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Expanding MANDATE

Splintered Opposition set to spurt NDA tally in Parliament

BlitzBUREAU

A series of political developments over the past few weeks has significantly altered the arithmetic of Parliament, placing Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led NDA in a much stronger position. With splits and rebellions in the Aam Aadmi Party, Trinamool Congress and, of late, the Shiv Sena (UBT); the ruling alliance is moving closer to the commanding numbers that can reshape the legislative landscape of the country.

The first major boost came from the AAP's dramatic implosion in the Rajya Sabha. Seven of its MPs crossed over to the BJP, sharply reducing the party's presence in the Upper House and pushing the NDA's tally significantly upward. The move

lifted the alliance's strength in the Rajya Sabha to 148, giving it an unprecedented leverage in a House where governments have traditionally struggled for numbers.

Renewed momentum

The momentum picked up further. Mamata Banerjee's humiliating defeat in West Bengal triggered a rebellion within her TMC, with 20 out of its 28 MPs in the Lok Sabha breaking away from the party and forming a separate bloc. Media reports suggest that their official extension of support to the NDA is only a matter of time.

In Maharashtra, a fresh split in the Shiv Sena (UBT) has fuelled hopes of additional gains for the NDA. Six MPs from nine of the Uddhav Thackeray camp have crossed over to the Eknath Shinde's

Shiv Sena faction boosting the NDA strength further.

The significance of these developments lies in the numbers. The NDA currently has roughly 293 members in the Lok Sabha. A two-thirds majority in the effective House strength would require around 360 members. While the alliance is still short of that mark, potential support from TMC rebels and further gains from Opposition ranks could push its tally beyond 310, substantially narrowing the gap.

The picture is even more encouraging for the ruling

alliance in the Rajya Sabha. Following the latest biennial elections, the NDA

won 19 of the 26 seats at stake, bringing it closer to the two-thirds threshold in the Upper House. If the current trend of realignment continues, the alliance could soon enjoy a level of parliamentary comfort unseen since the early years of the BJP's rise.

PM Modi's appeal

For the BJP, the emerging arithmetic is being viewed as a validation of PM Modi's continuing political appeal and the NDA's ability to attract support beyond its traditional base.

As Opposition parties wrestle with internal divisions and leadership issues, the ruling alliance finds itself in an increasingly advantageous position.

The immediate result is not merely stronger numbers. It is the prospect of a more decisive Government, armed with greater legislative flexibility and growing confidence as it approaches the next phase of its political journey. **BI**

The picture is even more encouraging for the ruling alliance in the Rajya Sabha. Following the latest biennial elections, the NDA won 19 of the 26 seats at stake, bringing it closer to the two-thirds threshold in the Upper House



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DEEPAK DWIVEDI

The young challenge



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Lifestyle diseases are appearing with alarming frequency among people in their twenties and thirties

For decades, diabetes, hypertension and heart disease were regarded as ailments of middle age, the inevitable companions of advancing years. That assumption no longer holds true. Across India's cities – and increasingly in smaller towns – lifestyle diseases are appearing with alarming frequency among people in their twenties and thirties, turning what was once an age-related concern into a pressing public health challenge.

The reasons are not difficult to identify. Sedentary jobs, long working hours, excessive screen time, processed foods, irregular sleep patterns and chronic stress have become defining features of modern urban life. The conveniences of technology have reduced physical activity even as changing dietary habits have increased the consumption of calorie-dense, nutrient-poor foods. The result is a generation that is digitally connected but often physically inactive.

The economic consequences are as worrying as the medical ones. Young adults are the backbone of India's workforce and the engine of its demographic dividend. Rising

rates of obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease threaten productivity, increase healthcare costs and place an enormous burden on families and employers alike. What appears to be a personal health issue is, in reality, a national economic concern.

Equally troubling is the culture of neglect. Preventive health check-ups are often postponed, symptoms ignored and unhealthy habits rationalised as unavoidable consequences of professional ambition. The glorification of overwork and the erosion of work-life balance have created an environment where exhaustion is worn almost as a badge of honour.

Technology, paradoxically, is both part of the problem and part of the solution. Wearable devices, health-monitoring apps and telemedicine can encourage preventive care and early diagnosis. But no gadget can substitute for disciplined habits – regular exercise, balanced nutrition, adequate sleep and effective stress management. Public policy also has an important role to play. Cities need safer walking paths, cycling infrastructure and public recreational spaces. Schools should place greater emphasis on physical

education, while workplaces can encourage wellness programmes and flexible schedules that promote healthier lifestyles rather than simply longer working hours. Public awareness campaigns must focus not only on treatment but also on prevention.

India's aspiration to become a developed nation cannot rest solely on highways, digital infrastructure and economic growth. It also depends on the health and vitality of its people. A country with the world's largest young population cannot afford a silent epidemic that strikes its citizens in the prime of their productive years. Lifestyle diseases are not inevitable consequences of prosperity; they are often the consequences of neglect. Reversing the trend will require a collective effort by individuals, employers and policymakers alike. The sooner that effort begins, the greater the chance that India's demographic dividend will remain a source of strength rather than become a preventable public health liability. **BI**

Blitz BUREAU SPECIAL

The FIFA World Cup, now under way, has captured the imagination of millions of Indians. Fans pack cafes at midnight, jerseys of Argentina and Brazil flood the streets and there are passionate debates on the social media over Lionel Messi, Kylian Mbappé or Cristiano Ronaldo. But, the uncomfortable reality has returned: the world's most populous nation remains largely absent from the world's biggest sporting stage.

The paradox is striking. India has one of the world's largest football audiences but one of its weakest international performances. The real question is whether India can convert the passion for the game into sporting excellence.

Cautious optimism

There are reasons for cautious optimism. The Indian Super League (ISL) has professionalised parts of the domestic game, attracted investment and improved infrastructure in several cities. Corporate sponsorship and digital broadcasting have also expanded the sport's reach beyond its traditional strongholds. But the obstacles remain formidable. India's football ecosystem suffers from inadequate grassroots de-

An uncomfortable reality

The world's most populous nation remains largely absent from the world's biggest sporting stage – football

velopment, poor coaching standards, fragmented administration and a shortage of quality playing facilities. Unlike cricket, which benefits from a robust pipeline extending from schools to state associations and national academies, football still lacks a coherent nationwide talent-identification system.

The challenge is also structural. Football is a game where technical skills are built over years of disciplined coaching beginning at early childhood. Countries that consistently excel – Brazil, Germany or Japan – invest heavily in youth academies, school competitions and community clubs. India cannot shortcut that pro-

cess through imported coaches or high-profile foreign players.

The economic case for football, however, is becoming increasingly compelling. A successful football ecosystem would create opportunities in broadcasting, sports technology, merchandising, tourism and sports medicine while generating thousands of jobs. It could also strengthen India's ambition to become a global sporting power and support future bids to host major international tournaments.

There is another dividend that deserves equal attention. Football is among the most accessible sports in the world, requiring relatively modest

equipment and encouraging teamwork, fitness and community participation. In an era of rising lifestyle diseases and digital addiction among children, its social value extends well beyond medals and rankings.

Expanding potential

Cricket will remain India's dominant sport for the foreseeable future, and there is no reason it should not. But sporting nations are rarely built on a single discipline. The success of hockey, badminton, wrestling and athletics has already demonstrated India's expanding potential.

For football to become India's next great sporting story, India should move away from television ratings, that is, stop measuring football's success merely by how many people watch it and instead concentrate on developing players and infrastructure. The country's passion for the game already exists. The challenge is to build a system worthy of that passion. **BI**

The paradox is striking. India has one of the world's largest football audiences but one of its weakest international performances. The real question is whether India can convert the passion for the game into sporting excellence



PIYUSH GOYAL
Union Minister for
Commerce and Industry

India has made remarkable progress since 2014. Its economy is much stronger, infrastructure is decisively superior, women are more empowered, farmers are getting better prices, and the poor are more secure. This transformation has one common theme: The vision and leadership of Prime Minister Modi.

The people of India have rallied behind his visionary and compassionate leadership to make him the country's longest-serving elected Prime Minister on June 10, when he completed 4,399 days of service to the nation, surpassing the tenure of Jawaharlal Nehru after his first electoral victory.

The historic milestone is a significant moment in India's democratic journey. The country decisively voted the Modi Government to power in 2014 at a time when the economy was shaky and public frustration was growing over policy paralysis, corruption, scandals and controversies that dominated the discredited UPA regime.

Compassionate leadership

The country has been on a transformational journey since 2014. The Modi Government ensured free foodgrains for over 81 crore people, enabled financial inclusion through 58 crore Jan Dhan bank accounts, and provided tap water connections to 16 crore households. Through Aayushman Bharat, the world's largest health insurance scheme, 12 crore families are assured free treatment of up to Rs 5 lakh.

For many young Indians, it may be difficult to imagine how challenging life was before the transformational

The Government has also strengthened the confidence of businesses and the middle class through major reforms, including the Goods and Services Tax and lower tax rates

changes introduced by him, first as Chief Minister of Gujarat and later as Prime Minister. His decisive leadership, combined with a caring and compassionate approach, has steered India towards the Viksit

Bharat 2047 mission, combining pride in India's heritage with an ambitious development agenda.

Nari Shakti: For the PM, women not merely beneficiaries of assistance, but builders of the nation. The fundamentals were addressed first: more than 12 crore toilets were constructed under the Swachh Bharat Mission, enhancing safety and dignity, while over 10 crore free LPG connections were provided under the Ujjwala Yojana, freeing women from the hazards of smoke-filled kitchens.



The Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao initiative has reinforced the importance of the girl child's education and well-being.

Through the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhinyam, the Prime Minister has secured greater representation for women in the country's legislatures to carry forward women-led development.

Welfare of Farmers

Farmer welfare has been a central pillar of Prime Minister Modi's policies. Through the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN), income support is transferred directly to crores of farmers in recognition of their contribution. Nearly 10 crore farmer families have benefited from more than Rs 4.28 lakh crore disbursed under the scheme.

The Government has also signifi-

cantly increased the Minimum Support Price, which is now at least 1.5 times the input cost. Also, farmers have been protected from the sharp rise in global fertiliser prices through continued access to crop nutrients at affordable rates.

Opportunities for the youth: Flagship initiatives such as Make in India and Startup India have been designed to create opportunities for young Indians.

The establishment of a dedicated Ministry of Skill Development and En-

major economy and an increasingly attractive destination for business and investment.

India has signed Free Trade Agreements with developed countries, opening global opportunities for our youth, farmers, small businesses, artisans and workers without compromising India's interests, unlike some reckless deals signed by the UPA.

The Government has also strengthened the confidence of businesses and the middle class through major reforms, including the Goods and Services Tax and lower tax rates. The Digital India initiative, coupled with the rapid expansion of internet access and digital payment systems, has had a significant impact on the economy while making daily life easier for citizens.

Businesses have further benefited from the decriminalisation of numerous outdated and minor offences, as well as the removal of unnecessary compliance burdens. The middle class has also received substantial relief, with annual income up to Rs 12.75 lakh being made exempt from income tax.

Modern infrastructure

The Modi Government is rapidly transforming India's infrastructure. The number of operational airports has more than doubled, rising from 74 in 2014 to more than 160.

Large-scale railway electrification, the ambitious bullet train project, and the rapid expansion of national highways and expressways have made many parts of India's infrastructure comparable with the best in the world.

The true significance of the PM's historic milestone lies not in the number of days served, but in the scale of change delivered.

His leadership has placed the welfare of the poor and farmers, the aspirations of the middle class, and the ambitions of a rising India at the centre of governance,

As the nation moves forward, this journey of transformation continues with renewed resolve towards building a Viksit Bharat by 2047. **BI**

From policy paralysis to VIKSIT BHARAT

The Modi era redefines India



PRABHU CHAWLA

Awesome foursome

The four southern CMs walked in together on what was meant to be a routine Niti Aayog meeting but left having altered the grammar of Indian federalism

In the sprawling Rashtrapati Bhawan complex, where Niti Aayog's national narrative unfolded as polite choreography between the Centre and the states, four chief ministers arrived not as supplicants, but as a single, coordinated force.

Kerala's VD Satheesan, Telangana's A Revanth Reddy, Karnataka's DK Shivakumar and Tamil Nadu's Joseph Vijay walked in together on what was meant to be another routine meeting. They left having altered the grammar of Indian federalism itself. Their combined weight is impossible to dismiss. These four states command 104 Lok Sabha seats, nearly one-fifth of the lower House. They generate close to 26 per cent of India's GDP and contribute roughly 30 per cent of the direct tax revenues.

Not one of their governments belongs to the ruling dispensation at the Centre. What they brought to Delhi was not a list of grievances, but individual structural diagnoses delivered with authority. It was the deliberate construction of leverage.

For decades, Indian Opposition politics has mistaken noise for power. Regional leaders have often confused visibility with influence, treating protest as an end rather than a means. During their first meeting,

the southern quartet has broken that pattern. By appearing as an ideologically opposed bloc rather than four separate petitioners, they have rendered southern solidarity legible to the national imagination.

Model federal citizens

The grievance they have placed on the national table is both real and self-inflicted by the constitutional order. Southern states have behaved as model federal citizens by every technocratic metric. They curbed population growth when it mattered most for national development. They built human-capital foundations through

education and health. They created export-oriented economies that now feed the Union's redistributive machinery.

Their reward, under the delimitation exercise scheduled after the next Census, is a diminished share of parliamentary representation. The current formula prizes raw population numbers above all else. They feel success in governance is penalised; demographic expansion is rewarded. For the South, this is not an administrative footnote. It is a constitutional contradiction that turns federal equity on its head.

Revanth Reddy, 56, has given this contradiction its sharpest national articulation. His proposed hybrid formula – half the seats allocated by population, half by economic contribution – does not invent new principles. It lifts that recognition from budgetary arithmetic into the architecture of the Lok Sabha itself. In doing so, he has transformed a regional anxiety into a constitutional question that any serious federal democracy must eventually confront. He has become the public face of the delimitation argument and possesses both the stamina and the political runway to sustain it across cycles.

Intellectual, moral anchor

Each leader supplies a capability the oth-



Not one of their governments belongs to the ruling dispensation at the Centre. What they brought to Delhi was not a list of grievances, but individual structural diagnoses delivered with authority. **It was the deliberate construction of leverage**

rattles BJP

ers cannot replicate. At 62, Satheesan functions as the bloc's intellectual and moral anchor. A practising lawyer and six-time legislator who rebuilt the Congress in Kerala through patient, principled work rather than inherited advantage, he carries the authority of demonstrated clean governance. Satheesan

categories struggle to contain. These four capabilities are not interchangeable.

A coherent position

They form a functional whole: moral legitimacy, galvanising

supplies the steady calibration of principle.

Shivakumar, at 64, is the indispensable organisational engine. An eight-time legislator with unmatched command of booth-level mobilisation and alliance arithmetic, he rescued the Congress in Karnataka from near-extinction and converted survival into stable governance. Karnataka is not merely another southern state; it is the physical and political bridge to the peninsula. Any formation that aspires to national consequence must pass through that gateway. Shivakumar guards it with institutional memory, personal relationships and the unglamorous machinery of power.

Joseph Vijay, at 51, remains the most disruptive element. He entered politics without dynasty, without prolonged apprenticeship inside an established party and without the ideological scaffolding that usually organises Tamil Nadu's contests. He converted a cultural phenomenon into a governing majority that now controls the South's largest economy and largest parliamentary contingent – 39 Lok Sabha seats. His presence at the Niti Aayog table in his first term signals that Tamil Nadu's historic ambivalence towards active engagement with national structures has shifted. More importantly, he commands a cross-community base that conventional

issue-framing, organisational muscle and mass disruptive appeal. When aligned, they produce something Indian Opposition politics has repeatedly failed to manufacture, a coherent southern position on representation and resources that carries electoral consequences rather than mere rhetorical force. The BJP's organisational footprint remains thin across most of the southern theatre. In Telangana, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, its electoral ceiling is structurally constrained. Karnataka is the sole genuine contest. This asymmetry grants the quartet strategic breathing room their Hindi-belt counterparts rarely enjoy.

The real adversary, however, is not the BJP. It is entropy. Regional coalitions in India have a well-documented habit of fracturing under the pressures of personal ambition, competing state interests and the centrifugal pull of immediate political calculations. Converting a moment of impressive solidarity into a durable institution is a harder task than any single election, and history offers more examples of failure than success. Yet the structural conditions favouring persistence are stronger than in previous regional experiments. The bloc's economic weight and parliamentary numbers create objective leverage that sentiment alone cannot generate. The de-

limitation question supplies a durable constitutional grievance around which coordination can crystallise over time.


Given that none of the four leaders is past the conventional peak of an Indian political career means the human capital exists to sustain the project across a decade. If that discipline holds, the implications extend far beyond the next election cycle. A southern formation commanding such economic and parliamentary leverage could, over successive electoral cycles, force a re-

negotiation of the terms of federalism.

National coalition arithmetic would shift permanently from One Nation, One Election and One Party to any party or a combination of many aspiring to govern at the Centre. The old binary of national party versus regional formation would give way to a more genuinely multiple polity.

Structural argument

What the southern quartet has already achieved is the first, and perhaps hardest, step. They have compelled a Centre long accustomed to managing regional dissent through selective concession to treat their argument as structural rather than episodic. Whether this becomes the opening chapter of a lasting reordering or merely an impressive season of solidarity will be decided by what these four men do next. The South has found leaders who appear to recognise the stakes.

The centre of political gravity is already beginning to tilt – not through demographic accident, but through deliberate organisation. In that emerging reality, the old assumption that numerical superiority somewhere guarantees national dominance no longer holds as an unchallenged premise. The conversation has changed. The structure of power may yet follow. 

They have compelled a Centre long accustomed to managing regional dissent through selective concession to treat their argument as structural rather than episodic.

(The writer is a veteran journalist, political commentator, and TV personality)

COURTESY:
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THE LINGERING INFLUENCES-II

Partition trauma with a thoughtful mind, secular spirit and sharp eye



MJ AKBAR

A veteran journalist, author of several books, and a former minister in the Indian Government



www.britannica.com

BK Nehru describes the trauma of Partition, the violent disruptor of history, geography and culture, with a thoughtful mind, a secular spirit and a sharp eye; a nightmare which besmirched the dream of his generation

This is not a story about alcohol. It is a story about hypocrisy.

His salary was top tier, but it was still a salary, not a lawyer's treasury. Braj was allotted a dress allowance of a hundred pounds when he left for England to study, but told to avoid Oxbridge, where he could turn into a fop. But there could be no compromise on dress standards. He was instructed to purchase three lounge suits at a cost of 30 guineas from top-of-the-line Henry Poole, although cheaper tailors offered the same quality at Savile Row. He bought a cheaper suit from Austin Reed, but auxiliaries included an opera hat and patent leather shoes. He discovered that times had changed when his Irish graduate valet at the London School of Economics (LSE) stole the Poole suits and all his belongings kept in two suitcases under the bed.

The author's maternal inheritance was culturally more Indian but politically pro-establishment. Their ancestor was Pandit Ganga Ram, a Kashmiri purohit who settled down in Lahore to serve

The barbaric horrors of the partition in 1947 still whisper their brutal incantations in dark corners of the subcontinent's psyche

Punjab's great Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1813 and received a jagir, or landed estate. His maternal grandfather was doyen of Lahore; his father was 18 and mother Rameshwari 15 when they were married in 1902.

Flavour of the age

The Dewan was known as Bhaijanji, roughly translated as 'Respected Elder Brother'. A scholar in Arabic and Persian, he was as familiar with Sanskrit religious texts as he was with the Quran. English became a natural addition to the linguistic repertoire. He was a graduate of Government College in Lahore. Bhaijanji went to the Round Table Conferences of 1930 and 1931 as a representative of Punjab landlords. The Punjab aristocracy may have been pro-British but it spoke to the British with head held high. This was not always true of Indian princes.

The author's professor at LSE, the eminent academic Harold Laski, narrated an anecdote which indicates the

flavour of that age. The Maharajdhiraj of Darbhanga hosted a dinner at the conference where Ramsay MacDonald (Prime Minister) was seated at his right and Laski to the left. The only sentence that the Maharajdhiraj uttered was: "I hope you like the menu..." That was sufficient for the requirements of British imperialism.

The ambience of Fairfields, their Lahore home, matched Anand Bhawan. Family friends included Sir Muhammad Iqbal, Sir Sundar Singh Majithia, Sir Jogendra Singh, Sir Zulfikar Ali Khan of Malerkotla, Sir Umar Hayat Khan Tiwana, Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan, Sir Shadi Lal, Sir Fazli-Hussain, Sir Feroze Khan Noon, Sir Ganga Khan: premiers, ministers, members of the Viceroy's Council, poets, leaders. Mian Azizuddin, aristocrat and heir of a famous vazir at the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, was another friend.

BK Nehru learnt Hindi, Urdu and English from his mother. She taught her son that the highest sin was telling a lie; and the ultimate definition of honour came

from the Raghukul Riti of Tulsi Das' Ram Charit Manas: Praan jaaye par wachan na jaaye. Celebrations at his janeu ceremony in the winter of 1925 were elaborate, with family and friends descending from all corners, including Saleh Tyabji with his family from Ran-goon. The puja lasted for a day; the baradari dinners went on for much longer. The Gayatri Mantra was recited into his ear by a priest who warned that it could not be repeated before women or other castes. The iconoclast in him cut off the top knot the next day.

Between the ages of 10 and 16, 'Pa-paji', or father, taught the young Bijju for an hour every morning, during a prolonged shave with the help of a small mirror and two bowls of hot water. The learning was eclectic: The Astronomical Atlas, geometry, algebra, arithmetic, trigonometry, dynamics, 19th-century English poets, fiction, Panini's Sutras, Hitopadesh, Kalidas' Raghuvansha, Latin, French, Persian, Diwan-i-Hafiz. This is education as it was once understood. Hindus, notes the author, began to give up Urdu only after the Muslim League, in yet another display of profound stupidity, announced that it would be the language of Indian Muslims. They forgot to check with Indian Bengali or Tamil or Malayali Muslims. Language, like culture, is older than any religion.

His mother was an instinctive reformer who brought her talent and spirit to Allahabad, becoming for a while editor of a Hindi magazine for women, Stri Darpān, with the help of Ramakant Malaviya, eldest son of Madan Mohan. The Malavias were close family friends even though caste orthodoxy did not permit them to eat in the home of a Kashmiri Pandit. The better elements of the British mores were incorporated seamlessly into conduct. Bijju, for instance, would not conceive of canvassing when elected class representative at the Allahabad University Union. Such things were not done at Oxbridge. He notes that half-a-century later Benazir Bhutto was nearly disqualified when she gave an innocent sherry party for friends on the eve of being elected President of the Oxford Union.

Assimilation process

The fascinating process of assimilation took another turn in 1930 when the author fell in love with a Hungarian Jewish fellow student, Fori; the resistance from his father proved to be stronger than from the mother. It took years of what can only be described as bilateral diplomacy before agreement, and then

arose an unforeseen hurdle: What would be the marriage ceremony? There was no question of either groom or bride changing faith. When God became a problem, Gandhi proved to be a saviour. He decreed that there was nothing in Hinduism which demanded conversion, and so the marriage could be performed by Hindu rites. This formula was repeated in the more famous marriage of 1942 when Jawaharlal's daughter Indira married a Parsi, Firoz Ghandy, son of Faredoon Jehangir Ghandy. Gandhi was once again deus ex machina.

BK Nehru describes the trauma of Partition, the violent disruptor of history, geography and culture, with a thoughtful mind, a secular spirit and a sharp eye; a nightmare which besmirched the dream of his generation, whose barbaric horrors still whisper their brutal incantations in dark corners of the subcontinent's psyche.

The man who destroyed peace, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, was a political Muslim. He was never a believer Muslim. He had no knowledge of Islam, a mere convenience for his exalted ambitions. One story tells us more than many a tome. Jinnah was travelling with Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru to England by ship. They stopped, as was routine, in Egypt, and went to visit the pyramids. The dragomans asked them if they were Muslims. Both said yes. Sir Tej interjected, in a spirit of friendly teasing, to say that Jinnah was lying. He then recited the kalmia, which proclaims that there is one Allah, and Muhammad is His prophet, to prove his Islamic credentials. Jinnah did not know the kalmia.

"It is one of the bitter ironies of history," writes BK Nehru, "that a man as modern, as rational, as contemptuous of the laws of his hereditary religion (recall his drinking whisky and eating eggs and bacon for breakfast till his last

days as Governor General of Pakistan) should have ended up as the leader of a party based on fundamentalism." If Jinnah had not died of lung disease in 1948, he would have been assassinated by some Pakistani fundamentalist over bacon and eggs.

Opposed ideologies

BK Nehru compares Jawaharlal and Jinnah, the two Anglicised guardians of opposed ideologies: "The Quaid-e-Azam had no concept of the forces which his words and attitudes had let loose among the followers of his religion. Jinnah, like Jawaharlal, was culturally an Englishman and, like him again, he was also probably an atheist. He continued, even when he occupied Government House in Karachi as Governor General of his Islamic State,



BK Nehru with his Hungarian wife Shobha 'Fori' Nehru after their marriage in 1935

to eat bacon and eggs for breakfast and drink his evening Scotch. Such a man could not possibly have foreseen what ultimately happened, any more than could have Jawaharlal, for neither of them understood the essential nature of their respective followings."

India opted for a civilisational state. Pakistan chose a fundamentalist ideology which restricted 'purity' to one faith. In 1947 the ethnic cleansing of Hindus in Pakistan was seen as a national duty, not an aberration.

Bhaijanji was also fortunate in that he did not live to see Partition; he never believed that Punjabis could ever massacre one another. But the poison sown by Jinnah infected the soul of Punjab. Bhaijanji passed away in 1945. He would have died of a broken heart in 1947. BK Nehru reports the tragedy with the philosophical calm of a humanist; he never raised his voice in conversation, he never raises his voice in print.

In 1950 he was posted to Washington, the year Pakistan Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan came for his first official visit to America. Pakistan Foreign Secretary Ikramullah and Ghulam Ahmed, both old friends, dropped by for a drink. Ghulam Ahmed was brother of the "notorious Hindu hater Aziz Ahmed". At three in the morning, when drink had loosened his tongue, Ghulam Ahmed told BK Nehru that the only effective way to deal with the forty million Indian Muslims would be to "kill a few, drive out a few and convert the rest", just as they had done to Hindus who remained in Pakistan.

Indians did not need to kill Indians. Pakistanis, not satisfied with the genocide of 1947, repeated it in 1971, killing millions of their own countrymen, both Hindus and Muslims, a massacre that led to the birth of Bangladesh. 1971 was the year in which Pakistan died. **BI**

(Concluded)

India opted for a civilisational state. Pakistan chose a fundamentalist ideology which restricted 'purity' to one faith. In 1947 the ethnic cleansing of Hindus in Pakistan was seen as a national duty, not an aberration



A stronger insolvency and credit ecosystem

The IBC consolidated multiple insolvency laws into a single structure, creating a more coordinated and predictable resolution process



BlitzINDIA SPECIAL

AFTER INDEPENDENCE, companies in India operated within structured legal frameworks supporting normal business activities. When financial stress emerged, they relied on multiple legal mechanisms for resolution. These included company law, debt recovery processes and secured creditor frameworks. Each mechanism followed separate forums and procedures. This often made coordination complex and time-consuming.

To address these challenges, the Government introduced the Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code, 2016. It consolidated existing laws into a single system. The Code also strengthened creditor participation and aimed to maximise asset value, while balancing the interests of all stakeholders.

As the system evolved, implementation experience highlighted areas for improvement. Refinements were introduced to enhance efficiency and outcomes. This continuous reform process led to the enactment of the Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Act, 2026, marking the next phase of consolidation.

The need for reform

Before the IBC enactment, insolvency resolution operated through multiple overlapping legal frameworks. These processes functioned through separate institutions and forums, often resulting in fragmented proceedings and overlapping jurisdiction. As a result, resolution processes frequently became prolonged and uncertain.

Cases remained pending for years

while the value of distressed assets continued to deteriorate. Delays weakened the ability of creditors to recover dues and reduced the possibility of reviving viable businesses. The absence of a consolidated and time-bound mechanism also affected overall credit discipline and investor confidence.

The Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code, 2016 established a unified framework for resolving insolvency across companies, partnership firms and individuals. It consolidated multiple insolvency laws into a single structure, creating a more coordinated and predictable resolution process.

A key objective introduced by the Code was the transition from a debtor-controlled system towards a creditor-driven resolution framework. The emphasis moved beyond mere recovery proceedings towards value maximisation, continuation of viable businesses and balanced treatment of stakeholders.

A structural mechanism

At the centre of the framework is the Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP), which provides a structured mechanism for resolving corporate insolvency. The Committee of Creditors (CoC), comprising financial creditors, evaluates resolution plans. They then make important commercial decisions regarding the future of the stressed entity.

The Code also introduced a time-bound structure for resolution. The CIRP was designed to be completed within 180 days, extendable up to 330 days in specified circumstances. If a resolution is not achieved within the prescribed framework, the entity moves into liquidation in accordance with the provisions of the Code.

The effectiveness of the IBC framework rests on a regulated institutional ecosystem established under the Code. The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) functions as the regulatory authority responsible for overseeing insolvency processes, Insolvency Professionals (IPs) and related institutions under the framework.

IPs administer the affairs of dis-

The effectiveness of the IBC framework rests on a regulated institutional ecosystem established under the Code. The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India functions as the regulatory authority

Insolvency And Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Act, 2026



72 Sections Amended



Builds on Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016



Introduces Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process



Expands role for Committee of Creditors

Source: Ministry of Law & Justice and Insolvency & Bankruptcy Board of India

tressed entities, safeguard assets and facilitate meetings of creditors. They oversee the resolution process in compliance with the Code and applicable regulations.

Strengthened ecosystem

Also, the corporate insolvency matters are adjudicated by the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), which acts as the adjudicating authority. Appeals against its decisions are heard by the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT).

Since its enactment, the IBC has significantly strengthened the country's insolvency and credit ecosystem. Till March this year, 8,987 CIRPs have been admitted under the Code. A total of 1,419 corporate debtors were resolved through approved resolution

plans, while several other cases were closed through settlements, appeals, reviews and withdrawals under section 12A.

At the same time, operational challenges continued to remain. Average resolution timelines in several cases exceeded the statutory limit of 330 days. Delays in adjudication and prolonged litigation affected value maximisation in some proceedings. Despite these challenges, the Insolvency Bankruptcy Code is a major structural reform in India's financial and corporate resolution framework.

An evolving framework

The reform leading to the Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Act, 2026 is built on the evolution of the insolvency framework through a series of legislative amendments. The key amendments include:

2018 Amendment: Introduced significant refinements to the resolution framework, including provisions for withdrawal of applications and changes in voting thresholds. It further strengthened creditor participation and modified eligibility criteria under Section 29A of the principal act. **2019 Amendment:** Improved the insolvency resolution framework by introducing an overall time limit of 330 days for completion of the process.

2020 Amendment: Introduced key safeguards, including immunity for corporate debtors after resolution. It also suspended insolvency proceedings for specified defaults in response to COVID-19.

2021 Amendment: Introduced the pre-packaged insolvency resolution process for MSMEs, enabling faster debtor-in-possession resolution with creditor supervision and oversight. It also included provisions to improve efficacy and timelines in insolvency proceedings.

Reforms across stages

The Amendment Act of 2026 builds upon the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 after nearly a decade of implementation experience. It seeks to address procedural delays, litigation arising from legal ambiguities and operational challenges during insolvency resolution and liquidation proceedings.

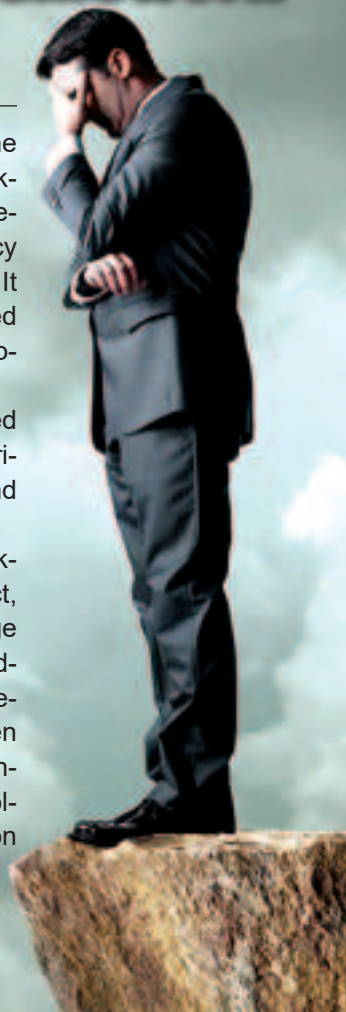
Towards a more efficient framework

Blitz BUREAU

Over the past decade, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 has reshaped India's insolvency resolution framework. It introduced a more structured and creditor-driven approach towards financial distress.

The framework also evolved through implementation experience, judicial interpretation and legislative reforms.

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Act, 2026 represents the next stage of this evolution. The amendment seeks to improve procedural certainty and strengthen timelines. It also aims to enhance the effectiveness of insolvency resolution and liquidation proceedings. Together, these reforms support a more efficient and predictable insolvency framework in India. **BI**



The Act introduces reforms across different stages of the insolvency process. It strengthens timelines for admission and approval of cases. It expands the role of the CoCs during liquidation. It also clarifies provisions relating to security interests, avoidance transactions and resolution plans. The amendment introduces safeguards for implementation of approved resolution plans. A key feature of the amendment is the introduction of a creditor-initiated insolvency resolution process for specified categories of corporate debtors.

Overall, the amendment seeks to make the insolvency framework more time-bound, predictable and resolution-oriented while retaining the core structure of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016. **BI**

Blitz BUREAU

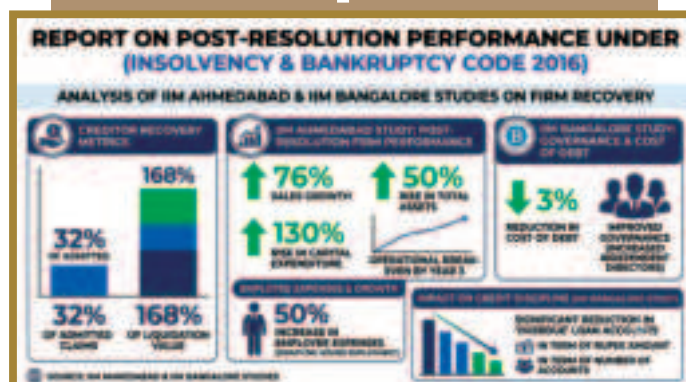
Thumbs-Up from IIMs

A n IIM Ahmedabad study reveals strong post-resolution recovery among resolved firms under the Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code 2016.

Creditors recovered 32 per cent of admitted claims and 168 per cent of liquidation value. Resolved firms saw 76 per cent sales growth, reached operational breakeven by the third year and experienced a 50 per cent rise in employee expenses meaning higher employment.

The total assets of the resolved companies grew by 50 per cent, capital expenditure rose 130 per cent, and profitability aligned with industry benchmarks.

Additionally, an IIM Bangalore study shows a 3 per cent



reduction in the cost of debt and improved governance through increased independent directors. Thus, these studies demonstrate that firms undergoing resolution through the IBC process have shown significant improvements in various aspects of their business, including sales, profitability, asset growth, market valuation and liquidity.

Further, the impact of the IBC on credit discipline has also been corroborated by a comprehensive study conducted by IIM Bangalore.

It finds that the Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code has prompted borrowers to adhere to stipulated loan payment schedules.

During the period under review, the study notes a significant reduction in loan accounts deemed 'Overdue', both in terms of the Rupee amount as well as in terms of the number of accounts. **BI**



Bhashini

Breaking down language barriers

Digital divide goes beyond device access to who the **MACHINE can UNDERSTAND**

ANOOP SAXENA

Inside a brightly lit community centre in rural Madhya Pradesh, 24-year-old Aarti Yadav is speaking into a low-cost smartphone. She isn't sending a voice note to a friend or scrolling through social media. She is reading aloud a series of complex legal phrases in Gondi, a Central Indian tribal language.

With every sentence Aarti utters, an AI algorithm miles away in a Bengaluru tech park grows smarter. Aarti is an 'AI Data Labeller' one of thousands of rural women currently powering Project

Blitz BUREAU

As AI automates routine coding and data entry, what vocational skills will remain 'AI-proof' for India's youth by the end of the decade? According to the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) 2026 Report, the curriculum is shifting from 'rote tech' to 'human-centric tech'. Here are the high-demand segments:

Socio-emotional care workers: As India's urban population ages, specialised geriatric care and mental health support are projected to see a 45 per cent employment jump. These roles re-

AI-proof skill map for 2030

quire high empathy, which algorithms cannot replicate.

Agri-tech extension managers: The demand for workers who can bridge the gap between AI drone data and a farmer's physical field is soaring. These professionals translate digital soil heatmaps into real-world crop management plans.

Cultural data curators: As seen in Project Bhashini, local language experts, tribal historians, and regional

Bhashini, India's National Language Translation Mission.

As Artificial Intelligence reshapes the global economy in 2026, the tech world faces an existential crisis: the 'Silicon Divide'. Traditional Large Language Models (LLMs) are overwhelmingly English-centric, trained on Western data.

For the 70 per cent of India's population living in rural districts – speaking over 22 official languages and thousands of dialects – the AI boom threatened to become a digital wall, locking them out of the future economy. Project Bhashini is the sledgehammer breaking down that wall, transforming SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) from a lofty target into a digital reality.

Hinterland data mines

The narrative around AI often centres on high-profile silicon valleys. But in 2026, the raw material driving India's localised AI revolution is being harvested in places like Chhindwara.

Through localised crowdsourcing apps,

audio archivists are becoming essential to train cultural nuance into AI models.

Green infrastructure technicians: From maintaining solar rooftops in Mumbai chawls to servicing IoT sensors in Chennai's sponge parks, physical, green-collar engineering jobs remain entirely insulated from automation.

The message for 2026 is clear: the future belongs not to those who can code like a machine, but to those who can solve problems like a human. **BI**

How Bhashini hooks into the India Stack

BlitzBUREAU

Project Bhashini isn't operating in a vacuum; it is the newest layer of the India Stack – the digital public infrastructure that brought the world UPI and Aadhaar. Here is how the technology functions under the hood in 2026:

Unified Language Interface (ULI): Just as UPI allows different banks to talk to each other to transfer money instantly, ULI allows any app to instantly translate text or voice across 22 Indian languages. A start-up building a delivery app can plug into ULI via an API, making their platform multilingual overnight without hiring translators.

Anuvadini App: This AI-powered tool is translating engineering, medical, and legal textbooks from English into regional languages at a fraction of the traditional cost. In 2026, a student in a rural Government college can access the latest global research in their native tongue simultaneously with their peers in tech hubs.

Open-source Crowdsourcing: Bhashini relies on the Bhasha Daan initiative. By gamifying data collection, citizens across the country contribute voice recordings, images of local text, and translations. This massive, open-source data repository is publicly available, preventing global big-tech monopolies from locking away local language data behind paywalls. **BI**

rural youths are being paid to validate, translate, and record audio files in their mother tongues. This localised data training ensures that voice-activated AI services can understand a farmer in Bihar or a micro-entrepreneur in Kerala, regardless of their accent or dialect.

"We used to think the digital divide was about who owns a computer," says Dr Kiran Bedi, a digital inclusion researcher. "In the AI era, the divide is about who the machine understands. If an AI financial bot or healthcare app can only respond to flawless English or formal Hindi, we are effectively disenfranchising half the nation. Bhashini is ensuring the hinterland speaks, and the machine listens."

The real-world applications of this localised AI are hitting the ground this year. In the agricultural sector, voice-bot systems are allowing non-literate farmers to ask questions about crop diseases in their local dialects and receive instant, AI-synthesised solutions.

In public health, AI triage bots are translating medical symptoms described in regional dialects into standard medical text for doctors in urban centres. This voice-first,

local-language ecosystem is bypassing the literacy barrier entirely, levelling the playing field for the rural poor.

CSR for digital equity

This transformation isn't a lonely Government effort. By early 2026, India's corporate heavyweights – including Jio, Infosys, and Microsoft India – have aligned their CSR and ESG strategies with the Bhashini ecosystem.

Rather than building generic computer labs that quickly become obsolete, these corporations are funding 'Dialect Hubs' in tribal and aspirational districts. They are providing the high-speed connectivity and hardware required for rural communities to participate as paid stakeholders in the AI data supply chain, turning data annotation into a viable rural service sector.

But, it's not as if the project is not facing any hurdles. Bhashini's developers are fighting three main systemic bottlenecks:

The dialect chasm: India's 22 official languages are just the tip of the iceberg. Dialects change every few dozen kilometers. Training an AI to distinguish between the Bhojpuri spoken in western Bihar and that spoken in eastern Uttar Pradesh requires immense amounts of hyper-local data.

Data quality dilemma: The Bhasha Daan crowdsourcing model relies on everyday citizens recording audio files. However, poor microphone quality, background village noise (traffic, wind, cattle), and mispronunciations create 'dirty data'. Bhashini has had to deploy heavy secondary AI validation layers just to filter out unusable audio contributions.

Context, technical jargon: Translating everyday conversation is easy; translating a complex banking contract or an intricate medical diagnosis into tribal languages like Santhali or Gondi is incredibly difficult. It requires creating entirely new technical glossaries from scratch.

Where do we stand?

Since its launch in July 2022, the project has progressed rapidly through its deployment milestones:

Proof-of-concept phase (2022-2024): Focused on basic model generation, text translation portals, and the launch of the Anuvadini app for translating educational textbooks. It proved its mettle during major public events, providing real-time audio

The localised data training ensures that voice-activated AI services can understand a farmer in Bihar or a micro-entrepreneur in Kerala, regardless of their accent or dialect



Reduced Inequalities

SDG 10 focuses on reducing disparities in income, opportunity, and power within and among countries. It targets the inclusion of all individuals, regardless of sex, age, disability, race, or economic status, while advocating for fairer migration policies and eliminating discriminatory laws to ensure no one is left behind.



translation of the Prime Minister's speeches into regional languages, like Tamil.

Infrastructure phase (2025-early 2026): Bhashini matured into a reliable infrastructure layer, crossing over 1.2 million downloads and integrating more than 350 distinct language models.

Sectoral integration phase (mid-2026): Right now, the focus is on deep institutional tie-ups. A prime example is the fresh May MoU signed with the Ministry of Ayush, which integrates Bhashini's APIs into traditional Indian healthcare grids. This phase runs through 2027, prioritising the rollout of voice-first public service bots across health, justice, and agricultural sectors before nationwide saturation by 2029.

But for now, as Aarti finishes her session, she checks her digital wallet. She has just earned Rs 350 for her morning's voice work. "They told us AI would take away jobs," she says, adjusting her headphones. "But here in the village, AI is the first job that respects the way we actually speak." **BI**

Hurdles, costs, and the timeline

BlitzBUREAU

Building a population-scale linguistic AI is a monumental task. As Project Bhashini scales up, it faces steep technical challenges, strict deadlines, and complex funding structures. Here is a breakdown of what it takes to get machines to speak India's languages.

Project Bhashini is entirely a Government-led, public-funded initiative, not a corporate venture. It was launched under the National Language Translation Mission (NLTM) by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.

Because it is a core piece of India's Digital Public

Infrastructure (DPI), its Central budget comes directly from Government outlays. It integrates into the broader R10,300+ crore IndiaAI Mission allocated for computing infrastructure and local ecosystem development.

Private sector participates through ecosystem partnerships and data co-creation alliances. For instance, Project Vaani, a major language data gathering initiative, is a collaborative effort between IISc, ARTPARK, Google, and Bhashini.

Rather than cutting CSR cheques to the ministry, corporations donate technical expertise, cloud compute space, or open-source datasets to enrich the public repository. **BI**



Twin achievements

Record defence production, exports

BlitzBUREAU

Marking a significant milestone in India's journey towards self-reliance in defence manufacturing under the Aatmanirbhar Bharat initiative, the defence production reached an all-time high of Rs1.78 lakh crore in the financial year 2025-26.

According to the Ministry of Defence (MoD), defence production registered a 15.6 per cent increase over the previous fiscal year's output of Rs1.54 lakh crore. The growth has been even more pronounced over the longer term, with production rising by 110 per cent since FY 2020-21, when the figure stood at Rs84,643 crore.

The latest achievement also highlights the rapid expansion of indigenous manufacturing capabilities. De-



fence production has nearly quadrupled from Rs43,746 crore recorded in FY 2013-14, reflecting sustained investments in domestic defence industrial capacity over the past decade.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh hailed the achievement and credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership for the sector's rapid growth.

In a post on X, Singh said

the record production figures reflected the success of the Government's efforts to strengthen indigenous defence manufacturing and build a robust defence industrial base.

Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs) and other public sector entities continued to play a dominant role in production, accounting for nearly 76 per cent of the

total output during FY26.

However, the private sector's contribution reached a record level, accounting for 24 per cent of total defence production, up from 22 per cent in the previous financial year. Private companies contributed approximately Rs42,000 crore, the highest-ever participation by the sector in India's defence manufacturing ecosystem.

The Ministry said the growing role of private industry reflects the success of Government initiatives aimed at encouraging greater participation of domestic companies in defence production and innovation.

Significant rise

The strong growth in domestic manufacturing has also contributed to a significant rise in defence exports.

India's defence exports touched a record Rs38,424 crore in FY26, underlining the increasing global acceptance of Indian-made defence equipment and platforms.

The Government views the twin achievements of record production and exports as evidence of the growing competitiveness of India's defence industry and its expanding footprint in international markets.

The Government has introduced a series of measures in recent years to promote indigenous design, development, and manufacturing of defence equipment. These include positive indigenisation lists, reforms in defence acquisition procedures, incentives for domestic manufacturers, and initiatives aimed at boosting exports. **BI**

Kamikaze drones with domestic partners

Sulur depot designated as nodal agency for the project

BlitzBUREAU

The Indian Air Force (IAF) has launched a project to develop indigenous long-range Kamikaze drones with Indian industry, a Defence Ministry official has said.

The IAF has issued a limited tender to select Indian companies for One-Way Attack Unmanned Aerial Systems (OWA-UAS), the official said in a statement.

The Kamikaze drone project will be handled by the 5 Base Repair Depot (BRD) at Sulur near Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu, that has been

designated as the nodal agency for the key task.

Kamikaze drones, also known as loitering munitions or suicide drones, are one-way, self-sacrificing unmanned aerial vehicles that fly to a target area, locate enemies and detonate on impact.

As part of the decisions taken by the Defence Ministry, the IAF will retain Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) of the drone platform that is proposed to be designed, developed and manufactured entirely in India with the help of home-grown companies and start-ups.

The project will enable faster upgrades, modifications and

customisation as per operational needs, the statement said.

As per IAF's specifications the long-range Kamikaze drones would operate up to 16,000 feet and function in

day and night conditions.

Earlier, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh had said that India must work in a mission mode to emerge as a global hub of indigenous drone

manufacturing in the next few years. He added that this was needed to ensure strategic autonomy, enhance defence preparedness and make the country 'Aatmanirbhar'. **BI**





Coming soon ...

4 'Namo Cities'

Existing NCR boundaries to stay intact

BlitzBUREAU

Four greenfield 'Namo Cities' will be developed in National Capital Region (NCR) - one each in Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. This was decided at the 42nd National Capital Region Planning Board (NCRPB) meeting, chaired by Union Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Manohar Lal, held in New Delhi recently.

The Board also decided to formulate a scheme to incentivise state governments to increase green cover across the NCR, including through the participation of private citizens and companies.

Addressing the meeting, Manohar Lal described the NCR Planning Board as a unique model of inter-state and inter-agency coordination. He emphasised that a cooperative, collaborative and coordinated approach would be essential for building an economically prosperous and future-ready NCR with citizen-centric infrastructure.

The Board also discussed

the development of four semi-greenfield urban centres under RP-2041. These mixed-use, transit-oriented development (TOD) hubs are proposed to be established around selected existing and planned stations on the Namo Bharat Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) corridors.

The proposed urban centres, to be known as "Namo Cities", will be identified through a competitive process among participating NCR states. To support their development, the NCRPB plans to offer a performance-linked incentive package worth Rs 5,000 crore, com-

The proposed urban centres, to be known as "Namo Cities", will be identified through a competitive process among participating NCR states.

prising grants, loans and guarantees, including a grant component of Rs 1,000 crore. The funding is intended to catalyse the growth of these urban nodes.

According to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), the Board held detailed discussions on the Regional Plan (RP)-2041 and decided to retain the existing geographical extent of the NCR without any changes to its current boundaries. It also resolved to promote innovative mechanisms such as green canopy credits and non-financial instruments, including transferable and saleable Special Development Rights, to encourage afforestation and environmental conservation.

The meeting was attended by Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini, Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, Rajasthan Urban Development Minister Jhabbar Singh Kharrar, Uttar Pradesh Urban Development Minister Arvind Kumar Sharma, and senior officials from the Centre and NCR states. **BI**

Rejuvenating Yamuna River

Consensus among six states on Kishau project

BlitzBUREAU

A consensus among six states was reached on June 16 on the long-pending Kishau Multipurpose Dam Project, a move aimed at increasing the flow of clean water in the Yamuna river.

The meeting, chaired by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, decided that 90 per cent of the cost of the water component of the Kishau Multipurpose Dam Project will be borne by the Central Government as Central assistance, while the remaining 10 per cent financial burden will be shared by the six participating states.

Significant milestone

The meeting also reached a consensus to allocate Himachal Pradesh's share of water to Delhi and Rajasthan in return for sharing the cost of Himachal Pradesh's portion of the power component, said a statement.

This decision will prove to be a significant milestone in the journey towards a cleaner and rejuvenated Yamuna, ensuring an increased flow of clean water in the river.

Following the initiative of the Union Home Minister, the states of Himachal Pradesh,

Uttarakhand, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and Rajasthan agreed to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the implementation of the Kishau Multipurpose Dam Project, said a statement.

Following the signing of the MoU, the project will be placed before the Union Cabinet for approval, it said.

The meeting was attended by Union Minister of Power Manohar Lal Khattar, Union Minister of Jal Shakti C. R. Patil, Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, Chief Minister of Uttarakhand Pushkar Singh Dhami, the Union Home Secretary, the Union Water Resources Secretary, the Secretary of the Ministry of Power, the Chief Secretaries of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, and senior officials from the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Jal Shakti.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Central Government has been translating the principle of 'Solutions Through Dialogue' into action by building consensus on important issues of national and public interest that had remained unresolved for many years, said the statement. **BI**





Right to walk

A fundamental right to walk safely on footpaths, says SC

BlitzBUREAU

The Supreme Court has held that the right to walk on safe, demarcated footpaths is a fundamental right,

and will take priority over the movement of vehicles, reported Bar and Bench.

A Bench of Justice PS Narasimha and Justice AS Chandurkar noted this right flows from the freedoms

guaranteed under Articles 19 (which includes freedom of movement) and 21 (right to personal rights and liberty) of the Constitution.

Framing pedestrian access as a constitutional

guarantee, the court underscored that public authorities are under a binding obligation to provide and maintain footpaths.

"If a road exists, there must then be a duty to ensure that a footpath is demarcated and maintained for the walkers. This is an enforceable duty. The fundamental right to walk on demarcated footpaths shall override the privilege of a motorised vehicle," held the court.

It also clarified that the freedom to walk is subject to

reasonable restrictions, but added that it must be ensured that common spaces are not monopolised by vehicle drivers alone.

The Bench observed that Indian cities and towns have long been designed with a disproportionate focus on vehicles, leaving pedestrians vulnerable and marginalised.

"The absence of safe and comfortable footpaths to walk on, and even when they exist, their subjugation to motor transport, has been a civilizational problem," it said.

Tracing the evolution of this neglect, the court pointed to how urban planning gradually prioritised motorised transport over human movement.

Making it clear that this approach can no longer continue, the court said, "This should stop from now on as we declare the fundamental right to walk on demarcated footpaths alongside motorised roads."

The judgment also identified the authorities responsible for implementing this right, stating that the obligation lies with urban and local bodies.

The court also highlighted the absence of a statutory framework governing pedestrian rights. **BI**

BlitzBUREAU

The Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), Pune, and the Aryabhata Research Institute of Observational Sciences (ARIES), Nainital, have signed a long-term Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to establish a climate observation station in the Himalayan region, a move aimed at strengthening climate change research and long-term atmospheric monitoring under the Bharat Climate Observation Network (BCON).

The agreement, signed online on June 18 by IITM Director Dr A Suryachandra Rao and ARIES Director Manish Kumar Naja, will remain in force for more than 50 years and will facilitate collaborative research through

Climate change research gets a boost

Observation station to be set up in the Himalayan region

sustained observations of climate variables.

As part of the partnership, a Climate Observation Station will be established at ARIES' Devasthal campus in Uttarakhand. The facility will monitor meteorological parameters, greenhouse gases, short-lived climate forcers, atmospheric chemistry and soil moisture to generate long-term climate data.

Located at a high altitude, Devasthal offers relatively pristine conditions that are well-suited for advanced atmospheric observations. Scientists will use the site to study greenhouse gases, the transport of climate-relevant pollutants and climate pro-

cesses over the Himalayan region.

BCON, a national initiative of the Ministry of Earth Sciences implemented by IITM, aims to build a long-term, high-precision climate monitoring framework across India. The network is expected to generate high-quality datasets that will help detect long-term climate trends, strengthen climate research and support evidence-based policymaking.

The data generated through BCON will also help validate and improve Earth



System Models, including IITM's Earth System Model, enabling more accurate climate simulations and future projections for India.

Scientists from IITM's Centre for Climate Change Research (CCCR) and ARIES were present during the online signing ceremony. **BI**

Quick bytes

Scientifically validated



The Government has reiterated that the Ethanol Blending Programme is scientifically validated and continuously monitored. It noted that certain misleading and unsubstantiated claims being circulated on social media regarding Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) are aimed at confusing and misleading the public. **BI**

El Niño concerns

Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that the Government is making



advance preparations for the Kharif season to help farmers deal with the possible impact of a weak monsoon caused by El Niño. He said that the country had so far seen around 43 per cent less rainfall and that the monsoon was expected to remain weak in July too. **BI**



UPI ecosystem

Queen Maxima of the Netherlands, in her capacity as UN Secretary-General's Special Advocate for Financial Health (UN-SGSA), visited Mumbai recently to understand India's UPI ecosystem and payroll-linked financial infrastructure to improve financial wellbeing of salaried individuals. She visited HCG Cancer Hospital, Colaba, where she interacted with healthcare professionals using SalarySe. **BI**

Deeper cooperation

BlitzBUREAU

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on June 23 met National Security Advisors and senior security officials from BRICS countries, highlighting the growing importance of the grouping in addressing emerging global security challenges.

During the meeting, PM Modi said BRICS has a crucial role to play in strengthening cooperation on key security issues in an increasingly complex global environment. He emphasised the need for closer collaboration among member nations to tackle common concerns such as terrorism, cyber security and the challenges posed by emerging technologies.

PM Modi also underlined that India's BRICS Chairmanship will focus on advancing practical cooperation among member countries. Reiterating India's commitment to championing the interests of the Global South, he said the grouping can contribute significantly towards building a safer, more secure and inclusive world.

Sharing details of the meeting on X, PM Modi said he was pleased to interact with National Security Advisors and senior security officials of BRICS countries. He noted that BRICS has a vital role in deepening security cooperation and addressing shared chal-

PM Modi meets BRICS national security advisors



lenges, ranging from terrorism and cyber security to emerging technologies.

India assumed the BRICS Chairmanship for 2026 and has indicated that strengthening cooperation among developing nations and promoting practical outcomes on global issues will remain key priorities during its tenure.

During the two-day meeting, the NSAs and heads of delegation from BRICS member countries exchanged views on security challenges confronting the world.

"In the non-traditional realm, they

deliberated on challenges related to energy security, food security, supply chain security, emerging technologies utilized by terrorist networks, cyber security and climate-induced instability," read a statement issued by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) following the meeting.

"The NSAs/Heads of Delegation expressed their full support to India's BRICS Chairship in 2026 under the theme: 'Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability,'" it added. **BI**

BlitzBUREAU

In a major milestone in India's journey towards self-reliance, maritime strength, Prime Minister Narendra Modi commissioned three indigenous naval ships – Agray, INS Dunagiri and INS Sanshodhak – in Kolkata on June 21.

Addressing the Tri-Commissioning Ceremony, PM Modi said the induction of the three naval ships reflected India's growing capabilities in defence manufacturing and maritime security. He emphasised that all three vessels were designed and built in India, showcasing the country's engineering expertise, industrial capacity and skilled workforce.

Naval might Three indigenous naval ships commissioned

"A country is powerful when it is Atmanirbhar," he said, adding that India is preparing itself for a self-reliant and developed future by strengthening its maritime capabilities.

Highlighting the strategic importance of the seas, PM Modi noted that maritime power is closely linked to a nation's development, security and prosperity.

He said the commis-



sioning of the three ships marked another chapter in India's maritime journey that began with the commissioning of the indigenous aircraft carrier INS Vikrant. He described the three vessels as symbols of India's commitment to self-reliance, innovation and indigenous defence production.

Stressing the Government's focus on domestic manufacturing, PM Modi said India no longer wishes to remain merely a buyer in the global defence market.

The Prime Minister revealed that more than 40 Made-in-India warships and submarines have joined the Indian Navy in recent years, while 45 major naval warships are currently under construction. **BI**



52ND G7 SUMMIT | JUNE 15-17, 2026 | EVIAN, FRANCE

Outreach & Bilaterals



Blitz BUREAU

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's participation in the G7 Outreach Summit highlighted India's growing diplomatic influence and its expanding engagement with major global powers.

On the sidelines of the summit, Modi held a series of bilateral meetings with key world leaders, including French President Emmanuel Macron, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese.

The discussions focused on strengthening economic ties, trade and investment, technology partnerships, energy security, defence cooperation and collaboration in emerging sectors such as artificial intelligence and critical minerals. PM Modi also reiterated India's commitment to working closely with partner nations on global challenges, including climate change, supply-chain resilience and international security.

The visit reinforced India's position as an important voice in global affairs and demonstrated New Delhi's ability to engage constructively with diverse partners across regions at a time of growing geopolitical and economic uncertainty. **BI**

Évian-les-Bains: Nestled on the southern shore of Lake Geneva at the foot of the French Alps, it was the host city for the 2026 G7 Summit. This charming lakeside town is a timeless wellness destination blending natural beauty, historic grandeur, and world-famous mineral water springs.



Quick bytes

Mansarovar Yatra



The first batch of pilgrims undertaking the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra 2026 crossed into China through the Nathu La Pass on June 20, marking the commencement of their onwards journey. The batch comprises 41 yatris, including two liaison officers and one medical officer, along with four support staff, taking the total strength of the contingent to 47 members.. **BI**

100 per cent success

The first phase of Census 2027 in Uttar Pradesh, covering the House Listing and Housing Census, has been completed with 100 per cent success within the scheduled period from May 22 to June 20 this year. The operation was carried out across all administrative units of



the state, including 75 districts, 350 tehsils, 17 municipal corporations, 200 municipal councils, 545 nagar panchayats, 13 cantonment boards and 8 industrial townships. **BI**

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Vaccine testing facilities



The Government has notified the expansion of Central Drugs Laboratory Functions at Chaudhary Charan Singh-National Institute of Animal Health (CCS-NIAH) in Baghpat, Uttar Pradesh, for Veterinary Vaccine Testing. With the latest notification, the scope of testing at the institute has been substantially expanded from testing two vaccines to testing 42 veterinary vaccines. **BI**

Now, MP to introduce UCC Bill

It is likely to be cleared in monsoon session



Blitz BUREAU

The Madhya Pradesh government will introduce the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill during the upcoming monsoon session of the state Legislative Assembly.

The UCC has already been implemented in states like Uttarakhand, Gujarat, and Assam.

Expressing strong confidence in its passage, Chief Minister Mohan Yadav said the Bill is expected to be cleared during the same session with the blessings of Baba Mahakal.

Speaking to media persons recently, Yadav said that the Government is entering the Assembly session with several significant and contemporary issues on its agenda.

Earlier, he had described the UCC as a crucial step aligned with the national vision of "One Nation, One Law", adding that Madhya Pradesh is rapidly advancing in this direction.

"There is nothing wrong with implementing a uniform law across the country. It is an effort to foster equality in society," he had earlier remarked, emphasising the Government's seriousness about the reform.

To ensure that the law reflects broad societal consensus, the state Government has constituted a high-level committee headed by retired Supreme Court Justice Ranjana Desai.

The committee is currently visiting various parts of the state to gather views from different sections of society.

Yadav highlighted that the UCC initiative aims to promote social equality by replacing religion-based personal laws with a common civil code governing marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption.

The move is seen as a significant step towards modernising the legal framework and ensuring equal rights for all citizens, irrespective of their faith.

The five-day monsoon session, which will begin on July 20, is expected to witness robust discussions on the Bill, alongside other key developmental and governance issues. **BI**

RAM TEMPLE DONATION ROW

SIT will reveal truth: Yogi

Blitz BUREAU

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has said the Special Investigation Team (SIT) constituted to probe alleged embezzlement at the Ram Temple will bring out the truth without any doubt, and also urged devotees not to get 'influenced' by attempts to tarnish the image of the temple and also the holy city.

The CM assurance of a fair probe into the embezzlement controversy in Ram Mandir's 'chadhawa' (offerings) comes close on the heels of Opposition parties raising hue and cry over mishandling of funds allegedly by the temple's own staff. FIRs have also been filed against some suspects, with many blaming the Temple Trust

officials for 'pocketing' gold and jewellery offered at the temple.

Addressing a gathering in Ayodhya's Rudauli on June 19, Adityanath said that those claiming a scam in temple funds are the ones who opposed the Ram Temple movement and also got their governments fire bullets at devotees as well as 'kar sevaks'.



The Chief Minister, speaking on the SIT investigation, said that the three-member team was constituted at the request of the Temple Trust and said that the enquiry will unmask the irregularities.

"We have constituted an SIT investigation at the request of the Trust. I can assure you that the SIT inquiry will bring out the complete truth without any doubt," the Chief Minister told the audience, while also urging them to submit 'evidence' to SIT if anyone has.

Adityanath also called upon the devotees to uphold the values of dignity and devotion associated with the temple and asked them not to get influenced by attempts to defame Ayodhya or the Ram Janmabhoomi Temple. **BI**

Heritage products get a **boost** : Assam gets four new GI tags

Blitz BUREAU

Assam has added four more treasures to its growing list of Geographical Indication (GI)-tagged products. Four iconic products from Assam — Bihu

Pepa, Karbi Anglong Handloom, Bah Silpa (Assamese Bamboo Craft), and Deori Handloom Products — have officially received GI certification.

The newly recognised products represent diverse facets of Assam's cultural landscape.

Bihu Pepa, a traditional wind instrument crafted from buffalo horn, is an inseparable part of the state's celebrated Bihu festivities.

Karbi Anglong Handloom reflects the weaving traditions of the Karbi community, while Deori Handloom

Products showcase the distinctive textile heritage of the Deori tribe.

Bah Silpa, or Assamese bamboo craft, highlights the centuries-old skill of bamboo artisans whose creations remain integral to daily life and cultural practices across the state.

In a post on X, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma hailed the development as a proud moment for the state and a significant step towards preserving and promoting its rich cultural heritage.

The recognition grants legal protection to these traditional products and acknowledges their unique link to Assam's cultural identity, craftsmanship and geographical origin.

The achievement is also expected to provide a boost to rural livelihoods by enhancing branding, market access and export potential.

More opportunities

Calling it "another shot in the arm" for efforts to conserve the state's heritage, the CM said the GI tags would help safeguard the authenticity of these products while creating greater economic opportunities for artisans and traditional producers.

GI tags are intellectual property rights granted to products that possess qualities, reputation or characteristics essentially attributable to their geographical origin. Such recognition helps prevent misuse of traditional product names and strengthens market confidence in their authenticity. **BI**



Blitz BUREAU

Tripura has secured another milestone in preserving and promoting its cultural heritage, with the traditional "Tripura Sarinda" receiving a Geographical Indication (GI) tag. With the latest addition, Tripura now has four GI-tagged products.

In a Facebook post, Chief Minister Manik Saha said the GI recognition for the indigenous stringed musical instrument would help safeguard, promote and popularise the state's rich folk traditions while strengthening Tripura's distinct cultural identity.

"The GI recognition for Tripura Sarinda is a significant step towards preserving and promoting our invaluable cultural heritage and folk traditions," he said.

GI tag for musical instrument To strengthen Tripura's distinct cultural identity

Saha said the recognition reflects the dedication, craftsmanship and creativity of the artisans and musicians associated with the traditional instrument.

He expressed confidence that the GI tag would further strengthen efforts to preserve the Sarinda and showcase Tripura's indigenous cultural legacy at both national and international levels.

The Chief Minister, who also holds the Information and Cultural Affairs portfolio, noted that Tripura's Queen Pineapple, Risha/Pachra (Rignai) — the traditional attire of indigenous tribal communities — and Matabari Peda had previously

received GI certification.

Matabari Peda, a dairy-based sweet, is traditionally offered as prasada at the 524-year-old Tripura Sundari Temple in Udaipur, Gomati

district. The temple is one of Hinduism's 51 revered Shakti Peethas.

Tripura is also known for its Queen and Kew varieties of pineapple, which thrive in

the state's hilly terrain and humid climatic conditions with minimal use of chemical inputs. According to Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Minister Ratan Lal Nath, the fruits are distinguished by their golden-yellow appearance, unique flavour and aroma when fully ripe.

Last month, Union Minister for Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) Jyotiraditya Scindia, along with Chief Minister Saha and Agriculture Minister Nath, launched the Rs 236-crore "Mission Queen Pineapple, Tripura" to expand cultivation and strengthen market access for the fruit. **BI**





Relief Rewritten

TN expands loan waiver

Blitz BUREAU

Yielding to demands from farmers' organisations and political parties, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C Joseph Vijay on June 16 announced a major expansion of the state's crop loan waiver scheme, extending full relief

to crop loans up to Rs 75,000 availed through cooperative banks by small, marginal, and other farmers.

The decision comes barely three weeks after the government unveiled a crop loan waiver programme covering loans up to Rs 50,000 obtained by small and marginal farmers.

Following the announcement, several farmers' groups and political parties had urged the government to broaden the scope of the scheme, arguing that a large number of cultivators with higher borrowings remained outside its ambit.

Acting on these representations, the government conducted a detailed review of the scheme at a high-level

meeting chaired by the Chief Minister at the Secretariat on June 15. Ministers and senior officials from the Agriculture, Cooperation, Finance, Planning and Development departments participated in the deliberations.

Based on the review, the government decided to increase the waiver limit from Rs 50,000 to Rs 75,000.

Under the revised package, crop loans obtained through cooperative banks between

May 1, 2025 and February 28, 2026, will be fully waived if the outstanding amount is up to Rs 75,000.

The government has also announced relief for farmers whose crop loans exceed Rs 75,000. Such borrowers will receive financial assistance of Rs 35,000 each, ensuring that a wider section of the farming community benefits from the scheme.

According to official estimates, the enhanced crop loan waiver package will benefit 14.43 lakh farmers across Tamil Nadu and involve an additional expenditure of Rs 5,932.23 crore. The government said 8.33 lakh marginal farmers would receive waivers and relief worth Rs 3,599.67 crore, while 5.16 lakh small farmers would benefit to the tune of Rs 1,995.42 crore. Another 93,548 farmers classified under other categories would receive assistance amounting to Rs 337.15 crore.

RBI guidelines

Officials said the revised scheme was formulated after considering farmers' demands and the operational guidelines issued by the Reserve Bank of India for government-sponsored loan waiver programmes. The Chief Minister directed officials to implement the expanded scheme without delay so that eligible farmers can access fresh institutional credit and prepare for the upcoming cultivation season without financial constraints. **[I]**

Reducing waiting time

Virtual queue system at Guruvayur

Blitz BUREAU

A virtual queue system will be introduced on a trial basis at Guruvayur Sree Krishna temple to provide devotees with a smoother and more organised darshan, Devaswom Minister K Muralaiah announced this after a review meeting held in Guruvayur in the presence of Devaswom Board members and heads of various departments.

The objective is to efficiently manage the increasing crowd of devotees and reduce waiting time. The minister said modern facilities required for pilgrims will be developed to transform

Guruvayur, Sabarimala and Kottiyoor temples into the country's leading pilgrimage destinations.

"As part of temple development, a comprehensive master plan will be prepared. Land acquisition procedures required for development will be accelerated. Officials have been asked to complete the process within nine months. Obstacles in implementation will be resolved through talks. The aim is to bring temple development projects into execution within three years, he said.

The present queue system is divided into free, paid, and priority lines. Devotees typically face waiting times ranging from 30 minutes to 2 hours, depending on crowd size. The Devaswom manages flow through distinct lines and token systems.

The main general queue is for all devotees. It is highly structured into compartments in such a way that devotees are called forward when the line moves. **[I]**



Upgrading rail stations

Telangana to get modern facilities

Blitz BUREAU

The Ministry of Railways has identified 40 stations in Telangana for redevelopment under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme (ABSS). These stations are being modernised at an estimated investment of Rs 2,015 crore.

The ABSS aims at development and upgradation of stations over the Indian

Railways network. The scheme has a long-term vision that involves creating master plans, promoting multimodal connectivity and better station accessibility for passengers.

Earlier this year, the national transporter announced that redevelopment work had been completed at four stations in Telangana: Begumpet, Karimnagar, Warangal and Sri Bala

Brahmeswara Jogulamba.

Of these, Secunderabad railway station is being redeveloped at an estimated cost of around Rs 715 crore. It was opened for traffic on October 9, 1874, when a railway line was constructed from Secunderabad to Wadi junction by Great Indian Peninsular Railway.

The station is one of the most important stations in South India with a passenger footfall of 1.97 lakh per day and over 200 trains daily. It is being redeveloped to accommodate an estimated 2.7 lakh passengers daily and around 32,500 passengers per hour once the project is completed. According to the latest update, nearly 64 per cent of the redevelopment work has been completed so far. **[I]**

Taking healthcare to TRIBAL areas

Two-wheeler units, mobile vans launched in Gujarat

BlitzBUREAU

In a move aimed at extending healthcare access to some of Gujarat's most remote tribal settlements, Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel on June 17 launched 51 two-wheeler mobile health units and flagged off nine new mobile health vans that will operate across 14 districts of the state.

According to the state government, the programme has been designed to support the holistic healthcare approach advocated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi by improving access to quality healthcare services for citizens living in tribal and remote areas.

The 51 two-wheeler mobile health units have been specially developed for lo-



cations where four-wheeler medical vehicles are unable to operate due to difficult terrain, poor road connectivity or geographical constraints.

Officials said the units would be used to provide healthcare services during emergencies as well as routine medical outreach activities. Each unit is equipped with a medical box containing

essential medicines and primary healthcare equipment.

The vehicles also carry digital blood pressure monitors, stethoscopes, glucometers, clinical thermometers, haemoglobin meters, knee hammers, needle cutters, instrument trays and torches.

The system has been integrated with digital data-entry facilities for preven-

tive healthcare services and linked with the Chief Minister's dashboard for monitoring purposes.

Regular health check-ups for pregnant women, newborn babies and children will be conducted, while counselling and treatment services will be made available at the local level.

Officials said the programme is expected to con-

tribute to improved maternal and child health outcomes by facilitating timely medical intervention and reducing delays in access to care.

The units will also support early diagnosis and treatment by enabling primary screening for blood pressure, haemoglobin levels, blood sugar, malaria and urine-related conditions within villages.

Patients requiring specialised treatment will be referred promptly to the nearest government healthcare institution, allowing faster access to expert medical care. Special attention will be given to adolescent girls and women through guidance on anaemia, nutrition, adolescent health and family welfare.

Awareness campaign

Health awareness activities will cover HIV/AIDS, tobacco-related diseases, communicable diseases and non-communicable diseases, while information about government healthcare schemes will also be disseminated among local communities. **B**



Cancer care project

Cyclotron hub coming up in Nagpur

BlitzBUREAU

In a bid to boost cancer treatment and research, the Maharashtra Cabinet on June 16 approved the establishment of a High Energy Medical Cyclotron Project (HEMCP) in Nagpur, with a provision of Rs 300 crore for this project, which will be implemented through "Mahacare".

A separate subsidiary will be formed for its management.

The project is expected to benefit patients across many cities in Central India and likely to develop Nagpur into a Radio Pharmaceutical Innovation Hub, providing high precision in medical treatments.

The primary objective is to ensure local availability of radioisotopes required for PET-CT and Nuclear Medicine services to address rising cancer cases.

Around thirty hectares of land at Bhansoli (Kinhi) in Hingna taluka has been approved for the project.

The estimated cost is Rs 300 crore, with Rs 150 crore to be provided by the Medical Education Department. Funds for land, construction, and machinery will be finalised after the project report.

An expenditure sharing ratio of 50:50 between the Medical Education Department and the Industry Department has been approved.

Patients within a 500 km radius—covering Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh—will benefit.

The presence of AIIMS, the National Cancer Institute, and the Government Medical College makes Nagpur an ideal centre, reducing dependence on Mumbai and Hyderabad. **B**

Bridge across creek

Six-lane facility planned between Thane, Navi Mumbai

BlitzBUREAU

Commuters travelling between Thane and Navi Mumbai may soon have a new route across the creek, with the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) initiating work on a six-lane bridge connecting Kopri in Thane East with Patni in Navi Mumbai.

The proposed 1.4-km bridge, for which bids were invited on June 16, is expected to ease pressure on the existing Airoli-Mulund Creek Bridge and the Kalwa Creek Bridge, the two major links between the neighbouring cities. Once completed, the crossing

is expected to significantly cut travel time between the two sides of the creek, particularly during peak hours.

The bridge will begin at Mith Bandar Road in Kopri, around 750 metres from Thane railway station, cross the Thane Creek and land near the Airoli Knowledge City Road in Navi Mumbai. It will provide a direct link between Thane Station Road and the busy Thane-Belapur Road corridor.

The project has been planned as a six-lane cable-stayed bridge and is expected to take around three-and-a-half years to complete, with the target date set for 2030.

According to traffic studies carried out for the project, around 51,000 vehicles use the Thane-Belapur Road daily, while nearly 30,000 vehicles pass through the Airoli-Mulund Creek Bridge every day. Based on projected demand, MMRDA estimates that more than 1,900 vehicles could use the new bridge every hour during peak traffic periods. **B**





Carbon looms over cotton

Man-made fibre is where India needs to focus on if it needs to sustain its textile sector

BlitzSPECIAL

In Tiruppur, the southern cluster that has clothed much of the Western world for three decades, factory managers spent the autumn of 2025 keeping their phones close. Buyers in New York, Boston and Atlanta were calling, not with orders but with cancellations. Confirmed shipments were paused. New orders did not arrive at all. By the time the calendar turned to 2026, India's largest single textile market — the United States — had become its biggest source of uncertainty.

This was the year the world stopped pretending that India's textile econ-

omy was on quiet auto-pilot. Tariffs from Washington climbed from 10 per cent to 50 per cent in five months. NITI Aayog, the Government's policy think tank, issued its bluntest assessment in years: India's textile sector requires "urgent and comprehensive reforms" or it risks losing its foothold in the global market.

The Ministry of Textiles, in its own internal documents, conceded that competitiveness "has eroded in recent years" as Bangladesh and Vietnam have surged ahead.

The survivor

And yet the sector survived. In the financial year just past, India's total textile exports rose by 2.1 per cent to

₹3.16 lakh crore — a modest figure, but a deeply telling one. The growth came not from the United States but from more than 120 other destinations: A 22.3 per cent surge in shipments to the UAE, 20.6 per cent to Japan, 38.3 per cent to Egypt, and a remarkable 205.6 per cent to Sudan. India's textile basket, it turns out, is more geographically resilient than its critics had assumed.

But geographic diversification is not the same as structural strength.

The Indian textile and apparel industry is, by most measures, immense. Valued at approximately USD 179 billion, it contributes about 2 per cent to India's GDP, accounts for 11 per cent of manufacturing gross value added, and 8.63 per cent of total mer-

chandise exports.

It employs over 45 million people directly — second only to agriculture. Nearly 80 per cent of its capacity sits within MSME clusters, a fact that gives the sector unique developmental weight in a country where small-enterprise employment is a perennial political imperative.

And yet India is only the world's sixth-largest exporter of textiles, with a global market share of just 4 per cent. The diagnosis from NITI Aayog's Trade Watch Q2 FY25 report, released in March 2025, was unsparing: India excels in cotton and carpets, lags in apparel, and trails badly in the high-value technical textiles segment now dominated by China, Germany and South Korea.

Stagnant numbers

The numbers that haunt every conversation in Delhi's textile ministry are these: India's garment exports in 2023–24 were USD 14.5 billion, broadly unchanged from USD 15 billion a decade earlier. In the same period, Vietnam's grew to USD 33.4 billion and Bangla-

India's export basket remains overwhelmingly cotton-heavy — roughly 80 per cent — even as global demand has shifted decisively towards man-made fibre, athleisure and blended categories, which now constitute about two-thirds of world textile trade

desh's to USD 43.8 billion. While India ran in place, two of its closest competitors nearly doubled their output.

The reasons are not difficult to enumerate. India's export basket remains overwhelmingly cotton-heavy — roughly 80 per cent — even as global demand has shifted decisively towards man-made fibre, athleisure and blended categories, which now constitute about two-thirds of world textile trade.

Indian factories operate at smaller scale than Vietnamese counterparts. Labour productivity lags. Free Trade Agreements have been signed but underused: NITI Aayog noted in the same report that India's trade deficit

with FTA countries grew 23 per cent year-on-year, with exports to FTA partners actually declining by 4 per cent.

The human cost of the tariff year was not evenly distributed. The Man-made Fibre and Technical Textiles Export Promotion Council reported that the impact fell heaviest on MSMEs and labour-intensive units — the precise segments least able to absorb shock, and the ones in which women and rural workers are most heavily employed.

With 80 per cent of textile capacity concentrated in MSME clusters, any sustained margin compression cascades downward to wages, to jobs, and to the small towns where textile factories often constitute the principal source of formal employment. The Tiruppur cluster alone supports several lakh workers; the Surat power-loom belt, several lakh more. When American orders pause, the consequences are not felt in boardrooms first.

Policy support present

To its credit, the Government has acted. The Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme, worth ₹10,683 crore, targets man-made fibre (MMF) apparel, MMF fabrics and ten technical textile segments. The PM Mega Integrated Textile Region and Apparel (PM MITRA) Parks scheme has now finalised seven sites — in Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra — projected to attract ₹70,000 crore in investments and 20 lakh jobs.

Cotton import duties were suspended through December 2025. The labour code was amended in November 2025 to permit women to work night shifts in ready-made garment units — a direct response, though officially unstated, to the capacity-augmentation challenge from Bangladesh.

Most consequentially, India's FTA architecture was rebuilt with extraordinary speed. The India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement was signed in July 2025. The India-EFTA TEPA came into force in October. The India-Oman CEPA was signed in December. The India-EU FTA

was concluded on 27 January 2026 — the single most important market-access development for Indian textiles in more than a generation.

NITI Aayog's six imperatives

NITI Aayog's Trade Watch Q2 FY25 report, released in March 2025 under CEO B V R Subrahmanyam, set out six reform imperatives for India's textile sector — the most candid official diagnosis in years.

First, supply chain integration: Consolidating the fragmented value chain from fibre to fashion. Second, cost efficiency: modernising manufacturing technology and achieving scale to compete with Vietnamese and Bangladeshi structures. Third, sustainability standards: Aligning production with environmental compliance frameworks now mandatory in EU markets, including Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) norms. Fourth, innovation: Shifting policy focus toward high-value technical textiles and man-made fibre apparel. Fifth, effective use of FTAs: Converting market access into market presence. Sixth, policy-driven competitiveness: Deepening remissions, incentives and skilling to address India's sectoral disabilities.

Subrahmanyam was characteristically blunt: "Despite its strong presence in natural fibre-based textiles, India's share in the global textile trade remains modest, highlighting the need for innovation, modernisation, and policy-driven competitiveness."

The underlying message: The sector's structural problems cannot be solved by tariff relief or remission schemes alone. They require a wholesale reorientation towards man-made fibre, scale, and high-value categories where Indian capacity is thin.

Ambitious targets

The Modi Government's stated tar-



get is to expand the textile market from approximately USD 176 billion to USD 350 billion by 2030, and to triple exports from ₹3 lakh crore to ₹9 lakh crore in the same period. Union Budget 2026–27 placed textiles within an integrated policy framework spanning fibre to fashion, village industries to global markets.

The Textile Ministry's budget allocation was raised by 19 per cent over the previous year to ₹5,272 crore, with a separate ₹12,000 crore corpus earmarked for reviving the jute sector. One crore artisans, the Ministry estimates, are connected to the handloom and handicraft chain alone.

It is an ambitious arithmetic. Whether it is also a realistic one depends on a single question: Can India's textile sector pivot, in the four years remaining of this decade, from a cotton economy to a man-made fibre economy, from small-scale to large, from FTA signatories to FTA users, and from low-value to technical textile production?

The instruments now exist. The diagnosis has been issued. NITI Aayog has set out the reform agenda in language uncharacteristically direct for a Government body. The Bangladesh comparison is no longer politely avoided in working documents.

The PM MITRA Parks are taking physical shape — the Dhar site in Madhya Pradesh alone is a ₹14,600 crore project projected to generate three lakh jobs. And the FTAs, after years of underuse, may finally find buyers willing to source from India in volume.

The carbon fibre question

The single largest growth opportunity in India's textile sector sits not in cot-

ton or apparel but in technical textiles — and it is precisely here that India is most exposed.

The Indian technical textiles market was valued at USD 29 billion in 2024 and is projected to reach USD 45 billion by 2026, USD 123 billion by 2035, and USD 309 billion by 2047. India is the world's fifth-largest market in this segment. The Indian composites market alone is expected to reach USD 1.9 billion this year, growing at a compounded annual rate of 16.3 per cent.

Yet India produces no carbon fibre domestically. Every kilogram of the material — used in aerospace, automotive, wind energy, defence and high-performance sport — is imported from the United States, France, Japan and Germany. The same is true of aramids and ultra-high-molecular-weight polyethylene, the specialty fibres used in fire-resistant fabrics, bulletproof jackets, and renewable energy infrastructure.

The National Technical Textiles Mission, launched with an outlay of ₹1,480 crore for FY 2020-21 to FY 2025-26, has begun to address this.

But the gap is strategic as well as commercial. As long as the carbon fibre question goes unanswered, India's textile autonomy remains incomplete — and the next USD 280 billion of global growth in the sector will continue to be captured elsewhere.

In Tiruppur, factory owners say they are running at 80 to 90 per cent capacity — a quiet improvement over the previous three years. New orders, post-tariff settlement, are slowly returning. The looms have not gone quiet.

But what is woven next — cotton or carbon fibre, garments or geotextiles, Tiruppur or Dhar — will decide whether India clothes the world in 2030, or merely reminds the world that it once did. **B**



Carbon fibre



From white revolution to white elephants

White goods spell prosperity but end up becoming **e-waste peril**

BlitzSPECIAL

On a sweltering June afternoon in Jaipur, a woman switches on her new inverter air conditioner for the first time. She has saved for 18 months to buy it. Four thousand kilometres away, in a suburb of Seoul, an engineer reviews algorithms teaching a refrigerator to order milk before the household runs out. And somewhere between these two moments, between aspiration and automation, between the first purchase and the last disposal, lies one of the most consequential industries on the planet.

White goods: refrigerators, washing machines, air conditioners, dishwashers, freezers, ovens. The term is unglamorous by design. Yet these silent, humming, enamel-finished objects are now the centrepiece of a market valued at approximately \$804 billion, on course to surpass \$1 trillion by 2030, and \$1.87 trillion by 2035.

They are the infrastructure of modern

domestic life, and their story in the year 2026 is one of breath-taking ambition, ferocious competition, and a gathering environmental reckoning that the world can no longer afford to ignore.

A market without ceiling

The numbers are striking in their consistency. Multiple forecasters place the global white goods market's compound annual growth rate between 7.8 per cent and 8.4 per cent through to 2035, a pace that would make this sector the envy of most industries.

Growth in the historic period has been driven by household appliance adoption, the expanding penetration of air conditioners, and the relentless rise of the commercial kitchen. The forces shaping the decade ahead are more sophisticated: smart connected appliances, energy-efficient cooling and heating systems, and the explosive expansion of e-commerce as a distribution channel.

North America remains the largest single region, but Asia-Pacific is the story. China holds 30.8 per cent of the regional

market. India, at 15 per cent, is the most dynamic frontier, a \$13 billion market in 2024, projected to reach \$20 billion by 2032. In India, air conditioners are surging on the back of rising temperatures, expanding urban housing, and the proliferation of EMI-based purchase schemes that have placed ownership within reach of the emerging middle class.

Air conditioners, refrigerators, and washing machines together account for over three-quarters of India's white goods demand. The European market, disciplined by stringent regulation, favours energy-conscious premium models, with Eastern Europe representing the next growth frontier.

India: The great white goods awakening
India is not merely a participant in the global white goods boom — it is one of its defining chapters with the market growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 5.5 per cent. The air conditioner segment is the headline act, propelled by a combination of rising summer temperatures, urban densification, and a Government star-rating awareness programme that is quietly nudging consumers toward energy-efficient inverter models.

Yet the opportunity carries its contradictions. India's e-waste burden is already among the world's heaviest: Mumbai generates 1.2 million tonne of discarded electronics annually; Delhi produc-

Globally, only 17.4 per cent of electronic waste is recycled in an environmentally sound manner. The remainder — worth an estimated \$57 billion in recoverable raw materials including iron, copper, and gold — is dumped, burned, or exported to communities ill-equipped to handle it safely.



Prosperity's hidden cost

Every appliance sold eventually becomes waste. That is not a counsel of despair — it is a statement of physics. And the reckoning, when it comes, is now arriving. Globally, only 17.4 per cent of electronic waste is recycled in an environmentally sound manner. The remainder — worth an estimated \$57 billion in recoverable raw materials including iron, copper, and gold — is dumped, burned, or exported to communities ill-equipped to handle it safely.

Lead, mercury, cadmium, and arsenic leach into soil and water. Workers in informal recycling operations absorb toxins that cause cancers, neurological damage, and shortened lives.

The circular economy — in which appliances are

designed for disassembly, components are recovered, and materials re-enter production — offers a structural solution. The EU's Ecodesign Directive has already mandated a 20 per cent energy-use reduction and is pushing manufacturers toward repairability and recyclability.

Some manufacturers are responding with subscription-based maintenance models, modular designs, and direct-to-consumer repair programmes. But the gap between ambition and infrastructure remains vast, particularly in Asia and Africa, where appliance consumption is growing fastest and recycling systems are least developed. The trillion-dollar machine produces extraordinary abundance. What it produces next will define its legacy. **BI**



es 0.98 million tonne; Bangalore, 0.92 million tonne.

As millions of first-time white goods buyers enter the market, the question of what happens to these appliances at end-of-life is one that neither manufacturers nor policymakers have answered with sufficient urgency. The boom in new purchases risks becoming a slow-motion environmental crisis unless recycling infrastructure is built at comparable speed to the aspirations of the consumers it must eventually serve.

The intelligence revolution

The white goods of 2026 are not the appliances of 2010. Over 66 per cent of newly launched products feature built-in Wi-Fi connectivity. Nearly half of all new product sales are smart or connected appliances. The defining trend of this moment is the integration of Generative AI and matter-standard connectivity, a new protocol allowing appliances from competing brands to communicate seamlessly, creating unified home ecosystems that learn household rhythms and adapt to them. A refrigerator no longer merely preserves food; it monitors inventory, tracks expiry dates, suggests recipes to reduce waste, and in the most advanced iterations, places orders without being asked.

The energy dividend is not trivial. McKinsey research found that AI-enabled appliances can reduce yearly household energy expenditure by up to 30 per cent. The US Department of Energy reports that efficient appliance models cut household electricity consumption by 28 per cent.

Over 72 per cent of global consumers now prefer low-power-consumption products, and manufacturers are responding: 72 per cent of new white goods are being designed with eco-friendly materials, and 64 per cent of

manufacturers are embedding AI and IoT capabilities into standard product lines. This is no longer a premium segment — it is becoming the default.

The corporate battlefield

Four companies, Whirlpool, Haier Group, LG Electronics, and Samsung, collectively command over 40 per cent of the global white goods market. Each holds its ground through different strategies. LG leads in dollar-share premium positioning in the United States, holding 20.9 per cent of the value market even as it faces modest

unit-share pressure.

Whirlpool is clawing back volume, its unit share rising from 15.0 per cent to 15.5 per cent in a single quarter, signalling renewed momentum in value-oriented segments. Samsung advances steadily, its connected ecosystem integration giving it structural advantage as the smart home market matures.

The most consequential story in corporate white goods is Haier's quiet, relentless ascent. Through a decade of strategic acquisitions, including GE Appliances in 2016 and,

The unstoppable machine

The white goods industry is not one story but several, running simultaneously at different speeds. It is the story of a Jaipur family's first air conditioner and a Seoul engineer's AI algorithm. It is the story of a Haier acquisition in South Africa and a Bosch executive studying Whirlpool's balance sheet. It is the story of a tariff on steel that raises the price of a Mumbai household's washing machine, and of an electronics dump in Ghana where children sort through circuit boards with bare hands.

What binds these narratives is the central paradox of the modern appliance industry: it has never been more innovative, more connected, or more consequential — and it has never faced a more complex set of demands. To grow at 7.9 per cent every year while reducing energy consumption. To serve a billion first-time buyers while designing for end-of-life. To compete ferociously on price while meeting

the most stringent environmental standards in history.

The companies that navigate this paradox with intelligence — that understand that a washing machine is not merely a product but a promise, from the factory floor to the landfill — will define the industry's next generation. Those that do not will be remembered as the ones who missed the most important instruction in the appliance manual: what to do when the cycle is complete. **BI**



The energy dividend is not trivial. AI-enabled appliances can reduce yearly household energy expenditure by up to 30 per cent.

most recently, Electrolux South Africa in December 2024, the Chinese giant has built a genuinely global footprint. Meanwhile, a reported Bosch bid for Whirlpool, if realised, would trigger the industry's most significant consolidation in a generation. Challenger brands, Midea, Hisense, Arcelik, are gaining ground through aggressive IoT adoption and competitive pricing, particularly in emerging markets where first-time buyers outnumber replacement-cycle purchasers.

Tariffs, steel, and costs

The industry that sells comfort is itself deeply uncomfortable. US tariffs on steel and aluminium, imposed in February 2025, have cascaded through manufacturing costs and are expected to reach the consumer in the form of higher appliance prices.

Supply chain bottlenecks — a residue of pandemic-era disruption compounded by geopolitical friction — have extended lead times by 15 to 20 per cent compared to pre-pandemic levels. Regulatory compliance now adds 8 to 10 per cent to production costs in markets subject to the EU's demanding Ecodesign Directive.

A Thomson Reuters global trade report found that 72 per cent of trade professionals in 2026 identify US tariff volatility as the most impactful regulatory change of the year — double the figure recorded twelve months earlier. **BI**

Starmmer's Fall

How Britain's Prime Minister Lost Power in Just Two Years



Deepak Dwivedi
from LONDON

Keir Starmer's resignation as British Prime Minister marks one of the sharpest political reversals in modern British politics. Less than two years after winning a historic Labour majority, Starmer has been forced to accept that the party which brought him to power no longer believes he is the best person to lead it into the next general election.

A political liability

The immediate reason for his exit was not a single scandal or a dramatic parliamentary defeat. It was the slow collapse of authority inside the Labour Party. Starmer's MPs, increasingly nervous about Labour's poor public standing and the rise of Reform UK, concluded that his leadership had become a political liability. The return of Andy Burnham to Westminster after his Makerfield by-election victory gave Labour MPs a clear alternative and accelerated the pressure on Downing Street.

Starmer came to office promising stability, discipline and national renewal after years of Conservative turbulence. For a time, that message worked. His calm, lawyerly style helped Labour appear serious and electable. But in gov-

ernment, the same style began to look cautious, distant and uninspiring. Voters who had been promised "change" saw little immediate transformation in their daily lives.

The economy played a major role in this political collapse. Britain was not facing a sudden financial emergency, but the economic mood remained deeply fragile. Living standards were under pressure, business confidence was weak, public finances were tight and growth was not being felt strongly by ordinary households. Starmer's central promise was to revive growth and repair public services, yet many voters felt the country remained stuck.

Immigration also became a powerful pressure point. Although official figures showed that overall net migration had fallen from earlier peaks, the politics of immigration was shaped by public anxiety over small-boat crossings, asylum hotels and border control. Reform UK used the issue aggressively, while Labour struggled to convince voters that it had restored control. Starmer's language on immigration also angered some Labour supporters without fully satisfying voters demanding tougher action.

This left the Prime Minister trapped between competing political forces. On the right, Reform UK attacked him as weak on borders and disconnected from working-class concerns. On the left and centre-left, critics accused him



of lacking boldness, empathy and a clear national mission. Inside Labour, the fear was simple: if Starmer remained leader, the party could lose the next election despite its huge majority.

Andy Burnham's rise changed the calculation. As former mayor of Greater Manchester, Burnham has cultivated an image as a more direct, regional and emotionally connected Labour figure. Many MPs now see him as better placed to confront Reform UK and reconnect with disillusioned voters.

Starmer's resignation therefore reflects more than one man's failure. It exposes Britain's wider political instability: repeated changes of prime minister, public impatience, economic strain and a volatile immigration debate. His fall shows that in today's Britain, even a landslide majority is no guarantee of political survival.

Loss of confidence

The central cause of Starmer's resignation was the loss of confidence inside Labour. But the forces behind that loss were economic frustration, immigration pressure and a growing belief that the promise of change had not been delivered fast enough. **BI**

What it means for India-UK ties

Keir Starmer's resignation is unlikely to derail India-UK relations, but it may briefly slow the pace of decision-making in London. The biggest pillar of the relationship — the India-UK Free Trade Agreement — is already on strong ground.

The UK government says the FTA will enter into force on 15 July 2026 and is expected to increase bilateral trade by £25.5 billion annually in the long run. It also aims to reduce tariffs, simplify customs and support businesses in both countries.

For India, the leadership change matters mainly in three areas: trade



implementation, immigration policy and strategic cooperation. If Andy Burnham or another Labour leader takes over, New Delhi will watch whether the new Prime Minister keeps Starmer's India focus intact. Any tougher British line on immigration could affect Indian students, workers and professionals,

although business mobility under the trade framework may remain protected.

Defence, technology, clean energy, healthcare and education ties are likely to continue because they are based on long-term national interests, not only on one leader's preference. Overall, Starmer's exit may create short-term uncertainty, but the India-UK partnership is expected to remain stable, pragmatic and trade-driven.

The FTA figures are based on the UK government's trade-deal summary, while Reuters has reported that Starmer's exit is being handled as an orderly transition. **BI**

A slice of history

Artifacts of one of first battles of American Revolution found

Blitz BUREAU

Inspired by a centuries-old map, archaeologists have been digging in the park that sits on the site where American patriots hastily constructed an earthen fort to slow advancing British forces at what became known as the Battle of Bunker Hill.

Soon after digging the first trench, the team led by Joe Bagley, the city of Boston's archaeologist, recently found definitive signs of a ditch constructed hours before the battle on June 17, 1775, one of the first of the American Revolution.

Musket balls and other artifacts from one of the Revolution's most consequential battles were buried just below their feet the whole time. Archeologists also found objects likely left behind by British troops who occupied the area after the battle — including tea cups, tobacco pipes, sleeve buttons and a wig curler. There were nearly 150 combatants who died there but no human remains have been found, though a forensic archaeologist is on site to identify any bones.

"Everything about the ditch is from 1775. You've got musket balls, gun flints. It's what you would expect to see," Bagley said. "It's pretty powerful because these



things are being dropped in the middle of the battle."

The start of the American Revolution is often associated with the Battle of Lex-


ington and Concord, skirmishes fought on April 19, 1775. But many scholars cite Bunker Hill and June 17 as the war's first significant battle.

Rebels intended to hold off a possible British attack by fortifying Bunker Hill, a 110-foot-high (34-meter-high) slope in Charlestown across the Charles River from British-occupied Boston. But for reasons still unclear, they instead took a position on a smaller and more vulnerable ridge known as Breed's Hill, where most of the fighting took place.

American victory

The battle ended with the rebels in retreat, but not before the British had sustained more than 1,000 casualties. Bunker Hill is often portrayed as an American victory, since the British failed to win decisively and it served to galvanize the colonies against the British.

Today, a 221-foot (67-meter) white obelisk atop Breed's Hill memorializes the battle.

Several tourists from Colorado stopped by to watch the dig. One visitor, Greg Nockleby, who had spent a week in Boston learning about American history, said watching the archaeologists at work was a "wonderful surprise." 

Commemorating the battle


Bunker Hill Day, observed every June 17, is a legal holiday in Suffolk County, Massachusetts (which includes the city of Boston), as well as Somerville in Middlesex County.

State institutions in Massachusetts (such as public institutions of higher

education) in Boston also celebrate the holiday.

On June 16 and 17, 1875, the centennial of the battle was celebrated with a military parade and a reception featuring notable speakers.

Celebratory events also marked the sesquicentennial (150th anniversary) in 1925 and the bicentennial in 1975.

In June 2025, multiple events were held during Bunker Hill Commemoration Week, celebrating and exploring the 250th anniversary of the Battle of Bunker Hill. 



Musket balls and other artifacts from one of the American Revolution's most consequential battles were buried just below their feet

BlitzBUREAU

China, the world's second biggest economy, is exporting more products than ever. It is just redirecting them away from the US tariff wall and toward more open markets in Europe and elsewhere in Asia.

The shift in Chinese trade risks creating a European sequel to the China Shock that wiped out hundreds of thousands of factory jobs in the American heartland in the 2000s and contributed to the political upheaval that put Donald Trump in the White House twice.

Despite US sanctions, China last year notched a record global trade surplus — an astonishing \$1.2 trillion.

Earlier this year, French President Emmanuel Macron warned that Chinese exports are “literally killing a large part of the European indus-

China dominates

Last year, it notched a global trade surplus worth \$1.2 trillion



try” and admitted that Europe was “slow to see that.”

China's trade practices were near the top of the agenda this week as leaders of the G7 rich democracies gathered in Évian-les-Bains, France. In briefings last week,

French officials indicated that they hoped to come out with a plan to tackle the China threat.

The G7 leaders didn't mention China by name in a statement from the summit on “balanced, durable and resil-

ient growth.” But they clearly had Beijing in mind when they noted “with concern that global imbalances have been persistent and widened in recent years.”

Germany has been hit hard. German companies once grew fat on exports to China but the situation has reversed: China now sells more goods to Germany than it buys. And German companies are struggling to compete with the Chinese rivals in industrial machinery, construction equipment, cars and chemicals — all mainstays of Germany's export-oriented economy.

Despite Trump's tariffs and diminished sales to the United States, China is benefiting from soaring demand for its low-cost EVs and from AI investment. **B**

Quick bytes

Lula maintains lead

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has maintained his lead over opposition right-wing Senator Flavio Bolsonaro in the race for the October presidential election, a new poll by Datafolha showed on Saturday. Lula, of the left-wing



Workers' Party, would win a potential second-round runoff against the senator by 47% to 43%, repeating last month's results, Datafolha said. Datafolha surveyed 2,004 respondents across 139 cities. The poll carries a margin of error of two percentage points.

Smart phones banned

Afghanistan officials face restrictions

BlitzBUREAU

The Taliban have ordered a sweeping ban on the use of smartphones by government officials — in what some analysts say could foreshadow broader, population-level restrictions.

In a directive issued by the Taliban's military courts, the ban was to take effect this week and prohibits “high rank, low rank, general mujahideen, or service staff” from using mobile phones.

In one video published online, a Taliban official appears to be shown reading the banning order from his phone while the other person is shown breaking phones.

The order states: “If anyone uses one, their mobile phone will be smashed and legal and sharia punishment will be imposed on the violator.” It adds that any exemptions require a written decree from the Taliban supreme leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada.

Reports and sources inside Afghanistan say that the bans



are being implemented in an “ad-hoc” way — in some areas targeting only government officials, in some cities and provinces extending to women, civilians, medical workers, schoolteachers and students.

The bans come after escalating efforts by the Taliban to completely cut Afghanistan off from the global internet. In September, authorities ordered an internet blackout which lasted two days and was vaguely justified by concerns over pornography; the order said the cutoff was to “prevent immorality.”

Employees wasting time online and leaking information may be part of the usual challenges of governance. **B**

Heatwave grips Europe

BlitzBUREAU

A punishing heatwave sweeping across much of Europe prompted a partial alcohol ban in France, nationwide warnings in Germany and the closure of a soccer fan zone in Spain, as temperatures climbed towards record levels.

France was expecting 35 of its 96 departments or regions to declare a red heatwave alert last week with temperatures of 39 to 40 degrees Celsius (102-104 Fahrenheit) expected from the southwest through the Paris region into Burgundy, with some areas possibly reaching 41C.

Authorities in Paris ordered parks to remain open around the clock.

Heat alerts were declared in most of Germany, with temperatures approaching 38C. The DWD weather service warned that a combination of heat and humidity could trigger severe

Temperature was between 35-41 C last week

thunderstorms.

Beyond the Alps, temperatures expected to reach 36–37C were transforming daily life and tourism in



some Italian towns.

Visitors queued under a blazing sun outside the Colosseum as Rome's summer heat turned sightseeing into a test of endurance. Some sought relief in the cooler underground spaces beneath the half-hidden remains of the Temple of Claudius.

In Spain, the football federation decided to close the fan zone it has set up with giant screens in Madrid's Plaza de Colon square. **B**

Pope hails saint

Pope Leo XIV on June 21 exalted the first American saint, Mother Frances Cabrini, as a model for Christians today to care for migrants in need, as he visited her birthplace during a trip to northern Italy. Cabrini, the patron saint of migrants, is well known to many Americans for her work caring for Italian immigrants in the United States at the turn of the last century. Her work went beyond the U.S., however.

Record interest rate hike

Japan's central bank has increased its main interest rate to a new 31-year high after a surge in global energy prices. Last week, the Bank of Japan (BOJ) raised its so-called policy rate to 1 per cent from 0.75 per cent - a level not seen since 1995. Japan's interest rates were cut aggressively in the 1990s to combat the fallout from a collapse in prices of assets like property and shares.

● US, Iran sign MoU ● Sticky points remain ● Conflicting messages continue

Blitz BUREAU

The Trump administration temporarily lifted oil sanctions against Iran on June 22 in a sharp reversal of US policy that could provide Iran with an economic boon after years of having to sell at a discount to buyers.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said that the 60-day sanctions exemption, which authorizes the purchase of Iranian oil in US dollars, giving Iran greater access to American currency, was the result of “ongoing productive” talks.

High-level negotiations in Switzerland seeking a permanent end to the Iran war concluded early June 22, with lower-level talks planned for the rest of the week as Iran and the United States agreed to create a “de-confliction cell” to address the fighting in Lebanon.

Pakistan and Qatar after the meeting said lower-level technical talks aim at producing the breakthroughs needed for high-level officials to return and sign agreements.

A statement from mediators Pakistan and Qatar said the cell would include the Lebanese government and would “ensure the adherence of the termination of military operations in Lebanon.” But it remains unclear whether that will be enough to stop fighting

Uneasy peace



between the Iranian-backed militia Hezbollah and Israel, which occupies Lebanon and insists it must maintain a free hand to attack militants who are launching attacks into northern Israel.

The talks marked the start of a 60-day diplomatic process that seeks to reach a permanent deal to end the Iran war. But the fighting in

Lebanon remains one of the key sticking points.

Meanwhile, Iran insisted it had again shut the Strait of Hormuz over the weekend, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf crucial to energy shipments, while the U.S. said traffic continued.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi wrote on X that “tireless Pakistani and Qa-

tari mediation has delivered major progress to end the Lebanon War.” He said the first “real test” of negotiations would be whether the deconfliction cell succeeded in halting the fighting in Lebanon.

Negotiators also discussed “mechanisms” to ensure the strait remains open and that a ceasefire in southern Lebanon is enforced, along with

The talks marked the start of a 60-day diplomatic process that seeks to reach a permanent deal to end the war. But the fighting in Lebanon remains an issue

“robust” discussions on the nuclear issue.

Blitz BUREAU

The Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding between the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Iran, was signed on June 12 between the United States and Iran aimed at ending the war. It was primarily brokered by Pakistan, with Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Egypt also facilitating negotiations.

Key points:

- Extension of the ceasefire and commitment to

What's in the deal



- end hostilities.
- A pledge to negotiate a comprehensive final agreement within 60 days.
- Iran's reaffirmation that it

will not develop nuclear weapons.

- US commitments to provide sanctions waivers, including allowing Iranian oil exports.
- US agrees to at least USD 300 billion for reconstruction of Iran.
- Reopening of commercial traffic through the Strait of Hormuz.
- A commitment by both sides to maintain the status quo while negotiations continue. **[B]**

Ceasefire holds

A renewed ceasefire in Lebanon, brokered on June 20, appeared to be holding, and Israel's military said it would lift movement restrictions for residents near the border with Lebanon on Monday morning — another sign of calm.

But neither Israel nor Hezbollah is a signatory to the US-Iran deal, and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to keep his forces in southern Lebanon until any threat to Israel is eliminated. Hezbollah has refused to halt attacks unless Israel commits to withdrawing. **[B]**

Swipe • Stream • Play

Blitz BUREAU

Sports in India is no longer confined to stadiums, television screens or cricket matches in neighbourhood parks. A dramatic cultural shift is underway, driven by Gen Z – the digital-native generation that is transforming how sport is consumed, played, celebrated and monetised.

For young Indians today, sport is not merely competition; it is lifestyle, identity, entertainment and social currency rolled into one.

The biggest shift is visible in attention spans and viewing habits. Gen Z prefers highlights over full matches, reels over lengthy commentary, and interactive content over passive viewing. A six, knockout punch or spectacular goal now travels faster through Instagram reels, YouTube shorts and memes than through conventional sports bulletins.

Sports economy

This evolution has fundamentally altered the sports economy. Leagues, franchises and broadcasters are re-designing content for mobile-first audiences. The Indian Premier League remains the biggest example – mixing sport with celebrity culture, music, fashion and influencer marketing to attract younger viewers.

But Gen Z's sporting world extends well beyond cricket. Sports like pickleball, padel, mixed martial arts, long-distance running and esports are witnessing explosive urban growth. Fitness apps, wearable devices and social media challenges have turned physical activity into a visible lifestyle statement. Weekend marathons, cycling clubs and amateur leagues now attract young professionals seeking both fitness and community.

Even gym culture has evolved into a form of sporting identity. Athletic wear, protein brands and performance-driven lifestyles have become aspirational among urban youth. Sport today intersects with fashion, wellness and social media influence in ways unimaginable a decade ago.

Perhaps the most striking develop-

Gen Z is rewriting the sports culture in India



are embracing women's cricket, football and combat sports with unprecedented enthusiasm. Athletes are no longer admired only for medals but for personality, confidence and digital engagement.

Technology sits at the centre of this transformation. Sports fans today follow athletes directly on social media, bypassing traditional journalism altogether. Locker-room videos, podcasts, behind-the-scenes clips and live interactions create intimacy between fans and sports stars. The athlete is now both performer and content creator.

The commercial world has quickly recognised the shift. Brands are pouring money into sports influencers, niche leagues and youth-centric sporting experiences. Sponsorships increasingly target engagement rather than mere television ratings. Even colleges and schools are investing more aggressively in sports infrastructure as participation gains aspirational value.

gains aspirational value.

Sociological change

There is also a deeper sociological change underway. For earlier generations, sport was often viewed as recreation or an uncertain career path. For Gen Z, it represents opportunity – from professional leagues and fitness entrepreneurship to content creation, analytics and gaming careers.

Parents who once pushed children exclusively towards engineering or medicine are increasingly open to sporting ambitions.

However, challenges remain. India's sporting infrastructure outside major cities is still uneven. Grassroots coaching, mental health support and athlete development systems lag behind global standards. Excessive commercialisation and social-media pressure are also creating new anxieties among young athletes.

Yet the momentum is unmistakable. India is witnessing the emergence of a generation that does not see sport as occasional entertainment but as an integral part of modern life. In this new ecosystem, fandom is digital, participation is fashionable and athleticism is aspirational. **B**

FIVE BIG TRENDS

Blitz BUREAU

Format Consumption: Young audiences increasingly prefer reels, highlights and short-form clips over watching entire matches. Viral moments now drive sports conversations.

Fitness as lifestyle: Running clubs, gym culture, cycling communities and wearable fitness technology have made athletic living fashionable among urban youth.

Rise of e-sports: Competitive gaming has become mainstream entertainment, with tournaments, influencers and sponsorships creating a booming industry.

Beyond cricket: Sports

like pickleball, football, MMA, badminton and padel are rapidly gaining popularity among younger Indians.

Athletes as influencers: Modern sports stars are now brands. Followers engage with them through podcasts, vlogs, fashion collaborations and social media.

Experts believe this cultural shift could eventually transform India from a cricket-dominated nation into a far broader sporting economy. With growing corporate investment, rising fitness awareness and digital engagement, Gen Z may become the generation that fundamentally changed India's sporting landscape. **B**

ment is the rise of e-sports and gaming culture. Competitive gaming tournaments now attract packed arenas, sponsorships and online audiences running into millions. Games such as BGMI, Valorant and FIFA have created

celebrity gamers with fan bases rivaling traditional athletes. For Gen Z, the distinction between physical and digital sport is increasingly blurred.

Women are also reshaping the sporting landscape. Young audiences

A champion's legacy beyond medals

SAJICHACKO

Jaspal Rana was one of the most influential figures in the history of Indian shooting. The 49-year old who tragically died in Delhi following heart problems on June 12 was the one who put India on the world shooting map before anyone else.

His contribution to the sport extends beyond just a champion shooter; since he also played a crucial role in shaping the next generation of Indian shooters as a coach. Through his dedication, discipline, and commitment to excellence, Rana significantly contributed to the growth and success of shooting as a major sports in India.



Jaspal Rana

June 28, 1976 - June 12, 2026

As a player, Jaspal Rana established himself as one of India's finest pistol shooters. Born on June 28, 1976, in Uttarakhand, he showed exceptional talent at a young age. Specializing in the 25-meter center-fire pistol and other pistol events, he quickly rose to prominence in national and international competitions. Rana gained widespread recognition when he won a gold medal at the 1994 Asian Games in Hiroshima, becoming one of the youngest Indian shooters to achieve such a feat. His remarkable performance marked the beginning of a distinguished career.

Throughout his career, Jaspal won

numerous medals at the Asian Games, Commonwealth Games, Asian Championships, and South Asian Games. He secured over 600 medals in national and international competitions, including several gold medals. His achievements helped establish India as a competitive force in shooting at a time when the sport was not as popular or well-supported as it is today. By consistently performing at the highest level, Rana inspired many young athletes to take up shooting and demonstrated that Indians could succeed on the global stage.

One of Rana's most significant contributions as a player was his role in popularizing shooting sports in India. During the 1990s and early 2000s, shooting received relatively little public attention compared to sports like cricket. His achievements laid the foundation for India's future success in international shooting competitions, including the Olympics.

After retiring from active competition, Jaspal Rana continued to serve Indian shooting as a coach and mentor. His transition from athlete to coach allowed him to share his vast experience and technical expertise with young shooters.

As a coach, Rana is best known for mentoring several talented shooters, including Manu Bhaker, one of India's most

successful young pistol shooters. Under his guidance, Bhaker achieved outstanding results at international competitions and emerged as a leading figure in Indian shooting. Rana's coaching philosophy emphasized discipline, mental strength, technical precision, and continuous improvement.

Rana also served in coaching roles with the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) and contributed to the development of India's shooting ecosystem. He worked to improve training methods, introduce scientific approaches to performance enhancement, and create a professional environment for athletes. His experience as an elite shooter enabled him to provide practical insights that greatly benefited his trainees.

Jaspal Rana's legacy was not merely reflected by the medals he won but also in the athletes he trained and the lasting impact he had on the development of shooting in India.



One of Rana's most significant contributions as a player was his role in popularizing shooting sports in India. During the 1990s and early 2000s, shooting received relatively little public attention compared to sports like cricket.

Jaspal Rana, one of India's most successful shooters and a renowned coach, was involved in some controversies during his career. His outspoken nature often brought him into conflict with sports administrators and fellow professionals. He earned a reputation for speaking openly about issues in Indian shooting, which sometimes led to disagreements with governing bodies.

One of the most publicized controversies involved his relationship with Olympic medal-win-

Run-ins of outspoken shooter

ning shooter Manu Bhaker. Jaspal had coached Bhaker from quite an early age, but differences emerged between them around 2021, leading to a temporary split. Although both later reconciled and worked together again before the Paris Olympics, the episode remained a major talking point in Indian sports.

Another controversy occurred in early 2024 when Rana alleged that he had been asked to leave Delhi's Karni Singh Shooting Range by the NRAI's high-performance director.

Rana was involved in yet another unsavoury incident in 2019, when he was dropped as National coach. This incident happened a couple of weeks before the World Cup and a bitter Rana openly criticized the shooting body for removing him without any prior notification.

INSIGHT



SUKUMAR SAH

Himalayan tourism needs a new model

The Himalayas have always represented something larger than geography. They are India's water source, its spiritual sanctuary, its climate regulator and one of its greatest natural treasures. Yet, from Kashmir to Arunachal Pradesh, the mountains are increasingly showing signs of stress – not only from climate change but also from the way tourism is being pursued.

The old model of measuring success by the number of visitors has reached its limits. The time has come to redefine Himalayan tourism in terms of sustainability rather than footfall.

Overstretched infra

Every long weekend now brings familiar images: kilometres-long traffic jams to hill stations, overflowing parking lots, plastic waste scattered across scenic landscapes and hotels mushrooming on fragile slopes. Popular destinations such as Manali, Mussoorie, Shimla and Nainital routinely struggle with shortages of water, waste disposal problems and over-

stretched civic infrastructure. The very attractions that draw visitors are being steadily eroded by their growing numbers.

Climate change has compounded the problem. Glaciers are retreating, rainfall patterns have become erratic and extreme weather events are becoming more frequent. Flash floods in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, landslides triggered by heavy rainfall and sudden cloudbursts have exposed the vulnerability of both local communities and tourists.

The Himalayan ecosystem is inherently fragile. Road widening, indiscriminate construction and unchecked commercialisation can destabilise slopes and increase disaster risks. The lessons from recent years are difficult to ignore: nature eventually makes you pay for reckless, mindless pursuit of development.

Economic lifeline

Tourism, undoubtedly, remains an economic lifeline for those populating the hills. It generates employment in hotels, transport, handicrafts, restaurants and adventure sports. Thousands of families depend on seasonal visitors for their



livelihoods. But there is a growing distinction between tourism that enriches local communities and tourism that merely overwhelms them.

A better model would focus on quality rather than quantity. Instead of encouraging millions of short-duration visitors concentrated in a few destinations, policymakers should promote longer stays, smaller groups and wider geographical dispersal.

Homestays, eco-tourism initiatives and community-managed tourism can ensure that economic benefits reach local

residents rather than being captured entirely by large commercial operators.

Technology can also become an ally. Online permit systems, digital crowd management, advance booking requirements and real-time visitor monitoring can help regulate tourist flows in environmentally sensitive areas. Carrying-capacity assessments should become mandatory before approving new infrastructure projects.

Infrastructure itself requires a rethink. Better waste management systems, sustainable water supply, electric public

transport and environmentally sensitive construction practices should become standard rather than exceptional. Development cannot simply mean pouring more concrete into mountain valleys.

Ecological necessity

Travellers, too, have responsibilities. Responsible tourism means respecting local customs, avoiding littering, reducing plastic use and recognising that mountains are living ecosystems rather than recreational playgrounds.

Every visitor leaves a footprint; the challenge is to ensure that it remains as light as possible.

The Himalayas have survived empires, wars and centuries of change. Their greatest threat today may come from well-intentioned, poorly managed prosperity.

If tourism continues to expand without ecological safeguards, the costs will eventually be measured not only in damaged landscapes but also in lost livelihoods and increased human tragedy.

The choice before India is not between development and conservation. It is between short-term gains and long-term sustainability. A new tourism model for the Himalayas is not an environmental luxury – it is an economic and ecological necessity. **BI**

A better model would focus on quality rather than quantity. Instead of encouraging millions of short-duration visitors, policymakers should promote longer stays, smaller groups and wider geographical dispersal

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