

► GST Collections Up 15.4% Last Month ► Car Dispatches Hit a Monthly High in July ► NEET Delays Puts a Question Mark over Engineering Admissions: P 1



Newbie's

Guide to Footie

If you – the casual fan – liked the World Cup sampler, you may want to check out the full range on offer, writes **Aashray Hariharan**



Erling Haaland



Luka Modric

For a month-and-a-half, football has been messing with your sleep cycles, your eating habits, your daily schedules. The kick-off whistle was your alarm clock, your nightmares were in yellow and red, your days and nights segued seamlessly into one endless carnival of football.

But just as abruptly, it's over. For most casual fans, their relationship with the beautiful game comes around once every four years, and ends in less than 40 days. But if the World Cup piqued your interest, there is good news: The regular season gets underway later this month. Here's our primer on all you need to know to ditch the casual tag and become a proper football fan.

Lamine Yamal



Harry Kane



THE BIG 5

English Premier League

The richest league in the world, the Premier League, gets its wealth thanks to lucrative broadcast deals it has cracked and hosts 11 of the 30 richest clubs in the world. All that money power results in a lot of exciting matchups, with almost every team capable of defeating every other team.

Key players

Erling Haaland (Manchester City), Declan Rice (Arsenal), Bruno Fernandes (Manchester United), Morgan Rogers (Chelsea), Dominik Szoboszlai (Liverpool)

Spanish La Liga

The English league makes the most money, but Real Madrid is the most successful club on the continent, with a record 16 European titles, while Barcelona has immense pull due to its history and legacy.

Breaking their duopoly is Atletico Madrid, which has won the league title twice in the past decade.

Key players

Lamine Yamal, Ferran Torres (Barcelona), Kylian Mbappé, Vinicius Jr (Real Madrid), Julián Alvarez (Atletico Madrid), Nico Williams (Athletic Bilbao)

Italian Serie A

Until the mid-2000s, the Italian league was the jewel in football's crown. But today, Italian clubs don't have the financial might to keep up pace with English and Spanish giants.

Today, the league still has some interesting matches, but it's known more for being a retirement home for players past their prime.

Key players

Lautaro Martinez (Inter Milan), Luka Modric (AC Milan), Kevin de Bruyne (Napoli), Nico Paz (Como)

French Ligue 1 and German Bundesliga

Ok, we're merging two leagues. But there are clear parallels between the two, which make it somewhat understandable.

Both are historic football countries with a proud tradition, but both are one-club leagues of sorts: Paris Saint-Germain in France and Bayern Munich in Germany. While PSG has won 12 out of the last 14 league titles, Bayern has clinched 13 out of the last 14.

Both clubs appear nailed-on favourites to clinch the title again this year, meaning the only thing that really counts for them is success in the Champions League.

Key players:

Ousmane Dembélé, João Neves, Khvicha Kvaratskhelia (Paris Saint-Germain), Folarin Balogun (Monaco), Ayyoub Bouaddi (Lille), Harry Kane, Michael Olise, Jamal Musiala (Bayern Munich)

UEFA Champions League aka Big Daddy

This is the one that top clubs really lust after. Qualification for the Champions League is through a merit-based system – the top clubs from domestic European leagues qualify. Most of the clubs you've read about until now are expected to participate this year, in what promises to be one of the most evenly contested editions in recent years.

While European club football remains the holy grail, there are several smaller leagues around the world that are picking up pace on the back of increased spending. The Saudi Pro League made a big splash by signing key players, including Cristiano Ronaldo, a few years ago. In the US, the MLS will be hoping that Lionel Messi's star power will make people come back for more.



TV GUIDE

When And Where to Watch
Matches are usually held on Saturday and Sunday nights, though mid-week games aren't uncommon. Most games tend to be held in the European afternoons, so make for primetime viewing in India. The EPL, in particular, will feature kick-offs between 5 pm and 12 am, IST. Mid-week games will start and end much later, especially in winter due to the end of daylight saving. If you're interested in those games, be prepared to stay up till 3.30 am –

with a cup of strong coffee and a mind full of excuses to be used at work the next day. The leagues will start around the third week of August and will continue till the end of May 2027. Different leagues are broadcast on different networks. The EPL will be on *Hotstar and Star Sports*, La Liga is on *FanCode*, Serie A and French Ligue 1 on *GXR*, and the German Bundesliga will be on *Zee5 and Unite8 Sports*, and the Champions League will be on *Sony*.

LINGO FOR DUMMIES

A list of common terms you can throw around at your next watch party and impress friends

xG and xA

Official definition: 'Expected goals' and 'expected assists'.

Actual meaning: Terms invented by nerdy fans who were reading data instead of watching football.

Back three

Official definition: A formation that uses three defenders.

Actual meaning: The name of Manchester United fans' PTSD after a year of suffering Ruben Amorim's tactics.

Amortisation

Official definition: A player's transfer fee divided by the length of the contract.

Actual meaning: Something most fans learnt about after Chelsea started handing out super-lengthy contracts that may see players enjoy a comfortable retirement.

FFP/PSR

Official definition: Financial Fair Play and Profit and Sustainability Rules

Actual meaning: A method to ensure rich clubs get richer while the poor get poorer.

Haraamball

Official definition: The overly defensive tactics of a 'safety-first' manager.

Actual meaning: The manager is a footballing terrorist. Unless you happen to be a fan of the club, in which case the term to be used is 'sufferball'.

PPDA

Official definition: Progressive passes per defensive action.

Actual meaning: Nobody knows what this is. Feel free to use it, secure in the knowledge that nobody can correct you.

THE BIG MATCH

Not sure which club to support? These questions will help match your vibe with your tribe

1 DESCRIBE YOUR IDEAL SUMMER VACATION

- a) You have no idea what an ideal vacation is, so you book 20 different trips. At least one of these will be fun.
- b) You don't go on vacations. You convince the vacation that it deserves you.
- c) You pour hours into research, study cloud patterns and wind behaviour to predict the weather, but forget to pack accordingly. You spend two miserable weeks in the rain.
- d) What's a summer vacation when you're on holiday 12 months a year?
- e) You don't go anywhere. You instead think of the great holidays you used to have 20 years ago.
- f) You book an extravagant trip, beautifully detailed, covering all your dream spots. You're told you can't afford it, so you sleep on a friend's couch.



2 IT'S YOUR BEST FRIEND'S BIRTHDAY. WHAT WILL YOU GET FOR THEM?

- a) You find out what everybody else plans to get, then get a premium version of the same thing.
- b) You show up. That's the gift.
- c) You check their Instagram posts going back five years, then check in with their parents to cross reference your observations. By the time you identify the perfect gift, the birthday is over.
- d) They tell you what they want.
- e) You get them the same thing you've been giving them every year for the past 15 years.
- f) You tell them you have something massive planned. You spend the party asking people if they can lend you some cash.

3 YOUR TV STOPS WORKING. WHAT DO YOU DO?

- a) Immediately buy the most expensive model available. You later learn that the old TV simply wasn't plugged in.
- b) Stare at it long enough and hard enough that it comes back to life.
- c) Spend the next several days on Reddit forums checking the latest technology. You reject all of them because nothing fits your process.
- d) Petition the TV company to send you a new model by convincing them that it's their fault.
- e) Get an older model because they just don't make good TVs anymore.
- f) Are told you can't afford a TV. You sell your house to buy one.

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ATTACKER CARRIED WEAPONS IN GUNNY BAG; AGENCIES PROBE LINK TO ANANTNAG ATTACK

Kulgam Gunman Asked Personal Details, Then Killed 2 Labourers

Hakeem Irfan Rashid

Srinagar: Preliminary investigation into the Kulgam attack in which two non-local labourers were killed revealed that the attacker conversed with the victims for around 10 minutes before opening fire.

Investigators said the attacker was in civvies, wearing a cap, and carried the weapons in a gunny bag, similar to the attacker who killed J&K Police head constable Ashiq Hussain Qureshi on July 22 in Anantnag district of southern Kashmir.

The incident took place around 8 pm on July 31, when an unidentified gunman opened fire at two non-local labourers around a brick kiln in Kalam village of Kulgam district. The two victims were identified as Bhupinder and Deepak from Chhattisgarh, who worked at brick kiln number 70-B and had arrived in the Valley over a month ago along with their family members.

“He had conversed with them for around 10 minutes and asked about their personal details, where they were from and how much they earn. He carried the weapons in a gunny bag



Security operation in Kulgam on Saturday—PTI

and opened fire from a rifle and a pistol as well,” a senior official told ET.

Another official said a female relative of the victims had seen the attacker after he opened fire and even tried to chase him.

“The duo was sitting between two brick kilns when the attacker spoke with them and fled into the nearby orchards, as per the relative of the victims,” he said.

He further stated that the attacker

fired at least “two shots from a pistol and two from a rifle.”

Officials are investigating the connection between the Anantnag and Kulgam attacks and probing whether the same “local militant” or “foreign infiltrator” was involved in the attacks.

Following the attack, the police lodged a formal case and is examining technical evidence to establish the sequence of events and connect the

dots. The armed forces have launched multiple cordon and search operations in the area and also detained, questioned and summoned several people in nearby areas.

“Our shops were ransacked and armed forces also directed the locals to ensure the safety of tenants, especially non-locals. And warned that if they can’t keep the tenants safe, they should not give them accommodation,” said a local pleading anonymity.

Hundreds of non-locals work in brick kilns across Kashmir and, as the apple harvest season has started, many of them work in the orchards. The authorities have urged all residents across the Valley to register their tenants with the local police station.

Meanwhile, Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah announced ex-gratia relief of ₹10 lakh each from the Chief Minister’s Relief Fund for the next of kin of the deceased.

J&K Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha chaired a high-level security review meeting and directed all the Deputy Commissioners and SSPs to conduct a comprehensive review of the Standard Operating Procedures (SoPs) established to protect labourers from outside J&K.

‘OPACITY CAN ALLOW APPOINTMENT OF JUDGES WHO DESCRIBE PEOPLE AS ANTS’

Justice Bhuyan Seeks More Transparency in Collegium

Our Political Bureau

New Delhi: Supreme Court judge Justice Ujjal Bhuyan on Saturday called for greater transparency in the collegium system, saying the failure to disclose reasons for judicial appointments does a disservice to deserving judges and is against the public interest. Speaking at the launch of a report by legal think-tank Vidhi’s JALDI initiative, Justice Bhuyan said withholding reasons not only undermines transparency but also creates space for undesirable candidates to enter the judiciary who then make unconstitutional remarks like describing groups of people as “ants”.

He said the SC collegium’s last three resolutions recommending judges for elevation contained no reasons.

“By not giving reasons, the institution actually does a disservice to many judges who are genuinely outstand-



Failure to disclose reasons for judicial appointments does a disservice to deserving judges and is against public interest
JUSTICE UJJAL BHUYAN

ding and have done tremendous work...Conversely, by withholding reasons, we also create space for individuals to enter the judiciary who

may later describe groups of people as ‘ants’,” he said.

To prevent such appointments, “there should be some discussion, there should be some reasons given”, he added, referring to remarks recently made by a high court judge.

Though Justice Bhuyan did not name the judge, a former Allahabad High Court judge had sparked controversy over remarks made at a Vishva Hindu Parishad event in 2024, drawing criticism from opposition leaders, who termed them “hate speech” and sought action against him.

“In our country, we are taught not to harm even the smallest animals, not to kill ants, and this lesson is ingrained in us. Perhaps that is why we are tolerant and compassionate; we feel pain when others suffer. But in your culture, from a young age, children are exposed to the slaughter of animals. How can you expect them to be tolerant and compassionate?” the HC judge had said.

OTHER NEWS OF THE DAY

Orunodoi 3.0: Assam to Give ₹1,250 Monthly Aid to Women

Bikash Singh

Guwahati: The BJP government in Assam on Saturday relaunched its flagship Orunodoi welfare scheme, unveiling an upgraded version that will not only provide Rs 1,250 a month to women but also enable beneficiaries to access interest-free advances and bank loans against future payouts. Launching Orunodoi 3.0 in Guwahati, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the government is working on a mechanism that would allow beneficiaries to draw up to Rs 15,000 interest-free in advance, with the amount adjusted against future monthly instalments.

Kejriwal to March to PM's Home on Aug 4 on E20 Issue

New Delhi: Stepping up his campaign against the use of E20 petrol, AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday announced that he would march to the Prime Minister’s residence on August 4 to submit a petition containing two lakh signatures collected through an online campaign.

Addressing a “National Town Hall Against E20” at the Constitution Club of India here, Kejriwal said he would start the march at 12 noon on Tuesday with 100 volunteers.

The Aam Aadmi Party national convener appealed to those willing to accompany him to inform him through social media. —PTI

OVER 650 UNIVERSITIES, 14,000 COLLEGES & 4,000 ITIs ADDED IN 12 YEARS: MODI

India’s Youth Driving Advances in AI, Space & Deep Tech: PM

Our Political Bureau

Bengaluru: Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Saturday that India’s youth powered the country’s emergence as the world’s second-largest mobile phone manufacturer and the third-largest startup ecosystem, while driving advances in artificial intelligence, semiconductors, space technology and deep tech.

The PM was speaking after inaugurating the Swami Vivekananda Cultural Youth Centre (Viveka Smarka) in Mysuru. The centre commemorates Swami Vivekananda’s visit to Mysuru in 1892 and aims to promote value-based education, leadership and personality development among young people.

“Digital solutions made in India are today inspiring many countries. India is rapidly moving forward on a new journey of semiconduc-



Modi during inauguration of Swami Vivekananda centre in Mysuru—IANS

tor manufacturing and is writing new chapters in AI, deep tech, space technology and innovation,” Modi said.

Referring to India’s growing private space sector, the PM said a privately built rocket developed by young entrepreneurs recently reached space, underscoring the capabilities of the country’s youth.

“Youth are driving India’s digital economy, building startups, creating jobs through Mudra loans and leading the Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat initiatives,” he said.

EDUCATION REFORMS

The PM said India’s demographic dividend could be fully realised only if young people received quality education, opportunities and the confidence to pursue their aspirations.

He said the country significantly expanded its higher education infrastructure over the past 12 years, establishing more than 650 new universities, nearly 14,000 colleges and over 4,000 industrial training institutes.



From Kashmir to Kochi

Flash floods triggered by a cloudburst swept the Chatroo area in Kishitwadi district, causing widespread damage early Saturday—PTI

A man paddles a canoe past the inundated Sree Mahadeva Temple in a waterlogged area following heavy rain in Kochi, Kerala, on Saturday—PTI



Doval, Shah with Fadnavis.—IANS

India Faces Threats Within, Outside; Rights Should Not Be Misused: Doval

Krishna Kumar

Mumbai: In remarks that come days after student protests in the country, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval on Saturday said the country faces challenges externally and internally and that India’s progress has upset several countries. The NSA said people talk of rights but should not misuse them.

“We need to resolve to make Bharat stronger, we have not reached where we need to be. It feels that we are independent and all our responsibilities are over. However, even today Bharat is facing a lot of challenges from outside and within. Not everyone is happy with Bharat’s progress. For several people, countries, interests, Bharat’s progress is a threat to them and we have to tackle them,” said Doval on Saturday.

Doval was speaking in Pune after being conferred with the ‘Lokmanya Tilak National Award’ by Home Minister Amit Shah in Pune.

Jayant Builds New ‘Team RLD’ Ahead of UP Polls

Ahead of the assembly elections, Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) is seeking to strengthen its presence in West UP. Over the past few months, the party has been actively inducting new leaders and building a new team of workers at the grassroots level.

RLD president and Union Minister of State Jayant Chaudhary told ET that ahead of the UP elections, the party will establish a presence in three regions — Hastinapur, Braj and Ruhelkhand — all part of West UP.

“We are building a ‘Team RLD’ parallel to our organisational network, which includes

youth, farmers and people from all walks of life. In the past few months, we have appointed office bearers and members of Team RLD across all villages in these three regions,” Chaudhary told ET.

The three regions have around 75 assembly seats. While other NDA allies have openly discussed the number of seats they want to contest in the alliance, RLD is silent on the issue.

“We are not in conflict but complementary to the NDA. That’s why none of our party leaders will say anything about the number of seats...”

KC Tyagi, RLD parliamentary board president, told ET.



TN CM Vijay’s Karnataka Visit to Resolve Cauvery Row Cancelled

On August 3, Tamil Nadu CM Vijay was supposed to come to Bengaluru, Karnataka to meet CM D K Shivakumar to discuss the long-drawn Cauvery water dispute. The visit was termed as a historic moment to resolve the dispute. However, on Friday Shivakumar requested Vijay to cancel his visit saying the atmosphere is not right for the meeting. Since the meeting was announced, several organisations have been protesting. Earlier the Cauvery Water Regulation Committee (CWRC) directed the Karnataka government to release 3500 cuses of water to Tamil Nadu. Karnataka Government challenged the order in the Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA) which upheld the CWRC order on Friday.



Shivakumar requests Vijay to cancel his visit, says the atmosphere is not right for the meeting

Karnataka says that there is a 60% deficit in reservoir inflows and irrigation has not started due to insufficient rainfall. Tamil Nadu on the other hand demanded more water than 3500 cuses. Vijay is also under pressure from political parties in Tamil Nadu to call off the meeting. The DMK on Saturday also moved to SC seeking urgent directions to compel Karnataka to release 3500 cuses of water as decided by CWRC.

Assam to Address Flood Causes After Relief, Rehab

While the Congress insists that sand and coal mining along the Assam-Nagaland border led to flooding in less flood-prone districts, the Assam government does not want to get into a debate and has assured it will discuss what caused the disaster only after relief and rehab measures.

Four districts of Assam along the Nagaland border faced catastrophic floods. These Upper Assam districts — Charaideo, Sivasaagar, Jorhat and Golaghat — are not known for such extensive flooding.

Congress said illegal sand mining in the Dikhow River, illegal coal mining along the Assam-Nagaland border and a thriving syndicate protected by those in power caused the flooding in these areas. Congress called it a man-

made tragedy enabled by inaction and absolute impunity.

Congress leader Debabrata Saikia has been consistently raising the issue of illegal sand mining and illegal coal mining.

Assam CM Himanta Sarma said experts are examining the causes behind the floods, but the government is prioritising relief measures. As a section of leaders wants to fix accountability on Nagaland for the flooding, Sarma opposed it at this stage.

“It would be inappropriate to discuss accountability or the causes of the floods at a time when Nagaland itself is grappling with the aftermath of the disaster,” he said.

Around 1.92 lakh people in the state still remain affected, while the death toll in the current wave of floods stood at 82.

Will Protect Persecuted Refugees: Adhikari

Bengal to fast-track CAA applications once DMs get powers: CM

Jayatri Nag

Kolkata: West Bengal Chief Minister Suvedu Adhikari on Saturday said the West Bengal government will prevent infiltrators from receiving benefits meant for Indian citizens and protect minorities who fled Bangladesh due to religious persecution and came to Bengal as refugees.

The West Bengal government will expedite the CAA certificate application, hearing and disbursement process once the Union Home Ministry allows the state government to deploy District Magistrates for the process, as done in Gujarat.

“Yesterday, I called the Union Home Secretary and urged him to give the CAA application

process in the hands of the West Bengal government like Gujarat. So, we can dispose of the applications through DMs quickly. I was assured that the process has started and we will get it within the next one month. Once we get it, with promptness, within six months, we will dispose of the applications of all CAA applicants,” the CM said.

In Indravati before becoming Rupesh’s personal security guard between 2015 and 2017 and carried a bounty of ₹8 lakh on him.

Mandavi says the beginning of the end came in 2025, when the insurgency found itself under unprecedented pressure from expanding security operations. Senior leaders, including Rupesh, began telling cadres that it was time to “return to the mainstream.”

JAL JUNGLE JAMEEN These contrasting realities lie at the heart of “Bastar 2.0”—the government’s ambitious attempt to transform the spirit of the slogan “Jal, Jungle, Jameen” from a rallying cry of insurgency into a blueprint for sustainable, community-led development. For that vision to succeed, it must address the pain of victims with the aspirations of those seeking redemption.

Bastar 2.0: Calm Returns, Trust Remains a Work in Progress

whether her own community will ever fully accept her.

The stories of Deepa and Phagni define the silent conflict that now simmers in the former Maoist stronghold of Bastar.

On March 31, India declared itself free from Maoist insurgency. The government’s war with Maoists may have ‘officially’ ended, but rebuilding trust among villagers, security forces and surrendered Maoists remains a challenge.

RIFLES TO REHABILITATION

At a modest workshop at the District Project Livelihood College in Dantewada, Mohan alias Azad Kadti (32), once a divisional committee member of the Maoists’ Kalahandi Area Committee, is learning a new trade.

A man who once helped lay landmines is now being trained to install tap water pipelines. For Kadti, the transition from being an insurgent to civilian is just not about acquiring a vocational skill. It is about rebuilding a life interrupted by years of conflict.

Reflecting on why many villagers

once gravitated towards the Maoist movement, he says: “People in rural and forest areas need only three things—hospitals, schools, and food and water,” he told ET.

Having returned to his village after years of being underground, Kadti says little has changed.

Common people wanted Naxalism to end. About 500 villages have been resettled and repopulated over the past two years....Through the Niyad Nellanar (our good village) scheme, we have built roads, provided electricity, water and telecom connections, ration cards and opened schools and hospitals

VISHNU DEO SAI Chhattisgarh Chief Minister



CONDITIONAL NOD
Jackson Labs' Baddi Drug Mfg Licence Restored After Suspension

Sterile injectables stay under ban; Punjab unit appeal due August 14

Teena Thacker

New Delhi: The Himachal Pradesh government has partially restored Jackson Laboratories' drug manufacturing licence of its Baddi unit, while denying permission for higher-risk manufacturing lines including sterile injectables pending re-inspection and verified compliance.

The unit's licence was cancelled in June after several women in Kota, Rajasthan, died allegedly due to spurious oxytocin injections supplied by the company's Punjab unit.

Manufacturing licence for the Punjab facility remains cancelled.

According to the records accessed by ET, Baddi unit's permission for testosterone injection has been cancelled. Likewise, product permissions for etopillyne and theophylline prolonged-release tablets stand cancelled.

Manufacturing of general category capsules, SVP dry and liquid, ophthalmic including ear drops and nasal drops, and beta lactam category SVP dry only, also remains halted till the firm submits compliance of the observations and this is verified through a joint inspection.

An appeal to restore the licence of Jackson Laboratories' Punjab facility is listed to be heard on August 14. The deaths of several women in Kota following Caesarean sections pointed to spurious oxytocin injections administered to these women.

Reports indicated that laboratory testing of the injections, which were manufactured by Jackson Laboratories, found them to contain no active oxytocin content. The Rajasthan government has attributed the deaths to multiple factors.

Zepto Suspends IPO Plans, Launches Pre-IPO Funding

Our Bureau

New Delhi: Quick commerce startup Zepto on Saturday said it has agreed with its major shareholders to close a pre-IPO equity funding round, deferring its proposed market debut.

As part of the IPO process, the board and founders have received terms from public market investors to list the company and are appreciative of the expressed interest. However, at this time, and afforded by the company's strong balance sheet, Zepto will focus on continued execution," the company said in a statement.

As of March 31, 2026, it reported a cash reserve of ₹5,681 crore.

Zepto said it will update its draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) with upcoming financial results. "Zepto's management team looks forward to completing the listing and partnering with public market investors on the next chapter of the company's journey," it said.

ET was the first to report on July 29 that Zepto was likely to defer its listing after

UAE Locks 'Desi Bling' Star's Wealth Over Unproven Funds

FIU puts a temporary freeze on funds, digital wallets of Sanpals, and 4 firms linked to them

Sugata Ghosh

Mumbai: The UAE anti-money laundering agency Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) is understood to have asked banks, financial institutions, and virtual asset service providers (VASPs) in the Emirates to put a temporary freeze on the accounts of Satish Sanpal, the 41-year-old Dubai-based Indian-origin businessman who stars in the Netflix docusoap series 'Desi Bling' that shows the lavish lifestyle of Sanpal and his wife Tabinda.

Besides the financial services accounts and digital wallets of Satish, the FIU freezing order, issued about a fortnight ago, extends to accounts of Tabinda and companies linked to Sanpals.

"...you are immediately requested to freeze any funds or accounts or deposits or investments and deny access to the safe deposit boxes, and stop any financial transfers or withdrawals and inform us of any credit facilities belonging to the below mentioned names," said the FIU communication.

The business entities covered in the notice are ANAX Capital Asset Management Company, ANAX Capital Financial Markets LLC, ANAX Holding PZCO, and SSBazaar General Trading LLC. SSB,



which is said to deal in precious stones, was formed in 2015, and the other three entities were incorporated between 2023 and 2024.

Once the freeze is executed and Sanpals are informed about the FIU directive, financial institutions and VASPs have to ask the account owners to provide documents that prove transaction legitimacy and lawful origin of funds.

The inclusion of VASPs in the notice assumes significance given the legal acceptance and wide use of cryptocurrencies in UAE - covering even transactions like property deals. VASPs include crypto exchanges, wallet providers, and entities offering trading, transferring, or digital asset safekeeping. The banks and VASPs will have

to cancel the freeze after 30 days from the receipt of the notice if they do not receive any instruction from FIU to extend the freeze.

Under UAE anti-money laundering legislation and recent frameworks like UAE FIU Regulation No (1) of 2026, financial institutions as well as VASPs are designated "reporting entities" obligated to share information and comply with FIU orders.

A school dropout from Jabalpur who claims to have made big in Dubai, Sanpal has till now denied various media allegations about his activities and transactions. In May the Delhi High Court had said that media had "prematurely labelled" him as a culprit though the official investigation was not over.

UPI Sets July Record on Mass Adoption

Processes 23.66 b transactions worth ₹29.88 lakh cr led by smaller-ticket payments

Our Bureau

Bengaluru: India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) processed a record 23.66 billion transactions worth ₹29.88 lakh crore in July, rebounding from a marginal dip in June as smaller-ticket payments continued to drive growth.

Data released by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) showed transaction volumes rose 4% from 22.72 billion in June, while the value of transactions increased 3.3% month-on-month.

On a year-on-year basis, transaction volumes rose 22%, while transaction value increased 19%.

The July data also points to continued



growth in low-value transactions. The average daily transaction value slipped to ₹36,383 crore from ₹36,405 crore in June, even as the average daily transaction count edged up to 763 million.

"It is not larger purchases by existing urban users that is driving the numbers," said Reju Datta, cofounder of Cashfree Payments. "It is smaller, more frequent transactions from newer users in smaller towns, spending categories that were previously settled in cash."

DUOPOLY CRACKS

In June, the combined market share of PhonePe and Google Pay fell to 78.8% after staying above 80% for several years

under of Cashfree Payments. "It is smaller, more frequent transactions from newer users in smaller towns, spending categories that were previously settled in cash."

Datta said July is historically India's weakest month for payments, with no festive season or quarter-end institutional settlements.

"Previous records have been set with at least one of those tailwinds. July had none of them, which means the growth is being driven purely by organic, everyday transaction behaviour rather than any seasonal or structural event," he said.

Monthly UPI transaction volumes have remained above 20 billion since October last year, supported by wider merchant acceptance across urban and rural markets, rising smartphone penetration and growing consumer adoption.

"With the festive season approaching, we expect this momentum to strengthen further, led by rising participation from smaller towns," said Anand Kumar Bajaj, founder, MD and CEO of PayNearby.

ASIP's ₹2,387 CR OSAT PROJECT TAKES OFF

Modi Launches South India's First Chip Plant

The 30-acre facility will package and test 96 million chips a year in its first phase

Our Bureau

Visakhapatnam | Bengaluru: Construction has begun on South India's first semiconductor packaging facility under the India Semiconductor Mission, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday virtually laying the foundation stone for ASIP Technologies' ₹2,387-crore project in Visakhapatnam.

The outsourced semiconductor assembly and test (OSAT) facility at Tarluvada, being developed with South Korea's APAC as technology partner, will package and test chips for artificial intelligence, high-performance computing, data centres and high-speed communications.

It will initially use wire-bond and flip-chip ball grid array (BGA) packaging technologies before introducing advanced 2.5D and 3D packaging capabilities within two to three years.

The 30-acre facility, being established with an initial investment of ₹460 crore, will have a capacity to package and test 96 million semiconductor chips a year.



ASIP Technologies plans an additional investment of more than ₹2,000 crore. The project is expected to create more than 1,000 direct high-skilled jobs and 1,600 indirect jobs.

Advanced packaging has become a key segment of the semiconductor industry as high-performance AI chips require sophisticated methods to combine multiple chiplets into a single package.

Modi commended Andhra Pradesh's information technology talent pool and said the state is now well positioned to lead in semiconductor manufacturing. Chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu joined the prime minister virtually for the ceremony.

Venkata Simhadri, MD and chief executive of ASIP Technologies, said the project would establish "Advanced assembly, packaging and testing capabilities in India, while driving skill development, supply-chain localisation and contributing to the growth of Andhra Pradesh's semiconductor ecosystem."

PM Inaugurates New Vizag Airport

Our Bureau

Visakhapatnam: Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Alluri Sitarama Raju International Airport at Bhogapuram near here on Saturday.

This greenfield airport, located about 45 km northeast of Visakhapatnam, is expected to reshape connectivity for North Andhra Pradesh and Southern Odisha while underpinning the southern state's ambitions to emerge as a manufacturing, logistics and technology hub.

Developed by GMR Visakhapatnam International Airport under the public-private-partnership model at an investment of ₹5,648 crore, the airport will begin commercial operations on August 17. It has an initial capacity to handle 6 million passengers annually, and a provision to expand it to more than 40 million in phases.

The new airport will replace the current Visakhapatnam airport, which will stop civil flight operations and continue only as a naval base. It is expected to serve as the primary aviation gateway for North Andhra.

Muthoot Finance Q1 Net up 25%

Our Bureau

Kolkata: Muthoot Finance on Saturday reported a 25% year-on-year rise in its standalone net profit for the first quarter ended June at ₹2,550 crore as its business expanded 43% to ₹1.72 lakh crore.

On a consolidated basis, it earned a net profit of ₹2,825 crore, also up 43%. YoY. The consolidated assets under management grew 43% to 1.91 lakh crore. The country's largest gold loan company has also

so embarked upon leadership succession with its board recommending the appointment of Alexander George Muthoot as managing director from October 1.

Currently joint MD, he will replace his uncle George Alexander Muthoot who will assume the role of executive vice-chairman from October.

The proposed transition would need shareholder approval.

The board also suggested KR Bijimon, executive director, to be elevated as chief executive officer.

Coal India's July Production Up 8.4% to 50.36 MT, Supplies Hit Record High

Our Bureau

New Delhi: Coal India on Saturday said the company's coal production in July rose 8.4% year-on-year to 50.36 million tonnes. It also saw an 18.4% rise in coal supplies to 64.19 million tonnes.

The coal supplied in July marks the highest-ever coal offtake for the month in any financial year. The previous highest July supply was 60.5

million tonnes in 2024.

This follows a record performance in June, when the state-run miner supplied 65.95 million tonnes of coal, its highest-ever supply for June.

Coal India's cumulative coal supplies during the first four months of FY27 rose 6.9% year-on-year to a record 262.04 million tonnes, beating 259.4 million tonnes achieved in April-July FY25.

CleanMax Posts ₹55 crore Q1 Profit

Our Bureau

Mumbai: CleanMax Enviro Energy Solutions swung to a net profit of ₹55 crore in the first quarter of FY27 from a net loss of ₹17 crore a year earlier, helped by strong growth in revenue and renewable energy capacity additions.

Revenue more than doubled to ₹832 crore from ₹402 crore a year earlier, while adjusted earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation rose 74% to ₹494 crore.

"Operating results saw strong growth in Ebitda, driven by volume growth and higher Ebitda margins in both business segments of RE power sales and RE services," said Kuldeep Jain, founder and managing director, CleanMax. "Further, we added a record new capacity of over 500 MW in the first quarter and are well on track to meet our guidance of adding a minimum of 1,500 MW of new capacity during the year."

Centre Advances ₹1.09 L-cr to States

Tax devolution to boost liquidity, infra spending and development projects

Our Bureau

New Delhi: The Centre on Saturday released ₹1.09 lakh crore in tax devolution to states, advancing this month's transfer to strengthen their cash flows and support faster spending on infrastructure and development projects.

The August 1 release is in addition to the regular monthly devolution due on August 10, giving states an early fiscal boost as they step up capital expenditure and roll out public programmes.

"The release is in line with the government of India's commitment to streng-

Front-Loaded Transfer

Uttar Pradesh	₹19,208 cr
Bihar	₹10,845 cr
Madhya Pradesh	₹8,010 cr
West Bengal	₹7,866 cr
Maharashtra	₹7,022 cr
Rajasthan	₹6,460 cr

then the finances of states to accelerate their capital and developmental expenditure," the finance ministry said. Uttar Pradesh received the highest allocation at ₹19,208 crore, followed by

Bihar (₹10,845 crore), Madhya Pradesh (₹8,010 crore), West Bengal (₹7,866 crore) and Maharashtra (₹7,022 crore). Rajasthan was allotted ₹6,460 crore, while Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu received between ₹4,400 crore and ₹4,800 crore each.

Tax devolution is the largest source of untied transfers from the Centre to states and finances both capital and revenue expenditure.

An advance release improves liquidity, reduces reliance on short-term borrowing and enables states to accelerate project execution without waiting for the scheduled monthly transfer.

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Alenjith K Johny & Mohit Bhalla

After making inroads into healthcare, private equity players are targeting India's schools, ploughing over \$1.5 billion into the sector in the past decade

If you woke up in 2026 after a decade in a coma, you would be surprised by the extent to which private equity players have made inroads into India's private hospitals. Most big private hospital chains have tasted PE money at some point. Major names like HCG are majority owned by KKR, while others like Manipal Hospitals have inducted global investors such as TPG and Temasek. For years, hospitals were set up as charitable trusts, which on paper meant promoters could not take money out of them directly. But PE, a class of capital that seeks very high returns, has quietly established itself in this critical sector, navigating complex regulations such as price caps and quotas for economically weaker sections as it seeks to generate quick returns. They drove consolidation of hospitals and funded expansion. In the last few years, PE majors have set their sights on another one of those traditionally conservative sectors in India—school education. Hospitals and schools bear similarities in that they were both historically viewed as philanthropic activities, not meant to be profited from.

Marquee names have made their moves. KKR has backed Lighthouse Learning, a platform that owns schools such as Billabong High, EuroSchool, Heritage Experiential and Centre Point. Blackstone has bought into Jayshree Periwai International School. Kedaara Capital has backed K12 Techno Services, which operates Orchids schools. As much as \$1.5-2 billion in PE money has flown into education in the last decade, according to industry sources. For PE, the attraction is obvious: fees arrive upfront, students tend to remain enrolled for years and parents rarely reduce education spend even during a downturn. Since schools operate through nonprofit entities, these investors participate through service, management and infrastructure companies built around them, which is not unlike

how they cracked healthcare. The big question: Can PE replicate its hospital playbook in the classroom, and at what cost?

ATTRACTIVE PROPOSITION

PE interest stems from how families treat schooling. "Parents don't pull their children out in the middle of an education cycle. Unlike healthcare, where if the doctor moves, the patient follows, in education, the child stays through the full cycle of 12 years, regardless," says Jacob Kurian, former partner of New Silk Route, a PE firm that was a pioneer in investing in K-12 schools. It once owned a significant stake in Sri Chaitanya Schools, which it sold back to the promoters.

Once a child is enrolled, the relationship with a school can last over a decade. Add to that a country where private schooling is in high demand and government spending has not kept pace, and it is easy to see why investors have gotten involved. Government spending on health and education, individually, is under 5% of GDP. And the population that needs schooling is enormous. India

A school is run by a non-profit. A PE fund builds a for-profit company that provides services to the trust for a fee

has close to 508 million, aged 3 to 23 years. That is a formal education cohort 1.4 times the size of China's, according to a DRHP filed by educational platform Elevate Campuses. For Jayshree Periwai International School, PE capital has resulted in expansion. "We can reach out to more children and more cities. We can empower children," she says. Herschools in Jaipur include three large campuses and five kindergartens. Only one of the big schools runs an international curriculum, and it's residential as well, drawing students from Singapore, China, Taiwan, Japan, Italy, the UK, the Netherlands and Spain.

MONEY FLOW

To understand PE money flow, it helps to understand how a school is set up. A school in India cannot be owned by a company. It has to be run by a trust, society, or something called a Section 8 company, all structures that are legally not for profit. This trust does two main things. It runs the school and it pays teacher salaries. Everything else can be out-

Enrolment Pattern

Year	Total Enrolment in Schools (mn)	Enrolment in Pvt Unaided Schools (mn)	Share of Enrolment in Pvt Unaided Schools (%)
2001-02	201.5	33.5	16.6
2023-24	248.0	90.1	36.3

Source: DRHP by Elevate Campuses

sourced. The school bus, uniforms, catering, IT support, HR, finance, marketing, teacher training—none of this has to sit inside the trust. Most schools hire outside companies to handle these. This is where PE has found its opening. A fund doesn't buy the trust. It builds a separate company that provides these outsourced services, and that company charges the school trust a fee. The trust stays nonprofit, exactly as the law requires. The company earning the profit sits one step away.

According to a Bengaluru-based lawyer specialising in education, structures are "set up with isolated buckets or silos for the not-for-profit trusts", which continue to operate the schools. "All the licences sit with those trusts and employees and teachers are employed by the trust. You essentially have service providers who come in to work with these trusts."

It also means clearing several layers of government approval before a single class can begin. "Broadly, this

is a three-layered regulatory regime," the lawyer says. "State-level compliance, which is what you need just to commence operations. Central compliance, which is fundamentally the Right to Education Act. And affiliation-specific compliances, depending on which board you are affiliated to."

On top of that come two rules that hit a school's finances directly. Several states cap how much fees a school can raise each year. Private schools are also required to set aside a share of seats for students from economically weaker families, at reduced or no fees. Both rules exist to keep education affordable. Both also cut into what a school, or the company servicing it, can actually earn.

That combination—a not-for-profit trust at the centre, and a for-profit services company built around it—is what people in the sector call a grey area. It hasn't been challenged or tested in any major way yet.

THE PARALLELS

Mukesh Tiwari, partner at Alta Capital that owns and invests in Elevate Campuses, says, "There are multiple platform plays. You have platforms that invest directly in schools. And you have NBFCs doing the financing side. Coaching is a platform, but that's a discretionary spend. In between all of these, nobody was focused on the essentials—the real estate and infrastructure management of schools. That's where we come in," he says.

Hospitals faced similar restrictions, and built the same kind of structure around it, called opco-propco structures in legal parlance. To put it simply, an operations company and a property management company are put in place. They charge the trust for services and

manage the real estate. Now it doesn't matter if the trust runs a hospital or an educational institution. The money it earns can still be redirected to these companies.

"Opco-propco structures exist in hospitals as well but in the healthcare sector for-profit companies are allowed to exist," says Raajiv Singhal, CEO of Marengo Asia Hospitals, which is backed by Samara Capital, the Godrej family office and the Havells family office. Max Hospital Saket, one of Delhi's largest, is registered as a trust, with a separate opco that charges its fees. Fortis Hospital Vasant Kunj is structured the same way. So is BL Kapoor Hospital in Delhi.

Singhal sees real upside in the entry of PE in education, like in healthcare. "Private equity can achieve certain things by entering education. Professionalism will come. Scale will come, especially if they can take it to tier-2 cities, where people want better offerings." All of which is welcome.

THE CONCERNS

But for those who have spent years building schools, the worry is about what changes once a fund is involved.

"I believe the soul should remain in the school," says Nipun Goenka, MD of GD Goenka Group, which operates over 120 K-12 schools. "It should not be too much about cost optimisation—after all, you are dealing with students. If a private equity player comes in, it's all about the bottom line."

He also sees clearly why funds are drawn to the business. It's a good annuity model, he says. Schools are also increasing fees by 5-10% every year—a good compounding return over 12 years.

There are also questions around whether consolidation of the sort that happened in hospitals will happen in schools, resulting in the rise of chains and franchises.

THE MORNING BRIEF PODCAST

The New Kids' Table Private equity is targeting a bigger, stickier market than hospitals: schools.

Tune in to ETPlay.com. Available on EconomicTimes.com/podcast, Amazon Prime Music, Apple Podcasts, JioSaavn and Spotify.

The sector does have plenty of room for upsiders. "The market is characterised by a persistent supply-demand imbalance, with limited capacity in high-quality schools. Coupled with rising household incomes, this has strengthened parents' willingness to spend on premium private education offering best-in-class infrastructure and international curricula," says Aakash Sathi, partner at LEK Consulting's global education practice.

The predictability of the cash flow works in a fund's favour too. "It has a negative working capital model since fees are collected at the start of the academic year," says Sethi. "It offers long-term revenue visibility with students typically enrolled for 12 years. It's resilient to economic downturn, as parents tend to prioritise education spending over most other discretionary expenses."

Even so, the question is whether they can replicate the success in hospitals. Nobody has had an exit. No large PE-backed education platform has gone public. None has been sold at the scale of hospital chains. The management-company structures built around school trusts have never been through a public market, or any real stress test. But then, hospitals had an almost 10-year head start and, even there, big exits are a fairly recent development. Education is further behind that curve. Simply put, the capital arrived well before anyone has proven it can be multiplied.

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Major PE-backed Players

School Operator	Investors	Deal Size (₹ cr)	No. of K-12 Schools	Areas of Investment	Location	Year of Investment
Lighthouse Learning	KKR, PSP Investments	8,260	60	Operations and management	Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Mumbai, Pune, Delhi, Gurgaon, Noida, Bhopal	2019, 2025 (two tranches)
K12 Techno Services	Kedaara Capital, Peak XV Partners, Sofina Ventures	2,406	113	Operations and management	Hyderabad, Chennai, Kolkata, and cities in Karnataka, Maharashtra, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan	2023
Elevate Campuses	Hillhouse Investments	2,700	15	Infra and property management	Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab	2025
Jayshree Periwai School	Blackstone	NA	6	Operations and management	Jaipur	2026

Source: Media reports, Tracxn, school websites, DRHP by Elevate Campuses

GRAPHICS: VIJAY



JASPREET BINDRA Co-founder, AI&Beyond

In 1997, Garry Kasparov lost to IBM's Deep Blue, and our belief in human supremacy over machines took a big blow.

The ancient game of chess, created in India and perfected by other civilisations, was always regarded as the highest theatre of pure human intelligence. But now it was conquered by a machine. Since then, the machine has only become more powerful.

Today a decent chess engine on a mobile phone can defeat the strongest human grandmaster. Magnus Carlsen or R Praggnanandhaa is not better than Stockfish, and no human being ever will be.

And yet, playing chess has become even more popular.

An increasing number of people watch Carlsen and Pragga play. They watch because the point of human chess is not only the perfect move, but the vulnerability of two humans like us who would hesitate, miscalculate, panic and improvise, get tired and then suddenly find a move that feels like magic. It is human drama, and machine-like perfection of two computers playing each other will leave them cold, the very antithesis of drama. This peculiar crush for imperfection may become the defining truth of the AI age.

We have spent the last few years asking whether AI can write, draw, code and create as well as human beings. Increasingly, the an-

swer seems to be yes, or at least close enough, for most practical purposes.

AI can write a clear LinkedIn post, generate a hummable song, produce a perfectly structured memo, make a McKinsey-like slide and finish off by summarising all of it in a competent email. It is fluent, smooth, tireless, often near perfect; 10 out of 10, almost.

The problem is that we may soon become sick of 10 out of 10.

MARK OF THE HAND

We are already seeing this in the plague of AI slop on LinkedIn. You can spot it from a mile away: the smooth opening line, the neat three lessons, the inspirational paragraph, the carefully balanced humility, the "here is what it taught me" ending.

It is grammatically correct and emotionally dead. In response, we have started hunting for posts that are messy, opinionated, oddly structured, perhaps even badly punctuated, but unmistakably written by someone who has lived that thought.

The same is happening with books. Amazon is reportedly flooded with AI-generated titles, many polished but soulless. As a result, we increasingly look for books from known publishers rather than self-published ones as a signal of human authorship.

In such a world, the value of a human book lies not just in how well it is written, but in how clearly it has been felt. When text becomes infinite, real authorship becomes scarce.

This phenomenon is not new. Human beings have always valued the mark of the hand.

A machine can make a perfect ceramic bowl, smooth, symmetrical and identical to the next thousand bowls. But we often pay more for the potter's bowl precisely because it is not per-

Age to Be Imperfect

In the AI era, flaw is not failure—it is human signature

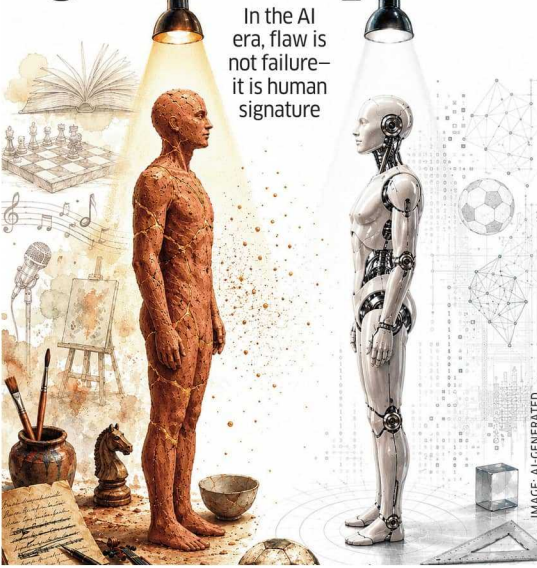


IMAGE: AI-GENERATED

fect. The uneven lip, the thumbprint, the minor dent, or the slight tilt in the body of the pot: these are not defects, but provenance, signaling that a human hand passed through here.

The Japanese have a phrase for this: wabi-sabi, the beauty of something that is imperfect, incomplete, and thus its art of kintsugi, where a broken pot is mended back together with gold lacquer.

In India, we have our own version of it. We have the nazar battu, the small black spot on a baby's face or the fiercely ugly face mask hung above doors. Perfect beauty feels dangerous, almost inhuman. Persian carpet makers were said to leave a flaw in their carpets because perfection belonged only to God. The flaw was not a failure, but a human signature.

Great art has always understood this. Picasso did not paint faces the way a camera sees faces. MF Husain did not draw horses like they should look like; his horses were restless, elongated, full of motion rather than anatomy, their power coming not from accuracy but from distortion.

AI will become very good at beauty, with symmetrical faces, flawless prose, balanced compositions and correct answers. But beauty is not the same as perfection; it is in the cracked note of a singer, the pause before an actor remembers a line and the grandmother who never measured anything but always got the dish right.

This is why author Sangeet Paul Choudhary says that in the age of AI, humans will become "luxury goods". He uses the example of a

wine sommelier—it is for their knowledge, selection and cork-sniffing performance that we pay a premium in a restaurant.

Similarly, we pay a huge premium to go to a live concert over a Spotify rendition. When machine output becomes abundant and cheap, human output becomes premium not because it is perfect, but because it carries human presence and lived experience.

AUTHENTICITY OVER EFFICIENCY

The mistake humans will make in the AI age is to compete with machines on the finish and

polish. The worst thing a writer or an artist can do now is try to sound like AI, as many of us are doing on our LinkedIn posts—sounding smooth, agreeable, optimised and dead. The winners will be those who become more of themselves, not less. Authenticity will always win over efficiency.

We began with chess, so let us end with football. Imagine if the recent football World Cup was played by perfect AI robots. There would be no misplaced passes or bad tackles, nerves or exhaustion, no striker missing from two yards, and no Messi walking for 70 minutes and then suddenly bending space-time. It would be technically astonishing and emotionally hollow.

In a world where machines can generate perfection on demand, the most valuable thing a human being may do is remain unmistakably, recognisably imperfect.

Views are personal

When machine output becomes abundant and cheap, human output becomes premium when it carries lived experience

Vikram Doctor

You are stuck at a junction in Goa. This is common during the regular November-March tourist season, but this used to be uncommon during the monsoons. Yet here you are, stuck in a light rain and, worse, next to a sewage tanker trailing its unmistakable odour. The vehicles jammed in all directions include many with out-of-state licence plates, particularly TS (or more up-to-date TG) from Telangana. Among the local cars is a taxi SUV crammed with a family of tourists, all wearing clothes cut from the same vibrantly floral fabric—men's shirts, women's frocks, even an old lady's sari. Nothing is moving so should you get out and stretch your legs, maybe buy a paneer tikka roll from the cart on the corner, or some flowers from a shop with blossoms in buckets?

This could be a weekend scene in several parts of Goa just now. The monsoons used to be when tourism ended. Beach shacks were brought down, restaurants closed their doors and staff went home to their villages or looked for non-season jobs. Resorts tried to minimise losses with super-discounted packages and the state government tried to promote what was called, rather cringingly, rain-drop tourism, with talk about waterfalls and lakes.

IT'S RAINING TOURISTS

Monsoon tourism really seems to be taking off now for reasons more linked to West Asia than established tourism efforts. The ongoing hostilities have ruined the Gulf as a holiday destination while its influence on the plummeting rupee has made other foreign trips painfully expensive. Goa has always been an easy option for quick, last-minute domestic tourism. Many restaurants have realised that the costs of closing and reopening, particularly hiring and retraining staff, are more than those of staying open, even with losses, through the monsoons. Ever since Covid, there have also been more permanent residents which help with demand, especially for food delivery.

Much of this change isn't captured in the standard metrics for tourism, which focus on flights and hotel room occupancy. A recent report showed a sharp see-saw, with a historic high of 18.18 lakh air passengers to Goa in May, most of them domestic, followed by a steep decline in June to 4.56 lakh, a 19.4% decline from the figures for June 2025.

This doesn't take into account the large number of tourists arriving in other ways. The Konkan Railways' monsoon services are particularly popular because they offer a spectacular glimpse of the Dudhsagar waterfalls, with spray often reaching the trains. The busloads of passengers that drive down from the west coast have resulted in Calangute becoming a mini-Gujarat, with pure vegetarian restaurants offering regional Gujarati food. Many regular tourists have realised that the best solution for Goa's soaring taxi rates is simply to drive your own car down, particularly if you come from close-by states like Karnataka and Telangana.

This is where Goa's traffic jam comes in.

OTHER METRICS

When regular indicators are ineffective people start looking at other metrics, even if they are more anecdotal than statistical. One well-known example is the Lipstick Effect, first advanced by cosmetics tycoon Leonard Lauder in 2008 when he noted that his company Estée Lauder's lipstick sales rose after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Lauder's theory was that when people were anticipating bad times, they switched expensive indulgences, like fashion wear, for smaller ones, like cosmetics. And so rising lipstick sales could indicate a coming recession better than government data which would take time to show a fall in economic activity—and could, quite likely, be massaged by governments to minimise bad news.

Another unusual indicator is cardboard box production, where rising sales are correlated with rising consumer purchases of the products it is used for packing. The Federal Reserve Bank of St Louis now tracks "corrugated and solid fiber box manufacturing". The consulting firm Accenture has tracked pet services (grooming, boarding, pet sitting) as a sign of economic confidence since the high costs associated with pet ownership mean that few will adopt pets in a recession. The seeming anomaly here is the Covid years

Sonalil Kokra

Buried in my phone live WhatsApp groups called Sole Sisters and Bag Ladies and half a dozen others with delightfully cringey, punny names. Cumulatively, these groups are roughly 500 women deep. I've met, at best, maybe a dozen of them. And, yet, I can tell you with a fair degree of accuracy, who among these familiar-but-faceless women is struggling with caregiving responsibilities for a narcissistic mother who just won't let up. Which one is burnt out by an ADHD child. How many have fallen out of love with their husbands. And who all uninstalled their dating apps for the 36th week in a row after their 228th run-in with a married man teasingly quoting Rumi and sermonising about marriage being a social construct. The women in these groups have helped each other crack interviews, start SIPs, rehomed show/pet/plant babies, build apps and appetisers and, on occasion, even fed and clothed their own.

In my 20s, I mythologised romantic love, built my entire emotional architecture around the idea that it is the main event. The meet-cute, the discovering of each other's eccentricities and peccadilloes (and problematic exes that give you pause), the soft and hard launches, the nail-biting will-they-won't-they (and by that I obviously mean both sets of vaguely

How Do I Count the Tourists in Goa?

As flights and hotel occupancy fail to capture the number of tourists flocking to Goa, here are some unusual indicators that also mark the changing nature of tourism—traffic jams in monsoon of vehicles sporting KL, MH and TG licence plates, rising short-term stays in villas and Airbnb properties and, of course, the many avatars of paneer on menus



traffic jam scenario brings together several unusual markers for tourism activity in Goa. Non-state licence plates obviously indicate cars being driven into Goa, though some of them will belong to non-Goan residents who haven't changed their plates. Goa offers a huge diversity of outside licence

manage short-term rentals so that the cost of their investment can be recouped.

GLOBAL VILLA-GE

These short-term rentals currently fly under the radar of most hospitality data collection, but one website that offers an indication is Airroi.com, which collates Airbnb listings and revenue internationally. Its top 100 markets in India by active listings oddly lists Goa villages alongside major cities: Bengaluru, for example, leads with 3,282 listings, and Candolim is the highest listing for Goa, with 1,188 listings. Four roughly contiguous villages in north Goa—Candolim, Calangute, Arpora and Anjuna—feature in the top 30, and their combined listings come to 2,945 properties, which puts them at No.3 on the list, ahead of New Delhi.

In total, 21 Indian locations on Airroi.com's list are in Goa, giving a total of 6,781 short-term rental locations. The website also lists locations by revenue and this is even more startling: 15 of the 20 most profitable short-term rental locations are in Goa, with Assagao topping the list with an average monthly revenue of \$1,243 and a 32.9% occupancy. No.2 is Badem, a village next to Assagao, with an average monthly revenue of \$1,182. The figures may be even higher since some really premium properties only offer direct bookings, not through sites like Airbnb.

On Airroi.com's list, 15 of the 20 most profitable short-term rental locations in India are in Goa. Assagao tops the list with an average monthly revenue of \$1,243 and a 32.9% occupancy. No. 2 is Badem near Assagao with an average monthly revenue of \$1,182

gentrification. Around 20 years back, if you wanted flowers you had to head to a large market, like Mapusa's, where flowers were mostly available as garlands for temples or wreaths for churches. Today, tourist locations like Anjuna have multiple shops selling expensive flowers grown out of the state, though Goa farmers are also now switching from rice and vegetables to more high-value crops like orchids and sunflowers.

CUT FROM THE SAME CLOTH

Groups of tourists wearing clothes of the same fabric is a small, but established part of mass tourism. One practical argument is that it helps large groups remain cohesive in crowded locations, but it's mostly just a fun way to signal a collective vacation. Corporate offsites, a rapidly growing business in Goa, also use themed shirts as a way for office groups to relax. There are

Many regular tourists have realised that the best solution for Goa's soaring taxi rates is simply to drive your own car down, particularly if you come from close-by states like Karnataka and Telangana. This is where Goa's traffic jam comes in

plates, but some states like KA (Karnataka), MH (Maharashtra) and, above all, TS/TG (Telangana) predominate.

BIRYANI ON THE MANDOVI

A hospitality professional says that the casino boats on the Mandovi river are seeing a surge in customers from Hyderabad, and their Telugu food offerings have increased. It can't be a coincidence then that Telugu food, which can be hard to find outside Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, is relatively well represented in north Goa now with restaurants like House of Telugu and Minapattu (Vagator), Trails of Taste (Anjuna) and Mana Andhra Ruchulu, Bhimavaram Vari Telugu Ruchulu and Royal Telugu Ruchulu (Calangute).

Aggregated hotel occupancy rates for May and June this year aren't yet available, but one factor is making this an increasingly inadequate indicator. Non-hotel options have been increasing rapidly, whether classified as homestays, villa rentals, or just short-term rentals. Family or friends who come to Goa often find renting two-three villas a better option than paying for many hotel rooms. Villas also come with more freedom from hotel surveillance and rules, and villa management companies can provide many of the services that hotels offer. Builders of villa clusters have now set up concierge companies that will maintain villas for those buying them as second homes and also



FOLLOW THE SEWAGE TANKER

Assagao, like many Goa villages, does not have sewage lines since most villagers have septic tanks. Builders of new villas typically skimp on providing adequate septic tanks or sewage treatment plants, preferring instead to hire sewage tankers to suck up the waste two or three times a week, depending on the level of occupancy.

This is then taken to sewage treatment plants, though it is often alleged that tankers discharge the waste in mangroves and secluded river locations. Whatever the truth of that, this does make the movements of sewage tankers one way to track occupancy rates in short-term rental properties—it is literally data that can't be flushed away!

Other indicators are perhaps less impactful, though more visible. Flower shops are one of the less noted signs of

clothing websites that cater to this market, offering coordinated wear for groups ranging from couples ("Twinning is Winning") to large family or friend groups.

Goa's cuisine never featured dairy products in any major way, but now paneer is inescapable. It shows the changing nature of domestic tourism. In the past, visitors to Goa, whether Indian or foreign, eagerly consumed the abundant seafood, pork and other meats on offer in the state. Most still do, but the prevalence of paneer on most menus signals the importance of domestic vegetarian tourists who view it as their desired protein.

Paneer usually appears in the standard North Indian dishes, but some places now offer a Goa-style paneer cafe! You can get paneer pizzas, paneer momos. That fried paneer and a van outside Mapusa offers paneer shawarma. Perhaps paneer on menus could become the best unusual indicator of the spending power of Indian tourists.

Our Unwritten Love Story

Friendship is possibly the only relationship that welcomes the slightly unhinged, unfinished version of the person lurking beneath the competent-adult exterior

disappointed parents who think their simple-minded spawn deserves better than what they've chosen for themselves), the invariable separation (because every good love story needs a cliffhanger), the ring and, finally, the choking declarations of finally finding the person who "completes" you and is your "everything".

But the thing about trying to complete someone and being their everything is that it's a fantasy. And it is profoundly draining. Love requires equal partnership. Parenting needs you to be a bottomless container. Work asks you to be efficient. Friendship is possibly the only relationship that welcomes the slightly unhinged, unfinished version of the person lurking beneath the competent-adult exterior.

OUR TRUE BETTER HALVES

Which is why, now, in my 30s, I have far more appreciation for the people who have been doing the actual heavy lifting. The ones who watch us go through more personality changes in a decade than



Ranbir Kapoor has managed in his entire filmography (so far), who are our cheerleaders through three career pivots, who saw us at our most diminished—seated with grief or humiliated by failure—and still chose to stay. They're really the ones we should be introducing as our "other half" to the world.

The friend who, at 18, smoked beedis with me outside the principal's room as a form of silent protest for something that seemed like a good hill to die on for two rebels without a cause during a college trip, is still, at 38, the one who determinedly floods her phone book with my fledgling business's catalogue while waiting for her mammogram.

Another one has flown across continents on little notice because "something felt very off" when I suddenly stopped responding to texts for a fortnight. No judgement, no leapfrogging to bitchy interpretations, just a gut that said, "that's not normal", which ultimately resulted in "I'm here" at 2am with five ice creams and the kind of hug that glues something—

you don't yet know what—back together:

COUNCIL OF WOMEN

One of the most delightful things about getting older is that if you do it right, you end up with a small council of scarily competent, gossipy-but-not-judgy women who will organise themselves around your crises, combat-ready, wielding Tupperwares and enough packets of Electra because obviously you need to be reminded to eat and drink and at least brush your teeth and hair; if you can't be bothered to shower, because you're not a heater. There's more romance in their no-nonsense presence than the collective poetic oeuvre of all the men I've encountered in the dating world.

Men do all of this, too, but while studiously pretending they're doing nothing at all. An ex and his best friend maintained their own two-decade-old friendship built almost entirely on cricket statistics, aggressive mockery and a shared refusal to ever say the words "I love

you, man" without immediately following it with an insult. Unlike my WhatsApp groups with long, verbose paragraphs providing context for the life event currently being dissected and equally sturdy walls of texts dedicated to the pursuit of ferreting out subtexts and undercurrents, his have subsisted almost entirely on memes, cricket/football arguments and the occasional four-word check-ins. For 11 years!

Women narrate their closeness. Men, pressured into emotional impermeability early in their lives, often build intimacy through the shared absurdity (and comfort) of doing something pointless together for decades. Both, I've come to appreciate, are expressions of love. One just comes bearing better voice notes.

Romantic love, for all its theatre, exists largely to convince you that you were chosen—that one person looked at the field and picked you over everyone else. And, of course, it feels good to be chosen.

But friendship never bothered with the audition. It just kept showing up, on its own schedule—mammogram texts, 2am ice cream, four-word check-ins—sometimes after years of near-total silence, refusing, rather rudely, to make a big deal of itself. Maybe that's the real reason it never got its own love story: We didn't bother to write it down because it was never trying to be literature. It was just trying to get us to Saturday.

Sonalil Kokra is a Mumbai-based writer

There's more romance in the no-nonsense presence of women friends than the collective poetic oeuvre of all the men I've encountered in the dating world

WHY WE CAN'T HANDLE THE SHEER FILTH & THE FURY OF 'KACHA KHSITI'

The choicest gaali and most obnoxious insults are bad enough to witness, but what ruptures many a respectable spleen is when these are hurled at public figures who deserve all-protective respect



INDRAJIT HAZRA

As astoundingly idiotic wrangles go, this has to be right up there with 'But you know, the British *did* bring the railways to India' (Abey Venn diagram ki... Russia, Japan, Mexico didn't have to be British colonies to import and implement railway steam tech.) After the jantar banter subsided last week, we now have Gen X, on different sides of X that marks the spot, fighting over whether Gen Z or millennials have been brought up better.

At the centre of this upbringing debate (sic) is Gen Z's apparent discovery of disgusting abuses and 'sickening' insults,

mostly in the form of nasty slogans, memes, and other visuals on placards, especially targeted at elders who deserve unmitigated respect for being, well, elders.

For starters, Gen Z did *not* discover the choicest gaalis. There have been people from my father's generation — pre-baby boomers born before 1946 — whose language targeted at 'respectable' public figures would have made Odysseus want his ears sealed with wax even when he was sitting at his 4-BHK in Ithaca.

But yes, these Gen Z-ers have done what we Gen X-ers could do only with the landline telephone. No, not make random prank calls and hang up after saying things to strangers that we'd not utter outside the safety of a telephone mouthpiece, but use prevalent technology to spread *gandi gandi baat*.

The Bengali phrase 'kacha khishti' is almost onomatopoeic in that it packs much more than what it means in English: raw, in the sense of choicest abuse. While the level of 'rawness' is still seen largely in socioeconomic class terms — the lower the position, the 'lower' the language — over time,



OK, KEEP IT CIVIL, CAPTAIN

unsavoury verbs and nouns, tactically arranged to scandalise and horrify, have gained social street cred for its power to shock and awe — and impress. Language never becomes more alive than in 'kacha khishti'.

Great contemporary writers like the late Nabarun Bhattacharya — Sahitya Akademi Award winner, no less — have made domestic abuses of the non-PG Wodehouse variety take on a literary sheen of its own. But I digress. Spouting a grand concoction of scatological-anatomical-sexual word-

images that make the best linguistic Molotov cocktail is just the gentler part of the story. Being foul-mouthed is seen as a sign of bad upbringing, and hanging with the 'wrong sort'. But you are marked as being downright depraved if your graphic abuse is directed at a personage — dead or alive, Nehru included.

I once heard a 70-year-old man, who happened to be fond of, among other things, Chaplin's Limelight and Cold War history, speak about Gandhi in language that would make even the other Mohandas —

The same cultures that tolerate violence often clutch their pearls harder at expletives

71-year-old rightwing commentator TG Mohandas, booked last week for saying on his YouTube channel in the context of NEET protesters, 'Gangrapes will happen. In this case, there won't be any complaints as these are people who like being raped. Some women like being raped, especially leftists, secular, democratic and proletarians.' — *almost* blanch.

But older generations with a gift of the garbage-gab didn't have much in terms of delivery mechanisms. Gen Z's talented abusers, however, have the reach, thanks to the great social-mainstream media loop. Like pornography, once an adult entertainment genre, hurling filth and fury are now available to anyone with a screen. All that was left for Gen Zabaan were intent and target. And these became 'suddenly' available.

So, witnessing the 'most disgusting' abuses isn't really the issue here, when whataboutery, denial, and other standard

methodologies are regularly taken out of the toolkit to defend those accused of rape, hanker for mob justice, or normalise hate speeches. The same cultures that tolerate violence often clutch their pearls harder at expletives.

The roots of this hypersensitivity lie in worship. Profanity was once tied to blasphemy; a direct affront to divine authority. To curse was literally to curse god. As religion ceded ground to secularism, the taboo migrated. Today, swearing is framed as an assault on civility, decency, family values, sanskriti. But the mechanism is the same.

But can there be something even more obnoxious than a respected figure being abused in the most disgusting way? I would think a respected figure giving 'kacha khishti' would be a thing to behold. I wait for that bl*ssey day.

indrajit.hazra@timesofindia.com

SUNDAY ROAST



RESHOM MAJUMDAR

The Quiet Joy Of Raising Ordinary Kids

Sure, ambition matters, but not every child has to be a concert level pianist

I find myself in a slightly more relaxed phase of motherhood. Both my children are now adults, with one stepping into the job market. It is, of course, not 'all done.' But it feels like the perfect moment to reflect, reassess, and indulge in a little retrospective wisdom.

Years ago, surrounded by high-achieving parents, the bar felt permanently set somewhere between the Olympics and Stockholm. I remember my husband remarking, after reading social media posts about unusually advanced toddlers, that our 'friends' children would collectively produce the following: an Indian cricketer, an Olympian, a Fields Medal winner, and a Nobel laureate. Such was the perceived talent pool. Or perhaps, the optimism.

I, too, quietly harboured dreams of raising exceptional children. Maybe not Nobel Prize-exceptional, but at least 'someone mentions them at a dinner party' exceptional.

Life, however, has a gentle way of editing our scripts. My children are exceptional, just not in the way I once imagined. They are kind. They are the sort of people who say thank you to waiters and call home without being reminded. Those are not minor achievements.

They have been to good schools, played sports, learned music, and done reasonably well at all of it. Not quite Royal Albert Hall or Lord's level, but solid, respectable, clap-from-the-second-row performances. And that, as it turns out, is where most of life happens.

We often forget just how small the percentage is that reaches global fame, or prize-winning brilliance. Just below that sits a vast and comfortable band of good, capable, and quietly successful people. The world, inconveniently, is largely run by them.

Yet, many of us prefer to believe our child is simply one coaching class away from greatness. So, we stretch ourselves financially, emotionally, and logistically all in pursuit of that extra edge. One of the most striking examples of this collective ambition is the rush to send children abroad for education, often without financial aid, and sometimes beyond a family's means.

The intention is pure: to give them the best. But the reality is more complicated. Alongside opportunity comes pressure. Alongside pride comes a quiet, persistent guilt. The unspoken weight of sacrifice.

With ever-changing immigration rules, staying on in many Western countries is uncertain. This is not always easy to explain to parents back home, for whom a foreign degree still sounds like a guaranteed life upgrade.

Meanwhile, these young adults study intensely and work equally hard. I see them in cafés and supermarkets, stacking shelves and serving customers. Their faces brighten instantly when someone is kind to them. It's a small reminder of how much they are carrying.

I do, however, occasionally feel a flicker of irritation. My daughter, after years of piano lessons, now barely plays. My son, after years of cricket coaching, wants a break. There is, I admit, a small voice that says, 'After all those early mornings?'

But perhaps that is the wrong lens. Not everything our children do needs to translate into a lifelong passion or professional achievement. Sometimes it builds discipline, exposure, and perspective. As someone wisely said, 'Your children are not your résumé.'

Be ambitious for them, certainly. Give them opportunities. Encourage effort. But don't begin with the assumption that every 5-year-old with a bat is a future national player; or, at least, IPL material.

There will always be a few extraordinary outliers. The rest will find their way into that wide, stable, and entirely respectable middle. And there is dignity in that space. In fact, there is happiness there too. Better to raise children who are emotionally secure, resilient, and kind than to raise ones burdened by quiet inadequacy or constant comparison. The world is already demanding enough. What we can offer is a home that does not measure them relentlessly. A safe space they can return to, regardless of how things unfold. A place that celebrates their joys and absorbs their disappointments.

A place where they are allowed to become themselves. Not impressive versions. Not performative versions. Just whole ones.

CAN MACHINES FILL IN FOR TEACHERS?

AI can certainly enhance learning in classrooms, but can it connect the way a human teacher can with a student?



ATANU BISWAS

Imagine an ordinary classroom — except for one thing: the teacher standing before the class has never been a student herself. She has never sat nervously before an exam, worried about disappointing her parents, struggled with a difficult chapter late at night, or felt the joy of finally understanding something that once seemed impossible.

Her name is Sally, and she's an AI-powered humanoid robot developed by Toronto-based Realbotix. She was expected to help teach coding, robotics and AI at a high school in Salamanca, New York State. The plan has since been shelved after concerns over privacy and data collection. That pause may delay Sally, but it's unlikely to delay the future. AI, like it or not, is steadily entering classrooms.

The debate over Sally is, therefore, not about one robot. It's about an unexpected old question: what makes someone a teacher?

For centuries, the answer seemed too obvious to ask. A teacher doesn't simply teach a subject. Every teacher walks into the classroom, carrying an invisible schoolbag filled with old report

cards, impossible homework, embarrassing mistakes, small victories and, if he or she is lucky, the memory of someone who once believed in them. Every teacher was once a child. Sally never was. Perhaps that absence matters more than all her computing power.

Curiously, Sally wouldn't have surprised Isaac Asimov. In his 1951 story, 'The Fun They Had,' children in 2157 learn from mechanical teachers that adjust lessons to each student's pace, a vision close to today's promise of personalised AI education.

The tech sounds remarkably modern. The question doesn't. Asimov quietly wondered whether something precious disappears when learning becomes a conversation with a machine instead of a room full of classmates. 70 years later, films like Park Joong Eun's 2021 After, Yang continue to ask a similar question: can a machine become part of our emotional

lives? Or does it merely imitate them?

None of this means AI should stay outside the school gate. Quite the opposite. Many countries and geographically remote areas struggle to recruit enough teachers, especially in S&T. Teachers spend hours on paperwork that nobody enters the profession ever dreamt about. If AI can take over routine tasks, explain algebra for the n-th time without sounding impatient, or help a shy student after school hours, it deserves a warm welcome.

The difficulty is that beneficial technologies never just solve problems. They quietly change. Calculators meant fewer logarithm tables. GPS meant fewer folded paper maps. Search engines meant fewer facts stored in our heads. AI will change classrooms too, perhaps in ways we cannot yet predict.

Some changes will be welcome. Some changes warrant reconsideration. For example, a human teacher forgets. A

machine usually doesn't. A wrong answer, an awkward question, or an embarrassing classroom moment has traditionally faded with time. Should every childhood mistake become permanent data?

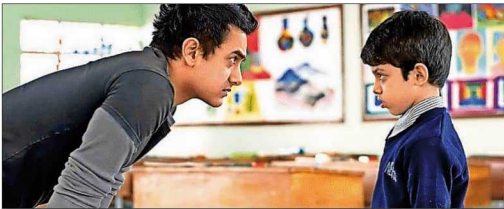
Yet, the deepest difference between a human teacher and a machine is unlikely to be intelligence. It's memory of another kind. Years after leaving school, few of us remember an elegant proof in geometry, or the date of an obscure historical treaty. We remember the teacher who waited after class because she knew we were struggling. We remember the teacher who looked at a disappointing marksheet and somehow saw more potential than the marks.

A machine may one day explain calculus more clearly than any teacher I ever had. I would happily welcome that day. But I still hope there's someone in the classroom who notices the student staring out of the window instead of at the board, or the one whose unusually untidy homework is really a quiet cry for help. Perhaps one day Sally will notice those things too.

Whether she truly understands them is a different question. Education has never been only about transferring knowledge. At its best, it's one human being helping another discover what he or she can become. It's about passing on confidence, curiosity, and hope. A human teacher gives a child something no algorithm can calculate: the feeling that another human being believes in them. And sometimes, that kind of lesson changes a life.

The writer is professor, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata

At its best, education's one human helping another discover what he or she can become



SO, YOU WANT ME REPLACED, DO YOU?

Going Totally Nuts Over Coco de Mer

Travel as obsession, from dodo bones in Mauritius to giant coconuts in the Seychelles



MICHEL BAAS

As my partner and I are neither beach people nor enthusiastic swimmers, we find ourselves remarkably often on islands surrounded by nothing but endless ocean. We already paid the price for this once by getting stranded on New Caledonia, a French territory comprising dozens of islands in the South Pacific, during a riot, only to be evacuated two weeks later by the French army.

It makes for a good story — and a column on this page two years ago. But once safely home, we solemnly vowed to stick to megacities with boutique cafés, serving organically sourced single-origin coffee. So, when we announced we were off to the Seychelles, eyebrows were raised. Not interested in resorts, what exactly possessed us then? The answer can be summarised in one word: coconut.

The island of Praslin is one of the few places where the 'coco de mer' still grows in the wild. Its French name translates as sea coconut, although, of course, it's not the sea that produces them, but

improbably tall palms.

The Seychelles entered the European colonial imagination surprisingly late. Portuguese sailors mapped the islands in 1502, but for centuries they remained uninhabited. Arab seafarers had long known of them, using the archipelago, much like the islands of Mauritius and Réunion, as a stopping point without ever settling there. It was only in 1756 that France formally claimed the islands, by which time their extraordinary flora had evolved largely undisturbed by human hands.

Curiously, coco de mer was already famous. For centuries, its enormous nuts washed up on beaches in the Maldives, giving rise to myths of a mysterious tree growing beneath the sea. Sailors carried them back to Europe, where their unmistakably female shape — somewhere between voluptuous buttocks and a vulva — fuelled endless fantasies about their origin. After repeatedly stumbling across them in Amsterdam antique shops, I eventually concluded that I could no longer live without owning one myself. The obvious solution was to travel to its place of origin.

This turned out to be easier imagined than accomplished. Co-

Our coco de mer (pic) now radiates its peculiar mystique from our living room

co de mer is among the world's most tightly protected botanical treasures. Every nut sold legally is individually certified, and the prices are appropriately eye-watering for what is, in the end, an absurdly oversized coconut.

The seed is the largest on Earth, commonly weighing 20 kg or more. Palms take around 30 years to bear fruit, and each fruit needs another 6-7 years to mature on the tree before it can be harvested and prepared for sale.

The joy of journeys like these lies precisely in their idiosyncy. Why travel halfway around the world to search for the perfect coconut? The question answers itself. We visited every shop on Praslin that supposedly sold them before deciding the most authentic specimen could be found at a small roadside store near Vallée de Mai nature park.

This is also where the palms themselves can be admired. More botanical sanctuary than untamed forest, the reserve has become something of a pilgrimage site for people who, like us, become disproportionately excited about astoundingly daft things.

Spotting another coco de mer palm beside the road on our way to the beach for sundowners, my partner muttered, 'Remember when you made me hunt for the dodo?' He meant Mauritius, where I had dragged him to the geological formation of Mare aux Songes, near the airport, where the largest concentration of dodo bones has ever been found. Not that there was one to buy.

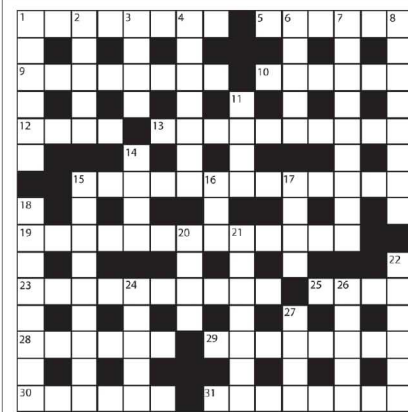
Earlier that week, I had visited a crocodile farmer who owned several reconstructed skeletons assembled from genuine bones, enough to conjure the vanished bird. It wasn't quite the same.

Nor, for that matter, was our determined search for an authentic Labubus in China when they were impossible to find. Dodos remain extinct. Labubus have already passed out of fashion. But our coco de mer now occupies pride of place in the living room, radiating its peculiar mystique. A monument to the glorious madness of travel.



ET Sunday Crossword

0179



- ACROSS
- 1 Pair touring Canada set off in police vehicle (5,3)
 - 2 One small car goes overboard? It's unique (10)
 - 3 A riotous mob surround vault of WHMD (4,4)
 - 4 One revolutionary firm in DIY makes silly comment (6)
 - 5 Feigned rage about wasted year where nothing's clear (4,4)
 - 6 Top cricketers making kecks, for instance (6)
 - 7 Broadcast note about the king entertaining earl (8)
 - 8 Boxing class where tea is brewed during match (13)
 - 9 One small car goes overboard? It's unique (10)
 - 10 In 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' he rebels against Union (4)
 - 11 One revolutionary firm in DIY makes silly comment (6)
 - 12 Feigned rage about wasted year where nothing's clear (4,4)
 - 13 Top cricketers making kecks, for instance (6)
 - 14 Broadcast note about the king entertaining earl (8)
- DOWN
- 1 cation in which one's caught fish (6)
 - 2 Name that is comforting old boy and old Greek lady (5)
 - 3 Testaments covering clergy, even parts of earlobes (4)
 - 4 Salmon leaves Borders to meet Queen and old charity worker (7)
 - 5 Irish TV quiz includes a citizen of Baghdad (5)
 - 6 Attic poet's torn undergarment (9)
 - 7 What barbers do, you could say, causing suffering (8)
 - 8 Fore iron, about a kilogram (4)
 - 9 Long playing field topped (4)
 - 10 In Libya it collapsed, revealing powerlessness (9)
 - 11 James and William primarily chat (3)
 - 12 Semptress as last turned up clothes (4)
 - 13 Bureaucrat and boffin striped and lay back (8)
 - 14 Bring up seat (4)
 - 15 Grow big green bananas around US city (7)
 - 16 A rough beard? Use emery board perhaps (6)
 - 17 Suffer desperate ruin going round clubs (5)
 - 18 When climbing, big rocks restrain pet (5)
 - 19 Publish extremely healthy exercise (4)

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Affordable Paperbacks

From Page 1

Affordable paperbacks are the top performers. Penguin's ₹499 Black Classics translation of 'The Odyssey' by E.V. Rieu saw a 10x sales boost, according to Sameer Mahale, vice president sales at Penguin Random House India.

It was the best-selling edition at Mumbai's famed bookstore Kitabhana, its chief operating officer Jagath Tekkatte said.

Academic translations that cost ₹1,000-2,000 are also thriving. Robert Fagles' version is popular with collectors at Kitabhana and Blossom Book House while Emily Wilson's 2018 translation, which Nolan cited as an inspiration, has sparked such high demand that Kitabhana is currently sold out and awaiting restocks.

Gowda of Blossom Book House also noted high demand for Stephen Fry's accessible retelling.

The surge isn't limited to 'The Odyssey' alone, readers who walk in looking for it often leave with a broader reading list. Mahale and Gupta reported a noticeable increase in demand for Homer's 'Iliad' as well, while Gupta said the same is true for Greek mythology classics, inspired fiction like Madeline Miller's 'Circe' and 'The Song of Achilles', and children's mythology.

"When ten year olds start asking for Greek myths through Percy Jackson, you have a reader for the next twenty years, not the next two weeks," Gupta said.

THE NOLAN EFFECT

Mahale credited Nolan for creating a "rare crossover moment where both new and long-time readers are engaging with the text." 2026 is emerging as a strong one for book adaptations. While Project Hail Mary and Dune "outsold expectations," 'The Odyssey' is "at a similar scale and possibly slightly ahead," Gupta said.

Gowda said Project Hail Mary still ranks first, but 'The Odyssey' editions have roughly equal growth.

Inverted Duty Structure

From Page 1

This may be time to start thinking about a GST 3.0, specifically easing refunds on input services and correcting the inverted duty structure, he added.

"This points to a persistent gap in domestic manufacturing capability despite the range of successful PLI (production-linked incentive) and Atmanirbhar Bharat interventions rolled out over the past few years," said Saurabh Agarwal, tax partner, EY India.

A sustained push by policymakers towards localisation will be critical for India to convert consumption-led growth into a more durable, manufacturing-anchored expansion, he said.

Personal Guidance Preferred

From Page 1

The hospital has expanded obesity clinics across centres and is hiring or redeploying staff to support this multidisciplinary model.

"There is an increasing demand for support, for hand-holding, for advising about diets, advising about exercise, advising about strength training for these people," said Ambrish Mithal, group chairman-endocrinology & diabetology at Max Super Speciality Hospital, Saket.

"There is scope for digital health coaches and even health apps and others to enable us to deal with the tsunami that's sweeping us."

According to Saumitra R Chand, career expert at Indeed India & Singapore, "While it is still early to draw a direct link between the growing popularity of these medications and hiring trends, Indeed's data suggests that demand for nutrition professionals in India remains on an upward trajectory: job postings for nutritionists were 26% higher in April

2026 from a year ago".

This suggests that as more people focus on sustainable weight management and long-term lifestyle changes, demand will remain strong for professionals who can provide personalised dietary guidance.

"Even with the emergence of new medical treatments, drugs, nutritionists are likely to play an important role in helping individuals build healthy habits, manage side effects and maintain outcomes over time," added Chand.

Aditya Phadte, consultant-endocrinology and diabetology at Manipal Hospitals, said increasing adoption of GLP-1 therapies has significantly expanded the need for multidisciplinary obesity-care teams led by endocrinologists and supported by specialised obesity nutritionists. Obesity is increasingly being recognised as a chronic metabolic disease rather than simply a lifestyle issue.

"We are seeing more patients actively seeking struc-

tured dietary counselling, meal planning, support for sustainable lifestyle modification and long-term follow-up during their weight-loss journey. This has naturally increased the demand for endocrinologists and specialised obesity nutritionists working together as part of comprehensive obesity-care programmes," said Phadte.

Shree Vidya Venkatraman, medical director-preventive health at Apollo Hospitals, said managing obesity and metabolic disorders now requires a multidisciplinary approach that brings together clinicians, including internal medicine specialists, endocrinologists and diabetologists, psychologists and medical nutritionists to deliver better long-term outcomes.

In India, the biggest gap is not access to medication alone but the absence of long-term monitoring and multidisciplinary support systems that help patients sustain healthier lifestyles beyond the treatment phase, she said.

\$60b Additional Capital Inflows

From Page 1

SBI Research said a large proportion of existing FCNR(B) deposits maturing in August and September 2026 is likely to be renewed under the new scheme, encouraged by higher interest rates, further boosting inflows.

In June, Goldman Sachs economists Arjun Varma and Santanu Sengupta esti-



mated the RBI measures could generate an additional \$60 billion in capital inflows, turning the balance of payments into a surplus of around 0.6% of GDP in the current financial year.

Nitin Aggarwal of Motilal Oswal Financial Services estimated the RBI's measures could generate an additional \$40-50 billion in forex inflows in the year ending March 2027.

'Robust Demand across Categories'

From Page 1

Together with its light commercial vehicle, Super Carry, Maruti Suzuki sold more than 200,000 vehicles in July, a monthly sales record for any automaker in India, said Partho Banerjee, senior executive officer, marketing and sales, at the local unit of Japan's Suzuki Motor company.

"Globally, only two other automakers, both from mainland China, sell more than 200,000 units every month," Banerjee said, adding, "We are seeing robust demand across categories and have pending bookings for 160,000 units." Sales of small cars at Maruti Suzuki rose 63% in July, while those of SUVs grew 48%.

"We were earlier constrained by lack of capacity. Now with two new lines starting in Kharkhoda and Hansalpur, we will be able to meet customer demand. Our market share is growing month-on-month," Banerjee said. The company is

particularly witnessing strong demand for CNG vehicles, whose sales peaked at 83,000 units in July. Network stocks of the company currently stand at about 16 days.

The Indian unit of Korean auto major Hyundai, which saw volumes decline by 10% in June on account of a production loss of 13,900 units due to a fire at one of its vendor's facilities, rebounded strongly last month, selling 54,210 units locally.

"We have kicked off the new quarter on a strong note," managing director and chief executive Tarun Garg said. Including exports, July's volume of 75,360 units was the highest ever since the local unit's inception, he added.

Tata Motors continued to hold the second slot in the category with sales of 62,611 units in July. At Mahindra, Nalinikanth Gollagunta, CEO-automotive division, said the company saw all-round traction across the portfolio in

July and grew volumes to 60,048 units. In the two-wheeler segment, too, demand largely remained healthy. Market leader Hero MotoCorp posted a 22% increase in local sales to 501,403 units last month, while Honda Motorcycle & Scooter India reported a 2% rise, dispatching 476,436 units. Royal Enfield's sales rose 38% to 105,317 units and Suzuki Motorcycle sold 123,216 units, up 28% from a year earlier.

In the commercial vehicle segment, leader Tata Motors sold 33,876 units last month, a 28% increase from July last year. In farm equipment, Mahindra's volume grew 21% to 32,643 tractors in July.

Veejay Nakra, president, Farm Equipment Business at Mahindra, said: "Significant recovery in rainfall, improved reservoir levels, accelerated kharif sowing aided by government support and healthy farm cash flows have led to positive rural and farmer sentiment."

Minimum Withdrawals

From Page 1

Roughly about 10% of such (medical) students also take seats at engineering colleges," said Ranjana Jha, vice-chancellor of Indira Gandhi Delhi Technical University for Women. "This year's delay in NEET counselling may lead to some overlap between medical and engineering admissions," she added.

At VIT Vellore, the impact of the delayed NEET counselling is minimal, said director-admissions S Sashikumar. VIT offers three bio-related B Tech programmes — Biotechnology, Health Sciences & Technology, and CSE (Bioinformatics). "Only a very small number of students leave these programmes to pursue MBBS

through NEET counselling," he said. Rajiv Chaudhary, chairperson of the B Tech admission committee at Delhi Technological University, said withdrawals from B Tech programmes (for admissions to medical courses) are usually minimal. "We do not expect this number to change much this year as well," he added.

ET THE ECONOMIC TIMES

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STRENGTH BEHIND INDIA'S ENERGY SECURITY

UNAUDITED STANDALONE AND CONSOLIDATED FINANCIAL RESULTS FOR THE QUARTER ENDED 30th JUNE, 2026

Pursuant to Regulation 52(4) SEBI (Listing and Other Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015

HIGHLIGHTS (Q1 FY 2026-27)

₹38,982 crore

₹5,773 crore

122.36 MMSCMD

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Former Chairperson - Prasadiya ARC Limited
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Advisor & Mentor - Prasadiya Group
Former Chairperson - NABARD

Left for heavenly abode on 23rd July, 2026.

His sad demise is an irreplaceable loss to all of us.
We express our deep condolences and pay tribute to the great visionary.
We pray for the departed soul to rest in eternal peace.

Board of Directors and Staff
Prasadiya Group of Companies
Hyderabad

M S R V Prasad
CEO Prasadiya Group
Hyderabad

Why Charli xcx Is One of Pop's Great Contrarians



Back in May, when Charli xcx released *Rock Music*, the first single from her new album *Music, Fashion, Film*, she was immediately labelled a provocateur.

The song, with its hyperpop affectations and cheeky, lyrical dedication to craft — “I think the dance floor is dead/ So now we’re making rock music” — confused and confounded. Was she trolling? Was she being sincere? Will the entire record be made up of power chords? Will *BRAT*, her zeitgeist-shifting 2024 electro album, be rejected?

None of these answers are found on *Music, Fashion, Film*. It’s up to the listener to decide. There are 11 alternative, genre-averse songs with winking rock ‘n’ roll instrumentation, preoccupied by artmaking and ego.

SELF-REFLECTIVE PHASE

Her reputation and perception have always mattered deeply to Charli xcx. On *Music, Fashion, Film*, she still does — just not as much as her many thoughts on what it means to be an artist — delivered with distortion and humour throughout.

There are apathetic, spoken-word sections that feel closer to the moody influence of Charli’s beloved Velvet Underground than the dance floor when placed atop fuzzed-out guitars.

like on the standout, crushed and choppy ‘Card Declined’. ‘2007’, written about filming TikToks, avoids vapidity atop power chords that play out like someone learning pop-punk covers for the first time. The instrumentation is repeatable, often valuing rhythm-driven minimalism and alternative tunings, the sound of an early musical love.

The production is another story. Complications abound, like in the unexpected tempo change found in the charming post-rock ‘Magic Metal Montana’, a platonic love song. If Charli xcx is looking to find ways for reinvention, she’s found a few, like in the loose and reverberating ‘I’m Afraid’, which has its charms: Loose bass, a claustrophobic chorus, a post-grunge exorcism.

The 2026 meta mockumentary *The Moment* may have foreshadowed this album. That was a document of what happens after celebrity ambitions are realised. It isn’t a partner piece to this album, but there’s a shared ideology: Both are an illumination of what it is to be Charli xcx without the self-hagiography of an artiste-produced documentary.

— AP

PICS: AP, GETTY IMAGES

Your Ticket to Slower Ageing? Become a Culture Vulture



Being a culture vulture can help keep ageing at bay.

A study found that people aged over 50 who regularly visit museums, theatres or the cinema have a lower biological age than those who do not.

Your biological age measures how well your body is functioning. And those who regularly take in cultural events scored better:

OUT AND ABOUT

Researchers in Japan asked 2,000 people about their hobbies and measured physiological markers including body mass index, walking speed, blood pressure and cholesterol levels. “Those with higher ‘cultural engagement’ score took part in outings to museums, galleries and the cinema every few months. They had a biological age of 66.9 years, three years

lower than those who did so less often.

Author of the research, Dr Yusuke Matsuyama, of the Institute of Science Tokyo, said: “Community-based cultural activities may also foster greater community involvement.”

Researchers said that promoting engagement with culture could be a “promising strategy to slow the pace of physiological ageing and support healthy ageing in older adults”.

“Cultural engagement is modifiable. It can serve as an effective intervention point for longevity. The impact can be comparable to physical activity. Increased geographical and financial accessibility to cultural events would expand participation opportunities,” Matsuyama said.

— Daily Mirror

Biryanis, Pulaos and the Mandi Mystery

FOOD FABLES



VIKRAM DOCTOR

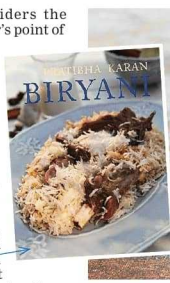
Pratibha Karan, in her book *Biryani*, briskly explains the difference between biryani and pulao. Biryani is layer rice with other ingredients before cooking them together — they are strongly spiced and moist. Pulaos mix rice with other ingredients before cooking — they are mildly spiced and dry.

In *A Quest for the Perfect Rice*,

Zubin D’Souza considers the question from the eater’s point of view. Biryani is for celebrations, so an excess of ingredients is expected, all coming together in one delicious meal. A pulao can be eaten on its own, or with a curry or chutney, so the spices are mild and added ingredients less dominant.

Even simpler is *tehari*, often just rice cooked with vegetables for a nourishing, yet digestible dish. “A *tehari* ends up with the rice clumping together in most cases because of the reduced amounts of fat being used,” writes D’Souza.

Into this mix comes *mandi*, a rice dish that’s trending in Kerala and



PICS: GETTY IMAGES



PICS: GETTY IMAGES

Hyderabad and spreading to other places too. It came from Yemen, which gives it a link to Hyderabad, which has had a Yemeni community since the Nizam’s days. But the Kerala version follows the trend of

the Gulf states, where Yemeni *mandi* has become a popular dish. In Tim Mackintosh-Smith’s *Yemen: Travels in Dictionary Land*, he describes eating “a tray of rice and *mind*, kid half roasted, half

smoked over the embers of a lidded fire-pit”. The word he uses for this tandoor-like dish refers to the meat, but now includes the rice as well. Some descriptions of the original dish suggest that the pot of rice was suspended in the pit to cook along with the meat.

Mandi has evolved in the Gulf, but in essence remains meat and rice, usually not cooked together like biryani and pulao, but united by a smoky, subtly savoury taste. In *Feast: Food of the Islamic World*, Anissa Helou gives a recipe adapted from the Gulf, where the juices of the roast meat are added to the water used to cook the rice. In Raziq Hosain Shaikh’s *Great Gulf Cookbook*, the rice is cooked in chicken stock and the meat roasted separately. A coal is lit, placed on an onion and put in the

pan with the meat, which gets infused with the fumes. *Mandi* is presented with meat laid out on top of the rice, which absorbs flavours that way.

Mandi’s meaning in India is also evolving, but what diners usually get is well-cooked meat and a very large amount of mildly flavoured rice. It is a rather dry dish, especially for those used to biryani, but here, one innovation from the Gulf is useful. At some point, *mandi* was paired up with *roum*, a Lebanese sauce made by crushing garlic with salt, oil and lemon juice into a creamy paste. Another solution, which Indian restaurants seem to be following, is to use garlic mayonnaise. The Europeans who popularised mayonnaise never imagined eating it with rice, but it works surprisingly well, the

intense garlicky taste tempered by the mild taste of the rice, and the creamy texture coating the grains perfectly.

Mandi is a definitely a dish for hardcore rice lovers, but why has it taken off when Indian cuisine has so many varieties of biryani and pulao that could be better known? Perhaps it’s the presentation, with meat upfront, rather than buried in the rice. Perhaps it’s the novelty of eating it with garlic mayonnaise. Or perhaps it’s the allure of the wealth of the Gulf, which endures despite current turmoil.

It does suggest opportunities for other rice dishes. *Mujaddara*, for example, where rice is cooked with whole lentils that stay separate, unlike melding with the rice, as dal does in *kichdi*. There are Indian dishes like Hyderabad *gabooli* or Tamil *kaima kichadi choru*, where rice is cooked with whole lentils, but these have never become well-known. Perhaps with a foreign name, these could start trending, like *mandi*.

Belle Burden’s bestselling memoir about the end of her 20-year-old marriage may not have told the whole story. But maybe it doesn’t matter

A Separation

Clare McHugh

All the best memoirs resemble novels. They progress along a powerful arc: An inciting incident is followed by rising action, leading to a climax when, at the peak of narrative tension, the characters confront and, by some means, resolve the central conflict.

Of course, there’s a delicious extrafrisson to a memoir because the story is, purportedly, not simply some writer’s imaginings. It happened.

In 2006, Oprah Winfrey publicly denounced James Frey’s memoir *A Million Little Pieces* after it emerged that he had embellished and fictionalised parts of his life story.

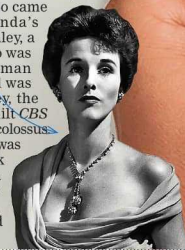
Belle Burden, the author of this year’s surprise hit *Strangers: A Memoir of Marriage*, is having a very different experience in the wake of a well-documented challenge to her veracity that *The New Yorker* published recently. The backlash has been minimal. People who might be expected to care — including Gwyneth Paltrow, who bought the movie rights, and Winfrey, who praised it during Burden’s appearance on her podcast — apparently do not.

With the natural sympathy she stirs as a woman whose husband abruptly left her after 20 years of marriage, Burden’s legions of fans seem generally unconcerned that she may have prevaricated in *Strangers*. But many readers and critics appear to resent that her story has been questioned at all.

MAKING OF A MARRIAGE

When *Strangers* was published in January, it was an immediate bestseller. The book grew out of a viral *Modern Love* essay in *The New York Times* in which Burden documented, in 1,500 words, the painful breakdown of her marriage. Burden herself has a glamorous background. As the daughter of the late Carter Burden, a New York politician and philanthropist, she is a member of the Vanderbilt family. Her mother, Amanda Burden, also came from wealth. Amanda’s mother was Babe Paley, a famous socialite who was one of author Truman Capote’s ‘swans’ and was married to Bill Paley, the businessman who built CBS into a media industry colossus.

In 1998, Belle Burden was working at a New York corporate law firm when she fell in love with a colleague, Henry Davis (called



PICS: GETTY IMAGES



James in the memoir). Before they married, Davis, who enjoyed none of Burden’s generational wealth, pressed for an amendment to their prenuptial agreement that only the assets held in both spouses’ names would be considered joint property and divided in case of a divorce. Against her lawyer’s advice, Burden signed this amended agreement.

Nearly 20 years passed. They had three children. Burden gave up her work as an attorney to be a stay-at-home mother, while Davis climbed the ranks at a hedge fund. Using money from two multimillion-dollar trust funds established for Burden by her father and grandparents, the couple bought a large apartment in Manhattan’s Tribeca neighbourhood and a vacation home in Martha’s Vineyard.



PICS: CHARLAINE BURDEN, GETTY IMAGES

TENSIONS RISE

The incident for the memoir takes place in March 2020 during the pandemic. The family is quarantining in Martha’s Vineyard when Burden receives a phone call from a man claiming his wife is having an affair with Davis. When confronted, Davis admits the affair, and some regret, before the next morning announcing he has been unhappy for a long time and wants a divorce.

Blindsided, Burden begs for an explanation, but, in her telling, Davis could not — or would not — provide one. He declares that the children, then aged 12, 15 and 18, should live with Burden, but that he intends to retain his half-ownership stake in the apartment and the Vineyard house, as he is entitled to under the prenup. Tensions rise.

She discovers that Davis had quietly amassed a fortune in cash and, after becoming a partner at his firm, was set to earn a seven-figure salary and bonuses — none of which she would share. She also fears her children will lose their homes because she cannot afford to buy out her soon-to-be ex.

The hour before the divorce trial was to begin, Burden writes, Davis relented, and the houses became her sole property.

FACTS UNDER FIRE

In her *New Yorker* article, journalist Jessica Winter — who had access to confidential court documents, including the original prenuptial agreement — lays out how Burden’s financial security was never at risk. Her wealth totals over \$60 million, and although about two-thirds of this is locked up in a trust, she has access to several million dollars, Winter reports. And in the year before the divorce, she earned \$800,000, thanks to her interest in family holdings. Also, Davis’s concession came not before a trial, but in advance of a status conference, a very preliminary stage of a divorce proceeding.

In a statement to *The New Yorker*, Burden said she stands by everything she wrote in the book: “I shared my heartache, my mistakes, and my shame. I owned my privilege as plainly as I could.”

Davis, Burden describes in the memoir, first expressed romantic interest in her upon discovering who her parents were. Once they married, her wealth paid for a life he could not afford alone — a life, she claims, he felt he had been unjustly denied as a child because of his own father’s breakdown and failure to work afterward. And Davis remained married to Burden until the year he made partner at his hedge fund, at which point he could bankroll his own uber-affluent lifestyle.

In *Strangers*, the facts may not totally line up, but the emotions are all present and accounted for.

— The Washington Post

PIC: AI GENERATED

Skip Amalfi. Here Are 4 Other Italian Beach Gems

The beachside destination is suffering from overtourism; try these options that are equally gorgeous but less packed

Natalie B Compton, Hannah Sampson

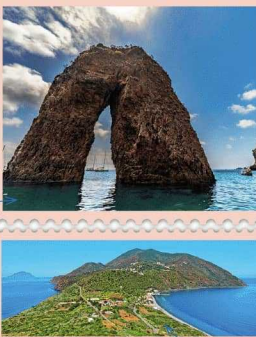
Italy’s peak tourist season is here, which means a familiar story is unfolding: Gridlock on the Amalfi Coast. Overtourism has prompted fresh complaints from travellers and Italians alike.

“Amalfi has always been crowded, but at the moment, it’s got worse,” said Simone Amorico, CEO of a private tour operator. The crowds have also become harder to manage. Residents and business owners have complained of difficulty getting around, finding parking and sepiating affordable housing.

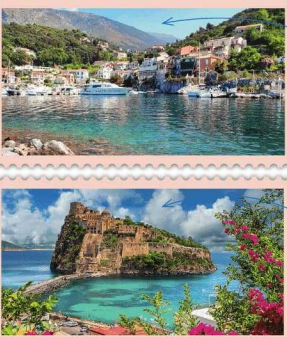
As locals plead with municipal leaders to manage tourism, travellers can do their bit. Experts suggest a few options instead of Amalfi:

PONZA

It once served as a Roman prison for Lazio, but today, the island off the coast of Naples has a much sunnier reputation: It’s a favourite vacation destination for Italians “without the Instagram hype around it”, Angel Castellanos, a travel expert and video host, said.



It’s also located conveniently — just about four hours from the capital Rome. But despite this location, Castellanos says Ponza still feels “super relaxed” and “much less expensive than Amalfi”. One word of caution: Don’t wait till the last minute. Ponza’s vacation rental inventory is limited.



THE AEOLIAN ISLANDS

Off the northeastern coast of Sicily, the Aeolian Islands are just out of the way enough to cut down on crowds. The archipelago is made up of seven islands and has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage site for its “outstanding record of volcanic island-

building and destruction, and ongoing volcanic phenomena”.

But you don’t need to be a geologist to appreciate their natural wonder. A popular activity for visitors is to snorkel among the underwater *fumaroles* (gas vents).

MARATEA

Two-and-a-half hours south of Amalfi in the province of Potenza, Maratea is often referred to as “the pearl of the Tyrrhenian coast”. Kathy McCabe, host of the *PBS* show *Dream of Italy*, called it one of the country’s best kept secrets.

McCabe is a fan of Maratea’s many sandy coves, grottoes and black sand beaches, like Cala Janitta, where visitors can rent umbrellas and sunbeds, or bring their own towel and stretch out for free.

ISCHIA

Hop on a ferry from Naples, and in about an hour, (the trip length will depend on the weather), you’ll reach Ischia, a less developed counterpart to Capri. “It doesn’t have that luxury old Hollywood kind of cachet that Capri has... It’s a bit more like being on a Greek island,” Castellanos said.

McCabe said that Ischia has managed to “preserve so much southern Italian authenticity”. It’s also a draw for more than its beaches. “I adore Ischia for so many reasons: Its simplicity, beauty, but most of all, its thermal hot springs,” McCabe said.

— The Washington Post

PICS: GETTY IMAGES

UTTAR PRADESH'S DIGITAL LEAP

UP emerges as a tech powerhouse

Uttar Pradesh is rapidly advancing towards a technology-driven future, with digital transformation, innovation and good governance emerging as key pillars of the state's development strategy. The state aims to establish itself as a global data hub by expanding its data centre capacity to 5GW by 2030 and 40GW by 2047. To support this ambition, six data centre parks and two data centre units with a combined capacity of 900MW are being developed to attract an investment of approximately ₹30,000 crore. Letters of Comfort have already been issued for eight projects. The state is also promoting the Data Centre Cluster and Township Model to create an integrated ecosystem for the sector.

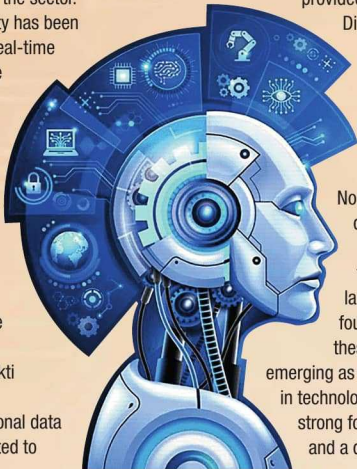
The State Data Authority has been established to facilitate real-time data management. In line with the 'Jan Vishwas' (Public Trust) principle, processes across 53 departments are being digitalised, while 65 departments have been integrated with the National Single Window System (NSWS), making governance more efficient and transparent.

Under the PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan, 29 mandatory and 55 additional data layers have been integrated to

support better infrastructure development planning at the district level. More than 26 applications have been developed, and over 2,000 officials have been trained to use these digital tools effectively.

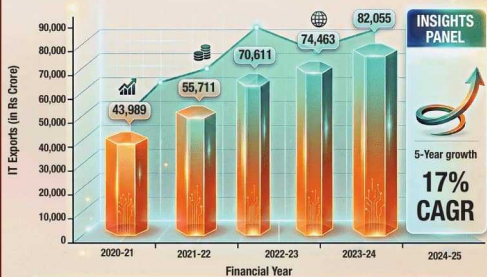
The digital revolution is also transforming public service delivery. Funds under government schemes are being transferred directly into beneficiaries' bank accounts through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), ensuring greater transparency and efficiency. The Government of India's official e-Sanjeevani platform is enabling people to access teleconsultation services from the comfort of their homes.

Through Project Ganga, rural youth are being provided employment opportunities as Digital Service Providers under the Digital Entrepreneur Scheme, with 50% of seats reserved for women. Meanwhile, the Uttar Pradesh Robotics Mission is promoting emerging technologies, with Noida-Greater Noida being developed as a robotics hub. To strengthen cyber security, the number of forensic science laboratories has increased from four in 2017 to 12 till now. With these initiatives, Uttar Pradesh is emerging as one of India's leading states in technology and innovation, creating a strong foundation for inclusive growth and a digitally empowered future.



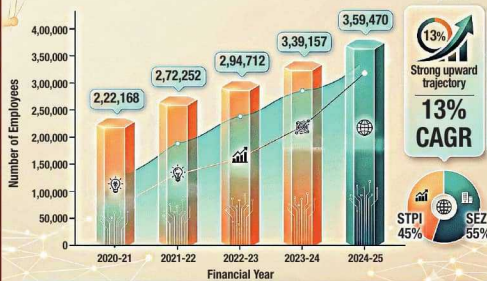
AI-GENERATED INFOGRAPHICS

A FIVE-YEAR FINANCIAL OVERVIEW IT EXPORTS PERFORMANCE

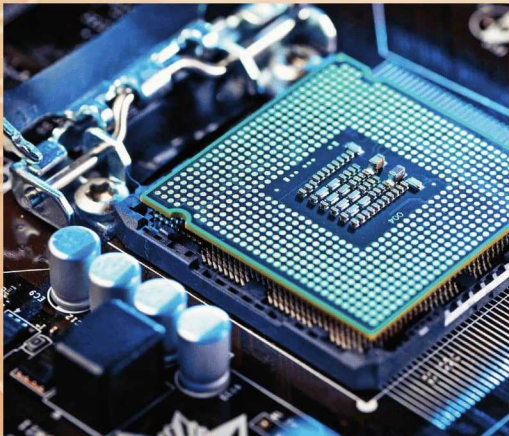


The data set shows substantial growth in IT exports over a five-year period, registering a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 17%

EMPLOYMENT GROWTH IN STPI AND SEZ REGISTERED UNITS



The data illustrates a strong upward trajectory with a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 13% over a 5-year period



TECHNOLOGY DRIVES TRANSFORMATION

UP Targets 40 GW Data Centre Capacity

- » Action initiated to establish a data centre cluster in the state
- » Target set to develop 5GW data centre capacity by the year 2030 and 40GW by the year 2047
- » Plan to establish six data centre parks and two data centre units to attract an investment of ₹30,000 crores
- » LoC (Letter of Comfort) issued to eight projects, which include six data centre parks and two data centre units
- » Promotion of cluster and township models for data centres

Building IT Ecosystem

- » As of July 2026, Uttar Pradesh has 7 STPI centres (Noida, Lucknow, Kanpur, Agra, Prayagraj, Meerut and Gorakhpur)
- » Upcoming STPI centres: Two (Bareilly and Varanasi)
- » Electronics exports of ₹3,862 crore in 2017-18 increased to ₹44,744 crore in 2024-25
- » Launch of 'Robotics Mission' to develop as a robotics hub

Ease of Living through Technology

- » More than 24 services, including income, caste, and residence certificates, are available on the e-Saathi mobile app.
- » Internet connectivity through optical fiber cable is available in 2,066 gram panchayats
- » With the objective of providing high-speed broadband internet to 20 lakh rural and semi-urban households, Project Ganga is being implemented, generating 10,000 employment opportunities
 - » Noida: IT hub of the country
 - » Kanpur: Action Plan to develop as a drone hub
 - » Lucknow: Action plan to develop as an Artificial Intelligence hub

Training for the AI Era

- » Launch of 'Uttar Pradesh AI Mission' for development in the field of AI
- » Under the India AI Mission, the process of establishing AI labs in 49 ITIs of the state is ongoing. Along with this, action for establishing AI Centres of Excellence and India AI Data Labs is in progress
- » Decision to establish a Cyber Security Operations Centre for cybersecurity
- » Launch of the AI-Pragya programme, under which global companies like Microsoft, Google, Intel, and IBM are providing AI training to farmers, self-help groups, students, doctors, and government officers/employees

Cyber Security Infrastructure made

- » Cyber crime police stations are operational in all 75 districts, with cyber help desks in all stations
- » The call centre in Lucknow, handling 5,000 calls daily, is being expanded to 9,000 capacity
- » 65,608 personnel trained via Cy-Train portal
- » 87,850 cybercrime cases registered since 2017
- » 75,272 cases resolved; action against 53,639 accused
- » ₹382.25 crore recovered from cyber fraud
- » As per NCRB 2024: UP's conviction rate in cyber crimes stands as 76.6% (nearly double the national average)

Effective Policing through Technological Advancement

- » The YAKSHA app was launched, using advanced AI and data analytics, serving as a digital beat book
- » Criminal records are continuously verified across districts through the app
- » Praheri Beat Policing App integrated with CCTNS. UPCOP App offers 27 services, including online FIR registration
- » Verification time for character certificates was reduced from 10-12 days to six days
- » Over 50 lakh app downloads
- » Over 2.10 crore FIRs registered
- » Over 7 lakh lost items registered
- » Crime Analytics Portal received FICCI Award in 2025
- » The police department has ranked first in the Data Quality Index (DQI) since July 2025 on the CM dashboard

First Semiconductor Unit

- » This project, with an investment of more than ₹3,700 crore, is a joint venture of HCL and the Foxconn Group
- » This will be India's first display driver IC-based OSAT (Outsourced Semiconductor Assembly and Testing) facility. This unit will provide India a new global identity in the field of semiconductor packaging, testing, and assembly and will greatly strengthen the electronics manufacturing supply chain
- » Fourth state in the country to promulgate Semiconductor Policy 2024





COMMONWEALTH C'SHIPS TT
It's an All India Semifinal for Men and Women

Delhi: India stamped its authority on the penultimate day of the Commonwealth Table Tennis Championships, with all eight paddlers storming into the men's and women's singles semifinals at the Thyagaraj Stadium on Saturday. Top seed Manush Shah beat Australia's Aditya Sareen while Payas Jain emerged victorious, edging compatriot Harmeet Desai. Ankur Bhattacharjee fought back to defeat Australia's Nicholas Wen Zheng Lum while Manav Thakkar recovered from a slow start to beat England's Connor Alexander Green. Among the women, Syndrela Das produced the biggest upset of the day, rallying from a game down to eliminate top-seeded Australian Yangzi Liu while second seed Sreeja Akula outclassed England's Tin-Tin Ho. Yashaswini Ghoshade thrashed Australia's Constantina Psihogios and Sutirtha Mukherjee completed India's flawless run with a 4-1 win over Aussie Min Hyung Jee. **PTI**

DULEEP TROPHY
Patidar to Lead Central Zone, Rinku Named VC



New Delhi: India batter Rajat Patidar will lead Central Zone in the Duleep Trophy, starting later this month at the BCCI Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru. India middle-order batter Rinku Singh will be the deputy to Patidar, the two-time IPL winning skipper with Royal Challengers Bengaluru. Off-spinner Saransh Jain has also been named in the squad but he is certain to miss at least the initial part of the domestic season opener since he is a part of the India Test squad to tour Sri Lanka. Jain is tipped to make his Test debut at Galle since off-spin all-rounder Washington Sundar was ruled out of the first match. **PTI**

SAFF C'SHIPS 2026
India Drawn with Maldives & Pakistan in Group B

Defending champions India have been drawn with Maldives and Pakistan in Group B of the SAFF Championship 2026, following the draw conducted in Thimphu, Bhutan, on Saturday. The 15th edition of the sub-continental football tournament will be hosted in Dhaka from November 4-17. Chasing a record-extending 10th SAFF championship title, India will begin their campaign against Maldives on November 5 before taking on Pakistan on November 11. Hosts Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Bhutan are placed in Group A. In the event that FIFA's suspension of the All Nepal Football Association is lifted by September 1, Nepal will be included in Group A. If the suspension stays, the SAFF Championship 2026 will go ahead with six teams. The top two teams from each group will qualify for the semi-finals. **PTI**

Maresca 'Happy' Despite Manchester City's Loss



Enzo Maresca said he was "very happy" on Saturday after his first game in charge of Manchester City, despite a defeat on penalties to Inter Milan after the sides drew 1-1 in a pre-season friendly in Hong Kong on Saturday. Matteo Lavelli netted the decisive spot-kick for a 3-1 shootout win for the Italian champions as Maresca led out City for the first time since taking over from legendary Pep Guardiola in June. "I'm very happy with the performance," the former Chelsea and Leicester boss told reporters. "Many positive things, including minutes for the legs, that's very important. Like always, there are things we can do better, but slowly, slowly, we're going to improve." An open first half saw the Premier League side take the lead in the 14th minute when Antoine Semenyo jinked towards the byline and crossed for youngster Divin Mubama to tuck in from a few yards out. **AP**

Chelsea Manager Alonso Delighted as Mudryk is Cleared of Doping

Sydney: Chelsea manager Xabi Alonso said he was delighted that Mykhailo Mudryk had been cleared to return to play after being sidelined for nearly two years following a positive dope test. The Ukrainian winger last played for Chelsea in November 2024 but was granted leave to return to action immediately on Friday after the English FA resolved his disciplinary proceedings in agreement with the World Anti-Doping Agency.



Xabi Alonso

Speaking after Chelsea went down 2-1 to London rivals Tottenham Hotspur in front of a crowd of 80,363 in Sydney on Saturday, Alonso said Mudryk's return would join the squad in the next leg of their pre-season tour. "I am very happy for him, for me also but mostly for him," the Spaniard told reporters. We want him to feel part of the team because he's been training on his own for so long. We have to see (about his future) because he's not been playing for a long time. "To be honest, we were not expecting to have this great news." Tottenham boss Roberto De Zerbi, who coached Mudryk at Shakhtar Donetsk before he joined Chelsea, also welcomed

GIRLS 5 GOLDEN PACK 5 PUNCHES

TOP MEDAL: JAISME, PREETI, SAKSHI, PRIYA & ARUNDHATI



Lovlina and Jadumani end with silver as boxers shine on penultimate day at Commonwealth Games

Indian women's contingent signed off with five gold medals in the Commonwealth Games boxing competition with Arundhati Choudhary beating Chantelle Reid of England in the women's 70kg final on Saturday on Saturday to take the fifth. Arundhati won in a unanimous 5-0 verdict in the final. Olympic medalist Lovlina Borgohain though settled for a silver as she lost to Emma-Sue Greentree of Australia in the women's 75kg final in a split 1-4 verdict. Earlier, Jaismine Lamboria, Preeti Pawar, Sakshi Chaudhary and Priya

Ghanghas won gold medals in their respective categories, while Jadumani Singh settled for a silver. Preeti claimed the gold with a dominant 5-0 victory over Canada's Scarlett Delgado in the women's 54kg before reigning world champion Jaismine clinched the yellow metal with the same scoreline against Northern Ireland's Michaela Walsh, who was the defending champion in the women's 57kg. Sakshi then beat Ruby White of England in women's 51kg final 5-0 to win India's third boxing gold of the day. It was a harder final bout for Priya who beat Marie-Bathoul



commonwealth games GLASGOW 2026
LIVE on Sony Ten & Sony LIV, 2.30pm onwards

UNNATI BAGS BRONZE, JUDO TALLY RISES TO RECORD 4



Glasgow: Indian judoka Unnati Sharma clinched the bronze medal in the women's 63kg event to continue the country's historic run. Unnati defeated South Africa's Skye Knoester by ippon, wrapping up the contest in just 1 minute and 7 seconds with a decisive move, hooking her leg to unbalance Knoester before throwing her cleanly onto her back to earn an ippon—the highest score in judo—and seal the bout instantly. The Indian had earlier gone down to Australia's Saya Middleton in the semifinal but bounced back strongly to secure a place on the podium with an emphatic victory. The bronze was India's fourth medal in judo, continuing the country's best-ever CWG campaign. The historic run was led by Harsh Singh (men's -60kg) and Asmita Dey (women's -48kg), who became India's first-ever Commonwealth Games judo medalists with twin titles on Saturday. Yamini Mourya added a silver in the women's -57kg category, giving India their record haul.

India will have a chance to add to their record tally on the concluding day on Sunday, with Ishroop Narang (women's -78kg), Avtar Singh (men's -100kg) and Yash Chngas (men's +100kg) in the hunt. **PTI**

There were three double podium finishes in para athletics in Glasgow—Sharmila (gold) and Shilpa Shylia (bronze) in women's shot put F57; Dilip Mahadu Gavil (gold) and Mohammed Basil (silver) in men's 100m T47; and Soman Rana (gold) and Shubham Juyal (silver) in men's Shot Put F57. **PTI**

WHERE THEY STAND -

Team	G	S	B	Tot
1. Australia	60	35	49	144
2. England	22	39	32	93
3. Canada	18	17	21	56
4. India	11	16	8	35
5. Scotland	11	8	16	35
9. Nigeria	10	6	5	21

***At 10.30 PM on Saturday**

RANA FINISHES OFF IN STYLE WITH GOLD
It's Best-ever Games for Para Athletes

Glasgow: Indian para shot put Rana clinched gold in the men's F57 event as he hurled the globe for a season's best 13.40m to stand on top of the podium on Sunday. Compatriot Shubham Juyal (season's best 13.28m) pocketed the silver, while Cameroon's Cedric Azamzdi (12.57m) took home the bronze as Indian para sports athletes scripted history in the Glasgow Commonwealth Games by equalling the haul of all the previous editions put together, winning seven medals. The 28-member Indian para sports contingent ended their campaign with 3 gold, 2 silver and 2 bronze. There is no Indian event in para sports on Sunday. It is the best-ever performance for Indian para sports in the CWG. Since the introduction of para-

sports in the CWG in 2002 edition in Manchester, India have won a total of seven medals – one gold, two silver and four bronze. Before Glasgow, the 2022 Birmingham Games was the most productive one for Indian para sports with Bhavina Patel and Sonalben Patel winning a gold and a bronze respectively in para table tennis. Sudhir, who won gold in para powerlifting in Birmingham, was later stripped of his medal after failing an in-competition dope test. In Glasgow, para track and field athletes scooped six medals – 3 gold, 2 silver, 1 bronze – while Jhandu Kumar clinched the other bronze in para powerlifting. The para athletics team also ended India's 20-year wait for a medal at the CWG. The last

medal from para athletics before Glasgow came from Ranjith Kumar Jayaseelan in the men's seated Discus Throw event in the 2006 edition.



Back as Skipper, Root will Look to 'Evolve Bazball'

England Test captain Joe Root plans to keep faith with the aggressive 'Bazball' tactics used by his predecessor Ben Stokes as he starts his second spell in the role. Root was appointed as skipper following Stokes' shock retirement from international duty during England's Test series defeat to New Zealand in June. The 35-year-old previously captaining England between 2017 and 2022 and took the role on an interim basis when Stokes was dropped for one Test against New Zealand. The Yorkshire batsman is planning to tweak the approach of Stokes and Brendon McCullum, who was sacked as England's Test coach after the New Zealand matches, rather than start from scratch. Root will lead England in the forthcoming

CAPTAINSPEAK

"Evolving and tweaking things to get us to where we want to be and really competing against the top nations consistently"

ing Test series against Pakistan, with former New Zealand captain Stephen Fleming arriving to replace McCullum later this year. "It'll be trying to continue some of the good things we have done over that period (since 2022) and not finding ourselves back to where we were before Baz and Ben took over," Root said in an ECB interview on Saturday. "Evolving and tweaking things to get us to where we want to be and really competing against the top nations consistently over a long period of time. "The wrong thing to do would be to completely rip everything up that we've done over the last four years. "There's so much good stuff that Ben and Brendon did and changed the way we look at the game and see the game." McCullum inspired Stokes to make England play with flair and power, but that approach did not work against Australia and India. England failed to win a Test series against either of their main rivals in

"The wrong thing to do would be to completely rip everything up that we've done over the last four years"

the Stokes-McCullum era, a dismal run culminating in an Ashes thrashing in Australia. That series and England's recent clash with New Zealand were both marred by issues involving players drinking, with Stokes and Gus Atkinson left out of the second Test against the Black Caps after breaking a team curfew in a nightclub incident. Root, a more conservative figure than the bash Stokes, plans to be stricter in his time as captain, without indicating if that will include off-field behaviour. "I've benefited hugely from that as a player so to think we have to start all over again would be wrong. But there are areas we want to sharpen up a little bit and become a little bit sterner with," he said. **AFP**

Infant(ino) Terrible

Fifa president shelves plan to sell WC profits to private equity after backlash, UEFA guns for chief's head



Geneva: Fifa president Gianni Infantino said on Saturday that he is abandoning his plan to sell World Cup profits to private equity after receiving pushback from all corners of the football world. Infantino's decision came after his senior adviser who sat on a White House panel resigned and Asia's football body joined Europe and North America in opposing it. "Having listened carefully to all the views, it has become clear that the project has created divisions of a nature that, regardless of the level of support, are no longer in the interest of the objective set out in the first place," Infantino said in a statement early Saturday. "Our purpose has always been — and will always be — to unite and improve. As a result, this proposal will not proceed."

No option should be off the table. The current Fifa leadership has not only lost UEFA's confidence but also that of many other members of the football family

UEFA STATEMENT

and all other FIFA competitions over Infantino's plan on Thursday. North America's CONCACAF and the Asian Football Confederation also said they opposed the plan. The second half kicked off Saturday with what seemed a clear aim of ending Infantino's decade-long presidency. "No option should be off the table," said European football body UEFA, whose president Aleksander eferin has led the fight against Infantino. "The current FIFA leadership has not only lost UEFA's confidence but also that of many other members of the football family"

UEFA issued its blistering statement hours after the Fifa announced. "We cannot keep going on like this with secret schemes on fast-track timescales, cooked up by faceless individuals and of dubious benefit to the game," UEFA said. "We must identify those responsible and hold them to account. "It is right that, in the coming days and weeks, UEFA will work with its associations and in close cooperation with other confederations to reflect on how this happened and devise a plan to make sure that it cannot occur again." **AP**

A WEAK WEEK

(TIMELINE OF THE DRAMA THAT SIGNIFICANTLY WEAKENED INFANTINO)

TUESDAY
The Times breaks the story, sparking UEFA to issue a strongly-worded statement. "None of us are the owners of football. It is not FIFA's to sell." Fifa finally breaks silence, says: "It would retain a majority share in Fifa Forward Enterprise (FFE)" but hoped to raise \$4.2 billion later this year by "carefully selecting long-term investors who will purchase minority, non-controlling interests".

WEDNESDAY
No support for Infantino. CONCACAF, Central and North American football's governing body says it was "disappointed" and "deeply concerned" at having not been consulted. **The European Union said: "Hands off our game."** The Asian Football Confederation also expressed disappointment at not being informed. **According to reports,** Infantino had sent a letter to Fifa's member associations saying they will each receive \$40 million if they back the plan—but they must sign up by September 19. Infantino hits back, saying: "Fans from everywhere in the world would gain immeasurably from this game-changing potential because it will transform football in their countries."

THURSDAY
UEFA's 55-member nations agreed to boycott the World Cup. Infantino's video message doesn't calm tensions. UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin had had enough. **"No UEFA national teams will participate in any FIFA competition for so long as these proposals remain alive,"** read their statement. Infantino took a further hit when CONCACAF's 41 members unanimously rejected the proposal.

FRIDAY
Fifa fights on, saying: "Nobody is selling football. This is not something Fifa would ever entertain." But soon enough, Infantino's Special Advisor Carlos Cordeiro resigns, and without mincing words, says: "Let me be clear, I had no involvement in this proposal, and I oppose it unequivocally."

SATURDAY
INFANTINO RAISES THE WHITE FLAG. **AFP**

In A (Baseball) League of Their Own'

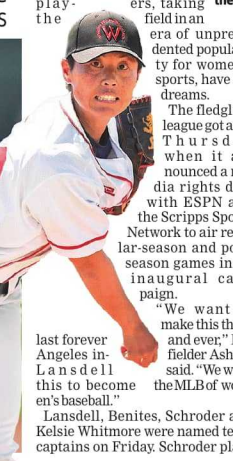
WPBL looking for longevity as players take the field amid rising popularity for women's sports

the chance to compete against players who have been my teammates, as well as Team USA players, and other athletes I've always considered rivals." Japanese right-hander Ayami Sato, one of New York's top pitchers, said Friday through a translator: "Being able to play against them in this league is something I've been really looking forward to." The opening weekend of the WPBL marks another major moment in a scattered history for women's professional baseball in the United States. The AAGPBL, which ran from 1943-54, was the first professional women's league in



AYAMI SATO

the U.S. There were at least two attempts to start a league in the 1990s, but each one was short-lived. The WPBL was co-founded by Justine Siegal, who became the first woman to coach for an MLB team with the Athletics in 2015. And its players, taking the field in an era of unprecedented popularity for women's sports, have big dreams. The fledgling league got a lift Thursday when it announced a media rights deal with ESPN and the Scripps Sports Network to air regular-season and postseason games in its inaugural campaign. "We want to make this thing and ever," Los Angeles infielder Ashton Lansdell said. "We want this to become the MLB of women's baseball." Lansdell, Benites, Schroder and Kelsie Whitmore were named team captains on Friday. Schroder plays



last forever Angeles in Lansdell said: "We want this to become the MLB of women's baseball."

for Boston, and Whitmore was selected by San Francisco with the No. 1 overall pick in the draft. "We were talking earlier today, I was telling them we're a family now," Whitmore said. "This is our new team, this is our crew, all 15 of us. And my goal is just to lead them the best way that I can, both on and off the field." Whitmore and the Firebells will be managed by Matt Williams, a five-time All-Star during his 17 years in the major leagues. Former Boston Red Sox closer Keith Foulke is the manager of the Hunters, and former big league infielder Eric Young is the skipper for the Queens. Rachelle "Rocky" Henley, a former player with a long history in women's baseball development, rounds out the managers with the Heights. With only 15 active players for each team, the managers and their coaching staffs are going to be busy as they execute their strategy for each game. "When I saw them play down in (Florida) this spring, it was like, 'Wow. These aren't women playing baseball, these are athletes playing baseball,'" Foulke said. "And I just want to bring that passion to my club, to the league, help build this and just be able to go out there and have a good time, put on a good product." **AP**

privating the Chelsea striker a goal-scoring opportunity. Goalkeeper Antonin Kinsky made several fine saves to keep 10-man Spurs in the contest and Richardson stole the victory in the last minute, tapping in the winner after Jamie Donley's shot came back off the post. "We wanted to win, to lose is not something we want to do," Alonso said. Alonso also welcomed the success of Chelsea's appeal against a suspended points deduction for breaches of the English FA's transfer regulations. **Reuters**