration of work.

What every liver donor should know about post-transplant recovery

ANURADHA MASCARENHAS
PUNE, AUGUST 27

DEATH OF a liver donor is extremely rare and so when a tragic incident occurred in Pune – a 42-year-old woman died of low blood pressure and multi-organ failure after donating a part of her liver to her husband – questions have been raised about how risk-proof the transplant procedure is.

As reported, 42-year-old Kamini Koamkar had donated a part of her liver to husband Bapu Bal Krishna Koamkar on August 15. Bapu passed away after the transplant surgery. Kamini recovered and was doing well initially till she, what the Sahyadri Hospital authorities said, devel-

oped hypotensive shock (when the body's circulatory system fails to move oxygenated blood and nutrients to cells) and multi-organ failure despite advanced treatment. While the health department is conducting a review, transplant surgeons and doctors reiterated that liver donation was a safe option.

"With proper evaluation of the donor's medical status and care, it is completely safe. By donating, you are not losing anything – instead, you are giving someone a new life, and that is the greatest blessing," says Dr Bipin Vibhute, liver and multi-organ transplant surgeon, Jupiter Hospital, Pune. "If there's any risk, that's too small. By that logic every surgery has that tiny risk," says Dr Harshal Rajekar, liver transplant surgeon at Medicovert Hospital, Pune.



Kamini Koamkar and her husband Bapu Koamkar

Chance of serious complication less than one per cent

Donor death is an extremely rare event. "Globally, the chance of serious complications is less than 1% and the risk of death is extremely rare – only 0.1–0.2%," says Dr Vibhute. That's because, he explains, the liver is a unique organ. It has the power to regenerate. This means the portion left

'NON-PAYMENT OF FEES': HINDUSTAN ANTIBIOTICS SCHOOL FACES PROBE

Parents allege students humiliated, photos shared on WhatsApp group

SOHAM SHAH
PUNE, AUGUST 27

PIMPRI-CHINCHWAD Municipal Corporation (PCMC)'s education department has set up an inquiry against Hindustan Antibiotics School following allegations of humiliation of students over non-payment of fees. Parents of Class 7 students have alleged children who have not paid their fees were singled out in class, made to stand together and photographed,

which was then shared on the parents' WhatsApp group.

The school is a government-aided school run by the Deccan Education Society. It was established in 1958 mainly for the wards of Hindustan Antibiotics Ltd employees and children from low-income families in the neighbourhood.

Requesting anonymity, the parent of a Class 7 student told *The Indian Express*, "The school had no communication with parents regarding the fees. They

told the students a couple of times and my child reminded me about the fees, but I could not pay it due to financial constraints. But why was my child humiliated? Is it right to humiliate children and their parents on WhatsApp groups over fees?"

"It is my fault that I was not able to pay the fees. What is the child's fault? Why single them out in class and take photos? It is only natural that now the other kids will make fun of them," he added.

After receiving the message

on the WhatsApp group on Monday, the parent approached the Republican Party of India (Athawale), which helped him file a complaint with the PCMC.

Sangita Bangar, administration officer at PCMC's education department, told *The Indian Express*, "We have formed a three-member committee, including myself and two other members, to investigate the issue. As today is a leave for both the department and the school, we will visit the school tomorrow.

We have conducted a primary inquiry and found out that due to some students' fees not being received, a class teacher clicked photos of the students and shared it in the parents' group. We will investigate tomorrow and find out why and how the teacher did this and what this fee was regarding."

Asha Mane, vice-principal of Hindustan Antibiotics School, told *The Indian Express* such photos should not have been taken and circulated by the teacher.

Who is Atharva Sudame, content creator in the eye of a storm?

SOHAM SHAH
PUNE, AUGUST 27

CONTENT CREATOR Atharva Sudame's tryst with controversy has ironically come from the same platform that has made him a popular face in the state – Instagram reels.

A 'reelstar' and regular Marathi content creator with over 1.7 million followers on Instagram, Sudame's latest reel on religious unity before the Ganapati festival has made him the target of certain groups.

In the reel, Sudame promotes Hindu-Muslim unity by purchasing a Ganesh idol from a Muslim shopkeeper.

After a section of social media users and the Akhil Bharatiya Brahman Mahasangh voiced their opposition, Sudame deleted the video and apologised for hurting sentiments.



Marathi content creator Atharva Sudame. *Express*

and Kane Williamson.

He was one of the social media influencers who was called by the Maharashtra Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Agriculture (MCCIA) to guide entrepreneurs on how to harness the power of social media last year.

A student of Modern High School, Sudame completed his education from the Marathwada Mitra Mandal's College of Commerce and married his long-time friend, Rucha, in 2023.

Sudame's content depicts him as the boy-next-door, but he has garnered his share of criticism, with social media users pointing out how some reels and jokes are problematic. A video by Sudame titled 'Gen-Z Kids Nowadays' makes light of conditions like anxiety, depression, panic attacks, and suicide.

In another reel titled 'Men will be Men', Sudame lists the

names of the women he had romantic relationships with in college to his friend. As his wife walks into the frame, his friend makes an excuse to get Sudame out of trouble. As soon as his wife leaves, Sudame starts talking about another woman.

Reddit user RKoi123 commented on a post on r/LGBTIndia, "Dannny pandit. And his friend Atharva Sudame. I find their skits homophobic and misogynistic."

Journalist Sunandan Lele, who collaborated with Sudame for cricket-related content, said, "I don't want to say anything specific about the reel, it is a part of an individual's creativity. But I can say for sure that the reel was made with a good heart. He never intends to create any controversy. Some of these things have become so unnecessarily sensitive that one is baffled about where things are headed."

'Deemed-to-be-university' status will enable IIPH to design courses relevant to emerging health needs

ANURADHA MASCARENHAS
PUNE, AUGUST 27

THE CONFERRING of deemed-to-be-university status to the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI)'s Indian Institutes of Public Health (IIPH) will enable the institute to design and deliver courses most relevant to the Indian population's existing, emerging and anticipated health needs, according to Dr K Srinath Reddy, founder president and Chancellor, PHFI Institute of Public Health Sciences.

"PHFI was earlier handicapped by the limitations of not being able to award degrees without affiliation to existing universities. Now with the conferring of Deemed to be University status,



it has come of age," Dr Reddy told *The Indian Express*.

Under Dr Reddy's leadership, PHFI established five Indian Institutes of Public Health. The IIPH in Hyderabad and sister institutions in Bengaluru and Bhubaneswar have been conferred with the status of a deemed-to-be-university under a distinct category by the Ministry of Education, Central Government. The recognition was formally notified through the Gazette of India in July. Two other

campuses (Delhi and Shillong) are awaiting final clearance to join the cluster of 'constituent units' of this new university.

The Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI) has been actively expanding through its Indian Institutes of Public Health (IIPH), yet it was in search of a cohesive identity, added Dr Reddy, who was also earlier Head of Cardiology at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi.

He said that public health must aim to promote health, prevent disease, and restore health through effective, equitable, empathetic, and economically efficient health systems as well as by aligning policies and programmes in other sectors to public health goals.

"Across the country, India's

health indicators vary widely. Even among key indicators, which have been targeted for several decades, like infant mortality and maternal mortality, there are considerable differences between states, districts, and urban-rural divides. For efficient design, delivery, monitoring, and evaluation of health programmes, health systems need public health expertise," Dr Reddy said.

He explained that PHFI established six Indian Institutes of Public Health in different regions of the country to provide this. "These IIPHs provide multi-disciplinary education which can be translated into multi-sectoral action on different determinants of health," he added.

The Chancellor also observed that since the determinants of human health lie across multi-

ple sectors, the faculty and student population represent a confluence of diverse but complementary disciplines.

"They include biological, social, environmental, data, and management sciences. Through the university, we hope to strengthen public health education, research, and public health practice while working closely with central and state governments to develop people-friendly health policies and impactfully deliver a wide array of health programmes," Dr Reddy said.

The university has started its formal operations by appointing an acting VC and has initiated the formal process to select a VC. During the period, directors of the IIPHs will continue to guide the conduct of teaching, training, research, he said.

EXPRESS

Careers

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Pune

Celebrations begin on a high note



On the occasion of Ganesh Chathurthi, marking the beginning of 10-day festivities, various processions carrying Ganpati idols and accompanied by beats of dhols and tashas, were taken out in Pune on Wednesday. Pavan Khengre

IDOLS MADE OF SHAADU MAATI

At Yerawada jail, inmates turn artistes for festival, shaping idols and hope

This year, 150 idols are being produced and over 100 are already booked; prices range between Rs 251 & Rs 3,000

VIRAJ MANDAR
PARANJPE
PUNE, AUGUST 27

AT YERAWADA Central Jail in Pune, clay has replaced steel, and brushes have replaced bars – at least for Ganeshotsav.

Prisoners here are handcrafting eco-friendly Ganesh idols, an initiative that the department calls “reformatory and environmentally urgent”.

This year, 150 idols are being produced, and over 100 have already been booked.

Prices range between Rs 251 and Rs 3,000, with popular designs including Vakratunda, Kamal Aasan, and replicas of Pune’s iconic Dagdusheth idol. The tallest Ganpati stands at 1.75 ft, and each idol is sold with a wooden paat for installation.

The project began at Nashik Central Jail in 2017, where sales crossed Rs 13 lakh in the first year, before being introduced at Yerawada jail.

In Pune, 250 idols were sold in 2021. This year’s idols are being crafted by five convicted prisoners, chosen through the work allotment committee.

They work under the guidance of Sunil Dhamal, Superintendent of Prison; Pallavi Kadam, Deputy Superintendent of Prison; factory manager Shivaji Patil, and technical officer P W Kharolkar.

Emphasising the programme’s discipline and inclusivity, Kadam says: “Only convicted prisoners are selected, not those on trial. But during Ganeshotsav, people from all communities



Ganesh idols at MaKa shop. Express

come together inside the jail – some place photos of Bappa in their barracks, some chant aartis. For 10 days, there is a different atmosphere in the prison.”

The idols are made of shaadu maati, natural clay that dissolves easily in water and avoids the environmental damage of Plaster of Paris (POP) idols. Kadam adds, “We want to create more awareness among citizens about eco-friendly Ganeshotsav. Pune’s should encourage the prisoners working on these efforts.”

Sales are managed through the Maharashtra Karagruha (MaKa) shop opposite the Yerawada sub-post office, run by Sanjay Tiwate. Demand is consistent, and the department now plans to introduce designs to

make the idols more market-ready and expand both production and participation.

Kadam notes that the idol-making process has noticeable effects on those involved.

“You can see the prisoners’ concentration and discipline improving. Their mental health is better, and when they carve the eyes of Bappa, you can feel the devotion,” she says.

She also offers a note of caution to youngsters, “Today’s youth are influenced by movies or by people who glorify crime. They think it is trendy, but the reality inside is very different. These prisoners are trying to channel their energy into something constructive. The society should recognise that.”



(Clockwise from top left) a Ganesh idol being taken on a tractor as part of a procession; dhols and tashas are played with great enthusiasm; a child dressed in a Ganapati-themed attire; people gather on road for celebrations; devotees click pictures of a Ganesh idol. Pavan Khengre

AMID CONCERNS ABOUT RISING POLLUTION

Ganeshotsav with solar power, eco-friendly traditions: a few mandals show the way

DIPANITA NATH
PUNE, AUGUST 27

IN A major boost to an eco-friendly Ganeshotsav in Pune, the Shree Shivraj Mitra Mandal in Bhavani Peth has created a solar garden and solar tree along with solar panels to supply its electricity needs.

“This is the first time in the history of Ganeshotsav in Pune that a mandal is going to create electricity by themselves. The solar tree has eight lights of a 50 watts each, and four panels of 165 watts each. This is more than enough for us to light eight 50 watts lights in the 25x35 ft mandal,” says Piyush Shah, an art director and the brain behind the concept.

Shah adds that the mandal will have a charging station, so-

lar lamps, a solar fountain and a solar cooker, among others.

“Solar is a big source of green energy, so this is a huge project. There are solar panels on the Narmada, so our message to the administration is also that we could think of a canal from Khadakwasala to Camp that could have solar panels,” says Shah. Pralhad Bhau Thorat is the president of mandal.

Incidentally, India ranks fourth globally in renewable energy installed capacity, and holds the third place in solar power capacity, according to the Government of India.

As the city begins its greatest festival of the year, amid concerns about rising pollution, many Ganesh mandals are showing the way forward.

Sanjeev Javale, president of Shrimant Bhausaheb Rangari



A solar garden and solar tree at Shree Shivraj Mitra Mandal in Bhavani Peth. Express

Ganpati Trust, the historical first sarvajani Ganpati, says that the idol of the deity was made in 1892 from paper pulp, sawdust and binder.

“The first idol, itself, was eco-friendly,” he says.

For 134 years, the “green” idol has decided how the mandal marks its celebrations. “Whatever music we play are bhakti songs. The level of noise is deliberately kept very moderate. This ensures that the mandal does not add to the sound pollution,” says Javale.

The Shrimant Bhausaheb Rangari Ganpati idol shows the god in an aggressive stance, slaying a demon.

The symbol is nationalistic from the time that freedom fighters were trying to bring down the British.

Today, the God could just as

well be signalling the need to defeat polluters and climate deniers.

“Until recent times, we had a rule about not using gulal. At present, due to the enthusiasm of the young generation, we have allowed a little gulal during the celebration. We are careful that this practice does not lead to air pollution,” says Javale.

While many homes and mandals use shaadu maati idols, the Navjyot Mitra Mandal Trust in Yerwada has gone a step ahead by distributing shaadu maati idols in the neighbourhood to more than 50 families.

“We have a permanent idol that we worship the year around, as well as a small idol that we place during Ganeshotsav. The latter is immersed during visarjan. We switched to shaadu maati a few years ago because we

did not like how Plaster of Paris idols impact water bodies,” says Amit Jadhav of the mandal.

Jadhav adds that people in the locality also receive a bucket and a cloth with their shaadu maati Ganpati.

This way, they can immerse the idol at home, sieve it and bring back the soil for recycling by the organisation Punaravartan.

“Shaadu maati comes from Gujarat and is a limited resource. We should be careful about using it, hence we collect the soil and give it for recycling,” says Jadhav.

For those still buying their idols, a word of advice – Shaad maati Ganpati must be handled with care and devotion for a fall can damage it. “But, we treat Ganpati idols like our children anyway,” he adds.

Maharashtra BJP MLC taking on ‘cow vigilantes’: Who is Sadashiv Khot?

PARTHASARATHI BISWAS
PUNE, AUGUST 27

BJP MLC Sadashiv Khot’s allegation on Monday of a cow vigilante “lobby” in Maharashtra “harassing” farmers has got flak from his own party, but it ties into his journey as a leader emerging from farmer groups.

Khot considers Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis as his political guru but also emphasises that farmer leader Sharad Joshi is his agricultural guru. “In the late 1990s, Joshi wrote about the need to repeal the Maharashtra Animal Preservation Act, 1976. This law, as per Joshi, was a threat to the farm economy and required amendments,” Khot said, articulating his position on the subject.

Joshi, Khot underlines, argued for farmers to have the authority to decide what to do with their animals.

For over a month now, traders and traditional butchers in Maharashtra have been on a strike in protest against “cow vigilantism”. The Maharashtra Qureshi Association, a body of the Muslim community that has traditionally worked as cattle traders and



MLC Sadashiv Khot

butchers, said they are unable to carry out their trade due to these vigilantes, with their animals often seized. Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar has also spoken on the matter and has directed police to take action against such vigilantism. Khot has also been speaking of the protests by the Qureshi community since Day 1 and arguing that the stopping of butchering and cattle trade is hurting farmers and their interests.

From the ground up

Khot, who belongs to Sangli district of Maharashtra, has been associated with agricultural issues, especially that of sugarcane farmers, for 30 years.

He joined hands with former MP Raju Shetti when he formed the Swabhimani Shetkari

Sanghatana in the late 1990s. The organisation was formed to ensure a better price for sugarcane and carried out an agitation against the powerful sugar mills of Western Maharashtra.

Khot became a debutant MLC in 2016 with the support of the BJP and became Minister of State for Agriculture in Fadnavis’s first term as CM. In 2018, Shetti decided to part ways with the BJP, but Khot stayed on with the party, and continued as a minister and an MLC. He later went to form the Rayat Kranti Sanghata, another farm outfit, but did not break his association with the BJP. In 2024, Khot was re-elected as an MLC.

Within the BJP, Khot’s opposition to the cow slaughter ban has been raising many eyebrows, with Fadnavis amending the 1976 Act in 2015 to ban the slaughter of animals of cow progeny (bulls, bullocks, ox, oxens).

Khot bases his argument on the economics of the milk trade. “A simple back-of-the-envelope calculation shows this. Animals require feed and fodder worth Rs 300 per day. Once they start yielding milk, the income from them is Rs 450 per day, if we consider production as 15 litres daily, with a base price of Rs 35 per litre,” Khot

says. Hence, if a farmer spends Rs 9,000 per month on an animal, he or she roughly makes Rs 13,500 from them in return. Their net profit: Rs 4,500.

The above expenditure, Khot says, is a “dead investment and would not yield any returns” if the animal is below two years of age, when it starts giving milk, or when it is older. The only way out, according to him, is selling the animals. “A farmer looks at an animal as a fixed deposit. When they sell these mature animals, they get a return on their investment and the very process of selling is now being threatened by the so-called cow vigilantes,” he says.

Khot claims that desi (indigenous) varieties of cows are never sold by farmers. “Such animals are always kept till their end as farmers consider them sacred. The trade is carried out in the milk-yielding or crossbred animals,” he says. Asked about the opposition he is facing from the BJP for his stance against cow vigilantes, Khot says the criticism is coming from people who have never milked a cow. Khot has claimed that his supporters and him faced physical violence at a gaushala (cow shelter) in Pune, which led him to lodge a complaint Monday.

12 killed as unauthorised building collapses in Palghar

Woman, one-yr-old daughter among dead; builder held after VVMC complaint

PRESSTRUST OF INDIA
PALGHAR, AUGUST 27

TWELVE PERSONS, including a mother-daughter duo, were killed and six others seriously injured after a portion of an unauthorised four-storey building collapsed on an adjacent vacant tenement at Virar in Maharashtra’s Palghar district on Wednesday, officials said.

While six bodies were retrieved from under the debris, six others died during treatment at various hospitals.

The operation to remove rubble at the crash site has been going on even after more than 20 hours have passed since the rear portion of Ramabai Apartment collapsed at 12.05 am.

The Vasai Virar Municipal Corporation (VVMC) stated in a release that six persons remain admitted to various hospitals in the area and Nalasopara on the outskirts of Mumbai.

Three others were discharged after treatment. Police arrested the builder af-



NDRF personnel during a rescue operation after the rear portion of a four-storey building crashed onto a chawl at Virar on Wednesday. PTI

ter Vasai Virar Municipal Corporation (VVMC) lodged a complaint.

Authorities have so far identified seven of the twelve deceased as Arohi Omkar Jovil (24), her one-year-old daughter Utkarsha Jovil, Laxman Kisku Singh (26), Dinesh Prakash Sapkal (43), Supriya Nivalkar (38), Amav Nivalkar (11), and Parvati Sapkal.

District Collector Indu Rani Jakhar has said that some more persons may still be buried under the debris.

Luckily, the chawl or tenement on which the building collapsed was vacant, said Vivekanand Kadam, District Disaster Management Officer of Palghar. As a precautionary measure,

all the chawls around the ill-fated building have been vacated and occupants shifted to safer places, he said.

Constructed in 2012, Ramabai Apartment has 50 flats, and the collapsed part had 12 apartments, said Kadam. A spokesperson of the Vasai Virar Municipal Corporation confirmed that the building was “illegal”.

The removal of debris was delayed because officials initially struggled to bring heavy machinery to the crashed building located in a congested locality.

“As of now, debris clearance is still underway. For the first several hours, the debris had to be cleared manually by civic teams and two units of the NDRF. Now, the operation is being carried out with machinery and progressing on a war footing,” VVMC Assistant Commissioner Gilson Gonsalves said. “All affected families have been temporarily housed at Chandansar Samajmandir. We are providing food, water, medical assistance, and other essential services,” Gonsalves said.

As prices of soybean, cotton and tur drop below MSP, Maharashtra farmers hope for govt intervention

PARTHASARATHI BISWAS
PUNE, AUGUST 27

VILAS UPHADE’S soybean crop, spread over 4 acres at the Takli village in the Latur district of Maharashtra, is healthy and in the advanced stage of pod formation. However, Uphade is less concerned about the unpredictable monsoon, and more about drop in prices of his crop.

As the June-September monsoon season comes to a close, farmers like Uphade are concerned that they will face challenges with pricing again this year. “The new crop is expected to hit the markets in about 45

days, but at Latur’s wholesale market prices are between Rs 4,600-4,650/quintal as against its Minimum Support Price (MSP) of Rs 5,328. There is going to be a bloodbath once the new crop comes,” he said.

If Uphade is worried about his soybean crop, Manikrao Kadam in the neighbouring Parbhani district is concerned about both cotton and tur (pigeon pea). “Rains have been satisfactory and the crop condition is good, but we are worried about prices,” he said.

Kadam said farmers in Parbhani primarily grow cotton, soybean, and tur as their main kharif crops, with prices being the main topic of discussion at the

moment. “Though heavy rains caused flooding in Nanded and Hingoli a few weeks ago, the crop condition is good overall.”

Soybeans are currently in the pod formation stage, while both cotton and tur are in their flowering and pod formation stages. Farmers expect to harvest their soybeans within the next 45 days. Cotton harvesting will begin after September, and tur harvesting and marketing are scheduled for the end of this year.

However, for growers of the three kharif crops, prices below the MSP have become a concern. Grown over 119.51 lakh hectares this year, soybean is trading below its MSP even before the start of the

marketing year.

Similar are the cases with cotton (108.47 lakh hectares sown area) and tur (43.98 lakh hectares). At Latur’s wholesale market, tur is trading at Rs 6,600/quintal against its MSP of Rs 8,000. The cotton lint crop is trading at Rs 7,200/quintal against its MSP of 7,521.

Factors affecting prices

The influx of imported tur is driving down prices, while US tariffs are adversely affecting cotton prices.

In the last fiscal year, the country imported 770,000 tonnes of tur. “Imported tur is trading at Rs 4,400/quintal, and this is affecting

the prices,” said a trader from Latur.

The purchase of cotton yarn by textile industries has decreased significantly due to the 50 per cent tariff the US imposed on imports from India. Traders say that a better price for cotton is nearly impossible in such a situation.

Soybean prices are down mainly due to a slack in exports of protein-rich soymeal, the solid residue left after oil is extracted from the bean. Traders across the country said the chances of any price rise appear slim.

Farmers are now hopeful for government intervention to increase procurement and ensure they receive the MSP.

ADVERTORIAL

THE EVER FLOURISHING ORGANISATION

Imran Shaikh’s Blueprint for Building Businesses That Last

Every business hits a point where effort stops translating into progress.

India-based business transformation consultant Imran Shaikh launches his new book “The Ever Flourishing Organisation”, a practical guide for leaders to build companies that are adaptive, antifragile, and built to endure.

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It’s based on what I’ve experienced, what I’ve learned, and what I’ve helped build, inside real companies, with real teams, facing real pressure.

Before I became a consultant, I spent over two decades in industry. I’ve led companies, sat across the table from customers, fought for cash flow, chased delivery commitments, and dealt with the daily pressure of “why isn’t this working yet?” All those experiences shaped how I approach transformation now.

This book isn’t about fixing symptoms. It’s about building a business that works, consistently, reliably, and profitably. One that doesn’t rely on heroic effort to meet basic goals. One where the systems support the people, not the other way around.

I’ve worked with companies across sectors, engineering, automotive, plastics, and more,



to bring this approach to life. I focus on fundamentals: identifying constraints, improving, flow, aligning teams, and managing the business with control and confidence. Using the knowledge, experience, wisdom and the best practices to solve the right problems at the right time. Every chapter in this book comes from the ground. The scenes, the conversations, the decisions, they’re all drawn from real work. The changes that stuck didn’t come from big projects or sweeping plans. They came from small, focused actions, taken consistently.

This book is for leaders who want to build companies that run better, where sales, operations, finance, and people move in sync. Where problems are solved at the root. Where systems make the work easier, not harder. If you’ve been carrying the same questions for a while now, I hope this book gives you a way to move forward.

— Imran Shaikh

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Imran Shaikh is a business transformation consultant with over 25 years of experience across industry and consulting.

He is the founder of Profound Consulting, a firm that works with companies to improve operational and financial performance through focused, system driven execution. He worked in leadership roles across operations, marketing & sales, strategy, supply chain, finance and JVs. He’s led organisations, turned around business units, and knows what it takes to deliver under pressure.

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Five dead in flash floods in Chhattisgarh

[illegible]

- 1 **U**pset a caterer in a domestic row (7)
- 2 **D**rops of water that will harm the eyes (9)
- 3 **D**ifficulty in hearing (5)
- 4 **F**ather quick to get high religious office (6)
- 5 **E**ast European country that's stated in US (7)
- 6 **F**ool takes a retrograde step (3)
- 7 **L**earning duty's to be changed (5)
- 8 **B**ud's tired out having been roused from sleep (9)
- 9 **S**how much interest then change occupation (7)
- 10 **P**ainter out in sea mist (7)
- 11 **N**ot in control yet I draft a new order (6)
- 12 **S**aves wrecked vessels (5)
- 20 **H**e ran a novel criminal class (5)
- 22 **S**uitable material for cheap newspaper (3)

WHY DO THE HUMANS WANT TO WATCH US?

WE'RE EXOTIC.

THEY CAN'T GET THIS STUFF ON STREAMING.

DARN OL' RAIN.

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7-19

I'M PUTTING MARVIN IN SUMMER SCHOOL

WHAT WILL HE DO?

LOSE MY SUMMER VACATION!

LOSE MY SUMMER VACATION!

AGOSTINI

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EXPRESS NETWORK

BRIEFLY

RAJASTHAN HC dismisses Asaram's plea for extending interim bail

Jodhpur: The Jodhpur bench of Rajasthan High Court on Wednesday dismissed self-styled godman Asaram's plea for an extension of interim bail in a 2013 rape case, ruling out any critical health situation. His bail term will end on August 29, after which he is required to surrender in Jodhpur Central Jail. The court relied on the medical report of Ahmedabad Civil Hospital doctors, indicating Asaram's "illness was not critical enough" to merit further extension of his bail. However, it permitted him to be taken to AIIMS Jodhpur for examination, if required. **PTI**

GUJARAT Three killed in two accidents during Ganesh processions

Surat: A day before Ganesh Chaturthi, three men escorting Ganesh idols in Gujarat's Navsari district were killed in two separate incidents on Tuesday, the police said. In the first incident, two men were electrocuted and five others suffered severe burns on Tuesday evening after their handcart, made of iron and wood, struck a high-tension overhead electric line while the group was escorting a 13.6-ft Ganesh idol. In the second case, 20-year-old Nayan Halpati, seated in a 'DJ-loaded tempo' that was accompanying a vehicle carrying a Ganesh idol, died after he lost balance and fell on the road in Navsari. **ENS**

KERALA ADGP Mahipal Yadav dies 3 days before retirement

Thiruvananthapuram: A 1997 Kerala-cadre IPS officer, ADGP Mahipal Yadav, died on Wednesday — just days before he was scheduled to retire from service on August 30, and hours before the Kerala Police was slated to accord an official farewell function for him online. Yadav died in Jaipur, Rajasthan, where his family had taken him for treatment after his health deteriorated recently. A recipient of the President's Police Medal for meritorious service, Yadav served as the Kerala excise commissioner and was recently appointed ADGP (Crimes), before going on medical leave. He worked with BSF and CBI on deputation. **ENS**

Govt clears Justices Pancholi, Aradhe as apex court judges

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 27**

TWO DAYS after the Supreme Court Collegium recommended their names, the Centre on Wednesday appointed Justice Alok Aradhe, Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court, and Justice Vipul Pancholi, Chief Justice of the Patna High Court, as top court judges.

Union Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal made the announcement on X. This comes amid the dissent by Justice B V Nagarathna, one of the five members of the Collegium, over the recommendation for Justice Pancholi. Besides Chief Justice of India Bhushan R Gava, the other members of the Collegium are Justices Surya Kant, Vikram Nath and J K Maheshwari.

Sources in the Supreme Court told *The Indian Express* that the Collegium nod for Justice Pancholi came after two consultative SC judges — Justices K Vinod Chandran and Ahsanuddin Amanullah — gave "positive remarks" on his proposed elevation. Whenever a High Court judge is proposed to be elevated to the SC, the Collegium calls for opinion from SC judges who were formerly part of the HC from which the elevation is proposed.

In her dissent note, Justice Nagarathna is learnt to have flagged the circumstances behind Justice Pancholi's transfer from the Gujarat High Court to the Patna High Court in 2023. She also cited his overall seniority and imbalance in regional representation.

Justice Pancholi currently ranks 57th in the all-India list of seniority of High Court judges. With his appointment, the Gujarat HC will have three of its judges in the top court. He will likely become the CJI on October 3, 2031, succeeding Justice Joymalya Bagchi, for an 18-month term that will end on May 27, 2033.

Justice Pancholi, who had been

Kerala HC gives anticipatory bail to rapper Vedan in rape case

**SHAJU PHILIP
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
AUGUST 27**

THE KERALA High Court Wednesday granted anticipatory bail to rapper Vedan in connection with a woman doctor's allegations that the artiste had repeatedly subjected her to sexual exploitation on the promise of marriage.

The allegations against Vedan alias Hiran Das Murali pertain to the period between 2021 and 2023. In her complaint, the woman claimed the trauma had left her depressed, leading to delay in filing the complaint. Last week, the court had allowed the complainant to implead in the anticipatory bail plea of Vedan, who has been facing a lookout notice issued by the police.

In the meantime, Vedan also faced another rape case.

A Dalit voice in the Kerala rap scene, Vedan hit the news in April this year after police arrested him in drug cases. The recent rape allegations have led to the cancellation of his concerts.

ELEVATION DISSENT SHOULD BE MADE PUBLIC: JUSTICE OKA



**Former
SC judge
Justice
A S Oka**

New Delhi: Former Supreme Court judge Justice Abhay S Oka Wednesday said the dissent in the Collegium on the elevation of Justice Vipul Pancholi must be made public. "This is a question of great deal of concern... We have to define what is transparency. You are right when you say that one judge has dissented, we must know what is that dissent, there is nothing wrong in that. You will be justified in criticising why the dissent is not on the public domain," he said. **ENS**

a judge of the Gujarat High Court since 2016, was transferred to Patna High Court in 2023 where he became Chief Justice in July. Sources aware of the developments then said the transfer came after a complaint of judicial impropriety against him. They said an inquiry cleared him of wrongdoing.

The then SC Collegium's decision to transfer him to Patna was opposed by the Gujarat High Court lawyers at that time. In a representation to the then CJI, the Gujarat High Court Advocates' Association said "the experience of members of GH-CAA who have appeared before him is almost uniform and without any complaint..."

Sources said the government also cleared the names of 14 advocates who were recommended for appointment as judges of the Bombay High Court on August 19. **FULL REPORT ON www.indianexpress.com**

Kerala MLA booked for 'stalking'

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
AUGUST 27**

KERALA POLICE on Wednesday registered an FIR against Palakkad MLA Rahul Mamkootathil, who was suspended from the Congress on August 25 after he stepped down as the Youth Congress's Kerala state president, in the wake of allegations of misconduct from women.

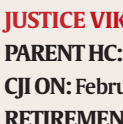
Though no woman has so far come forward with a formal

NEXT IN LINE FOR CJI POST

Justice Pancholi is set to become CJI in October 2031



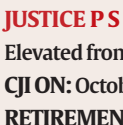
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CJI ON: November 24, 2025
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JUSTICE VIKRAM NATH
PARENT HC: Allahabad HC
CJI ON: February 10, 2027
RETIREMENT: September 23, 2027



JUSTICE B V NAGARATHNA
PARENT HC: Karnataka HC
CJI ON: September 24, 2027
RETIREMENT: October 29, 2027



JUSTICE P S NARASIMHA
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CJI ON: October 30, 2027
RETIREMENT: May 2, 2028



JUSTICE J B PARDIWALA
PARENT HC: Gujarat HC
CJI ON: May 3, 2028
RETIREMENT: August 11, 2030



JUSTICE K V VISWANATHAN
Elevated from Bar
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RETIREMENT: May 25, 2031



JUSTICE JOYMALYA BAGCHI
PARENT HC: Calcutta HC
CJI ON: May 26, 2031
RETIREMENT: October 2, 2031



JUSTICE VIPUL M PANCHOLI
PARENT HC: Gujarat HC
CJI ON: October 3, 2031
RETIREMENT: May 27, 2033



**MLA was
suspended
by Congress
over
misconduct**

complaint against Rahul, the police acted upon complaints the state police chief had received and registered an FIR under section 78(2) of BNS for offences of stalking, and section 120(0) of Kerala Police Act, which deals with repeatedly causing annoy-

ance to a person through any means of communication.

An official communication from the state police said, "The complaints were examined and found that they were included in the category of cognizable offence. The FIR was registered as per the direction of the state police chief (Ravada Chandrasekhar). Crime Branch Deputy SPPC Binu Kumar will probe into the case."

Earlier in the day, Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan said legal action will be taken and assured complainants of protection.

Gadchiroli: Four Maoists killed after 8-hr shootout

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NAGPUR, AUGUST 27**

FOUR MAOISTS, including three women, were killed Wednesday after an eight-hour-long encounter with security forces in the Koparshi forest area along the Gadchiroli-Narayanpur border.

According to the police, they received intelligence inputs about the presence of Gatta Dalam, Company No. 10, and

other Maoist formations of the Gadchiroli Division in the forest on August 25.

A search operation was launched in the forest by a team of police and paramilitary forces. The team came under fire from Maoists, prompting retaliatory action. The gun battle, which stretched for nearly eight hours, resulted in the death of four Maoists, police said. One SLR rifle, two INSAS rifles and a .303 rifle were seized.



fertilizer requirements compared to paddy. "Growing blueberries can be remarkably rewarding. They can generate an estimated profit of Rs 64 lakh per acre by year five of plantation," said a farmer. Though domestic production is still negligible — just around

2,500-3,000 tonnes — farmers said blueberries are commanding a wholesale price of Rs 1,200-2,000 per kg at present. India currently imports over 20,000 tonnes of blueberries annually in fresh and processed forms, mainly from Chile, Peru and Panama.



Blueberry varieties grown at the PAU farm (left) in Ludhiana. PAU

Consumed fresh, frozen or in processed forms like jams, juices, liqueurs, baked goods and even pharmaceuticals, a report in Blueberries Consulting said the global production of blueberries may nearly double from the current 1.86 million metric tonnes in

Assam CM: Police to probe inter-religion land transfers

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
GUWAHATI, AUGUST 27**

CHECKS BY the Special Branch of the Assam Police to examine "coercion" or illegality, source of funds for the purchase, potential effect on "social cohesion", and "national security" implications: these are part of a Standard Operating Protocol (SOP) approved by the Assam Cabinet Wednesday to regulate the transfer of land between members of different religions.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said this will also apply to NGOs based outside Assam which are seeking to buy land in the state.

Last year, Sarma had said that the state could make the CM's consent necessary for land sale permissions for land transactions between Hindus and Muslims. This featured in Finance Minister Ajanta Neog's Budget speech this year as well when she cited "sensitivities involved in land transfer matters in the state" and said that "all



Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma in Guwahati on Wednesday. PTI

cases of inter-religion land transfers between individuals will be given effect only after due approval of the state government".

The SOP requires that when a proposal for a land transfer is received by a Sub-Divisional Magistrate, in the case of a land transfer proposal between people of two different religions, they will forward it to the DC's office after carrying out the usual checks and verification.

Sarma told reporters after the Cabinet meeting: "The DC will immediately send it to the Revenue Department of the state government. There will be

a nodal officer in the Revenue Department. After the Revenue Department gets the proposal, the nodal officer will send it to the Special Branch of the Assam Police. The Special Branch will examine four things. First, whether there is any element of fraud, coercion or illegal transfer. Second, if someone wants to buy the land, what is the source of money? Whether it is white or black money. Third, what kind of effect will this have on the social cohesion of the place. Fourth, they will also examine (the land transaction) from the (point of) view of national security."

According to the SOP, the proposal will be sent to the state government with the Special Branch's inputs, which will send it back to the DC for a final decision. "This will also be applicable to NGOs from outside the state. In the last few days, we are seeing that from places like Kerala, lots of NGOs are buying land in Assam and they are holding events which in the future could be detrimental to national security," the CM said.

Residents 'evict themselves' from Assam colony: 'Best to go quietly'

**SUKRITA BARUAH
GUWAHATI, AUGUST 27**

ON 27 August, over 171 concrete shops and homes on government land in the busy junction of Jengoni Tinali in Assam's Nagaon district had been earmarked for eviction. A night before, however, authorities learnt the area had been cleared — by the residents themselves.

The residents of this stretch of 50-odd bighas received eviction notices in the last week of July. According to officials, around 1,000 Bengali-origin Muslim people were affected.

After receiving the notices, some of the residents met Deputy Commissioner Devashish Sharma seeking a month's time, which was granted. After the month was up, Sharma and other officials visited the site on August 22.

Using a loudspeaker, he addressed the crowd, saying: "When we say eviction, we have the image of someone crying in their house, a JCB being brought, houses being broken. We are also people and we don't like it. That situation is created when a notice is given, and people do not leave."

The residents were being given three more days, he said. Wahidur Rehman, a teacher whose family also had a house in the area, was one of the people who had met the district admin-



A still from a video shared by the Assam CM shows houses being razed in Nagaon district's Jengoni Tinali. X/@himantabiswa

istration last month.

"We were given additional time for a month. After the DC came, we understood that it's best to go quietly. If we resist, it could become a clash and we will be the ones to suffer. After discussion, everyone decided that it's best to empty the area ourselves because we cannot fight the government," he said.

Assam's evictions have turned violent on multiple occasions. While many families have cleared out before earlier evictions as well, the people at Jengoni Tinali took it a step further.

"One of the boys was able to arrange a JCB because he works as an operator. People thought that rather than have the administration break down the buildings badly, we can break them ourselves so that we can at least recover and take the building

material since it is expensive," Rehman said.

Seeing them take matters into their own hands, the district administration supplied them with three more excavators. By 10 pm on Tuesday, all buildings in the area were razed and those with homes in the area moved into relatives' homes.

DC Sharma said the way the eviction took place was because the administration decided to "try something new". "When they asked for more time, we gave it to them..." he said.

However, the area is just a fraction of 19,000 bighas of land earmarked for eviction in Nagaon district alone. "It worked this time, it may not work every time. If the people do not cooperate in some other place, we will have no choice but to go ahead as usual," said Sharma.

HC bail for Bangladeshi woman: 'Right to liberty'

**MANRAJ GREWAL
SHARMA
CHANDIGARH, AUGUST 27**

THE PUNJAB and Haryana High Court Wednesday granted bail to a Bangladeshi woman accused of forgery, cheating, and staying in India without valid documents, holding that the right to personal liberty under Article 21 applies to foreigners too. The court held that prolonged pre-trial custody, especially for an undocumented mi-

grant unable to arrange sureties, would amount to "irreversible injustice."

Farida Praveen, who also went by the name Shikha Gaur, has been in custody since February 5 in a case registered in Faridabad under Sections 420, 467, 468, and 471 of the IPC and Section 14-A of the Foreigners Act.

The FIR is based on a complaint by one Santosh Sharma, who accused Praveen of inducing her son into a relationship and taking cash and gold jewellery. In the court, the counsel for Haryana

government contended that she is a foreign national "and residing in India without legal documents... she has prepared her Aadhaar, voter ID, and PAN on the basis of fake documents and changed her name to Shikha Gaur".

The court was informed that during police interrogation she confessed to have illegally entered India and that photocopies of her Aadhaar, passport, and Bangladeshi ID were recovered. A chargesheet was filed in April and the case is now before the Chief Judicial Magistrate, Faridabad.

Granting bail, the court noted that the petitioner had spent over six months in custody with no criminal history. "Given the penal provisions invoked vis-à-vis pre-trial custody, coupled with the prima facie analysis of the nature of allegations, and the other factors peculiar to this case, there would be no justification for further pre-trial incarceration," the court observed.

Citing Supreme Court rulings, the court reiterated that foreigners are entitled to protection under Article 21.

As India explores exotic foods, Blueberry having a field day — Kullu to Ooty

**ANJU AGNIHOTRI CHABA
JALANDHAR, AUGUST 27**

WHAT DOES a former engineer who lived in Delhi before the pandemic, a garments industrialist from Ludhiana and an Ooty-based seasoned floriculturist have in common? All three are among the growing crop of progressive farmers cultivating blueberries, the blackish-blue superfood that has caught the fancy of Indian agriculturists over the past few years.

Before he moved home to Dharabag in Himachal Pradesh's Kullu in 2020, Vishal Thakur, 34, had been working as an engineer for seven years in Delhi. Instead of sticking to cultivating persimmons, a tomato-like fruit grown widely in China and Japan, he decided to grow "something else".

"I thought about growing custard apple, dragon fruit, but both were incompatible with Kullu's climate. Then, I heard about someone growing blueberries in Kullu. In 2022, I started experimenting with 250 saplings of a dozen varieties," he said over telephone.

Like him, farmers across Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka have been experimenting with blueberries since the past few years. Before blueberries, they had already experimented with exotic high-value crops like avocados, strawberries, kiwis, dragon fruit, persimmons and pecan nuts.

Experts said the shift from traditional farming practices was driven by rising urban demand for exotic produce, better margins than cereals, and lower water and



fertilizer requirements compared to paddy. "Growing blueberries can be remarkably rewarding. They can generate an estimated profit of Rs 64 lakh per acre by year five of plantation," said a farmer. Though domestic production is still negligible — just around

2,500-3,000 tonnes — farmers said blueberries are commanding a wholesale price of Rs 1,200-2,000 per kg at present. India currently imports over 20,000 tonnes of blueberries annually in fresh and processed forms, mainly from Chile, Peru and Panama.



Blueberry varieties grown at the PAU farm (left) in Ludhiana. PAU

Consumed fresh, frozen or in processed forms like jams, juices, liqueurs, baked goods and even pharmaceuticals, a report in Blueberries Consulting said the global production of blueberries may nearly double from the current 1.86 million metric tonnes in

five years. Most farmers *The Indian Express* spoke to said they had been experimenting with varieties (including Biloxi, Emerald, Misty, Legacy and Robin Blue) that require different chill hours (cumulative cold hours a plant needs during dormancy to prepare for healthy fruit growth), cultivation spots (growbags, raised beds or greenhouses) and climates.

Thakur said his first harvest was modest — "100-200 grams per plant" — which he sold to online vendors for nearly Rs 30,000.

"By 2024, my yield rose to nearly 2 kg per plant. I have planted 4,000 saplings on 2.5 acres at another local site. By year four, each plant should yield nearly 5 kg," he said. Since blueberries are grown from saplings, Thakur has set up a government-licensed nursery to import vari-

eties from the US, South Africa, the Netherlands, Ukraine and Italy that he sells for Rs 400-850 each.

Thakur, whose pioneering efforts earned him an award from Kullu's Dr Y S Parmar University of Horticulture and Forestry, added, "I suggest planting at least three varieties for cross-pollination. Blueberry farming is costly to start (nearly Rs 1,500 per plant with infrastructure), but it can transform high-value farming in the hills... Blueberries love acidic conditions. The soil pH should be between 4.5 and 5.5."

Not just individuals, even corporations have jumped on the farming bandwagon.

Neva Plantations, owned by Ludhiana-based Neva Garments, has been growing blueberries at Gopalpur in Palampur since 2021. Owner Nirmal Jain said a trip to

Canada a decade ago "inspired" him to grow blueberries. "In 2021, a year after we imported 1,500 saplings from the US and Holland, we planted them under a half-acre polyhouse (a type of green-house) at the farm. Our average yield this year was 3 kg per plant. We sold 4,500 kg of blueberries for Rs 1,200-1,600 per kg," he says.

The company, which runs one of India's few licensed tissue culture laboratories for blueberry propagation, has sold over 50,000 saplings over the past two years.

Marketing head Parvinder Guleria said, "Farmers receive technical support and 50% subsidy on plants (which cost around ₹300 per sapling after the subsidy)." Two years ago, they supplied 200 trial plants to PAU, Ludhiana. **FULL REPORT ON www.indianexpress.com**



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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

THE BIG PICTURE

Even as India continues trade talks with the US, it must reiterate red lines, push ahead on domestic reforms

THE US ADMINISTRATION has pressed ahead with its decision to impose a 25 per cent penalty on Indian imports effective from August 27. This takes total tariffs to 50 per cent, effectively pricing out Indian goods in the US market. The sheer double standard in imposing this penalty needs to be called out. Such action has not been taken against other countries that import from Russia. For instance, according to the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air, in June, China accounted for 47 per cent of Russia's crude exports, with the EU and Turkey importing 6 per cent each. In the case of Russia's LNG exports, the EU was the largest buyer at 51 per cent, followed by China (21 per cent) and Japan (18 per cent). Tariffs, however, do not seem to be the only issue. There has also been talk about the H-1B visa. For instance, Howard Lutnick, the US Secretary of Commerce, has called the visa system "a scam", and spoken about changing it. By all accounts, relations with the US could remain mired in uncertainty.

The 50 per cent tariff rate now makes trade with the US infeasible in most segments. Several sectors ranging from shrimps to diamonds, gold and jewellery, textiles, leather and footwear are expected to be badly hit, though some like pharmaceuticals, electronics and petroleum products have been exempted. The Global Trade Research Initiative, a think tank, estimates that two-thirds of exports to the US will be hit by the 50 per cent tariff. There will be economic pain and companies will face disruptions. For instance, textiles and apparel manufacturers in Tirupur, Noida and Surat have reportedly stopped production. Labour will be impacted and diversifying away from the US and finding new markets will not be easy. There may also be indirect impacts. For instance, companies, both domestic and foreign, may be less inclined to launch fresh investments in the country amid uncertainty.

The Indian government has stood firm in the face of mounting pressure. It should continue to stick to its red lines in trade agreements, even as it must continue its talks with the US. On Monday, the two countries spoke about energy security and defence cooperation under the India-US 2+2 Intersessional Dialogue. But who India trades with — Russian oil deliveries for the coming months would give a better picture of shifts, if any, in sourcing of crude — should be determined by the country's own cost-benefit analysis, not by US President Donald Trump's pressure. And while the government must continue to pursue trade deals with other countries, it must also aggressively push forward the domestic reform agenda. As per a report in this paper, two new informal groups of ministers (GoMs) have been set up to "prescribe reforms in the economic and social sectors". The government must move ahead on this with urgency.

MAPPING THE MARGINS

Tribal ministry does well to propose that Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups be counted separately

ON JULY 17, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) wrote to the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India (RGI), requesting it to consider including Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) — the most marginalised tribal groups in the country — in the upcoming Census exercise. As reported in this newspaper, the MoTA has asked RGI to separately count the number of PVTG households and individuals, along with their distinctive cultural, demographic and socio-economic features. If this is done, it will be the first time that the PVTGs are enumerated separately since the category was introduced. Earlier, in the 2011 Census, 40 PVT groups were counted within the broader category of Scheduled Tribes (STs). Currently, there are 75 PVT groups across 18 states and one Union Territory. The MoTA's initiative to count the most marginalised groups separately to facilitate targeted policies of uplift and redress is a welcome move.

The PVTGs entered political discourse for the first time after the Dhebar Commission was constituted to investigate and report "on the problems of the Scheduled Tribes"; the committee submitted its report in 1961. It identified the inequalities within the tribal groups. This led to the creation of the category Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) in 1973, based on four criteria — pre-agricultural level of technology, low level of literacy, economic backwardness and a declining or stagnant population. In 2006, the name was changed to PVTG, as the word "primitive" was seen as problematic. The female literacy rate among the PVTGs is the lowest in India. A recent study that surveyed research work on 13 PVT groups in Odisha between 2000 to 2023, published in the *Journal of Health, Population and Nutrition* (2024), highlighted their precarious health indices. In 2023, the Centre launched the Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PMJANMAN) to provide basic facilities to PVTGs. For the successful implementation of any developmental scheme, sociological mapping is necessary, and the proposed inclusion of PVTGs as a separate category in the Census would help serve this purpose.

Alongside, the government could consider rethinking the definition of PVTG ahead of the enumeration exercise. The existing criteria are decades old and risk excluding some communities, as ground realities have changed due to the intervention of state and non-state actors. For example, the use of "pre-agricultural level technology" — modernisation of technology has equipped many marginalised communities to use "developed" tools. A careful step towards not only identifying but also addressing PVTGs is necessary to facilitate social inclusion, instead of assimilation.

STARBUCKS-ISH

In Pyongyang, tourists are treated to consumerism with communist characteristics

EVEN IN NORTH Korea, the idea of a good life looks something like a Starbucks. And Uggs. And onion rings and "lego sets" that are inspired by similar products — down to their packaging — found in the vigorously capitalist societies beyond the borders of the self-identified socialist utopia. If "the tendency to swallow things of others undigested or imitate them mechanically" was anathema to "Eternal President" Kim Il Sung, under his grandson Kim Jong Un the infamously hermetic nation appears to have decisively swerved on to the path of conspicuous consumerism.

Recent pictures obtained by *The New York Times* from foreign visitors to North Korea show a country that appears to bear a striking similarity to the rest of the world. They show a brightly coloured water park, coffee shops that mimic the interiors and products of South Korean and American cafes, and a home decor store bearing a strong resemblance — down to the products — to the Swedish furniture giant Ikea. This is a change that has been in the making for a while, a strategy that seems designed to distract from the chronic deprivations that continue to make life miserable for the vast majority of North Koreans; as per long-established protocol, none of the visitors was allowed to venture beyond a carefully curated list of glitzy venues designed to impress.

Meanwhile, across the DMZ, an actual Starbucks that opened late last year claims to offer a view of the real North Korea. As long as they are equipped with a pair of binoculars, visitors to the Aegibong Peace Ecopark in South Korea's Gimpo city can peer at their northern neighbours going about their lives — a mere glimpse maybe, but one that could offer a fuller picture than the manicured images of Pyongyang that are allowed to tourists.

Countering the tariff

US action violates its commitments under WTO. India must diversify its export basket and destinations



JAYANT DASGUPTA

THE US HAS imposed "secondary tariffs" of 25 per cent on Indian products (barring a few exceptions) with effect from August 27. This is in addition to the "reciprocal tariff" of 25 per cent imposed from August 7. The Trump orders exclude pharmaceuticals, semiconductors and mobile phones, lumber and some chemicals from their purview for the time being.

Following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's White House meeting with President Donald Trump on February 13, an ambitious plan to elevate bilateral goods trade to \$500 billion by 2030 was announced. Negotiations for a two-tranche bilateral trade agreement to give concrete shape to the target were to commence immediately. As a show of its earnestness, India almost immediately reduced its tariffs on bourbon, high-end motorcycles and electric vehicles. It also withdrew the equalisation levy for offshore entities, which had been objected to by successive US administrations.

From Trump's press statements, it appears that India offered zero or near-zero duty tariffs on a wide range of goods, which included not only almost all industrial products but some agricultural products as well. It needs to be borne in mind that in global trade, the shares of industrial products vis-à-vis agricultural products are roughly 90:10. Thus, by all accounts, India offered a very attractive deal to the US.

As far as its "red lines" are concerned, Delhi made it clear from the start that it would not be able to negotiate on the access to genetically modified food (GMO), soya, maize and some other cereals and dairy products, because of its serious concerns relating to its vast numbers of small and marginal agriculturists and dairy farmers, their livelihoods and food security.

A few other points have a bearing on this subject. First, the US's focus has moved on from GMOs and other agricultural products to the purchase of Russian oil. It has not imposed tariffs on the EU and China, the two largest buyers of energy from Russia. Even if India had stopped the purchase of Russian oil, the goalposts could have easily shifted to stopping purchases of Russian defence equipment, walking out of BRICS and not trading in the currencies of its other bilateral partners.

Second, India is reported to have offered to

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ALISHA LALLJEE

THE EDITORIAL ON the ban on online real-money gaming ('The wrong answer,' *IE*, August 25) presents an account of the move's economic, legal, and regulatory implications. But it overlooks one of the most critical dimensions of this issue: Mental health, particularly of children and adolescents.

Online gaming, especially real-money gaming, operates on psychological principles nearly identical to gambling: Variable rewards, intense engagement loops, and the pursuit of rapid gratification. These mechanics are designed to sustain play, extract payments, and create dependency. When introduced to young, impressionable users, it often leads not to leisure, but to addiction.

Parents often discover the problem too late — when credit card bills spike, academic performance collapses, or a child's mental health has begun to deteriorate. Families describe a toxic home atmosphere, filled with secrecy, arguments, and emotional distress. In such cases, therapy is not enough. Prevention through regulation or, when necessary, prohibition is a legitimate and urgent public health response.

Online gaming today is not what it was a decade ago. What appears to be harmless entertainment is, in reality, designed to keep users hooked. These games are not simply "fun distractions". They are immersive environments that condition the brain to crave more play, more wins, more risk. The line between skill and chance blurs rapidly. Many adolescents

DEAR EDITOR, I DISAGREE

A column in which we invite readers to tell us why, when they differ with the editorial positions or news coverage of 'The Indian Express'

India's youth deserve more than just a firewall. They deserve understanding, support, and care. By reframing online gaming addiction as a behavioural and mental health issue, and by combining thoughtful regulation with robust counselling, the country can create a safer digital environment.

lose track of time, lie about usage, steal to fund gameplay, or suffer from anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation when they lose or are forced to stop. The resulting tension often spills into the household, straining relationships and eroding trust between parents and children.

This addiction is not theoretical. Across India, there are numerous cases of children draining family bank accounts, falling into debt, or spiralling into behavioural and emotional distress. In some tragic instances, the consequences have included suicide. Despite these human costs, the mental-health dimension of this crisis is too often absent from policy discussions and public commentary.

A ban can seem like a protective measure, removing the source of harm. It also offers families an immediate sense of relief by reducing conflicts and financial losses. Partial bans or stricter age-gating can be particularly effective, helping protect minors while allowing informed adults to engage responsibly. By limiting exposure for younger users, partial restrictions can delay the onset of addictive behaviours and offer parents a safer environment to guide healthy digital habits.

However, the psychology of addiction is rarely that simple. When compulsive behaviour is forcibly interrupted without therapeutic intervention, it often re-emerges in other forms, a phenomenon known as psychological displacement. Children who lose their primary coping mechanism may turn to more

might be tempted to use other pieces of legislation to achieve the same ends.

The WTO has a two-stage dispute settlement system, with the second stage appeal being decided by three members of a seven-member permanent body called the Appellate Body (AB). All seven members of the AB have to be selected by consensus by WTO members. President Trump, in his first term, had persistently blocked the nomination of new members to the body. Since 2019, the AB has had no members. Thus, the dispute settlement system has become non-functional. Therefore, filing a dispute against the US may only serve as a symbolic gesture.

The tariffs violate the US's binding commitments to all the members of the WTO. They also violate the Most Favoured Nation principle — not discriminating between different countries in terms of tariffs, except under a free trade agreement. President Trump's actions and the silent but willing acquiescence of all the developed countries show that the consensus which had led to the setting up of the GATT in 1947 (which later transformed into the WTO in 1995) lies in a shambles.

There are some steps India can take to minimise the effects of the tariffs.

India's export basket is not very broad and spans only a few sectors. We are also heavily dependent on the US (17 per cent of our goods exports) and the EU. The most important thing which needs to be done is to diversify both our export basket and destinations. This will require, of course, at least a few years and will need robust public-private partnerships.

Second, we need to conclude our FTA with the EU as quickly as possible and deepen and widen our existing FTAs with Japan, Korea, ASEAN and Australia. Third, we must explore expanding trade with the BRICS countries. Finally, we need to bring in multi-sectoral domestic reforms spanning both the Centre and the states to provide the impetus to economic growth.

This turn of events should not be viewed as a disaster but as a wake-up call. It is an opportunity to reform and grow, as we did in 1991.

The writer served as India's ambassador to the WTO (2010-14)

ADDICTION, NOT PLAY

Ban on online real-money gaming will protect mental health of the young

harmful behaviours such as compulsive pornography consumption, social media overuse, or even substance abuse. Without guidance, the family environment can remain tense, with children seeking escape in even less regulated spaces.

Children caught in the grip of addiction often become irritable, secretive, or aggressive when access is restricted. To truly protect children and adolescents, any form of ban must be accompanied by a comprehensive mental health framework. This means integrating routine mental health screenings in schools, expanding access to child-friendly counselling services, and training educators and parents to recognise warning signs of distress. Awareness campaigns on digital addiction must target students and caregivers alike.

By treating this issue as a behavioural health challenge rather than a purely disciplinary problem, India can begin to heal the emotional rifts that gaming addiction creates within families. India's youth deserve more than just a firewall. They deserve support and care. By and by combining thoughtful regulation with robust counselling and prevention programmes, the country can create a safer digital environment, one where families find balance, and children grow up with healthier relationships to technology.

The writer is a psychologist and special educator

AUGUST 28, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

COUP IN NIGERIA

THE 20-MONTH-OLD military government of Gen Mohammed Buhari in Nigeria was overthrown in what appears to be a bloodless coup. The nation he inherited was in a terrible financial state. The price of oil, virtually its only export earner, was in the doldrums, and foreign debts totalled about \$15 billion. After the coup, critics of the government complained of slow progress towards recovery. The army chief, Ibrahim Babangida, has been named president.

PUNJAB POLL PREP

THE CHIEF ELECTION Commissioner has called a meeting on August 29 of senior offi-

cials of the Punjab government to review security arrangements for conducting a peaceful poll. Before this meeting, state officials will have another round of discussions in the Home Ministry to discuss the plans prepared, keeping in view all the aspects of the situation and the requirements of the state government.

PROGRESS IN THIMPHU

INDIA'S EFFORTS TO ensure the Thimphu talks between the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil groups are resumed at an early date appears to have made some headway at the end of yet another round of talks on between the foreign secretary, Romesh Bhandari, and the

leader of the Sri Lankan delegation to the Thimphu talks, H W Jayewardene. Sri Lankan High Commission sources told ENS later that "something concrete" might emerge.

SRI LANKA BLAST

SIX NAVY PERSONNEL and a woman were killed when their jeep hit a landmine in north-east Sri Lanka, Defence Ministry sources said. They said the woman, a civilian employee in a navy office, was also in the jeep when the landmine blew up at Palampattaru near Trincomalee naval base. They said the mine was planted by Tamil guerillas. The blast brought to 46 the toll during the past two days in the northern and eastern provinces.

Who am AI?

An artificial intelligence-powered Bhagavad Gita project raises troubling questions of identity, selfhood and authenticity



GURCHARAN DAS

ONE WINTRY EVENING in Delhi, I received an unusual call from New York. At the other end was a soft, charming voice that belonged to someone who was bringing out the world’s classics using Artificial Intelligence. They’d chosen the Bhagavad Gita from India and wondered if I’d be a guide for this interactive AI book. The voice explained that the AI book would encourage readers to ask questions while reading the text. Answers would come from my cloned voice, based on 15 hours of interviews conducted in advance. At the end of each chapter, the reader would engage in a discussion with my clone.

I was fascinated and perturbed. I wished I’d had such a personal tutor while reading the Gita for the first time. But I was also troubled with questions of identity, selfhood and authenticity. It felt strange having a twin speaking in my voice. Ironically, these are the same questions — who am I? — that the Gita also addresses.

The friendly voice reassured me that their company had already published half a dozen classics. Well-known names like Salman Rushdie and Margaret Atwood had signed up to do future classics. I was ambivalent but I agreed. After hanging up, I was left to deal with my AI monsters.

Nine months later, I’m hard at work on this project. I have three AI interns to assist me: ChatGPT is the most empathetic. Perplexity is best at research, giving links to follow up, and Claude has a literary style. Gemini is a good standby. They are hugely competent and cheerful. ChatGPT can translate a Sanskrit verse into English in 3 seconds, which is 100 times faster than Patrick Olivelle, the great scholar. When I have occasionally pointed out that something is not quite right, they try again, without a hint of complaint or the need for approval. And they keep getting better. While they have taken away the drudgery of research, I’m troubled by my lack of ownership, feeling an alienating distance from the AI output.

Since the invisible labour of research has been eased, I have more time to think, to play thought games: What if the Buddha had been Arjuna’s charioteer? How is it that MK Gandhi, the apostle of non-violence, and Heinrich Himmler, the Nazi apostle of violence, were both inspired by the Gita? Himmler used to train SS officers quoting from the Gita.

I worry about being cloned by a machine. What will my friends think of me spouting fake rubbish? Will my twin know my thoughts, memories, things I don’t want to talk about? What if a friend of mine actually developed a closer relationship with my compassionate clone? I’d feel jealous, cheated, and a fool. It feels eerie having him running around giving talks, making podcasts, racking up thousands of listeners. Worse, what if he cleaned out my bank account, confirming transactions on the phone via voice recognition software?



AJAY VIR JAKHAR

IN 1990, MILITARY strategist Edward Luttwak coined the term “geo-economics”. Loosely, it is about using economic strength as a tool to achieve strategic and foreign policy goals, rather than solely for economic welfare. Enter US President Donald Trump with his expected transactional approach, which caught India unawares. Though it is safe to think that, over time, the 50 per cent tariff that came into effect on Wednesday will be whittled down to 20-25 per cent.

The UK has succumbed to 10 per cent, the EU 15 per cent, Indonesia 19 per cent and Vietnam 20 per cent import duty. More countries are poised to do the same. It is important to work out the math. India refusing trade concessions and paying 20-25 per cent may be the better option when compared to opening the Indian agricultural markets. In practical terms, India would be competing with a disadvantage of about 5 per cent, which the country can live with. In ignoring the things that governments do right, we omit half the story, and farmers should appreciate the PM’s reaffirmation to safeguard Indian farmers’ interests.

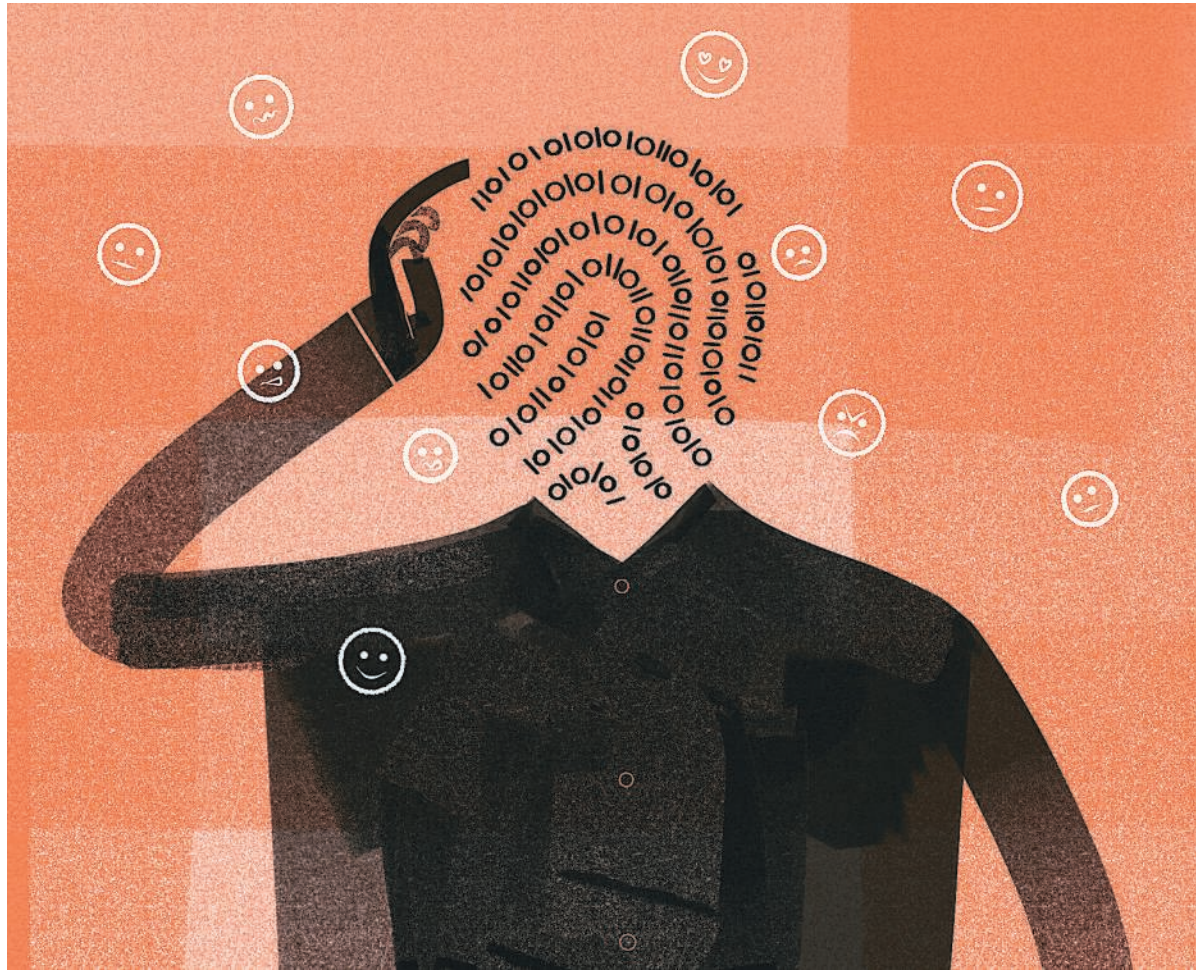
However, the impact of tariffs will broaden beyond directly affected industries. Growth in the manufacturing sector is an absolute imperative for creating employment. Despite the high-profile “Make in India” campaign, the share of manufacturing in GDP is still 14 per cent, well short of the 25 per cent target set for 2025. After 10 years, possibly for the first time, there

AI raises fundamental questions about what it is to be human. The only thing I am sure of at this moment are the thoughts and feelings going through my head. If I look into my consciousness, I cannot find the thinker of my thoughts, the feeler of my feelings. Western philosophers and neuroscientists have tried to locate the self but haven’t found it either. The Gita claims that my sense of identity is an illusion, created by the human ego. My true self is the *atman*, which is identical with the cosmic brahman. Awareness of the oneness of everything is the Gita’s central teaching. Buddha also faced this problem but reached the opposite conclusion. He resigned himself to living with the idea of no-self (*anatman*).

AI has added a second layer of falsehood. “Who am I?” is a question based on lived experience, not to be answered by a machine. The idea of a “cloned twin” of my thoughts providing answers feels like betrayal. Already shaken by the realisation that my exalted liberal self is a fictional narrator, AI has added a double fiction, leaving me totally befuddled. Mark Twain must have felt this absurdity when he quipped, “There is no difference between fiction and non-fiction — only that fiction has to make sense!”

That AI might become sentient is my other fear. Before it happens, I believe, AI has formidable hurdles to cross. One, the human experience is inherently subjective and cannot be explained in objective terms. When I observe a red apple, it invokes all kinds of feelings of redness inside me. It could be the memory of blood oozing out of my brother’s leg in an ac-

I worry about being cloned by a machine. What will my friends think of me spouting fake rubbish? Will my twin know my thoughts, memories, things I don’t want to talk about? What if a friend of mine actually developed a closer relationship with my compassionate clone? I’d feel jealous, cheated, and a fool. It feels eerie having him running around giving talks, making podcasts, racking up thousands of listeners. Worse, what if he cleaned out my bank account, confirming transactions on the phone via voice recognition software?



C R Sasikumar

cident; or the red cheeks of Renoir’s young girl in his painting. Philosophers call this subjective content “qualia”. The question is how AI will duplicate qualia, the private, unspoken product of the subjective consciousness of eight billion humans?

Another obstacle is to replicate my brain’s biological neuron-specific physiology in my subjective experience. AI may copy the objective red colour — its wavelength of 650 nanometres — but it cannot access my subjective redness that emerges from my brain’s 86 billion neurons and 500 trillion synapses. Both these hurdles lead to a third one. Essential to human consciousness is spontaneity, a freedom to choose my goals. That autonomy, the Gita tells me, comes from the life force, *atman*. AI today can follow commands based on algorithms and data. It has far to go to achieve self-awareness.

While I am charmed by the wonderful possibilities of AI in teaching classics to the world, I am deeply concerned about its downside. Re-reading the Gita, however, has made me rethink my own values. In the “real world” of work, I was valued for being sharp and acquisitive. What I admired, though, were kindness and generosity, traits of failure in the “real world”. What is at stake is our conception of success. The present crisis in public life around the world may lie in this. There are parallels between the Gita’s lament and the things we might say about our leaders today.

Das has interrogated the Mahabharata in his book, The Difficulty of Being Good

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“As the Israeli occupation of Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese land has shown, the Zionists very much intend to deliver on their promise of ‘Greater Israel’. Therefore, unless the slaughter of Palestinians is stopped, large swathes of the region may soon be devoured by the Zionists.” — DAWN, PAKISTAN

A stronger air shield

Successful test of air defence system shows depth of Indian research, how collaboration with private, foreign partners can fill gaps



AJAI SHUKLA

LAST SATURDAY, THE Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) announced the maiden flight test of a new, all-indigenous, Integrated Air Defence Weapon System (IADWS) off the coast of Odisha. The IADWS is a three-layered system for shooting down enemy aircraft, drones and missiles when they are as far away as 30-35 km. It comprises a Quick Reaction Surface-to-Air Missile (QR-SAM) with a range of 30 km, an Advanced Very Short Range Air Defence System (VSHORADS) with a range of up to 6 km, and a high-power, laser-based, directed energy weapon (DEW) with a range of 2-4 km. The integrated operation of all three systems is controlled by a Centralised Command and Control Centre, developed by the Defence Research and Development Laboratory (DRDL) — the DRDO’s nodal laboratory in charge of this development programme.

“During the flight tests, three different targets, including two high-speed, fixed-wing unmanned aerial vehicles and a multi-copter drone, were simultaneously engaged and destroyed completely... All the weapon system components, including the missile systems and drone detection and restriction systems, performed flawlessly,” stated the DRDO. The IADWS missile defence system incorporates multiple technologies that the DRDO has developed over time, in different labs. This provides a demonstration of how capabilities built in individual technology realms can be integrated into weapon systems that serve specific battlefield requirements.

India began this technological synergising with the Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGMDP) that was set up in 1983 by APJ Abdul Kalam. The IGMDP’s “missile cluster”, located mainly in Hyderabad, consists of five laboratories, each directed to a specific, but linked, purpose. The so-called missile cluster, which includes the Advanced Systems Laboratory (ASL), specialises in rockets and missiles. It has developed and honed the Agni and Prithvi series of ballistic missiles, which form the delivery end of India’s nuclear deterrent. Over the years, the DRDO has developed these two ballistic missiles into a highly advanced anti-ballistic missile (ABM) shield, an anti-satellite (ASAT) missile system and into advanced capabilities such as multi-independently targetable re-entry vehicle (MIRV).

Similarly, as part of the IGMDP, the development of a series of tactical missiles, including the anti-aircraft Trishul and Akash and the anti-tank Nag missile, were entrusted to the DRDL. These, too, have been developed further into a range of more capable tactical missiles.

The IGMDP has also spawned the DRDO Young Scientists Laboratory for asymmetric technologies, such as AI and quantum computing. There is the Terminal Ballistic Research Laboratory that specialises in warhead design. The most essential is the Research Centre Imarat, which specialises in critical missile technologies such as navigation and control, guidance and homing systems, command and control systems and high temperature materials that are essential for long-range missiles and aircraft.

These sophisticated technologies, mostly developed by public sector agencies like the five IGMDP laboratories, are trickling down into defence products manufactured by capable private sector technology companies, such as Carborundum Universal Limited (CUMI). Earlier this year, CUMI announced the signing of a “Licensing Agreement for Transfer of Technology” with the DRDO for manufacturing ceramic radomes — essential, state-of-the-art technology for missiles and high-performance aircraft during flight regimes. Radomes experience extremely high surface temperatures, especially during flight regimes such as re-entry from space. To withstand that, radomes at the tip of Indian missiles are made of specialised ceramics developed in the DRDO’s laboratories.

Besides the growing synergy between India’s public and private sector defence firms, there are opportunities for working with foreign partners, such as the Israeli military, in developing integrated air defences that can repulse combined operations by the Pakistani and Chinese air forces, such as during Operation Sindoor earlier this year. How would such a technology partnership function? The DRDO could partner with Israel’s military and defence industry in developing layered air defence systems such as the Iron Dome. Its sophisticated radar detects, identifies and tracks incoming threats within a 160-km radius. Its Tamir interceptor missile, which travels at one kilometre per second, leaves the Iron Dome battery with less than a minute to respond to a missile launch. Working fast, the battery commanders analyse the threat and launch their Tamir interceptors. In seconds, the incoming warheads would have detonated into lethal fragments of high-speed metal.

In the modern battlefield, money is everything. An interceptor’s cost determines how many can be fired. The Tamir initially cost about \$1,00,000 each to produce, but the Israeli industry brought down the price to \$40-\$50,000. The technology challenge involves integrating the individual elements of the missile shield. For targets at ranges beyond the Iron Dome’s 160 km, Israel deploys the US-supplied Terminal High Altitude Area Defence System (THAAD), which intercepts ballistic missiles outside the atmosphere at ranges out to 200 km. The next layer is David’s Sling, with a range of 300 km. For the outer layer, Israel’s Arrow 3 system destroys medium-range ballistic missiles at ranges out to 2,400 km.

When India enters into an international collaboration that involves joint development, we have thus far followed the rule of sharing our strengths and complementing our weaknesses. When we developed the BrahMos cruise missile with Russia, our clearly defined work share included the navigation system and the mission control. We had done a similar exercise in the case of the LR-SAM, where it was reported that we would develop the rear section and the Israelis would provide the front section and the seeker. Since we are doing the entire integration, it will be an Indian product.

When we began jointly developing the LR-SAM with the Israeli weapons industry, we knew that no such system was available with the Israelis. The Israeli Navy came forward to collaborate only because they badly wanted a new system for their warships. The Indian Navy also wanted a new system. We never enter into a collaboration for a product that already exists.

The writer is a retired army officer and journalist

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

INTEGRITY MATTERS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial ‘Test for the Fed’ (IE, August, 27). Indeed, it is the era of political high handedness over autonomous institutions like central banks which are supposed to be managed by experts and apolitical officials with the utmost integrity. Political interference will erode the credibility of not only public institutions but the democratic apparatus of a country itself. This phenomenon of making autonomous institutions subservient has grown consistently across the world in the last decade. India is no exception.

Vasant Nalawade, Satara

DOUBLE STANDARDS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘A thinning line’ (IE, August 27). The editorial correctly identifies a critical flaw in our governance: The selective application of the law. While agencies pursue those without proper documentation, a more insidious threat exists where these same institutions help create fraudulent cards. This double standard doesn’t just “thin”

the line between legal and illegal; it completely undermines the constitutional guarantee of due process of law. This is a profound betrayal of public trust and requires a complete overhaul of the systems that allow “guardians of the law” to become its primary exploiters.

Krishan Kumar Chug, New Delhi

REACT NOW

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Man and machine’ (IE, Aug 27). The growing debate on whether artificial intelligence deserves rights may seem futuristic, but it reflects a deeper moral question. Technology is no longer a mere tool; it is becoming a mirror of human thought and behaviour. While machines are not conscious, their increasing ability to imitate emotion and decision-making demands that society prepare ethical frameworks in advance. Ignoring this will only leave us reacting in panic when the line between code and cognition blurs. It is better to begin the conversation now than to wait for a crisis to decide what dignity and responsibility mean in the age of AI.

Dattatray S Giri, Pune

The writer is chairman, Bharat Krishak Samaj



GOLD

₹1,01,270

USD RATE

₹87.69*

OIL

\$69.74

SILVER

₹1,20,000

Note: Gold, silver rates at Delhi spot market, gold per 10g, silver per 1 kg; Crude oil (Indian basket) per barrel as of August 26

*Equity and forex markets remained closed on Wednesday on account of Ganesh Chaturthi; International market data till 1900 IST

'SCAM THAT LETS FOREIGN WORKERS FILL AMERICAN JOBS': US COMMERCE SECY

Amid US H-1B rhetoric, govt officials say visas helped American companies

SOUMYARENDRA BARIK & AGGAM WALIA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 27

THE RISING criticism in the United States of the H-1B visa — of which Indians are the prime beneficiary — could impact India's IT sector and its workers, resulting in fewer US-based contracts from them, a senior government official said. However, the government believes that the H-1B visa has inevitably helped American companies the most, and it could be difficult for them to find equally skilled American people.

"It could certainly limit access for Indian workers in the US, leading to fewer IT companies here getting US based contracts which could contract their revenue. But the visa has immensely helped American companies in finding the right workers across the world, and whether they can substitute that with American people is not clear. Certainly it's not an easy

change and despite all the political signalling, the reality is that the visa helps American companies the most," a senior government official told *The Indian Express*.

On Tuesday, United States Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick called the popular H-1B visa programme a "scam that lets foreign workers fill American job opportunities," adding that hiring American workers should be the priority of all US businesses. The US administration has signalled significant overhaul of the visa programme, which involves a lottery-based allocation. Immigration is one of the most polarising subjects in the US currently, with the discourse now shifting from illegal immigration to programmes like the H-1B system.

People born in India are the largest beneficiaries of the H-1B programme. Data from the US government show that Indians account for more than 70 per cent of all H-1B petitions approved each year since 2015. People born in

PEOPLE BORN IN INDIA LARGEST BENEFICIARIES

■ People born in India are the largest beneficiaries of the H-1B programme. Data from the US government show that Indians account for more than 70% of all H-1B petitions approved each year since 2015. People born in China come a distant second

China come a distant second, hovering at the 12-13 per cent mark since 2018.

Between October 2022 to September 2023, 72 per cent of the nearly 4 lakh visas issued under the H-1B programme went to Indian nationals. During the same period, top four Indian IT majors with a presence in the US —

namely Infosys, TCS, HCL, and Wipro — got approval for around 20,000 employees to work on the H-1B visa, as per latest US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) data.

One of the key concerns in the US administration on the H-1B visa is that it is used by American corporations to hire talent from overseas at a cheaper cost than what it would take them to hire a native born US citizen.

While there is some truth in that, data collected by the non-profit American Immigration Council (AIC) showed that H-1B workers do not earn low wages or drag down other workers' wages. In 2021, the median wage of an H-1B worker was \$108,000, compared to \$45,760 for US workers in general. Moreover, between 2003 and 2021, the median wage of H-1B workers grew by 52 per cent. During the same period, the median wage of all US workers increased by 39 percent.

Supporting the argument that

the visa has immensely helped American companies, AIC said that between FY 2010 and FY 2019, eight US companies that would later participate in the development of a COVID-19 vaccine — Gilead Sciences, Moderna Therapeutics, GlaxoSmithKline, Inovio, Johnson & Johnson Pharmaceuticals, Regeneron, Vir Therapeutics, and Sanofi — received approvals for 3,310 biochemists, biophysicists, chemists, and other scientists through the H-1B programme.

US President's former aide and tech mogul Elon Musk has also come in support of the H-1B programme.

The H-1B programme was started in 1990, with the intention of helping "employers who cannot otherwise obtain needed business skills and abilities from the US workforce by authorising the temporary employment of qualified individuals who are not otherwise authorised to work in the United States".

Trump tariffs offer space to deleverage overreliance on US market, push reforms

ANIL SASI
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 27

WITH THE steep 50 per cent American tariffs on Indian goods exports kicking in from Wednesday, policymakers in New Delhi have their work cut out. The problem for them, however, is not knowing how long these tariffs will persist and if a policy intervention can be cogently rolled out without clarity over the timeline of the very disruption that it seeks to address.

These tariffs have, however, triggered serious deliberations on three issues that have been looming on the horizon for years, but certain inertia in New Delhi, combined with an increasingly defensive trade outlook, led to concerted policy inaction. Some of that is now back on the table, precipitated by US President Donald Trump's tariff action and the realisation that this stance could continue for the better part of the next three years.

■ One, the heavy reliance of Indian exports on the US market is now a matter of serious debate, given that America has been India's largest trading partner for the fourth consecutive year now. The nearly \$45 billion trade surplus with the US in 2024-25 has largely counterbalanced the trade deficits with other countries, especially China.

■ Second, to de-risk from this overreliance on the US as a market, there might be a case to aggressively push ahead with not just bilateral deals, but also to be open to the possibility of joining a big multilateral deal in order to integrate into the global supply chains. While China-led RCEP is unlikely to be that option, the Japan-led Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership or CPTPP could be a possibility. Especially, given that the UK has joined the CPTPP, and the European Union has applied to join the 12-nation pact. China is not yet in. There is a view in New Delhi that India should try to get in by formally applying for a membership to the CPTPP, before China attempts to get in. For this, however, India will have to go through the accession process to join the CPTPP, unlike in the RCEP, where India was an original negotiating State. The positive thing, though, is that key members including Japan, Australia and the ASEAN countries are keen that India joins in. A section within the Union government, though, continues to be vehemently against multilateral trade deals, citing objections from sections of industry, especially the bigger enterprises.

■ Third, while the US has repeatedly peddled its trade deficit with India, the fact is that America runs close to a \$40 billion overall surplus in its trade with India, if revenues from digital services, financial activities, royalties, education and arms trade are taken into account. Analysts have said that this misplaced deficit claim by the US should be counteracted with the overall deficit figures, in a bid to strengthen India's negotiating position, as and when trade talks



File

EXPLAINED

Vulnerability of strategy

THE PROBLEM for India's export sector is that it got used to the comforts of the US market — the fact that there was easy access to that big consumer market and that America's streamlined customs procedures and entry norms offered a seamless experience for exporters. That vulnerability of strategy now stands exposed.

resume. There is a belief that the secondary tariffs will go away at some point in the next few months, but the primary 25 per cent tariffs could stay. So the worst case scenario from India's point of view is already here. "One can only go up from rock bottom," an official said.

Excessive reliance on the US market

The real big problem for India's export sector is that it has gotten used to the comforts of the US market — the fact that there was easy access to that big consumer market and that America's streamlined customs procedures and entry norms offered a seamless experience for exporters. Till Trump took charge in January, Indian goods going into the US faced just an average 4 per cent tariff and virtually no non-tariff barriers. This lulled Indian exporters and the supporting government machinery to double down on the American market, with virtually no real efforts to hedge this exposure over the years. That vulnerability of strategy now stands exposed, just as Europe's overdependence on the US defence blanket has not been called into question.

As of 2024, the US accounted for around 18 per cent of India's total exports, a rise from 15 per cent in 2017 and 11 per cent during the lows of the post-financial crisis in 2010. The share of Chinese exports, meanwhile, going to the US has declined from 20 per cent to 14 per cent since 2017, as Beijing consciously diversified its export basket. India's overreliance on a single market has given Trump a crucial leverage point with India, which he is unabashedly exploiting at the cost of the strategic and diplomatic relationship, which both sides had painstakingly invested in over the last three decades and one that New Delhi had pretty much taken for granted. The belief in government circles here that even in the worst

case scenario, Washington DC would maintain a tariff differential between India and China is now a pipedream, at least till Trump's next tariff tweak.

With the steep 50 per cent tariffs kicking in, India's exports of low-margin and labour-intensive goods ranging from apparel, textiles, gems and jewellery to shrimps, carpets and furniture, are set to become unviable in the American market, jeopardising low-skilled jobs in India.

The impact to the economy as a whole might be somewhat overstated, given that exports to the US accounts for less than 2 per cent of India's GDP and that nearly 40 per cent of export sectors including pharma and electronics are exempted from the punitive tariffs for now. The problem for policymakers, however, is the outsized impact of this disruption on the employment sector, given the labour-intensive nature of India's export basket to the US. Meanwhile, competitors like Vietnam, Bangladesh, Cambodia, and even China and Pakistan, which currently face lower tariffs from the Donald Trump administration, are set to benefit from India's potential losses.

To counterbalance the immediate impact, exporters have asked for facilitating access to big domestic buyers, including the Indian Railways and procurement by various government departments and undertakings. The Centre is exploring the possibility of a stop-gap package, including cheaper credit. The problem is that it is not known how long this pain will last and if there is no visibility into how the demand itself will be impacted, credit sops can only solve a small part of this problem. The Federation of Indian Export Organisations said Tuesday that textiles and apparel manufacturers in Tirupur, Noida, and Surat have halted production amid worsening cost competitiveness and uncertainties over flow of fresh orders.

Positive factors

On the brighter side, India is now in a much better position to negotiate multilateral deals as compared to when it jettisoned the RCEP talks, given that New Delhi has now shed some of its diffidence on the trade front. In the UK deal signed earlier this year, Indian policymakers have shown some degree of realism in opening up segments of imports in areas where the country has been relatively weak or in sectors such as intermediate goods. That is being seen as a positive step, given India's tariff structure currently has rigidities that include high tariffs on inputs and intermediate goods, which acts as a disadvantage to domestic players. With the UK, India has shown accommodation in certain areas that the other side has pushed for, which officials in New Delhi termed as part of a "structured and balanced market access offer" that followed a "development-oriented quota based liberalisation" process. This includes Scotch whiskey and cars.

FULL REPORT ON
www.indianexpress.com

RAVIDUTTA MISHRA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 27

THE COMMERCE and Industry Ministry has begun consultations with industry stakeholders ranging from major e-commerce players including American retail firms Amazon and Walmart-owned Flipkart to Indian small-scale manufacturers and mid-segment retailers to explore models that could boost e-commerce exports, a source told *The Indian Express*. This comes in the backdrop of sharp 50 per cent US tariffs on India.

"One round of consultation has taken place and the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) has invited stakeholders for a second round of talks next

week. The current agenda is to explore ways to boost exports under the e-commerce Export Hubs (ECEHs) model that was announced in the Union Budget and explore what can be done to aid MSMEs," the source quoted above said.

The source said that various methods to boost e-commerce exports are being explored, but there is a major difference of opinion among stakeholders regarding the inventory-based model of e-commerce. "MSMEs have asked the government to allow FDI in the inventory-based model as it could help ease the compliance burden, but there is significant opposition," the source said.

At present, 100 per cent foreign direct investment (FDI) is allowed under the automatic route

Under the inventory-based model of e-commerce inventory of goods and services can be owned by e-commerce entities and sold directly to consumers

in the marketplace model of e-commerce, but FDI is not permitted in the inventory-based model of e-commerce. "The government is looking at the inventory-based model to see if MSMEs can benefit from it amid US tariffs. MSMEs want it as it could ease compliance burden but retailers oppose the same," the source said.

FINANCE MINISTRY'S MONTHLY ECONOMIC REVIEW FOR JULY

Secondary, tertiary effects of US tariffs on economy pose challenges: FinMin report

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 27

THE IMMEDIATE impact of an extra 50 per cent US tariff on Indian exports may appear limited, but their secondary and tertiary effects on the economy pose challenges that must be addressed, the Finance Ministry said in its latest monthly economic report.

In this context, the ongoing India-US trade negotiations will be crucial, it said in its July review of the economy, even as uncertainties persist on whether the tariff quantum could be minimised anytime soon.

The US government has im-

... the government and the private sector, acting in tandem and concert, can keep the disruptions to a minimum"

— FINANCE MINISTRY'S MONTHLY ECONOMIC REVIEW

posed a total of 50 per cent additional tariffs on Indian exports to America, barring a few sectors, beginning Wednesday. The tariff increase will make Indian goods uncompetitive in several sectors, as many other Asia Pacific countries attract a 15-20 per cent tariff.

While India is actively pursuing a diversified trade strategy to sustain its resilient trade performance, "these initiatives will take time to show results and may not fully address the shortfall in exports to the US that may arise if the current tariff rates on India persist," the Ministry said.

India recently concluded free trade agreements (FTAs) with the UK and EFTA and ongoing FTA negotiations with the US, EU, New Zealand, Chile, and Peru.

While upgrading India's rating to 'BBB' from 'BBB-', S&P Global Ratings recently said though the US is India's largest trading partner, "we do not expect the 50 per cent tariffs (if imposed) to pose a

material drag on growth." India's exports to the US constitute about 2 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Factoring in sectoral exemptions on pharmaceuticals and consumer electronics, the exposure of Indian exports subjected to tariffs is lower at 1.2 per cent of GDP.

"While near-term risks to economic activity, principally exports and capital formation, remain due to tariff-related uncertainties, the government and the private sector, acting in tandem and concert, can keep the disruptions to a minimum," the Ministry said.

It said setbacks eventually make "us stronger and more agile, if handled properly." FE

STATISTICS MINISTRY SURVEY

Almost half of all 11th, 12th urban students take private coaching

SIDDHARTH UPASANI
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 27

ALMOST HALF of all urban Indian students in the 11th and 12th standard have taken private coaching classes in the current academic year, according to a new survey by the Statistics Ministry released.

As per the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation's (MoSPI) Comprehensive Modular Survey: Education, released on Tuesday, 44.6 per cent of all urban students in the higher secondary segment were taking or had taken private coaching during the year, with the proportion for rural areas lower at 33.1 per cent. On the whole, 37 per cent of all Indian students in classes 11th and 12th took private coaching this year.

In terms of expenditure, urban students in classes 11th and 12th are spending Rs 9,950 per year on average on private coaching, more than twice as much as their rural counterparts, who are

spending Rs 4,548. At an all-India level, the average expenditure per student on private coaching in the higher secondary segment is Rs 6,384, survey data showed. The amount of money being spent on private coaching by Indian households will be a concern to policymakers, with India seeing a boom in online and offline classes in recent years amid a race to secure high marks and coveted seats in the top educational institutions of the country.

As per data provided by the education ministry in July 2024 to the Rajya Sabha, the Goods and

Services Tax (GST) from coaching institutions had risen to Rs 5,517.45 crore in 2023-24, more than double the Rs 2,240.73 crore collected in 2019-20.

Big chunk of household spending

As per MoSPI's most recent Household Consumer Expenditure Survey (HCES) the annual consumption expenditure of Indian households in rural areas in 2023-24 was Rs 49,464. Urban households, meanwhile, spent Rs 83,952 on average in a year on all goods and services. As

such, households whose children are in 11th and 12th may be spending as much as 9-12 per cent of their annual consumption expenditure just on private coaching classes, per calculations by *The Indian Express*.

As per the 2023-24 HCES, 'education' accounted for 3.24 per cent of rural households' monthly per capita consumption expenditure, almost half the urban households' figure of 5.97 per cent.

Across all levels, the MoSPI survey data released on Tuesday showed 27 per cent of all Indian students were taking or had taken

private coaching during the year, with the proportion being higher in urban areas at 30.7 per cent compared to 25.5 per cent in rural areas. In terms of the costs, the average annual household expenditure on private coaching per student in urban areas was Rs 3,988, Rs 1,793 in rural areas, and Rs 2,409 at a national level.

The survey, part of the 80th round of the National Sample Survey (NSS), was conducted during April-June and covered 52,085 households in total — 28,401 in rural areas and 23,684 in urban areas — with data collected from 57,742 students currently enrolled in schools across India. "Although the survey mainly aims to generate national-level estimates to support the requirements of the Department of School Education and Literacy, wherever possible, disaggregated estimates at the sub-national level have also been presented in the report," MoSPI said.

To be sure, the survey does not cover private coaching for skills such as coding and foreign lan-

guage classes or extracurricular activities like art, dance, music, and sports.

The last time a survey on household consumption of education was conducted was from July 2017 to June 2018, which showed that 19.8 per cent of students attended private coaching centres. However, the statistics ministry cautioned on Tuesday that the findings of that survey "cannot be directly compared" with those of the latest one as anganwadi centres were previously not classified under pre-primary education and expenditures on school education earlier included private coaching.

Transport expensive than uniforms

Private coaching classes apart, school-going children spent as little as Rs 2,639 in a year on a government school education in rural areas to as high as Rs 35,758 in unaided private schools in urban areas.

FULL REPORT ON
www.indianexpress.com

BRIEFLY

EU trade commissioner likely to visit

New Delhi: European Commissioner for Trade Maros Sefcovic is likely to visit India next month to take stock of progress of free trade agreement negotiations with Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal, an official said on Wednesday. PTI

Auction of five critical mineral blocks cancelled

New Delhi: The government has cancelled the auction of five critical mineral blocks, including a rare earth element (REE) block in Karnataka, in the fifth round of auction due to poor response. There were no bids for three blocks — two glauconite mines in Gujarat and Chhattisgarh and one Nickel and PGE (Platinum Group Element) block in Karnataka, which led to cancellation of their auction, the mines ministry said in a notice. PTI

Employment in industries rises 5.92% in FY24

New Delhi: Employment in industries increased by 5.92 per cent to 1.95 crore in 2023-24 from 1.84 crore in 2022-23, according to the latest Annual Survey of Industries (ASI) released on Wednesday. PTI

Govt appoints Akash Tripathi as SECI MD

New Delhi: Akash Tripathi, an IAS officer of the 1998 batch, has been appointed as the MD of state-owned Solar Energy Corporation of India. PTI

TOP OF THE WORLD



Iran Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi. File

IRAN IAEA back in Iran, no deal over inspections yet

Dubai: UN nuclear inspectors have returned to Iran for the first time since it suspended cooperation with them in the wake of Israel's attacks on its nuclear sites, Iranian state media reported on Wednesday. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi told lawmakers Tehran had still not reached an agreement on how it would resume full work with the UN's IAEA watchdog, parliament news agency ICANA reported. But he said the inspectors would supervise the changing of fuel at Iran's Bushehr nuclear power plant. The comments come after Iran met with France, Britain and Germany over UN sanctions. REUTERS

PAKISTAN Imran's party to boycott upcoming bypolls

Islamabad: Jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's party has decided to boycott the upcoming byelections for national and provincial assemblies, in line with the opinion of its founder. Several seats of the national and provincial assemblies became vacant last month after the conviction of leaders of Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) for their involvement in the May 9, 2023 riots. The decision to boycott the byelections was taken by the party's political committee, which met to consider Khan's input following a meeting with his legal team at Adiala Jail on Tuesday, The Dawn newspaper reported. PTI

AFGHANISTAN Passenger bus crash kills 25 in Kabul: Govt

Islamabad: A passenger bus overturned in Afghanistan's capital early Wednesday, killing at least 25 people, a Taliban official said. It happened early in the morning in the Arghandi area of Kabul. The bus was coming from southern Afghanistan with passengers from Helmand and Kandahar. Reckless driving caused the accident, which also injured 27 people, Interior Ministry spokesman Abdul Mateen Qani said. The accident comes less than a week after a crash that killed about 80 people in the western province of Herat. PTI

MORE THAN 80% OF GAZA IS ISRAELI MILITARY ZONE NOW

Israel tells Gaza City residents to leave, US to host talks on post-war situation

WAFAA SHURAF, SAM METZ & SALLY ABOU ALJOUD GAZA CITY, AUGUST 27

ISRAELI AND US officials were to meet Wednesday in Washington to discuss post-war Gaza, even as Israel's military called the evacuation of Gaza City "inevitable" ahead of a new offensive and no signs of a ceasefire were in sight.

The meeting comes amid mounting outrage over this week's double Israeli strike on a southern Gaza hospital that killed journalists, emergency responders and others. The toll from the attack on Nasser Hospital rose to 22 after two more people died Wednesday, Gaza health officials said.

The Israeli military, which has said it will investigate, offered no immediate explanation for striking twice and no evidence for an assertion that six of



Palestinian families leaving Gaza City on Tuesday. AP

the dead were militants.

President Donald Trump was presiding over a policy meeting on the Gaza war on Wednesday with input from former British Prime Minister Tony Blair and former Trump Middle East envoy Jared Kushner, a senior

White House official said.

Trump, top White House officials, Blair and Kushner were discussing all aspects of the Gaza issue, including escalating food aid deliveries, the hostage crisis, post-war plans and more, the official told Reuters.

The Israeli military on Wednesday told residents of Gaza City to prepare to leave. "The evacuation of Gaza City is inevitable," spokesperson Avichay Adraee wrote in Arabic on X. He said Israeli forces have surveyed vast empty areas south of the city "to assist the evacuating residents as much as possible." He said the displaced would receive space for tents, and infrastructure would be set up to distribute aid and water.

More than 80% of Gaza is designated as an Israeli military zone or subject to displacement orders, the U.N. humanitarian agency said in June.

Israel has pressed ahead with plans to mobilize tens of thousands of reservists. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said the military will launch its offensive while simultaneously pursuing a ceasefire. Hamas said last week that it accepted a ceasefire plan from Arab mediators. AP WITH REUTERS INPUTS

UNSC members, except for US, say famine in Gaza is 'man-made crisis'

ALL UNITED Nations Security Council members, except the United States, on Wednesday said the famine in Gaza was a "manmade crisis" and warned that the use of starvation as a weapon of war is banned under international humanitarian law.

In a joint statement, the 14 council members called for an immediate, unconditional and permanent ceasefire, the release of all hostages held by Hamas and other groups, a substantive surge of aid throughout Gaza, and for Israel to immediately and unconditionally lift all restrictions on aid. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification system said Friday that 514,000 people in Gaza are experiencing famine. REUTERS



The site of a Russian strike in Sumy region, Wednesday. Reuters

Kremlin opposes Europe plans on Ukraine security

European troops in Ukraine would mean a NATO presence, says Moscow

REUTERS MOSCOW, AUGUST 27

RUSSIA TAKES a negative view of European proposals on security guarantees for Ukraine and will not accept any presence of NATO troops on its neighbour's territory, the Kremlin said on Wednesday.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov spoke US President Donald Trump's efforts to end the war in Ukraine as "very important" however, said Moscow hoped they would continue. As part of a potential peace settlement, Ukraine's European allies are working to put together a set of guarantees for Ukraine that would protect it from a possible future attack by Russia.

But Peskov said a European troop deployment in Ukraine would mean a NATO presence there, which he said was something Russia had aimed to prevent from the start. "In fact, at the very beginning, it was the advancement of NATO military infrastructure and the infiltration of this military infrastructure into Ukraine that could probably be named among the root causes of the conflict situation that arose," he said.

"So we have a negative attitude towards these discussions." All sides agree that security guarantees for Ukraine must be part of any peace deal, but disagree fundamentally on what form they should take.

Russia says it should be one of the guarantors of Ukraine's security and wants to revive a proposal that was discussed between the two sides in 2022, in the early weeks of the war. Kyiv rejects that, saying it would have given Moscow an effective veto over any outside military support for Ukraine. Peskov said security guarantees were "one of the most important topics" but that Russia did not believe it was helpful to discuss them in public. He said that this month's U.S.-Russia summit in Alaska between presidents Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin had been "very substantive, constructive and useful".

Meanwhile, Russia launched a massive drone attack on energy and gas transport infrastructure across six Ukrainian regions overnight, leaving more than 100,000 people without power, Ukrainian officials said on Wednesday.

Gunman opens fire in Minneapolis school, kills two children, himself, say officials

TIMEVANS & BEN BREWER MINNEAPOLIS, AUG 27

A BLACK-CLAD gunman killed two children and wounded 17 other people on Wednesday, when he opened fire on students attending Mass at a Minneapolis Catholic school, authorities said.

The assailant, a man in his early 20s, fired dozens of rounds through the church windows and then took his own life, officials said.

He was armed with a rifle, a shotgun and a pistol, they said.

"This was a deliberate act of violence against innocent children and other people worshipping. The sheer cruelty and cowardice of firing into a church full of children is absolutely incomprehensible," Minneapolis Police Chief Brian O'Hara told reporters. The shooting occurred two days after school started at Annunciation Catholic School, a



Parents comfort their children near the crime scene, after the shooting on Wednesday in Minneapolis. Reuters

private elementary school with about 395 students connected to a Roman Catholic church in a residential area in the southeast part of Minnesota's largest city. Local TV showed parents duck-

ing under yellow police crime tape and leading students out of the school.

Officials said the shooter did not have an extensive criminal history. They did not provide his

name and said they were trying to identify a motive.

Law enforcement was investigating multiple online videos to determine if they were posted by the shooter, according to two sources who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Local hospitals said they were treating 15 children and two adults, with many suffering gunshot wounds.

School shootings occur on a regular basis in the U.S., spurring ongoing debates about gun laws and school safety. There have been more than 140 such incidents so far this year, according to the K-12 School Shooting Database.

"Don't just say this is about thoughts and prayers right now. These kids were literally praying. It was the first week of school. They were in a church," Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey said at a news conference, visibly angry. REUTERS

US to allow 6 lakh Chinese students, Trump says colleges will struggle without them

ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON & DIDI TANG WASHINGTON, AUGUST 27

PRESIDENT DONALD Trump seemingly caught his loyal conservative base off-guard and sparked backlash by saying he would allow 600,000 Chinese students into American universities.

That would be a departure for the Trump administration after it added new vetting for student visas, moved to block foreign enrollment at Harvard and expanded the grounds for terminating international students' ability to study in the United States.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio has singled out China, the second highest source of international students in the US, saying in May that the State Department would revoke visas for students tied to the Chinese Communist Party and boost vetting of new applicants.

"I hear so many stories about 'We are not going to allow their students,' but we are going to allow their students to come in... We are going to allow it. It's very important — 600,000 students"

— DONALD TRUMP US PRESIDENT

"President Xi would like me to come to China. It's a very important relationship. As you know, we are taking a lot of money in from China because of the tariffs and different things," he said. "I hear so many stories about 'We are not going to allow their students,' but we are going to allow their students to come in. We are going to allow it. It's very important —

600,000 students."

Trump's announcement Monday adds to the confusion about the administration's restrictive visa policies and its approach to China as the superpowers tussle over trade and intensifying tech competition. It also marks another divide with figures in Trump's "Make America Great Again" base, who tout an "America First" agenda and had contested the U.S. inserting itself in the recent Israel-Iran war.

Some of Trump's most ardent supporters — from US Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene to former adviser Steve Bannon and far-right activist Laura Loomer — rejected the idea of welcoming more Chinese students. It's not immediately clear why the figure Trump cited was so high — more than twice the number of Chinese students enrolled in the 2023-2024 school year. The total also has been falling in the past few years. AP

Trump admn to tighten duration of visas for students, media

Washington: The Trump administration aims to tighten the duration of visas for students, cultural exchange visitors and members of the media, according to a proposed government regulation issued on Wednesday, part of a broader crackdown on legal immigration.

The student and exchange visa periods would be no longer than four years, the proposed regulation said. The visa for journalists — which currently can last years — would be up to 240 days or, in the case of Chinese nationals, 90 days. The visa holders could apply for extensions, the proposal said. REUTERS

To preserve Lumbini, Nepal SC orders ban on industries

Kathmandu: The Nepal Supreme Court Wednesday issued a ban on setting up new industries in Lumbini, and ordered shifting of the existing ones, to save the birth place of Gautam Buddha.

A division bench of the Supreme Court comprising justice Kumar Regmi and Sunil Pokhrel ruled that the shrine must be protected, and polluting industries must be either shut down or shifted within two years.

In its verdict on a petition filed by senior advocate Prakash Nani Sharma, the court said: "If Lumbini, the most revered shrine for Buddhists... and equally revered by the Hindus... dies, it can not be recreated, but industries can be set up elsewhere." Apart from the heritage, Lumbini has also been home of 652 of the total 697 species of cranes found in Nepal, the verdict said. ENS

German Cabinet clears proposal for voluntary military service, opens door to conscription

ASSOCIATEDPRESS BERLIN, AUGUST 27

GERMANY'S LEADERS on Wednesday launched a drive to attract more people into voluntary military service as the country scrambles to strengthen its armed forces in the face of growing fears about Russian aggression, a project that some in the governing coalition say doesn't go far enough.

Germany, a leading NATO and European Union member, has moved to modernize its long-neglected military since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

New Chancellor Friedrich Merz's coalition this year pushed plans through parliament to enable higher defense spending by loosening strict rules on incurring debt. Merz has said repeatedly he wants the Bundeswehr to be "the strongest conventional



German Chancellor Friedrich Merz

army in Europe."

Germany had some 181,000 active servicepeople at the end of last year. But the government says it needs to increase that in the long term to 260,000, plus some 200,000 reservists.

"The Bundeswehr must grow — the international security situation, above all Russia's aggressive behavior, make this necessary," Defense Minister Boris Pistorius said Wednesday. The plan still needs parliamentary approval.

The plan allows for the government to move toward compulsory service "if, in the course of the next one, two or three years, we see that the target figures aren't being reached," Merz said.

POLLS SAY IMMIGRATION HAS BECOME BRITISH VOTERS' BIGGEST CONCERN; MIGRANTS & ETHNICALLY DIVERSE COMMUNITIES FEEL TARGETED

England flags spark pride and concern amid anti-immigration protests

CATARINA DEMONY & VITALI YALAHUZHIAN LONDON, AUGUST 27

THE RED and white St George's Cross and the Union Jack flags have proliferated along streets across England in recent weeks in what supporters say is a campaign to show national pride, but others fear is part of growing anti-immigration sentiment.

The flags have emerged during a politically charged summer in Britain that has been dominated by the subject of migration, with the YouGov monthly sentiment tracker showing that

since the end of June immigration has overtaken the economy as voters' biggest concern.

"It's our flag, we should be able to feel proud to fly it," said Livvy McCarthy, a 32-year-old bartender, as she walked past a pedestrian crossing in the Isle of Dogs, London, painted to resemble the English flag. "Every other country can do the same, so what's the problem?"

National flags often hang from public buildings in Britain, but it is rare for them to appear in the streets outside of sporting, royal or military events. The appearance of flags has coincided with a wave of protests in recent weeks

outside hotels sheltering asylum seekers. Fuelled by social media, the movement appears to have originated with the Birmingham-based Weoley Warriors, with several groups now encouraging the display of more flags.

The Warriors call themselves a group of "proud English men" on their fundraising page, which says they want to show how "proud we are of our history, freedoms and achievements".

In the 1970s, the Union flag was adopted as a symbol by the far-right National Front party, which openly promoted white supremacist views, while the Cross of St George, the patron saint of



The appearance of flags has coincided with protests in recent weeks outside hotels sheltering asylum seekers. Reuters

England, likewise was brandished by English soccer hooligans and extreme right-wing groups.

While some regard displaying the flag as showing patriotism, others, including those from migrant communities or ethnically diverse backgrounds, are concerned they are being targeted.

Stanley Oronsaye, a 52-year-old hospitality worker from Nigeria and a resident of the Isle of Dogs, said people should be free to express their views on migration policy, so long as it remains within the law. Yet he felt uneasy. The Tower Hamlets borough, which is home to the Isle of Dogs, is one of the most diverse areas in

Britain, with nearly half of residents born outside the UK.

"The worry is from the fact that if it escalates it can turn into something else," Oronsaye said. "It's worrisome when... nationalism is allowed to take a different tone." Jason, 25, who declined to give his last name, said the flags were about "getting English culture back... We are seeing more of other cultures than we are of our own now."

The protests outside hotels housing asylum seekers in recent weeks were triggered in part after an Ethiopian asylum seeker staying in a hotel north of London was charged last month with sexual

assault. He denies the charge.

It follows a wave of riots last summer targeting asylum seekers and ethnic minorities in several British cities, after three young girls were murdered, with social media falsely attributing the attack to a radical Islamist immigrant.

PM Keir Starmer said at the time the violence was the result of "far-right thuggery". Asked about the flag movement, a spokesperson for Starmer said the PM views flags as symbols of the nation's heritage and values but has recognised that some want to use it to cause conflict. Some councils have removed flags, citing safety reasons. REUTERS



PLAYING TODAY

- BWF World C'ships: Round of 16: 1:30 pm onwards; Live on Star Sports & JioHotstar
- US Open: Round 2: 8:30 pm onwards; Live on Star Sports & JioHotstar

BRIEFLY

Para Worlds: Antil to lead Indian charge

New Delhi: Three-time Paralympics medallist high jumper Mariyappan Thangavelu was one of the notable omissions from India's 73-strong team, led by star javelin thrower Sumit Antil, for next month's World Para Athletics Championships, being hosted by the country for the first time. Another high jumper Sharad Kumar, who won a bronze and a silver in Tokyo and Paris Paralympics, also failed to find a place in the squad, which has 19 women. The Indian squad was announced during the unveiling of the jersey of the players for the championships to be held at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium here from September 27 to October 5. Thangavelu, 30, is a highly decorated para athlete of the country. He won a gold in the 2016 Rio Paralympics, a silver in the Tokyo edition and a bronze in the Paris Games. PTI

Narayana wins gold, Nirupama bags silver

Ahmedabad: Indian weightlifters Ajith Narayana and Nirupama Devi Seram delivered superlative performances to clinch the gold and silver medals in the men's 71kg and women's 63kg category respectively at the Commonwealth Championships. Narayana recorded a total lift of 317kg (145kg snatch + 172kg clean & jerk) to secure the top position on the podium, setting new Commonwealth records in the process. Narayana's victory came after a thrilling contest with Nigeria's Joseph Edidiong Umoafia, who claimed the silver medal with a total of 316kg (146kg snatch + 170kg clean & jerk), while Nauru's Ezekiel Moses won bronze, managing a total of 290kg (135kg snatch + 155kg clean & jerk). In women's 63kg, Nirupama produced an impressive performance to finish second with a total of 217kg (91kg snatch + 126kg clean & jerk). PTI

Bhanwala wins 25m rapid fire pistol silver

Shymkent: India's Anish Bhanwala once again showed why he is the best rapid fire pistol shooter in the country, clinching the silver medal in the ongoing Asian Shooting Championships here on Wednesday. The 22-year-old Olympian finished with a total of 35, just one shy of gold winner Su Lianbofan of China. The bronze went to Korea's Lee Jaekyoon. The Indian had a one-point lead after the first four series but fell behind after that. Another Indian in the competition, Adarsh Singh, finished fifth. Bhanwala, the 2018 Commonwealth Games gold medallist, was placed sixth with a score of 290 after the precision round of 30 shots on Tuesday, but in the rapid fire round on Wednesday, the Haryana marksman shot a superb 293 to jump to fourth place, aggregating 583 points. PTI

Sixth skin-cancer surgery for Clarke

Melbourne: Former Australia captain Michael Clarke has undergone a sixth surgery for skin cancer, this time to remove a lesion from his nose. The 44-year-old 2015 World Cup-winning skipper posted a post-operative picture on Instagram, urging people to prioritise regular skin checks, especially in countries with high sun exposure such as Australia. "Skin cancer is real! Especially in Australia. Another one cut out of my nose today. A friendly reminder to get your skin checked. Prevention is better than cure but in my case, regular check ups and early detection is key," he wrote on Instagram. Clarke was first diagnosed with skin cancer in 2006. PTI

BWF WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

Slow start, smooth finish

As in her first match, Sindhu had to come back from the brink in first game; will have to begin better against World No. 2 Wang Zhi Yi

VINAYAKK MOHANARANGAN
AUGUST 27

NOT COUNTING her walkover due to injury at the 2022 edition in Tokyo, PV Sindhu has never lost a completed match against Chinese opponents at the BWF World Championships. It is a stunning statistic that summarises her brilliant record at the marquee event, where she has won five medals.

But the streak will be tested to the fullest on Thursday in Paris, where she faces world No.2 Wang Zhi Yi. For the Indian superstar to stand any chance, she'd have to be at her best from the word go. On Wednesday, Sindhu once again overcame a slow start to defeat Letshanaa Karupathevan from Malaysia 21-19, 21-15 in 43 minutes.

There are a couple of ways to look at Sindhu's campaign at the 2025 edition thus far. One, the most obvious, is that she is through to the round of 16 without dropping a game against her two lower-ranked opponents. That was broadly what was expected from her. The other, slightly more concerning, is the slow starts she has made to both her matches. On another day, or two, she might have been made to pay – perhaps been forced to play three games and waste unnecessary fuel at the start of the tournament.

In her opening-round match against Bulgarian teenager Kalyona Nalbantova, Sindhu trailed 7-12 at one stage and then faced two game points before the youngster snatched at the chance to take the lead.

It was even more precarious on Wednesday against Letshanaa, who was up 18-12 in the opener on the back of some impressive attacking play. But on both occasions, the Indian held her nerve – and just as importantly, her younger opponents rushed at chances to close it out – to take the lead. Once she pocketed the opener, however, Sindhu's attacking strengths saw her sail through the second game.

She blew away Nalbantova with a flurry of cross-court smashes, while against Letshanaa it required the use of her pace variations, with coach Irwansyah's inputs in the intervals coming handy. On Day 1, it was perhaps a combination of unknowns – an opponent she couldn't have seen much of before and playing at the arena for the first time. "Once I understood the court, I think I was playing my game. First game in the tournament, first match, it definitely took me some time to get used to it (the playing conditions)," Sindhu had told AFP on Tuesday.

Different approach

While she could hit her way out of trouble against Nalbantova, against Letshanaa, it required more tactical guile. The Malaysian was hitting some wonderfully precise smashes to either flank of Sindhu, and the Indian seemed a yard off the pace in defence.

Scrambling around on the court often, Sindhu was unable to dictate the tempo of rallies as much as she would have liked. But all that changed from 12-18 down as she reeled off six straight points with a nervous Letshanaa unable to keep up her earlier attacking tempo. One smash echoed off Sindhu's racket after she nailed it down the line.

When coach Irwansyah walked over to Sindhu during the interval, he had a smile on his face, of satisfaction that his ward was able to turn things around. Sindhu nodded back,



PV Sindhu once again overcame a slow start to defeat Letshanaa Karupathevan from Malaysia 21-19, 21-15 in 43 minutes on Wednesday. BWF/Badminton photo

understanding what she had to do right.

"No net?"
"Yes. Don't start slow, don't follow her tempo."

Sindhu was aware of taking the first game, as it freed her of any unnecessary pressure. "It was very important for me to win the first game, I have managed quite well given the conditions. But I hope I don't make unforced errors from the beginning and be focused in the next match," Sindhu told olympics.com. "From 12 to 18 in Game 1, I kept pumping myself up, that it was not over. I was alert from the start in Game 2, once I knew how she was playing, I was able to maintain the lead."

That should well be Sindhu's mantra when she faces Wang in the Round of 16. She has a 2-2 record against the current world No.2, but both of her wins came well before Wang became the outright second-best player in the world. If not for the machine that is An Seyoung, she could have had a few more titles to her name.

Wang's style is often likened to Chen Yufei's, a strong all-round game with no glaring weakness. And a physical ability to even push the likes of An to the limits as one saw in the epic All England final earlier this year.

Sindhu's proud record of winning all her matches against Chinese opponents at the World Championships – some of the biggest names to have played the game – will perhaps face its sternest test yet because of the current gap between the two players. But if she can mix the adaptability she has shown so far with a faster start, there might yet be a chance.

Post setbacks on and off the court, Sat-Chi on quest to find magic again

SHIVANI NAIK
AUGUST 27

IT'S IN that understanding silence after a clumsy clash of rackets down the middle, with the lead whittled to 20-19. Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty were flying so high from 2021-2023 that a mistake like that was unthinkable. It's in Chirag learning to linger back and letting Satwik negotiate the front court interceptions, even if he isn't nailing those.

Or Satwik gesturing to let it go, knowing Chirag will mull and beat himself up over his service dipping into the net. The SatChi magic is biding its time to explode, the SatChi friendship, though, is filling the cracks like Kintsugi gold and making their bond indestructible.

For a pair of fairly happy athletes riding the sunny waves – Satwik was happy-go-lucky even – the last year has been nothing short of a nightmare. Grief, on-court disappointments, injuries, and even going out of the Top 10. It's why they are on Mission: Finding Sat-Chi now, rather than fixating on medals.

Starting off at the Paris World Championship against the yuppie Taiwanese pairing of Liu Kuang Heng – Yang Po Ha – speedy, restless and with a sleeve of tattoos – Satwik-Chirag gulped down a few scares, and then cruised to make the Round of 16 with a 22-20, 21-13 win.

A major change implemented for a few months now by coaches Tan Kim Her and Sumeeth Reddy, is that Satwik is encouraged to play front court; be in the eye of the speed storm that Asian pairings unleash with their parallel games. Liu-Yang were additionally a left-right combination, and quite upbeat about their chances to slash at the big-hitting giants. While Chirag can comfortably hit big from the back court – he is in possession of the second hardest smash in the world – Satwik has to completely inhabit that front court matrix that demands agility, quick footwork, interceptions and sharpness on shots



Satwik and Chirag beat Chinese Taipei's Yang Po Han and Liu Kuang Heng 22-20, 21-13 to enter the pre-quarterfinals. BWF/Badminton photo

"Just give our best. We want to find the SatChi back. Doesn't matter if we win or lose. But we want that A game. It's been a while since we played that A Game, so once we are there, maybe we can do something here."

SATWIKSAIRAJ RANKIREDDY

Not thinking too far ahead," he told BWF after the win. "Just give our best. We want to find the SatChi back. Doesn't matter if we win or lose. But we want that A game. It's been a while since we played that A Game, so once we are there, maybe we can do something here. But we are not hoping... just give our best to get that Chirag and Satwik back and see where it goes."

Once we are there, maybe we can do something here: that is Dory's equivalent of "Just keep swimming" in Finding Nemo.

The opening set in Paris, a city that can appear like a stranger even if they've won twice there, and love it to bits – for the Olympic loss was scalding – was sobering.

"It's always tricky playing the first game, first set. You don't know what's coming, how courts are. You have to hold your nerve when leading. It's happened quite a lot of times that first game is tough, next game we got comfortable," Satwik said.

Liang-Wang are tough opponents. But they have their own goofy moments and clumsy spirals, and the Weikeng smash is as mellowed as Satwik's with shoulder troubles. A month back at a fashion show in China, Weikeng walked on the ramp, turned around and forgot to pose for a final time, and disappeared into the wings, leaving Wang perplexed. That was comical, but doubles pairings in badminton all go through moments of utter bewilderment at what the partner is up to.

Sometimes, "Finding SatChi A game" is a good enough goal. Medals can be quite the mirage.

IN SEARCH OF GREENER PASTURES

After IPL retirement, 'explorer' Ashwin could be Hundred's biggest catch

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
AUGUST 27

AFTER SAYING goodbye to the Indian Premier League (IPL), spin great Ravichandran Ashwin could be the biggest Indian catch for The Hundred tournament in England, with the media in that country claiming he is likely to turn out for one of the franchises next season.

In his retirement note on X, Ashwin said that now he will explore playing opportunities in leagues around the world.

"They say every ending will have a new start; my time as an IPL cricketer comes to a close today, but my time as an explorer of the game around various leagues begins today," Ashwin posted on social media. "Would like to thank all the franchisees for all the wonderful memories and relationships over the years and most importantly the @IPL and the

@BCCI for what they have given me until now. Look forward to enjoying and making the most of what's ahead of me."

Soon afterwards, reports emerged that the off-spinner could be seen in action in England next year with *The Daily Telegraph* saying it "understands that Ashwin would be eager to play in next season's Hundred tournament."

"Ashwin plans to play in several leagues around the world over the coming years, and has identified the Hundred as a competition in which he would be eager to appear," the report stated.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Dinesh Karthik retired from Indian cricket and appeared for Paarl Royals in the last edition of the SA20 league. Getting top Indian names for their domestic competitions has been the aspiration of boards around the cricketing world to attract eyeballs, social media attention and advertisers, but BCCI doesn't allow its players to turn out in



Ashwin began and ended his IPL career with his home franchise Chennai Super Kings (CSK), playing a key role in successive titles in 2010 and 2011. File

In his retirement note on X, Ashwin said that now he will explore playing opportunities in leagues around the world.

leagues in direct competition with the IPL unless they retire from all forms of Indian cricket – international as well as domestic.

After retiring from international cricket midway through the tour of Australia late last year, and from the IPL now, he has thrown his hat in the ring to attract other franchise leagues.

The speculation around Ashwin playing The Hundred could be fuelled by the fact that at least four of the eight franchises are wholly or partly owned by owners of IPL teams, with a fifth, London Spirit 49 percent-owned by Tech Titans, a Silicon valley consortium led

by Nimesh Arora, the CEO of Palo Alto Networks. It includes other Indian-origin tech tycoons such as Google's Sundar Pichai, Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella and Adobe CEO Shantanu Narayen. That there's a big Indian diaspora in Britain that the league would be keen to tap into goes without saying.

Ashwin began and ended his IPL career with his home franchise Chennai Super Kings (CSK), playing a key role in successive titles in 2010 and 2011. He also has two Champions League T20 crowns (2010 and 2014). He also turned out for Rising Pune Super Giants, Delhi Capitals, Kings XI Punjab and Rajasthan Royals. In 221 games since making his IPL debut in 2009, he managed 187 scalps, making him the fifth-highest wicket-taker in the league's history, conceding only 720 runs an over in the batsman-friendly format.

In the 2025 season, the 38-year-old played nine games, getting seven wickets at

an average of 40.43 and an economy of 9.13. Not playing regularly had prompted Ashwin to seek clarity on his role with the franchise.

"Last season, I played only nine games; in all my years of playing in the IPL, that was the first year I played just nine games. I always used to play every game... so it was my first experience like that," he had said on a podcast on his YouTube channel. "I asked for clarity from my side, but I asked for it during the IPL season itself."

CSK acknowledged the contribution of one of their stalwarts. "Chepauk's own. The carrom-ball thiruppura-sundaran! From your first run-ups in Yellow to the dusty tracks of Anbuden to absolute spin domination in the world's grandest arenas, you've given us everything," the franchise posted on social media.

"You've pillared our legacy and made Fortress Chepauk roar like no other! You truly have the streets, Ashwin!"

Cabinet clears India’s 2030 CWG bid, names Ahmedabad as ‘ideal’ host city

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 27

THE UNION Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Wednesday approved submission of India’s bid for the 2030 Commonwealth Games. A press release from the Press Information Bureau stated that the Cabinet has further given its approval to sign the Host Collaboration Agreement (HCA) along with the required Guarantees from concerned Ministries, Departments and Authorities and sanction of required grant-in-aid to Gujarat Government, in case the bid gets accepted.

Additionally, it also named Ahmedabad as an “ideal” venue because of its “world class stadiums, cutting-edge training facilities, and a passionate sporting culture”. “The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi approved the proposal of the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports for submission of bid for the Commonwealth Games (CWG) 2030,” stated the PIB release.

The decision comes just days after the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) gave its nod to the proposal after a submission of the ‘Expression of Interest’ in March. “It also gave its approval to sign the Host Collaboration Agreement (HCA) along with the required Guarantees from concerned Ministries, Departments and Authorities and sanction of required grant-in-aid to Gujarat Government, in case the bid gets accepted,” the release added.

August 31 is the last date to submit the bid for the event and the IOA is expected to complete the formalities in the next 48 hours. India last hosted the CWG in 2010.

The General Assembly of Commonwealth Sport will decide the host country in the last week of November in Glasgow. India’s chances of bagging the event have brightened as Canada has pulled out of the race citing budgetary constraints. The PIB statement after the cabinet meeting stated that Ahmedabad would be the ideal host city for the Games. “Ahmedabad is an ideal host city offering world class stadiums, cutting-edge training facilities, and a passionate sporting culture. Narendra Modi Stadium, the largest stadium in the world, has already demonstrated its capability by successfully hosting the 2023 ICC Cricket World Cup Final,” it said.

The cabinet further stated through the PIB that hosting the event in India would “leave a lasting impact” on “tourism, creating jobs and inspiring millions of young athletes.” “Apart from that, a large number of professionals will be getting opportunities in Sports science, Event Operations and Management, Logistics and transport coordinators, Broadcast and media, IT and communications, Public relations and communications and in other fields as well.

“Hosting such a globally prestigious event will foster a strong sense of national pride and unity. It will provide a shared national experience and boost the morale of our Nation. It will inspire a new generation of athletes to enter into Sports as a career option and encourage greater participation in sports at all levels.”

India is also aiming to conduct the 2036 Olympic Games and for that too, Ahmedabad is a front-runner as the host city. The city’s sporting infrastructure is being upgraded in line with this ambition. The Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Sports Enclave is one of the prime venues that is currently under construction and apart from the Narendra modi Cricket Stadium, it is designed to house an aquatics centre and a football stadium along with two arenas for indoor sports.

It also gave its approval to sign the Host Collaboration Agreement (HCA) along with the required Guarantees from concerned Ministries, Departments and Authorities and sanction of required grant-in-aid to Gujarat Government, in case the bid gets accepted.”

PIB STATEMENT

Even in her sunset and semis loss, Joshna shows she is not a spent force

PRITISH RAJ
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 27

THE DAILY ended bitterly for Joshna Chinappa. The timeless talisman of Indian squash lost in the semi-finals of the National Squash Championships against Akanksha Salunkhe on Wednesday. But not after the 18-time-national champion, now 38, showed her characteristic grit in pushing her 26-year-old Goan adversary in a four-match game.

Joshna’s body has endured rigours in her two-decade-long career. She underwent a knee surgery after the 2023 Asian Games, had a small coaching gig with the Indian team, when she travelled for the World Squash Team Championships in Hong Kong last December, and most of her contemporaries had long bade farewell to the game. But Joshna’s heart still beats for the game inside the hard, glassed cages that she picked up in her early teens.

The fuel, she tells The Indian Express, is the pride in putting on the national stripes. “Well, a lot of it has to do with playing for

Shining diamond before the big gold

Tonight’s finale will be the first of Neeraj’s two major targets, the other being World Athletics C’ship

NIHAL KOSHI
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 27

RAINY WITH light winds, humidity and the temperature around 18 degrees Celsius — the conditions are set to be tough on Thursday night when India’s Neeraj Chopra and six other javelin stars compete in the Diamond League Final at the Letzigrund stadium in Zurich. Chopra returns to a venue where he made history three years ago, becoming the first Indian to win a Diamond League Final. In the two subsequent finals, he finished runner-up with only a centimetre separating him from the winner, Grenada’s Anderson Peters, at last year’s finale in Brussels.

Peters, a two-time world champion, cannot be written off in the big events even though on current form Neeraj will watch out for the clear and present danger from a German, Julian Weber, who gave him a run for his money this season.

Since the Paris Olympics, the name of a human hulk from across the border gets often mentioned as a real threat to Chopra’s World Championship ambitions, the most-anticipated track and field competition this year. Pakistan’s Arshad Nadeem, however, has not competed since winning the gold medal at the Asian Athletics Championships in South Korea’s Gumi in May. Since the Olympics final, Neeraj and Nadeem have not featured in the same competition. Nadeem has focused on post calf-surgery rehabilitation. Those seeing the men’s javelin only through the India-versus-Pakistan lens should start paying attention to Germany’s Weber.

At the Diamond League final in Zurich on Thursday, Neeraj will run into Weber, the 30-year-old without an Olympic or a World Championship medal. But this could be the year, the 2022 European champion leaves an imprint on the world stage. If he does so, Weber will also restore Germany’s status as a powerhouse in men’s javelin. The last German to finish on the podium at the World Championship or the Olympic Games was Johannes Vetter, a bronze in 2019.

Germany’s lost glory

Over the past half decade, injuries to Vetter and 2016 Rio Olympics champion Thomas Röhler have hit men’s javelin stocks in the country. For Weber it’s been a case of so near yet so far in the Neeraj-Nadeem-Anderson Peters era. He finished fourth at three major competitions — the Tokyo Olympics in 2021, the Eugene World Championships in 2022 and the Budapest World Championships in 2023 — and was sixth at the Paris Olympics.

However, Weber’s season so far has been bookended by two impressive throws, the



Neeraj Chopra returns to Zurich where, in 2022, he became the first Indian to win the Diamond League Final. *Diamond League/X*

latest less than a week before the Diamond League Finale.

At the Doha Diamond League in May, Weber raised his game even as Chopra did. Both men entered the 90-metre club for the first time, Weber in dramatic fashion with 91.06 metres in the final round after Chopra had produced his best-ever 90.23 in the third round. The direction of the wind in Doha helped the throwers but what stood out was Weber’s resilience to fightback when he seemed destined to finish second best.

On the eve of the Diamond League final, Chopra said if he gets his technique right in competition, he is capable of consistently hitting the 90-metre mark. “I really want to throw more and more consistently... 90 metres. It (Doha) was early in the season, but I still tried to find good technique. In training we are doing really good with my coach Jan Zelezny. I need to focus on the same technique in competition,” Chopra said.

When asked about his speed on the runway, he added: “In the run up I am really, really fast, but I don’t think I am using speed right now. In Doha the 90 meter throw was really good, but technically I don’t want to say that was perfect. If my left leg is straight and I use the perfect block that will be a really good throw. Then I will be satisfied with my speed.”

India’s world champion also said he was taking inspiration from Zelezny on how to produce big throws. “When Jan competed he threw more than 50 times over 90 metres,

THE FINAL FIELD		
Name	SB	PB
Neeraj Chopra (Ind)	90.23m	90.23m
Julian Weber (Ger)	91.06m	91.06m
Anderson Peters (Gm)	85.64m	93.07m
Julius Yego (Ken)	84.51m	92.72m
Keshorn Walcott (TTO)	86.30m	90.16m
Andrian Mardare (Mda)	82.38m	86.66m
Simon Wieland (Sui)	79.33m	79.44m

he was at another level. I always followed him, how he managed all the pressure and these distances. He was really consistent. He always said, technique is my biggest weapon. So I really try to understand what he wants to say, and what he tells me during training. Because technically I don’t think I am at a good level, so I am trying to improve technique,” Chopra added.

After winning in Doha, Weber was asked if he had peaked too early in the season. He said there was more to come. “It is a big motivation for me. I know I have much more potential,” he said.

He sent out another warning with an impressive 89.65 metres to win the Brussels Diamond League last week with Chopra pulling out. “It will mean a lot (winning a medal at the World Championships) for me. I mean I have been fourth three times at the World Championships and the Olympics,” Weber said.



The service has troubled Coco Gauff throughout the season. *AP*

gular controllable of the sport a phenomenal amount. This year, prior to the start of the tournament, Gauff had made an astonishing 320 double faults, 95 more than the next-worst player. She has won just 42.7% of the points behind her second serve.

Daly’s inputs were uninspiring, so Gauff hit the reset button. A week before the start of the Major in Flushing Meadows, Gauff announced she had parted ways with Daly and hired biomechanics specialist Gavin MacMillan.

the tournament — continues to rankle.

Gauff had let go of her successful partnership with Brad Gilbert, who guided her to her first Major at her home slam in New York in 2023, last year. He had paved the way for Matt Daly, more of a technician than a psychological worker, who was expected to fix the more concerning issues in her technique.

Daly had made adjustments to the western grip of her weaker forehand and tried to get her to stop retreating behind the baseline and become more of the aggressor in baseline exchanges. But most crucially, he concerned himself with her serve, suggesting its flimsiness needed to be fixed via a change in grip.

The results were nonexistent. In 2025, Gauff ticked off a major goal, winning her second Major at the French Open and making sure to avoid the tag of a one-hit wonder. She had a positive clay season, reaching two WTA 1000 finals on the surface too. But away from the dirt, her season has been lacklustre to say the least; in Australia, she was out in the quarter-final, and in Wimbledon she lost in the first round. Since the Paris triumph, she has only won five of her nine matches.

And the service is the major sticking point. For a player of her quality, she falters on the sin-

Since Doha, Neeraj and Weber have split honours in the two competitions they have competed in together — Weber (86.12m) winning in Chorzow, Poland, in May and Neeraj staving off Weber in the Paris Diamond League in June.

But the real test for Weber will be if he can deliver a medal on the big stage at next month’s World Championships. He has bitter memories of World Championships and Olympics, and will want to change that. He’s spoken about how the pressure of expectations got to him at the Eugene World Championships. “That was the first time where I had difficulties with mental things. Before, I never had problems. I was always on beast mode, competition mode, throwing much farther in competition than training. But this time there was pressure on me. I made it for myself, but also from my surroundings. The news was (saying) the Germans are not any good at sport, there are not many medals, I felt I was one of the only hopes,” Weber had told World Athletics. He bounced back to win the Europeans Championships but the big medal has eluded him.

He started off early in athletics but then turned his attention to handball from the age of 12 to 16. It was his athletics coach who convinced him to return to javelin because of his strong right arm. After a series of disappointments at the big events, Weber, at 30, seems primed to achieve his full potential.

Live on Diamond League YouTube Page, 11.15pm

MacMillan had previously worked with current World No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka, taking her from a double fault machine to one of the most consistent servers on the tour.

MacMillan’s methods are simple but not simplistic. He does not believe double faults are a sign of mental fatigue nor of a longstanding technical deficit. The service motion, right from the ball toss to the point of impact, is the area that requires adjustment.

And in Gauff’s first match since hiring the specialist, he had indeed seemed to have influenced some change. Gauff served with a slower, more assured motion. She was evidently trying to go for greater accuracy and spins as opposed to speeds. She was trying to place the ball outside of her opponent’s comfort zone as opposed to blowing her off the court.

It worked, and then it didn’t. The American 21-year-old fought back from a break down in the first set and then led by a break in the second before she cracked. The double faults started pouring out, and once again, she began trying to serve bombs, with plenty of errors.

The serve is not the only area of Gauff’s game that needs improvement. Tomljanovic’s singular strategy seemed to be

Pragg stays in the hunt for Sinquefield Cup

MAYANK
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 27

THE 2025 Sinquefield Cup has been a slow-moving affair. The impressive field and eight tightly contested rounds have ensured that no single player has managed to secure an unassailable lead. The standings are incredibly cramped, so much so that even seventh-placed Samuel Sevian has a genuine shot at finishing in the top two.

R. Praggnanandhaa, a joint-leader ahead of the penultimate round, played a safe draw against the USA’s Wesley So. Another co-leader, Fabiano Caruana, also shared points with France’s Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, ensuring the status quo remained unchanged heading into the final round. Both Praggnanandhaa and So played a spotless game with an identical accuracy of 98.9 percent, giving each other practically no chance to make any inroads.

The GM from Chennai will now take on Levon Aronian in the final round, while Caruana will lock horns with Gukesh D in a double dose of Indo-American clashes. Praggnanandhaa may fancy his chances if the tournament moves to a tiebreak against Caruana, considering all three of his classical wins in 2025 — at the Tata Steel Masters, the Superbet Chess Classic Romania, and the Uzchess Cup — were secured in tiebreaks. “This year, playoffs have been good for me. But you never know what’s going to happen,” Praggnanandhaa said.

Gukesh, who had nothing to lose after a mediocre event, went up against Aronian for his eighth round clash and played the Queen’s Indian game. Coming in with a fighting approach, Gukesh gained a slight advantage out of the opening. He created a material imbalance in the hope of striking with the light pieces but Aronian had no real difficulty in equalising the position in the middle-game.

In an extremely difficult endgame to convert with a bishop pair and a two-pawn advantage against a rook and a bishop, Gukesh gave it all. He kept on asking difficult questions to Aronian in an attempt to break him down. The American started to lose his grip towards the fag end of the game, but the position being so complex to handle, Gukesh failed to find any winning ideas. The moment he allowed his opponent to exchange the light-squared bishop, the in-form Aronian pounced on the opportunity and chopped off Gukesh’s two extra pawns in exchange for his one pawn. The position equalised.

Soon after, Gukesh — desperately looking for a win under a severe time crunch — made a one-move blunder by misplacing his other bishop with just eight seconds left on the clock. The position was resignable for White, but this time, it was Aronian, who missed the winning move. Gukesh quickly exchanged all the remaining pieces left on the board, sealing the fate of the game in a draw.

to repeatedly test her weaker forehand, especially while returning second serves, and there were stretches in the match where it worked almost too well.

It shows that for all the prodigal talent and early success she has enjoyed, there are still huge margins for improvement. This season has been a testament to that. The US Open may be a testament to whether a sudden shake-up can be effective in creating those refinements, or whether the call is a panicked, last-minute punt.

She had to do it the old way on Tuesday. She can’t always rely on that. **KEY RESULTS: Men’s singles Rd 1:** 1-Jannik Sinner (ITA) beat Vit Koprieva (CZE) 6-1 6-1 6-2; 27-Denis Shapovalov (CAN) beat Marton Fucsovics (HUN) 6-4 6-4 6-0; Jacob Fearnley (GBR) beat Roberto Bautista Agut 7-5 6-2 5-7 6-4 (ESP) Roman Safiullin (RUS) beat Gael Monfilis (FRA) 6-4 2-6 6-1 3-6 6-4

Women’s singles Rd 1: 23-Naomi Osaka (JPN) beat Greet Minnen (BEL) 6-3 6-4; 3-Coco Gauff (USA) beat Ajla Tomljanovic (AUS) 6-4 6-7(2) 7-5; 8-Amanda Anisimova (USA) beat Kimberly Birrell (AUS) 6-3 6-2; 18-Beatriz Haddad Maia beat Sonay Kartal (GBR) 6-3 1-6 6-1 (BRA)

Not looking at Olympics

With Squash included in the 2028 LA Olympics program, the buzz around the sport has considerably increased around the globe. The sport is buzzing in India too, with a raft of youngsters such as Anahat Singh, Abhay Singh, and Velvan Senthilkumar coming through the ranks. Will the old guard of Joshna and Dipika return for one last tango? “Well, three years is a long way off. I am only taking it one month at a time right now. It takes a lot out of me every day with training and recovery and things like that. So I just want to be smart and selective with what I play. So LA 2028 is a little bit of a stretch right now,” Joshna says.

The Asian Games, though, is just a year away. It’s a more realistic target, she says. “Asian Games is certainly on the back of my mind and doubles is a great option there but it all depends on certain questions like how am I playing, am I fit, can I earn my spot in the team,” admits Joshna. Her march to the semi-final, and the fight she showed, showed that she has the tenacity to launch another medal challenge in the Games.